

Church and Theology

Where the Bible and the Local Church Meet

Studies in the Book of Daniel¹

#1-Introduction

Daniel 1:1-2

Paul S. Karleen

It is 605 BC. Jerusalem, in the southern kingdom, Judah, finds itself besieged by Babylon, the greatest power in the middle east at the time. Josiah, one of Judah's godliest kings, had died in 609 and was succeeded by Jehoahaz, who only reigned three months, and Jehoiakim (609-598), two ungodly kings. They were followed by Jehoiachin, who ruled for three months in 598-597, then Zedekiah (597-586), a puppet ruler installed by the Babylonians. Nebuchadnezzar starts the first of four waves of deportation of the residents of Judah, with the rest coming in 597, 586 and 582, all but the poorest people being exiled (remember that Israel, the northern kingdom, had been overrun by the Assyrians in 722 B.C.) Thus began the 70 years of captivity predicted by Jeremiah, just a few years earlier, as found in Jer. 25:8-11 (see also 34:12-22):

⁸ Therefore the LORD Almighty says this: "Because you have not listened to my words, ⁹ I will summon all the peoples of the north and my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon," declares the LORD, "and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants and against all the surrounding nations. I will completely destroy them and make them an object of horror and scorn, and an everlasting ruin. ¹⁰ I will banish from them the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of bride and bridegroom, the sound of millstones and the light of the lamp. ¹¹ This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years.

These 70 years were a period in Israel's history that brought both suffering and blessing: suffering because of the harsh treatment from the Babylonians and blessing because Israel as a people would finally turn from the idolatry that they had fallen into over and over since Abraham entered Canaan some 1400 years earlier.

Among the very first captives to leave Jerusalem is a young man, a nobleman who must have been spiritually sensitive enough to realize these events had been predicted. Undoubtedly, he loved the city and must have wept when he left, as the writer of Ps. 137 describes:

¹ By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion.

² There on the poplars we hung our harps,

³ for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"

⁴ How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land?

⁵ If I forget you, Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill.

⁶ May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy.

And so we have the beginning of this man's role as an instrument for God to display an exemplary life and to be a recorder of amazing revelations from God. He was not one who issued predictions himself or engaged in pleading with his people, as Ezekiel and Jeremiah did at the time, but a statesman. Yet the book is grouped

¹ Copyright 2023 by Paul S. Karleen. Scripture taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by [Biblica, Inc.](http://www.biblica.com)® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

with the major prophets of the Old Testament. His life is never criticized and he could stand before his God in keeping with his name—"God is my judge." We have the man Daniel and the book Daniel, a biblical book that all believers should understand. The two Daniels go together: the man is part of the message.

1. Seeing the big picture

Why study the Book of Daniel? You might ask, "What's in it for me?" Look first at vv. 1-2, which are essential to the understanding of the book and the key to its value:

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. ² And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god.

This seems too simple and plain. But here's what this tells us: a Gentile power decides to flex its muscles and overrun Judah—oh, wait, *the Lord* gave Judah into the hands of the Gentiles. The things associated with Jewish worship were trampled and profaned as Jerusalem was overrun as part of the plan of God. The counterpart to this is that later the exiles are brought back, as God shows his control over the Babylonian king and his successors. Just as Judah goes away, so Judah will return. These verses and their reversal years later form the essence of the book of Daniel, and Daniel is God's key to his plan for the ages: God's people chastised and God's people brought to blessing.

If you only see in this book the life of a godly man and some startling visions, you're only looking at the surface. The Book of Daniel provides the big picture of what God is doing in history from 605 B.C. to the Kingdom of Christ on earth. It shows in outline and in detail how the pieces of God's prophetic plan fit together. We should let it force us to think in terms of God's plan and his control over history. God is not haphazard. He *tells us* what he is going to do—a great part of which has already happened by our time.

2. Key takeaways from studying the Book of Daniel

Here, then, are fourteen key takeaways from the book that we should be following as we study it:

1) The Book of Daniel presents all of history from the sixth century up to the Messianic Kingdom as the control of human affairs by four great powers. The first three controlling entities cover a geographic range from Afghanistan to southern Europe and northern Africa, with the fourth beginning in Europe and then extending its control to the whole world even to our time and beyond.

2) These controlling forces are presented in terms of the effects they have on Israel, with Jerusalem in the center, the most important city in the world. Biblical prophecy is not concerned with Cape Town, South Africa, Tokyo, Japan, Sydney, Australia or Los Angeles. It is centered on Jerusalem, Israel and the Jewish people.

