

The theme of Daniel is the Kingdom of God

The theme of the Book of Daniel is the kingdom of God. It shows us how God rules over pagan empires and is able to allow one kingdom to arise, and then another, but all the time God is ruling in the world with the intention of bringing in his own kingdom. All other kingdoms of this world arise from human sinfulness, and will inevitably be crushed and defeated by the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is a kingdom of spiritual power. It is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

1. An exciting book

1. The Book of Daniel is an exciting book. There are few books that are more dramatic. Children enjoy many of its stories because they are so exciting. What is more dramatic than Daniel in the den of lions?

2. A key to other parts of Scripture

2. Daniel is the key to other parts of Scripture. It helps us to understand Matthew 24, Mark 13, 2 Thessalonians, as well as the Book of Revelation.

3. It must be studied in an atmosphere of love and graciousness

3. It is a book that has unfortunately divided Bible-believing Christians. The Book of Daniel must be studied in an atmosphere of love and graciousness towards other Bible-believing Christians. Yet unfortunately it has to be said that the Book of Daniel has always been a playground for the kind of person who has extravagant and weird ideas about his ability to decipher the future by using the Scriptures in an eccentric manner. The cults often make a lot of use of the Book of Daniel. Seventh Day Adventists like it. Anyone who has peculiar views about prophecy is likely to make a lot of the Book of Daniel. It is dangerous to get intellectual enjoyment by playing a kind of jigsaw puzzle with the Bible. Some people love debates over interpretation. They feel they are very spiritual because they love discussing prophecies. But remember that the Pharisees were great Bible scholars! It is possible to enjoy 'Bible-study' in this way – but it is entirely intellectual and entirely useless.

4. A battleground between Bible believers and sceptics

4. The Book of Daniel has been a battleground between Bible-believing Christians and those who have a sceptical attitude to the Bible. It claims to be a record of what happened in the sixth century. Yet there are predictions that run forward into the Greek and Roman empires, and they do so with great accuracy. So sceptical people tend to say, 'This cannot happen. It is too miraculous. Daniel must have been written after these events which it predicts.' And yet Daniel has stood up well as modern discoveries have been made. In chapter 5 we have a king called Belshazzar. There was a time when people said, 'There is no such king as Belshazzar. There cannot be because we know every Babylonian king that there is.' Then one day an archaeologist discovered references to Belshazzar; it turned out that he was a king's son.

5. Written in Hebrew and Aramaic

5. Daniel is written in two languages. Part of it is written in Hebrew, and part of it is written in Aramaic.

6. Daniel comes in 'the writings'

6. It comes in 'the writings'. You may remember that the Hebrew Old Testament is divided into the law, the prophets and the writings. We might expect that Daniel would be one of the prophets, but actually it comes in 'the writings'. Daniel was not an 'official' prophet. He was a layman, an employee of the Babylonian empire and then of the Persian empire. You could call him a 'part-time' prophet.

The Book of Daniel surveyed

As I have said, **the theme of Daniel is kingship and God’s royal power.** It deals with rule and empire and monarchy, with government and royalty and authority. Chapters 1–6 are about Daniel's experiences within pagan empires. There are six stories that tell us what it was like to live in a pagan world. Can one man like Daniel stand up to such pressure?

Chapter 1 – Under Babylonian rule

Daniel chapter 1 tells a story that lets us know what it was like to live under Babylonian authority.

Chapter 2 – Babylon the first of several empires

Then in **Daniel chapter 2**, Daniel was told that the Babylonian empire was only the first of several empires that would dominate Jerusalem. After the Babylonian empire would come three more. Then in the time of the fourth empire the kingdom of God would be set up and eventually would throw down all pagan empires.

Chapter 3 & 4 – Life under the Babylonians contd..

Daniel chapter 3 (the golden image) continues the story of what it was like to live under the Babylonians, and **Daniel chapter 4** (the dream of the tree) continues the same theme.

Chapter 5 – Babylon falls to the Persians

A change comes in **Daniel chapter 5**. At that time Daniel witnesses for himself how one empire can be overthrown and another can be brought in at any moment. At the beginning of the story the Babylonians are in control of the civilized world. By the end of the chapter the Babylonian emperor has been killed and his empire has ended. The Persians rule instead. It is the second of Daniel’s four world empires.

Chapter 6 Under Persia – the lion’s den

So in the next chapter, **Daniel chapter 6**, we find Daniel in the reign of Darius. ‘Darius’ is probably another name for Cyrus the Persian (or possibly for one of his generals). Daniel is now living under Persian authority and again the state persecutes him as a believer in the God of Israel. But Daniel survives the den of lions, *in the reign of Darius, that is, the reign of Cyrus the Persian.*

Chapters 7-12 – God’s kingdom and man’s kingdoms – progress despite opposition

Then chapters 7–12 meditate on the way in which God’s kingdom and man’s kingdoms relate to each other. God’s kingdom makes progress despite every opposition. **Chapter 7** tells again of the four empires that will precede the kingdom of God, in which a Saviour will come riding upon the clouds of heaven. After the vision of four empires, in **chapter 8**, two kingdoms are taken up in detail (those of Cyrus and one of a king who came to be known as ‘Alexander the Great’). Then in **chapter 9** there are specific prophecies about God’s coming kingdom. Then in a long vision in **chapters 10–12** we shall see how all of this works itself out in the course of history.



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