

Aquifer Open Study Notes (Book Intros)

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Daniel

While Daniel was coming of age, Babylon was flourishing. Meanwhile, the people of Israel were being exiled from Judah to Babylonia. Could God's people hope to enjoy life as the Lord's chosen nation again? Through Daniel's experiences as a captive and as a government official, and through special messages, God revealed to Daniel his power and his plan for history, showing that he would rescue his people from exile and even from death.

Setting

In 605 BC, Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon (605–562 BC) attacked Jerusalem and took some Israelites as captives back to Babylon, including some of the young men of Judah's royal family ([1:1–4](#)). In this historic event, God began sending his people into exile as he had warned he would do. The Israelites had broken faith with God by breaking his covenant ([Deut 28:36, 64](#); [Jer 11:1–17](#); [25:11–12](#); [29:10–11](#)). Through the mighty king Nebuchadnezzar, God judged his people Israel ([Jer 25:9](#)). During that time, Daniel and his friends began a process of enculturation ordered by Nebuchadnezzar that threatened to absorb them into a pagan way of life while effectively neutralizing their identity as the Lord's holy people (see [Exod 19:5–6](#)).

Meanwhile, the Babylonians continued to devastate Judah and Jerusalem. In 597 BC, more Israelites were taken to Babylon, and in 586 BC, Jerusalem was destroyed. After 586 BC, Judah was no longer a nation; God's people were totally helpless and hopeless. At this low point in their existence, God's people became the tail of the nations, not their head (see [Deut 28:13, 44](#)). It seemed that they might simply be absorbed into Babylon and disappear from the stage of history.

The promise that Abraham's descendants would be a blessing to all nations seemed hopelessly in default ([Gen 12:1–3](#)). The great Gentile superpowers of the ancient Near East, first Assyria and then Babylon, ruled the world. What would happen to Israel in exile? What would become of God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses ([Exod 19–20](#)), and David ([2 Sam 7:1–29](#))? Would God act on the basis of his words of hope through his prophets? How would God rescue his people from exile?

Daniel maintained his integrity, honored his people, and glorified his God through the reigns of several Babylonian kings to the end of the Babylonian Exile. As God's people endured the "death of exile" ([Ezek 37](#)), God showed Daniel visions of the future, when a coming King would receive power and reign forever.

In 539 BC, Cyrus of Persia shook the world by invading Babylon, gaining entrance into the capital city, and subduing it and its blasphemous ruler, Belshazzar, just as the prophet Isaiah had predicted he would ([Isa 44:26–45:7](#)). Daniel witnessed the decree that the captive peoples could return to

their homes (see [Ezra 1:2–4](#)). This fulfilled Jeremiah's prophecy ([Jer 25:11–12](#); [29:10–11](#)) and answered Daniel's prayer earlier that same year ([Dan 9:1–19](#)). After seventy years of servitude, God's people were being restored.

The Lord gave his holy people encouragement for the future through Daniel by painting the canvas of history with visions and dreams. God spoke to give his people new hope as they faced a threatening future.

Summary

The book of Daniel covers the period from 605 BC to around 535 BC. [Chapters 1–6](#) feature events and stories that demonstrate God's faithfulness to Daniel and his friends as they remained faithful to God and his law. Three times, the Hebrew captives were faced with royal decrees that went against God's law ([chs 1, 3, 6](#)); all three times, they exhibited wisdom while obeying God, and he saved them from harm. Three times, God spoke through Daniel to interpret revelations he had given to pagan kings ([chs 2, 4, 5](#)). Daniel's words and subsequent events showed that God wields ultimate power and authority on earth.

In [chapters 7–12](#), the focus shifts to God's sovereignty over the course of history. [Chapter 7](#) uses animal symbolism to tell the same story found in [chapter 2](#): World history will culminate in the establishment of God's Kingdom, but first there will be fierce opposition to God and his purposes. Chapter 8 highlights the roles of Persia and Greece, culminating in the acts of a wicked ruler who opposes God's people. Chapter 9 features Daniel's marvelous prayer that is inspired by Jeremiah's prophecy of seventy years of servitude ([9:1–2](#)). The prayer touched God's heart and helped to end the Exile. As a result of the prayer, the angel Gabriel is sent to Daniel to reveal the coming seventy sets of seven, an overview of God's plan to establish his people and deal with their oppressors. In [chapters 10–12](#), the book concludes with a final vision that portrays history from the third year of Cyrus (536 BC), to the time of Greece and Rome, and on to the time of the resurrection. Daniel was faithful to his calling, and God promises that he will be raised in the end ([12:13](#)).

