



The Book of Daniel (1-6)

*NOTES BY KERRY DICKSON; REFERENCES: THE BAKER ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF THE BIBLE
(ED. WALTER A. ELWELL), AND CHARLES RYRIE'S NASB STUDY BIBLE*

INTRODUCTION

We are introduced to Daniel when he is a very young man, and in the first half of the book (chapters 1-6) we get a slideshow of the highlights of his life – stories that span about seventy years.

The Old Testament gives numerous examples of men and women who are faithful to God, even in difficult times. Daniel is one of the best of these. He is far from his spiritual homeland, and the support that he would have had there. He is forced to serve foreign kings in a foreign land, among people who have hugely different beliefs and practices, but he is determined to serve God faithfully in everything - no matter how hard it gets. And through Daniel's faithfulness, God does some amazing things...

THE BOOK OF DANIEL (chapters 1-6)

Daniel 1:1-21:

Daniel and his friends are faithful in difficult circumstances

- In 605 BC, the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar conquered Israel, looted the temple, and took captives back to Babylon as slaves. These captives included four young Israelite men - Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.
- The captives were all to undergo an identity makeover. Each of them was given a new name, sent on an involuntary training course, and they were to be given food that was not kosher.>>

Their Hebrew names meant: God is judge; Yahweh is gracious; Who is like God?; The one that Yahweh helps. Their new names (Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego) related to Babylonian gods.

- Daniel 1:8: “But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king’s choice food or with the wine which he drank; so he sought permission from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself.”
- God “grants favour and compassion” to Daniel and his friends. That is, the commander allows them to only eat vegetables on a trial basis. The four friends are so healthy and robust at the end of the trial that they are permitted to go on eating kosher. At the end of their course, these four had excelled beyond everyone else in wisdom and understanding, and especially in the understanding of visions and dreams.

Daniel 2:1-49:

Nebuchadnezzar's first dream (God begins a conversation with the king)

- We find out that the king doesn't trust his team of dream-interpreters. (Can you blame him?) He says the only way he will know for sure that they are honest is if they can tell him his dream as well as its interpretation. When they can't do it, he decides to have the whole lot of them killed.
- Daniel and his friends are among the people affected by this decision, so when they are being rounded up, Daniel asks what is going on, and then requests to be taken to the king. The king gives him the same instructions as he had given to his team of dream-interpreters.
- "Then Daniel went to his house and informed his friends, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah about the matter, in order that they might request compassion from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his friends might not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon" (2:17-18). In a crisis, Daniel turns to trusted friends and to prayer.
- God shows Daniel the dream and its interpretation. The next few verses (2:20-23) record a beautiful song of thanksgiving from Daniel to God because their prayers had been answered.
- When he goes before the king, Daniel makes it clear that it is not through any merit of his own that he is able to give the interpretation. **Read Daniel 2:27-30.**
- The dream itself is about a four-part statue that is destroyed and it foretells the falling and rising of four different kingdoms, generally believed to represent the kingdoms of Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and Rome. And then, it says, "the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed." **Read Luke 1:30-33.>>**

The "Messianic" prophecies in the Old Testament were not fully understood by those they were originally given to, but when we read them now, knowing everything that we know, it is much clearer that this stuff is talking about Jesus.

- Going back to Daniel, the king was pleased with his interpretation of the dream and promoted him. So the next highlight we get in the slideshow is about the other three friends...

Daniel 3:1-30:

Three friends are faithful in still more difficult circumstances (God continues a conversation with the king)

- King Nebuchadnezzar has a gigantic gold statue made and then orders everyone to worship it. If they don't, they are going to be killed with fire in a furnace.
- This is a big deal for the Israelites. The very first commandment is: "You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol... you shall not worship them or serve them..." (Exodus 20:3-5). The three friends make a choice: they are going to obey God and not worship the statue, even if it means their death.
- They get called before Nebuchadnezzar and given a warning and a second chance. They are pretty gutsy. Here's what they say to the king: "We do not need to give you an answer concerning this. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But even if he does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up" (3:16-18).
- The king is furious and they are put into the furnace (after it has been made even hotter). And here we get a miracle: the furnace is so hot that the soldiers who escort the three friends to their death are killed by the heat, but the three of them are not hurt at all.
- And then, the king looks and sees four men, instead of three, walking around casually in the fire "and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods.">>

There is a lot of discussion about this fourth person. Was it an angel? Was it a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus? We don't know. But we are meant to understand that God sent an ambassador of some kind to save these three young men who were faithful to his commandment.

- The king is astonished and has them taken out of the fire and sees that they are completely unharmed. He makes a speech that makes us think he finally understands who God is (but he doesn't), and he rewards the three friends.

