

Reading Daniel

Context: Dan.1:1-2 sets the book in the context of Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar's invasion and conquest of Judah and Jerusalem, around 605 B.C. The Babylonians destroyed the beloved city and its temple, carting away many of its sacred vessels and taking captive to Babylon most of Jerusalem's elders, nobles and leading citizens.

Having finally entered in to their Promised Land under Joshua, unfortunately Israel did not follow the directions of Moses and so things did not go well. Prophets repeatedly warned Israel that if she did not follow Moses' directions they would become weak and unhealthy and would ultimately lose their land. Now, having lost so much of what they held dear, they found themselves living a strange and unfamiliar place, with different values, language, customs and gods.

The book of Daniel is meant to serve as an encouragement and challenge for those who find themselves in "Exile."

It consists of six stories (chapters 1-6) and four dream-visions (chapters 7-12). The stories try to show how faithful Jews can live in the strange land while the visions interpret current history, promising a coming kingdom which will prevail over all the others and bring peace. The purpose of the visions is not to provide a timeline for future events –the revelation of these future events is not detailed enough for that. Rather the purpose of the visions is to encourage those living within various times to harbor hope and remain faithful.

In the talks I bring in church we will discuss some more specific messages contained in the stories and visions, but to begin with, for the purpose of reading the book, I will pass on how the Oxford Annotated Bible summarizes the chapters:

1:1-12 Daniel and his friends: A story to teach how faithful observance of the Law is rewarded.

2:1-49 Nebuchadnezzar's dream: A story to teach the feebleness of human wisdom compared with that conferred by God.

3:1-30 The three Hebrew youths in the fiery furnace: A story to show how martyrdom is preferable to being unfaithful. I would add also to show God will be with you to help you in acting out your faithfulness.

4:1-39 Nebuchadnezzar's madness: A story to show how helpless is the greatest heathen power against Israel's God.

5:1-31 Belshazzar's feast: A story to show that divine punishment is visited on sacrilege.

6:1-28 Daniel in the lion's den: A story to show how God will deliver his faithful servants.

7:1-28 The vision of the four beasts: A vision of the passing kingdoms to make way for the kingdom of God.

8:1-22 The vision of the ram and the he-goat: A vision pertaining to the future of Persia and Greece.

9:1-27 The prophecy of the seventy weeks: Expounding the prophecy of Jeremiah 25:11,12; 29:10 (ie that the Jews would be in Babylon for seventy years, then return...which is indeed what took place) featuring Daniel's prayer of confession and repentance.

10:1-21- 12:13 A vision of the last days:

10: 1-21 Prologue

11:1-45 Vision: interpretation of the vision of history unfolding

12:1-13 Epilogue: Final consummation preceded by great tribulation