

Valley Bible Church - Bible Survey

Bible Survey Lesson 49: The Book of Daniel, Part I

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF DANIEL

Introduction

Studying the books of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel in sequence is especially interesting. While Jeremiah was preaching and prophesying in Judah, and especially Jerusalem, Ezekiel was engaging in the same ministry among the Jews in exile in Babylonia. At this same time, Daniel was prophesying and serving in the royal court of their enemy, Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon.

It is the prophet Daniel that has most influenced the minds of Jews, both in captivity and free. It is he that gave substance to their vision of a Messianic Kingdom.

The earlier prophets spoke of the relationship of the Jews to the nations surrounding them with an occasional mention of a future kingdom, but Daniel would teach them how the promised kingdom would fit in the scheme of great nations to come. There were to be four powerful monarchs and then one final kingdom. This was and is the great hope for the religious Jew: a Messiah, a Kingdom, a Throne.

Part of the fun in studying this book is the realization that many of the events predicted have now become history. For us they are provable fact, but for Daniel, very little was confirmed. It should give us supreme confidence that the book of Daniel is true and that the remaining predictions will come to pass as well.

Introducing the Book

According to traditional Hebrew literature, the title of the book of Daniel comes from the man who speaks throughout. Woven throughout the book are accounts of the life of Daniel, his rise into power, and his service to three kings. The remaining Scripture is a recounting of many direct revelations given by the Lord to Daniel, through visions and dreams.

In our Bible, the book of Daniel is placed with the books of the prophets. In the Hebrew Bible it is in the third section which follows the Law, and the Prophets, and is called the Writings. It is placed there because Daniel is never directly referred to by the Hebrew word translated prophet. He is, instead identified by the title translated "seer," or "wise man." Jesus, however, called him, "*Daniel, the prophet*" in Matthew 24:15.

In Judah's darkest hour, when the City of David fell and the temple was destroyed, there was a need for a unifying testimony to the exiled nation.

They needed to see purpose and plan in the events of history. They needed to understand that God would not stand for evil, immoral, idolatrous, and disobedient behavior. They also needed to know that the Lord is a covenant-keeping God.

Many scholars doubt whether these prophecies were well-enough known during Daniel's lifetime to be a comfort and encouragement to the exiles.

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But they certainly gave hope to the remnant that returned to rebuild the temple. They were also a great source of hope and strength during the many periods of Jewish persecutions: from the period of the Maccabees; throughout the holocaust in Germany; and into the severe persecutions in Russia.

An unusual feature in Daniel is the fact that its central-portion, 2:4 through 7:28, is written in biblical Aramaic or Chaldee. Actually there are very short portions of Aramaic in Ezra and Jeremiah as well. This is not a problem, since Aramaic was the language of trade or business, in that entire part of the world, in that era. This has been confirmed by a large amount of archaeological evidence found in recent years.

Introducing the Prophet

One of the best known of all Bible characters is Daniel. There was a time when virtually everyone in the western world, saint and sinner alike, knew the story of *Daniel in the Lions Den*, and *Daniel in the Fiery Furnace*. That has certainly changed. But we owe it to ourselves, and our children to keep that trend alive, at least in the church.

It is helpful that we know more about him than any other prophet. The account of the courage, conviction, and commitment to the Lord of he and his three friends is a valuable and practical lesson for us all.

Daniel's name means "God is my Judge," so what did God think of him? God called him, ". . . man of high esteem, . . ." (10:11) Men had a high estimation of he and his friends, also, describing them as, "youths in whom was no defect, who were good-looking, showing intelligence in every branch of wisdom, endowed with understanding, and discerning knowledge, and who had the ability for serving the kings court.; . . . "

Ezekiel ranked him together with Noah and Job. (Ezek. 14:14) and talked of him as a man of righteousness and character.

As was the policy of Babylon, his name was changed to one attached to their gods, when he entered the royal court. He was called Belteshazzar, which means "a prince favored by Bel."

