

DANIEL

Introduction

The book of Daniel is rich in spiritual instruction, and will reward prayerful study. It shows, first of all, how those who believe in God can take their place in the society where they find themselves, play their part in current affairs, and yet remain true to God, thereby bringing glory to Him and blessing to men. Such men and women are needed among the nations today.

The book of Daniel is also a tonic to faith. The overthrow and exile of the Jews raised the question 'Where is their God?' (Ps. 115: 2). The book of Daniel reveals God as sovereign over the nations, watchful over those who trust in Him, and working all things 'according to the counsel of his will'. The earlier chapters helped to bring home to the Jews the great truth of the sole Deity of the Lord. This weaned them from idol-worship (*cf.* Ps. 115: 3-11). The later chapters of the book, with their exact prediction of the course of events, were the means by which the faith of the remnant was sustained amid the troubles and persecutions that they endured. This book should help also to sustain our own faith in days of darkness.

The book of Daniel is also an integral part of Scripture in its revelation of things to come. This assumes that the book is a true record and prophecy belonging to the time of the exile. There has been a strong trend in recent times to dispute this, and to assign the composition of the book to a period 400 years later, when many of its predictions had already become facts of history. The older view is not without its difficulties, but the progress of archaeology has already removed some of these, and in holding to the authenticity of the book, we are in line with the New Testament, which bears witness to its miracles and predictions (see, *e.g.*, Heb. 11: 33, 34; Mt. 24: 15), and quotes from or alludes to it frequently, especially in the synoptic Gospels and the book of Revelation.

Analysis**History** (chapters 1-6)

- 1 Daniel and three other youths selected, proved, educated.
- 2 Nebuchadnezzar's dream and its interpretation.
- 3 Nebuchadnezzar's golden image, and the fiery furnace.
- 4 Nebuchadnezzar's second dream, with its fulfilment, and his testimony.
- 5 Belshazzar's feast, the writing on the wall, the fall of Babylon.
- 6 Darius' edict. Daniel in the den of lions.

Prophecy (chapters 7-12)

- 7 Vision of the four great beasts, in the first year of Belshazzar.
- 8 Vision of the ram and he-goat, and of four kingdoms, and of the little horn, in the third year of Belshazzar.
- 9 The prayer of Daniel; the revelation concerning Messiah.
- 10-12 Vision of the future, and of 'the time of the end', in the third year of Cyrus.

☐ **STUDY 1 Daniel 1**

- 1 What were the motives which lay behind the resolve of Daniel and his three friends to avoid defilement? Cf. Lv. 3: 17; 20: 24-26. How did they set about achieving their aim? What Christian qualities did they display in their approach to authority? With what gifts did God reward them?
- 2 What light does the story throw upon what it means to be 'in the world' (Jn. 17: 11), but 'not of the world' (Jn. 17: 16)? Notice how firmness of conviction in youth laid the foundation for later steadfastness.

Notes

- 1 Verse 1. The year is probably 605 BC, and the reference is to a Babylonian foray immediately after their victory at Carchemish.
- 2 Verse 2. 'Shinar': an ancient name for Babylon.

☐ **STUDY 2 Daniel 2: 1-30**

- 1 Daniel and his companions were brought suddenly into great peril through no fault of their own. Note carefully what steps Daniel took. What may we learn from his example as to how to act in any such time of sudden danger? Cf. Acts 4: 23, 24; 12: 5.
- 2 Watch the four at prayer. They might have asked God to change the king's mind, for he was acting very unreasonably; but what did they ask? Consider the faith behind their petition, and how God answered them above what they had asked. See 2: 47-49; and cf. Eph. 3: 20, 21.

☐ **STUDY 3 Daniel 2: 31-49**

- 1 Observe that the four kingdoms, though historically appearing one after the other, are yet all parts of the one image. Also, it is not only the last kingdom of the four, but the whole image that is broken to pieces by the stone that smites it. What does the dream reveal as to God's final purpose? And what differences do you find between the kingdoms of the world that compose the image and the kingdom prefigured by the stone? Cf. Rev. 11: 15.
- 2 What divine purposes did the dream serve in relation to (a) Nebuchadnezzar, (b) Daniel and his friends, and (c) all who knew, or know of it?

