

Group Study Outline

Daniel 7-12 Theme Sentence

The rule of God and his people is certain

It is not possible to study six chapters in one evening's Bible study, so you will need to select what you will cover: this outline concentrates on ch 7.

Launching Question

If you could write a letter to the exiles in Babylon, what would you say to encourage them?

Give out handout showing two languages/different styles of writing: what do you make of this? what might this imply or mean?

READ Daniel 7:1-8

What is the story? ('four' = 'totality'; 'sea' = place of anti-God, disorder)

What do you think this is describing?

Is this rather unflattering picture fair on world rulers?!

READ Daniel 7:9-14

What is the reaction of the Ancient of Days?

What is the setting for this scene (ie where are we)?

READ Daniel 7:15-28

Tell me about more about the fourth beast, just as Daniel asks in verse 19.

Who is given the kingdom and dominion?

Where is the Son of Man?

What is the connection between the Son of Man, and 'the saints'?

Thinking it through

Summarise the message of this dream/vision.

What is God revealing to his people (cf handout)?

What is the message for the exiles in Babylon (cf *Launching Question*)?

In what way can we apply the message of this chapter to our world today?

What does it tell us about powerful people?

What does it tell us about God?

What does it tell us about Jesus?

What does it tell us about 'the saints'?

How does this 'behind the scenes' vision help Daniel/us to re-interpret the historical stories of the first half of the book?

What do we now understand that God is doing in our world behind the rise and fall of leaders like Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Darius and Baruch Obama?

If you could write a letter to some Christian missionaries in Tehran or Baghdad, what would you say to encourage them (cf *Launching Question*)?

Daniel 7-12



Introduction

The book of Daniel is written in two languages:

1:1-2:4a	Hebrew (the language of God's people)
2:4b-7:28	Aramaic (the common language of the Persian period)
8:1-12:13	Hebrew.

And this roughly matches two different styles of writing in the book:

ch 1-6	'history'
ch (2), 7-12	'apocalyptic' ie as in Revelation, and (?) Mark 13, etc.

Why this is so? A persuasive explanation suggests:

- chs 2-6 were intended as an evangelistic tract for the Persian/wider world, with an international gospel appeal and seeking to convert: 'our God will call you to account, for he is the Sovereign Lord'.
- chs 8-12 are written for the 'insider', to interpret for the Judah exiles the events going on around them. So, they should understand the rise and fall of Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar and Darius in the light of what God is doing behind the scenes. The big themes are:
 - ⇒ history has a cosmic significance, the interplay of principalities/powers;
 - ⇒ despite appearances, Israel's God presides over history and nations;
 - ⇒ God's kingdom will come by divine intervention;
 - ⇒ 'one like a son of man' (7:13) will emerge as God's world ruler.

Chapter 7 is central. It sets out the universal truth that is then spelt out (in ch 8-12) for the Israelite situation of exile (see previous notes for that context).

If this is a right way to understand it, then our usual approach (the stories are easier to understand, so leave the more difficult 'apocalyptic' sections aside) is to misread the book. The interpretative revelations are explicitly for the people of God. How daft it would be for us to miss out on understanding them!

[NS]

Daniel 7-12 Theme Sentence

The rule of God and his people is certain

Application

- God will win ... and this should radically change how we feel when things in our world feel out of control: does it?
- All human kingdoms which rise will fall, and then ultimately pass away.
- God's people will be the winning side. This truth has real bite when it is applied to the historical setting of the exile, and also to our 'exile' (cf 1 Peter 1:1; 2:9-10; 2:16 [and context]; 2:21-25 [esp 23b]).

Commentary

7:1-14 Four (representing 'totality') beasts arise from the primeval chaos of the sea: together they represent total opposition to the kingdom of God. Chronology is not important (since the fourth beast is destroyed before the remaining three lose their dominion [12]); rather what is emphasised is the certainty of the final universal judgement of 9-10. 'One like a son of man' (13) appears in the context of this judgement. Dominion is given to him (14) once all other dominions and powers have been brought to nothing (11-12). His coming ushers in the age of everlasting dominion.

7:15-28 The Son of Man surprisingly disappears, replaced by the saints of the Most High (18, 22, 25, 27). It therefore seems likely that the Son of Man is representative for the saints. It is not that they are the same as him nor that he suffers with them, but rather that their future rule (18, 22, 25) depends on/is assured by his exaltation & dominion (14).

