Daniel

WHAT'S THIS BOOK ABOUT? A principled young man and his friends stand up for their faith in the midst of a corrupt and sometimes hostile culture.

WHO WROTE IT? Daniel, though some sections of the book are written in the third person.

WHEN DID IT HAPPEN? The action in Daniel took place between 605 and 535 B.C. Daniel also received visions of future events.

WHERE DOES THIS BOOK FIT? The events in Daniel took place during the Exile.

THE BREAKDOWN

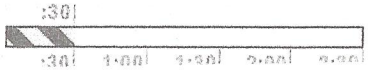
- Chapter 1: Daniel and his friends are captured, pass their first test, and are promoted
- Chapter 2: Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a statue and Daniel's interpretation
- Chapter 3: Nebuchadnezzar demands that all must worship his statue; Daniel's friends say no—and take the heat
- Chapter 4: Nebuchadnezzar's crack-up
- Chapter 5: Belshazzar's spooky banquet
- Chapter 6: Daniel survives the den of lions
- Chapters 7–12: Amazing dreams and visions

KEY CONCEPTS The expressions "Most High" and "God of heaven" show that God is sovereign.

SCORECARD

- **Daniel:** The captive who becomes a government executive and also a prophet
- **Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego:** Daniel's three friends, also high achievers
- **Nebuchadnezzar:** The Babylonian ruler who took Daniel and others into captivity and destroyed Jerusalem
- **Belshazzar:** A weak ruler; reigned after Nebuchadnezzar
- **Darius:** Ruler of Babylon after its fall to the Medes and Persians

READING TIME



WORTH MEMORIZING

- **2:20-21**

"Praise the name of God forever and ever,
for he has all wisdom and power.
He controls the course of world events;
he removes kings and sets up other kings.
He gives wisdom to the wise
and knowledge to the scholars."

- **9:19** "O Lord, hear. O Lord, forgive. O Lord, listen and act! For your own sake, do not delay, O my God, for your people and your city bear your name."

THE MASCULINE PERSPECTIVE

- **POLITICS AND FAITHFULNESS.** Daniel shows that it's possible for a man to be politically savvy without compromising. He wasn't naive, but he kept himself pure. This hurt his popularity with the "good old boy" network, but they couldn't make any of their accusations stick. Even when they framed Daniel, he remained faithful to God.

WHAT'S THE POINT OF Daniel?

+ + +

A godly man can thrive under pressure.

Timeline

612 B.C.
HABAKKUK BECOMES A PROPHET TO JUDAH

609
JEHOIAKIM BECOMES KING OF JUDAH

605
DANIEL TAKEN CAPTIVE TO BABYLON

600?
DANIEL BECOMES A BABYLONIAN OFFICIAL; FIERY FURNACE

597
NEBUCHADNEZZAR TAKES MORE CAPTIVES

593
EZEKIEL BECOMES A PROPHET TO THE EXILES

586
JUDAH FALLS; JERUSALEM IS DESTROYED; JEREMIAH'S MINISTRY ENDS

562
NEBUCHADNEZZAR DIES

553
DANIEL'S FIRST VISION

539
BABYLON OVERTHROWN; DANIEL THROWN TO LIONS

538
FIRST EXILES RETURN TO JUDAH

535
DANIEL'S MINISTRY ENDS

In the years leading to the Second World War, Winston Churchill often complained that Parliament wasn't taking Hitler's threats seriously enough, and Churchill sometimes quoted a little poem that asked: "Who is in charge of the clattering train?"

That's the question Daniel asks and answers in his incredible book of stories and prophecies. Intelligent, well-trained, and God-fearing, Daniel was among the first captives taken to Babylon. There he became a powerful statesman in both the Babylonian and Persian empires. His book divides into two parts of six chapters each. The first half tells stories showing the power of God's providence in human affairs. The last half is comprised of visions about the successive kingdoms of earth. Daniel saw the Babylonian kingdom replaced by the Persian, the Persian replaced by the Greek, and the Greek replaced by the Roman—exactly as it later happened in history. But he also saw the eventual establishment of a kingdom that would never be destroyed. His predictions provide a framework for all the rest of biblical prophecy and serve as a backdrop for the book of Revelation. Daniel's overarching message is that the Most High rules over the affairs of men, and God is sovereign over the tides of history.

As we read the headlines each day, we're led to wonder: "Who is in charge of the clattering train?" But when we read Daniel, we know the answer: Heaven rules. The Most High is laying the tracks of history and steering it toward its final destination.

KEY THOUGHT:

The Most High God is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and over the tides of human history.

KEY VERSE:

"Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever."
Daniel 12:3

KEY ACTION:

We must serve God faithfully, resolved to remain undefiled in a godless society, living prophetically for the future.

KEY PRAYER:

Lord, may I face future times with confidence, always remembering the maxim: Heaven rules.

