



# Daniel

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GENERAL EDITORS

ILLUSTRATING THE TEXT

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This commentary is dedicated to my students at Biola University who, for nearly four decades, have partnered with me in a close reading of Daniel. From their widely varied disciplines, rich experiences, and maturing knowledge of the faith, they have helped to shape my ever-growing understanding of this literary and theological masterpiece of sacred Scripture. More importantly, we have grown together in understanding the person and work of the Most High God of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

A special word of gratitude is due to Patrick B. Flynn, my teaching assistant for several years at Biola University and primary research assistant throughout this project during his graduate studies at Talbot School of Theology. His academic skills, insightful critiques, and rigorous labor in the Lord proved vital to bringing this commentary to publication. Appreciation is also in order for my current teaching assistant, Kayle J. Curley, a Torrey Honors student at Biola, who thoughtfully and carefully crafted the index for the volume. Finally, I am indebted to Talbot for providing me with research leave to work on this project.

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# Contents

List of Sidebars and Tables	ix
Welcome to the Teach the Text	
Commentary Series	xii
Introduction to the Teach the Text	
Commentary Series	xiii
Abbreviations	xv
Introduction to Daniel	1
Daniel 1:1–7	10
<i>God Subjugates Judah under Babylon</i>	
Daniel 1:8–16	16
<i>Daniel's Resolve Incurs God's Favor</i>	
Daniel 1:17–21	22
<i>God Gifts Daniel and His Friends</i>	
Daniel 2:1–16	28
<i>Nebuchadnezzar Is Troubled by a Dream</i>	
Daniel 2:17–30	34
<i>Daniel's Praise for God's Wisdom</i>	
Daniel 2:31–49	40
<i>Daniel Interprets Nebuchadnezzar's Dream</i>	
Additional Insights	46
<i>The Kingdoms in Daniel 2 and 7</i>	
Daniel 3:1–12	48
<i>Nebuchadnezzar Builds the Statue</i>	
Daniel 3:13–23	54
<i>Three Judeans Remain Faithful</i>	
Daniel 3:24–30	60
<i>God Rescues the Faithful from the Furnace</i>	
Daniel 4:1–18	66
<i>Nebuchadnezzar's Testimony and Tree Dream</i>	
Daniel 4:19–27	72
<i>Daniel Interprets the Dream and Confronts Nebuchadnezzar</i>	
Daniel 4:28–37	78
<i>Nebuchadnezzar's Judgment and Repentance</i>	
Daniel 5:1–9	84
<i>The Handwriting on the Wall</i>	
Daniel 5:10–17	90
<i>Daniel Confronts Belshazzar</i>	
Daniel 5:18–31	96
<i>Belshazzar's Judgment and Babylon's Fall</i>	
Additional Insights	102
<i>Darius and/or Cyrus in Media and Persia</i>	
Daniel 6:1–9	104
<i>Daniel's Success and Darius's Decree</i>	
Daniel 6:10–18	110
<i>Daniel's Fidelity and Death Sentence</i>	
Daniel 6:19–28	116
<i>God Rescues Daniel from the Lions</i>	
Daniel 7:1–14	122
<i>Ancient of Days and Son of Man</i>	
Daniel 7:15–28	128
<i>Triumph of God's People and Kingdom</i>	
Daniel 8:1–14	134
<i>Spiritual Warfare and Jewish Suffering</i>	
Daniel 8:15–27	140
<i>The Rise of Media, Persia, and Greece</i>	

Daniel 9:1–6.....	146	Additional Insights .....	178
<i>Jeremiah’s “Seventy Years”</i>		<i>Naming the Unnamed Kings in Daniel 11:2–28</i>	
Daniel 9:7–19.....	152	Daniel 11:21–39 .....	180
<i>Daniel’s Prayer for Israel and Judah</i>		<i>A Contemptible Person</i>	
Daniel 9:20–27 .....	158	Daniel 11:40–12:13 .....	186
<i>Gabriel Brings an Answer to Daniel’s Prayer</i>		<i>Resurrection and Accountability</i>	
Additional Insights .....	164		
<i>The “Seventy ‘Sevens’” of Daniel 9:24–27</i>			
Daniel 10:1–11:1.....	166	Notes .....	193
<i>Daniel’s Final Revelation</i>		Bibliography .....	201
Daniel 11:2–20 .....	172	Image Credits .....	207
<i>From Persia to Greece</i>		Contributors .....	208
		Index .....	209