He was unique, in that he was God's prophet to the Gentile, as well as the Jewish world. His ministry lasted from 605 to 536 B. C. He lived, and served his Lord through the entire seventy years of the Babylonian Captivity.

Daniel spent the majority of his life as a statesman, in the court of pagan kings, even though he never failed to serve the true God. He was taken captive in 605 B. C., when Nebuchadnezzar lay siege to Jerusalem and carried off the cream of the young noble families in order to solidify his plans of future conquest. (The Babylonian way)

There are many books written about the authorship of the book of Daniel. As usual, the first problem is the accuracy of the predictions which drive non-believers to try to "late date" them. There is a very fine, brief treatment of this problem in the introduction to Daniel in the *Ryrie Study Bible*. and Dr. John Walvoord deals very well with this, and other questions, in the introduction to his commentary, *Daniel: The Key To Prophetic Revelation*.

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Let me present just three of the newest findings, which verify the accuracy and timing of the Book of Daniel:

1. In the first verses of the first chapter it says that Nebuchadnezzar took vessels from the temple at Jerusalem and brought them into the temple treasury of his god. For years critics insisted that no ruler ever did such a thing.

Not long ago a group of archaeologists entered a room in Babylon and found inscriptions proving that very act was a peculiar habit of that very king. He always put his choice treasures before his gods.

2. Also in the first chapter of Daniel there is a reference to a man by the name of Ashpenaz, the master of the eunuchs, who was in charge of the young captives from Babylon. Critics insisted he was a fictional character made up by the scribe who wrote the book many years later.

Within the last 25 years, the name Ashpenaz was found on several monuments in ancient Babylon. Those monuments, which are now in the Berlin Museum, say, "Ashpenaz, master of the eunuchs in the reign of Nebuchadnezzar.

3. In chapter five, the story is told of Belshazzar, king of Babylon, who was slain during a drunken feast when Persia invaded and conquered them. Secular history books said the king of Babylon at that time was not Belshazzar, but Nabonidus.

This really troubled some believers until Sir Henry Rawlinson discovered an inscription on a cylinder found in the Euphrates river. There were two kings in Babylon, during this time, Nabonidus, the father, who ruled from a fort in a nearby city, and his son, Belshazzar, who sat on the regents throne in the city. This also explains Daniel 5:29, which says, *"Then at Belshazzar's command, Daniel was clothed in purple, a gold chain placed around his neck, and he was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom."* There were already two co-rulers in place.

There are also several strong evidences that Daniel, himself wrote the book:

1. Several verses indicate it (8:15, 27; 9:2; 10:2,7;12:4,5)
2. It is written in autobiographical, first person form from 7:2 on.
3. He was a famous historic figure of his time known by Ezekiel.
4. There is no record in any Jewish literature to indicate that they disclaim his authorship or the historicity of his dating.
5. Jesus attributed these prophecies to him in Matthew 24:15.

Since he was probably around fifteen years old when he was captured, in 605 B. C., and he served Cyrus until 536 B. C., he lived at least 85 years. We have no verifiable record of his death, but tradition has him buried at Shushan, at a very old age, probably over ninety.

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Introducing the Times

The historical background of the book of Daniel has been thoroughly presented in the introductions to the books of Nehemiah and Ezekiel.

Because of the events we will discover in chapter 2, Daniel was given a place of prominence in the government of Nebuchadnezzar. He fell from favor when the king died, but was grudgingly recalled to interpret the writing on Belshazzar's wall at the very end of his reign. He was made one of three presidents under the Medo-Persian, King Darius, and lived until the third year of the rule of King Cyrus.

There is one phrase, having to do with the times that is prominent in the book, and probably needs to be defined. That is "*The times of the Gentiles.*"

"The times of the Gentiles" defines the periods of history when the Gentiles (non-Jews) would dominate world history. Jesus adopted that term, with that definition, in His discussion of the end times as well (i.e. Luke 21:24).

"The times of the Gentiles" began with Nebuchadnezzar, and will end with the return of the Christ (Messiah) in glory. This is the period of history, with its Gentile dominance, that God revealed to Daniel, long before most of it happened.

