

Studies in Daniel #1 - Introduction

We live in “interesting times”, and the book of Daniel has a lot that will be of value to us in the near future.

The overall theme of Daniel is **God’s kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion is from generation to generation.** Dan. 4:3, 4:34, 6:26, 7:14, 7:27, Ps. 145:13

There are at least ten major themes that run throughout the book of Daniel, and they can be considered under four types:

1. Who God is
 - a. God is the source of wisdom and knowledge, the revealer of secrets
 - b. God’s kingdom
 - c. God’s sovereignty
2. Man’s responsibility
 - a. Absolute obedience to God
 - b. Humility
 - c. Repentance
3. Special personalities
 - a. Son of God/Son of man
 - b. The Antichrist
 - c. The “saints of the kingdom”
4. The future
 - a. Dreams concerning world empires
 - b. The “Latter Days”

Jerusalem was the capital of the kingdom of Judah, but the nation had degenerated from the time of David and Solomon (roughly 1000 BC) until they were judged by God, using the Babylonians, a great world empire in the area that is now Iraq and western Iran. The Babylonians defeated Jerusalem three times (605 BC, 597 BC, and 586-587 BC). The last time was an utter destruction of the city. Daniel was one of the Jews who had been taken to Babylon in the first wave (605 BC), and was brought up in all the instruction and knowledge of Babylon, and he became the principal wise man of the king of Babylon, and later, the Medes and Persians.

There were **three major dreams** that he interpreted, all having to do with the future world empires:

- a. In chapter 2, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had the dream of the “colossal image”. The dream, interpretation, and rough dates are as follows:
 - i. Head of gold – Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon (612 BC to 539 BC)
 - ii. Breast and arms of silver – Medes and Persians (539 BC to 334 BC)
 - iii. Belly and thighs of brass – Greeks (334 BC to 146 BC)
 - iv. Legs and feet of iron – Romans (146 BC to 476 AD)

(Actually, there was overlapping of dates, as one empire came to strength and another declined.)

Last, there was a stone “cut out without hands”, which smote the image on the feet, destroying the image completely, and the stone became a great mountain that filled the whole earth. This represents Christ and the Kingdom of God.

- b. In chapter 7 there was the dream/vision of “the four beasts”.
 - i. Lion with eagle’s wings – Babylon
 - ii. Bear, raised up on one side – Medes and Persians
 - iii. Leopard with four wings and four heads – Greece
 - iv. The “dreadful” beast with iron teeth – Rome, and the end-time world government
- c. In chapter 8 there was a vision of “the ram and the he-goat”. It started with a ram with two horns, again referring to the Medes and Persians, who pushed east, north, and south. But then a great he-goat came from the west with a notable horn and smote the ram with great speed, and beat down the ram and

“stomped him”. But in the height of his strength, the great horn was broken and it was replaced by four lesser horns. This represents the Greeks, who defeated the Persians and rapidly spread their empire clear over to India, under Alexander the Great. He died at a very young age, and the Greek empire was split up into sections run by his four generals. It also mentions a “little horn” that became great, magnified himself, and took away the daily sacrifice. This was a prediction of Antiochus Epiphanes, who in 167 BC committed horrible sacrilege against the temple and sacrifices in Jerusalem and greatly provoked the Jews. He is typical of the yet future depredations of the “antichrist”

Theme #1: God is the Source of All True Wisdom and Knowledge, the Revealer of Secrets

The world desires to know the future, but seeks to know it either by “informed speculation”, or by various occult means, like fortune telling, astrology, seances, etc. God on the other hand, is able to reveal the future, if he desires, because he is in control of all things, past, present, and future, and is using them for his great and all-wise purposes. (One of the themes of Daniel that we will study later is his sovereignty.)

The first reference is in chapter 1, where Daniel and his three friends were pressed into service for the king’s court, and were taught in all the learning of the Babylonians. They had to pass a test of conscience concerning the food they would eat, which we will deal with later, but in the end it is stated that they excelled all the other wise men in the whole empire. We must not think though, that it was merely their education or their innate intelligence that got them this distinction.

1:17-20 – “As for these four children, **God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom:** and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. ... among them all there was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: therefore they stood before the king. And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm.”

The second example is in chapter 2, where Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had a disturbing dream, but couldn’t even remember what it was. He called all the wise men and demanded that they tell him both the dream and its interpretation, or they would be killed. Daniel and his three friends sought God in earnest, and he was able to tell the king both the dream (the “colossal image”) and its interpretation.

2:19-22 describes how Daniel got the answer – “Then was the secret **revealed** unto Daniel in a night vision. ... for wisdom and might are his ... **he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding. He revealeth the deep and secret things:** he knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him.”

Then when Daniel was brought before the king, he did not claim this wisdom as his own, but said that it was a revelation from God. 2:28 – “But **there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets**, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days ...”

The king’s response was astonishment that Daniel could know the dream itself, and so acknowledged that the interpretation must be true. He then promoted Daniel with riches and rulership over all of Babylon. 2:47 – “The king answered unto Daniel, and said, Of a truth it is, that **your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings. and a revealer of secrets**, seeing thou couldest reveal this secret.”

The last example is in chapter 5 at the very end of the Babylonian empire, when king Belshazzar was terrified by the handwriting on the wall. None of the wise men could give an answer, but his queen reminded him of Daniel. 5:11-12 – “There is a man in thy kingdom, in whom is the spirit of the holy gods; and in the days of thy father **light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, was found in him ... Forasmuch as an excellent spirit, and knowledge, and understanding, interpreting of dreams, and shewing of hard sentences, and dissolving of doubts**, were found in the same Daniel ...” The queen could only view Daniel’s wisdom in the light of her pagan background, but she could still recognize results. Daniel did interpret the writings, which pronounced immediate doom on Belshazzar.

One thing we need to remember is that this wisdom did not come to Daniel unsought – he had to seek it diligently in prayer, and sometimes with fasting.