

**NCACHURCH Bible Studies
2009**

Daniel

Reigning On High

Term 4, 2009

Six Studies in Daniel 7-12

Introduction to the Book of Daniel

Form

The book of Daniel belongs to a genre of literature known as 'apocalyptic'. (This term comes from the Greek word for 'revelation' – same word behind the last book of the New Testament 'Revelation'.) An apocalypse is a 'revelation', an 'unveiling' or 'disclosure'. In apocalyptic literature visions (and dreams, etc) are given often with angelic interpretation through which a significant revelation is made known invariably of the 'end' and often into heaven itself.

Though there are many similarities and some overlap between apocalyptic literature and prophetic literature, there are some notable differences as well. To be sure there are apocalyptic elements to be found within Hebrew prophecy – see parts of Isaiah (24-27 & 56-66), Ezekiel (38-39 & 47), Joel (3) and Zechariah. Yet only the book of Daniel is regarded as full-blown apocalyptic. Indeed, in the Hebrew version of the OT – which includes all the same books but arranges them differently into: Torah (Law); Neviim (Prophets); and Cethuviim (Writings) – the book of Daniel is included among the Writings, not the Prophets.

Among the key and distinct features of apocalyptic literature (both in terms of form and content) are these:

- they are specifically divine revelations;
- they have a special focus on the end of time;
- they are given in the form of visions or dreams;
- occasionally, the seer views heavenly events or is taken up into heaven;
- frequently, an angel is present as mediator or interpreter;
- symbolic imagery is very common – sometimes the symbols are transparent, sometimes they are obscure;
- they often involve the periodization of history;
- they often culminate in a final battle;
- they are concerned with the establishment of the kingdom of God & the resurrection of the dead & an end-time judgment.

The standard explanation for the emergence of this kind of literature is the crisis of the exile into Babylon. Apocalyptic literature appeals to, and provides a more expedient perspective for, people who are experiencing severe distress and/or persecution in the present. When life in the here and the now is ominous and oppressive, apocalyptic raises one's sights beyond to the heavenly, supernatural and eternal.

One OT professor (Hanson) sees apocalyptic emerge with the religion of Judaism as the people face the dismantling and destruction of their theocracy. While they lived in the land of promise under the king of God's choosing, with the temple where God had caused his name to dwell and with the priesthood God himself had consecrated – then all of Israel's hope and dreams focussed on and were caught up with those institutions. The future they looked forward to would come through those things. The invasion of foreign rulers and countries, the occupation of the promised land and the undoing of so many of these institutions forced the people of God to look beyond these things – to a future / end which God would bring about regardless of present difficulties and circumstances.

Structure

The book divides quite neatly into two halves: the first section in chapters 1-6 is a series of stories (or narratives) focussing on Daniel and his three young friends during the reigns of four kings; the second section, chapters 7-12, is comprised of a series of visions by the interpretation of which by celestial beings is communicated to Daniel a series of messages concerning the schemes of four reigns:

Narratives			Visions	
1-4	Nebuchadnezzar	7-8	Babylon /	Babylonian
5	Belshazzar	9	Media /	Medo-Persian
6	Darius	10	Persia /	Greek (Alexander)
6:29 [28]	Cyrus	11-12	Greece /	Roman (Alexander's successors)

For what it is worth, I prefer the secondary schema (ie, grouping the Medes & Persians, rather than the Graeco-Roman) as the best way to make sense of the kingdoms referred to in Daniel's schema.

The section we are looking at is the second half and it is important to try to locate the vision in the narrative of the first half of the book – so as you look at each chapter, work out where the vision fits into the narrative schema and how that vision may have shaped Daniel's action in the narrative.

Purpose

The form and structure of the book will be a significant feature in trying to understand it and to come to terms with it (– particularly the second half!). And the book of Daniel has perplexed many a biblical scholar and spawned many a variant interpretation as to some of its particular details.

Most of all, however, we ought to see in it and hear from it that dominant message that the kingdoms of this world rise and fall; that they do so according to Him who holds the hearts of kings in His Hand and Who controls and orders all things; that even when we do not understand what is happening around us nor why it is, we can know that God is in control and rest assured that one day the future of his intention and purpose will be realised regardless!