God explained, through Daniel, that during this period the Gentiles would rule over the earth, especially over the Jews and the land of Palestine. This period would last from the rule of Nebuchadnezzar, through when the last Caesar reigns, in the revived Roman Empire, and up to the personal, visible, bodily return of the Lord Jesus to the earth.

Another way to define this time period is to see it as the present interruption in God's direct dealing with the Jews. The time of the setting-aside of His chosen nation, until they see the Son of God sitting on, "*the Throne of David; and He shall reign over the house of Jacob forever.*" (Luke 1:32,33), when they will again follow the Lord.

Introducing the People

The audience is basically the same as Ezekiel's, with the addition of the gentiles, or pagans, who had captured the land and the people.

Daniel dates his various prophecies and writings, which helps us to tie them to the kings of Babylon or Persia under which he served.

HISTORICAL PROPHETICAL

Chapters Kings

4 - Nebuchadnezzar

5 - Belshazzar

7-8 - Belshazzar

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6 - Darius

9 - Darius

1 - Cyrus

Introducing the Lessons

There are two major thrusts in the book of Daniel, both of which are given to encourage the exiled Jews by revealing the Lord's long range plan for them:

First, God is a sovereign God.

God has control over all of the affairs, of all of the rulers, of all of the nations of the world. And God is planning to replace the power structure of man with a final kingdom and the True King.

God no more suffered a defeat in Jerusalem in 586 B. C., than He did on the cross at Jerusalem in 33 A. D. He will punish and purify His nation by setting them aside for a long time, but He will keep His word. He will fulfill His covenant. He will provide the Messiah for the Throne of David.

Second, God is a supernatural God.

God sometimes uses miracles to get man's attention. When He created the world; through His patriarchs and Moses; through His prophets Elijah and Elisha; during the life of Daniel; through His apostles; and He will again in the time of revelation. When God chooses to reach down into the natural world, by His supernatural power, He make waves.

Importance of the Book

How important is the book of Daniel? Sir Isaac Newton said, "*to reject Daniel is to reject the Christian religion.*" Why would he be so concerned? To reject these prophecies leaves us without an official, prophetic word about "things to come." This affects us in three ways:

1. Israel was set aside nationally and without Daniel we would not know how God is going to work out His continuous plan to resume His covenant relationship with the chosen Hebrew people.
2. Jesus refers to Daniel in his prophetic "Olivet Discourse," and that message can only be properly understood with the book of Daniel as a frame of reference.
3. The book of the Revelation, the only prophetic book in the New Testament, would be less clear without the prophecies in Daniel and the two should always be studied together.

Through Daniel's visions the Lord makes it clear that human empires rise and fall, but He ultimately will shatter the Gentile hold in the world, and establish His kingdom on earth.

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Homework:

Read: Or re-read the Book of Daniel

Think: What are the character traits that Daniel displays that I should emulate.

Apply: Ask God to help you this week to avoid the world's provision and live on the spiritual nourishment He gives.

Bible Survey Lesson 50: The Book of Daniel, Part II

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF DANIEL

Introduction

I have separated the book of Daniel into its two natural divisions. The first is largely historical and gives us a picture of Daniel, his walk, his witness, his worship, and his work. The second is, for the most part, prophetic and involves a series of prophetic visions describing the near and distant future of the Hebrew nations.

I. DANIEL'S PERSON (Chapters 1-6)

Daniel takes his place as one of those select few who are spoken of in Scripture in nothing but positive terms. If you have the time to do a personal character study of Daniel, it could be one of the most productive studies of your life. Chapters 1-6 make this crystal clear.

He was righteous, obedient, loyal, courageous, and wise. With the possible exception of Moses and Solomon, he may have been the most learned man in the Old Testament, and was certainly well-trained for his important role in world history and the unfolding of God's plan for Israel.

A. Testing (1-3)

The book of Daniel begins with a blunt account of the first siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 605 BC. He did not capture the city, but was able to steal some articles of worship from the temple, and capture some of Israel's finest young men, including, "*some of the royal family and of the nobles.*" (v 3).

