



A Self-Study Workbook by Nathan Combs

Introduction to Daniel

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Author and Title

The book of Daniel, named after and written by Daniel in the sixth century b.c., records the events of his life and the visions that he saw from the time of his exile in 605 (1:1) until the third year of King Cyrus (536; 10:1). Daniel, whose name means “God is my Judge,” was a young man of noble blood who was exiled from Judah during the time of King Jehoiakim (609–597 b.c.) and lived thereafter at the Babylonian court. After the fall of the Babylonian Empire, he served the Medo-Persian Empire that succeeded it.

Date

Both Jewish and Christian (cf. [Matt. 24:15](#)) tradition have held that the author of this book is Daniel, a Jew who lived during the sixth-century b.c. Babylonian exile. Many of the chapters are dated and range from the first year of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign (605 b.c.; [Dan. 1:1](#)) to Cyrus’s third year (536; [10:1](#)). But because of its detailed prophecies of events in the middle of the second century b.c. (see [ch. 11](#)) and alleged historical inconsistencies with what scholars know of sixth-century history (see note on [5:30–31](#)), some scholars have argued that the book must be a second-century document, from the time when Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175–164 b.c.) was oppressing God’s people. In that case, it would contain “prophecies after the fact,” put into the mouth of a famous historical character rather than being written by Daniel himself. Thus, the visions that “Daniel” saw would attempt to interpret rather than predict history. It has also been argued that the book must be dated later than the sixth century due to its language, especially the presence of Persian and Greek loanwords.

However, the facts do not require a late date. In the first place, current knowledge of sixth-century b.c. history is far from complete, and there are plausible harmonizations that explain the alleged discrepancies.

Second, the Bible asserts clearly that the Lord announces ahead of time his plans through his prophets as a means of vindicating his sovereignty and encouraging his people (see [Isa. 41:21–24](#); [44:6–7](#)), and there is no reason in principle why such prophecies should not be detailed and precise. Some scholars, who allow in principle that God can foretell events, nevertheless suggest that such detailed foretelling is unparalleled in the rest of the canonical prophets, and that it cannot be reconciled with the usual purpose of prediction (namely, that the first audience should be faithful to the covenant). In reply, note that Jeremiah did give a specific amount of time for the exile ([Jer. 25:11](#); cf. note on [Dan. 9:2](#)). Further, the high degree of specificity in Daniel’s prophecies does serve its first audience as well as those to follow: this shows how carefully God has planned events and governs them for his perfect ends; therefore the faithful can recognize that none of their troubles take God by surprise, and none will derail his purpose of vindicating those who steadfastly love him. This is quite relevant to the people of God in Daniel’s day, who are on the verge of horrendous devastations and persecutions (see notes on [ch. 11](#)); they must be assured that the story will continue to its appointed fulfillment, so that they do not lose heart.

Third, there were likely Greeks and Persians present at the Babylonian court as mercenaries and in other capacities, providing a ready explanation for the presence of loanwords.

Fourth, the book of Daniel was accepted as canonical by the community of Qumran (who produced the Dead Sea Scrolls). This is telling because this group emerged as a separate party in Judaism between 171 and 167 b.c., before the proposed late date. They would not have accepted the book if it had appeared after the split.

Fifth, some who favor a later date say that the author of Daniel represented Antiochus IV Epiphanes using the figure of Nebuchadnezzar. Literary studies, however, have shown that the book of Daniel puts Nebuchadnezzar in far too positive a light (e.g., he comes to acknowledge the true God) for him to be an effective image of the relentless persecutor Antiochus IV. Of course the book's lesson, about God's sovereignty over even the imperial forces, would have taken a heightened relevance in the days of Antiochus IV; but that is different from saying that the book was written for that particular occasion. There are therefore no compelling reasons to deny that Daniel wrote this book.

