

Daniel

Context

Daniel is the only book that stands the length of the entire exile. Daniel was a teenager when he was taken captive to Babylon during the first wave of exiles in 606 BC. He was still in Babylon, then an old man when the first wave of Jews returned to Jerusalem in 536/537 BC.¹ He spent that entire time in the city of Babylon. At first the Babylonians were the dominant empire in that region, but then conquered by the Medes and Persians in 539 BC. So, chapters 1-4, 7, and 8 occur during the reign of the Babylonians. Chapter 5 records the fall of the last Babylonian king, and the take over of power by the Medes. Chapters 9 and 6 record events that occurred during the reign of the new empire called the Medo-Persian Empire. I'm sorry that the chapters are not chronological, but I'll comment on why that is in a moment. For now, the important point is that the people of God are captured by Gentile nations, and caught up as little pawns (so it appears) as those Gentile nations struggle for sovereignty and rule on the earth. In it all, even though they are like little pawns, they are not ignored. They are persecuted and afflicted, mainly for their monotheistic religion.

That really captures the redemptive-historical context of the book. The question on the table is: Who sovereignly rules the earth? The Jews had always thought that Yahweh was the Lord of both heaven and earth, ruling by a *truly* divine right. We've already looked at the number of theological conundrums that the exile has caused (in 2 Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel). Well here's another one: Having been dominated by first the Babylonian and now the Medo-Persians, is Yahweh in control of the world of men, or are there kings and empires stronger than Yahweh? It sure looks as though the latter is true. Add to the fact that the people of God are *small inconsequential* in the passing of power from one empire to another, and *persecuted* along the way. Where is their God? How will all this turn out, both in the immediate future and when all of history is said and done? Equally important, how ought the people of God behave through all of this? Those are the questions that Daniel will answer.

Theme

And the answer will come basically in this form:

The Most High, the God of Daniel, sovereignly rules and reigns supreme over all mankind. Therefore His people are brave in the face of persecution.

You'll notice in that first sentence, I didn't refer to God by His covenant name, Yahweh, as I have since we were in the book of Exodus. That's because, as with every other book so far, I'm trying to convey the feel of the book. In Daniel, God is referred to as Yahweh only in chapter 9. He is largely called "The Most High." The sudden near absence of the covenant name could be for a couple of reasons. It could be because the focus of the book is to address who truly rules the earth. Various kings have thought that they are quite "high" on such a short list. But it is the only true God who is "the Most high." Furthermore, the people of God have understood that the covenant name, Yahweh, emphasized that they, and *only* they, out of all the nations of the earth, are in covenant with Him. But that phrase, "the Most High," in places where we'd expect to see "Yahweh," emphasizes that He is God over *all* peoples of the earth, not just the Jews. Or, it could be intended to highlight that fact that the Jews are in exile after all because of their own covenant unfaithfulness. Interestingly enough, it's in chapter 9 where the covenant name, "Yahweh," reappears in the text. It's there, in chapter 9, that Daniel is talking and praying

¹ He may have died just shortly before the first wave continued

about the *end* of the exile. It's as though he is rejoicing in the promises of God that he and his fellow Jews will again be "My people" in the eyes of God! Perhaps it's all, or some kind of combination, of all these reasons.

It's also very intriguing the way Daniel *structures* his book to get this point of God's complete sovereignty across. Look at your outline, do you see that mirroring effect going on in the first part of the book? Do you see how the content of the first 4 chapters are recapitulated in chapters 5-9?² As I said before, these chapters are not arranged chronologically, but thematically. The point is to draw emphasis to the middle, to the two sections labeled with "D's," There we have the stories of two kings being humbled from their place of where they thought they were untouchable and themselves sovereign. Set in the middle of those two stories we find **chapter 4, verses 34 and 35**. That is the major point of the book.

But I also said that another major theme of Daniel is the persecution and affliction of the people of God. This comes because of all turmoil between nations that they are caught up in. Well, it's because of that rock solid confidence that these nations don't rule history, but "the Most high" does, that they can be brave and weather any tribulation that *mere man* might send their way.