THE BOOK OF

DANIEL

DANIEL'S LIFE AND MINISTRY BRIDGE the entire seventy-year period of Babylonian captivity. Deported to Babylon at the age of sixteen, and handpicked for government service, Daniel becomes God's prophetic mouthpiece to the gentile and Jewish world, declaring God's present and eternal purpose. Nine of the twelve chapters in his book revolve around dreams, including God-given visions involving trees, animals, beasts, and images. In both his personal adventures and prophetic visions, Daniel shows God's guidance, intervention, and power in the affairs of men.

The name *Daniye'l* or *Dani'el* likely means "God Is My Judge," and the book is, of course, named after the author and principal character. The Greek form *Daniel* in the Septuagint is the basis for the Latin and English titles.

WATCH WORDS

- **image** (statue, idol, representation, likeness)—3:1 (also 2:31, 32, 34, 35; 3:18)
- **dominion** (power, rule, sovereignty)—4:3 (also 7:12, 26, 27)
- **Messiah** (anointed one, Savior)—9:25
- **vision** (God-given sight, glimpse into the future)—10:7 (also 10:8, 16)
- **wait** (have anxious, yet confident, expectation of God's work)—12:12

SPOTLIGHT › RENAMED

Part of King Nebuchadnezzar's mind game with his captives was to rip away their heritage, even to the point of changing their names to something more Babylonian. Daniel and his friends, however, never gave up their deep faith in the God of Israel.

Birth Name	Meaning	Babylonian Name	Meaning
Daniel	God is my judge	Belteshazzar	Bel's prince, or Nebo protect his life
Hananiah	Yahweh has been gracious	Shadrach	The command of Aku
Mishael	Who is like God?	Meshach	Who is like Aku?
Azariah	Yahweh has helped	Abednego	The servant of Nebo

BASIC SURVEY

DANIEL

AUTHOR: Likely Daniel, but although chapters 7–12 are written in the first person ("I Daniel," 7:15 KJV), the first six chapters are in the third person ("Then Daniel answered," 2:14 KJV).

DATE: The period of the "Babylonian captivity," approximately 605–539 BC.

IN TEN WORDS OR LESS

Faithful to God in a challenging setting, Daniel is blessed.

DETAILS, PLEASE

As a young man, Daniel is taken from Jerusalem to serve the king of Babylon. Daniel's God-given ability to interpret dreams endears him to King Nebuchadnezzar, whose vision of a huge statue represents existing and future kingdoms. A later king gets Daniel to interpret the "writing on the wall," but loses his kingdom that same night. Later, the Median king, Cyrus, keeps Daniel as an adviser but is tricked into passing a law that sends Daniel into a den of lions. The final six chapters contain Daniel's prophetic visions, including that of "seventy weeks" of the end time.

QUOTABLE

> Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king (3:17 KJV).

> "We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy" (9:18 NIV).

UNIQUE AND UNUSUAL

The book was originally written in two languages: Hebrew (the introduction and most of the prophecies, chapter 1 and chapters 8–12) and Aramaic (the stories of chapters 2–7).

SO WHAT?

God will always take care of the people who "dare to stand alone. . .to have a purpose firm" for Him.

READ DANIEL 1–2.

- One-Month Course: your next reading is on page 142. →
- Three-Month Course: your next reading is on page 138. →
- Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 138. →

HEART OF THE BOOK

The Prophet Daniel

As a young man, Daniel—along with three other youths later called Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—was taken from his home in Jerusalem in 605 BC to serve Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon. Daniel was from a noble family (Daniel 1:3–4), and he and his friends started off by taking a courageous stand, refusing to eat the nonkosher food allotted to them. But their risk paid off and God blessed them.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego found trouble when they disobeyed an order to bow before a statue of Nebuchadnezzar; as punishment they were thrown into a fiery furnace, where they were protected by a powerful being "like the Son of God" (Daniel 3:25 NKJV).

Daniel was ignored and almost completely forgotten after Nebuchadnezzar's death, and a number of briefly reigning kings followed. Finally, the last Babylonian king, Belshazzar, threw a drinking party using cups stolen from the temple in Jerusalem; he literally saw "the handwriting on the wall" that Daniel, hastily called out of retirement, interpreted as the imminent takeover of Babylon by the Medes.

Belshazzar's Feast by Rembrandt (1606–1669) illustrates the moment when the Babylonian king saw the writing that appeared on the wall.

The Median king, Cyrus, kept Daniel as an adviser and made him one of the three top rulers of the Babylonian territories. The final six chapters of this book contain Daniel's prophetic visions, including that of "seventy weeks" of the end time. Daniel also studied the scroll of the prophet Jeremiah and realized that the "seventy years" Jeremiah had prophesied about were almost over, and that it was time for his people to be released from captivity.

READ DANIEL 3–4.

- Three-Month Course: your next reading is on page 142. →
- Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 139. →

CLOSER LOOK

Visions of Great Empires

One night, King Nebuchadnezzar had a troubling dream of a statue made of different materials. Daniel first told him what he had dreamed and then gave its interpretation. Its head, made of gold, represented the Babylonian Empire (610–539 BC), which was presently in existence.

The rest of the statue symbolized empires yet to rise: its two arms of silver represented the Medo-Persian Empire (539–333 BC); its belly of bronze was the Grecian Empire (323–146 BC); its two legs of iron were the Roman Empire (27 BC–AD 476)—which later split into two empires, east and west. Finally, the feet and toes made of iron mixed with clay symbolized an end-time federation of ten nations—both dictatorships and democracies.