Note. Verses 39, 40. Those who assign the book of Daniel to the Maccabean period take the four kingdoms to be those of Babylon, the Medes, the Persians and the Greeks. This, however, apart from other objections, seems to go contrary to the book itself, which regards Medo-Persia as one kingdom (see 5: 28; 6: 8; 8: 20, 21). The older interpretation, therefore, which takes the four kingdoms to be Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome, is to be preferred.

☐ **STUDY 4 Daniel 3**

In the opening part of this chapter the king manifests a very different attitude towards the Lord from that of 2: 47. The probable reason is that between chapters 2 and 3 there is an interval of several years, during which Nebuchadnezzar had evidence that his own god was greater than the God of the Jews (cf. verse 15b). It accounts also for the enmity of the Chaldean officials against Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. They would resent Jews continuing to hold rule over the province of Babylon.

- 1 What threefold accusation was brought against the three Hebrews? Consider how subtly it was worded to stir the king's anger.
- 2 How does this trial of faith differ from anything these men had had to meet hitherto? For similar instances of courage see Acts 4: 8-12; 5: 29-32; 2 Tim. 4: 16, 17. What purposes were served by the miracle of deliverance which God wrought?

☐ **STUDY 5 Daniel 4**

The theme of this chapter is pride. It takes the form of a decree by Nebuchadnezzar announcing the strange psychical affliction he has undergone, through which he has learnt the all-important lesson that 'the Most High rules the kingdom of men, and gives it to whom he will' (verse 25). It can be compared with Is. 14: 8-17 and Ezk. 28: 1-10, passages which in their turn look back to the basic sin of humanity (Gn. 3).

1 How effective was the king's experience in bringing him to humility? Contrast his attitude to God and confession of Him in this chapter with his previous utterances in 2: 47; 3: 29. How would you define the change?

2 What are the main themes of Daniel's teaching in this situation? With verse 27, cf. Mi. 6: 8.

Notes

1 Verse 13. 'A watcher, a holy one': i.e., an angelic figure who acted with the authority of God.

2 Verse 33. The mental derangement, known as zoanthropy, lasted for a set period described as 'seven times' (verse 16). This could mean 'seven years' or simply 'a substantial period of time'. In the apocryphal 'Prayer of Nabonidus', found at Qumran, it is recorded that King Nabonidus, a successor of Nebuchadnezzar, spent seven years of his reign in isolation at Teima because of some strange illness. So this chapter is not without parallel in ancient traditions.

□ STUDY 6 Daniel 5

Babylon fell in 539 BC, twenty-three years after the death of Nebuchadnezzar. A quarter of a century, therefore, has elapsed since the events of chapter 4.

1 What four accusations did Daniel bring against Belshazzar? In what two ways was Belshazzar's sin aggravated and made more heinous?

2 Consider the judgment pronounced upon Belshazzar as symbolizing the divine judgment upon all ungodliness, whether in national or individual life. See verses 26-28, and cf. Pr. 15: 3, 9; Ec. 8: 11-13.

Notes

1 The identity of Belshazzar was for long unknown, but he is now known to have been the eldest son of King Nabonidus (556-539), and to have shared the duties of the throne with his father. While Nabonidus was away from Babylon, his son had supreme authority there.

2 Verse 10. 'The queen': probably the queen-mother, widow of Nebuchadnezzar.

3 Verses 25-28. The words represent three weights or coins, viz. mina, shekel, and peres or half-mina. But the interpretation conceals numerous plays on words, for the verbal roots mean 'to number, to weigh and to divide'. In the case of 'peres', 'to divide', a further similarity to the word for Persian has been used.

□ STUDY 7 Daniel 6

The identity of Darius the Mede is still a matter for debate, but the most likely candidates are Gobryas (Gubaru), the governor of Babylon, or Cyrus the king. This is one of many instances of biblical interpretation over which the reader has to admit that he simply does not know the answer until fresh evidence comes to light to help to solve the mystery.

1 Neither pressure of business nor the threat of death kept Daniel from prayer. How is it with you? Do you think that other qualities in Daniel's character revealed in this chapter were the outcome of his prayer life? What were those qualities? Cf. Is. 40: 29-31; Phil. 4: 5, 6.