Outline w. Pivotal Texts

- I. Chapter 1-9 — God alone is sovereign; His people are afflicted by pseudo-sovereigns
 - A. Ch. 1—Exile; People of God afflicted
 - B. Ch. 2— Four empires brought low by God's king (type in history)
 - C. Ch. 3. — King sets himself up as god; People of God afflicted
 - D. Ch. 4 — Nebuchadnezzar brought low
 - D. Ch. 5 — Belshazzar brought low
 - C. Ch. 6—King sets himself up as god; People of God afflicted
 - B. Ch. 7— Four empires brought low by God's king (eschatological)
 - B. Ch. 8— Four empires brought low
 - A. Ch. 9 — Return from exile; Messiah afflicted
- II. Chapter 10-12 — Visions of the future

Note: These chapter are not chronological, but thematically arranged. (A chronology of the chapters most likely goes like this: 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 5, 9, 6.)

Note: 4:34-35 sits at the middle of the thematic chiasm.

Note: Chapters 2-7 were originally written in Aramaic.

Theme Texts

With all these interesting characteristics about Daniel, there are a number of approaches from which we could study the text in our short time today. We could just go chapter by chapter. Or we could try to take the chapters in their chronological order. Or, we could take the chapters that are meant to reinforce each other and look at those pairs together. I'll think we'll do that, to help us feel that structure better today. Now we decide whether to start in the middle and work our way out, or on the outside and work our way in. Today, let's go for the middle and work our way out.

² Literarily this sort of arrangement is called a "chiasm."

Daniel 4, 5

So we'll start in chapters 4 and 5. In these two chapters we have prideful kings who believe that they rule over their large territories by their own might. They believe that they are the sovereigns of all sovereigns. We'll look at one at a time.

The first is Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Babylonians. In the first part of **chapter 4**, Nebuchadnezzar has a dream of a ver large tree with many different birds nesting in it, which is the suddenly chopped down. By this time Daniel has risen far in the Babylonian government because of the wisdom God has given him, and because of his usefulness to the king. He's also shown himself to be an accurate interpreter of dreams, of course as God has given him those interpretations. Anyway, in **4:24-26** Daniel gives the king this interpretation. In other words, Daniel is saying that the king is too puffed up and the Most High will humble him until he admits that he is but an *under-sovereign* who only had power because the Most High has temporarily given to him.

Now whether or not Nebuchadnezzar believed Daniel or not the text doesn't say. However, we are tempted to think that he didn't because of what we read in **verses 29-30**. Then we read this in **verse 31**. Thereafter Nebuchadnezzar was struck with some sort of insanity to where he couldn't effectively rule. He didn't recover until he confessed this: look at **verses 34-35**. As I said before, that really is the "center" of the book. Much of everything else revolves around *that* theology. The story ends with Nebuchadnezzar uttering these words: **verse 37** and that last sentence leads us right into chapter 4's sister chapter, chapter 5.

In **chapter 5** the Most High delivers the same message to another king. By now Nebuchadnezzar is dead and Belshazzar is running Babylon.³ However, Belshazzar did not learn the lesson from Nebuchadnezzar's pride and humiliation. Instead he there himself a big party and used, as drinking goblets, the sacred vessels from the temple in Jerusalem! Just like Nebuchadnezzar, he is given a vision from the Most High, this time in the form of handwriting suddenly appearing on the wall, putting a real damper on his merrymaking. The Most High has come and crashed his party! But he doesn't know what the writing means, and so Daniel is again called in to give an interpretation. Here is what Daniel says in **5:22-23**. Brave man that Daniel! Here is what the writing actually said: **verses 26-28**. Then we read in **verses 30-31**.

Again, the point of it all is that the Most High will brook no rivals. He alone rules all the affairs of Heaven and Earth. We ascribe to our God, complete and unchallenged authority and divine sovereignty by which he rules and governs all the affairs of His moral universe! The same is true today. God has not changed. So when His people see kingdoms rising, falling, and governing in godless ways, they need not fear that the Lord does not see and is somehow off His throne.⁴

Daniel 3, 6

Let's work our way out from those central chapters to see what that theology of divine sovereignty looks like when it runs up against more arrogant kings and how it affects the lives of the people of God. We'll look now at chapters 3 and 6.

