

Introduction to Daniel: God's Sovereignty in Death and Resurrection

Introduction

This morning, we're going to begin a sermon series through the book of Daniel. We're going to come to hear the word of God to us through the book of Daniel. I'm truly excited to learn and to grow with you and to be further established in my faith and be better enabled to glorify God along with you as we study this amazing book.

I. Six Chapters – Six “Stories” (Daniel 1-6)

When you hear “the book of Daniel” what do you think of? Many of us think of the famous stories of “Daniel and the Lions’ Den” or “Shadrach, Meshack, and Abednego and the Fiery Furnace,” or even Daniel’s refusal to defile himself with the king’s food, or the story of the handwriting on the wall, or the story of how Nebuchadnezzar was given the mind of a beast and made to eat grass like an ox. These are all very memorable “stories” (or “historical narratives”). Some of them we tell to our children from their very earliest days along with other stories such as “David and Goliath” and “Gideon and his 300 Men.” But what do these stories all have in common with one another (there are six stories—or historical narratives—in the first six chapters of Daniel)? What’s the underlying and the overarching theme or message that runs through all of these stories and binds them all together?

II. Six Chapters – Four Visions (Daniel 7-12)

When we hear the book of Daniel mentioned, many of us think of the famous stories, but all of these stories are recounted in the first six chapters, and there are actually twelve chapters in Daniel. It’s the last six chapters of Daniel that comes to mind for others when they hear the book of Daniel mentioned. We might think about a vision of four beasts (a lion with eagles’ wings, something like a bear with three ribs between its teeth, a leopard with four wings of a bird on its back and four heads, and a terrifying beast having great iron teeth and ten horns and being different from all the beasts that came before it), and in this same vision there’s one like a Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven and being presented before the Ancient of Days (7). We might think about a vision of a Ram with two horns, one higher than the other, and a Goat with a conspicuous horn between his eyes who kills the ram and whose horn is then broken and replaced with four horns (8). We might think about world empires (Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome). We might think of Daniel’s famous “Seventy Weeks” in chapter nine. We might think of periods of time like “2,300 evenings and mornings” (8:14), 1,290 days and 1,335 days (12:11, 12), and a “time, times, and half a time” (12:7). We might think of the “Abomination of Desolation” (11:31; 12:11). And when we think about these things, either our mind starts to swim, and our eyes glaze over, *or* we get really excited about prophecy and the end times and solving hard riddles, *OR...* might there be a third and a better response to these visions – one that God intended?

What’s the real *point* of all these visions (there are four visions in the last six chapters of Daniel; 7, 8, 9, 10-12)? Was it to really just to give Daniel (and us) a detailed map of the future? What’s the real *reason* for all the “apocalyptic” symbolism of beasts and horns, and wings, and ribs? Is it

really just to confuse us and make things as obscure as possible? What we really need to do is ask the same question of the visions here in the second half of Daniel that we asked of all the famous stories in the first half of Daniel. What is the underlying and overarching theme or message that runs through these various visions and ties them all together?

III. How the “Stories” (1-6) and the “Visions” (7-12) fit together (Part 1)

Let me ask this question: What’s your “favorite” half of Daniel – the “stories” in the first half (1-6) or the apocalyptic visions in the second half (7-12)? Of course, the problem with this question is that it implies that Daniel can be neatly divided in half, but in fact, the stories in the first half and the visions in the second half are carefully interlocked together. On the one hand, the stories in the first half are the key to rightly reading and interpreting the visions in the second half, and so the visions in the second half are actually built on the foundation of the stories in the first half. One commentator puts it like this: “The historical narratives [the stories in chapters 1-6] are paradigmatic adumbrations [concrete foreshadowings and practical examples] **in history** of what the apocalyptic revelations [the visions in chapters 7-12] declare will happen **in the future** (Hamilton, 78). We need to be able to see both halves together (stories *and* visions) in order to rightly understand the theme and the message of the book of Daniel. We need to ask the same question of all twelve chapters of Daniel that we asked of the stories in the first six chapters and the visions in the last six chapters: “What is the underlying and overarching theme or message that runs through all the stories *and* all the visions in all twelve chapters and binds them all together?”