2 Is your faith of such a kind that you can stand alone in obedience to God without external support? Are we so living that even our keenest critics take it for granted that the will of God comes first in our lives, come what may?

□ STUDY 8 Daniel 7

The chapter records, first, the vision (verses 2-14); then the general interpretation (verses 15-18); then Daniel's enquiry concerning three features of the vision (verses 19, 20); and lastly, the answer given to these enquiries.

1 Assuming the four kingdoms to be the same as those which Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream (chapter 2), what is there new in this vision which caused Daniel such distress and agitation of spirit (verses 15, 28)?

2 To Nebuchadnezzar the kingdoms of this world appeared in the glittering splendour of material wealth and power, whereas by Daniel they are seen as beasts of prey. What is the difference between these points of view, and which is the deeper and truer view? Cf. 1 Sa. 16: 7; Mt. 4: 8; 1 Jn. 2: 16, 17.

3 What is to be the final goal of history to which this vision looks forward? Who are meant by 'the saints of the Most High' (verse 18)? What privileges will they have in the days to come?

Notes

1 Verse 5. The bear represented the Medo-Persian Empire, noted for its greed for further conquest.

2 Verse 6. The wings on the leopard's back indicate the swiftness of Alexander's campaigns. After his death his empire was divided into four parts.

3 Verse 7. The fourth beast is either the Seleucid Empire, with its many kings (horns), of whom Antiochus Epiphanes was the most deadly, or Rome with its many emperors, under one of whom arose the Son of man.

□ STUDY 9 Daniel 8

The vision of this chapter received historical fulfilment in the overthrow of Persia by Alexander the Great (330 BC), the division of Alexander's kingdom into four ('but not with his power', verse 22), and the rise of Antiochus Epiphanes, who did what is here foretold of him in verses 9-12 and 23-25 (170-164 BC). Gabriel's emphasis, however, upon the vision having to do with 'the time of the end' (see verses 17 and 19) suggests that its meaning is not

exhausted in Antiochus, but that he is only a type of one greater than he, and yet to come, who will act in a similar way. Cf. 7: 24-26 and Mt. 24: 15; 2 Thes. 2: 8-10.

1 What expression is used both of the ram and of the he-goat in the time of their prosperity, and also of the king of verse 23? Yet what was the end of these kingdoms? Notice the repetition of the verb 'to break'.

2 Why was Daniel so deeply affected by this vision? Consider how the prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel seemed to indicate that the return from exile would coincide with the advent of the kingdom of God (see, e.g., Je. 32: 37-44; Ezk. 37: 21-28); but this vision shows long vistas of history stretching into the future, and *further suffering for the Jews*.

Notes

1 Verse 9. 'The glorious land': i.e., Palestine.

2 Verse 10. 'The host of heaven . . . stars': used figuratively of Israel and her leaders.

3 Verse 11. 'The prince of the host': i.e., God Himself. Cf. verse 25.

4 Verse 12. Israel was to be given over into the power of the 'horn' because of transgressions, and true religion was to be suppressed.

5 Verse 14. If the burnt offering ceased for 2,300 times, that would be 1,150 days, which is a little more than three years. It is known that Antiochus did suspend the burnt offering for three years and possibly a little longer.

□ STUDY 10 Daniel 9: 1-19

1 Consider the effect of the fall of Babylon upon one who, like Daniel, saw in it a fulfilment of prophecy (verse 2; cf. Je. 25: 11; 29: 10-14; 50: 1-5). What did it lead him to do (cf. Ezk. 36: 37), and what light do verses 2 and 3 throw upon the use of Scripture in our praying?

2 As you read through Daniel's prayer, how would you describe his praying? See especially verses 3 and 19. In his confession, how does he speak of God? How of himself and his people? In his petition, on what does he base his plea for mercy, and for what does he ask?

□ STUDY 11 Daniel 9: 20-27

Daniel had assumed that a period of seventy years would finish 'the desolations of Jerusalem' (verse 2), and in his prayer had pleaded with God for this (verse 18). God sends Gabriel to give him fuller understanding (verses 20-23), by conveying to him 'a word', which speaks not of seventy years, but of seventy weeks of years. The message is very condensed, and every clause is significant.

