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# BOOK OF DANIEL

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**Approximate date:** 539-530 B.C.E. (Right, some conservative-moderate); 500s B.C.E. (some conservative-moderate); 500s-300s B.C.E. (Left)

**Time period:** Southern Kingdom of Judah in Babylonian Exile

**Author:** Daniel and/or a close associate (Right, some conservative-moderate); anonymous writers and editors (some conservative-moderate, Left)

**Location of prophet/author(s):** Babylon (Right, some conservative-moderate); Land of Israel (some conservative-moderate, Left)

**Target audience and their location:** Southern Kingdom Israelites during the Babylonian exile (Right, some conservative-moderate); Southern Kingdom Israelites after the Babylonian exile (some conservative-moderate, Left)

## People:

Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah (Beltshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego), Nebuchadnezzar, Arioch (commander of king's guard), "a son of the gods" or "the Son of God" (KJV),<sup>1</sup> Belshazzar, Darius the Mede (son of Xerxes),<sup>2</sup> Gabriel, Michael

## People mentioned:

Jehoiakim, Ashpenaz (court official), Cyrus, Medes and Persians, Jeremiah, leaders of Ammon, Lybians, Nubians

## Places:

Babylon, Jerusalem, Susa, Elam, Greece

## Places mentioned:

Judah, Ulai Canal, Tigris, Egypt, Edom, Moab

## Key Themes and Events:

Jerusalem is sacked by Nebuchadnezzar and exiles are taken to Babylon / Daniel and his colleagues become servants of the Babylonian court / Nebuchadnezzar prepares to execute men in his court who cannot interpret his dream / Daniel is able to recount Nebuchadnezzar's dream to him / Daniel speaks to Nebuchadnezzar about his **dream of the statue** (2:31-45) describing four kingdoms / Nebuchadnezzar acknowledges Daniel as one filled with wisdom and appoints him ruler of the province of Babylon / Nebuchadnezzar constructs a giant gold image for all to worship / Daniel's friends

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<sup>1</sup> Ara. *bar-Elahin* (בַּר־אֱלֹהִין); Grk LXX(a) *angelou Theou* (ἄγγελου θεοῦ); LXX(b) *huiō Theou* (υἱὸ θεοῦ).

<sup>2</sup> Not the same Xerxes as seen in the Book of Esther.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—Jews—refuse to worship the idol / the three are thrown bound into a blazing furnace / a fourth person is seen in the blazing furnace / Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego survive, and Nebuchadnezzar promotes them in rank in the province of Babylon, decreeing that their God has power / Nebuchadnezzar has a dream of a tree, and Daniel tells him that it describes his downfall / Nebuchadnezzar loses his sanity until acknowledging the power of Daniel's God / the new king, Belshazzar, orders that wine be poured into goblets taken from Jerusalem's Temple / Belshazzar's party witnesses a hand writing on a wall, and Daniel tells the king that his kingdom will fall / Babylon falls to Persia / Daniel is appointed as a Persian administrator, earning enemies because of his excellence in service / a decree goes forth from the Persian court: no prayers to any god or man but the king for thirty days / Daniel prays three times a day with his windows open toward Jerusalem / the king of Persia makes every effort to spare Daniel / Daniel is thrown into a den of lions, surviving a night / the king of Persia is relieved to see Daniel, and his accusers are thrown into the same den of lions / Daniel's dream of **four beasts** is revealed (7:2-14) / Daniel is distressed over the fourth beast, a final kingdom on Earth that the Ancient of Days Himself will defeat / Daniel receives a vision of a ram and a goat (8:1-14) / Daniel is told by Gabriel how Greece (*by name*) will overtake Persia in the future / Daniel prays for the exile spoken of by Jeremiah to be over / Daniel is told that seventy "weeks" or "sevens" have been decreed to accomplish the full restoration of Israel / the angel Michael appears before Daniel to tell him what is to come in the future / Michael describes events from the "Book of Truth" and how Persia will be ultimately defeated by Greece / a king will arise who exalts himself, wanting to be worshipped as a god / there will be a future resurrection of both the righteous and unrighteous / Daniel's prophecies are to be sealed until the end

