

The Book of Daniel

Overview of Daniel



We will begin this series with an overview of the Book of Daniel. This lesson will be most useful if used in conjunction with the Timeline for the Book of Daniel (see separate 8 ½ by 14 handout).

Background:

Writer: Daniel

Timeframe: 605 B.C. – 536 B.C.

Historical Setting: In 931 B.C., after the reign of King Solomon, the kingdom of Israel was divided between the Northern and Southern kingdoms. The Northern Kingdom, Israel, was disobedient to God and was taken captive in 722 B.C. by Assyria. The Southern Kingdom, Judah, lasted awhile longer because they enjoyed some periods of godly leadership and were generally more obedient as a nation. However, their ultimate rebellion against God led to their conquest and captivity, beginning in 605 B.C., which is when Daniel and his friends are taken captive to Babylon.

Theme:

There are many lessons that we will learn from this wonderful book. I know many of you are looking forward to the prophecies that we will cover in Chapter 2 and Chapters 7 through 12. However, there is a very practical theme that overarches this entire book. It is that God is sovereign over all the affairs of men and He is faithful to His people.

Sovereign – above or superior to all others; chief; greatest; supreme – He is in control!

Authenticity:

The authorship and timeline of Daniel are among the most criticized of any Old Testament book. This is because it provides amazingly accurate prophecies about events that transpired over several hundred years. The critics refuse to believe in miraculous prophecy and therefore deny that the Book of Daniel could have been written by Daniel or even written during his lifetime. Read Matthew 24:15. What does this tell us of Jesus' opinion on the authorship of Daniel. *Note that Jesus makes reference to the abomination of desolation, which is referenced in Daniel 9:2, 11:31, and 12:11. These are the specific chapters that critics attack as being written many years after the lifetime of Daniel.*

We learn that Jesus, God Himself, recognized the authenticity of Daniel and ascribed the book, especially the controversial chapters, to Daniel himself. There can be no greater authority on the authorship of Daniel than this statement of Jesus Christ!

Chapter 1

Timeframe: Around 605 B.C.

Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah are taken captive from Judah by King Nebuchadnezzar of the Babylonians. They undergo training to become advisors to the King. During their training, Daniel and friends forsake the King's meat and wine because of their Jewish dietary laws. God performs the first recorded miracle in the Book of Daniel.

Chapter 2

Timeframe: Around 604 B.C.

King Nebuchadnezzar has a troublesome dream and asks all of his advisors to interpret it. None are able, save Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar's dream is a prophecy concerning the coming kingdoms of this world and the Kingdom of God.

Chapter 3

Timeframe: Sometime during the first part of Nebuchadnezzar's reign (605 B.C. – 562 B.C.)

King Nebuchadnezzar builds a giant statue of gold and requires everyone in the kingdom to worship it. Shadrach (Hananiah), Meshach (Mishael), and Abednego (Azariah) refuse to worship the statute and are thrown into the fiery furnace. A mysterious "fourth man" appears in the furnace and they are released without any trace of destruction from the fire.

The Book of Daniel: Overview of Daniel

Chapter 4

Timeframe: An 8 year period during Nebuchadnezzar's reign (605 B.C. – 562 B.C.)

King Nebuchadnezzar has another troublesome dream and calls Daniel to provide the interpretation. Daniel tells the king that it is about him losing his kingdom for seven years while God humbles him. A year later, Nebuchadnezzar appears to go crazy and behaves like an animal for seven years until he acknowledges that God is sovereign.

Chapter 5

Timeframe: Around 539 B.C.

Belshazzar, a co-regent of Babylon, has a drunken party and uses the utensils taken from the Jewish temple. During the party, a disembodied hand appears and writes the words, "MENE, MENE, TENKEL, UPHARSIN" upon the wall. Daniel is called to interpret the message. He tells Belshazzar that on that very evening, he would lose the kingdom and be killed. The prophecy is fulfilled and the Medo-Persian empire takes Babylon.

Chapter 6

Timeframe: Around 540 B.C.

King Darius of the Medo-Persian empire is tricked by his advisors into signing a decree to require all subjects to worship him for 30 days. Daniel continues to worship God and pray to Him three times daily. He is caught by Darius' evil advisors and presented to the King for punishment. Daniel is thrown into the lion's den but rescued by angels, which shut the mouths of the lions.

Chapter 7

Timeframe: Around 553 B.C.

Daniel has a vision of four beasts, a lion with eagle's wings, a bear, a leopard, and an unnamed but terrible looking beast. Each symbolized four world empires, three of which were yet to come: Babylonia, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. Daniel also saw God coming in His kingdom, which is established during the days of the fourth kingdom.

Chapter 8

Timeframe: Around 550 B.C.

Daniel has a vision of a ram and a he-goat while on the Ulai (now Kerkah) River. The ram was overtaken by the he-goat, which then grows a large horn that is later replaced by four smaller horns. This vision refers to the Greek Empire and the interpretation of the vision is given to Daniel by the angel, Gabriel.

Chapter 9

Timeframe: Around 538 B.C.

Daniel intercedes with God for the nation of Israel, which is nearing the end of its captivity, begging for their restoration. God sends the angel Gabriel, to reveal not only the end of Israel's captivity but also a prophetic vision of 70 "weeks".

Chapters 10, 11, & 12

Timeframe: Around 536 B.C.

Daniel has an amazing vision while on the Tigris River. Chapter 10 is a prelude to Chapters 11 and 12, which give specific prophecy about the end of the Medo-Persian Empire, significant events of the Greek Empire, and beyond. Daniel also learns of his own death and future resurrection to eternal life.

Items for Discussion:

How do we see the theme of God's sovereignty developed in the Book of Daniel?

Daniel serves during the reign of at least seven kings that control a world empire. Through all of this, we see God protect His servant Daniel and control the affairs of men. The prophecies show us that He knows what will happen in the future and despite the appearance that things are out of control, they will never leave the reach of His hand, nor prevent the fulfillment of his plan.

What do you expect to get out of this series?