The first three chapters introduce us to four of those noble young men, and we see three specific aspects of their character: Their walk with his God; Their witness before their captors; And their worship of the one and only true Lord.

1. Walk (1)

Following the Babylonian plan, Neb. ordered his chief court official, Ashpenaz, to pick the cream of the captives and bring them into the royal palace for training and indoctrination.

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What were they like, and what was their future?

READ VERSES 4 THROUGH 6

Put yourself in the place of Daniel and his friends. You're about 15 years old. You have been raised nobly, but strictly. You are captured by your feared and cruel enemy, but find yourself in the position of a prince. What do you do? What do you do?

Test one: One of the perks of their new position is food from the king's own chef, the very best in Babylonian cuisine, and you're a growing boy. What's the problem? The Babylonian food was not kosher. Much of the diet was made up of "unclean" animals, mostly pork, the meat was rare and bloody, some food was mixed with dairy products, and much of the wine and meat had been offered to the king's favorite idols.

For Daniel this choice was no choice so, " . . . Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king's choice food or the wine which he drank; . . ." (v 8).

What happened next, I present to my classes as an example of creative problem solving and the art of negotiation. Daniel convinced Ashpenaz to allow he and his three friends to eat only vegetables and water for a ten-day trial period. At the end, the four of them looked healthiest of all the young men, and so were allowed to keep their own kosher diet.

Was this risk worth it? " . . . as for these four youths, God gave them knowledge and intelligence in every branch of literature and wisdom; Daniel even understood all kinds of visions and dreams." (v 17), and "and as for every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king consulted them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and conjurers who were in all his realm " (v 20)

2. Witness (2)

Fitting in to the court of the king is one thing. Being put on the hot seat is another. How will Daniel and his friends stand up to a supernatural challenge?

Test two: Neb. had a dream. He had had dreams before, but this one was especially troubling to him and he couldn't sleep. He called for his "wise guys," the magicians, the sorcerers, and the really sharp Chaldeans, to help him understand the dream. I think the king had always wondered if these guys were for real, so this time he not only asked them to interpret the dream, he asked them to tell him what the dream was.

The pay was good, "Tell me and I make you rich," however, there was a down side, "Fail and you die." They were understandably upset. This was without precedent, it wasn't fair, this time they couldn't cheat. So, the king decreed they all be executed.

When Daniel heard what was going on, he went to his friends and they prayed to the Lord for wisdom to know and interpret the king's dream. God honored them and revealed the dream and its meaning, and here is where the test came in.

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Daniel can have it all. He can let the "wise guys" die, tell the dream *and* be the top advisor in the land, or he can give a clear witness for his Lord. What did he do? He saved the "wise guys" and told the king, "*As for the mystery about which the king has inquired, neither wise men, conjurers magicians, nor diviners are able to declare it to the king. However, there is a God in heaven . . .*"

(vv. 27-28). [Remember, Neb. had some gods he really liked.]

Was it worth the risk?

READ VERSES 46 THROUGH 49

3. Worship (3)

The third test was faced by Daniel's three friends since Daniel, seems, to have been away on royal business. We know, however from later events, that He would have stood with his friends.

Test three: Studying Scripture or secular history, it is obvious that Nebuchadnezzar had an ego problem. He had a gold image made, 90 feet high by 9 feet wide, perhaps of one of his god's or, as traditional teaching has it, himself. He ordered all his cabinet to come to an official dedication ceremony. When the musical fanfare was played, all those present were to bow to the image.

As usual, the punishment of disobedience was severe.

The dilemma is obvious. Do the three Jews bow in body, but not in heart, and therefore obey the king? Or do they, "*worship the one true God and Him only,*" as their belief demanded. They not only didn't bow, they told the king why, and affirmed the Lord's power to intervene, if He desired, and their willingness to die for Him if He didn't.

Of course, you know the "rest of the story," They were cast into the fiery furnace, God delivered them and their clothes didn't even smell of smoke.

Was it worth the risk?

