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## The Book of Daniel

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### **Author:**

The book itself claims to be the work of Daniel (7:1; 8:1; 9:1-2, 20; 10:1-2; 11:1; 12:5). Jesus Himself credited the book to Daniel: "When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand)" (Matthew 24:15). The prophet Ezekiel also referred to Daniel, noting his righteousness along with that of Noah and Job: "Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it [the wicked land of Judah], they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord GOD" (Ezekiel 14:14; see 14:20). Like Noah and Job, Daniel was an actual historical person, not a fictional character.

### **Daniel, The Man:**

Daniel was a remarkable man. His life and ministry spans the entire duration of Judah's 70-year captivity in Babylon. We will see him rise to high office in the administration of both the Babylonian and Persian Empires and yet maintain his faith and obedience to God despite persecution and trial. The story of Daniel in the lion's den is one known from childhood throughout the Judeo-Christian world.

Since Nebuchadnezzar's invasion "took place in 605 BC, and Daniel was at that point placed in the category of 'young men' to be educated (Dan. 1:4), he would probably have been 15-20 years old. That would make his date of birth around 625-620 BC during the middle of the reign of the last godly king of Judah, Josiah (640-609 BC; 2 Chron. 34-35)" ("Daniel," Paul Gardner, ed., *The Complete Who's Who in the Bible*, 1995, p. 122). Indeed, Josiah may have been a great influence on the young Daniel. In fact, Daniel 1:3 says that those who were carried to Babylon to be educated included some of the nobles, even royalty. Josephus states that Daniel and his three famous friends were all members of the royal family (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 10, chap. 10, sec. 1). This is even more reason to suspect Josiah's influence—and perhaps the influence of Josiah's friend, the prophet Jeremiah.

Although Daniel served for around 70 years in the royal palaces of four great gentile kings (compare Daniel 1:21), we are given little information about his civil duties. The book that bears his name is not a complete chronicle of his life but is actually a short collection of different documents, most of them written by Daniel but one surprisingly authored by Nebuchadnezzar (i.e., Daniel 4). The only definite details we have about Daniel are the incredible and inspiring stories relating to his spiritual life and messages.

### **Date Written:**

The book of Daniel was completed around 530 BC. It opens with the account of Daniel being deported by Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon during the rule of Judah's King Jehoiakim—in 605 or 604 BC. (1:1). Daniel wrote about events he experienced and visions he received during the time period of 605 to around 536 BC. (10:1). His service

as a government official is said to have ended during the first year of King Cyrus' reign (1:21), and his prophetic ministry sometime during Cyrus' third year. Daniel likely completed his writings within a few years of retirement. Most commentators date this between 532 to 530 BC. Daniel lived a long and fruitful life. Assuming that he was in his teens when deported to Babylon, he would have been 85 to 90 years of age when he completed his writings.

### **To Whom Written:**

Unlike most prophetic books, Daniel's writings are not addressed to any one specific audience.

First, his interpretations of dreams and visions were given directly to the Gentile kings he served—most notably Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, and Darius. But he no doubt recorded his life and visions to encourage the Jewish exiles living in Babylon and beyond—his people who had been exiled from their homeland as a result of God's judgment. The Lord through His prophet was assuring the people that He was in complete control and that they would one day be restored as a nation according to God's promise and plan.

Second, one of the key themes of Daniel is God's supreme power and rule—His sovereignty over all nations and their rulers. Daniel makes clear that God appoints the rulers of this world; therefore, He can also bring them to ruin. Looking forward in time, Daniel likely wrote with future kings, presidents, prime ministers, and leaders of all kinds in mind. What Daniel experienced and witnessed, he recorded as a warning to leaders and rulers of every nation—all who would be given power in every generation and age. Just as with Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar, all rulers will one day give account of their rule to the Living God.

Third, Daniel is written to all people of every nation and generation:

- to give an example and warning to us (1 Corinthians 10:11)
- to teach us how to live (Romans 15:4)

### **Purposes:**

The principal theological emphasis in Daniel is the absolute sovereignty of Yahweh, the God of Israel. At a time when it seemed to all the world that his cause was lost and that the gods of the heathen had triumphed, causing his temple to be burned to the ground, it pleased the Lord strikingly and unmistakably to display his omnipotence. The theme running through the whole book is that the fortunes of kings and the affairs of men are subject to God's decrees, and that he is able to accomplish his will despite the most determined opposition of the mightiest potentates on earth.

The miracles recorded in chapters 1–6 demonstrate God's sovereignty on behalf of his saints. The surpassing health of Daniel and his three companions after ten days of a simple vegetable diet (ch. 1); the miraculous disclosure to Daniel of the contents of Nebuchadnezzar's dream (ch. 2); the amazing deliverance of Daniel's three friends from

the fiery furnace (ch. 3); the previous warning to Nebuchadnezzar of seven years of dehumanizing insanity because of his overweening pride (ch. 4); the terrifying prediction inscribed on the banquet wall of Belshazzar, followed by a speedy fulfillment of the same (ch. 5); and Daniel's deliverance from the lions' den all clearly show that the Lord God of Israel was in charge of the tide of human affairs and was perfectly able to deliver his people from pagan oppression during their captivity.