Theme

The central theme of the book of Daniel is God's sovereignty over history and empires, setting up and removing kings as he pleases (2:21; 4:34–37). All of the kingdoms of this world will come to an end and will be replaced by the Lord's kingdom, which will never pass away (2:44; 7:27). Though trials and difficulties will continue for the saints up until the end, those who are faithful will be raised to glory, honor, and everlasting life in this final kingdom (12:1–3).

Purpose, Occasion, and Background

The book of Daniel is made up of two halves, each of which has its own genre. The first half (chs. 1–6) contains narratives from the lives of Daniel and his three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These court stories exemplify faithful living in exile and provide models of how God's people should live as strangers and exiles in a world that is not their home (Heb. 13:14). They show Daniel and his friends serving their pagan masters loyally, as Jeremiah 29:5–7 had commanded, yet without compromising their greater loyalty to God. The second half of the book (Daniel 7–12) contains apocalyptic visions, which are designed to reassure God's people that in spite of their present persecution and suffering, God is in control and will ultimately be victorious. The Lord is aware of the suffering of his people and will bring their trials to an end on the day when he establishes his kingdom. The final victory belongs to the Ancient of Days and his representative, the Son of Man (ch. 7). When they triumph, the powers and authorities of this world will be defeated and judged, while the saints will be vindicated and rewarded (7:26–27).

The two parts of the book are linked by a variety of literary features: (1) the dates attached to the visions locate them during the same period of history as the narratives of chapters 1–6; (2) the book begins in Hebrew, switches into Aramaic from 2:4–7:28, and then returns to Hebrew for chapters 8–12; (3) the vision of the four beasts in chapter 7 mirrors in a number of ways Nebuchadnezzar's dream in chapter 2; and (4) the message of the visions of chapters 7–12 reinforces the message of the narratives in chapters 1–6: God's ultimate victory over the powers and authorities of this present evil age is sure, so the wise will be faithful to the Lord in the meantime, whatever pressures are brought to bear upon them.

History of Salvation Summary

The people of Judah could have interpreted their exile to Babylon as the end of their special relationship with God. But not only does the book of Daniel show them that it is possible to be faithful to God even away from the Promised Land, it also shows them that God has not abandoned his plan for the whole world: he controls all of history, even the most dire conflicts, to bring his Messiah's rule to all nations.

Literary Features

The book of Daniel is unique in the Bible in falling decisively into two distinct genres in its two halves. The first six chapters are hero stories comprised of six self-contained ordeals. The last six chapters are a series of visions that employ highly symbolic images to portray vast stretches of political and spiritual history. The visions that deal with the end times are apocalyptic visions. The techniques of symbolic reality figure prominently in all of the dreams and visions, including those in the first six chapters; in symbolic reality, the world that is entered consists largely of great symbols instead of literal characters and places.

The prophet Daniel provides the greatest point of unity in the book, since he figures in most of the separate episodes in the narrative half of the book and is the first-person narrator of the visions in the second half. The sovereignty of God is a unifying element in the plot and theme. The "world" of the story is constant, and its main features include the political and courtly arena of action (a world of courts and kings); supernatural and miraculous happenings and characters; dreams and visions; and striking and famous images (the fiery furnace; a disembodied hand that writes on a wall; a lions' den; and a gigantic statue of a man composed of various materials).

Outline

- I Daniel and the Three Friends at the Babylonian Court (1:1–6:28)
 - A Prologue (1:1–21)
 - 1 Daniel and his friends taken into exile (1:1–7)
 - 2 Daniel and his friends remain undefiled (1:8–16)
 - 3 Daniel and his friends promoted and preserved (1:17–21)
 - B Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a great statue (2:1–49)
 - 1 The dream and Nebuchadnezzar's threat (2:1–13)
 - 2 Daniel's response and prayer (2:14–24)
 - 3 Daniel interprets the dream (2:25–45)
 - 4 Nebuchadnezzar promotes Daniel (2:46–49)
 - C Nebuchadnezzar builds a great statue (3:1–30)
 - 1 The nations worship Nebuchadnezzar's statue (3:1–7)
 - 2 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego preserved in the fiery furnace (3:8–29)
 - 3 Nebuchadnezzar promotes Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (3:30)
 - D Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a toppled tree (4:1–37)
 - 1 Nebuchadnezzar's dream and its interpretation (4:1–27)
 - 2 Nebuchadnezzar's humbling (4:28–33)

