

DANIEL

The book of Daniel begins with six stories. In each of the first six chapters, Daniel and three of his friends face challenges. They could give up, give in and get along, OR they can stand up for their God. Each chapter is a self-contained story, understandable on its own. The stories of Daniel and the lion's den or the three young men in the fiery furnace are the most familiar. They, like the other four stories, require no background information. The plot and characters carry the lesson.

To read Daniel is to hear our own circumstances. How does God want me to respond when someone in authority asks me – perhaps unknowingly – to do something offensive to God? Will I trust God to give me wisdom and the right words? What if choosing faithfulness to Jesus may mean losing my grades, my job, my home, my life? How can I be a person of integrity when corruption and immorality is all around?

To read Daniel is to step into a more dangerous time and place for believers than you and I have experienced. Daniel and his friends always survive, and those around are convinced that his God is the one, true living God. However, not all courageous believers survived then, or in hostile situations before or after the Babylonian empire. Believers of Daniel's era, and the times when Daniel was written, were well aware of that reality. Faithfulness and witness are more important than survival.

As the book opens, we find Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah chosen to become part of King Nebuchadnezzar's staff. They were taken from Jerusalem and placed in training with promising men from every part of the king's rule. It was probably an "offer you can't refuse." The Babylonian empire had conquered Judah. Within a few years, Jerusalem was destroyed and almost everyone was force-marched to Babylon.

Daniel and his friends were given new names. Daniel, whose name means "God is my judge," was called Beltshazzar. His friends were renamed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Their family lineage is not given, which is very unusual in the Bible. This shows how alone they are, how isolated from family and history. It also indicates that they are less important as historical

figures than as examples of faith in hostile environment.

Daniel faithfully serves the living, eternal God while earthly rulers come and go. A reliable man with impeccable character and Godly wisdom, he survives nine kings over 70+ years. Three kings are named in Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar, the conquering king, ruled from 605-562 B.C. King Belshazzar, apparently a co-regent with King Nabonidus, ruled from 549-539 B.C. King Cyrus of Persia, who overthrew Babylon in 539 B.C., is not mentioned in Daniel. Under Cyrus, Jews could return and rebuild Jerusalem. Daniel remained abroad. King Darius, who rejoices when Daniel is released from the lion's den, is the Persian king from 522 to 486 B.C.

To read Daniel is to encounter God's word for a time and place worse than the Exile. The stories of Daniel are set in Babylon, but the content addresses a more hostile, foreign rule: the Greeks. Alexander the Great took control of Palestine in 322 B.C. as he stormed across the Middle East. His worst successor, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who ruled from 175 to 163 B.C., tried to make Jerusalem into a Greek city. He transformed the temple into an altar for the Greek god Zeus. He sacrificed a pig, a forbidden unclean animal, in the temple. The Jews revolted. Antiochus IV conquered Jerusalem twice, slaughtering thousands. He outlawed Judaism and proclaimed himself to be God incarnate. He died, raving from insanity.

Chapters 7 through 12 are first person accounts of Daniel's dreams, visions, and prayers. He is seeking insight, deeply concerned about his people. Answers come in detailed, symbolic language. This is apocalyptic writing: strange creatures symbolizing powerful forces and rulers, battles of good vs. evil in times of uncertainty. "Apocalyptic" means "unveiling." Through coded, mysterious language interpreted by the angel Gabriel, the truth about evil rulers, especially Antiochus IV, is named and the good news of God's ultimate victory is proclaimed. As Darius says about Daniel's God when he emerges untouched by lions: ***For he is the living God, enduring forever. His kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion has no end.***

Symbols of four empires in Daniel's visions

	<u>Babylon</u>	<u>Persian</u>	<u>Greece</u>	<u>Rome</u>	<u>Kingdom of God</u>
Chapter 2	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Iron	Supernatural rock
Chapter 7	Lion	Bear	Leopard	Beast with horns	Ancient One, Son of Man
Chapter 8		Ram	Goat		
Chapter 11			King of the north		