



Daniel

Daniel is a book of two halves. The first six chapters contains stories about 'Daniel', an exile in a high position in the court and what he did to survive as a Jew in that potentially hostile environment. The final six chapters contain a series of visions about the future and God's intervention into that future in different ways. To add to the complexity of the book it is written in two different languages: 2.4-7.28 are in Aramaic, whereas 1.1-2.3 and 8.1-12.13 are in Hebrew.



How long will it take?

Reading time: 1 ¼ hours
Short of time? Just read 1.1-21; 6.1-28;
 7.1-28; 12.1-13



Genre

Historical story and Apocalypse



Anything tricky?

After the engaging and inspiring stories of chapters 1-6, the visions of 7-12 are much harder to read. Also a number of the historical details in the stories are wrong (e.g. names of kings) which raises questions about where the inaccuracies came from.



Inspiring quotes

²⁰ Blessed be the name of God from age to age, for wisdom and power are his. ²¹ He changes times and seasons, deposes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding. ²² He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what is in the darkness, and light dwells with him.
(Daniel 2.20-22)

And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall this kingdom be left to another people.
(Daniel 2.44a)

² Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. ³ Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.
(Daniel 12.2-3)



About the Author

The book is traditionally associated with Daniel, the book's hero, but there are problems with this. Some of the details associated with the stories in chapters 1-6 are hard to tie up with evidence from the Babylonian and Persian periods. Also details in the visions in chapters 7-12 are uncannily accurate about events that took place in the second century bc. So although it appears to be set in the sixth century bc, it seems to be more knowledgeable about the second century bc.

One explanation for this is that the stories from chapters 1-6 originated in the sixth century bc, but were talked about and retold over a period of 400 years until eventually being writing down in the second century bc, along with the visions in chapters 7-12. This would make Daniel a book with a long period of composition and used in various different contexts as a reflection on how to remain faithful to God in hard times.

What do we know about him?

Daniel, a young man, was a member of the aristocracy in Judah and taken into exile by the Babylonians. His wisdom and skill marked him out and he was promoted to a position of influence in the Babylonian court. He served the king with skill and loyalty while at the same time remaining loyal to God.



About the times

The book of Daniel tells another side of the exile story with which we are familiar from the books of Isaiah, Ezekiel and Jeremiah. The start of the exile (597-587 bc) was a time of devastation and loss. It took place over a number of years and was the result of various rebellions. Judah had been in the Babylonian empire since 612 bc but at the start of the sixth century attempted to rebel against them and withhold their taxes. The response of the Babylonians was swift and harsh. It began with the first wave of exile in which the people in the highest echelons of society (including the King) were taken from Judah to live in Babylon in captivity (597 bc) but then continued ten years later after another rebellion with more people being taken into exile and the Temple being destroyed.

Reality for those taken into exile, however, was not all bad. For talented people like Daniel (and Esther) it was possible to rise to positions of influence in the Babylonian and Persian courts, though this brought with it challenges of how to remain faithful to God in a situation that did not recognize him to be God.

What were people feeling?

Daniel reveals a different set of emotions from other exilic books. Books like Lamentations talk about the grief and pain of loss; Daniel is much more pragmatic and reflects on how to live in the new context.

Other books set around this time

Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Esther.



How is it structured?

1.1-21	Living a healthy life	7.1-28	A vision of the beasts from the sea and the victory of the Son of Man
2.1-49	Dream interpretation	8.1-27	The ram and the he-goat who challenge God and lose
3.1-30	The fiery furnace	9.1-27	A prayer of Daniel
4.1-37	More dream interpretation	10.1-12.13	Another battle of Kings against God with a message of encouragement for the faithful who stand firm.
5.1-31	Writing on the wall		
6.1-28	The lion's den		



What kind of Book is it?

Historical story and apocalypse.

The first six chapters are very like other stories in the Old Testament (such as Ruth or Esther). These stories exist to reflect on live issues and offer advice (like how to treat foreigners – Ruth; why to celebrate Purim – Esther; and how to live faithfully in a foreign land – Daniel).

The second six chapters are of a very different kind. They consist of a range of visions which are reminiscent in some ways of the book of Revelation. They contain weird beasts, violent battles between good and evil but beneath everything a certainty that God was in control. There are only two full apocalypses in the Bible (Daniel and Revelation) but outside of the Bible this was a very common way of writing, the most common in fact between around the second century bc and the sixth century ad. The word apocalypse means revelation and points to the fact that all these books seek to reveal God's role in the world even where he appears to be absent.



Look out for...

The theme that holds the two very different halves of this book together is the theme of faithfulness in a tough situation. Look out for it as you read.

Another important theme is hope – told in a variety of different ways – see what you think looks like hope in this book.

Underpinning both of these other themes is the belief that God both can and will deliver his people from even the worst of situations, reflect on this and how it is revealed in the book.



What could this mean for me?

What makes this book fascinating is the question of what one should do to remain faithful to God in a situation that does not recognize God at all. This is a very modern question. Reflect on it as you read, can we learn anything from Daniel about how to live faithfully in a secular world?



Discussion group questions

- Were there any parts of the book that you particularly liked or which inspired you?
- Were there any parts of the book that you disliked or which troubled you?
- What did *you* think the book was about?
- What is your favourite Daniel story and why?
- Why do you think they put these two very different halves of the book together? We normally just end up reading chapters 1-6. What can we learn from them both together?
- What do you think it means today to live faithfully (like Daniel did) in a world that doesn't recognize God? Would should we do? What should we not do?
- Did you read anything in the book that touched you, expanded your faith or made you think more deeply about your life and how you live it?



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