# List of Sidebars and Tables

## Sidebars

- Ambiguous Dates and Numbers  
in Daniel 12
- Interpretive Challenges of Narrative  
in the Old Testament 17
- Wise Men in the Book of Daniel 24
- Susanna 31
- Theocentric Structure of Daniel's  
Prayer 35
- God's Covenants and Kingdom 42
- The Prayer of Azariah and the Song  
of the Three Jews 56
- Nondivine, Heavenly Beings  
in Daniel 61
- Chapter and Verse Divisions in the Hebrew  
Bible 62
- Role of Prophet and Seer in the Old  
Testament 73
- The Prayer of Nabonidus* 80
- Queens and Queen Mothers in the Old  
Testament 91
- Joseph and Esther Narratives 112
- Bel and the Dragon 118
- "Son of Man" Imagery in the Bible 125
- Symbolism of Three and a Half Years  
in Daniel 130

- Judah's "Seventy Years" of Exile 148
- Deuteronomic Theology of Exile  
and Return 153
- Masoretic Punctuation in the Hebrew  
Bible 159
- John's Use of Daniel in the Book  
of Revelation 168
- References to the "Antichrist"  
in the Bible 183
- Sheol in the Old Testament 187

## Tables

- Chronological and Stylistic Literary  
Structure of Daniel 5
- Relation of Babylonian Kings  
to Nebuchadnezzar 86
- Key Events in Media and Persia in Relation  
to Darius/Cyrus 102
- Symbolic Visions of Daniel 7 and 8 122
- Appearance Visions of Daniel 9  
and 10–12 146
- Correlation of the Language of John  
(Revelation) and Daniel 168
- Kings of Persia 172
- Greek Kings in Daniel 11:5–35 174

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# Welcome to the Teach the Text Commentary Series

Why another commentary series? That was the question the general editors posed when Baker Books asked us to produce this series. Is there something that we can offer to pastors and teachers that is not currently being offered by other commentary series, or that can be offered in a more helpful way? After carefully researching the needs of pastors who teach the text on a weekly basis, we concluded that yes, more can be done; this commentary is carefully designed to fill an important gap.

The technicality of modern commentaries often overwhelms readers with details that are tangential to the main purpose of the text. Discussions of source and redaction criticism, as well as detailed surveys of secondary literature, seem far removed from preaching and teaching the Word. Rather than wade through technical discussions, pastors often turn to devotional commentaries, which may contain exegetical weaknesses, misuse the Greek and Hebrew languages, and lack hermeneutical sophistication. There is a need for a commentary that utilizes the best of biblical scholarship

but also presents the material in a clear, concise, attractive, and user-friendly format.

This commentary is designed for that purpose—to provide a ready reference for the exposition of the biblical text, giving easy access to information that a pastor needs to communicate the text effectively. To that end, the commentary is divided into carefully selected preaching units, each covered in six pages (with carefully regulated word counts both in the passage as a whole and in each subsection). Pastors and teachers engaged in weekly preparation thus know that they will be reading approximately the same amount of material on a week-by-week basis.

Each passage begins with a concise summary of the central message, or “Big Idea,” of the passage and a list of its main themes. This is followed by a more detailed interpretation of the text, including the literary context of the passage, historical background material, and interpretive insights. While drawing on the best of biblical scholarship, this material is clear, concise, and to the point. Technical material is kept

to a minimum, with endnotes pointing the reader to more detailed discussion and additional resources.

A second major focus of this commentary is on the preaching and teaching process itself. Few commentaries today help the pastor/teacher move from the meaning of the text to its effective communication. Our goal is to bridge this gap. In addition to interpreting the text in the “Understanding the Text” section, each six-page unit contains a “Teaching the Text” section and an “Illustrating the Text” section. The teaching section points to the key theological

themes of the passage and ways to communicate these themes to today’s audiences. The illustration section provides ideas and examples for retaining the interest of hearers and connecting the message to daily life.

The creative format of this commentary arises from our belief that the Bible is not just a record of God’s dealings in the past but is the living Word of God, “alive and active” and “sharper than any double-edged sword” (Heb. 4:12). Our prayer is that this commentary will help to unleash that transforming power for the glory of God.

The General Editors

# Introduction to the Teach the Text Commentary Series

This series is designed to provide a ready reference for teaching the biblical text, giving easy access to information that is needed to communicate a passage effectively. To that end, the commentary is carefully divided into units that are faithful to the biblical authors' ideas and of an appropriate length for teaching or preaching.

The following standard sections are offered in each unit.

1. *Big Idea.* For each unit the commentary identifies the primary theme, or “Big Idea,” that drives both the passage and the commentary.
2. *Key Themes.* Together with the Big Idea, the commentary addresses in bullet-point fashion the key ideas presented in the passage.
3. *Understanding the Text.* This section focuses on the exegesis of the text and includes several sections.
  - a. *The Text in Context.* Here the author gives a brief explanation of how the unit fits into the flow of the text around it, including

reference to the rhetorical strategy of the book and the unit's contribution to the purpose of the book.

