



Daniel 6:22

# DANIEL

## Background File

In Christian tradition, Daniel appears in the Prophets section of the Bible, following Ezekiel, another book that contains symbolic visions. In Jewish tradition, Daniel follows Esther, which also narrates the experiences of exiles—people displaced from Judah and Jerusalem. The book of Daniel focuses on Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, not on other exiled people of God. The book was written in two languages. While 1:1–2:4a and 8:1–12:13 were written in Hebrew, 2:4b–7:28 were composed in Aramaic. This division does not match the common division of the book between chapters 1–6 and 7–12.

## What's the Story?

The first six chapters of Daniel are stories, some of which include visions. The last six chapters are primarily visions. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego interact with various kings in the first half of the book. Daniel, with help from God, interprets the dreams of others. These dreams are about the destiny of kings. The evil of the kings has an immediate impact on Daniel and his friends. Daniel's work takes place during the rule of several kings, but life does not improve for him as we move from one ruler to the next. God blesses Daniel and his friends, abides with them, and rescues them from the jealousy and violence directed against them. But the chaos continues and evil persists.

In the second half of the book, Daniel speaks with heavenly beings as he seeks to interpret his own visions. These visions concern the future of God's people ("the holy ones of the Most High," according to 7:25). They cover more than the time of the exile (587–538 B.C.E.) and the world of the Babylonians, Medes, and Persians. The main action moves back to Judah and Jerusalem. The final scenes take place in the centuries after Alexander the Great (d. 323 B.C.E.). With ever-increasing intensity, the chaos and violence are beyond comparison. Even the faithful will die, but God's abiding faithfulness is extended to life after death (12:1–4).

Several puzzles in this book have not been resolved. The language of the visions has been interpreted in many ways. For example, the final king or kingdom (the last "horn" in 7:20, the "little" horn in 8:9, and the "king of the north" in chapter 11) has been interpreted various ways, from political powers such as the Romans to figures such as the Antichrist. Smaller puzzles include where Daniel is when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego face the fiery furnace (chapter 3) or where the three men are when Daniel refuses to bow to Nebuchadnezzar's statue (chapter 2).

## What's the Message?

Daniel is a book of consolation. The message is clear: evil will not have the last word. Usually seen here in the form of arrogant kings and kingdoms, evil is both upended in the stories and foreseen in the visions. Kingdoms collapse from overextension or are directly defeated by other kingdoms. Ultimately they face God's judgment, but in the short term the people of God live in a chaotic and even violent world.

Daniel also gives us a model for prayer. When he is puzzled by Jeremiah's reference to seventy years, he turns to prayer (chapter 9). He confesses his and his people's sin, then makes several requests of God: listen, open your eyes, hear, forgive, act, do not delay, and more.

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### Four Young Israelites at the Babylonian Court



**1:1-2 In the third year:** King Jehoiakim of Judah rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in 601 B.C.E., but the first report of Babylonians taking away people and seizing items from the temple is during the reign of King Jehoiachin (597 B.C.E.). See 2 Kings 23:31—24:17.



**1:2 The Lord let... fall:** The deportation or exile of the people of Judah to Babylon is not simply a matter of bad political luck. Although Nebuchadnezzar undoubtedly assumes that the victory over Judah is a credit to his own greatness, the truth is that God gave him the victory.



**1:3-7 competent to serve:** Daniel and his three friends are chosen to learn a new language and government system in order to serve in the royal administration (the book of Daniel does not mention what happens to the rest of the Judeans in exile). It is not brutal work, but they are expected to alter their diet and their names. Their new names include references to various Babylonian gods.



**1:8 he would not defile himself with the royal rations:** Old Testament dietary laws do not demand vegetarianism (see Lev 11:4-12 and Deut 12:23-25), but Daniel believes that what he eats and drinks is the dividing line between obedience and disobedience to God's law.

**1** In the third year of the reign of King Jehoiakim of Judah, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.<sup>2</sup>The Lord let King Jehoiakim of Judah fall into his power, as well as some of the vessels of the house of God. These he brought to the land of Shinar,<sup>a</sup> and placed the vessels in the treasury of his gods.

**3** Then the king commanded his palace master Ashpenaz to bring some of the Israelites of the royal family and of the nobility,<sup>4</sup>young men without physical defect and handsome, versed in every branch of wisdom, endowed with knowledge and insight, and competent to serve in the king's palace; they were to be taught the literature and language of the Chaldeans.<sup>5</sup>The king assigned them a daily portion of the royal rations of food and wine. They were to be educated for three years, so that at the end of that time they could be stationed in the king's court.<sup>6</sup>Among them were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, from the tribe of Judah.<sup>7</sup>The palace master gave them other names: Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego.

**8** But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the royal rations of food and wine; so he asked the palace master to allow him not to defile himself.<sup>9</sup>Now God allowed Daniel to receive favor and compassion from the palace master.<sup>10</sup>The palace master said to Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king; he has appointed your food and your drink. If he should see you in poorer condition than the other young men of your own age, you would endanger my head with the king."<sup>11</sup>Then Daniel asked the guard whom the palace master had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah:<sup>12</sup>"Please test your servants for ten days. Let us be given vegetables to

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<sup>a</sup> Gk Theodotion: Heb adds to the house of his own gods