READ VERSES 28 THROUGH 30

B. Triumph (4-6)

This section of Scripture emphasizes the sovereignty of God in the affairs of kings, nations, and the lives of His people.

1. Testimony (4)

Chapter 4 begins and ends with a testimony from an unlikely source. Nebuchadnezzar, influenced by Daniel, his three friends and their God, says, "*It has seemed good to me to declare the signs and wonders which the Most High God has done for me.*" (v 2) It sounds like he's become a believer, even a follower. Not yet!

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How do we know he's still a pagan? He has another dream and calls for the usual suspects, the "wise guys," and, as usual, they can't interpret it. Then, according to verse 8 he said, ". . . *Daniel came before me, whose name is Beltashazzar according to the name of my god, and in whom is the the spirit of the holy gods; and I related my dream to him, . . .*"

In his dream Neb. saw a large fruit tree with beautiful leaves and animals lounging in its shade and birds living in its branches. An angelic being commanded that the tree be cut down and the stump be bound with iron and bronze. He then related that the stump represented a man who would become insane and live outdoors, like an animal, for seven periods of time (perhaps seven years).

Daniel informed Neb. that the tree represented the king himself, who though powerful and providing protection and a home for many, would be brought low. Once sufficiently humbled he would be restored to the throne.

One year later the dream came true and Neb. began to act like an animal, his hair and nails grew grotesquely long and he actually ate grass. When God restored his sanity, Nebuchadnezzar praised God publicly and warned his people about the dangers of pride.

Verse 37 gives testimony to the fact that he had a true conversion to worshipping the "*King of Heaven.*"

2. Truth (5)

In 539 B. C., twenty years after Nebuchadnezzar's death, King Belshazzar was ruling Babylon in the absence of his father, Nabonidus who had retired to Arabia.

"Belshazzar, the king, held a great feast for a thousand of his nobles, and he was drinking wine in the presence of the thousand. When Belshazzar tasted the wine (got drunk), he gave orders to bring the gold and silver vessels which Nebuchadnezzar his father (actually grandfather or great grandfather) had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem, . . . " (vv. 1-2)

As if that wasn't bad enough, as they drank from the temple implements, they, "*praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone.*" (v. 4)

While the people partied, the disembodied fingers of a man's hand appeared and began to write a message on the wall of the palace.

The king was terrified and sent for his "wise guys" to read the message and, even though he offered to make the reader third ruler in the kingdom, no one could read the mystery message. The queen, perhaps the queen mother, entered and reminded Belshazzar of the old prophet who could read dreams and visions.

Daniel was called and declined the king's gifts, but he reminded him of what had happened to his grandfather because of his pride. He applied that object lesson to the arrogant upstart who would dare defame the Lord by using the temple vessels.

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Finally he read the message, "*Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin.*" and then interpreted it. Belshazzar's days were numbered and his reign was ending, he has been weighed on God's balance of justice and found lacking, and his mighty kingdom would be divided between the Medes and the Persians.

Actually, as Daniel was delivering this prophesy of doom, the enemy armies were entering the city through the diverted Euphrates River which was the cities main water supply, and were taking the city with virtually no resistance. (vv 30-31)

3. Trust (6)

Daniel continued to prosper under the new Medo-Persian rule. Darius, the Mede, chose to make him one of three administrators over the 120 districts of the provinces he ruled. In fact, it was his success that caused jealousy among the other leaders.

Knowing that Daniel was loyal to the king and to his own God, they plotted to have him executed for treason by making him disobey an official edict of the king.

Appealing to Darius' pride, and knowing well the "law of the Medes and Persians," they convinced him to issue a decree ordering all his subjects to worship him, and him only, for one month or be fed to the lions.