- b. *Outline/Structure.* For some literary genres (e.g., epistles), a brief exegetical outline may be provided to guide the reader through the structure and flow of the passage.
- c. *Historical and Cultural Background.* This section addresses historical and cultural background information that may illuminate a verse or passage.
- d. *Interpretive Insights.* This section provides information needed for a clear understanding of the passage. The intention of the author is to be highly selective and concise rather than exhaustive and expansive.
- e. *Theological Insights.* In this very brief section the commentary identifies a few carefully selected theological insights about the passage.

4. *Teaching the Text.* Under this second main heading the commentary offers guidance for teaching the text. In this section the author lays out the main themes and applications of the passage. These are linked carefully to the Big Idea and are represented in the Key Themes.
5. *Illustrating the Text.* At this point in the commentary the writers partner with a team of pastor/teachers to provide suggestions for relevant and contemporary illustrations from current culture, entertainment, history, the Bible, news, literature, ethics, biography, daily life, medicine, and over forty other categories. They are designed to spark creative thinking for preachers and teachers and to help them design illustrations that bring alive the passage's key themes and message.

# Abbreviations

## Old Testament

Gen.	Genesis	2 Chron.	2 Chronicles	Dan.	Daniel
Exod.	Exodus	Ezra	Ezra	Hosea	Hosea
Lev.	Leviticus	Neh.	Nehemiah	Joel	Joel
Num.	Numbers	Esther	Esther	Amos	Amos
Deut.	Deuteronomy	Job	Job	Obad.	Obadiah
Josh.	Joshua	Ps(s).	Psalm(s)	Jon.	Jonah
Judg.	Judges	Prov.	Proverbs	Mic.	Micah
Ruth	Ruth	Eccles.	Ecclesiastes	Nah.	Nahum
1 Sam.	1 Samuel	Song	Song of Songs	Hab.	Habakkuk
2 Sam.	2 Samuel	Isa.	Isaiah	Zeph.	Zephaniah
1 Kings	1 Kings	Jer.	Jeremiah	Hag.	Haggai
2 Kings	2 Kings	Lam.	Lamentations	Zech.	Zechariah
1 Chron.	1 Chronicles	Ezek.	Ezekiel	Mal.	Malachi

## New Testament

Matt.	Matthew	Eph.	Ephesians	Heb.	Hebrews
Mark	Mark	Phil.	Philippians	James	James
Luke	Luke	Col.	Colossians	1 Pet.	1 Peter
John	John	1 Thess.	1 Thessalonians	2 Pet.	2 Peter
Acts	Acts	2 Thess.	2 Thessalonians	1 John	1 John
Rom.	Romans	1 Tim.	1 Timothy	2 John	2 John
1 Cor.	1 Corinthians	2 Tim.	2 Timothy	3 John	3 John
2 Cor.	2 Corinthians	Titus	Titus	Jude	Jude
Gal.	Galatians	Philem.	Philemon	Rev.	Revelation

## General

//	parallel	esp.	especially
ad loc.	<i>ad locum</i> , at the place	fig.	figure
ANE	ancient Near East	n(n).	note(s)
cf.	<i>confer</i> , compare	no(s).	number(s)
chap(s).	chapter(s)	NT	New Testament
contra	against	OT	Old Testament
e.g.	<i>exempli gratia</i> , for example	v(v).	verse(s)

## Ancient Text Types and Versions

LXX	Septuagint (ancient Greek version of the OT)
MT	Masoretic Text
OG	Old Greek (earliest translation of Daniel in the LXX)

## Apocrypha and Septuagint

Bel	Bel and the Dragon
1–2 Esd.	1–2 Esdras
Jdt.	Judith
1–4 Macc.	1–4 Maccabees
Wis.	Wisdom of Solomon

## Modern Versions

ESV	English Standard Version
KJV	King James Version
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NIV	New International Version, 2011
NJPS	New Jewish Publication Society, Tanakh Translation
NKJV	New King James Version
NLT	New Living Translation
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version

## Greek and Latin Works

### Arrian

Anab. Anabasis

### Diodorus Siculus

Bib. hist. Library of History (*Bibliotheca historica*)

### Herodotus

Hist. Histories

### Josephus

Ant. Jewish Antiquities (*Antiquitates Judaicae*)  
Ag. Ap. Against Apion

### Polybius

Hist. Histories

## Xenophon

Cyr. Cyropaedia

## Secondary Sources

ANEHST	Mark W. Chavalas, ed. <i>The Ancient Near East: Historical Sources in Translation</i> . Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006
ANETPP	James B. Pritchard, ed. <i>The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures</i> . Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011
BDB	Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. <i>The New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon</i> . Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1979
HALOT	Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner. <i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Revised by W. Baumgartner and J. J. Stamm. Translated and edited by M. E. J. Richardson. 2 vols. Boston: Brill, 2001
IVPBBCOT	John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas. <i>The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament</i> . Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000
NBD	D. R. W. Wood, ed. <i>New Bible Dictionary</i> . 3rd ed. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996
ZIBBCOT	John H. Walton, ed. <i>Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Old Testament</i> . 5 vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009

# Introduction to Daniel

Five introductory matters are foundational to teaching the book of Daniel: its authorship and composition, its twofold historical emphasis, its twofold literary structure, its use of an apocalyptic style of writing, and its canonical theology. These considerations guide us in interpreting Daniel on its own terms as the author intended.

