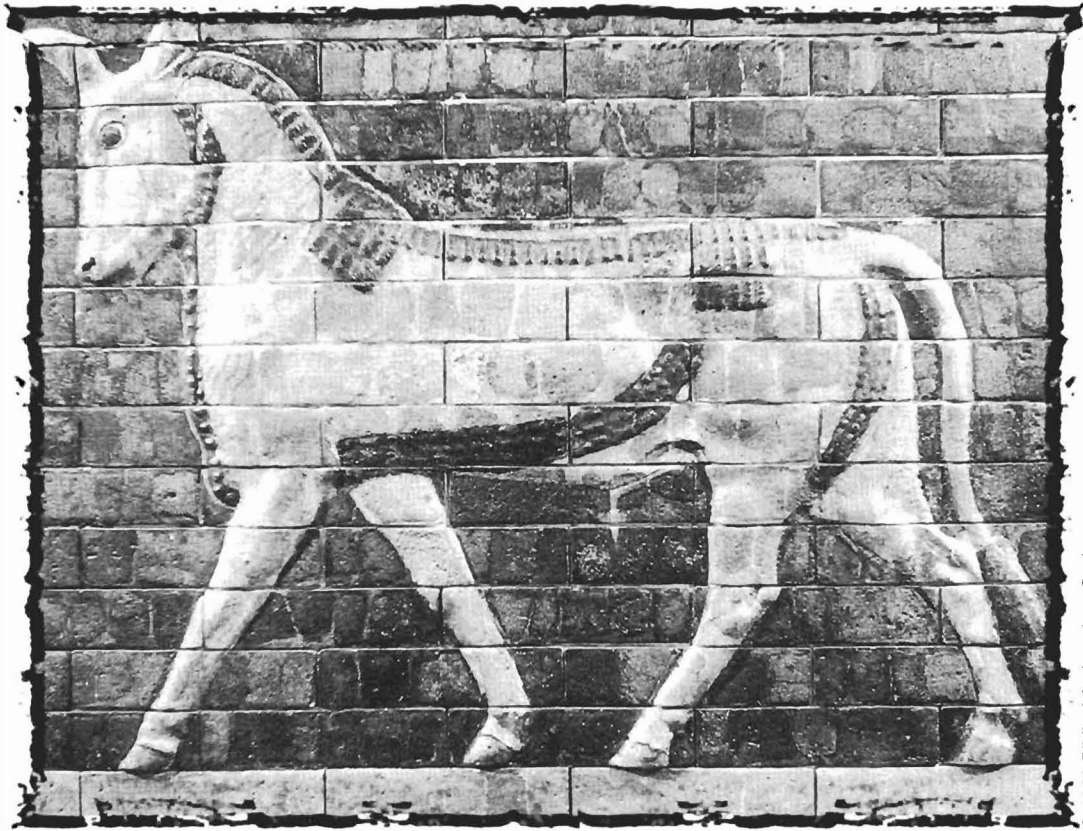


DANIEL



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Three-foot-high bull on Ishtar Gate, Babylon

The subject of this lesson is the Book of Daniel. In Christian Bibles, Daniel follows the Book of Ezekiel and is therefore considered one of the books of the prophets. In the Hebrew Bible, Daniel follows the Book of Esther and precedes the Book of Ezra. That is, its place is among the Writings rather than among the Prophets.

The ancient Greek version of the Book of Daniel is much longer than the Hebrew version. It contains three episodes of 174 verses not found in the Hebrew text. These additions to the book are the Song of the Three Young Men, Susanna, and Bel and the Dragon. These additions are found in Catholic Bibles or in Protestant versions of the Apocrypha.

The origin, nature, and content of the

Book of Daniel have been some of the most controversial issues in the history of biblical scholarship. Even in the early church, Christian scholars debated the question of the original content of the book, as well as whether the book was written in the sixth or second century B.C.

The introduction to Daniel in 1:1-2 suggests the historical background of the book. Read these verses, and answer the questions below.

a. Who came to Jerusalem and besieged the city?



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Daniel 3:24-25

b. Who gave the king of Judah into his hand?

c. What is the location of Shinar?

DANIEL

Daniel belongs to a class of literature that we call *apocalyptic*. The other biblical example of this type of literature is the New Testament Book of Revelation. The word *apocalyptic* comes from a Greek word meaning *an unveiling* or *revelation*. In apocalyptic literature, a person receives revelation—through angels or other mediators—of coming events in history or of heavenly conditions in the other world. The last six chapters of Daniel, Chapters 7 to 12, are especially apocalyptic. Because apocalyptic literature tends to speak in veiled images and in puzzling ways about rulers and events, it is difficult for a later audience to understand fully the original meanings.