³ Belshazzar was not the king of Babylon, but only the co-regent of the city for his father, Nabonidus, who was currently elsewhere in the empire.

⁴ This is much of the point Augustine makes in *The City of God*.

Chapter 3 contains that famous story of Daniel's three friends. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, in the fiery furnace. Nebuchadnezzar sets up a gold image of himself that all in his kingdom must fall down and worship. This, of course, is an attempt to exert his sovereignty and promote his claim to deity. This most likely occurred before the events of chapter 4.

Well, like proper monotheists who still love their covenantal God. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego will not bow down and will not worship the image. Look at **3:12-15**. That last sentence there is the key. Nebuchadnezzar is throwing down the gauntlet and challenging anything or anyone to show himself more powerful than he!" What God can rescue you from me!" We're back to the same question. Who's in charge?

Well, in response to that, we see that these three men are as brave as Daniel. Look at their response starting in **verses 16-18**. What a response! Nebuchadnezzar, we don't need to answer to you; we only answer to the God we serve. You'll see. If not, we still don't fear you, and you need to know that.

Upon this answer, they are indeed thrown into the fire. The fire was so hot that it even consumed the guards who escorted them to the edge of the furnace! But they themselves, were not harmed at all. Their God whom they serve, indeed saved them, and answered the question of verse 15. What god will be able to rescue you from my hand? The God of the Jews, that's who. Nebuchadnezzar is astonished and declares this in **verse 29**. There is no other God like this, he says.⁵

In **chapter 6** we have a similar account. This time the king is Darius⁶, and the faithful Jewish victim is Daniel. This is the story of Daniel and the lion's den. By now Daniel is an old man, and has as many enemies as he does friends. Look at **6:5**. Interesting isn't it? Daniel is thought of even by those jealous of him that he is blameless and faithful to his God. Therefore they'll try to use that piety to trap him. It's not uncommon for the enemies of God to use godly characteristics as weapons against His people. Look for that; you'll see it everywhere even in our society today.

Anyway, their sinister plan is there in **verses 7-9**. Of course it worked! Look at **verse 10**. Subsequently, the plotters were looking out for Daniel to do something so *treasonous* as pray to the true God! They caught him in his criminal act!

But Darius *liked* Daniel. We read this in **verses 14-15**. Now in **verse 16** we have the same emphasis that we had in 3:15, only attended to with different words. Darius is hopeful. After a night we read this: **verses 20-23**.

The scheming men who crafted this deception had their wickedness revisited upon their own heads as they were then cast to the lions, and a similar pronouncement to what we saw in chapter 3 is then made by the king. **Verses 26-27**.⁷

The point of all this is to emphasize that just because the true God reigns, does not mean that His people will be exempt from persecution. In fact, it means that they will be the

⁵ Notice that this story begins and ends with a decree, only of different emphasis.

⁶ Darius may not be a name, but a title (like Caesar) for Cyrus, King of the Medes.

⁷ Again, different sorts of decrees begin and end the story.

target of all the more persecution⁸ For those who would want to amass power unto themselves and establish themselves as the head of the universe will only see the people of the true God as getting in their way. Their faithfulness to the Lord will appear to be, and will indeed, be, a challenge to any earthly claim to absolute allegiance. In other words, Christians are first and foremost citizens of Heaven, before they are citizens of any earthly kingdom. This will make people unhappy. But it's because of that confidence that indeed the Most High rules over the kingdoms of men, that the persecuted and afflicted people of God are willing to endure great trial and tribulation for the sake of the truth about the God they love.⁹

Now, we may be untouched by this in our country, but we have many brothers and sisters throughout history, and around the globe today, who have declared their allegiance to the King of kings, the Lord Jesus Christ and have suffered greatly for it at the hands of the enemies of God. We need to know their plight, confess our solidarity with them, pray for them, and help in anyway the Lord calls and gifts us to.