## **Authorship and Composition**

The book of Daniel never explicitly reveals its author or time of composition.

In some places Daniel is described in third-person

narrative (1:8; 6:1), while elsewhere he writes in the form of a first-person dream/vision report (7:2; 10:2). The complex arrangement of the book suggests that a single author and/or editor oversaw its final composition. There is no reason why Daniel could not have completed this manuscript in his mideighties, around the time of Cyrus's third year, 536–535 BC (cf. 10:1), as Daniel possessed unusual gifts and abilities in literature and language (1:4, 17).

A scroll containing a large portion of the book of Daniel was discovered in cave 4 (shown here) at Qumran. Other fragments containing the text from Daniel have been identified from at least eight other scrolls that are part of the Dead Sea Scrolls materials. Dating from the second century BC to the first century AD, these manuscripts give support for an early composition date for the book of Daniel.



Such a view has been the long-standing tradition of Jews (Josephus, *Ant.* 10.11.7, first century AD) and Christians (Jerome, *Commentary on Daniel*, fifth century AD), although the internal and external evidence does not allow for a rigid dogmatism. Moreover, nothing would be lost exegetically or theologically if Daniel were not the last, inspired editor.

The pagan philosopher Porphyry (third century AD; see Jerome, *Commentary on Daniel*) foreshadowed the modern critical assessment of the date and authorship of Daniel. He argued that any writer who knew second-century events with the detail found in Daniel 11 must have lived at the time of the persecutions of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (171–164 BC). This so-called Maccabean thesis reemerged in the nineteenth century. The heated and polarizing polemic of modernists versus fundamentalists continued into the next century. By this time, most liberal-critical scholars agreed that an unknown second-century BC author created this book in the name of Daniel. To be fair, most of them were not arguing that the intent of such an author was to deceive his readers, for pseudopigraphic literature from that time is common. Some even would speak of a God-inspired, Maccabean author who wrote in the name of the sixth-century BC Daniel. Yet they argued that this multistage process began in the third century BC with the writing of an Aramaic book of “court tales” (Dan. 1–6), to which the “vision” of chapter 7 was added. Daniel 8–12, then, originated in the Maccabean era (around 164 BC), when the entire book was completed and reworked.

In addition to challenging the idea of a genuine, distant-future, apocalyptic vision,

skeptics today cite other objections to Danielic authorship. First, they point out that the book contains a small number of Persian and Greek loanwords. In response, one can argue that Daniel lived into the Persian era, when ancient Greece existed; furthermore, scribes who copied the early manuscripts may have updated these terms.<sup>1</sup> Second, skeptics assert that some questionable historical references to the sixth century exist, such as Darius the Mede (who cannot be verified outside of Daniel). In response, the existence of Belshazzar as king was denied until confirming Babylonian documents containing his name were discovered in the 1860s. Third, certain theological concepts, such as resurrection, angels, and messiah, are better known in the Greek era. In response, this argument assumes a late dating of Daniel, as well as other Old Testament books that mention or allude to such ideas. Fourth, Daniel appears in the last of the three sections of the Hebrew Bible—Law, Prophets, and Writings—suggesting the “Prophets” section is closed by 164 BC.<sup>2</sup> In response, the book’s placement may result from its narrative and apocalyptic style and the minimal traditional “prophetic” work of Daniel (chaps. 4–5). In final response, fragments of Daniel appear among the Dead Sea Scrolls from the second century BC—remarkably quick for a writing to be recognized as sacred Scripture.<sup>3</sup>

In contrast to seeking resolution for the question of date and authorship—which is not essential to understanding the book’s message—this commentary proceeds from four convictions. First, as part of sacred Scripture this book is fully inspired and authoritative. Second, the narratives are historically accurate. Third, Daniel saw



The Neo-Babylonian Empire  
in the sixth century BC.

and recorded summaries of his own visions. Fourth, the book's literary-structural intricacies point to one final editor—who likely is Daniel.

