

Introductory Notes to Daniel

I. The Man

Daniel stands out as one of the greatest men in Jewish history. That he was a real person in history is proved by Ezek. 14:14 and 28:3, as well as Matt. 24:15 and Heb. 11:33. He was a teenager in the year 605 B.C. when Nebuchadnezzar came to Jerusalem and began his conquest of Judah. There were several “deportations” of Jews to Babylon, and Daniel was in the first group because he was of the princely line. It was the practice of Babylon to deport the finest of the citizens and train them for service in their own government. Daniel was still active in 539 B.C. when the kingdom was taken by Cyrus, so he lived and ministered in Babylon for over sixty years. In fact, he lived through the reigns of four rulers (Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Darius, and Cyrus) and three different kingdoms (Babylon, Media, Persia). His name means “God is my judge.” He held several important positions and was promoted greatly because of his character and wisdom, and because the blessing of God was upon him. Nebuchadnezzar named him chief of the wise men and a ruler of the land (2:48), a position similar to a modern prime minister. Nebuchadnezzar’s grandson, Belshazzar, called Daniel out of retirement and, because he explained the handwriting on the wall, made Daniel third ruler in the land (5:29). Darius named him leader over the whole realm (6:1–3). For at least seventy-five years, Daniel was God’s faithful witness in a wicked and idolatrous kingdom.

II. The Book

Daniel is to the OT what the Book of Revelation is to the NT; in fact, we cannot fully understand one without the other. Prophetically, Daniel deals with “the times of the Gentiles” (see Luke 21:24), that period of time that began in 606 B.C. with the captivity of Jerusalem and will end when Christ returns to earth to judge the Gentile nations and establish His kingdom. In the various visions and dreams in Daniel, we see the program of Gentile history from the rise of Babylon through the conquests of the Medes, Persians, Greeks, and Romans, and to the rule of Antichrist just before the return of Jesus Christ. This book proves that “there is a God in heaven” (2:28) and that “the Most High rules in the kingdom of men” (4:25, NKJV). Daniel makes it clear that God Almighty is sovereign in the affairs of this world; “history is His story.” God can take rulers off their thrones; God can defeat the strongest nations and turn them over to their enemies. In 1:1–2:3, the writing is in Hebrew, but from 2:4 to 7:28, it is in the Chaldean language. The Hebrew sections deal primarily with the Jews.