**Key Scriptures:** Daniel 1:17; 2:21-22, 27, 47; 3:16-18, 25; 4:27, 33-35; 5:5-6, 25-29; 6:6-9, 14, 21-24, 26-28; 7:13-14, 23-25; 9:4-19, 24-27; 11:36-37, 39, 45; 12:1-3, 6-7, 9-10 / **Daniel's life** (1:1-6:28); **Daniel's visions** (7:1-12:13)

**Theological Summary:** The Book of Daniel (Heb. *Dani'el*, דַּנְיֵאֵל) is one of the most difficult to understand texts of the Tanach, and is highly debated among most interpreters. Daniel is placed after the Book of Ezekiel in the Christian book order of the Old Testament, reckoned among the Major Prophets, but is a part of the Writings in Jewish tradition. Daniel is prophetic/apocalyptic in nature, but its words were delivered by one who was a government official.<sup>3</sup> Daniel was an exile taken to Babylon at a young age, who was renamed Belteshazzar and trained for the royal service (1:1-6).<sup>4</sup> While in Babylon he became an interpreter of dreams and signs, and was shown visions of both the future of the world and destiny of Israel.

Internally in the text, Daniel is afforded some level of involvement of delivering its prophecies (8:1; 9:2; 10:2). While many conservatives consider him to be the author of the book, others concede that a close associate may have been responsible for writing down or compiling his prophecies.<sup>5</sup> Yeshua the Messiah certainly refers to Daniel speaking prophecies

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<sup>3</sup> J. Barton Payne, "Daniel, Book of," in *NIDB*, 253.

<sup>4</sup> Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 1105.

<sup>5</sup> Gleason L. Archer, Jr., "Daniel," in *EXP*, 7:4.

(Matthew 24:15), validating Danielic involvement. The language style of Daniel, mixed Hebrew and Aramaic, is thought by conservatives to suggest an earlier, rather than a later dating of the text, likely sometime around 530 B.C.E. The Book of Daniel does demonstrate a unity of style,<sup>6</sup> leading many to conclude “the internal evidence leads us to believe that Daniel was the source of the vision reports of Daniel 7-12” (Dillard and Longman).<sup>7</sup>

Up until the Twentieth Century, Danielic involvement with this book was not severely challenged, until the rise of the German critical movement.<sup>8</sup> Liberals today totally discount any kind of genuine Danielic involvement in Daniel. Most liberals suggest that Daniel is a fictional text because its prophecies are too predictive and specific,<sup>9</sup> with the character Daniel perhaps being based on the “Daniel” mentioned in Ezekiel 14:14 and 28:3. In this schema, the figure of Daniel is a legendary character to be relegated to various “court tales” (*ABD*),<sup>10</sup> of which there is no historically reliable information. A few liberal commentators have suggested a comparison between Daniel’s existence and that of Britain’s King Arthur.<sup>11</sup>

Liberals often suggest that because of the specificity of Daniel’s prophecies, that the Book of Daniel must be a work of fiction probably written during the Maccabean revolt of 164 B.C.E.<sup>12</sup> Thus, when Daniel prophesies concerning various abominations, what is to be considered are not events to come in the future, but events that have already taken place via the sacking of the Temple in Jerusalem by the Seleucids. In this schema, the Book of Daniel is nothing more than a “pious fraud” similar to the Book of Deuteronomy, as advocated by proponents of the JEDP documentary hypothesis. Liberals do not take Daniel very seriously, concluding “The author of Daniel tried to calculate the time of the end and failed” (*IDB*).<sup>13</sup>

There are a few conservatives who embrace the liberal propositions concerning the Book of Daniel. Some, perhaps seeing the abuses of various prophecy teachers, who today give a great deal of attention to Daniel, have ended up adopting the position that the “prophecies” were given after the fact.<sup>14</sup> This is further complicated by some historical issues surrounding Daniel, as extant data from the Seventh and Sixth Centuries B.C.E. is probably not as complete as it could be.<sup>15</sup> However, conservatives supporting genuine Danielic involvement rightly suggest that the lack of information we have is not sufficient grounds to claim pseudonymity.

The Book of Daniel has some unique linguistic differences, likely accounting for a composition somewhere in Babylon. 1:1-2:4a and chs. 8-12 are written in Hebrew, with 2:4b-7:28 being written in Aramaic. Liberals commonly claim that this is evidence for a later

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<sup>6</sup> Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp 1107-1009; Payne, “Daniel, Book of,” in *NIDB*, 253; R.K. Harrison, “Daniel, Book of,” in *ISBE*, 1:862.