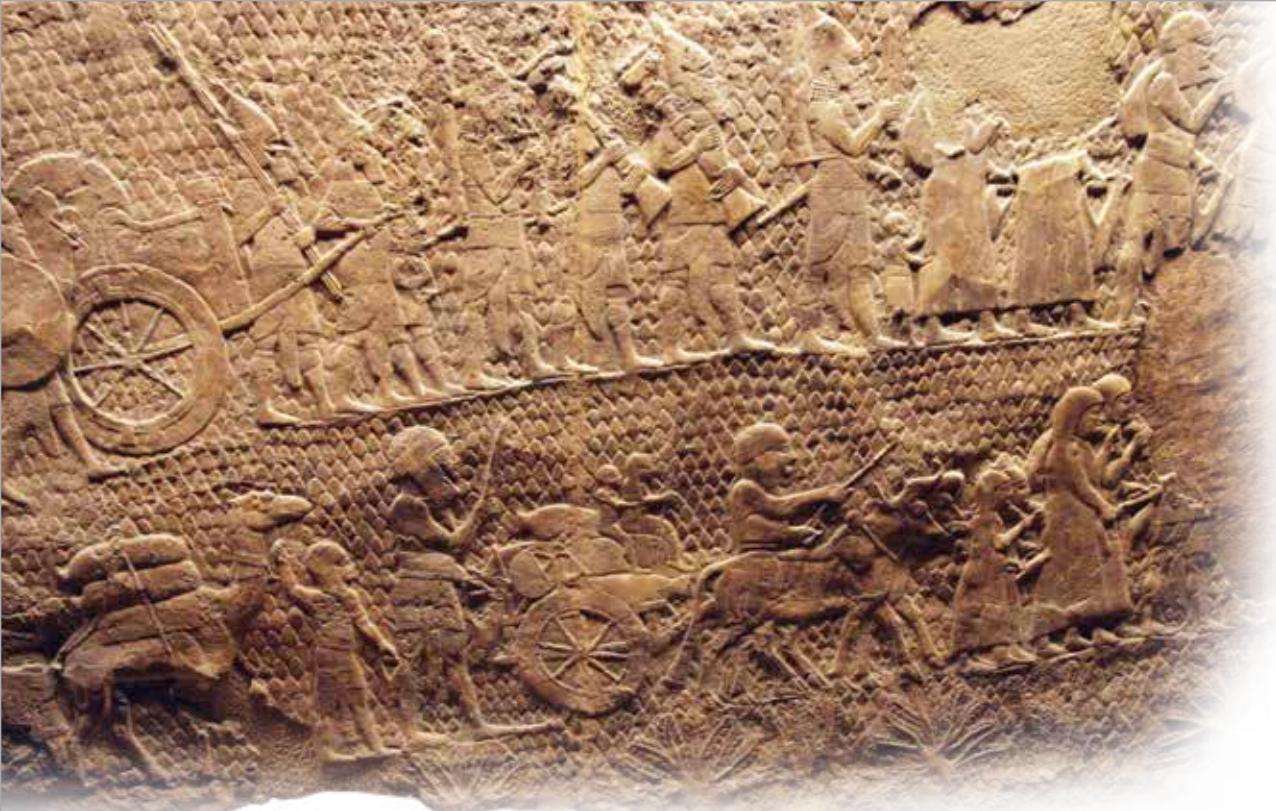
### Twofold Historical Emphasis

Daniel explicitly names four kingdoms that dominate Judah for nearly five centuries (with an emphasis on the first and fourth): Babylon, Media, Persia, and Greece. He highlights Judah's exile under Babylon (sixth century BC) in the narratives of chapters 1–6. Then, in contrast, the apocalyptic visions in chapters 7–12 focus on Jewish persecution in a partially restored Judean province under the Greeks (second century BC).

#### Babylon

Daniel 1–6 spans the rise and fall of Neo-Babylonia (605–539 BC), including

its conquest by Media and Persia. Chapters 1–4 reflect the reign of its first king, Nebuchadnezzar II (605–562 BC), whose unparalleled forty-three-year rule followed the conquest of Assyria (with the help of Media) by his father, Nabopolassar. Assyria had conquered the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BC, scattering its people around the Fertile Crescent. As crowned prince, Nebuchadnezzar helped his father capture Nineveh (612 BC) and Carchemish (605 BC), dividing the Assyrian Empire between the Medes to the north and the Babylonians (or Chaldeans) to the south. After Nabopolassar's death, Nebuchadnezzar conquered and exiled the southern kingdom of Judah in three deportations, which occurred in 605, 597, and 586 BC. Daniel 1 recounts his subjugation of the Davidic king Jehoiakim in 605 BC, while chapters 2–4 reflect settings later in his rule.



Ignoring the reigns of lesser kings, Daniel 5–6 brings the reader to Babylon’s fall under Belshazzar (553–539 BC), who was coruling with his father, Nabonidus, until their defeat by the Persians. This event ended the approximately “seventy-year” exile of Judah (Jer. 25:11–12; 29:10) and was followed by the Jews’ return to Jerusalem during the spring of the first year of Cyrus the Persian (539–538 BC; cf. 2 Chron. 36:22–23).

