

The Half Hour That Changes the World

Daniel

Book 27

Basic Question behind the book:

How can I keep loyal to God when it feels like I'm swimming against the tide in the world in which I live?

Summary of book:

Some of you will remember singing in Sunday school, "Dare to be a Daniel". He was also the inspiration for the comic book character, "Dan Dare". The book of Daniel is twelve chapters long. The first six involve accounts of the lives of four young Jewish heroes caught up in the exile and their engagement with the culture and authorities in that new world. The core theme is keeping the faith in a hostile environment against the odds, when it isn't popular or easy, remaining faithful in adversity to their God and their way of life. Their integrity and boldness are inspiring to succeeding generations. **Chapter 1** is the story of the beginnings in the royal court of Nebuchadnezzar when they refuse to eat off the royal table, unclean food. They are given a special vegetarian diet and end up healthier than everyone else. **Chapter 2** is about Daniel interpreting the King's dream after telling him what the dream actually was in the first place. **Chapter 3** is about the large statue that the three friends refuse to bow down to and end up in the fiery furnace instead. **Chapter 4** is about the madness and restoration of Nebuchadnezzar. The foreign King, while powerful, is still under the control and sovereignty of Yahweh. In **Chapter 5** we have a new king, Belshazzar, who sees a vision of a hand writing on the wall of the palace. Daniel again gives the interpretation which is about the future of the kingdom. In **Chapter 6** we have another new king, Darius. Political jealousy of the exalted Daniel leads to intrigue in which Daniel ends up in the lions' den. Rescued by an angel, the enemies of Daniel end up meeting a horrific end in the mouths of the same lions. **Chapters 7 - 12** contains apocalyptic visions and dreams which many believe speak about the period of history, post exile up to the Maccabean revolt.

Vital Statistics:

Purpose: To give an account of some faithful Jews who lived during the exile, & to show how God is in control of heaven & earth, directing the forces of nature, the destiny of nations, & the care of his people.

Author: The book centres around the main character, Daniel, and purports to have material from him. Such pseudonymous authorship was very common then and is still used today.

Recipients: Initially it was written for the Jewish people in a time of persecution, where being reminded of how a hero from a previous generation might encourage and guide them.

Dating: On the surface it appears to be written during the period of the Babylonian exile (605 BC to 535 BC). However, most scholars would agree that it was written around the time of the Maccabean revolt c.160 BC. Its appearance at the end of Hebrew canon, in the writings section rather than the Prophets seems to bear that out.

Setting: In 167 BC the Seleucid King, Antiochus Epiphanes IV set up an idol of himself in the Jerusalem temple, raided the treasury, and started public burnings of the Torah. This sparked the Maccabean Revolt which led to political independence and which lasted until the Roman Empire arrived (63 BC).

Other Reflections:

Exile: None of the Jews wanted to be in Babylon away from their beloved land and their temple in Jerusalem. Read Psalm 137 (how they felt in Babylon) & 126 (how they felt upon their return).

New Testament Interest: We find reference to the Son of Man and the Ancient of Days in Daniel. We find a rare reference to the idea of Resurrection which is hardly known in the Old Testament.

In the Fiery Furnace: A fourth figure is in there with them. Is this a pre-incarnate Christophany?

Their example of faith is great: God can, God will, God is still to be trusted even if he doesn't.

"In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed." (7:13-14)