A second theological emphasis in Daniel is the mighty power of prayer. Neither Daniel nor his three companions held back from asking the Lord to deliver them from life-threatening dangers and impossible dilemmas. In chapter 2 Daniel did not hesitate to declare to Arioch, the king's commander, that he would correctly recall Nebuchadnezzar's dream and interpret its meaning. In chapter 3 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did not shrink back from the prospect of a swift and horrible death in the terrible furnace, for they were certain that their God was able to save them from perishing in its heat. Their total commitment to sacrifice their lives for the Lord's cause (v.18) furnishes the firmest basis for effectual prayer.

Even more impressive was Daniel's intense and persistent prayer on behalf of his captive nation as he claimed God's promise to restore his people to their ancestral land at the end of seventy years (9:2–19; cf. 10:12–14). The third and major deportation to Babylon had taken place in 586 B.C., only fifty-two years earlier, when Daniel urgently brought this matter before the Lord. But Daniel was not content to wait for an additional eighteen years or more. He wanted to personally witness the restoration before he died, and sixty-seven years had elapsed since the captivity had begun in 605 B.C. Daniel therefore stormed the throne of God, as it were, so that the restoration of the remnant might take place in the seventieth year after his own exile. By that time he would have been a good eighty-six years old. So the Lord saw fit, in answer to Daniel's importunity, to grant him this boon by the earliest possible reckoning of the seventy-year span—even though the restoration of the temple did not occur till 516 (Ezra 6:15), or seventy years after the Solomonic temple had been destroyed (2 Chronicles 36:19).

A third theological emphasis of Daniel is the long-range purview of God's program of redemption. His marvelous plan of the ages is set forth on a scale almost as grandiose as that in Isaiah. Both works display the irresistible providence of almighty God's sovereign purpose to redeem his people through his divine-human Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. While Isaiah sets forth most clearly the substitutionary Atonement as God's means of salvation, Daniel predicts the precise year of Christ's appearance and the beginning of his ministry in A.D. 27 (cf. Dan 9:25–26). But even beyond this point, Daniel was given the revelation of the eschatological Seventieth Week (9:26b–27), which we still eagerly look forward to, expecting the second coming of the Lord, with his triumph over the rebellious powers of earth (11:36–12:12).

A fourth theological emphasis of Daniel is the indomitable grace of God. Even though Abraham's descendants would fall into apostasy and betray their trust, it was the Lord's unchangeable purpose to fulfill his promise to Abraham that he would "surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him" (Gen

18:18). God was determined that a remnant of true believers would remain faithful and present his saving truth to the Gentiles. Despite periods of rebellion and moral declension during the times of the judges, the united monarchy, and the divided monarchy, a core of followers would remain true and keep alive the testimony of a holy people. Even after the sternest warnings of the prophets had been disregarded and severe judgment of near total destruction had overtaken the nation in 587 B.C., the Lord was merciful and gracious to his people during their exile. Isaiah, Micah, and Ezekiel foresaw the return of the remnant at the end of their chastisement; but it was Daniel, living with the exiled nation through its captivity, who witnessed their release under Cyrus, to set up the second commonwealth back in the Promised Land. God never abandoned his people to the full consequences of their sin, but in loving-kindness he subjected them to an ordeal that purged them of idolatry. Then, hearing their cry of repentance, he allowed them to return to their homeland, thus setting the stage for the coming of the Messiah. The Book of Daniel thus sets forth the pattern of God's preserving grace that characterizes the NT as well, that "God's gifts and his call are irrevocable" (Rom 11:29). And even though in the NT age Israel as a nation has experienced hardening of the heart, yet after the full number of Gentile believers (the larger "Israel" of the church age) has been redeemed, "the deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob" (Rom 1:25–26).

In NT prophecy Daniel is referred to more than any other OT book. Moreover, it contains more fulfilled prophecies than any other book in the Bible.

### **Unique Features**

- Daniel has more to say about the Tribulation and the Antichrist than any other OT book.
- Daniel 11 includes a greater number of prophecies already fulfilled than any other single chapter in the Bible.
- Daniel refers to another prophet, Jeremiah, by name (Daniel 9:2).
- Daniel 9:25-26 marks the only OT occurrence of the Hebrew term Messiah ("Anointed One")
- In the original Aramiac, Daniel 7:13 uses the term "Son of man." This term occurs several times in the OT, mainly in Ezekiel, referring to Ezekiel himself. It also occurs many times in the NT in reference to Christ. Daniel's use of it is the only clearly messianic OT occurrence.
- Daniel is the only OT book to mention angels by name: Gabriel, who interpreted visions for Daniel (Daniel 8:16; Daniel 9:21) and would later announce Christ's birth to Mary (Luke 1:19, 26); Michael the "archangel," seen here and elsewhere in Scripture as a spiritual warrior and defender of believers (Daniel 10:13, 21; Daniel 12:1; Jude 1:9; Rev. 12:7-9). Except for the fallen angel Lucifer (Isaiah 14:12, KJV, NKJV), Gabriel and Michael are the only two angels mentioned by name in all of Scripture.

The *Preacher's Outline and Sermon Bible Commentary*, *Expositors Bible Comentary* as well as *Willmington's Bible Handbook* were used in the preparation of this background material.