#### Greece

Although Daniel receives his apocalyptic visions (chaps. 7–12) in the days of Belshazzar of Babylon (7:1; 8:1), Darius the Mede (9:1), and Cyrus the Persian (10:1), these visions consistently focus on the domination of Judea by Greece (333–164 BC)—the book’s second historical emphasis. After brief references to the rulers of Media and Persia, the text transitions to

The narratives in Daniel span the seventy-year Babylonian exile of the inhabitants of Judah. Nebuchadnezzar ordered three deportations, which occurred in 605, 597, and 586 BC, during his military campaigns against Jerusalem. This Assyrian palace relief shows an even earlier deportation when Israelite families were sent into exile after their city, Lachish, was conquered by the armies of the Assyrian king Sennacherib (700–692 BC).

Greece’s Alexander the Great, who defeated Persia, extending his empire east to India and south to Ethiopia. After his premature death (323 BC), his four generals divided the land into successor kingdoms: Greece and Macedon, Thrace and Asia Minor, Egypt and Judea, and Syria and Babylon. Two quickly became warring factions: the Ptolemies in Egypt (south of Judea; dominant 323–146 BC) and the Seleucids in Syria (north of Judea; dominant 312–164 BC). Rulers from these divisions appear unnamed, although identifiable, in

Daniel 11 as the kings of the “South” and the “North.”

The visions in Daniel 7–12 focus on Jewish persecution in Jerusalem under the Seleucid ruler Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175–164 BC). While traveling through Judea to and from his campaigns against the Ptolemies in Egypt (169–167 BC), Antiochus attacked Jerusalem, desecrated the temple, and Hellenized many Jews by force (1 Macc. 1; 2 Macc. 5–6; Dan. 8:11; 11:31). His actions caused a family of pious Jews to instigate the Maccabean Revolts (167–164 BC), which led to the Hasmonean Kingdom (104–64 BC) in the ancient homeland of Israel, from Dan to Beersheba on both sides of the Jordan River (1 Macc. 2–5; 2 Macc. 8–15). This was the most significant Israelite occupation of this land since David and Solomon’s extensive kingdom from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, Euphrates (cf. Gen. 15:18; 1 Kings 8:65 [“Lebo Hamath” is on the way to the Euphrates]). Judean possession of that kingdom was lost after Solomon’s death in the tenth

century BC. Daniel only alludes to the rise of Rome as “the western coastlands” (11:30) and the Jewish revolts that would begin in 167 BC, giving “a little help” to the persecuted (11:34).

A few passages in Daniel reach beyond these two historical contexts—such as the final establishment of God’s kingdom (2:44; 7:27) and the final resurrection (12:2). Nevertheless, understanding the majority of Daniel is enriched by a basic knowledge of Babylonian and Greek history.

### Twofold Literary Structure

Understanding Daniel’s literary structure is important for teaching and preaching because the author shapes his essential message through it.<sup>4</sup> Similar to its two-fold historical emphasis, the book’s structure is also twofold, and at the same time, slightly overlapping to form a tightly woven unity. It includes a two-part chronological arrangement, reflecting different literary styles (narratives in chaps. 1–6 and visions

**Table 1: Chronological and Stylistic Literary Structure of Daniel**

#### **Daniel 1–6: Paired Third-Person Prose Narratives about Daniel and His Friends**

1: Judean exile to Babylon (Nebuchadnezzar’s first year, 605–604 BC)	Dated narratives
2: Fourfold statue/kingdoms (Nebuchadnezzar’s second year, 603 BC)	
3: Blazing furnace (after Nebuchadnezzar’s dream but early in his reign)	Undated narratives
4: King’s illness (at or shortly after the height of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign)	
5: Handwriting on the wall (Belshazzar’s last year, 539 BC)	Dated narratives
6: Lions’ den (Darius/Cyrus’s first year, 539–538 BC)	

#### **Daniel 7–12: Paired First-Person Apocalyptic Visions Reported by Daniel**

7: Four beasts/kingdoms (Belshazzar’s first year, 553 BC)	Symbolic visions
8: Media, Persia, and Greece (Belshazzar’s third year, 550 BC)	
9: Seventy sevens (Darius/Cyrus’s first year, 539–538 BC)	Appearance visions
10–12: Persia, Greece, end of days (Cyrus’s third year, 536–535 BC)	

in chaps. 7–12), as well as a three-part concentric (“chiastic”) arrangement distinguished by language shifts (Hebrew in chap. 1, Aramaic in chaps. 2–7, and Hebrew in chaps. 8–12). Both encompass the same ten literary units that parallel the book’s chapter divisions (with the exception of the single literary unit of chaps. 10–12).

#### ***Chronological and Stylistic Structure***

The book of Daniel may be viewed through two contrasting literary styles: prose narratives and apocalyptic visions. Within each is a linear progression, with the second section reaching slightly beyond the first (see table 1).