“The Christian Church has always been intrigued by the book of Daniel. At times its scholars have ventured some fanciful interpretations. Especially painful have been the attempts to use Daniel's symbolic numbers as a guide to the exact timing of Christ's second coming. But most expositions have been a source of real hope in times of deep distress.” (Goldingay, Daniel [WBC])

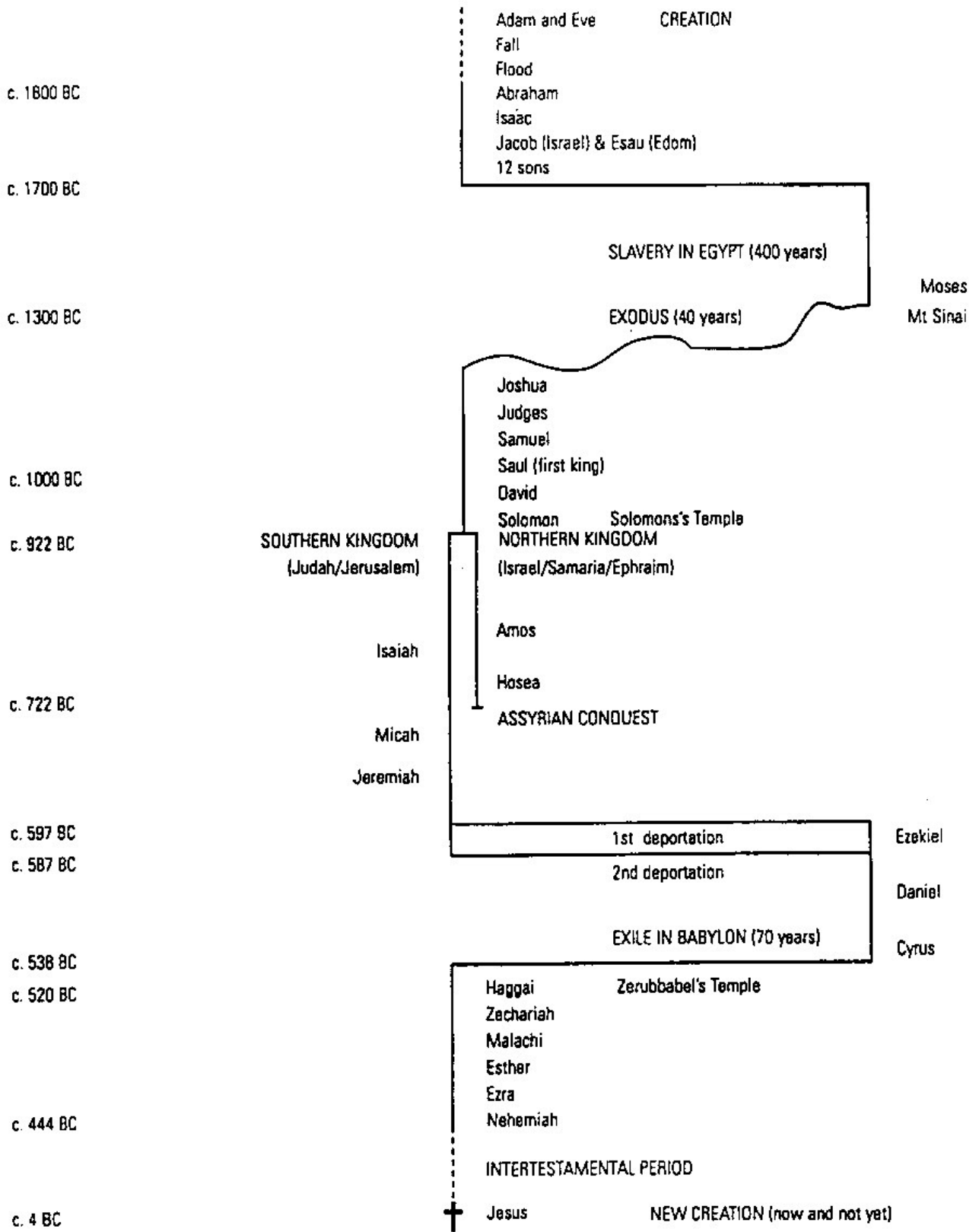
Introduction by Will Orpwood

I have included an Old Testament Timeline so you and your group can get familiar with the history of the OT as you do these studies.