"Now when Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he entered his house (now in the roof chamber he had the windows open toward Jerusalem); and he continued kneeling on his knees, three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously." (v. 10)

Darius, who obviously admired and respected Daniel, tried all day to think of a way to bail him out. However, the other leaders waved the law in front of his face and he gave the order to cast Daniel into the lions' den. He was not a happy king. *"Then the king went off to his palace and spent the night fasting, and no entertainment was brought before him; and sleep fled from him." (v 18)*

When he returned to the den in the morning he cried out to Daniel, *" . . . has your God, whom you constantly serve, been able to deliver you from the lions?"* And, of course, He had shut the lions' mouths, and Daniel was safe. Darius had him lifted out of the lions' den and his accusers and their families were thrown in and they were destroyed.

The end of the chapter reminds us of chapter 4, when King Nebuchadnezzar praised God, as Darius made a decree praising Daniel's God as the sovereign Lord of the universe, and demanding that all in his kingdom fear and tremble before Him.

II. DANIEL'S PROPHECIES (Chapters 7-12)

Up to this point the book of Daniel deals with the life and work of Daniel. With the exception of the giant image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, the prophecies that he presented were tied to the rulers then alive and came to pass in a relatively short time.

Now we move into a section devoted primarily to future prophecies which were given to Daniel in a series of visions.

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A. Visions (7-9)

Daniel received three visions which are central to understanding God's prophetic plan for the world from his time on, both for the Gentile nations, and for the Nation of Israel as well.

In the seventh chapter Daniel traces the course of four great world empires: Babylon; Medo-Persia; Greece; and Rome climaxing with the second coming of Jesus, the Christ, and the inauguration of the kingdom of God on earth (The fifth and final kingdom.).

In the eighth chapter Daniel concerns himself with the empires of Persia and Greece as they relate to Israel. Under Persia the Israelites went back to rebuild their land, city, and temple. Under Greece, especially under Antiochus Epiphanes, the city and temple were again desolated.

In the ninth chapter Daniel presents the history of Israel from the time of Ezra and Nehemiah to the coming of the Messiah to the earth to reign.

The visions are not simple to understand, but fortunately there is an interpretation with each which does give some direction.

1. Four Beasts (7)

This vision occurred in Belshazzar's first year of co-reign, which puts it at about 553 B C., prior to the fall of Jerusalem described in chapter 5. (Parallel of Neb's vision in chapter 2.)

Four great beasts come up out of the sea, each representing rulers of a great world empire:

"The first was like a lion and had wings like an eagle." (v. 4) These symbols of strength and speed were both used in reference to **Babylonia** (Jer. 4:7 and 13). [British Museum Lions]

". . . a second one, resembling a bear." (v 5) The bear was used as a symbol for the **Medo-Persian Empire** because of its strength and fierceness in battle (Isa. 113:17-18). It is possible that their three beaten enemies, Lydia, Babylon and Egypt are the ribs.

". . . another one, like a leopard, . . ." (v 6) This lightning fast creature with wings is clearly the **Greek Empire** under Alexander the Great, who invented the lightning military strategy called "blitzkrieg." After his death, the empire had four heads; Asia Minor, Syria, Egypt, and Macedonia, each ruled by one of his generals.

"" . . . a fourth beast, dreadful and terrifying and extremely strong; . . . " (v 7 and 8) This beast is beyond human description. It devoured, it crushed, it trampled, it is the **Roman Empire**. The ten horns are, as explained in verse 24, the final form of that empire, a confederation of ten nations which will arise together in a **re-constituted Roman Empire**. And then a new ruler arrives to tear his way into the scene, this is the Antichrist (vv. 24-27).

This vision ends with the judgment of those nations by the "Ancient of Days." God, the Judge and the Messiah, "One like a Son of Man," comes to wage war with the little horn and *"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of the Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign for ever and ever."* HALLELUJAH!

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All this scenario is presented in detail in the Book of the Revelation from chapter 4 on, but especially in chapters 12 through 22.

2. Two Beasts (8)

This vision also came during the reign of Belshazzar.

Daniel saw a ram with two horns of unequal length, the longer growing after the shorter. The ram charged to the west, north, and south conquering all that were in its way.