Several years later Daniel himself had a dream of great empires. The first, a winged lion, symbolized the Babylonians; the second, a bear, was the Medo-Persians; the third, a four-headed leopard, was the Greeks; the fourth, a powerful monster, was the Romans. The fourth beast had ten horns on its head, which again symbolized the final ten-nation empire that would rise out of the Roman Empire.

The bear had three ribs in its mouth: these were the three empires that had come before it—Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon. So there have been a total of *seven* great empires so far. This corresponds to the seven-headed beast that the apostle John described many years later: "I saw. . .a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns" (Revelation 17:3 NKJV).

READ DANIEL 7–8.

- Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 140. →

CLOSER LOOK

God and the Son of Man

After his vision of four beasts, Daniel's vision continued: "I kept looking until thrones were set up, and the Ancient of Days took His seat; His vesture was like white snow and the hair of His head like pure wool. . . . I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven one like a Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples. . .might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion" (Daniel 7:9, 13–14 NASB).

During His earthly ministry, Jesus constantly referred to Himself as the "Son of Man," and most people assumed that He was using God's title for the prophet Ezekiel (Ezekiel 2:1, 3, 6, 8; 3:1, 3, etc.)—but Jesus had the prophecy from Daniel in mind. Thus, when the high priest pointedly asked Jesus whether He was the Son of God, Jesus answered, "You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Matthew 26:64 NASB).

Jesus also prophesied of His second coming: "And they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven" (Matthew 24:30 NLT). And the apostle John wrote: "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him" (Revelation 1:7 KJV). (See also Luke 1:32–33.)

READ DANIEL 9 AND PSALM 2.

● Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 142. →

HIDDEN TREASURE

Daniel in the Lions' Den

God's protection of Daniel from hungry lions is depicted in the painting *Daniel in the Lions' Den* by Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640).

Cyrus placed Darius the Mede in charge of the conquered Babylonian territories, and Darius favored Daniel, appointing him as one of the three top rulers of the kingdom. This made many governors and satraps jealous, so they persuaded Darius to enact a law that no one must pray to any god for thirty days—only to Darius. All offenders should be thrown to the lions. Darius foolishly agreed. Daniel, of course, continued praying faithfully to God. When Daniel's enemies told Darius of it, he reluctantly ordered Daniel placed in the lions' den. Early the next morning, after a sleepless night, Darius called to Daniel, asking if he was still alive. Daniel answered that God had sent an angel to shut the lions' mouths. Darius then threw Daniel's accusers to the lions.

READ DANIEL 5–6.

HIDDEN TREASURE

Daniel Prays for Three Weeks

The prophet Daniel once prayed for twenty-one days, and God sent an angel with the answer. When the angel finally arrived, he told Daniel that his prayers had been heard from the first day he'd prayed, but that a demon prince had fought him to prevent him from getting through (Daniel 10:1–13). Satan still constantly fights God's will. That's often why people have to pray so much and wait so long for answers to prayer. Paul told the Christians of Thessalonica, "We wanted to come to you—even I, Paul, time and again—but Satan hindered us" (1 Thessalonians 2:18 NKJV). Satan tries to stop God's will by creating obstacles. And sometimes, as in Daniel's and Paul's cases, he delays answers to prayer, even if he can't stop them completely.

READ DANIEL 10 AND 12.

DANIEL

A. EXPERIENCES OF DANIEL AND HIS FRIENDS (1:1 — 6:28)
   1. In Nebuchadnezzar's Court (1:1 — 4:37)
   2. Daniel Explains the Writing on the Wall (5:1 – 30)
   3. Daniel in the Lions' Den (6:1 – 28)

B. DANIEL'S VISIONS AND PRAYER (7:1 — 12:13)

THE BIG PICTURE

The mistakes and crimes of other people often injure innocent bystanders. Natural disasters may haunt us for life even though we have no direct responsibility for the events that have taken place. The best way to handle these setbacks, however, is to accept them and make the best of the situation.

Daniel and his friends were innocent bystanders. They suffered a lifelong exile to Babylon because of Judah's prolonged disobedience to God. But Daniel and his friends did not let their misfortune destroy their relationship with God. With courage and faith in God, they faced the realities of exile and lived successful lives — even by Babylonian standards. Their lives give us insight into how we, too, can deal with tragedy.

After being taken from Jerusalem to Babylon, Daniel and his three friends were trained for service in the king's court. Part of their training required adherence to standards that stood in opposition to God's revealed will for these young men's lives. To protect their relationship with God, Daniel and his friends set clear boundaries for their behavior. They followed God's plan for their lives, despite its conflict with the commands of their strong-willed captors and the life threatening consequences that resulted from these choices. God protected these faithful young men from the foreign laws and unstable tyrants who ruled over them.

