

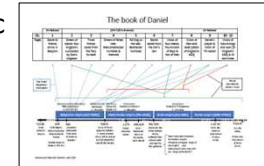
The Book of Daniel

Study notes by pastor Klaas-Jan Gunnink, October 2024

1

Overview of the book

- History: when did it happen?
 - About 600-530 BC (600 years before birth of Jesus Christ)
 - Dreams and visions in the book cover great period of time, some until the return of Jesus
- Place in the Bible's storyline
 - Near the end of the Old Testament
 - God's people Israel & Judah taken into exile
 - NT (Revelation) builds on Daniel!
- Two genres: story (narrative) and visions ('apocalyptic')
- Two languages: Hebrew & Aramaic
- See separate handout for timeline and summary of the book



2

Context: Why the exile?

- God's covenant with Israel (Moses, Sinai, see Exodus-Deuteronomy)
- Israel (as a nation, not every individual) broke the covenant
 - Idolatry: worshipping false gods
 - Sin in the land: injustice, oppression of the poor, bloodshed, etc
- God sent many prophets to warn & call to repent
- The people refused, kept sinning
- God brought judgment: taken away from the promised land (exile)
 - See Deuteronomy 28 (see vs. 36, 45-50, 64)
 - See 2 Chronicles 36 (Note vs. 21 links back to Leviticus 26:34)
- *What can we learn from this?*
 - God takes sin seriously: justice!
 - God is in control over all the nations.

3

Where did it happen?



Babylonian Empire (605-539BC) (Map from ESV Global Study Bible)

4

Main themes & lessons

- God's kingdom lasts forever!
- Sovereign control of God, also over pagan kings (and 'raging beasts' in the visions)
- Faithfulness of God's servants in the midst of opposition
- Encouragement to keep going (perseverance)
- God always fulfils his word/promises/prophecies

5

When was it written?

- **Wrong:** Many today believe Daniel was written 2nd century BC
 - They think the visions are too detailed, cannot be true predictions
 - They don't believe God can predict the future
 - This means they believe the author is lying when he presents prophecies, he is actually writing when it already happened.
- **Truth:** Daniel himself is author (compare Matthew 24:15)
 - The message of the book only works when it is truly predicting!
 - God knows everything, and is in control (a main theme in the book!)
 - Archaeology and language study fits well with this date.

6

Introduction to 'Apocalypse'

- From chapter 7, the Book of Daniel has a different genre. Before, it were stories. Now it is visions full of symbols, often called 'apocalyptic' literature.
 - Other Bible parts in this genre: 2nd half of Zecharia; most of Revelation.
- 'Apocalypse' comes from the Greek word 'to reveal, make known' → often about what is going to happen in the future
 - See Revelation 1:1-3
- In these parts of the Bible, we see angels who explain and interpret visions full of symbols, numbers, beasts.
 - The highly symbolic language means we should not take everything literally, in a 'wooden' way.
- *Why would God give his Word in this genre, at these times?*
 - Times of great opposition → encouragement to faithfulness and perseverance (Revelation 13:10)

7

How to read apocalypse?

- It is more like a comic book than a novel ("an image says more than a thousand words")
- 'Feel' the stories! They are meant to stir emotions
 - Come to it not just like a scholar, but like the excited boy: dragons!
- Don't 'press' every detail!
 - When this is done, the wildest explanations and connections are found, which usually change when the news moves on to the next big event.
 - Such reading makes the Bible often seem difficult – not needed!
- Remember: the vision is given for a reason, and that is not to give us a puzzle or riddle to keep us busy. Ask: why?
 - This is true for the initial readers, not just for us today.
- Interpret the difficult parts in light of the easier parts
 - Carefully notice which things are explained by the interpreter angels, and which parts are left out.
- What is not clear in the Bible, we don't need to know!
 - The Bible tells us all we need for salvation and living the Christian life, we don't need today's newspapers or other info to make sense of it.