- 3 Nebuchadnezzar's exaltation (4:34-37)
- E Belshazzar's feast (5:1-31)
 - 1 An idolatrous feast (5:1-4)
 - 2 An unreadable message (5:5-9)
 - 3 A forgotten interpreter (5:10-12)
 - 4 A message of judgment (5:13-31)
- F The lions' den (6:1-28)
 - 1 Daniel promoted (6:1-3)
 - 2 The administrators plot to remove Daniel (6:4-15)
 - 3 Daniel preserved in the lions' den (6:16-24)
 - 4 Darius acknowledges the power of Daniel's God (6:25-27)
 - 5 Daniel preserved until the end of the exile (6:28)
- II The Visions of Daniel (7:1-12:13)
 - A The vision of four great beasts and the heavenly court (7:1-28)
 - 1 The four great beasts (7:1-8)
 - 2 The Ancient of Days judges the beasts (7:9-12)
 - 3 The coming of the Son of Man (7:13-14)
 - 4 The interpretation of the vision (7:15-27)
 - 5 Daniel's response (7:28)
 - B The vision of the ram, the goat, and the little horn (8:1-27)
 - 1 The vision of the ram and the goat (8:1-14)
 - 2 The interpretation of the vision (8:15-26)
 - 3 Daniel's response (8:27)
 - C Daniel's prayer and its answer (9:1-27)
 - 1 Daniel's prayer concerning the 70 years (9:1-19)
 - 2 Gabriel's answer: 70 sevens before the promised redemption (9:20-27)
 - D Daniel's vision of the final conflict (10:1-12:13)
 - 1 A heavenly messenger brings news of heavenly conflict (10:1-11:1)
 - 2 A detailed vision of future earthly conflicts among nations (11:2-45)
 - 3 The promise of resurrection to glory or shame (12:1-4)
 - 4 How long until the end? (12:5-13)

The City of Babylon

The city of Babylon reached its zenith under Nebuchadnezzar II (Nebuchadnezzar of Scripture, who reigned from 606–562 B.C.). He restored and enlarged it, making it the largest city seen in the world up to that time. The Euphrates River flowed through it, with the oldest quarter of the city lying on the east bank of the river. The city was surrounded by a city wall with fortified gates that were named after the various Babylonian deities. The Esagila Complex on the east bank of the Euphrates contained the Temple of Marduk with its associated seven-storied ziggurat Etemenanki.

From Esagila, the Processional Way (its walls lined with glazed bricks with representations of lions) led to the Ishtar Gate (which was decorated with glazed brick reliefs of dragons and young bulls). Beside the Ishtar Gate stood two immense fortified palaces. A bridge led over the Euphrates to the western part of the city. No evidence of the famed Hanging Gardens of Babylon has been found, but if anything like this was ever constructed here, it would have been during this time, at the height of the city's splendor. The city was captured by Cyrus the Persian in 539 B.C.



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Rulers During the Time of Daniel		
Babylon	Nebuchadnezzar	605-562 B.C.
	Nabonidus	556-539 B.C.
	Co-regent Belshazzar	550-539 B.C.
Persia	Cyrus	539-530 B.C.
	Darius I	522-486 B.C.

Schedule of Classes

Date of Class	Material to Cover
1/4/17	Introduction to Book
1/11/17	Chapter 1: God Protects Daniel and Friends in Exile
1/18/17	Chapter 2: God Shows Nebuchadnezzar a Nation Timeline
1/25/17	Chapter 3: Golden Idol & Fiery Furnace
2/1/17	Chapter 4: God humbles Nebuchadnezzar
2/8/17	Chapter 5: God's Judgment on Belshazzar
2/15/17	Chapter 6: God's Rule Revealed to Darius
2/22/17	Chapter 7: Four Beasts and the Everlasting Kingdom
3/1/17	Chapter 8: The Ram and the Goat
3/8/17	Chapter 9: Daniel Prays for Israel
3/15/17	Chapter 10: Daniel's Terrifying Vision
3/22/17	Chapter 11: Future Earthly Conflicts
3/29/17	Chapter 12: The Time of the End

