

Study on Daniel

Introduction to the book of Daniel.

An earthquake shakes the foundations of our security. A tornado blows away a lifetime of treasures. An assassin's bullet changes national history, a drunk driver claims an innocent victim, a divorce shatters a home.

International and personal tragedies make our world seem a fearful place overflowing with evil and seemingly out of control and the litany of bombings, coupes, murders and national disasters could cause us to think that God is absent or impotent.

"Where is God?" we cry, engulfed in sorrow and despair. Twenty-five centuries ago Daniel could have despaired. He and thousands of his countrymen had been deported to a foreign land after Judah was conquered. Daniel was taken into captivity with his friends. He was about fourteen years old. Daniel although only young was indeed

- a) A man of high integrity
- b) A paragon of his time
- c) A prophet in a sense
- d) Very strong in his faith and courage
- e) He was very wise although young
- f) Definitely a man of prayer

Background to the book of Daniel

The Book of Daniel was written in two languages Aramaic and Hebrew. Daniel was a Jew in the Southern kingdom and was born of a royal or noble family. He was among thousands taken by Nebuchadnezzar in 606 BC. He was trained for special service to the king and given a Babylonian name. A deeply spiritual man he maintained his integrity before God under trying circumstances. He would not eat food that was evidently unclean to a Jew, or consecrated to an idol. He spoke God's message faithfully and prayed to the Lord in spite of a devious edict against such worship.

God gave Daniel a special gift of interpreting special dreams and visions. He interpreted to those of other men but God also gave him visions of his own. Daniel was highly respected for his unique power yet he was careful never to claim credit for himself and he filled high government posts for 70 years under three kings. Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar and Darius and in two different Empires – Babylon and Medo-Persia

On arrival in Babylon, Daniel found himself facing an egocentric despot and surrounded by idolaters. Instead of giving in or giving up, this courageous young man held fast to his faith in his God. Daniel knew that despite the circumstances, God was sovereign and was working out his plan for nations and individuals. The book of Daniel centres on this profound truth – the sovereignty of God.

After a brief account of Nebuchadnezzar's siege and defeat of Jerusalem the scene quickly shifts to Daniel and his three friends. Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah (later to be renamed Shadrack, Meshach and Abednego) and these men would later come to hold prominent positions within the Babylonian government. Daniel in particular, would hold such a position because of his ability to interpret the King's dreams that told of God's unfolding plan (**chapters 2 and 4.**)

Sandwiched between the dreams is the fascinating account of Daniel's three friends and the furnace (**Ch 3**). Because they refused to bow down to an image of gold they were condemned to a fiery death but God intervened and spared their lives. Belshazzar ruled Babylon after Nebuchadnezzar and **chapter 5** tells of his encounter of God's message written on a wall.

Study on Daniel

Daniel, who was summoned to interpret the message, predicted Babylon's fall to the Medo Persians and this prediction came true that very night when Darius the Mede conquered the Babylonian Kingdom.

Daniel became one of Darius most trusted advisors. His privileged position angered other administrators who plotted his death by persuading the King to outlaw prayer. In spite of the law, Daniel continued to pray to his sovereign Lord. As a result he was condemned to die in a den of hungry lions. Again God intervened and saved him shutting the mouths of the lions (Ch 6).

The book concludes with a series of visions that Daniel had during the reigns of Belshazzar (chapters 7 and 8) Darius (Chapter 9) and Cyrus (Chapters 10 – 12). These dreams dramatically outlined God's future plans beginning with Babylon and continuing to the end of the age. They give a preview of God's redemption and have been called the key to all biblical prophecy.

God is sovereign, He was in control in Babylon and He has been moving in history, controlling the destinies of people ever since, and He is here now. Despite news reports or personal stress we can be confident that God is in control. As you read Daniel watch God work and find your security in His sovereignty.

The purpose of the book is to give an historical account of the faithful Jews that lived in captivity and to show that God is in control of heaven and earth directing the forces of nature, the destiny of nations and the care of His people. The author is Daniel and it was written to the other captives in Babylon and indeed God's people everywhere. It was written approx. 535 BC recording events that occurred from about 605 to 535 BC (70 years)

The setting for the book

Daniel had been taken captive and deported by Nebuchadnezzar in 605 BC. There he served the government for 70 years during the reigns of Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Darius and Cyrus.

1. **A key verse** is "He (God) reveals deep and hidden things – He knows what lies in darkness and light dwells with Him (2: 22)
2. **The key people** in the book are Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar, Shadrack, Meshach and Abednego, Belshazzar and Darius
3. **The key places in the book are:**
 - Nebuchadnezzar's palace
 - The fiery furnace
 - Belshazzar's banquet
 - The Den of lions
4. **Special features**
 - Daniel's apocalyptic visions (Ch 8 – 12) give a glimpse of God's plan for the ages including a direct prediction of the Messiah.

Let's turn to chapter one.

So Daniel and his three friends find themselves in captivity. This must have been a real culture shock for them Daniel coming from a royal background where he would be an authoritative figure.

It would be like Prince Charles being thrown into Wormwood Scrubs where everything would be foreign to him the language, the food, the customs and the hierarchy. The first thing that Nebuchadnezzar was determined to do was to turn them into Babylonians so he had their names changed.

Study on Daniel

The three friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah had their names changed to Shadrach which means the same as Marduk a Babylonian God, Meschach that was an ancient form of the God Venus and Abednego a servant of the God Nebo. Daniel had his name changed to Belteshazzar - Bel was a Babylonian God.

What was basically happening here was that the King was trying to get these faithful Jewish boys to worship the Babylonian idols and to become integrated into Babylonian society. Much to their honour the boys adhered rigidly to their faith that they had been brought up with. Which was no mean feat when faced with the formidable court of such a powerful king. They refused to eat the rich food and drink the wine that they were offered, much to the chief eunuch's consternation. (He was afraid that they would become ill and then the blame would fall on him)

Instead they asked if they might be given vegetables to eat and water to drink for a period of ten days. At the end of the ten days it was seen that they were fatter and better in appearance than the other youth's who ate the king's food. So the Chief Eunuch took away the rich food and wine and gave them vegetables. We might do well to do likewise cutting out all the stodgy and fatty food that we eat. (Show pictures of good and bad food)

The boys grew in wisdom and skills and when brought before the King were found to be ten times better in their wisdom and knowledge than all the magicians and enchanters that were in his kingdom.

Have you got what it takes?

How did you feel when you first moved away from home and were launched out on your own? Daniel and his friends were torn from their land and taken to Babylon as young men. They were probably only twelve to fourteen years old. In Babylon they were placed in a three year training programme to prepare them to oversee Jewish affairs on the Babylonian empire. A crisis of conscience erupted when the first meal was served.

1. Think back to when you first moved away from home or moved to a new town. What knew adjustments did you have to make?
2. From our study today what specific tactics were used to give these young Jews a new Babylonian orientation?
3. How does this compare with the pressures Christians face in a secular society?
4. Why do you think the food regulations of the Old Testament were so important to Daniel? Do you think he was making a big issue out of a minor problem? Explain
5. What criteria can Christians use today to determine which activities we will engage in and which we won't?
6. What can we learn from Daniel's attitude and actions when our biblical convictions are challenged?
7. What one aspect of Daniel's character or conduct in this chapter impresses you most?
8. How can you follow Daniel's example in your own life?

Our next study will concentrate on what happened in the first few years of their captivity and how the Lord watched over them.