8

Daniel 7 – World history in a vision

- This chapter is the central point (or ‘hinge’) in the book
 - It is the final chapter in Aramaic (parallel to ch2; as ch3 is to ch6 and ch4 is to ch5 -> in each pair, the themes are similar)
 - It is the first chapter of the visions (‘apocalyptic’ genre)
- The main themes of Daniel continue, and are clearly present in this chapter/vision!
- Vv13-14 about the ‘son of man’ are quoted often in the NT -> this is a key text about Jesus Christ!
- The chapter has two parts:
 - vv1-14 the vision
 - Vv15-28 the interpretation as given by the angel
- Receiving these visions wasn’t easy for Daniel!
 - See v15, 28 (also 8:27; 10:7-11)

9

Bad news: beastly powers rage!

- The beasts are like animals in a nightmare: scary, and they seem so real!
- They are symbols of kings/kingdoms (v17, 23)
- As in ch2, four kingdoms/empires are described by these dangerous beasts:
 1. Babylonian (v4: compare ch4 events with Nebuchadnezzar)
 2. Medo-Persian (v5; one side – Persian – was stronger than the other; see also 8:3-4, 20)
 3. Greek (v6; very fast, and four heads represent the 4 parts into which the Greek empire broke after death of Alexander the great. See also 8:5-8, 21-22)
 4. Roman empire, and beyond (v7; notice iron teeth, as iron legs/feet in the statue of ch2. Very strong)
- Daniel wants to know especially about the 4th beast and the horns on its head, and the ‘little horn’ (v8, 19-22)

10

10 horns and a little horn

- Horns in the Bible are a symbol of strength/power
- In 7:24, ten kings “come from” the 4th beast
 - So not simply about 10 Roman emperors
 - Better to see this as 10 (or more generally, ‘many’) kingdoms arising after the Roman empire, and building on its foundations. This is indeed what happened when the Roman empire fell (Rome was destroyed in 410 AD)
- The ‘little horn’ (v8, 25) represents a king in proud rebellion against God. Speaks boastful and blasphemous words. Persecutes God’s people.
 - In 8:9-12, 23-25, we find another ‘little horn’ in the 3rd empire. See also 11:21-35 [see slides below]
 - This suggests a pattern throughout world history of ‘little horns’ – antichrists (!) – rising up against God and his people; with a final great enemy / ‘little horn’ / Antichrist.
 - See also 11:36-45 [slides below] and 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4.

11

Living in a world full of ‘beasts’

- The beasts in the vision of Daniel 7 show us that we live in a world full of ‘raging beasts’
 - Kings and nations make war against each other.
 - Dictators ‘trample’ their own people
 - Persecution of God’s people; proud rebellion against God
 - Behind all of this is the spiritual war; Satan is the great enemy
- Without God’s grace limiting this evil, we could not live! Sin turns us into animals!
- Application: Don’t be surprised when this ‘raging’ hits your own life! Take up the armour of God (Eph. 6:10-18)
- And don’t give up or despair! Because God is in control over all of it!

12

Good news 1) God rules over it all

- The vision of the beasts suddenly switches to a scene in heaven (compare action movie, showing another event); v9-10.
- We move from earth to the heavenly throne room
 - The 'Ancient of Days' is God (the Father)
 - White clothing and white hair represent purity and wisdom
 - Thousands of angels serve and worship him
 - God *sits* – he doesn't run around in a panic. He sits on the throne to judge (books were opened)
- The beasts are judged / killed / power taken away at the right time in God's plan (v11-12, 26)

13

Good news 2) a Son of Man will be King

- How will God rule and judge? Through 'one like a son of man' (v13-14)!
 - More than just a human being – this is a divine figure!
 - "coming with the clouds" is said of God in e.g. Isaiah 19:1, and compare the cloud of God's presence in Exodus
 - He is allowed to approach the Ancient of Days – he must be perfect/sinless!
- V14: he receives the eternal kingdom, and all people will worship him!
 - 'An everlasting kingdom' is God's kingdom in 2:44; 4:3, 34; 6:26; yet now it is given to this 'Son of Man'.
- This is Jesus Christ! He is truly God and truly human
 - 'Son of Man' is Jesus' most-used title for himself in the NT
 - See e.g. Matthew 26:64; Mark 2:10, 14:62.
 - Through Jesus' death and resurrection, he has completed the Father's plan and received the eternal kingdom. Matthew 28:18-20.

14

Good news 3) we will reign with him!