Chapter 1: God Protects Daniel and Friends in Exile

Write additional notes here:

1. Why would Daniel draw attention to what happened to some of the vessels of the temple?
2. What's the strategy behind Nebuchadnezzar's plan to capture some of Judah's upper class kids and bring them to Babylon?
3. Why did the Babylonians change the names of Daniel and his friends? What did they originally mean? What did their new names mean?
4. Why would Daniel be defiled by eating the king's food and drink?
5. Why does the Scripture say in the last verse that "Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus"?
6. Record three things that "the Lord gave..." or "God gave..." in this chapter. What do we learn from that?
7. What applications do you see for your own life in this chapter?

Chapter 2: God Shows Nebuchadnezzar a Nation Timeline

Write additional notes here:

1. What is the main (repeated) message about God in this chapter?
2. What's so unusual about Nebuchadnezzar's demand to his sorcerers?
3. How does Daniel ensure that God receives the credit for this?
4. What do we learn about God by examining Daniel's prayer?
5. Which nations are represented by the various parts of the dream? What are their dates?

Gold:

Silver:

Bronze:

Iron and Clay:

The Stone:

6. What do we learn about God's kingdom from this chapter?
7. What applications do you see for your own life in this chapter?

Chapter 3: Golden Idol & Fiery Furnace

Write additional notes here:

1. What is the main (repeated) message about God in this chapter?
2. How does Nebuchadnezzar's statue compare to the statue in his dream? What does that suggest about how Nebuchadnezzar sees himself and his empire?
3. Certain lists are repeated in this chapter - the list of officials, the list of musical instruments. Why? What effect does that create for the reader?
4. From what Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego tell the king, what do they understand about God?
5. How does Nebuchadnezzar's reaction to this miracle compare with his reaction to Daniel's revelation in the previous chapter?
6. What applications do you see for your own life in this chapter?

Chapter 4: God Humbles Nebuchadnezzar

Write additional notes here:

1. What lessons does Nebuchadnezzar learn about God and His kingdom in this chapter? Why does he write this declaration to the entire world?
2. Summarize the dream and its interpretation.
3. Why are we told that it was a full year between the warning and the judgment on Nebuchadnezzar?
4. God humbles Nebuchadnezzar by turning him into a hairy, grass-eating, long-nailed crazy person. Why is this such an appropriate punishment for pride?
5. How was Nebuchadnezzar restored to his throne?
6. What applications do you see for your own life in this chapter?

Chapter 5: God's Judgment on Belshazzar

Write additional notes here:

1. Why did Belshazzar and his guests drink out of the golden vessels of the temple? What kind of message does that send?
2. Although Belshazzar is not literally the son of Nebuchadnezzar, the mighty former king was called his "father." Why? What's the connection?
3. Why does Daniel compare Belshazzar to Nebuchadnezzar before he gives the interpretation of the message?
4. The words "Mene, Men, Tekel, and Parsin" were basic terms. What did they mean in Aramaic and how did Daniel interpret them?
5. What is the repeated message about God in this chapter?
6. What applications do you see for your own life in this chapter?

Chapter 6: God's Rule Revealed to Darius

Write additional notes here:

1. What do you see in the text that indicates that Daniel was a trusted man?
2. Compare the plot against Daniel to the plot against Jesus. What are the similarities and underlying motives?
3. What is significant about Daniel's reaction to the sinful law passed by Darius?
4. According to Daniel, why did God save him from the lions?
5. What does Darius understand about God's character at the end of the chapter?
6. What applications do you see for your own life in this chapter?

Chapter 7: Four Beasts and the Everlasting Kingdom

Write additional notes here:

1. Chronologically, the vision Daniel receives in this chapter occurs before the events of chapters 5-6. Why does Daniel place this message here?

