

Daniel — The Statesman-Seer in Babylon

Series: 30 Prophets of the Bible - Dr. Randy White

I. Identity of Daniel

Name and Known Facts

- “Daniel” (Hebrew: דָּנִיֵּאל, *Daniyyel*) means “God is my judge.”
- Daniel was of Judah, likely of royal or noble background, taken to Babylon in the first deportation under Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 1:1–6).
- He was given the Babylonian name Belteshazzar, yet the book continues to remember him as Daniel.
- He lived as an exile, court official, interpreter of dreams, receiver of visions, and faithful servant of the God of Israel.

Was Daniel a Prophet?

- Daniel is not called “the prophet” inside the book of Daniel.
- Jesus explicitly calls him “Daniel the prophet” in Matthew 24:15.
- Daniel is therefore prophetically authoritative by Christ’s own testimony.
- Functionally, Daniel is a statesman-seer: a man in government service who receives and records divine revelation about Gentile empires, Israel, and the end.

II. Historical Setting

Babylonian Exile

- Daniel’s public life begins after Babylon subdues Jerusalem in the days of Jehoiakim (Dan. 1:1–2).
- The vessels of the temple are carried to the house of Babylon’s god, setting the central conflict: whose kingdom and whose God will prevail?
- Daniel serves through the Babylonian empire and into the Medo-Persian period (Dan. 1:21; 6:28).

A Long Public Ministry

- Daniel is a young man in Daniel 1 and an aged man by the time of Cyrus.
- His life spans the rise and fall of Babylon and the beginning of Persia’s rule.
- He ministers from inside Gentile power, not from Jerusalem’s temple, palace, or prophetic school.

III. The Man Daniel

Conviction Without Exhibition

- Daniel “purposed in his heart” not to defile himself with the king’s meat or wine (Dan. 1:8).
- His faithfulness is firm but not theatrical; he requests, proposes, and lets God vindicate the matter.
- Daniel shows that godliness in exile may require quiet refusal more than public spectacle.

Wisdom in Public Office

- Daniel is trained in the learning and tongue of the Chaldeans (Dan. 1:4).
- God gives him knowledge, skill, and understanding in visions and dreams (Dan. 1:17).
- He serves pagan kings without surrendering the claims of the God of heaven.
- His excellence is not merely administrative; it is theological witness in the court of empire.

Prayer as a Habit of Loyalty

- Daniel prays when threatened by death (Dan. 2:17–23).
- Daniel prays when forbidden by law (Dan. 6:10).
- Daniel prays in confession and prophetic expectation when reading Jeremiah’s seventy years (Dan. 9:1–19).
- His prayer life is not crisis-only; it is the settled rhythm of a loyal Jew in exile.

IV. Nature of Daniel’s Ministry

Interpreter of the Times

- Daniel interprets Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of the image, showing the succession of Gentile kingdoms and the final kingdom of God (Dan. 2).

- He interprets the handwriting on the wall, announcing Babylon’s fall to Belshazzar (Dan. 5).
- He receives visions of beasts, horns, kings, weeks, and final conflict (Dan. 7–12).

Witness Before Gentile Kings

- Nebuchadnezzar learns that “the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men” (Dan. 4:17).
- Belshazzar is judged for pride and sacrilege (Dan. 5:22–28).
- Darius sees Daniel delivered from the lions and honors the living God (Dan. 6:25–27).
- Daniel’s ministry repeatedly confronts empire with heaven’s rule.

V. Major Themes

The God of Heaven Rules

- Daniel’s God gives kingdoms, removes kings, reveals secrets, delivers servants, and appoints the end.
- Babylon can change Daniel’s location, education, diet, language, and name, but not his God.
- The book is not merely about surviving exile; it is about God’s sovereignty over Gentile dominion.

Israel’s Future Is Not Lost

- Daniel’s visions move beyond his own lifetime to Israel’s future trouble, restoration, and kingdom hope.
- The seventy weeks prophecy is especially Israel-centered, concerning Daniel’s people and holy city (Dan. 9:24).
- Daniel 12 anticipates resurrection, final deliverance, and the wise shining as the brightness of the firmament.

Prophecy and the Lord Jesus

- Jesus cites “Daniel the prophet” when speaking of the abomination of desolation (Matt. 24:15).
- This ties Daniel’s prophecy directly to the Olivet Discourse and future tribulation.
- Daniel’s “Son of man” vision (Dan. 7:13–14) provides royal, heavenly kingdom language later used by Christ.

VI. Structure of the Book

Daniel 1–6 – Daniel in the Courts of Kings

- Daniel and his friends are tested in Babylon (Dan. 1).
- Nebuchadnezzar’s image dream reveals the course of Gentile kingdoms (Dan. 2).
- The fiery furnace, Nebuchadnezzar’s humbling, Belshazzar’s feast, and the lions’ den show God’s rule over rulers (Dan. 3–6).

Daniel 7–12 – Daniel’s Visions of the Future

- Four beasts and the Son of man set earthly empire against heavenly kingdom (Dan. 7).
- The ram, goat, and little horn focus attention on later Gentile conflict (Dan. 8).
- The seventy weeks give a prophetic timetable concerning Israel and Jerusalem (Dan. 9).
- The final vision looks to conflict, deliverance, resurrection, and sealed words until the time of the end (Dan. 10–12).

VII. Why Daniel Matters

The Prophet in an Unusual Place

- Daniel proves that prophetic ministry is not limited to wilderness preachers or temple courts.
- A prophet may wear the clothing of a statesman and serve in the machinery of empire.
- His life joins personal holiness, public wisdom, and prophetic vision.
- Daniel is the man who stood before kings but bowed only before God.