

Intro to DANIEL

Author: While there are various opinions as to who wrote the Book of Daniel, it is commonly accepted that the book was penned by Daniel, himself. It may be possible that another writer wrote the first six chapters, or that Daniel, himself wrote them, referring to himself in the third person. In chapter 7, it is unmistakable that the visions and dreams related were from his own pen. The text, itself, gives us much background information on who Daniel was in the first verses of Chapter 1. The verses tell of the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar and the transporting of exiles from Jerusalem to Babylon. Daniel was one of four prominent men taken from Judah, and verse three tells us that they came from the upper echelons of the royal and noble ranks. The name, Daniel, means “God is my judge.” Nebuchadnezzar gave him the name “Belteshazzar,” which means “may he protect the King.” From all the scripture that we read, Daniel was a man of impeccable character and integrity. This is one of the few places in scripture where we read of a major Biblical character having few, if any, character flaws.

The book was probably written between 540 and 530 B.C. and recounts the events that occurred during the reign of four Babylonian kings: Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Cyrus the Great, and Darius. Around 600 B.C., the Babylonians began exiling men from Judah to Babylon. Daniel was in this first group of captives and was probably around 15 years old at the time. A second group of exiles were taken with King Jehoachin, including the prophet Ezekiel, around 597 B.C. A third group of exiles were taken with the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., as foretold by Jeremiah in the 52nd chapter of his prophecy.

Synopsis of the Book (chapter by chapter)

Chapter 1: We are introduced to the four young men from Judah who are chosen to be groomed in the King’s court: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. They were assigned new names by the king: Daniel became Belteshazzar, Hananiah became Shadrach, Mishael became Meshach, and Azariah became Abednego. Part of the King’s prescription for the four young men was to put them on a diet of the king’s meat and wine. But Daniel refused and made a deal with the king that a diet of vegetables and water would make them much healthier and able-bodied. So at the end of 10 days, the results were just as Daniel had said, and they were given vegetables and water on a regular basis.

Chapter 2: Seeking someone who could interpret his dream, Nebuchadnezzar consults the advice of Daniel, who interprets his dream with the help of God. The interpretation of the dream in Daniel 2:36 ff. had to do with the empire of Babylon and the empires that would succeed it. The head of gold was the present kingdom of Babylon, which, in Jeremiah 51:7, was referred to as a golden cup. Gold was always associated with the kingdom of Babylon. Daniel 2:39 says that “another kingdom will rise, inferior to yours.” History confirms that the Babylonian Empire was overthrown by the Medes and the Persians, and was represented by the chest and arms of silver. Verse 39 also told of a kingdom of bronze that will rise and rule, indicative of the Greek Empire of Alexander the Great, who overthrew the Medes and the Persians in 331 B.C. Verse 40 tells of the fourth empire that breaks and smashes everything, which came to be known as the Roman Empire. Verse 44 is a messianic prophecy which tells of a kingdom that God, himself, will set up with the rock cut out of the mountain, not made by human hands. Because of the brilliant interpretation, the king placed Daniel in a high position and lavished many gifts upon him.

Chapter 3: Here we read the famous story of the three men in the fiery furnace. Nebuchadnezzar constructed a god of gold 90 feet and 9 feet wide and commanded everyone to bow down to it at the sound of the instruments. When the instruments sounded, all but three—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—bowed down to the idol. As a result, they were thrown into the fiery furnace, but were not harmed. When the king looked in to the furnace, he saw a fourth man with the three—someone like the son of God. As a result, Nebuchadnezzar released and promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and offered praise to their God.

Chapter 4: Nebuchadnezzar has another dream, for which, he seeks an interpretation from Daniel. This dream is that of a large tree which is cut down and stripped of its branches. Daniel tells Nebuchadnezzar that the tree represents the king, himself, who will be cut down due to his arrogance and pride. The prophecy was fulfilled with the king going through a time of temporary insanity, living with the wild animals and eating grass like the cattle. Raising his eyes toward heaven, the king praised the Most High God and his sanity was restored.

Chapter 5: Belshazzar is now the king,, and while feasting, a mysterious handwriting appears on the wall. MENE MENE TEKEL PARSIN, which interpreted, told that the kingdom would be brought to an end and be taken by the Medes and the Persians. That very night, Belshazzar was slain and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom at the age of 62.

Chapter 6: This chapter is the famous story of Daniel and the Lion's Den. Because they could find no corruption in him, Daniel's enemies set a trap for him. Knowing that he was a praying man, they succeeded in getting the king to sign a law forbidding prayer to anyone but the king. When Daniel violated the king's law, the king had no choice but to throw him into the lion's den. Seeing that Daniel made it through the night unharmed, the king issued a decree that everyone worship the God of Daniel.

Chapter 7: Here is where the book of Daniel almost becomes a second book. Chapter 7 on is filled with prophecies that can be interpreted as being partly fulfilled in Daniel's day and partly fulfilled at the end of time. In Chapter 7, we read of Daniel's vision of the four beasts, which like the vision in Chapter 2, represent the same four empires: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greek, and Roman. The difference is that in verse 23, the prophecy seems to point to the end of time and the emergence of the antichrist and his reign of 3 1/2 years.

Chapter 8: The vision of the two horned ram and the goat are prophecies concerning the Medes and the Persians (the two horns of the ram) being taken over by the goat (the Greeks and the conquests of Alexander the Great).

Chapter 9: Daniel offers a prayer to the Lord in the first part of Chapter 9,. In the latter part of chapter 9 is the famous discourse on the seventy "sevens." Through the years, this has been the topic of many different interpretations as to what the seventy "sevens" represent. Most scholars agree that the seventy "sevens represent 490 years, and most agree that the first 69 sevens represent the period of time from the rebuilding of the temple to the time of Christ. However, it is that 70th week that has been the point of diverse interpretation. Most hold to the belief that the last 7 represents the 7 year tribulation that will occur after the rapture and before the return of Christ.

Chapters 10 - 12: The last vision of Daniel is the most apocalyptic in nature, and resembles the vision that John saw and related in the book of Revelation. In chapter 10, Daniel sees a vision of the Lord, who assures him, that even though evil empires will rise and conquer, God will be the giver of peace and strength during these times. The latter part of chapter 11 refers to the "king who will do as he pleases," and most prophecy scholars believe this to be the antichrist during the end times. Chapter 12 ends this prophetic book with references to the great tribulation, the resurrection of the dead, and the final consummation of the Kingdom of God.

Life Lessons:

- **God rules even among the kingdoms of men**
- **We have the power to stand firm even when we feel outnumbered**
- **We all will be tested and refined by fire**
- **God will deliver us even in the most dire of circumstances**
- **God has a plan to deliver His people and establish His kingdom**