

Surveying the Text: Daniel

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INTRODUCTION:

The theme of the book of Daniel is the universal sovereignty of Jehovah over all the nations of men. This sovereignty was active through God's providential oversight of historical events in the time of the Old Testament. But the book is also rich in promises with regard to the coming new era, the time when God's rule over the nations of men will be mediated through Messiah, the Prince.

THE TEXT:

"Now among these were of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: Unto whom the prince of the eunuchs gave names: for he gave unto Daniel the name of Belteshazzar; and to Hananiah, of Shadrach; and to Mishael, of Meshach; and to Azariah, of Abed-nego" (Daniel 1:6-7).

SUMMARY OF THE TEXT:

There are two basic sections to the book of Daniel. The first has Daniel writing of himself in the third person (Dan. 1-6), and it records a series of six historical sketches, in which Daniel and/or his friends are delivered and/or otherwise vindicated. There are six stories here and each one is a chiasm. Below is a description of each story, and a statement of what is revealed at the center of the chiasm.

Life in a pagan court > Daniel and friends are healthier than the others

Nebuchadnezzar's dream > God reveals the dream to Daniel

The fiery furnace > The three men are unharmed

Nebuchadnezzar's insanity > The king goes mad

Belshazzar's feast > Daniel is recalled.

Daniel in the lion's den > Daniel is unharmed

In the second section of the book, Daniel speaks of himself in the first person, and records a series of visions relating to Israel and the surrounding nations. Daniel predicts the rise of the Greeks (Alexander and his generals), and even gets as far as the Romans. But his great interest is found in how the glorious statue is brought to nothing by the kingdom of God.

BACKGROUND TO THE BOOK:

Among liberal scholars, there is almost universal consensus that it was not written in the fifth century B.C., but rather was written much later. This assumption is built on the rickety foundation of unbelief. Because the visions are so prophetically accurate, it is assumed that they could not have been delivered beforehand. But we are believers, and

the book claims its origin in the Babylonian exiles. In addition, the Lord Jesus lends His authority to the question by saying, “But when ye shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet . . .” (Mark 13:14).

A QUESTION OF LOYALTY:

The protagonists of this book (Daniel and his three friends) are constantly having to navigate and balance various loyalties in tension. They are captives of war, with loyalty to their homeland. They are adopted by Babylon, and have loyalties and duties there. And they are servants of the Most High God, which is the fundamental loyalty that must never bend. Because that loyalty won't bend, the three young men won't bow before the statue of the king. Because that loyalty won't bend, they won't eat the appointed food. Because that loyalty won't bend, Daniel will not stop praying to God in his old age, doing so in the same way he has for decades. Notice that their fierce loyalty to Jehovah does not require defiance across the board. Nor does submission to the king require cravenness across the board. Daniel was willing to go to the wall in his refusal to eat a Babylonian hot dog, but he did not refuse being made the Chancellor of the University of Babylon (Dan. 2:48), a university that had a witchcraft department. And you may not look down on him—he was one of the three most godly men who ever lived (Ezek. 14:14).

EMPIRES OF CHAFF:

“Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth” (Dan. 2:34–35).

The vision sees a descending order of empires. Babylon is the most glorious, the golden head. Then the silver was the kingdom of the Medes and Persians. Then came the brass of the Greeks. After that we find the iron of Rome, and then the iron and clay of a weakened Rome. The stone cut without hands is the kingdom of God, which came during the time of Rome, and struck the kingdoms of this earth on the feet. That stone, the rule and realm of Christ, is in the process now of becoming a mountain that will fill the entire earth.

Before the Ancient of Days:

“I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed” (Dan. 7:13–14).

In the earlier vision, a stone strikes a human form on the feet. In this vision, the stone is a human form. The Lord Jesus refers this prophecy to Himself in his answer to the high

priest. You will see “the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven” (Matt. 26:64). But coming on the clouds of Heaven does not refer to the Second Coming—rather it refers to the Ascension. Jesus is not coming to earth here, but rather into the presence of the Ancient of Days. And what happens there? He is given universal dominion. Who has absolute sway over this earth? The Lord Jesus Christ.



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