2. Using chapter 2 as a help, define the four beasts that Daniel sees in this chapter:
 1. Lion with plucked off eagles' wings:

 2. Bear with three ribs in its mouth:

 3. Leopard with four wings and four heads:

 4. Terrifying and dreadful fourth beast:

 5. Little horn on fourth beast:

3. Why is God called the "Ancient of Days" and what is the purpose of vs. 13-14? Define what is going on in this part of Daniel's vision.

4. What will the fourth beast do and what will happen to it? What will happen to God's people?

5. What is interesting about Daniel's reactions to knowing the future? Is this the reaction you might expect?

6. What applications do you see for your own life in this chapter?

Chapter 8: The Ram and the Goat

Write additional notes here:

1. After examining the chapter carefully and noting the angel's interpretation, define the following images:
 1. Ram with two horns:
 2. Male goat with the great horn:
 3. Four horns in place of the one:
 4. Little horn which grew exceedingly great:
2. What do we learn about the actions of the little horn? Where does his power come from? What does it mean to rise up against the "Prince of princes"? What will happen to the horn? How does this fit with history?
3. Why is Daniel given a specific historical interpretation of his vision? What benefit might that serve?
4. What is Daniel's reaction, what is he told to do with his vision, and why? How does this compare with the book of Revelation (especially chapter 5 and following)?
5. What applications do you see for your own life in this chapter?

Chapter 9: Daniel Prays for Israel

Write additional notes here:

1. Why is Daniel motivated to pray and what are the main ideas of this prayer?
2. What does Daniel confess to God?
3. In his prayer, Daniel gives several reasons for God to hear his cries for mercy - what are they?
4. What do we learn about God from the coming of Gabriel (9.20-23)?
5. What will happen during the 70 weeks? What's the main point of this description?
6. Gabriel speaks of "one who makes desolate" (9.27) - who is this? Compare Matt. 24.15 and Luke 21.20.
7. What applications do you see for your own life in this chapter?

Chapter 10: Daniel's Terrifying Vision

Write additional notes here:

1. In the third year of King Cyrus, Daniel receives another vision of a “great conflict.” Two years earlier, Jews had been allowed to return to Israel, but they had encountered problems when they tried to rebuild (Ezra 1-4). What might this vision be intended to show Daniel and the Jews?
2. Why is Daniel praised by God?
3. Who's the “prince of Persia” and the “prince of Greece”?
4. What insight to we get into angels and the spiritual realm from this chapter?
5. What is Daniel's response to this heavenly visitor who tells him about unseen heavenly conflicts?
6. What applications do you see for your own life in this chapter?

Chapter 11: Future Earthly Conflicts

Write additional notes here:

1. Don't get lost in all the details and ignore the big picture of this section of Daniel! What are your overall impressions of this chapter? What intrigues you? What confuses you?

2. Why did God give Daniel and the Jews so much exact prophecy about the years to come?

3. Define the following images, perhaps by using a study Bible, commentary, etc. (if needed, come see me for resources, I'd be happy to help)
 1. The three kings of Persia and a fourth that is much richer:

 2. The mighty king with great dominion who will do as he pleases (3):

 3. The kingdom broken and divided toward the four winds of heaven:

 4. The king of the south:

 5. The king of the north:

 6. The king of the north who defiled the temple and took away the regular offerings (31):

4. What applications do you see for your own life in this chapter?

Chapter 12: The Time of the End

Write additional notes here:

1. When you read Jesus' teachings on a time of suffering for God's people, how do they compare with what we read here in Daniel 12? You might want to review Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21.5-36.
2. Explain the meaning of vss. 2-3. How would these verses encourage Daniel's readers?
3. What are the two questions that the angel is asked? Why are those important questions for Daniel? How does the angel respond?
4. What does it mean to be "wise" in this chapter?
5. Look carefully at the last verse of the book. What is the angel telling Daniel to do and what is the message for the first readers of Daniel's book?
6. What applications do you see for your own life in this chapter?