There is a leaders copy and group copy of each study and some leader's notes have been provided in text boxes. Feel free to contact me if you need extra help.

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Old Testament Timeline



Daniel: Reigning on High

Chapter 7 :: In the end...

LEADER'S NOTES

Introduction

The Humanist Society of NSW say that their "members believe that reason and scientific enquiry provide the only real path to the solution of our problems."

Do you agree or disagree? What do you think is the solution to the problems in the world?

Analysis

The first of these visions of Daniel is set in the first year of the reign of Belshazzar, and so is located in the time between Daniel 4-5; however it has similarities with Daniel 2.

READ Daniel 7:1-8

What similarities exist between Nebuchadnezzar's vision in Daniel 2 and Daniel's vision in Daniel 7?
What differences exist?

SIMILARITIES	DIFFERENCES
The idea here is just to get the group thinking back to what we have already done but also to separate the two if people remember so they can see the emphases in Dan 7. Make sure you note the evil of the beasts, the fact that they arise together and the characteristics they have – human, vicious etc.	

READ Daniel 7:9-10

What passages of the Bible come to mind as you read this section? Does this help you identify who is being described?

Among others see Ezekiel 1, Isaiah 6, Revelation 7:9-end. It is clearly God who is on view. You can explore what the characteristics in this part of the vision may symbolise in regard to God – white as purity and holy, fire for power and authority, wheels for omnipresence, worship and court scene etc.

READ Daniel 7:11-14

What does verse 2, 11-12 and 17 tell you about the identity of these beasts?

They co-exist so there is great difficulty in identifying them specifically and to attempt to is fruitless. How might we understand them? Perhaps the idea that they come from the 4 winds is meant to be that they encompass all the powers on the earth that are opposed to God.

Who is verse 13-14 talking about and when does this happen – before the cross, now(after the cross), at the end of the world or a combination?

You might want to look at 1 Corinthians 15:20-28

By this point you may be feeling overwhelmed with the detail in the vision. No doubt Daniel was too. It actually says in v.15 that he was troubled and disturbed by the vision. The comforting thing is that in v.16-18 the main message of the vision is made loud and clear.

READ Daniel 7:16-18

Write in your own words what you think these verses say is the main message of the vision.

What impact do you think this might have had on Daniel given his circumstances?

What does it mean that we will receive the Kingdom & possess it forever when the Son of Man does too (v.14)?

See NT concepts of inheritance eg. 1 Peter 1:3-4 and heirs Galatians 4:1-7

How ought this shape your life?

Daniel wanted to know more of the detail...

READ Daniel 7:19-27

What new information is included in this recount of the vision?

v.21-22

How have you seen this taking place in your own life? The life of those you know?

Some people think no persecution = not living Christianly enough. I don't think this is necessarily true (although it could be). See if people can think beyond being neatened up to more subtle north shore ways of excluding people or the way people might talk about others behind their back about their faith.

What ought our response to opposition and persecution be?

You could spend time praying for people in countries where Christians are persecuted. See opendoors.org.au.

READ Daniel 7:28

What is Daniel's response to the vision? Do you find this strange or appropriate?

Reflection

What is over-riding message of this chapter?

God is in control

How do we understand the hard times in our lives given what this chapter is saying?

If God is in control, what do we make of sickness, illness and death. You might want to consider the end of Acts 7 – Stephen's death – 2 Cor 6:3-13 & 12:1-10 – Paul's struggles – 1 Tim 4:12, 1 Corinthians 10:13, Hebrews 12:1-11
In the end, we live in a world that is marred by sin and characterised by Godlessness. As humans we suffer the full effect of that now, and the full effect of redemption later. God continues this world as it is (marred by sin and suffering) because he is patient with us – see esp 2 Peter 3:1-13

How does this chapter shape the way we think about the rulers and authorities that sit over us?