These narratives span Judah’s approximately seventy years of exile under Babylon. Chapters 1–4 focus on the first king of Babylon, while chapters 5–6 mark the transfer of power from its last king to the mysterious character Darius the Mede. Daniel’s interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream in 2:36–45 is an intentional exception to this style, in that it incorporates “vision” terminology (2:19, 28)—identical to that in 7:1 and 8:1—which reveals three kingdoms that will follow his rule of Babylon. Although Daniel’s vision in chapter 2 is seen first by a pagan king, it serves to preview the apocalyptic visions that are solely Daniel’s in chapters 7–12.

Daniel 7–12 is set in a tightly focused context (553–535 BC)<sup>5</sup> that witnesses a diminished Babylonian influence and an increased Median threat, which later combines with a dominant Persian power. This second chronological unit transitions the reader to the late fourth century BC, when Greece becomes the next world power. Judah’s domination by one foreign kingdom

(Babylon) extends to three more (chap. 7; most likely Media, Persia, and Greece named in chap. 8). Visions of the last kingdom focus on Jewish suffering under Greece (chaps. 8–11) and into the distant future, “the time of the end” (12:4).

#### ***Concentric and Linguistic Structure***

Daniel also has a concentric or “chiastic” structure (A-B-A pattern). This is discernible in two Hebrew sections that frame the central Aramaic section. At the same time, the element of forward movement is preserved as the first Hebrew section (chap. 1) introduces the Aramaic section (chaps. 2–7), while the last chapter in the Aramaic section introduces the final Hebrew section (chaps. 8–12). In this arrangement, Daniel 7 connects the two overlaid structures by ending the concentric Aramaic section and beginning the second chronological section. This feature highlights the chapter’s essential messianic role in the book’s intentional structuring.<sup>6</sup>

- A Hebrew prologue: Judean exile to Babylon (Dan. 1)
- B Aramaic center section: Focus on God’s kingdom
  - C Four kingdoms, then God’s kingdom: Statue (Dan. 2)
  - D Servants faithful to God: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Dan. 3)
  - E King opposing God: Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 4)
  - E King opposing God: Belshazzar (Dan. 5)
- D Servant faithful to God: Daniel (Dan. 6)

- C Four kingdoms, then God’s kingdom: Beasts (Dan. 7)
- A Hebrew final section: Focus on Judean oppression and persecution
  - F Opposing God and his people: Media, Persia, and Greece (Dan. 8)
  - G “Seventy ‘sevens’” of extended exile for God’s people (Dan. 9)
  - F Opposing God and his people: Persia, Greece, and the end (Dan. 10–12)

Both of the concentric sections contain paired and parallel subsections. The Aramaic section (chaps. 2–7) focuses on the triumph of God’s kingdom over earthly kingdoms (C, C), deliverance of faithful servants (D, D), and judgment of pagan kings opposing God (E, E). The final Hebrew section frames the extension of Judah’s exile (G) with the gentile oppression of postexilic Judea, most intensely under Greece (F, F). Then, in order to connect the two concentric sections, the writer parallels the outside pair of the Aramaic section (C, C) with the single center of the Hebrew section (G) and, in reverse, parallels the outside pair of the last Hebrew section (F, F) with the dual center of the Aramaic section (E, E). This creative, literary artistry tightly weaves the entire book of Daniel into a unified tapestry.

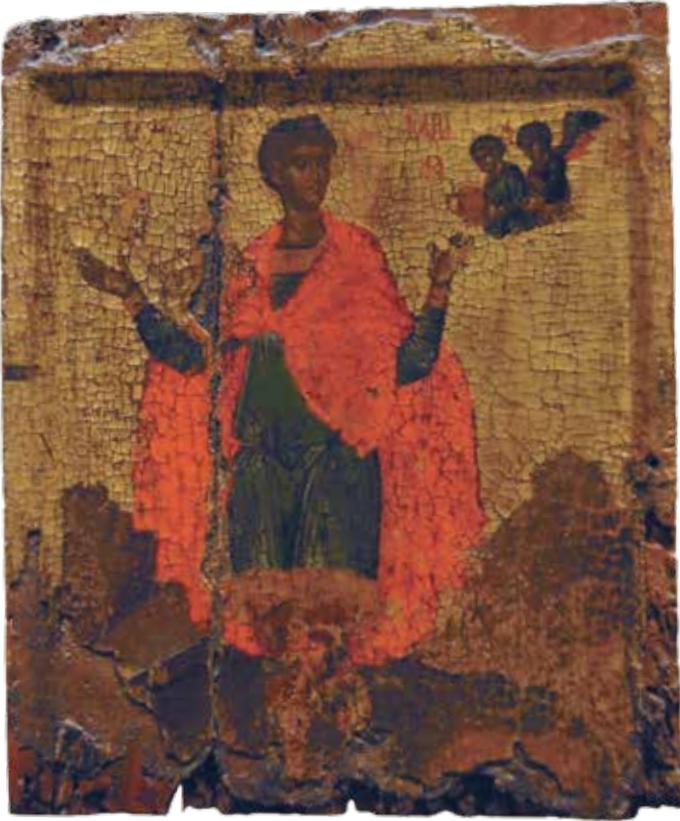
The “symbolic” nature of the visions in Daniel 7 and 8 links their content, whereas the “appearance” nature of the visions of chapters 9 and 10–12 links theirs. Also, the clearer identifications of the last two kingdoms in chapters 8 and 10–12 inform the less-clear revelations in chapters 7 and 9.

