

Lesson 2 – Daniel, Pt. 1

Daniel was taken as a young man in the first Babylonian invasion in 605 BC. He served in the Babylonian capital among the Babylonian and Persian rulers. The latest date given in the book is c. 536 BC, in third year of Persian rule. Thus, his time in Babylon spanned the entire 70-year exile. Daniel means “God is My Judge.”

The book can be divided chronologically and thematically. Chapters 1-4 narrate events of Daniel (Belteshazzar), Hananiah (Shadrach), Mishael (Meshach), and Azariah (Abednego) during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar (605-562 BC). Chapter 5 narrates events in the palace on the night before Babylon’s fall (539 BC). Chapter 6 continues with events in Babylon under the Persian Empire. The second half of the book (chs. 7-12) contains prophetic visions.

The book was written partly in Hebrew (1:1-2:4a; 8:1-12:13) and partly in Aramaic (2:4b-7:28). Aramaic was the language spoken in Babylon and gradually adopted by the Jews during their exile. While Hebrew was still used in religious settings, Aramaic was the common tongue in Judea in Jesus’ time.

The theme of Daniel is that God is in control of the kingdoms of earth. Daniel’s prophecies foretell events centuries beyond his lifetime with incredible detail. This has caused opponents of the Bible to try to reposition the book at a much later time, but there is abundant evidence validating it as a 6th century BC document.

Skeptics also once criticized Belshazzar’s designation as king. The last king of Babylon, Nabonidus, ruled from 556 to 539 BC. But it has been discovered that he was absent from Babylon for about a decade (c. 552 to 542 BC), leaving his oldest son, Belshazzar, as co-regent in the capital.

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The identity of “King Darius” has been debated. Darius I ruled Persia from 522 BC as the empire’s fourth king, so he doesn’t fit the timeframe of Daniel. There are three possibilities. (1) Darius was appointed to rule Babylon as a subject of Persia. (2) Darius is another name for Cyrus, the first king of the Persian Empire. (3) Darius was another name for Gobryas, the general who led the conquest of Babylon and was subsequently made something like a mayor of the city.

1. What did Nebuchadnezzar do with the vessels from the Jerusalem temple?
(Dan. 1:2)

2. What demonstration of the faithfulness of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah do we see early in the narrative? (Dan. 1:5, 8-16)

3. Briefly describe Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and which kingdoms were represented? Describe the kingdom God would set up. (Dan. 2:31-45)

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4. How did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego respond to Nebuchadnezzar's decree to worship his statue? What punishment was enforced? What happened to the three Jews? (Dan. 3)

5. Briefly describe Nebuchadnezzar's second dream and its interpretation. Why was Daniel hesitant to tell Nebuchadnezzar the interpretation? (Dan. 4)

6. What did Nebuchadnezzar say as he walked on his palace roof? What did God do to him? What did Nebuchadnezzar do after he was restored? (Dan. 4)

7. What did Belshazzar use as wine glasses at his feast? Why might he do such a thing? (Dan. 5)

8. Briefly describe the alarming scene at Belshazzar's party and its interpretation, including the fate of Belshazzar and the Babylonian Empire. (Dan. 5)

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9. After the Persians conquered Babylon, what position was Daniel given, and what position did the Persians plan to give him eventually? (Dan. 6)

10. What plan did the officials and satraps devise to hurt Daniel? Once Darius had indulged their request, what did Daniel do? What was the punishment for Daniel's disobedience to the king? (Dan. 6)

11. Who died in the lion's den? What did Darius decree after Daniel was saved? (Dan. 6)