- The very good news of this chapter is not only that God is in control, through the Son of Man. More than that, we will receive the eternal kingdom too!
 - See v18, 22, 27
 - Compare 2 Timothy 2:11-12 "... If we endure, we will also reign with him."
 - See also 1 Corinthians 6:3
- Remember, this is how it started for Adam and Eve before the fall, 'dominion' over the earth, under God. This is our future again! Paradise restored!
- But this is again 'already and not yet'
 - We still live in this broken world full of 'raging beasts', with real suffering.
 - Yet, this certain hope for the future gives us every reason to keep going; to stay faithful! The end is secure!

15

Daniel 9 – A prayer and an answer

- Between many complicated visions, we find a beautiful example of the basics of the Christian life: prayer
- Daniel responds to God's word (v1-3)
 - V2 -> see Jeremiah 25:1-12 God's promise of return after 70 years in exile are over.
 - He prays with great mourning, fasting (v3)
 - *Do you pray in response to God's word? Praise for what you see about God; confession when you read about sin; pleading on God's promises, etc. This is what Daniel does!*
- Most of the prayer is confession of sin (v4-14)
- Only one petition/request is made in v15-19, basically: "turn away your anger and fulfil your merciful promise"
- Daniel receives an amazing (but complicated) answer from God in v20-27

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Praise God for who He is!

- Amidst all the confession in v4-14, Daniel describes also who God is – in great contrast with the people!
 - V4 *"O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments..."*
 - V7 *"To you, O Lord, belongs righteousness..."*
 - V9 *"To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness..."*
 - V15,16 *"O Lord our God, who brought your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and have made a name for yourself, as at this day... O Lord, according to all your righteous acts..."*
- We can only pray rightly to Someone we really know!
- Now, after Christ, we can pray to and praise God as Our Father in Heaven [Matthew 6:9] – intimate and personal; yet we should still pray with humility and reverence
 - Compare Hebrews 12:28-29 '... our God is a consuming fire...'

17

Humbly confess your sin

- Most of Daniel's prayer is confession of sin, v4-14.
 - *Is this the case for us? How much do we confess? Do we skip this?*
- Notice how many different descriptions of sin are used!
 - sinned, done wrong, acted wickedly, rebelled, turned aside from your commandments, not listened to prophets, treachery, not obeyed, transgressed your law, refused to obey
 - Sin is not thought of lightly, simply!
- See link with the covenant with Moses in v11; what has happened is fulfilment of those covenant curses
 - (see on 'exile' earlier in this handout)
 - This is why Daniel prays on behalf of his people ('we', 'us'): Israel as a nation had broken God's covenant.
- V13 is perhaps most sad: even in exile, the people have still not repented!
- We can confess sin in knowledge of who God is for us in Christ, so move from confession to thanksgiving!

18

Seek God's glory in your requests!

- In v15-19, Daniel pleads with God to show mercy, to fulfil his promise that Israel/Judah could return to Jerusalem.
 - He remembers God's saving work in Exodus, v15 *"to make for Himself a name that endures to this day"*, i.e. for his own glory!
 - Compare Exodus 3:13-15; 5:2; 6:2-3, 7; 7:5, 17; 9:14-16!
- Notice how Daniel seeks God's glory above all, more than just the comfort or freedom for the people!
 - v16 *"your city Jerusalem, your holy hill..."*
 - v17 *"for your own sake, O Lord, make your face to shine upon your sanctuary, which is desolate..."*
 - v18 *"see... the city that is called by your name."*
 - v19 *"for your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people are called by your name."*
- *Do we have this desire in our requests?!*

19

God can answer beyond expectation!

- V20-23 show how God answered Daniel's prayer
 - "while I was praying..."!
 - The angel Gabriel is sent to Daniel, v21 (as in 8:16) to explain how God would answer, in much greater ways than Daniel expected!
 - Notice v23! Daniel had only just begun, and God already acted! "a word went out... You are greatly loved"
- V24-27 have a short vision-like description of what is going to happen, during "70 weeks" or "sevens"
 - This is a much-debated passage! Perhaps more complicated than the visions in the other chapters. Be humble in the interpretation. This was not given to argue about, but to encourage!
 - Further complicated by difficult translation (see number of footnotes in the Bible)
 - [The slides below summarize my understanding, see a study bible or commentary for alternatives]

