

Introduction to the Book of Daniel

Daniel tells the story of some of the young leaders of God's people, taken captive to Babylon and made to work for King Nebuchadnezzar and his successors. Whilst there, they go through times of success and persecution.

Key Focus of Daniel

Daniel answers the question, *'Is God really in control, wherever we go?'* The answer for the original hearers is the same for us: *'There is one true God who reigns, everywhere.'*

Because of that wonderful reassurance, God's people can trust the Lord even when society or our situation may suggest not to. He will see his people through, and he will preserve a people for our good and for his glory.

Daniel in the Bible

In the Christian Bible, Daniel is located among the prophets, and in Jewish Scriptures it is positioned among the wisdom books (like Proverbs). Daniel includes prophecy, history and apocalyptic (revelatory) writing.

Chronologically, the events occur at the end of the time of Kings. Having been led out of Egypt under Moses, God's people entered the promised land of Canaan under Joshua. Initially they were led by Judges but the nation continued to turn away from God. Eventually, God accepted their request for a king like the other nations, beginning with Saul, David and then his son Solomon (of Wisdom and Proverbs fame). Sadly, things deteriorated and the kingdom split in two - the tribes of Judah and Benjamin in the south and the remaining tribes in the north. Each kingdom had its own succession of kings (of varying faithfulness) until the northern kingdom was conquered by Assyria in about 722BC. After this, the southern kingdom was conquered by Babylon in the early 6th century BC. That's the point at which Daniel picks up the story, as the upper echelons of Israelite society are taken to Babylon leaving Zedekiah as a puppet king in Judah.

Several other prophets ministered around this time. Jeremiah had sounded a warning to God's people that this tragedy would happen if they persisted in rejecting God. Ezekiel was also prophesying, and was part of the contingent taken to Babylon.

The chronology of Daniel concludes with a return to Jerusalem in 537BC after Cyrus of Persia conquers Babylon and begins sending exiles home. You can read more of this in the accounts of Nehemiah and Ezra.

As with all of Scripture, it's good to look for the unifying thread of God's salvation plan that runs throughout. In Daniel, we see the now and not yet of God's redemption - they are eventually saved out of Babylon, but there's a sense of more to come. The apocalyptic final chapters also point forward to further events in God's plan. For Christians, we can see how God used this situation to lead forward towards Jesus' birth — who's kingdom is the rock? And who's that with them in the fire...?!

Daniel in Babylon

The book of Daniel charts the stories of a number of God's people forcefully deported from Judah to Babylon under the rule of Nebuchadnezzar. We know from extra-Biblical sources that this was a common tactic of the Babylonians. Rather than destroying their enemies, they preferred to assimilate opponents' knowledge into their own. They captured the elite and forced them to serve in the palaces and libraries of their kingdom. It's even possible that this was how the Old Testament prophecies of a Messiah eventually made their way to a group of Magi several hundred years later.

Daniel and his peers would be taking their faith in YHWH, the one true God, into a sophisticated but often hostile environment of pagan and emperor worship. The book of Daniel reveals how God managed to preserve them and keep them faithful, even as their faith was scrutinised, tested and persecuted by the Babylonians.

The very fact that this book was written and preserved demonstrates that it's message is true. God did see them through the 60(ish) years of captivity, before working through King Cyrus to send them back to the promised land.

Origin of Daniel

Although the book is about Daniel, we're not told that it was written by him. Scholars continue to debate the date it was written, primarily because of the accuracy of the prophecy sections. Do the detailed descriptions of world events in the years after Daniel mean that it must be written later? Or, is it a case of prophetic insight? That's the question which has generated controversy. We'll explore this more as we go through the series.

It's also unique among Old Testament books in being written partly in Aramaic - the more international language of Babylon and other nations. It's as if the writing itself is reinforcing the message that there is one true God of everyone, everywhere.

Daniel's Message for us

The book of Daniel has a lot to say to us about living faithfully for God when under pressure from the world around us. Pressure to not believe, or to stop living as God calls us to. Plus, implicit pressure to put our trust in other gods and idols - far more subtle ones in our culture.

How can we trust God when it often feels like things are out of control, we're in the minority and it's hard to see how things could change?

Daniel has the answer. God has led his people through hard times before, and he is still doing it today. The God of Daniel, God made known to us in Jesus, is with us throughout life. He can lead us in a way that blesses the world we live in, whilst remaining faithful to him.

This book has a lot of wisdom for how we can be in the world but not of the world, where and when we need to take a stand, and also where and when we can work together with others to 'seek the good of the city' we find ourselves in, as Jeremiah said.

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During our series, the sermons on Sunday and the smallgroup notes will all be available to download from: www.allsaintswick.org.uk—click 'Resources'

Structure of the Book of Daniel

The book of Daniel is arranged according to a deliberate pattern, with stories and prophecies that mirror each other. Some is in [Hebrew](#) and some in [Aramaic](#):

CH1 - Historical Prologue

CH2 - Dream of statue representing four kingdoms

CH3 - Worship the statue or perish in a pit

CH4 - Judgment on Nebuchadnezzar

CH5 - Judgment on Belshazzar

CH6 - Worship Darius or perish in a pit

CH7 - Dream of beasts representing four kingdoms

CH8 - Kingdom Prophecies

CH9a - Trials of God's people

CH9b King's Prophecy

CH10 - Trials of God's people

CH11 - Kingdom Prophecies

CH 12 - Prophetic Epilogue

Timeline of Daniel