IV. How the “Stories” (1-6) and the “Visions” (7-12) fit together (Part 2)

➤ The “sandwich” in chapters 2-7

At this point we have to take a step further back and ask how far we can really go in dividing Daniel into two halves of six chapters each. We mentioned most of the stories (or the historical narratives) in the first half of Daniel, but there’s one story we didn’t mention – the story in chapter two of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of a mighty image with a head of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its middle and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, and its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. The four different parts of this image represent four successive kingdoms of men. And then the stone cut from a mountain by no human hand that topples the entire image and becomes a great mountain that fills the whole earth represents Christ and His kingdom that will “never be destroyed” (2:44). That’s the historical narrative—or the *story*—of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and Daniel’s interpretation of that dream in chapter two. And yet it *parallels* Daniel’s *vision* in chapter seven perfectly. In chapter seven there are four beasts that represent the same four kingdoms of men that are represented by the four parts of the image in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. And in chapter seven we see one like a Son of Man who destroys the kingdoms of men and sets up a kingdom that will “never be destroyed” (7:14). The vision in chapter seven repeats the exact same message of the “story” in chapter two, but also expands on that message and fills in some of the “details.” If chapter seven “matches” chapter two, should we expect any other “matching” chapters in the book of Daniel?

In chapter three, we see Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refusing to obey the king's command to bow down to his image; 3:10-18). In chapter six, we see Daniel refusing to obey the king's command to offer prayer to any other god/God but only to the king; 6:7-10). In chapter three, we see Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego trusting in the Lord (3:28), and then being delivered by an angel from the fiery furnace (3:24-25, 28). In chapter six, we see Daniel trusting in the Lord (6:23), and then being delivered by an angel from the lions' den (6:22). The parallels between these two chapters are clear and obvious – and also intentional (cf. Hamilton, p. 75). If chapter seven is a perfect “match” for chapter two, and chapter six is a perfect match for chapter three, should we be surprised if chapter five just happens to end up being a perfect match with chapter four?

In chapter four, Nebuchadnezzar has a dream that alarms him and causes him to be afraid (4:5). In chapter five, Belshazzar sees a disembodied hand writing a message on the wall that alarms him and causes his limbs to give way and his knees to knock together (5:6, 9). In chapter four, Nebuchadnezzar calls for all the wise men—the magicians, the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the astrologers—to make known to him the interpretation of his dream (4:6-7). In chapter five, Belshazzar calls the wise men—the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the astrologers—to read the writing on the wall and show him its interpretation (5:7). In both chapters four and five, Daniel is finally brought before the king after all of the pagan “wise men” have failed (4:7-8; 5:8-13). In both chapters four and five, Daniel is spoken of by the king as one in whom is the “spirit of the holy gods” (4:8-9, 18; 5:11, 14). And finally, in both chapters four and five, a proud king is humbled (Nebuchadnezzar is given the mind of a beast, and Belshazzar is killed; 4:28-33; 5:30). Daniel himself points out that the events of chapter four are a perfect parallel with the events of chapter five (5:18-23). So we see not only that chapter five parallels chapter four, but also that Daniel is purposefully highlighting and emphasizing this parallel. We can say the same thing about Daniel's careful emphasizing of the parallels between chapters three and six and chapters two and seven.