We can divide the Book of Daniel into two equal halves. Chapters 1 to 6 contain stories about Daniel and his friends who live among the exiles. In these chapters Daniel and his companions are presented as very loyal Jews who remain faithful to their religious beliefs and practices in spite of all threats. The writer depicts Daniel as an interpreter of dreams and various other omens. In Chapters 7 to 12 Daniel is no longer the interpreter. Daniel himself has visions that he cannot interpret and questions that he cannot answer. The angel explains these to him.

The Book of Daniel appears to have been written during the time of the Babylonian Exile. However, the book was probably composed during the second century B.C. Daniel was written to encourage the faithful during a time of religious persecution. But some of the material—particularly the stories in Chapters 1 to 6—could be much older than the second century.

Today most scholars place the Book of Daniel against the background of the persecution of Jewish religion during the reign of the Syrian king Antiochus IV. Antiochus, with his capital at Antioch, ruled over Palestine from 175 to 164 B.C. About 168

B.C. Antiochus issued his famous edict outlawing the worship of any God except Zeus. He erected an altar to Zeus in the Jerusalem Temple. Loyal Jews fled the country, went into hiding, or took up arms against Antiochus. The Book of Daniel was probably written to reveal to the community how long its suffering would last or how long before God would intervene to set matters right.

DANIEL 1:3-2:49

Let us now take a closer look at the contents of the book. In Chapter 1 we meet Daniel and his friends. They are taken into exile in the third year of King Jehoiakim of Judah—or 606 B.C. Daniel requests that they be allowed to eat only vegetables and drink water while they are in training for service at the royal court. The request is granted. After their period of training the youths are found to be superior in every way to the trainees who ate from the king’s table. This story demonstrates that faithfulness to God and the dietary laws can bring reward and that God watches over the faithful.

In Chapter 2 the Babylonian king

Nebuchadnezzar has a dream. He wants his advisers—the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and Chaldeans—to reveal not only the meaning of the dream but also the dream itself. After all the others fail to meet the king’s demands, Daniel makes known the dream and its interpretation.

Read Daniel 2:27-28.

Daniel tells the king that he saw a great statue with a head of gold, breasts and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, with its legs of iron and its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. In the vision a stone uncut by human hands smashes the statue. The stone then grows into a mountain and fills the whole earth.

Daniel tells Nebuchadnezzar that the parts of the statue represent various kingdoms. These kingdoms will rule from the time of Nebuchadnezzar until the time when God will destroy all earthly kingdoms and set up God’s own kingdom that will never be destroyed. Nebuchadnezzar is the head of gold. Daniel does not identify the earthly kingdoms represented by the other metals. He only gives a general description of them. For revealing and interpreting the dream Nebuchadnezzar makes Daniel ruler of the province of Babylon and gives him other honors as well.

Daniel 2:36-45 gives Daniel’s interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. Read these verses, and answer the following questions.

a. To whom does the head of gold refer? (2:38)

b. What will the fourth kingdom of iron do? (2:40)



MENE MENE TEKEL PARSIN



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Daniel 6

c. What will the stone—the kingdom that will never be destroyed—do? (2:44)

DANIEL 3

In Chapter 3, Daniel's companions—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—refuse to bow down and worship an image set up by the king. For their refusal Nebuchadnezzar's men throw them into a fiery furnace. When Nebuchadnezzar calls them forth from the flames, they are unharmed. In light of this miraculous event, the king elevates them in the royal administration.

The experience of the three friends in the fiery furnace shows the willingness to die for one's belief. This willingness to be a martyr for the faith is illustrated by the men's words in verses 17 and 18. Read Daniel 3:17-18.

Read Daniel 3:19-30, and answer these questions.

a. Whom did the king throw into the fire? (3:23)

b. How many figures did the king see in the fire? (3:25)

c. According to the king, who was the fourth man in the fire? (3:25)

d. What did the king do to these three men after they came out of the fire? (3:30)

DANIEL 4-7

In Chapter 4 Nebuchadnezzar dreams again—this time of a great tree that grows to the heavens, but is cut down. The stump is left in the field. Daniel says the dream refers to the coming madness of the king. He will live in the fields with the beasts—as a beast—until he admits that the Most

High rules the world. The chapter then reports that this interpretation comes true.

Chapter 5 tells the story of King Belshazzar's feast, which is interrupted by the fingers of a hand, writing on the wall. Daniel interprets the inscription—MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN—to mean that God has numbered the days of the Babylonian Empire. He has weighed the empire and found it wanting. The kingdom will be given to the Medes and Persians. Chapter 5 records that the king was slain that very night, and Darius the Mede took over his kingdom. Read Daniel 5:26-28.