Daniel and his friends were exiled to Babylon because of the sins of their ancestors, but they did not use those past sins as excuses for continued failure. Instead, they trusted God to redeem their lives and determined to live according to his will. Because of their faith and courage, God not only repeatedly delivered Daniel and his friends from difficult circumstances, but God also used them to prove his existence and power to others who might otherwise never have had the opportunity to know him.

SPIRITUAL RENEWAL THEMES

LIFE IS UNFAIR

When we experience injustice in life, the examples of Daniel and his three friends give us some encouragement and direction. Despite his life of obedience, Daniel was not protected from God's judgment on the people of Judah. Innocence does not automatically protect us from tragedy. But we do have the assurance that God is concerned about what we are doing. He will honor our faithfulness and obedience.

GOD IS IN CONTROL EVEN WHEN LIFE IS OUT OF CONTROL

Daniel's life was controlled by a powerful group of people. He had no say in his future. Even though Daniel's life was out of his control, he trusted that God was still sovereign. Daniel was not merely the hapless pawn of a selfish and unstable foreign ruler. He was in God's powerful and protecting hand. As Daniel faithfully obeyed God's commands, God delivered him from terrible situations, giving him freedom in the midst of his exile and bondage.

GOD CAN DO ANYTHING

If Daniel and his friends had not believed that God was sovereign, they might have decided that compromising their beliefs was better than risking their lives. But if these young men had compromised, they would not have experienced God's glorious victories. God is greater than anything we might face. We must be willing to hand our lives over to him and follow his will.

PAIN IN THE PROCESS OF RENEWAL

Daniel and his friends sought to live according to God's plan, but they found that others opposed their efforts. This led them all into great danger. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had to walk through a fiery furnace because they obeyed God's will. Daniel was thrown into a den of lions. Yet the obedience of these young men ultimately led to glorious victory. Only the ropes that bound Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were burned by fire; they escaped unharmed. Daniel walked out of the lion's den unscathed because of his faithful obedience. God used these trials to bring blessings to his servants and glory to himself. As we seek to do God's will, we may face some difficult situations. God can use such trials to bless us. We need to continually seek God and surrender to him, no matter what difficulties we face.

Essential Facts

PURPOSE:
To show that God humbles proud oppressors and vindicates those who trust him through their days of suffering.

AUTHOR:
The prophet Daniel.

AUDIENCE:
God's people during and after the Babylonian exile.

DATE WRITTEN:
The book was probably written around 535 BC, recording events that happened between 605 and 535 BC.

SETTING:
The land of Babylon after Daniel and his friends were exiled there in 605 BC.

KEY VERSE:
"Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever" (12:3).

KEY PEOPLE AND RELATIONSHIPS:
Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego; and foreign rulers Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar and Darius.

KEY PLACES:
Jerusalem, Babylon and Susa.

1:1-6 Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah faced troubled times: Their city was conquered, and they were captured by the enemy and marched across the desert to Babylon. Life must have seemed over for the four young men. But then their fortune changed. After a three-year training period they were chosen to be Nebuchadnezzar's counselors. No one knows what the future holds. Our current bad times may be temporary; God's blessings may be just around the corner. God may even use our hard times to prepare us for greater service for him.

1:7-16 When people try to squeeze us into their mold and get us to compromise our values, we need to remain strong and set godly boundaries on our behavior, just as Daniel did by not eating food prohibited by God's laws. With proper boundaries, we will be less tempted to give in to compromise and will foster our spiritual growth.

The Source of True Greatness

ASK A GROUP OF CHRISTIAN men to name their favorite Bible character, and chances are a healthy percentage will choose Daniel. It's not hard to see why.

Much like Joseph, who lived much earlier, Daniel rose from teen captivity to wield enormous influence in the greatest empire of his time. Over a remarkable 70-year career, Daniel stayed true to his Lord despite colossal pressures to switch spiritual allegiances. His enemies and friends alike took note of his unimpeachable character and devotion to God.

> Daniel constantly called attention to the sovereignty of God—and lived what he taught.

Ezekiel, Daniel's contemporary and fellow prophet, called special attention to his peer's righteousness and wisdom three times (Ezekiel 14:14, 20; 28:3). An angelic messenger likewise told Daniel three times that he was "very precious to God" (Daniel 9:23; 10:11, 19). By all accounts, we might aptly call Daniel "great."

But that's not how Daniel saw himself.

In contrast to the popular public figures of today, many of whom are full of themselves, Daniel's eyes remained riveted not to the mirror but to his Sovereign Lord. Despite receiving a series of lucid dreams, Daniel never forgot that only one Star blazed in the heavens, and only one King ruled the earth:

"Praise the name of God forever and ever,
for he has all wisdom and power.
He controls the course of world events;
he removes kings and sets up other kings.
He gives wisdom to the wise
and knowledge to the scholars.
He reveals deep and mysterious things
and knows what lies hidden in darkness,
though he is surrounded by light." (2:20-22)

Daniel constantly called attention to the sovereignty and eternal rule of God. From the beginning of his career to its end, he staked both his life and his reputation on God's preeminence. Captivated by the majesty and glory of God, Daniel felt no need to promote himself or massage his public image.

