

Daniel - Introduction, Part 1

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COURSE  COMMENTARY 



Goals

- **Historic Context of Daniel**

Gain an understanding of the historical setting within which the events of the Book of Daniel transpired.



Image provided by [Juan de la Corte](#) (1580 - 1663). "The burning of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar's Army." This image is in the public domain.

- **Daniel as Key for Understanding Prophecy**

Understand how prophecies within Daniel frame a comprehensive understanding of prophetic themes found throughout Scripture, especially in the [Book of Revelation](#).

- **Understand Attacks on the Book of Daniel**

Inoculate the student concerning critical views of the Book of Daniel.



Image courtesy of [John Vachon](#). This image is in the public domain.

- **Apply Insights from Daniel**
Observe, interpret, and **apply** what we learn in the book.



Attacks

- **Why Attack the Book of Daniel?**
Since the Book of Daniel is part of God's Word, believers should expect it to be attacked by those opposed to God. Yet this particular book has been the target of criticism more than other books of the Old Testament because of certain characteristics: **1)** the close correspondence between the Book of Daniel and the Book of Revelation; **2)** detailed historical predictions within Daniel which found fulfillment in events involving the Seleucid and Ptolemaic dynasties culminating in the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (Dan. **11-12**) recorded in the book of 1st Maccabees.
- **Why Daniel Must be Rejected by Skeptics**
If the Book of Daniel was written in the sixth century B.C. and accurately predicted events in the second century B.C. and the time of Christ, then: **1)** the source of Daniel's information is supernatural; **2)** God exists and is an active participant in the affairs of history. These conclusions are **unacceptable** to those who believe that God doesn't exist and the future cannot be foretold. Therefore, they **must** find a way to dismiss the contents of the book. The various "attacks" on the book represent persistent attempts to reinterpret the evidence to avoid the logical conclusion leading to God.
- **Supposition Combined with Fragmentary Records**
The attacks are as varied as the critics of the book, but generally share two characteristics: **1)** argument based on supposition and casting aspersion; **2)** appeal to fragmentary secular historical records--or the complete lack thereof.
- **Porphyrus - An Early Skeptic**
Perhaps the earliest skeptic is a philosopher by the name of Porphyry who lived in the third century A.D. His writings are no longer available, but we know about his views from the church father Jerome who wrote of him in a commentary on Daniel. Porphyry denied that predictive prophecy was possible and sought other ways to explain the accurate predictions in the Book of Daniel.
- **Skeptics Answered To No Avail**
Jerome mentions that "able reply" was made by various church fathers such as Eusebius, Apollinarius, and Methodius. Yet the same basic argument of Porphyry continues to be parroted from his time to today. This tells us that the arguments of the skeptics are merely **symptomatic** of a deeper root cause -- rational humanism and the complete rejection of the possibility of supernatural revelation from God.
- **Attacks from Those Who Claim the Name of Christ**
Some of the most puzzling attacks on the legitimacy of the Book of Daniel are by those who purport to uphold the cause of Christ. Although this "friendly fire" may be surprising to the new

believer, it is a disappointing reality all students of Scripture will eventually encounter. It is most frequently found among liberal academics who are often seminary professors. Torn between allegiance to Christ and acceptance by academia, these compromising scholars generally satisfy neither. A ready example is provided in a recent commentary on Daniel by a seminary professor:

“I believe that the God of Israel who is also the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is capable of knowing future events and thus of revealing them, and is capable of inspiring people to write both history and fiction, both actual prophecy and quasi-prophecy, in their own name, anonymously, or—in certain circumstances—pseudonymously...”

- **No One Risks Death for Fiction**

The same scholar dedicates his commentary to several individuals by writing,

“... may they stand with Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.”

But if Daniel contains fiction, why should people risk their lives for the faith—as did the real historical figures in the book and countless other martyrs down through history?

Guidelines

- **Read Normally**

Read the text normally recognizing figures of speech and symbolism. Follow the *Golden Rule of Interpretation* as given by D. L. Cooper:

“When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense, therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise.”

- **Compare Related Passages**

The Bible is its own best interpreter. Use a cross-reference Bible or other tool like the *Treasury of Scripture Knowledge*. Related passages are the best way to understand obscure passages, especially where symbols are involved (e.g., sun and moon). The “safety net” for Bible interpretation is found in the phrase, “Scripture interprets Scripture.”

- **Recognize Supernatural Origin**

The Scriptures are not a production fueled by the cleverness, motivation and literary analyses of its many authors. The careful crafting of related passages is the fingerprint of the *Holy Spirit*. Although the motivation and thoughts of each author impinge to a greater or lesser degree on the text, be cautious about attributing subtle aspects of the text to the design of the author. This is especially the case in prophetic passages (e.g., visions and dreams) where the author did not control the content, sequence of presentation, or emphasis (1 Peter 1:10-11).

- **Details are Divine**

Details in the text are there for a reason. God included them because they carry some significance. They certainly wouldn't have been preserved for thousands of years if God didn't intend us to pay attention to them.

- **Seek the Understanding of the Original Recipients**

Believe that language, created by God, is sufficient to communicate what He intended. Meaning is constrained both by the author and *by the normative understanding of the original recipients* within the historical context it was delivered. God can broaden the meaning or application of His original promises, but they cannot be reinterpreted into meaning something different than the original recipients would have understood. God cannot and will not mislead. Nor did He communicate in a way which is insufficient for proper understanding by His sincere followers.

- **Pray**



Pray before and while studying the Scriptures. Ask God to help you to understand what you are reading,

“Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law (Psalms 119:18).”

Ask for spiritual discernment (1 Corinthians 2:13-14).

Apply

Observe and listen to the Spirit speak to your heart regarding how a passage or theme applies to your own life, those you fellowship with, or the leaders or country where you live. Although not all passages are written *to us*, they are all written *for our understanding* and application. This may, in turn, trigger additional thoughts about things to pray about. Be sure that application comes after gaining a proper understanding of the context of the passage. Avoid jumping straight to application before observation and interpretation.

The Scripture Application Cycle



- **Rest in the Unknown**

If a passage is puzzling, don't try to force an understanding from it or make it fit one's preconceptions. Instead, set the passage aside and move on with other study and make it a matter of prayer. Over time, God is faithful to provide the keys to understanding today what was puzzling yesterday. Most "Bible difficulties" fall into this category. Time, maturity, or teaching from another source can usually unlock these stumbling blocks--often yielding a hidden insight along the way.