Chapter 6 reports a plot against Daniel. The king's assistants persuade him to issue an edict prohibiting prayer to any god except the king. Because Daniel remains loyal to the offering of prayer three times a day, the king orders him cast into a den of lions. When no harm befalls him the king again rewards Daniel. King Darius then decrees that all his subjects should tremble before the God of Daniel. Read this decree from Daniel 6:26-27.

Thus we see that all of the stories in Chapters 1 to 6 offer encouragement to those who would remain loyal to their faith even when threatened with oppression and persecution. In Chapters 7 to 12 Daniel dreams or has visions. He interprets these to mean the end of the persecution of the Jews and the establishment of God's kingdom on earth.

In Chapter 7 Daniel sees four beasts rise from the sea and plunder the earth. God deposes the four beasts—a lion, a bear, a leopard, and an indescribably horrible fourth beast. God then gives universal dominion to one "like a human being" (or "son of man," see footnote in the New Revised Standard Version)—that is, to a human-looking figure, probably an angel. For Daniel the dream refers to the kingdoms that will exist before God's intervention through one "like a son of man/human being."

In the latter part of Chapter 7 Daniel interprets his vision of the four beasts. Answer the following questions about Daniel's interpretation of this vision.

- a. What is different about the fourth kingdom? (7:23)

- b. What is the meaning of the ten horns? (7:24)

- c. How much time will be given into the hand of the eleventh king? (7:25)

- d. What will be given to the people of the holy ones of the Most High? (7:27)

DANIEL 8-12

In Chapter 8 Daniel again dreams of a battle, this time between a ram and a male goat. After the goat wins, a little horn grows from one of the four horns on his head. This horn grows large. It defiles the Temple and makes sacrifice cease. This dream refers to the Persian and Greek Empires. Many scholars believe that

Antiochus IV was the arrogant little horn.

In Chapter 9 the angel Gabriel interprets Jeremiah's statement that Jerusalem would be desolate for only seventy years. The seventy years are not just seventy years, but seventy weeks of years or 490 years. The remainder of the chapter describes what will happen during these seventy weeks of years. Read Daniel 9:24-27.

According to the writer's calculation, the last half week of the seventy weeks, which amounts to three and one-half years, will be the time when sacrifice ceases. Dating from 168 when Antiochus took over the Temple, the writer sees the end of the 490 years as falling in 164 B.C.—or in his own day.

Chapters 10 and 11 give a history of the Near East and Jerusalem from Persian times until the writer's own day. The exactness of this history suggests that most of it had already occurred before the writer predicted it. The end of Chapter 11 predicts that the persecutor of the Jews will die encamped between Jerusalem and the Mediterranean Sea. According to Chapter 12, resurrection follows the death of the persecutor. The just are rewarded, and the evil are punished. Read Daniel 12:1-4.

According to Daniel 12:2 to what shall the people awake after the resurrection?

SUMMARY

The Book of Daniel is both strange and familiar to most of us. Five familiar episodes found here are those listed below.

- (1) Daniel and his friends enter the court of King Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 1)
- (2) Nebuchadnezzar has a dream, and Daniel interprets it (Daniel 2)

- (3) God delivers Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the fiery furnace (Daniel 3)
- (4) The hand writes on the wall during the feast of Belshazzar (Daniel 5)
- (5) God delivers Daniel from the lions' den (Daniel 6)

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Apocalyptic literature, such as Daniel and Revelation, is based in part on visions. This kind of literature deals with the struggle in the world between the opposing forces of good and evil. What evidences do you see in our world today of the conflict between the forces of good and evil? How do writers and/or media productions represent this conflict? How is the conflict evident in your everyday life?
2. Apocalyptic writings are tracts for hard times. Daniel becomes an example for later generations of a wise servant of both God and his political sovereign. Which of Daniel's qualities are worthy of copying? How can these qualities sustain Christians in a time of turmoil and persecution?
3. Recall the stories of the three young men in the fiery furnace and of Daniel in the lions' den. These stories encouraged the original audience of this book—Jews undergoing persecution. In what ways do Christians suffer persecution today? How can we encourage those who suffer?

DAILY READINGS FOR HOSEA, JOEL, AND AMOS

- Day 1: Hosea 1:1-11
Day 2: Hosea 3:1-5
Day 3: Hosea 14:1-9
Day 4: Joel 1:1-12
Day 5: Amos 4:1-13
Day 6: Amos 5:14-27
Day 7: Amos 7:1-17