Daniel 2, 7-8

We return again to some dreams and visions: chapters 2, 7, and 8. Here we'll see Daniel make predicted prophecy about the future.¹⁰

In **chapter 2** Nebuchadnezzar has a dream. This time he sees his dream a large statue, the meaning of which only Daniel can interpret¹¹ The stature that Nebuchadnezzar saw had a head made of gold, chest and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, and feet of iron and clay mix (cf. vv. 31-33). Then he say this in his dream: **verses 34-35**. Daniel then goes on to explain the meaning of the dream, according to that God had told *him*. He says in the following verses that each section of the statue represents four successive kingdoms. Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom is the golden head, but the Babylonians will be succeeded by three other kingdoms. The last of which will be as strong as iron, yet at the same time as fragile as clay because it will be divided between many kings. What about that rock that smashed the statue and itself grew into a mountain? Look at **verse 44**.

Now I ask *you*. What's the interpretation of the interpretation? Even Daniel's interpretation is a little cloudy because it pertains to future things to him and his

⁸ **2 Timothy 3:12** says, "all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution."

⁹ I again think of Augustine teaching us that the City of God is always under attack by the City of Man, but it's the city of God that will persevere in the end.

¹⁰ Now, there may not be time for this in the class, but it sure is interesting enough to note: Daniel is here portrayed as a new Joseph. There are many similarities between them. They are both captured and oppressed by Gentiles when they are young. They both rise high in the service of the Gentiles, second in command no less. They are both falsely accused. They are both delivered by God in life threatening situations. They both interpret dreams. They both ascribe their ability to interpret dreams to God in the face of others who cannot interpret them relying on *their* religious means. The point of all of this is most likely to encourage the people of God that as He had been with His people before in a foreign land to protect them. He will do so again. Afterwards, as He brought His people out of Egypt. He will bring them out of Babylon too. The "new Joseph" is a sign unto all these things. Both are types of Christ.

¹¹ Actually, Daniel is able to recount to Nebuchadnezzar the *content* of the dream as well without having first been told. All of this, of course, comes from the sovereign hand of God (cf. 2:19-23, 27-30.)

contemporaries. But for us, who are further along in history and can therefore look back we see more precisely what's going on here. As we already said, the Babylonians Empire was taken over by the Medo-Persian Empire in 539 B.C. That empire is the silver chest and arms. Then, in around, 332 B.C. the Kingdom of Persia was conquered by Alexander the Great of Greece. The Grecian Empire is represented by the legs of bronze. That then gave way to the feet of iron and clay, the Roman Empire, in over a period of time in the 2nd and 1st centuries B.C.

But what we are most interested in is that rock cut out without hands! That of course is the Kingdom of Heaven, and its ruler is the Lord Jesus Christ. However, his conquest did not come through military might, but through the preaching of the gospel did He conquer the hearts and the minds of the people of the Roman Empire. Just as we read with the mountain filling the whole earth in verse 35, Christ's Kingdom has spread throughout the entire world. As we read in verse 44, it is forever. So what Daniel sees here is the victory of the preaching of Christ and the spread of His Church to every tongue, tribe, people, and nation. Amen!

By way of side note: Is this not a powerful affirmation of the divine inspiration of the scriptures? Who else but God Almighty can see hundreds of years into the future like this?

Now, with that we jump ahead of chapter 7. What see there is that these kingdoms are typological in history to teach us something, not only of the religious kingdom of the universal church, but also of Christ's complete and total worldwide rule when He comes to earth a second time.

Turn to **chapter 7**. Here Daniel has a dream of four beasts. The first resembles a lion with eagle's wings, the second a bear devouring bones, the third, a leopard with four wings and four heads, and the fourth is so terrible that there is nothing to compare it to. Daniel only says that it had great iron teeth, and many horns with eyes and a mouth to speak pompous words, and was destroying everything in its path (cf vv. 2ff).

Then, Daniel has a vision of God, whom he calls The Ancient of Days. Let's see what happens. Look at **verse 9**. So God destroys these beasts. Who takes the power and dominion that was once theirs? Look at **verse 13**. Who is this "one like a son of man" who will rule forever with sovereignty given to Him by God? When Jesus was on trial, and asked about His identity, who He was, He referred to this passage. Listen to **Mark 14:61-62**. *"But He kept silent and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked Him, saying to Him, "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" 62 Jesus said, "I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven."* In other words, Jesus is saying that He has the divine prerogative to approach the living and true God, and to reign with Him, and that He will return to earth on the clouds of heaven in due time to *publicly* take what is rightfully His! We know by faith that He currently reigns. Soon all will see it.