Are you seeing how these matching chapters end up giving us a layered “sandwich”? (The fancy word for this is a chiasm or a chiastic structure, but we'll just stick with a “layered sandwich.”) It's this sandwich “shape” in Daniel that helps us to make sense of Daniel as a whole and that enables the real message of Daniel to shine out all the more clearly. It's this sandwich “shape” in Daniel that helps us to see that the four *visions* in chapters 7-12 are intimately tied together and woven together with the six “stories” (or historical narratives) in chapters 1-6 (see chart on p. 9). We can't rightly understand and feel in ourselves the full impact of the visions unless we read them in the full light of the stories (the historical narratives). And we can't rightly understand and feel in ourselves the full impact of the stories unless we read them as a prelude to the visions.

I want to just quickly introduce one other thing here and we'll come back to it later. You probably know that almost all of the Old Testament was written in Hebrew. But there's a big portion of Daniel that was actually written in the international language of Daniel's day, which was Aramaic (just like English is the international language today). So in Daniel chapter two and verse four, we read:

- Daniel 2:4 — Then the Chaldeans said to the king in Aramaic, “O king, live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation.”

From the point that the Chaldeans answer the king all the way to the end of chapter seven (the *first* of the four visions), the book of Daniel is written in Aramaic, after which the rest of Daniel (8-12) is written in Hebrew. I think it's worth asking *why* this portion of Daniel was written in Aramaic, and we'll come back to this later. For right now, we can say that we know this was done intentionally and we notice that the Aramaic section corresponds exactly with the "sandwich" in chapters 2-7.

➤ **The "sandwich" in chapters 8-12**

Anyone who reads Daniel can see right away that the apocalyptic visions in chapters 7-12 are very different from the historical narratives in chapters 1-6. These are two very different genres of literature. And yet it's also obvious to us now that chapter seven (the first vision) is very tightly bound up together with the "stories" in chapters 2-6. So what are we to make of chapters 8-12? How do these chapters "fit" in the structure or the outline of Daniel? Well, these chapters all *grow out of* chapter seven, and therefore these chapters, too, are very tightly bound up with the stories in chapters 1-6.

In chapter two, Nebuchadnezzar dreams of four kingdoms followed by the kingdom of God. Chapter seven recapitulates chapter two and expands on chapter two with Daniel's vision of four kingdoms followed by the kingdom of God. Chapters 8-12 then grow out of this first vision in chapter seven with three more visions. In chapter eight, Daniel sees a vision relating to the second and third kingdoms followed by the restoration of the sanctuary (8:14) and the destruction of a powerful king who opposes God's people (8:25). In chapters 10-12, Daniel sees another vision relating to the second and third kingdoms followed by the restoration of God's people. And in between these two matching visions ("matching" because both visions focus in on the second and third kingdoms) we have chapter nine. In chapter nine, Daniel prays a very long and earnest prayer (9:1-19) and is then answered with a vision of seventy weeks (or seventy "sevens") that are decreed for the restoration of Jerusalem and the salvation of God's people (9:20-27) You can see how chapter seven is the close of the first "sandwich," and yet out of chapter seven comes a second "sandwich" (cf. Steinmann). Chapter seven, then, with its vision of the "Ancient of Days" and one like a "Son of Man" is a sort of central "hinge" in the book of Daniel that binds the whole thing together (see chart on p. 9).

V. The "Bookends" of Daniel (1 & 12)

So now we've accounted for all the chapters in Daniel except one. Where does chapter one "fit" in the structure or the outline of Daniel? We'll see next week that chapter one is very much an introduction to the entire book of Daniel. But this week I want us to see how chapter one isn't just the introduction to the book of Daniel, but also a bookend that has its counterpart, or its match in chapter twelve (cf. Hamilton). We read in chapter one, verses 1-7:

- **Daniel 1:1-7** — In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God. And he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god.

Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobility, youths without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace, and to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans. The king assigned them a daily portion of the food that the king ate, and of the wine that he drank. They were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time they were to stand before the king. Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah. And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names: Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego.

What we see in these verses is that the entire book of Daniel is set very specifically and very carefully against the backdrop of *exile* – of the Jewish people being forcibly removed from their land and relocated over a thousand miles away to live in the foreign land of Babylon. We can't rightly understand the message of Daniel unless we understand and really grasp the *meaning* of exile – not just what exile *is*, but what it *means*.