A goat with one long horn came from the west, shattered the ram's two horns, and trampled the ram into the ground. None could then stand up to the goat, but at the height of its power its horn was broken and replaced by four small horns. *(Are you with me? Then explain it to me.)*

Just to make it more complicated, another horn grew from one of the four and it became increasingly powerful, extending its power to the south and east. It challenged the hosts of heaven, oppressed God's people, and disrupted the sacrifices in the Lord's temple.

This time we have the angel Gabriel to come to our rescue. He revealed the meaning to Daniel, and to us:

The two-horned ram was the Medo-Persian Empire, and the goat, the Greek Empire. The four small horns were the four divisions of Greece after Alexander's death. The little horn (not the same as in 7:8) refers to Antiochus Epiphanes who came to power in Syria from 175-164 B. C., persecuted the Jews, blasphemed God, and plundered the Temple in Jerusalem, desecrating it by offering pig's flesh on the altar.

Daniel was so disturbed by watching the persecution of his people he, ". . . was exhausted and sick for days." (v. 27)

3. Seven years/Seven "weeks" (9)

In 538 B. C., immediately after the Persian conquest of Babylon, Daniel prayed to the Lord on behalf of the exiles Israel. *"Daniel observed in the books the number of years which was revealed as the word of the Lord to Jeremiah (25:11-12) the prophet for the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years."* (v 2)

Since the prophecy began in 605 B. C., there were only three years left until the return would begin. Daniel believed in the literal fulfillment of that prophecy.

Daniel prayed humbly with fasting, sackcloth and ashes, to his faithful and merciful covenant God. It was a remarkable prayer of confession associating himself with the sins of his people 32 times. This is especially meaningful since he had little of his own sin to confess. He acknowledged that they deserved the judgment they received and asked for the Lord's forgiveness, mercy and the restoration of His people to the land.

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While he prayed, Gabriel appeared to him and gave him an answer, "seventy sevens" were decreed for Israel and Jerusalem, after which time atonement would be made for their sins (vv. 24). These are weeks of years, as opposed to weeks of days as in 10:2 and 3, and measures the span of time from the Persian decree to rebuild Jerusalem up to the founding of the Messiah's kingdom (v 25).

Though we can't get into the detail now, it is interesting to note that 69×7 (483 years) of this prophecy can be traced in literal details of history. They have already passed, leaving only one "week," or seven years to be fulfilled. (Interesting number?)

This chapter is a fulcrum for understanding prophecy. Verse 24 is a summary of the entire prophecy. Verse 25 then gives details about the first 69 weeks. Verse 26 pictures the gap--the time we are in now, the temporarily putting aside of Jewish history. Finally, the last verse (27) gives us a glimpse of the 70th week.

B. Visitors (10-12)

Dr. Charles Ryrie calls these last three chapters, "Daniel's Prophetic Panorama." They include a vision of an angel just come from a fierce battle, a vision of two antichrists, one in type and one in truth, and a vision of Michael, the Jews own guardian angel, who has the last word.

1. Angels, Part I (10)

In 536 B. C., Daniel received his final vision. He had in a vision a message from Jerusalem that broke his heart. The small remnant of Jews who had returned weren't getting the job done. It had been two years and they had only started the temple foundation.

Also, renegade Jews and other peoples were giving them a hard time (Ezra 4). To top it off, a royal edict was sent out to stop construction all together and some of the people were slipping back into idolatry. "*Daniel had been mourning for three entire weeks.*" (v 2). He was crying out to the Lord for help.

He went down to the Tigris River and he saw a shining angelic being who awed him, and he fell on his face in a deep sleep. This is how he received the vision. The angel related to Daniel how, even though he had heard his prayer and tried to come to him immediately, he had been detained by the "prince of the kingdom of Persia," apparently an evil angel who was involved in the affairs of that nation.

After a three-week struggle, Michael intervened, allowing the angel to proceed. Interestingly, the angel will return to resume his warfare (v 20), but first he reveals the future to Daniel.

2. Antichrists (11)

This chapter outlined Palestinian history from Daniel's time through the time of Antiochus Epiphanes. Verse 2 refers to the four Persian rulers who would succeed Cyrus: Cambyses (530-522 B. C.), Pseudo-Smerdis (522), Darius I (522-486), and Xerxes, Esther's husband (486-465). It alludes to Xerxes' failed campaign against Greece.