This will result in the vindication of all of His people who have been mistreated by the kingdoms of this world. Look at **Daniel 7:17-18**. (Cf. also vv. 21-27.)

Now, another reason why I believe that this refers to Christ's second coming whereas chapter 2 refers to His first coming is because John picks up on this language of a ferocious beast persecuting God's people and Christ coming to vindicate them in the book of Revelation, chapters 13, 14, and 17. There, that one beast resembles a combination of all four beast in Daniel. It represents all and any government, throughout this Church-Age, who would persecute Christ's people. In heaven, these persecuted saints currently rule with Christ. **Revelation 20:4**, *"And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for*

the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.” Thus those who have died for their testimony reign with Christ right now, even as He Himself reigns. When He returns, both His and their authority will be made permanently public. **Revelation 22:5**, *“There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.”*

I’ll leave it to you to study **chapter 8** on your own. A similar thing is going on.

Daniel 1, 9

We’ve finally made it to chapter 1! We’ll look at it together with its companion, chapter 9. It’s in these chapters we especially focus on the exile. In chapter 1, the people of God *go into* exile. In chapter 9, the people of God are getting ready to *come out!* (Cf. 1:2 & 9:2.)

In **chapter 1**, we see all four of the Jewish boys, Daniel Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego¹² placed in a Babylonian prep school of sorts. They are put there because they’ve shown potential in someday serving the kingdom. Well, while there they bravely ask that they might be exempt from eating foods outside of their religious dietary laws. The result of it is what we see in **verse 15**. The point of this story is to launch a doctrine that Daniel will drive home again and again throughout this book. Look at **verse 17**. Another major sub-theme of the book is *wisdom*. You notice it in just about every chapter. Wherever you do, you see that *it too* falls under God’s sovereign rule. He gives it to whomever He pleases, and anyone who has it has only God, and not themselves, to thank for it. (Cf. 2:20-23 especially.) When they have it by God’s grace they are able to withstand sometimes subtle, and sometimes powerful temptations to conform to the surrounding culture. We should all pray for wisdom.

Finally, let’s look at the wonderfully encouraging **chapter 9**. Look at **verse 2**. How did he know that the exile was almost over? What a novel concept! For encouragement, and understanding, David reads the Bible! You’ll remember from the book of Jeremiah that no one was listening to him. Well, Daniel did. Daniel believed him. The prayer that follows, beginning in verse 3, is eloquent, vigorous, moving, and overwhelming. You can tell from reading it that Daniel truly know his God. We are all challenged to adopt the kind of language he uses in our own prayer lives. I encourage all of us to read and meditate on his prayer this week. Like I said before, it’s particularly exciting in the context of Daniel because Daniel again refers to God as “*Yahweh, our God!*” The end of the exile is dawning!

But **the real exile**, the exile that began when Adam and Eve were kicked out of the Garden of Eden, the separation from God that we all experience because of our sins, will not end simply with the Jews’ return to Jerusalem. *That* exile, the exile that the Jewish exile is only a picture of, ends only when Christ makes atonement for our sins. Look at **9:25-27**. Read those verses again carefully later, and why you’ll see is that what we have here is a prophecy about the rebuilding of Jerusalem, then the coming of Christ and His death on behalf of sinners.

Daniel 10-12

Chapters 10-12 don’t sit in that mirroring structure with the first 9 chapters, but they are just as important. They contain more predictive prophesies about the future of the people of God, again both in the more immediate future and into the last days. Those continual theses of

¹² The last three of which being given their Babylonian names.

God's sovereignty over history and the persecution and subsequent vindication of His people are still present there as well. I'll leave you to study these chapters and discover those themes.

Conclusion

So we say goodbye to the Major Prophets. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel comprise a very large part of the Old Testament, and give us a lot with which to understand God, history, the plan of redemption, and the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. I hope your future studies of those books will be enriched because of your time in this class.