1 Verse 24. What are the six things here mentioned? Notice that they all concern the Jews and the holy city, and are to come to pass at the end of the full seventy weeks of years.

2 The seventy weeks of years are divided into three periods of seven weeks, sixty-two weeks and one week respectively. What the first period signifies is not certainly known, unless it is the time taken to build the city. What event, however, is stated as happening at the end of the second period?

3 The remainder of the passage has been variously interpreted, even by those who regard it as inspired prophecy. If verse 26a is a reference to the cross of Christ, then verse 26b seems to point to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by the Romans in AD 70. But such questions as these arise: (a) Does the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70 exhaust the prophecy? (b) Who is the 'prince that shall come', and is he to be identified with the little horn of 7: 8, 24, 25? See Note 3 below.

Notes

1 Verse 24. 'To finish the transgression' and 'to put an end to sin' are parallel expressions meaning to bring Israel's sinning to an end. Cf. Rom. 11: 26, 27. 'To seal both vision and prophet': i.e., to ratify them as being fulfilled. 'To anoint a most holy place': i.e., the consecration of the Messianic Temple, fulfilled in the establishment of the church, the body of Christ.

2 From the decree of Artaxerxes I, referred to in Ezr. 7: 11ff. (458 BC), sixty-nine weeks of years bring us to the period of Christ's ministry. This prophecy of Daniel may account for the widespread expectation of a Messiah at the time Jesus appeared (cf. Mt. 2: 1, 2; Lk. 2: 25, 26; 3: 15), and may lie behind our Lord's own words in Mk. 1: 15a.

3 Verses 26, 27. Many hold that in this prophecy, as in other Old Testament passages, the beginning and end of the Christian era are telescoped together, and that the prophecy here leaps forward to the end of the age. If so, the last 'week' is separated from the first sixty-nine by the whole interval between Christ's first and second comings. With verse 27, cf. 2 Thes. 2: 8.

□ STUDY 12 Daniel 10: 1-11: 1

1 This chapter is introductory to Daniel's last vision. Consider the date (10: 1) and trace out from Ezr. 1: 3; 4: 4, 5 what was happening at that time to the first contingent of those who returned from exile. What light does this throw upon the mourning of Daniel (verse 2) and upon the purpose of the vision?

2 What does this passage teach of the costliness of communion with God, and of true prayer?

3 Read Eph. 6: 10-13 in the light of this chapter; also 2 Ki. 6: 16-18; Ps. 34: 7. In the presence of the mysterious spirit-world, what comfort may we draw from the New Testament revelation that our Lord is supreme there also? Cf. Eph. 1: 20-23; Col. 1: 16; 2: 15.

Notes

- 1 Verses 5, 6. It is not said who this august being was. Some features of his appearance and person remind us of the visions of Ezekiel and John (Ezk. 1: 13-16; Rev. 1: 13-15).
- 2 Verse 8. 'No strength': 'Before God gives strength and power unto His people He makes them sensible of their own weakness.'
- 3 Verse 13. 'Prince': used here of guardian angels of the kingdoms.
- 4 Verses 16, 18. The angelic figure described in these verses is probably the same as the original being of verse 5, but the text is not very clear.

□ **STUDY 13 Daniel 11: 2-20**

This passage is a forecast of history, not continuous, but selective. The period is one of nearly 400 years, from the time of Daniel's vision to the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes. Verses 2-4 are introductory, having reference (a) to the rulers of Persia, up to Xerxes (verse 2), and (b) to the rise of Alexander the Great nearly 150 years later, and to the division of his kingdom into four (verses 3, 4). From this point the prophecy confines itself to two of these four kingdoms: Egypt, whose ruler is called 'king of the south', and Syria, whose ruler is called 'king of the north'. The successive rulers of these kingdoms in historical succession were (a) *Egypt*: Ptolemy I (304-285 BC); Ptolemy II (285-246 BC); Ptolemy III (246-221 BC); Ptolemy IV (221-205 BC); Ptolemy V (205-180 BC); Ptolemy VI (180-145 BC); (b) *Syria*: Seleucus I (312-280 BC); Antiochus I (280-261 BC); Antiochus II (261-246 BC); Seleucus II (246-226 BC); Seleucus III (226-223 BC); Antiochus III, called the Great (223-187 BC); Seleucus IV (187-175 BC); Antiochus IV, called Epiphanes (175-163 BC).

