



Daniel

Video Transcript

Introduction

00:00-01:08

The book of Daniel. The story is set right after Babylon's first attack on Jerusalem, and they had plundered the city and its temple and taken a wave of Israelites into exile. Among them were four men from the royal family of David: Daniel, who's later named Belteshazzar, and his three friends, whom you probably know by their Babylonian names, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. This book tells of their struggles to maintain hope in the land of their conquerors.

The book's design seems pretty simple at first. Chapters 1-6 contain stories about Daniel and his friends in Babylon, while chapters 7-12 contain the visions of Daniel about the future. But this two-part shape is made even more interesting by another design feature, and that's the book's language.

It begins in Hebrew, the language of the Israelites, but chapters 2-7 are written in Aramaic, a cousin language to Hebrew spoken widely among the ancient empires. But then in chapters 8-12, it goes back to Hebrew. This design shows how chapters 2-7 are a coherent section, but it also highlights the importance of chapters 2 and 7 for understanding the later chapters of the book. Let's just dive in.

Chapter 1

01:08-01:33

Chapter 1 introduces the basic tension of the first half of the book. Daniel and his friends, they're really wise and capable, and they're recruited to serve in the royal palace of Babylon. But they're pressured to give up their Jewish identity by living and eating like Babylonians and violating the Jewish food laws found in the Torah. So they refuse, and they choose faithfulness to the Torah, and it puts them in danger. But God delivers them, and they end up being elevated by the king of Babylon.

Chapters 2-7

01:34-05:46

After this begins the Aramaic section, which you'll see has this really cool symmetrical design. So first, the king of Babylon has a dream that, it turns out, only Daniel is able to interpret. It's about a huge statue made of four types of metal. And it symbolizes a sequence of kingdoms, and the head is Babylon. But then a huge rock comes flying in, and it shatters the statue, and it becomes this huge mountain.

Now, this dream is the first of many symbolic visions in the book, and this one introduces the basic storyline of them all. Daniel says that the statue represents a train of human kingdoms following from Babylon, and they will all fill God's world with violence. But one day, God's Kingdom will come and will confront and humble the arrogant kingdoms of this world and fill the world with the healing justice of God's reign and rule.

After this, chapter 3 tells the famous story of Daniel's three friends who refuse to bow down and worship a huge idol statue, which, like the statue in chapter 2, represents the king and his imperial power. And so the friends are persecuted; they're thrown into a fiery furnace. But God delivers them from death, and they're exalted by the king who now acknowledges their God as the true one.

After this come a pair of stories about two Babylonian kings: the father, Nebuchadnezzar, and then his son Belshazzar. They're both filled with pride because of their imperial power. And so like in chapter 2, God warns them both through dreams and then visions, which also like chapter 2, only Daniel can interpret. He says that both kings are to humble themselves before God, and both kings arrogantly resist.

So Nebuchadnezzar is stricken with madness. He becomes like a beast in the field. But then he humbles himself before God, and his humanity returns to him. He's restored as king. This is in contrast with his son Belshazzar, who doesn't humble himself before God, and he's assassinated that very night.

Now, these two stories draw this imagery from Genesis chapters 1 and 2 and Psalm 8, where humans are depicted as the royal image of God. He's given them authority to rule over the beasts of the field and the birds of the air on behalf of God, who is the world's true King. But when human kingdoms forget that, when they rebel and make themselves and their power into a god, they become less than human, like violent beasts who will face God's justice.

Which brings us to chapter 6, the pair of chapter 3. And this time it's Daniel who is being persecuted because he refuses to pray and worship the king as a god. And so, like the friends, he's sentenced to death and he's thrown into a lion's den. But God delivers him from the beasts and, like the friends, the king exalts Daniel and praises his God.

Which brings us to chapter 7. It's the pair of chapter 2 and the center of the book, where all its themes come together. It's another dream, but it's Daniel's this time. And ironically, he can't understand the dream until an angelic messenger explains it to him. He sees a series of four beasts, one like a lion, then like a bear, then one like a winged leopard, each of these symbolizing an arrogant kingdom. And last of all is a super-beast, identified as a really evil empire. And it has lots of horns, a common symbol for kings in the Old Testament.

And there's one specific horn who is an image of an arrogant king, who exalts himself above God and persecutes God's people. Now, they are symbolized by a figure called the Son of Man, who's an image for both God's covenant people, but also for their king from the line of David. But then all of a sudden, God—who's called the Ancient of Days—comes, and he sets up his throne. He destroys the super-beast, and he exalts the Son of Man on the clouds, where he comes up to sit at God's right hand and share in God's rule over the nations.

We can look back now and see how all of these stories in the first half fit together. The three stories of faithfulness despite persecution, these are meant to offer hope to God's suffering people among the nations. But they suffer because human kingdoms have rebelled against God and have become beasts. And so these visions encourage patience, that God's people are to wait for him to bring his Kingdom and rule over our world and vindicate his suffering people. But it raises the question about when God is going to do that, and that's what these final three visions set out to explore.

Chapters 8-12

05:46-07:48

In chapter 8, Daniel has another vision about the final two beasts of chapter 7. But this time, they're symbolized by a ram, who we're told is an image of the empire of the Medes and the Persians, and then by a goat, who's an image of ancient Greece. And out of the goat come a whole bunch of horns, one of which symbolizes the evil king from chapter 7. And we're told more about him, that he will attack Jerusalem and exalt himself above God and defile the temple with idols. However, in the end, he will be destroyed by God, who will exalt his people and his Kingdom.

Now by chapter 9, Daniel is very puzzled, especially as to when all of this is going to take place. And so he consults the scroll of the prophet Jeremiah, where God said that Israel's exile would only last 70 years. So for Daniel, the 70 years is almost up, and so he asks God to fulfill his promise soon. But an angel comes and informs him that Israel's sin and rebellion has continued, and so their time of exile and oppression will continue on seven times longer than Jeremiah envisioned.

Daniel is deeply disturbed by this, and he has one final vision. We're shown the same sequence of kingdoms. It's Persia, then Greece and Alexander the Great, followed by lesser kings, all leading up to this final king of the north who will invade Jerusalem, set up idols in the temple, and exalt himself above God. But then, all of a sudden, this king comes to ruin.

Now there's been endless debate about what all of these visions refer to. Many see a clear connection to the exploits of the Syrian king Antiochus in the 160s B.C. He killed many faithful Jews in Jerusalem and set up idols in the temple. Others think it points forward to the Roman Empire's role in the execution of Jesus and the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70. And still others think it will be fulfilled in future events that have yet to happen, when Jesus will return. Now the problem is that the symbols and the numbers, they don't quite match any of these views perfectly. But it opens up the possibility that, in a sense, they are all right.

Conclusion

07:49-08:52

The book of Daniel has been designed to offer hope to all future generations of God's people. It did so in the days of Antiochus' empire, and it has ever since. This is why Jesus could use imagery from Daniel to describe and confront the oppressive leaders he confronted in Jerusalem. This is why John the visionary, who wrote The Revelation, could adapt Daniel's visions and apply them to Rome of his day and also all future oppressive empires.

And so the point of Daniel is that all generations of readers can find here a pattern and a promise. It's a pattern that human beings and their kingdoms become violent beasts when they glorify their own power, when they redefine right and wrong and don't acknowledge God as their true King. But Daniel also holds out a promise that one day God will confront the beast. He will rescue his world and his people by bringing his Kingdom over all nations.

And so for every generation, this book speaks a message of hope that should motivate faithfulness. And that's what the book of Daniel is all about.