- He repeatedly refused to take any credit for his ability to interpret dreams and heavenly signs (1:17; 2:23, 30, 45; 5:17; 6:22).
- He freely admitted his fears (7:15, 28; 8:17, 27; 10:8-9, 15-17).
- He had no trouble admitting when he didn't understand (8:27; 12:8).
- He strongly identified with his erring countrymen and confessed their sin as his own (9:1-20).

God used Daniel to show the world what lay in its future. Even Jesus Christ built his most famous prophetic utterance around a prediction of Daniel (Matthew 24:15). Daniel did not always understand the things God showed him, but he never lost sight of God's promise to him: "As for you, go your way until the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the days, you will rise again to receive the inheritance set aside for you" (Daniel 12:13).

THE POINT: The greatest men serve the greatest God.

Introduction to DANIEL

BACKGROUND

Daniel's life summarizes the exile of the people of Judah. Having been taken as a teen to Babylon nearly twenty years before the fall of Jerusalem, Daniel saw kings rise and fall throughout the decades he spent away from home. The common thread through the reigns of these non-Hebrew kings is the wisdom of Daniel, which comes from God.

Daniel is the Greek form of the Hebrew name meaning "God Is My Judge." Several passages in the book point to Daniel as the author: the first-person account, starting in 7:2; and the words of 12:4: "But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end." Jesus also attributed the book to Daniel (see Mt 24:15).

MESSAGE

The book of Daniel is a mixture of historical narrative and apocalyptic or symbolic literature. God's sovereignty is the theme of this book. While Daniel and his friends are the spoils of war and serve in the palace, God has other plans for his men. This is evident in Daniel's colleagues' being saved in the midst of the "fiery furnace" (3:6) and in Daniel surviving a night in the den of lions. These men are to be God's representatives—towers of faithfulness—in a permissive society. Having served as a trusted administrator through the reigns of conquerors Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, and Darius, Daniel knows that ultimately God is in control. Much of the book of Daniel recounts dreams and visions—some given to kings and some to Daniel about world kingdoms and end times.

TIME

Although the books of Esther and Ezekiel precede the book of Daniel in the Bible, some of the events of Daniel predate Ezekiel's time and certainly all of Esther's era. Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego), along with thousands of citizens of Judah, were taken captive to Babylon in 605 B.C., before the fall of Jerusalem in 586.

OUTLINE

I. History
A. Daniel and his friends 1:1–21
B. Nebuchadnezzar's dreams 2:1–4:37
C. Belshazzar 5:1–31
D. Daniel in the lions' den 6:1–28

II. Prophecy
A. The four beasts 7:1–28
B. The ram and the goat 8:1–27
C. Daniel's prayer 9:1–27
D. Vision of man 10:1–11:1
E. The kings of the south and north 11:2–45
F. Judgment in the end times 12:1–13

someone you should know:

Nebuchadnezzar

When Pride Eats Grass

WHAT DO YOU GET when you combine a hot temper, an inflated ego, a lack of conscience, and unlimited power? An ancient king of Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar rose to power shortly after defeating the Egyptians in one of the most important battles of ancient history, then ruled the Babylonian Empire for more than four decades, from 605 to 562 B.C. He reigned as the undisputed sovereign of a vast kingdom that dominated the ancient Near East. Looking back on the king's long rule, Daniel said of him that "people of all races and nations and languages trembled before him in fear. He killed those he wanted to kill and spared those he wanted to spare. He honored those he wanted to honor and disgraced those he wanted to disgrace" (Daniel 5:19).

It took insanity to teach Nebuchadnezzar humility.

God used Nebuchadnezzar to discipline the rebellious people of Judah through a series of devastating invasions, culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem and the razing of the Temple in 586 B.C. Babylonian troops slaughtered thousands of Hebrews and led away uncounted thousands of others into captivity.

In addition to his military conquests, Nebuchadnezzar made a name for himself through an impressive building program. His capital, Babylon, was already an ancient city by his time, but he greatly enlarged and beautified it, creating the most impressive metropolis on earth. The city covered about six square miles, featured 17 miles of double walls with eight main gates, and boasted a huge artificial lake designed for defense. Today, visitors still can gaze upon the ruins of the famous Ishtar Gate, adorned with colored bricks and raised images of bulls and lions and dragons. More than 50 temples dotted the city's interior, chief among them a ziggurat 130 yards square and seven stories high, with an altar at the top, some 300 feet from the ground.

One day as Nebuchadnezzar gazed out from his palace at all he had built, he exclaimed, "Look at this great city of Babylon! By my own mighty power, I have built this beautiful city as my royal residence to display my majestic splendor" (4:30).

At that moment, the awesome judgment of God fell. Just as Daniel had predicted a year before, Nebuchadnezzar plunged into the chaos of insanity (for seven months or seven years; the Hebrew text is unclear). His symptoms—living with animals, eating grass, hair growing as long as eagles' feathers, and nails like birds' claws—describe a rare medical condition today identified as boanthropy, a mental illness in which the sufferer believes that he is an ox. God intended to teach the haughty king "that the Most High rules over the kingdoms of the world and gives them to anyone he chooses" (4:25).