3) God's plan for the ages is not complete until he brings complete blessing and safety for Israel. Sadly, these days more and more Christians are being fooled into thinking that, since the Cross, Israel has been replaced by the Church there is no distinctive future for Israel. The names for this position are 'replacement theology,' 'supersessionism' or 'fulfillment theology.' The Church has supposedly replaced Israel in God's program. Some Jews will be saved, but they will simply be part of the Church. The Book of Daniel will not allow us to think this way. Romans 9-11 won't either, but that's part of another study.

4) The Amillennialist says that there will be no specific kingdom on earth; all there is of the Kingdom today is God's residence in each believer. The Postmillennialist says that the Kingdom is the Church bringing the conversion of the world, after which Christ will return. The Book of Daniel will not allow us to think this way.

5) Luke 21:24 tells us that "Jerusalem shall be trodden under foot of the Gentiles, until the time of the Gentiles be fulfilled." This period of time began with Dan. 1:1-2 in 605 B.C. We are now in the times of the Gentiles, with both Israel (northern kingdom) and Judah (southern kingdom) having lost their roles as carriers of the rule of God among the Jewish people. **Daniel gives the most detailed outline in the Bible of Israel's future and what God will do to establish his presence once again among his people.**

6) Since Daniel is the key to understanding God's plan from 605 to the Kingdom, it is the key to world events during the times we are living in. The controlling powers in Daniel successively affect larger and larger portions of the world—they go global. Put these two points together in your thinking: global and control. It's difficult to dismiss the slide we are seeing in our country and the whole world into a time where there will be single-point control of individuals with entities such as the UN and World Economic Forum utilizing the internet and linked computers with huge storage capacities. If you wonder about what is going on today politically and economically, study Daniel.

7) Daniel is the key to understanding NT prophecy. The Olivet Discourse in Mt. 24, the world ruler of 2 Thess. 2 and all of Rev. 4-22 depend on Daniel for their correct interpretation.

8) Did you know that Daniel contains the most fine-grained prophecy anywhere in the Bible?

9) I believe that biblical prophecy taken together teaches that there will be a removal of the Church from the earth before the return of Christ to set up his Millennial Kingdom—the rapture. The Book of Daniel gives us the most complete rationale for this in the Bible.

10) Speaking of the Millennium, the Book of Daniel is the key to understanding the purpose of that time.

11) Daniel itself records the fulfillment of other prophecies (e.g., Jeremiah and the Babylonian captivity) and as such is a part of the unified fabric of prophetic Scripture.

12) Daniel is one of several Bible books that contain apocalyptic texts. The word apocalyptic is borrowed from the Greek word ἀποκάλυψις (*apokalupsis*) which means revelation or disclosure, and is used to describe literature that involves communication from God by means of such things as dreams and visions. Ezekiel, Isaiah, Zechariah and Haggai in the OT and Revelation in the NT also contain apocalyptic sections.

13) The Book of Daniel presents the exemplary life of a great man of God whose experiences constitute a parallel to those of Israel during the Times of the Gentiles—persecuted but preserved.

14) Daniel is such a miraculous book that it has been the focus of the most severe attacks on Scripture with regard to authenticity. It prophesied the Greek and Roman kingdoms so clearly that liberal Bible scholars could only say it was written after the rise of those powers. Such attacks began in the 3rd century A.D. and were picked up with greater intensity in the 18th and 19th centuries by rationalistic German theologians. Its scope, accuracy and startling predictions have been a stumbling block for those who reject the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible. Today most non-conservative Bible scholars date the book as late as 165 B.C., with some calling it 'historic fiction.'

3. Four challenges

Now some challenges for you as we study the Book of Daniel:

- 1) Learn to think historically in terms of God's plan for the ages.
- 2) Look for theological teaching and work at putting it together. Some doctrinal features of the book are the second coming of Christ, judgments, resurrection, angels, components of a God-pleasing spiritual life, providence, the Messiah, the sovereignty of God, grace, sin, retribution, prayer and many more.
- 3) Continue to work on putting Scripture together—particularly Daniel with Matthew, Revelation and 1 and 2 Thessalonians.
- 4) Work at learning principles of biblical interpretation, especially of prophetic texts.

Questions for further study

1. What direction was Babylon from Jerusalem? What country would it be in today?
2. Why did Babylon invade Judah and take its people into captivity? (Trick question)
3. What does the fact that the deportations occurred in waves suggest?
4. What views do people have today about how important various cities on earth are? What makes New York important? Or London?
5. What is replacement theology?
6. What is God's view of the place of the present century (or the 15th or the 9th in history? What is the relation of Jerusalem to this?
7. What is the purpose or effect of dating Daniel in the second century B.C.? In other words, why do it?