A 'Simple' Guide to Daniel

The Book of Daniel is an extraordinary mix of historical narrative and prophetic visions. We see Daniel's unshakable faith in God and through the detailed prophetic visions evidence of the power of God's eternal plan. Throughout Daniel we see that God has absolute sovereignty over all creatures, people, nations and empires. In addition, he perfectly knows the future and it will happen exactly as he intends. For example: *"He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding"* Daniel 2:21 *"The God of the heavens will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, and this kingdom will not be left to another people. It will crush all these kingdoms and bring them to an end but will itself endure forever."* Daniel 2:44 cf Daniel 4:17, 25b, 34b-35 (Psalm 22:8; 47:8; 103:19; Isaiah 46:9-11)

Timing of Daniel

605BC Daniel is taken captive to Babylon - Daniel 1:1-3. He served for all of the Babylonian captivity as a prophet and government minister. He continued under the Medes & Persian Empire until at least the third year of Cyrus in 536BC - Daniel 10:1 It is unlikely that he ever returned to Jerusalem but in this 70 year period of captivity/exile (his whole adult life) he unwaveringly followed and served God.

Outline of Daniel

Chapters 1-6 Key events in Daniel's life

- Daniel's captivity and training in Babylon (1)
- Nebuchadnezzar's dream and Daniel's interpretation (2)
- The Golden Image and deliverance from the Fiery Furnace (3)
- Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a Tree, his humbling and restoration (4)
- Belshazzar's banquet and the Writing on the Wall (5)
- Daniel's rescue from the Den of Lions (6)

Chapters 7-12 Daniel's dreams and visions

- Dream of the Four Beasts (7)
- Vision of a Ram and a Goat (8)
- Daniel's Prayer and Vision of 70 weeks (9)
- Vision of future Kings (10–12)

Daniel's various dreams and visions which have a number of possible interpretations, show us that God has a plan for His people and that he knows how and when this will all work out in future events.

These visions, which are simultaneously captivating and complicated, include:

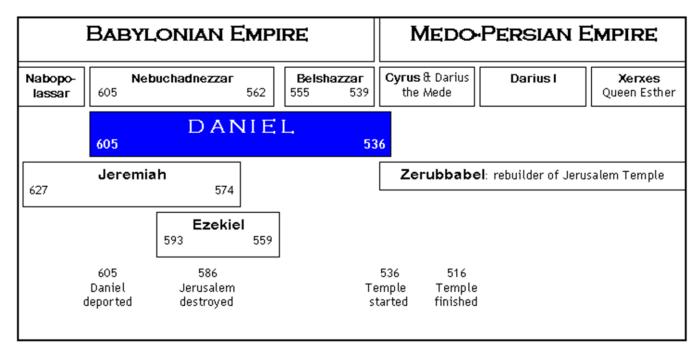
- **Nebuchadnezzar's Dream**: A statue of various metals foretelling four kingdoms and are historically understood to refer to the Babylonian, Persian, Greek and Roman Empires. The final fifth kingdom will be the everlasting Kingdom of God.
- **The Four Beasts**: Also historically considered to represent the same four kings or empires but would also seem to have complete fulfilment sometime in the future.

- The Ram and the Goat: Historically understood to depict the battle between the Medo-Persian Empire and the Greek Empire. One of the horns is historically understood to be fulfilled by Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who severely oppressed the Jews and desecrated the Second Temple. But some consider it, or another of the horns, may also refer to an Antichrist yet to come.
- **The Seventy Weeks**: A prophecy that is understood historically to be about the timeline from the rebuilding of Jerusalem to the coming of the Anointed One (Jesus). Yet there appears to be more to be fulfilled with this prophecy and its exact interpretation and timing is uncertain.
- Various Other Kings are referenced and if they are historical or future is not always clear. What is clear is that God knows the future, it is under His control and what He purposes will happen.

My recommendation is that as you read Daniel don't get too caught up in trying to understand dates and seasons. Study it more deeply by all means, but don't fall into the trap of becoming fixated by end times theology (Eschatology) and risk becoming distracted and led down what may prove to be false and often unedifying speculation.

Rather ask questions like:

- What does this teach me about God and draw me closer to him?
- What does this teach me about God's dominion over other nations and world events?
- In view of my limited understanding how then should I be living my life?



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