Daniel: Reigning on High

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How ought this reality shape your life?

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Daniel: Reigning on High

Chapter 8 :: Goats and Rams and Living in the Present

LEADER'S NOTES

Introduction

What are the things you do on a "normal" day?

What are the reasons that you do these things and what has shaped your decision to do them?

Analysis

This vision of Daniel is set in the third year of the reign of Belshazzar, and so is located in the time around Daniel 5; however as we think about who the animals in the vision may represent, we are forced to look beyond Belshazzar to the next Kingdom and the next.

READ Daniel 8: 1-2

Fill in the following table:

The animal/ creature	Its characteristics	Its actions
The Ram		
The Goat		
The Horn		<p><i>You will have to do a bit more work in this box but some hints....</i></p> <p><i>v.10 – looks to be more supernatural than earthly – host being armies? Angels?</i></p> <p><i>v.11. set up against God, ban on religious activity and desecrates temple</i></p> <p><i>v.12 people were made to worship the horn and not God and truth was distorted. Antiochus destroyed copies of the Torah.</i></p>

Read Daniel 8:20-25 and assign identity to each of the creatures.

History has shown us that perhaps what Daniel saw in the ram was the kingdom of the Medes and Persians. The Persian empire grew up after the Medes and ended up exceeding its power. Then came the Greeks and specifically Alexander the Great. Over 4 years (334-331BC) Alexander demolished the Persian empire and established an empire of his own extending from Europe to India. But God humbled him when at the height of his power he died in 323BC. He divided his Kingdom into parts before he died (?four horns). Most scholars then say that the one horn that came up next was Antiochus IV who was particularly vicious ruler and opposed the Israelites especially. In 167 he completely desecrated the newly built temple. But, we must not let history drive our interpretation but must stick to the text and let it tell its story.

What in the vision gives you a clue that the historical identification might not be where the explanation of the vision ends?

It is important to get people to see the layers here that there is an historical element but there is more than the historical element too. In fact as the passage proceeds into the explanation you will see that despite the beasts being identified there is a "movement towards ambiguity and that performs an important function in this passage. It highlights that although we are dealing with specific historical circumstances there are larger supernatural forces operating behind the human figures here. There is a battle going on that is both timeless and operating on a much larger scale than that of one tyrant in the 2nd Century". *Andrew Reid, Daniel, p.180*

Note especially v.9-11, the interplay between the 2300 days and v.17, 19, 26

Who else might this vision be pointing us to? When might the things involving this person take place?

You might want to look at 2 Thess 2:1-12 or Revelation 12

What is the inevitable end point for those who oppose the rule of God?

In chapter 7 there was a big emphasis on victory for the saints. Here that emphasis is missing and there is no big fanfare made around God's victory. Rather it is subtle but poetic and fits with one of the themes of this chapter which is "power". See the end of v.25.

Compare Daniel's reaction in 7:28 and 8:27. Is there a difference and if there is, what might have caused it?

Reflection

What is over-riding message of this chapter?

The important point made here is that in our world there are human forces that run riot around the world opposing God. Unlike chapter 7 where the point was the ultimate power of God, in chapter 8 the point is the power of the evil forces. Yes they will be destroyed by God but they are at work behind the scenes. See Ephesians 6:10-12. "the influence of such powers can be seen in the rule of individual tyrants but also in ideas, institutions and nations that think they can replace God and treat him with contempt. It is right that we as Christians should seek to recognise such forces not by adding up numbers in names or making speculative calculations based on Scripture but by noting their characteristics [and so we have spent time looking at their characteristics in this study!!]. It is also right that Christians should seek to oppose such people and institutions through their prayers and actions, recognising that although their fall will surely happen, it will happen only when God so ordains. Such powers will fall not by human hands but because the victory won over Satan through the cross of Christ." *Andrew Reid, Daniel, p.183*

Daniel's vision finishes with him returning to his "normal" day – he got up and went about the King's business. He is disturbed and no doubt left pondering the vision of what the end will be like. Read the following verses: 1 Peter 5:8-9; 2 Peter 3:10-14.

