

## Daniel

The book of Daniel relates a series of stories about Daniel and three friends, and a series of visions about events to come. Daniel and his friends were taken to Babylon as forced migrants just before the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC, and the first half of the book relates the series of stories about them that tell of challenges they face in this alien context, of their faithfulness to Yahweh, and of Yahweh's faithfulness to them as he miraculously rescues them from danger and enables them to flourish. The stories would act as encouragement to people forced to live in foreign countries under imperial pressure, encouraging them to be faithful to Yahweh even though they might not experience the miraculous protection and recognition that came to Daniel and his friends.

The stories include a vision that describes four reigns that are to follow that of the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar. The further visions in the second half of the book take up the themes of this first vision and relate the history that is to unfold after Daniel's day. They focus on a great crisis that comes to Jerusalem four centuries later, in the 160s BC, when the Hellenistic king Antiochus Epiphanes bans people from serving Yahweh in accordance with the Torah and introduces pagan worship into the temple in Jerusalem. Whereas the visions in chapters 7 to 12 are irrelevant to Daniel and his friends, they bring Yahweh's message to Jews living in the crisis in the 160s and encourage people to be faithful to Yahweh in this context as the stories do so in that other context.

In the Middle East it was sometimes a convention to present accounts of past events as if they were prophecies, and Daniel's visions are an example within the Scriptures. The visions that are inspired by the Holy Spirit are in another sense inspired by Daniel: that is, the vision in

Daniel 2 is the fountainhead of the other visions, which assure people that Yahweh has been in control of events in between. The climax of each vision relates an act whereby Yahweh puts down oppressors and restores his people, and these promises found some fulfilment in the deliverance of Jerusalem from Antiochus. This deliverance would thus be evidence that the visions really did come from Yahweh. One may guess that this awareness led to the community's including the book of Daniel in the Scriptures. The visions also envisage a more final putting down of oppression and a more final restoration of God's people, and thus inspire readers to continue to look to God's future with confidence.

The opening and closing chapters of the book are in Hebrew but the central chapters are in a sister language, Aramaic. We do not know why it should be so, but it compares with the way many people in the United States can move easily between English and Spanish. The book outlines as follows.

- Ch. 1 Introduction to the stories and the visions
- Ch. 2 Daniel interprets Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a statue symbolizing the four reigns
- Ch. 3 Daniel's three friends insist on not bowing down to an image, and God rescues them
- Ch. 4 Daniel interprets another dream for Nebuchadnezzar, which comes true
- Ch. 5 Daniel interprets an inscription on a wall for Belshazzar, which comes true
- Ch. 6 Daniel insists on being faithful in prayer, and God rescues him
- Ch. 7 Daniel has a dream of four monsters symbolizing four reigns that are followed by God's reign
- Ch. 8 Daniel has a vision of two strange animals symbolizing Medo-Persia and Greece

Ch. 9 Daniel asks about how long the devastation of Jerusalem will last, and Gabriel explains

Chs. 10 – 12 Daniel has a vision of Persian and Greek kings fighting and of the deliverance of God's people

#### Commentaries

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