After hoofin' it with the heifers for the ordained time, Nebuchadnezzar finally regained his sanity—and a profound respect for a Ruler infinitely more powerful than himself. "His rule is everlasting," he declared, "and his kingdom is eternal. All the people of the earth are nothing compared to him" (4:34-35). Perhaps most tellingly, the chastened king concluded that almighty God "is able to humble the proud" (4:37).

THE POINT: Human arrogance has no place before God's majesty.

Shadrach, Meshach, & Abednego

Standing Tall in a Tight Spot

FOR DECADES SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHERS have told the story of the three Hebrew children who stood for God and got thrown into a fiery furnace—only to enjoy a miraculous rescue (Daniel 3).

Kids learn that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—three young captives from Judah who served in the court of King Nebuchadnezzar—refused an order to bow down to a pagan image and so incurred the king's white-hot wrath. Nebuchadnezzar ordered them bound, then tossed into a large superheated oven. The intense heat killed the men who carried out the king's orders but had no effect on the three, other than to burn away the ropes that bound them.

These three men found in God the strength they needed to risk their lives for him.

When the astonished king saw what had happened—and that a fourth figure who looked "like a god" walked among them—he told them to come out. They did so, unhurt and without a hint of smoke on them. Nebuchadnezzar promoted them all and issued a harsh decree prohibiting anyone in his kingdom from speaking a word against their God.

The story thrills children and adults alike. But what gave these three young men the courage to stand up for their beliefs? Where did they find the strength to risk their lives in a public show of loyalty to God? We find some important hints in what they said to the king before their ordeal.

"The God whom we serve . . ." (3:17). This trio did not merely go to worship or occasionally read their Bibles. They made it a habit to serve God continually.

". . . is able to save us" (3:17). Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego knew and loved a mighty Lord with infinite power.

"He will rescue us from your power" (3:17). They knew that power alone wouldn't cut it—Nebuchadnezzar had that, and threatened to use it to kill them. But they expected that omnipotence, directed by infinite love, would change history.

"But even if he doesn't . . ." (3:18). Daniel's compatriots trusted their lives to a sovereign God. They expected him to act on their behalf, but they also knew that God has the right and the wisdom to move in ways he thinks best—which sometimes means he does what we don't expect or desire. As Nebuchadnezzar himself would learn in a few years, God "does as he pleases among the angels of heaven and among the people of the earth. No one can stop him or say to him, 'What do you mean by doing these things?'" (4:35).

Do we want to stand tall for God when we land in a tight spot? Then we must learn well the lessons of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

THE POINT: To stand tall for God, we must know and love him.

Daniel

Timeline
- World Events
- Biblical Events

620 BC	605 BC	602 BC	586 BC	573–566 BC
Birth of Daniel	Fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar during Jehoiakim's reign	Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's statue dream	Destruction of the temple in Jerusalem	Nebuchadnezzar's seven years of insanity

562 BC	560 BC	556 BC	553 BC
Evil-merodach, the son of Nebuchadnezzar, assumes the throne.	Murder of Evil-merodach by Nergal-sharezer, Nebuchadnezzar's son-in-law, who takes the throne	Leadership turnover in Babylon until Nabonidus assumes the throne (Nergal-sharezer dies; Nebuchadnezzar's grandson Labashi-marduk becomes king but is assassinated); birth of Belshazzar, son of Nabonidus	First year of Belshazzar's reign as co-regent

"I saw One like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven . . . . His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away" (7:13-14).

Who wrote Daniel?

The book of Daniel bears the name of its author (1:6; 7:2; 8:1; 9:2; 10:2; 12:5). Daniel was a teenager when he was taken to Babylon about 605 B.C. He and his three friends were of noble or royal Judean lineage (1:3). He served in the Babylonian administration during the successive reigns of several Babylonian and Medo-Persian kings.

Who were the recipients?

The book of Daniel is written both in classical Hebrew and in Aramaic. The former was Daniel's native language, and its use points to a primarily Jewish audience. Aramaic was the official and legal language of the empire, giving evidence that the Gentiles using that language were included among the book's intended readers.

When was Daniel written?

Although many modern critical scholars contest Danielic authorship and posit a second-century B.C. author (ca 165 B.C.), the traditional view asserts that the book was composed in the sixth century B.C., at the time of the events described, over the course of the prophet Daniel's long life (ca 620–530 B.C.). Both manuscript and linguistic evidence supports the sixth-century dating.

Where did it happen?

The contents of the book take place in Babylon during the Babylonian exile, which began under King Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel opens with a description of the events when he and his friends were taken to Babylon (ca 605 B.C.) and ends in the reign of Cyrus of Persia (third year of his reign, ca 536 B.C.).

What is Daniel about?