Verse 5a of our chapter refers to Ptolemy I, and verse 5b to Seleucus I, who for a time was one of Ptolemy's generals, but became ruler of a wider empire than Ptolemy's. Verse 6 refers to Ptolemy II, who gave his daughter Berenice to Antiochus II in marriage upon certain conditions. The conditions were, however, broken and Berenice lost her life. Verses 7 and 8 refer to Ptolemy III, brother of Berenice, who successfully attacked the kingdom of Syria under Seleucus II and returned with great spoil. Seleucus II later invaded Egypt, but without success (verse 9). Verses 10-19 predict continued wars between the kings of Syria and Egypt in the reigns of Antiochus III, Ptolemy IV and Ptolemy V. The victory turned now to the north (verse 10), and now to the south (verses 11, 12). Then Antiochus brought Egypt low (verses 13-17), but, wishing to press westwards (verse 18), made an alliance with Egypt by giving Ptolemy V his daughter Cleopatra in marriage (verse 17). The plans for a conquest westward were, however, defeated by a Roman commander (verse 18), and Antiochus had to retire to his own kingdom, where he died (verse 19). Verse 20 refers to Seleucus IV, who imposed heavy taxes upon Palestine to build up his kingdom's finances. In all this time Palestine, named 'the glorious land' (verse 16) and 'the glory of the kingdom' (verse 20), was the pathway of marching armies, and a bone of contention between the warring nations. But it had not yet suffered what it was soon to suffer under Antiochus IV.

- 1 What was the purpose of this detailed prediction? In what way would it help the remnant during the persecution which was to come?

- 2 Ponder the words in verses 3 and 16 'shall do according to his own will'. See also verse 36, and contrast Jn. 4: 34; Rom. 12: 1, 2; 1 Jn. 2: 17. Are you learning to say with Christ Mt. 26: 42 and Heb. 10: 7?

Note. Verse 14. A party among the Jews will rise up, thinking by violence to bring to pass the fulfilment of prophecy.

□ **STUDY 14 Daniel 11: 21-12: 13**

At chapter 11: 21 the predicted course of events as told in the vision reaches the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes, and the historical fulfilment can be traced with accuracy up to verse 35. The career of Antiochus is revealed in four main features: (a) the craft by which he obtained the throne and won his way to power (verses 21-23); (b) his love of munificent and lavish giving (verse 24a); (c) his plans for war (verse 24b), and especially his wars against Egypt (verses 25-30); and (d) his acts of sacrilege against the Temple in Jerusalem, and persecution of the Jews (verses 31-35).

The remainder of the passage (11: 36-12: 4) seems at first sight to be a continuation of the career of Antiochus, but on closer examination is seen to go beyond it, alike in its description of the king (verse 36; cf. 2 Thes. 2: 4), in the events which it records (e.g., 12: 1, 2), and in the emphasis laid upon its being 'the time of the end' (11: 35, 40; 12: 4). The figure of Antiochus seems here to merge into the more sinister figure of the Antichrist. With 12: 2, 7, cf. 7: 25; 9: 27.

- 1 Gather out the evidence given here on the one hand of man's sinfulness and lust for power, and on the other of God's overruling control and purpose. Cf. Je. 17: 5-14.

- 2 What are the characteristics of those who will be glorified and of those who will be put to shame at the last?

Notes

- 1 11: 21. *I.e.*, he was not the recognized heir to the throne.
- 2 11: 22-24. 'The prince of the covenant' is probably Antiochus, the infant son and heir of Seleucus IV. 'The strongholds' are those of Egypt.
- 3 11: 27. Antiochus actually captured the king of Egypt, but they pretended to be friendly.
- 4 11: 30. 'Ships of Kittim': *i.e.*, Roman ships, which refused Antiochus liberty to proceed. He vented his anger, therefore, upon Palestine.
- 5 11: 31. 'The abomination that makes desolate': a small altar was placed upon the altar of burnt offering and sacrifices were offered to idols.
- 6 11: 37. 'The one beloved by women' refers to the god Tammuz. See Ezk. 8: 14.