The encouragement of this chapter for God's faithful ones still suffering (25) is clear. The outcome of the issues affecting the history of their day has already been determined: the court has been convened, the judgement pronounced, and their vindication is certain!

chapters 8-12 work out the details of chapter 7	(see Introduction above)
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ch 8 concentrates on the second and third figures of the vision of ch 7. The probable 'little horn' (9) of this vision, Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 BC), assaults even heaven and God himself (10-11).

ch 9 Meditation on Jeremiah 25:11-14; 29:10 leads Daniel to realise that the exile (as the covenant curse of Deuteronomy 28:15f now fulfilled) is open-ended, that Israel can hope for forgiveness (9), and that the city and sanctuary could be rebuilt (17-19). Daniel therefore significantly confesses Israel's sins against the covenant (5-6, 10-14). The chronology of the answer which Gabriel brings is unclear (because of the symbolic use of numbers in apocalyptic literature), but it is most likely that the entire period of history from Daniel's time to the second coming of Jesus is being generally presented. This 'abomination that causes desolation' (27) is the only part of Daniel to which the NT explicitly refers (cf Mark 13:14), and this tends to confirm that the answer to Daniel's prayer is to be looked for in the entire period up to the time when 'the Son of Man comes in the clouds' (Mark 13:26).

ch 10-11 10:1-11:1 explains that the real conflict of the Hellenistic wars was already being fought out in heavenly places: angels representing Persia and Greece (10:13, 20) were contending with the man of verses 5-6, helped by Michael. 11:2f explains the vision, concentrating again on Antiochus Epiphanes (21-45), the antichrist in direct conflict with God himself (36).

ch 12 Michael, the protector of 'your people', intervenes (1): woes precede the final deliverance (which will include the resurrection of the faithful 2-3). When it will happen is unclear (7), that it will happen is clear (8f). Despite much apparently powerful opposition, God's kingdom will prevail. Present history is thus under divine control as the repetitive glimpses behind the scenes reveal. The Son of Man will come, dominion will be given to him, and God's people will prevail. So the book ends with the vision of God's faithful not chained, but triumphant.

Reading Daniel though the New Testament

There are two big New Testament controls to help us understand this section:

• The Son of Man

is Jesus' preferred title for himself. Many think that he chose it because it had an ambiguity (ie did he simply mean he was Joseph's son, or was he making some allusion to Daniel 7?). But there are points where he is clearly implying that he is the figure of Daniel 7 who was given dominion, glory and an everlasting kingdom (eg Mark 2:28; 8:38; 13:26-27; 14:62).

We therefore have Jesus' own authority for reading *Daniel* with Jesus at its centre. All of God's sovereign dominion over this world is focussed on this Son.

• The abomination that causes desolation (cf Mark 13:14)

is a phrase that comes four times in Daniel to refer to the actions of the 'little horn' (8:9). When, in 167BC, Antiochus Epiphanes invaded Jerusalem, destroyed the Torah scrolls (8:12) and abolished the daily sacrifice, he also committed some other act (possibly setting up an idol or an altar for pagan sacrifice in the Temple). This act came to symbolize an unspeakable affront to the sanctity of God's house and therefore to God himself.

In Mark 13, Jesus is similarly talking about the destruction of the Temple (cf 13:1-3): when his disciples see a *Daniel*-like sacrilege, they are to flee the city (14). Some think this refers to a specific historical moment (eg the destruction of the Temple in AD70), and others think Jesus is warning that there will always be terrible crimes against Christianity, so we shouldn't be surprised by them.

We should draw a clear link from this revelation for Daniel's immediate future, to the disciples of Jesus (in his day, and right up to our own). 'Twas always the case that God's people face appalling and disgusting opposition.

The challenge in Jesus' words for his hearers is that the 'days of distress' they face are even more grim than the dark days of the 'little horn'. But here's the thing: in Dan 8:13, it is Israel's 'transgression' that brought about these terrible events. In Jesus' day similarly, it is the people's rebellion against and murder of the vineyard owner's Son (cf Mark 12:1-12) that means he'll return to 'destroy' them (Mark 12:9). We therefore have Jesus' own authority for seeing God's judgement of this world's sin worked out through the events of history.