- *God's sovereignty over all nations.* Daniel's perspective on the Babylonian exile indicates that God is the agent who "handed Jehoiakim king of Judah" to Nebuchadnezzar (1:2). Daniel tells Nebuchadnezzar that he is "king of kings" because "the God of heaven has given you sovereignty" (2:37). Daniel also affirms in prayer that God "changes the times and seasons; He removes kings and establishes kings" (2:21).
- *God's providence in a foreign land.* God was faithful to His covenant with Abraham (9:4), having brought Israel to the promised land of Canaan. God is also just and righteous, and He punishes according to the stipulations of the Mosaic covenant (9:11 -14; Dt 29). Despite their sin, God still had plans to prosper His people (Jr 29:11), to cleanse, forgive, and restore them (Ezk 36:22-28), promises that were made even before they entered the land (Dt 30:1-10, especially v. 6). Daniel claimed these promises and even lived to see the beginning of their fulfillment in the return of the exiles to Jerusalem (Dn 9:2,17-19; 10:1). Jeremiah advised the Jews to pray for their Babylonian overlords (Jr 29:4-7) so that both nations would prosper. Indeed, God raised up faithful leaders such as Daniel, as well as encouraging him with visions through his ministry.
- *Encouragement for God's people to be uncompromising in their worship and devotion.* The young men could have used their exile, distance from Jerusalem, and indeed, the destruction of their worship sanctuary as excuses for why the rules of their faith and practice no longer applied. Yet in the years of their youth as much as in adulthood and old age, Daniel and his companions demonstrate uncompromising faith, even at the risk of their lives (Dn 1:8; 3:18; 6:10). God had called Israel to be a nation set apart (holy) as a witness to the Gentiles, and this group of exiles determined to remain holy even as their nation was disciplined by the Babylonian subjugation.
- *God's sovereignty over history, as He reveals the future to His servant.* God is not bound by the circumstances of human history, political exigencies, or imperialistic ambitions. As the "Ancient of Days" who changes times, seasons, and rulers (2:21; 7:9-10), God is above the flow of time and human history. As the Jews have been captured and engulfed once again by a Gentile nation, God reveals from the throne room of heaven His plan to fulfill His covenantal promises. These plans are assured and non-negotiable and will be carried out in God's own time by His messengers and heavenly agents (10:13,21). Two parallel worlds appear in this book, one earthly and temporal, the other heavenly and eternal. The kings of the earth may hold sway at one period or another, but the "Most High" God and His Messiah hold eternal sway over the universe and its destiny. Daniel's visions provide glimpses of this supernatural parallel universe.

Why should women read Daniel?

Women as well as men derive comfort and assurance that God is in control of the times, of nations and governments. This book encourages the faithful to trust God: He is taking history to the conclusion He has planned for it, and its destiny is something good that glorifies Him. Such a perspective also encourages believers to look beyond personal circumstances and take an eternal perspective, praying for divine insight into God's dealings with the world and what role he would assign to each believer. The book follows Daniel on his life journey, from a young man (teenager) to an old man, all the while living a life without compromise as an exile in a foreign land. His life of faithful and uncompromising devotion gained him favor with God and the privilege of receiving powerful visions, which encouraged the Jews that God was with His people and revealed Himself to them even in their time of punishment. His life of integrity as a wise man distinguished him from his administrative peers and garnered the respect of the ruling authorities.

Another aspect of the book has to do with Daniel's unseen and unknown parents. Jeremiah's description of the covenant compromises in Judah in the decades before Jerusalem's fall indicates that idolatry was often a family affair, with the participation of both parents and children (Jr 7:17-20). Daniel's determination to remain pure in an apostate culture that did not acknowledge God as Lord is all the more amazing, and may be attributed to godly parents, and quite possibly to godly leaders such as the zealous King Josiah, whose religious reforms may have been sincerely heeded by the noble families of Daniel and his friends and others. The critical value of faithful parents and leaders is here underscored. If the next generation is to be equipped to face the challenges of a sinful culture that seduces with promises of greatness in exchange for moral and spiritual compromise, parents must take their assignment to prepare the next generation very seriously.

How do you read Daniel?

The book of Daniel is generally divided into two distinct sections. The first, containing accounts of Daniel and his friends, is primarily historical narrative. The second, featuring the dreams and visions of the future, is primarily prophetic and belongs to the genre of apocalyptic literature. The Greek word *apokalupsis* suggests an "unveiling of that which has been concealed; a revelation, disclosure." Like prophetic material, apocalyptic literature features God-given revelation concerning future events. Through visions saturated with symbolism, the apocalyptic section heavily emphasizes what will happen "at the time of the end," a refrain in chapters 11 and 12. For the modern reader, unaware of the history of the Jews in the second century B.C., the final few chapters can prove confusing and foreign. However, perseverance in reading the text, along with notes on its background, will yield a fruitful understanding of the book's message for Daniel's future as well as for the modern era; indeed, some of the events related have not yet taken place. Not least among these promised events "at the end of days" is the resurrection of the dead to either "eternal life" or "eternal contempt." Resurrection in these terms (which approximate the NT teaching so closely) appears only in Dn 12 in the Old Testament canon. Written in the midst of persecution, oppression, or crisis, apocalyptic literature offers assurance of God's sovereignty over all history and the promise of His ultimate triumph over all evil powers.