<sup>7</sup> Dillard and Longman, 330.

<sup>8</sup> Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 1111.

<sup>9</sup> Harrison, “Daniel, Book of,” in *ISBE*, 1:862.

<sup>10</sup> John J. Collins, “Daniel, Book of,” in *ABD*, 2:29-30; Matthias Henze, “Daniel,” in *New Interpreter’s Study Bible*, 1231.

<sup>11</sup> S.B. Frost, “Daniel,” in *IDB*, 1:761.

<sup>12</sup> Frost, “Daniel,” in *IDB*, 1:766-767; Archer, in *EXP*, 7:6-8; Collins, “Daniel, Book of,” in *ABD*, 2:33-34.

<sup>13</sup> Frost, “Daniel,” in *IDB*, 1:768.

<sup>14</sup> Dillard and Longman, 331.

<sup>15</sup> Dillard and Longman, pp 333-337; cf. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 1112-1127.

composition of the text. Conservatives respond by saying that the differences in vocabulary are not significant when compared to the mixing of other Ancient Near Eastern languages in various documents.<sup>16</sup> It is significant that Hebrew and Aramaic are both Semitic relatives, and interactions between the Jews and Babylonians necessitates the existence of loan words.<sup>17</sup>

The Greek Septuagint version of Daniel includes some notable additions: the Story of Susanna, the Story of Bel and the Dragon, and the Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Jews. All of these books are included in the Apocrypha. A fair amount of agreement exists between the Hebrew Masoretic Text and LXX versions of Daniel.<sup>18</sup> Fragments of Daniel were discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls, and bear some significant resemblance to the MT.<sup>19</sup>

The text of the Book of Daniel is divided into two large parts: historical narrative (chs. 1-6) and apocalyptic revelation (chs. 7-12). Believing the stated location of the events to actually be Babylon, then Daniel's prophecies would have been composed to encourage the Jewish exiles in Babylon who could have thought that the Lord abandoned them.<sup>20</sup> Daniel reminded them that God was not unfaithful to His people, and that the punishment meted upon Israel was to be lifted (9:2).

A major thrust of Daniel's prophecies is to remind God's people that He is sovereign over human affairs: "This sentence is by the decree of the *angelic* watchers and the decision is a command of the holy ones, in order that the living may know that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whom He wishes and sets over it the lowliest of men" (4:17; cf. 5:21).<sup>21</sup> Daniel portrays God as being triumphant (7:11, 26-27; 8:25; 9:27), something that is climaxed later in the Book of Revelation (Revelation 11:15; cf. Daniel 2:44; 7:27). God's people are stirred to anticipate a world to come where the battle of good and evil has come to resolution,<sup>22</sup> with evil being defeated.

For Believers in Messiah Yeshua, Daniel reminds us that the Messiah will be triumphant over the world. The words of Daniel significantly affect the symbolism we see in a text like Revelation. However, the ideas in Daniel also impact the history of the Apostolic Scriptures, its authors, and concepts displayed by them such as the antimessiah/antichrist, and most significantly the Second Coming.<sup>23</sup>

Jewish theological positions on the Book of Daniel have helped lead some interpreters to some of the liberal conclusions that are frequently made today. The ancient Jewish testimony regarding Daniel is that he was considered to be a real prophet with real prophecies for the future (Josephus *Antiquities of the Jews* 10.266-268; 4Q).<sup>24</sup> Later Rabbinic tradition, however, had difficulty embracing Daniel as a prophet. This largely came in response to how various

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<sup>16</sup> Harrison, "Daniel, Book of," in *ISBE*, 1:860-861.

<sup>17</sup> Archer, in *EXP*, 7:23-24.

<sup>18</sup> Frost, "Daniel," in *IDB*, 1:763; Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp 1133-1134.

<sup>19</sup> Collins, "Daniel, Book of," in *ABD*, 2:29.

<sup>20</sup> Archer, in *EXP*, 7:3.

<sup>21</sup> Dillard and Longman, pp 348-351.

<sup>22</sup> Iain Provan, "Daniel," in *ECB*, 665.