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Verses 3 and 4 then refer to Alexander the Great (336-323) and the divisions of his kingdom. Verses 5-20 outline the relationship between the Seleucids, "the king of the North" who ruled Syria, and the Ptolemies, the king of the South, who ruled Egypt during the period 321-175 B. C.

Verses 21-35 focus on the career of Antiochus Epiphanes (175-164), mentioning his Egyptian campaigns and persecution of the Jews. Verses 32-35 anticipate the Maccabean revolt against him. Most scholars consider him a type of the antichrist.

The details of verses 36-45 do not correspond to his career and so, I believe, a switch is made from the perspective of the type of antichrist to a portrayal of the Antichrist himself, whose hostility has been foreshadowed in the career of Antiochus Epiphanes.

3. Angels, Part II (12)

The last section of chapter 11 (vv. 36-45) anticipates a time of tribulation which Jesus described in Matthew 24:21 as, "*a time such has never occurred,*" in which Michael, Israel's guardian angel, intervenes (12:1-4). Verse 3 indicates that, during this Great Tribulation, some will see through the Antichrist's deception and will lead others to the truth.

In Daniel's final vision the angel instructed him to seal up the revelation until the end of times. Daniel then saw two other angels; one asked how long it would be before the revelation would be revealed, the other answered ". . . *a time, times, and a half a time; . . .*" (v 7), referring to the three and a half years, or the last half of the Great Tribulation.

The Book of Daniel ends with a great commentary on modern society and three great words of advice for Daniel which also apply to us:

First, the commentary.

"Many will be purged, purified and refined; but the wicked will act wickedly, and none of the wicked will understand, but those who have insight will understand." (v 10)

People are coming to Christ around the world. They are in a process of refining "as by fire," being made pure in the crucible of testing which James calls a joyful maturing process.

But, at the same time, the wicked are acting wickedly. Why are we so surprised? It seems there has never been a time when man, in general, has been so wicked. They even hear the truth and they don't have a clue what it has to do with them.

Last, the advice.

"But as for you, go your own way to the end; then you will enter into rest and rise again for your allotted portion at the end of the age." (v 13)

Daniel was in his nineties. He had done his job faithfully and his prophecy was complete. He was soon to die. Wasn't it time for him to retire? NO! God's message to him was, "Go back to your job. Stay involved. Keep doing what you do so well."

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When we study prophecy we get so involved with figuring things out, having the inside information, knowing the mysteries, that we forget the purpose of prophecy.

The purpose of prophecy is, seeing as these things are going to happen, how shall we live. Prophecy should change our life-style!

Next, God's message was, "You'll get your rest, when you die."

There was a built in retirement program for prophets. They worked hard, served faithfully and "entered into their rest." They died and were resurrected to be with the Lord they served. Isn't this the same retirement program Paul talked about? "I'd rather go now to be with Jesus, but He obviously has more for me to do, so I'll fight on until I see Him face to face."

Our purpose on the earth is to serve God and enjoy Him forever. What better way to do that than to take our part in His body, use our gifts to serve Him and others, and then go to be with our Lord.

Finally, God's message was, "You will receive an inheritance."

Can you imagine what his "allotted portion" must be when his benefactor, His father, is the Lord of the Universe? We are fortunate. Daniel spent his entire life away from his homeland among foreigners. He died in exile, but some day he was going home to receive his part of the Promised Land. Daniel had special reservations in the land of the Messiah.

And we? We have a great inheritance also. A dwelling place, beyond imagination, where the light source is the Holy God.

This is our future hope. Why are we not more excited?

I'm just going to let those three pieces of advice be our lessons for today.

Homework:

Read: Begin to read in the Minor Prophets with the books of Hosea, Joel, and Amos

Think: Evaluate the effect of the prophets and prophecy on your life.

Apply: Live this week in the knowledge of God's great plans for you.