Authorship and Date

Scholars have endlessly debated the date at which the book of Daniel was put into its final form. Most conservative scholars argue that Daniel wrote the book in the late 500s BC. The book claims to be predictive prophecy ([2:29-31](#); [4:24](#); [7:1-12:13](#)), and the author places Daniel in the 500s ([2:1](#); [5:1](#); [10:1](#)). The book displays excellent knowledge of Babylonian history, although some historical issues do arise.

Other scholars argue for dating the book around 164 BC, primarily because Daniel describes events down to about that time—the predictions in [11:1-35](#) are thought to be much too detailed about events that occurred between 190 and 164 BC to have been given 300 years beforehand.

There are problems with ruling out an early date for the book, however. Above all, the book in its present form is clearly attributed to Daniel alone; a late date assumes that Daniel could not have been the author. If Daniel himself did not write the predictive prophecies, then the book's claims lack the integrity demanded of one of God's inspired prophets and would have faced difficulty being accepted into the Hebrew canon. One of the major claims of Daniel is that God can predict the future ([2:27-29](#); [10:21](#)). Without denying that the precision of detail is remarkable, these predictions should not be assumed to be impossible: Who is to say with what detail God may reveal the future to his prophets?

Daniel's visions also have characteristics of apocalyptic literature. Apocalyptic literature was especially popular among Jewish writings of the intertestamental period (after 400 BC), so it has been said that the book could not have been written prior to that time. However, recent studies have argued that apocalyptic thinking is present in biblical books from the exilic period. Therefore it is possible to think of Daniel as serving as a model for the later apocalypses.

In summary, it is not implausible to view the book of Daniel as having been written in the 500s BC by Daniel himself. The arguments for later authorship are not without problems, and the traditional viewpoint is consistent with the book's character as inspired predictive prophecy.

Daniel as Literature

Daniel contains history, but it contains much more. It teaches the theological lessons of history by going behind earthly events to demonstrate their true meaning and significance. It shows God's hand and plan in history by the way it reports events.

Daniel as Wisdom Literature. Daniel is a book of wisdom intended to make God's people wise in God's ways. The wise person is purified through suffering, seeks the path of righteousness, and leads others into that way ([11:33-35](#); [12:3](#)). The wise person knows that God Most High is the God of gods, that he holds the future in his hands, and that he can rescue his people from any danger ([3:16-18](#); [6:21-22](#); [12:1-3](#)).

Daniel as Apocalyptic Literature. Certain parts of Daniel belong to a genre called apocalyptic literature (*apocalyptic* comes from the Greek word *apokalupsis*, meaning "revelation"). This genre pulls back the curtain of earthly history and reveals the activity of God, angels, and other spiritual powers behind the scenes. These activities affect historical events on the earth. Apocalyptic literature reveals reality by using rich symbolic language such that statues, animals, or horns can represent such things as kings, kingdoms, and persons.

It is important to interpret apocalyptic literature according to what its imagery intends. What is the reality and truth behind the imagery? The literary context and the historical background of a passage must be examined in order to properly interpret its symbolism. Sometimes the insights needed to interpret the imagery are found within the text ([7:1-14](#), [16-17](#), [23-25](#)). In other cases, a study of the social, political, military, or cultural milieu will yield helpful insights. For instance, studying the history of Babylon can be helpful in understanding why a certain image for Babylon (a golden head or a lion) is fitting. By going behind earthly events to demonstrate their true meaning, the book of Daniel teaches a number of theological lessons.

The Text of Daniel

The ancient Greek version of Daniel and the Latin Vulgate include three passages not found in the Hebrew manuscripts. These passages are included in Roman Catholic and Orthodox editions of the Bible, but not in Protestant editions.

Meaning and Message

Daniel's major theme is that God is sovereign: He will accomplish his purposes for humanity and all of creation. History is on an inexorable march toward the Kingdom of God, in which God's sovereignty will be fully realized. God judges and rescues his people, controls history as he pleases on a universal scale, and raises up or brings down pagan kingdoms and kings. He decided when to conclude the Exile ([9:18-19](#)), and he defeats and controls the powers of evil ([4:30, 32](#); [7:8, 20-21](#); [10:13](#); [11:28, 30-32](#)). Heavenly powers bow to him ([3:28](#); [4:23, 35](#); [5:5](#); [6:21](#); [8:16](#); [9:21](#); [10:5, 13](#); [12:1](#)), and he has the power to raise the dead ([12:1-3](#)). His wisdom controls all things ([3:18](#); [11:35](#)). He chooses and approves of those who are beloved and highly esteemed in his eyes ([9:23](#); [10:11, 19](#)). God establishes his Kingdom over all the earth forever, and his people will rule over it with their King, the Son of Man ([7:13, 22](#); see [Ps 110:1](#); [Matt 24:27-44](#); [25:31](#); [26:2, 64](#); [Mark 14:62](#); [Rev 1:7](#)).