

Introduction to Daniel

Where is it in the Bible?

Daniel, the fifth and last book in the major prophets section, is the twenty-seventh book in the Protestant Old Testament and is found between Ezekiel and Hosea. In the Hebrew Bible, Daniel is found in the Writings and comes between Esther and Ezra-Nehemiah. The Septuagint version of Daniel includes passages and stories that are not found in the Hebrew version.

Who wrote it?

Traditionally the book is attributed to Daniel, a Jewish exile who lived in Babylon during the reigns of Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Cyrus, and Darius the Mede. According to this view, the book was written by Daniel to recount his experiences and to predict the distant future. This opinion is widely disputed, however. Most scholars believe that the book was composed in stages by unknown authors. The stories found in chapters 2-6 are traditional and probably existed independently prior to their inclusion in Daniel. The material in chapters 7-12 was added considerably later.

When was it written?

The question of when the book was written is linked with the question of authorship. Those who hold the traditional view that Daniel was the author date the whole book to the sixth century B.C. Those who believe that the book was composed in stages give it a much later date. The material in chapters 1-6 was probably finalized in the third century B.C. The material in the rest of the book concerns events which took place between 168 and 164 B.C., during the last five years of the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes IV, king of the Seleucid Empire.

What is it about?

Daniel is a book of consolation and encouragement. "The examples of faithful courage in the first part of the book serve to encourage the reader who may have to live in the midst of the dark times envisioned in the latter part of the book. The visions have many different twists and turns, but they all end on the encouraging note that there is a limit to even the worst forms of evil and that the kingdom of God will prevail."¹

How is it structured?

- I. The Stories (1:1-6:28)
 - A. Faithfulness of Daniel and His Friends (1:1-21)
 - B. Nebuchadnezzar's Dream (2:1-49)
 - C. Daniel's Friends and the Fiery Furnace (3:1-30)
 - D. Nebuchadnezzar's Madness (4:1-37)
 - i. Nebuchadnezzar Dreams Again (4:1-18)
 - ii. Daniel Interprets the Dream (4:19-27)
 - iii. Nebuchadnezzar's Humiliation (4:28-33)
 - iv. Nebuchadnezzar Restored (4:34-37)

1 Richard W. Nysse at <http://www.enterthebible.org/oldtestament.aspx?rid=47>

- E. The Writing on the Wall (5:1-31)
- F. The Lions' Den (6:1-28)
- II. The Visions (7:1-12:13)
 - A. Visions of the Four Beasts and Interpretation (7:1-28)
 - B. Vision of a Ram and a Goat and Interpretation (8:1-27)
 - C. Daniel's Prayer for the People and Its Answer (9:1-27)
 - D. Daniel's Final Vision (10:1-12:13)
 - i. Heavenly Conflict (10:1-11:1)
 - ii. Conflict Among the Nations (11:2-45)
 - iii. The Promise to the Faithful (12:1-13)

What are some things to note?

- **Deliverance Comes from God:** The stories in the first six chapters of Daniel demonstrate that God delivers those who are faithful in spite of the circumstances in which they find themselves. "This affirmation is pushed to the limit in the visions; God must defend the faithful who are not only tested, but explicitly persecuted. The theme 'God can deliver' moves to 'only God can deliver,' for there is no other escape from the tyranny of the persecutors."²
- **Historical Issues:** Daniel is filled with dates and names which do not always correlate with other sources, including some elsewhere in the Bible. There have been many efforts to explain these inconsistencies; however, it is better not to attempt to solve these puzzles and to recognize that the book was not meant to be a factual account but to inspire awe, wonder, and hope.
- **Identity:** Daniel and his three friends are a model of fidelity as they maintain their faith in spite of threats from several foreign rulers whom they serve. This would be a source of encouragement for people in exile or suffering persecution.
- **Language:** The book is written in two different languages. Daniel 1:1-2:4a and 8:1-12:13 are in Hebrew, while the rest of the book (2:4b-7:28) is in Aramaic. Notice that this does not correspond to the division in content between the stories and the visions. Many theories have been proposed to account for this, but there is no agreement on an explanation.
- **Resurrection:** Daniel 12:1-3 is the clearest statement in the Old Testament about resurrection from the dead.

² Nysse at <http://www.enterthebible.org/oldtestament.aspx?rid=47>