Daniel 4:1-37:

Nebuchadnezzar's second dream (Nebuchadnezzar finally gets it)

- The king has another troubling dream, this time it is about a strong and prosperous tree that gets cut down at the order of an angel. Daniel is called to explain the dream, and even though he is afraid (because it's bad news for the king), he gives the interpretation.
- The tree represents the king, and because of his great pride and his failure to acknowledge the sovereignty of God, he is going to be given "the mind of a donkey" and live like a wild animal for seven years until he acknowledges God. His kingdom is to be given back to him when he repents.
- One year later, the king the dream is fulfilled, exactly the way Daniel interpreted it.

Summary: The Interesting Conversion Story of Nebuchadnezzar

After Daniel interprets his first dream Nebuchadnezzar says, "Surely your God is a God of gods and a Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries" (2:47), but he still doesn't get it, because he orders the death of Daniel's friends when they refuse to worship an idol.

But then after he witnesses the miracle in the furnace, he says. "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants who put their trust in him, violating the king's command, and yielded up their bodies so as not to serve or worship any god except their own God. Therefore, I make a decree that any people, nation or tongue that speaks anything offensive against their God shall be torn limb from limb and their houses reduced to a rubbish heap, inasmuch as there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way" (3:28-29). And we think he gets it then, but he still doesn't..

But God has not given up on Nebuchadnezzar(!), because the next chapter is about God using the strangest means to get through to him. After his near-animal-transfiguration experience, Nebuchadnezzar really does get it and says, "Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise, exalt, and honour the King of heaven, for all his works are true and his ways just, and he is able to humble those who walk in pride" (4:37)

Daniel 5:1-31:

A new king (Belshazzar), same old problem

- At the same time that Daniel and his friends were taken captive, the temple had also been looted and the sacred treasures brought back to Babylon. So after Nebuchadnezzar is gone and his successor Belshazzar becomes king, the new king decides to take out the sacred vessels and use them at a big feast, where idols are worshipped: big mistake.
- A hand appears and begins writing on the banquet hall wall: “Mene Mene Tekel Upharsin.” They don’t understand it but they are terrified. The king’s mother remembers Daniel’s reputation for explaining strange things, and he is called to interpret the meaning of the phenomenon.
- Interestingly, it seems that Belshazzar (and everyone else) knew about Nebuchadnezzar’s conversion experience, yet, as Daniel says, “you have not humbled your heart, even though you knew all this” (5:22). He explains the great sin that was done in having the sacred vessels brought for his own exaltation and to praise idols while “the God in whose hand are your life-breath and your ways, you have not glorified” (5:23).
- The interpretation of the writing on the wall is this: God has numbered the kingdom and put an end to it; You (Belshazzar) have been weighed on the scales and found deficient; Your kingdom has been divided and given over to the Medes and Persians.
- The very same night the prophesy was fulfilled: Belshazzar was killed by the conquering king of the Medes and Persians, and his kingdom was overtaken.

Daniel 6:1-28:

Another new king (Darius), toxic politics, and Daniel's rock-solid character

- After the new king (Darius, possibly also known as Cyrus) takes over, Daniel is promoted to a very high position. The other court officials are jealous and conspire to bring him down. >>

This tells us a few important things about Daniel. Firstly, he is so completely trustworthy that the new conquering king knows he can trust Daniel to govern honestly on his behalf. Secondly, Daniel is committed to obey the law of the land in everything, unless it contradicts God's law. The conspiring officials clearly recognize this because they say, "We shall not find any ground of accusation against this Daniel unless we find it against him with regard to the law of his God" (6:5).

- The conspirators get Darius to agree to a law that will punish anyone by death who prays to someone other than the king for thirty days. Daniel knew that this law had been passed, but he did not change his devotional practices, but instead continued praying three times daily.
- The conspirators bring the matter to the king's attention and remind him that there is no way to get around enforcing this law. The king must have realized right away what was going on. He is deeply upset, but cannot revoke the law.
- Daniel is arrested and locked into a pit of lions. As this is happening, the king says to him, "May your God whom you constantly serve deliver you." We are told that the king spends the night fasting. Darius must have really believed it possible for God to save Daniel because first thing in the morning he goes back to the pit and calls into it, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you constantly serve been able to deliver you from the lions?"
- Daniel informs the king that God sent his angel (perhaps the same one that was sent to the three friends in the furnace) to shut the mouths of the lions. Daniel is set free and the king turns his wrath upon the conspirators who tricked him into signing the law in the first place – they and their families are placed in the pit... and the lions make short work of them.
- Darius then makes a decree honouring the God of Daniel. **Read Daniel 6:26-27.**

THE BOOK OF DANIEL (chapters 7-12)

The second half of the book of Daniel contains a collection of his prophetic visions.

It's ironic. Prophecy is tricky stuff. When we look at prophecy and cannot see how it has been fulfilled, critics of the faith say it's evidence that the whole thing is a fairy-tale. BUT, when we look at prophecy and can clearly see how it has been fulfilled, critics of the faith claim that it cannot have been written until after the prophecies came true. The alternative view is to believe that God knows all things and is able to work miracles and impart knowledge to his prophets as he chooses. Learning about how God has worked in history, helps us to know what God is like and what kind of lives he wants us to live.