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Understanding the 70 'sevens'

- v24-27 answer Daniel's request in v15-19, so we must use the OT context to understand the 70 'sevens'/weeks
 - It is as if Gabriel says: "You prayed about the 70 years, let me tell you about 70 'sevens' that will come. This 70 years until the return of your people is just a foreshadowing of a greater exile and greater return..."
 - 2 Chronicles 36:21 speaks of exile as 'Sabbath rest' -> links to 'weeks'. Background for this in Leviticus 26:33-35, 43: the land enjoys its sabbath years/rest (see Lev. 25 about jubilee)
 - Notice also the 'sevenfold' = complete punishment in Lev. 26:18,21,24 etc. -> Daniel hears about God's answer of seventy-sevens (perfect?) fulfilment/restoration after trouble
 - This is the message of Daniel: God's everlasting kingdom wins after all the 'raging beast'-like human kingdoms have fallen!
- Daniel sees 70 years are over, but v13 shows the crucial repentance (Lev. 26:40) was still missing! So, a greater solution of forgiveness and repentance is needed. That's why the 70 'sevens' point to Christ!

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Understanding the 70 'sevens'

- V24 gives the summary: 6 goals of God's plan/answer
 - "[1] to finish the transgression, [2] to put an end to sin, and [3] to atone for iniquity, [4] to bring in everlasting righteousness, [5] to seal both vision and prophet, and [6] to anoint a most holy place."
 - This will be a true solution to human sin! Compare Jeremiah 31:31-34 and 33:7-9,14-16.
- Detailed in v25-27 (start of v25 signals v24 is summary)
 - 69 'sevens' come, in two parts: first 7, then 62 'sevens'
 - First period of 7 sevens starts with the going out of the word to restore Jerusalem: the decree of Cyrus (Ezra 1) Ends probably with Jerusalem rebuilt in time of Ezra/Nehemiah
 - 69 'sevens' finish [I follow ESV footnote / NIV translation] with the "coming of an Anointed One, a ruler/prince"
 - V26 also mentions this Anointed One (Messiah!) – I believe both refer to Jesus Christ. He "shall be cut off" = crucifixion.

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Understanding the 70 'sevens'

- So, it seems the first 69 'sevens' are like a sevenfold exile until the Messiah Jesus comes, to bring in a great year of Jubilee [Lev. 25], the 70th 'seven' of great blessing.
- But that period would be a long and hard wait!
 - Remember the other visions/dreams: beasts rage until the kingdom of God is completed for us! (see on ch7 above)
 - V25, the city would be rebuilt, "but in a troubled time"
 - V26, *"And the people of the prince who is to come [not about Jesus, but an earthly ruler] shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed."*
 - V27 is complicated in the details, what it exactly refers to. But it picks up language we saw about the 'little horns' in ch7+8. A great persecutor / anti-christ.
 - Compare Mark 13: wars, famines, desolations: hardship!
 - The 70th 'seven' seems to be the church age, the time between the two comings of Jesus (remember how OT prophecies often combine/merge the two!) (perhaps foreshadowed by 70AD?)
 - *But the end is 'decreed' – God's plan is firm! Keep going!*

23

Daniel 8 & 10-12 – main lessons

- Ch8 and esp. 11 describe detailed history of 2nd and 3rd empires -> shows God is in complete control over world history. This was all predicted, centuries before!
 - The 'little horn' (8:23-25; 11:21-35) is Seleucid king Antiochus IV 'Epiphanes' ('God manifest'), a wicked persecutor who ruled cruelly over Judah from 175-164BC. The books of 1&2 Maccabees (Apocrypha) describe this period.
- Daniel 10 introduces final vision of ch10-12 – showing the spiritual side behind the earthly wars & chaos.
 - Compare 2 Kings 6:8-17; Ephesians 6:10-18
- From 11:36, history of 3rd empire and Antiochus fades into a picture of final opposition against God, contrasting the 'way of the wicked' and the 'way of the wise' (12:3)
- 12:5-13 call us to stay faithful, to persevere, till the very end (v9, 13). We may have limited understanding (v5-9) but can trust God with the outcome, and hope for glory!

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