Another way to divide the book is linguistically. Daniel's material has been recorded in two languages: 1:1-2:4 and 8:1–12:13 are written in classical Hebrew and are apparently directed at the captive Israelites; 2:4–7:28 is written in Aramaic, the official and legal language of the Persian empire, giving evidence that the Gentiles using that language were included among the book's intended readers. This feature strengthens the book's theme that God is interested in revealing Himself to and among Gentiles as well as His own people and that His sovereignty extends over all people.

Within the context of the biblical canon, Daniel is important for his descriptions of the "Ancient of Days" and the "son of man" (Dn 7:9-10,13); imagery from these passages is applied to the risen Jesus in the book of Revelation (Rv 1:13-18; 2:18). Also, in the apostolic preaching of Stephen, his final vision was that of the exalted Jesus, whom he clearly identified as the "Son of Man, standing at the right hand of God" (Ac 7:56). Jesus Himself took on the appellation "Son of Man," which He considered a Messianic title when He predicted His second coming (e.g., Mt 24:30; Mk 13:26). He thereby validated Daniel's visions as predictive prophecy.

Outline

I. Daniel's Service in Babylon (1:1–6:28)
   - A. The Capture of Jerusalem and the Deportation of Youth to Babylon (1:1-21)
   - B. Nebuchadnezzar's Dream (2:1-49)
   - C. The Gold Statue (3:1-30)
   - D. Nebuchadnezzar's Insanity (4:1-37)
   - E. The Great Feast of Belshazzar (5:1-30)
   - F. The Lions' Den (5:31–6:28)

II. Daniel's Visions (7:1–12:13)
   - A. Daniel's First Vision (7:1-28)
   - B. Daniel's Second Vision (8:1-27)
   - C. The Prayer of Daniel (9:1-19)
   - D. The 70 Weeks of Years (9:20-27)
   - E. The Future of Israel and the End-Times (10:1–12:13)

LIFE LESSONS: God rewards purity (1:8–21). Trust God and put your life in his hands (3:16–18).

What's in a Name?

The name Daniel means "The LORD is my judge."

DANIEL

Do You See What I See?

Daniel was anointed with messages from God, often in the form of dreams and visions. Nine of the chapters in Daniel refer to visions, dreams or other supernatural revelations from the Lord.

A CAPTIVE AUDIENCE

Daniel was a prophet for the Lord. He was 16 years old when he was taken captive to Babylon, and he lived there throughout the entire 70-year time span of the Babylonian captivity.

DID YOU KNOW?

▶ It is traditionally believed that Daniel was over 80 years old when he was thrown into the lions' den.

BY THE NUMBERS

12 CHAPTERS

357 VERSES

10,535 WORDS

INTEGRITY IN ACTION

Daniel lived a pure life. The Bible doesn't record anything negative about him. "At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent *(6:4)*."

LIFE LESSONS: Be prepared for whatever God asks of you, and use the gifts he's given you (5:1–29).

DANIEL IN REVIEW

HOT SEAT

1. I am one of four young friends taken captive from Judah and brought in to serve King Nebuchadnezzar. My old name was Hananiah. What new name have I been given?

MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY

2. Which of these was not one of the instruments played when everyone was to bow to Nebuchadnezzar's statue?

A. Cymbals
B. Flute
C. Harp
D. Horn

WHO DUNNIT?

3. Who told Daniel that King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream he wanted interpreted?

MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY

4. In the king's dream, he saw a statue made of several different things. What were the feet made of?

A. Gold and bronze
B. Silver and onyx
C. Iron and clay
D. Gold and silver

THEN VS. NOW

5. The statue Nebuchadnezzar had made was 60 cubits tall. If we measured it today with a yardstick, how many yards tall would it be?

MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY

6. Some of this book is in first-person narrative. Is it all from Daniel's point of view?

HOT SEAT

7. I am the chief official who gave the four young men from Judah their new names. Who am I?

TIME TRAVELER

8. You are Belshazzar. Are you any relation to Nebuchadnezzar?

MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY

9. When Darius became king, he appointed several satraps to rule throughout the kingdom. About how many were there?

A. 70 satraps
B. 90 satraps
C. 100 satraps
D. 120 satraps

TIME TRAVELER

10. Sweet dreams! In your vision, Daniel, you see four beasts come out of the water. What does the third one look like?

A. A bear
B. A leopard
C. A lion
D. An eagle

MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY

11. When Daniel was told by Gabriel about the "seventy 'sevens,' " how long did he mourn?

A. Two weeks
B. Five days
C. A month
D. Three weeks

MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY

12. What was written on the wall that needed to be interpreted?

A. Mar Mar Izith Dardal
B. Mene Mene Tekel Parsin
C. Moil Moil Embas Ovir
D. Do Wa Diddi Diddi Dum

ANSWERS:

1. Shadrach (1:7) 2. A (3:5) 3. Arioch (2:14–15) 4. C (2:32–33) 5. about 30 yards (3:1) 6. No, some of the book is written from Nebuchadnezzar's point of view. (4:1–18, 34–37) 7. Ashpenaz (1:3–6) 8. Yes, Nebuchadnezzar is your father. (5:18, 22) 9. D (6:1) 10. B (7:2–7) 11. D (9:20–27; 10:2) 12. B (5:25–28)