Therefore, Daniel 2, 7, and 9 announce that seventy years of foreign domination under Babylon has been extended to “seventy ‘sevens’” (units of time) under Babylon, Media, Persia, and Greece, after which God’s kingdom is to be reestablished. The significant theological questions that this last point raises are discussed throughout the commentary.

By so structuring his book, the writer/editor emphasizes the establishment of God’s kingdom in the climactic Aramaic center section of the book (cf. 2:44; 4:3, 34; 6:26; 7:14, 18, 22, 27), while setting Judea’s suffering in a secondary position in the final Hebrew section, where God’s kingdom is not mentioned. To place this historically, God establishes his kingdom sometime after the time of the Greeks, but until then Judea suffers persecution.<sup>7</sup>

### Apocalyptic Style of Writing

The genre of Daniel 7–12 is “apocalyptic.” The Greek *apokalypsis* means “revelation,” but not in the sense of a straightforward description (like the narratives of chaps. 1–6) or a traditional prophetic utterance (like Daniel’s confrontations of Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar in chaps. 4–5). Rather, apocalyptic literature employs mysterious dreams and visions with highly figurative metaphors, similes, and periods of time. Even Daniel, as a skilled sage who is specially gifted by God, does not understand their messages. A brief moment of unexpected clarity appears with the use of the names Media, Persia, and Greece later in the book (8:20–21; 10:1, 13, 20; 11:2), which focuses most of these visions on a specific event within history (10:1–11:35), while other sections seem to transition to



One of the major themes in the book of Daniel is that God is able to rescue and reward faithful servants. This is illustrated through the experiences of Daniel and his friends. Shown here is an icon of Daniel from the fourteenth century AD.

the culmination of history as we know it (11:36–12:13). It is important to remember that apocalyptic literature differs from prophetic—the former envisioning the distant future, the latter predicting it.<sup>8</sup>

### Canonical Theology

The more essential church doctrines achieved some degree of consensus in the ecumenical councils (AD 325–787), which were followed by the great schisms of the Orthodox and Catholic, then Protestant, factions (AD 1054, 1517). During the past

two centuries, speculations about the end times have become the primary focus of many conservative Protestants. This has led to a debate about whether the kingdom of God is to be viewed mostly as a spiritual rule in the hearts of human beings, starting at Jesus's first coming (Reformed or covenant theology), or as a literal rule focused on a revived national Israel at the end of the age (dispensational theology). Not surprisingly, these systematic eschatologies (studies of the end times) are brought to bear on opposing interpretations of Daniel's visions. Regretfully, this often leads to interpreters reading as much into the book ("eisegesis") as out of it ("exegesis").

During this same era a different approach to Christian theology developed known as biblical or canonical theology—the latter is used here.

Canonical theology focuses on contextual exegesis, which looks primarily for what a given text "meant" to its original writer and readers within its historical and literary contexts. It is a limited, narrowly focused discipline that often leaves unanswered questions that do not arise directly from the text at hand. With such a method, a theology of Daniel can be developed on its own terms, which then can contribute to a larger Old Testament theology, and eventually to a broader and more inclusive Christian, canonical theology (including the NT). Yet at any of these stages, the principles one learns through this approach can be applied on a practical level, or they can inform a broader (although often more speculative) systematic theology.

The writing of this commentary is guided primarily by a canonical-theology approach to Daniel. Taken together, the book's historical emphases and literary structures inform this theology, speaking clearly to the book's central idea: God's sovereign control over humanity, from exiles to kings to kingdoms.<sup>9</sup> This big idea is expressed more specifically in three key themes that recur throughout Daniel: God is able to rescue and reward faithful servants; God holds accountable people and

kings who oppose him; and, in the end, God will replace all earthly kingdoms with his eternal kingdom. Although this idea and these themes must be applied carefully in different times, cultures, and situations, the essential principles that lie behind them remain relevant across these divides. From Daniel's easily accessible Sunday school stories to its dark and difficult apocalyptic visions, the central message of Daniel is available to all who would seek it.