<sup>23</sup> Archer, in *EXP*, 7:10-12.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 1107; Harrison, "Daniel, Book of," in *ISBE*, 1:861-862.

words in Daniel were interpreted as favoring the Messiahship of Yeshua of Nazareth.<sup>25</sup> The Jewish theology of the Talmud affords Daniel the role of a seer (b.*Megillah* 3a; b.*Sanhedrin* 94a), but not a prophet.<sup>26</sup> The composition of Daniel was attributed to the figures of the Great Synagogue (b.*Bava Batra* 15a),<sup>27</sup> not Daniel himself or one of his associates. Consequently because of these factors, the Book of Daniel has not had a great impact on more contemporary Jewish theology, but words in Daniel are used in various liturgical prayers.

The Book of Daniel has impacted Christian theology significantly more than Jewish theology, particularly Christology as it concerns the Messiahship of Yeshua of Nazareth. Evangelicals today widely consider Daniel to be composed of authentic Danielic words and prophecies.<sup>28</sup> However, even though Daniel is considered to have important words regarding Yeshua—particularly its distinct “Son of Man” references (7:13; cf. Matthew 24:30) and the fact that the doctrine of resurrection is based in Daniel (12:2)<sup>29</sup>—significant variance exists regarding how its future prophecies are to be interpreted.

Some evangelical Christian scholars interpret Daniel as predicting the prominence of the Church following the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E.,<sup>30</sup> with the remainder of Daniel’s prophecies given some kind of “allegorical” view. Many other evangelicals regard Daniel’s vision of the four beasts (7:23) to portray the major empires of ancient humanity (Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome), culminating in a final global empire led by an antimessiah/antichrist figure—only to be defeated by the Messiah.<sup>31</sup> The prophecy of Daniel’s seventy “sevens” (9:20-27) is often viewed as culminating in a seven-year tribulation period.<sup>32</sup>

Today’s Messianic movement generally leans toward some form of futuristic, pre-millennial view of Daniel, consistent with what is seen in much of evangelicalism. A significant amount of engagement has occurred among Messianics and *parts* of Daniel, particularly with those who place a high degree of emphasis on Bible prophecy. However, it is notable that some Messianic views of Daniel often shift—and are primarily designed to make the text fit current events. Thus, to what degree Messianic engagement with Daniel may be considered responsible exegesis can be questioned.

Yeshua the Messiah is clear that no person knows the exact day or time of His return (Mark 13:32-36; Acts 1:7-8). No interpreter should be dogmatic with the numbers of Daniel, but instead entreat God for insight and wisdom for how to deal with its prophecies (12:3-4). In the future, it is likely that Messianic engagement of Daniel will take into consideration more of the critical views present, how Daniel would have encouraged those living in Babylon

<sup>25</sup> Lawrence M. Wills, “Daniel,” in *Jewish Study Bible*, 1642.

<sup>26</sup> Frost, “Daniel,” in *IDB*, 1:763; Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 1106.

<sup>27</sup> “The Men of the Great Assembly wrote Ezekiel, the Twelve Minor Prophets, Daniel, and the scroll of Esther” (b.*Bava Batra* 15a; *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*).

<sup>28</sup> Harrison, “Daniel, Book of,” in *ISBE*, 1:861.

<sup>29</sup> Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 1131.

<sup>30</sup> Harrison, “Daniel, Book of,” in *ISBE*, 1:865.

<sup>31</sup> Provan, in *ECB*, 665; cf. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp 1129-1130; Dillard and Longman, pp 351-352.

<sup>32</sup> Payne, “Daniel, Book of,” in *NIDB*, 253; Harrison, “Daniel, Book of,” in *ISBE*, 1:865.

and/or the Maccabean period, and certainly how we can have a stable view of the text that does not diminish the importance of its future prophecies.

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## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION ON DANIEL:

- 1. Describe the significance of Daniel as a servant to both the king of Babylon and the king of Persia.**
- 2. What do you consider Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the statue to represent?**
- 3. Summarize the trauma of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace. What happened?**
- 4. By which circumstances did Babylon fall to Persia?**
- 5. Why was Daniel thrown into the lions' den?**
- 6. What do you consider Daniel's vision of the four beasts to represent?**
- 7. What do you think the seventy "sevens" or seventy "weeks" prophecy means?**