

What's the Point....of Daniel?

Mark Garner

The book of Daniel reminds us that God reigns over all, and his kingdom is an eternal kingdom, not of this world. It does so in two different ways - the first part has several straightforward narratives about Daniel and his friends in Babylon, the trials they face, and their walk of faith. The second half has complex visions that can be hard to understand; yet they teach the same truths.

God's Kingdom Is An Eternal Kingdom (Overview Of Daniel 1-6)

Daniel is abruptly taken to Babylon (approximately 606 BC), where for many years he and his friends serve King Nebuchadnezzar and his successors, and depend on God to take care of them. Finding themselves in a harsh land, where even simple choices can pose problems, and where they must even adopt new names, God gives favor to Daniel and his three friends (Daniel 1). Soon there is a crisis when the king becomes outraged with his advisers and decides to execute them all. Daniel and his friends pray for God to guide them, and God answers them (Daniel 2).

Daniel explains the king's dream, for he had seen a statue foretelling a series of earthly empires: Babylon (head of gold), Persia (chest and arms of silver), Greece (stomach and thighs of bronze), and Rome (legs of iron, feet of iron mixed with clay). Moreover, as the statue was crushed, one by one these earthly kingdoms would fall, while God's kingdom is a spiritual kingdom that cannot be destroyed. Besides God's care for the believers, he is also teaching Nebuchadnezzar about God.

Next, God protects Daniel's friends from the king's displeasure, and Nebuchadnezzar learns about God's ability to save (Daniel 3). Then, the king is humbled by God; he comes to know God more clearly, and he praises God for his wonders and teachings (Daniel 4). After Nebuchadnezzar, the remaining kings of Babylon are both idolatrous and inept, and Babylon is eventually overthrown by the Persians and Medes (Daniel 5). God continues watching over Daniel under Darius the Mede, who is appointed ruler of Babylon (Daniel 6).

The Books Are Opened (Overview Of Daniel 7-12)

Now the book turns to dreams and visions that God gives to Daniel, showing the prophet what things look like to God. In particular, many of these visions tell of the coming of Jesus. Daniel has a dream that parallels Nebuchadnezzar's dream, with more details (Daniel 7). The progression of human empires is followed by the "Ancient of Days" taking his seat, the books are opened, and we are again reminded that God's kingdom is an everlasting dominion.

The rest of the book contains visions that can be difficult to understand (indeed, Daniel himself is often overwhelmed by them), yet we can clearly see signs of Jesus' ministry that would bring redemption and sanctification for many souls from many nations (Daniel 8-12). This part also includes Daniel reading Jeremiah's prophecy that explains Jerusalem's fall and promises the chance for restoration in 70 years, and the prayer that Daniel makes upon reading it (chapter 9).

The book concludes with Daniel, astonished with everything God has told him, asks what the outcome of all this will be (chapter 12). Daniel is reassured simply to "go your way till the end", that is, to continue walking by faith, and he will receive his inheritance. Likewise, Jesus reminds us to remain in him and walk by faith; for he can give us rest for our souls, and he brings us the imperishable inheritance of eternal life with him and God.

December 2023

What's the Point....of Daniel? Caleb Dillinger

Daniel is possibly the best book of the Bible to read when discussing faithfulness in an unfaithful culture. That in itself is a point of reading Daniel today in 21st century America. Our culture is not, as a whole, “faithful to God.” The story of Daniel and three other Jewish young men of faith will inspire you and give you an example to emulate when it comes to living faithfully. The book also gives a warning for pride and power and the fleeting nature of both.

The story begins with Israelites being taken into captivity into Babylon, a powerful country that defeated Israel and plundered the city and took the people as slaves. Daniel and three other Jewish men who would play a role in shaping Babylonian history (Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael) are among the captives. They showed they could follow God’s laws on eating foods and remain healthier than the Babylonians. They showed their faithfulness to God would answer the king’s dreams and save them from schemers. The three friends are instructed to worship an idol and refuse, and despite being tossed into a fiery furnace, they survive and convince the king that their God is real and powerful. Daniel later is envied by other wise men and tossed into a lion’s den when he prays to his God instead of worshipping the king; he survives and the wise men are killed instead! Dreams and visions persist through the book, and though we do not understand all of them even now, they point to the power of God and the endurance of God over the power structures of the world.

Literal kingdoms and world powers change during the course of this book, but the faithfulness of Daniel never changes. The book even ends with an encouragement to be patient: “Blessed be the one who waits...”(Daniel 12:12). Patience, faithfulness, endurance, obedience, all these are lifted up in the book of Daniel. Yes, the dreams and visions are vibrant and can bring confusion. But the message is clear: Faithfulness to God outlasts pride, power, selfishness, and all kinds of evil. Every character who prioritizes themselves faces severe consequences. But the characters who prioritize God are blessed.

Why read Daniel today? You will be blessed by seeing godly examples. You will see the parallels in culture of sin (specifically arrogance, pride, and selfishness) and the destructiveness caused by sin. And you’ll be amazed at the power of God. That’s the point of reading Daniel today.