How ought the reality of the coming of the end and the power of evil up until then shape your "normal" day? Are there things you should no longer do, things you should do, priorities you should take change?

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Daniel: Reigning on High

Chapter 9 :: The Power of Prayer and the Promise of God

LEADER'S NOTES

Introduction

How often do you pray? What is the usual content of your prayers?

What motivates you to pray? What stops you?

Analysis

As we come to chapter 9, we jump forward to the first year of Darius and we find ourselves between chapters 5 & 6 in the narrative. We also find Daniel hard at work, trying to understand the promises God has made in the book of Jeremiah.

READ Daniel 8:9:1-3

What is the context of this prayer? (You may want to look at Jeremiah 25:8-11 & 29:10-14)

Note especially Jeremiah 29:12 that instructs the Israelites to pray. It seems that not only has Daniel learnt from Jeremiah the time but also the appropriate response to the situation. I was going to put in a question – why did Daniel pray? – but it seemed a little obvious after reading those passages – it was the only thing he could do and the thing he had been instructed to do.

Read Daniel 9:4-19

What are the main themes or points made in Daniel's prayer?

You will want to note both the things that Daniel says but also the history he outlines.

Is there anything in the prayer that surprised you?

Note the solidarity that Daniel has with the Israelites who opposed God in the past. He does not say "they sinned" but we sinned. He was not there when they sinned but he still sees himself and this generation as culpable. They continue to bear the fruit and the stain of the past. He also prays on behalf of others. Do you think this is something we can do for people? Consider Mark 2:1-10 and 1 John 5:16 if your group has time. What effect might such a prayer have?

Read Daniel 9:15-19 (again)

What is the basis of Daniel's preparedness to pray?

Look carefully at what he says about why God would act.

How should this reality shape and inform your prayers??

Read Daniel 9:20-23

What happened when Daniel started to pray? What does this tell you about God?

Although we may not know it, feel it, see it or even believe it, God is only too ready to listen to the prayers of his people and will respond to them as he sees fit and appropriate and according to his glory. You may also want to note that in the coming of the angel and another apocalyptic vision, the idea that Jeremiah's 70 years might be being fulfilled is both strong and questionable at the same time. Strong because God has sent a messenger to speak but questionable in the sense that the 70 years may be a reference to something else as indicated by the presence again of apocalyptic pictures and language.

READ Daniel 9:24-27

What is the main message of the vision?

What event do you think v.24 is talking about?

Verses 24 is really the answer to much of Daniel's prayer. We know that only in one place in history are these things said to have happened in a lasting and complete way – and that is only in the person of Jesus and in his death and resurrection. In Jesus, the expectation of Daniel 9:24 is fulfilled.
The seventy times seven is probably a reference to completion rather than a certain number of years (7 being the number of completeness which we can ascertain from other apocalyptic literature like Revelation.)
The remainder of the vision (v.25-27) is perhaps answering the question Daniel asks which is the “when” question – when will you restore your honour and glory.

What might v.25-27 be about?

Every commentator I read said these are notoriously difficult verses. It is all in the timing and what happens when. In general, I think they are initially indicating again the difficulties that the people will have and opposition they will have as they go about setting up the temple and trying to worship God again. But these verses also have the life and death of Jesus in view too and beyond. Mark 13 seems to indicate this. Have a look at Mark 13:1-17. I think the best line and perhaps the thing to focus on is the fact that the end will come! (v.26)

Summarise the answer to what Daniel has prayed.

Reflection

What is over-riding message of this chapter?

How ought this chapter inform/ change/ shape our prayers and the way God answers them?

“How many of us will be willing to not see the answers to our prayers and still believe in the God of history? Only the person of faith can do this. That is the point of Hebrews 11:13-15. Daniel did not receive what was promised. His heartfelt prayers were not answered in his lifetime. He had not seen the day when transgression was done away with. Nevertheless he put his faith and trust in God, becoming a model for all those who are required to do the same thing in light of the same difficulties.” *Reid, Daniel, 205.*

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