The Jews weren't the only people group to suffer exile. The Assyrians and the Babylonians were both committed to the practice of relocating the peoples they conquered to other lands, far away from their homeland. They even relocated some nations to live in the land that used to belong to Israel. Can you imagine the effects of all this relocating? Can you see what is the real point of exile? What it amounted to was the killing of a nation without actually killing all of its people. Exile was intended to strip nations of their identity as a people with their own culture and traditions and language and gods, and so what exile amounted to in the end was the *death* of a nation. But that's probably still too tame. In the end, what exile amounted to was the violent and brutal murder of a nation – of the life and identity of an entire people. We hear the word "exile" and we don't have any emotional or moral response to that word. That's partly because we've never experienced anything like "exile" and partly because we're Americans and we don't have the same sense of national identity as a people group bound together by a common ancestry, a common religion, and a common ancestral homeland. At some level, exile is something that's impossible for us to understand. But when ancient peoples heard the word "exile" (*galuth*) that word was to them the sound of death – of even a brutal and a violent death. Is there any hope *after* death? Is there ever any hope *after* the grave? The answer from history and the answer from the universal experience of ancient peoples was "no," there's never any hope after death. Think of what this would mean for Israel. If exile (*galuth*) means the death of Israel *as God's people*, then it would seem that exile also means the death of all God's promises, and of the hope of salvation and redemption.

That word "exile" is a terrible and a fearful word. But let's still ask ourselves this question: If exile is the *death* of a people, then what would it be if an exiled people was returned to their homeland and reconstituted as an independent people ruled by their own king, and bound together by their ancestral kinship, by their ancestral language, and by their ancestral religion? What would that be? Surely it wouldn't be exaggerating to say that this would be nothing less than a *resurrection*. Even from the very beginning, before Israel had even entered the land of Canaan, God had already foretold this "death and resurrection" of His people.

- Deuteronomy 30:1–6 (cf. Lev. 26:33-42; Deut. 4:25-31) — When all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God has driven you, and return to the LORD your God, you and your children, and obey his voice in all that I command you today, with all your heart and with all your soul, then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have mercy on you, and he will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you. If your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there he will take you. And the LORD your God will bring you into the land that your fathers possessed, that you may possess it. And he will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers. And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

Are you beginning to see what an astonishing, “impossible” miracle this would be? Are you beginning to see why it’s no exaggeration to call this restoration a resurrection from the dead? And did you see why this would be far more true in Israel’s case than in the case of any other ancient people? The resurrection of Israel will involve *more* than just their return to the land and their reconstitution as a people; it will also mean the circumcision of their heart to love the Lord their God with all their heart and with all their soul, that they may *live*. This is the light in which we’re meant to understand a vision that the prophet Ezekiel saw of a valley full of bones.

- Ezekiel 37:1–3, 11–14 — The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones. And he led me around among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry. And he said to me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” And I answered, “O Lord GOD, you know.” ... Then he said to me, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.’ Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the LORD.”

For Israel, the only hope after exile was nothing less than resurrection.

Remember, we can’t rightly understand the message of Daniel unless we understand the *meaning* of exile (*galuth*). In the opening verses of Daniel, we see that the entire book of Daniel is set very specifically and very carefully against the backdrop of exile – against the backdrop of death. The death of a people—of *God’s* people. Daniel lived a long life. Sixty-six years after he arrived in Babylon as a youth of probably around 15 years old (so he’s now about eighty years old), he saw the Babylonians conquered by the Persians and the edict of the new King Cyrus that the Jews could return to their homeland. It was in this same year of Cyrus’ edict (539 BC) that Daniel prayed the famous prayer that’s recorded for us in Daniel chapter nine. Daniel had read in Jeremiah that seventy years were decreed for the desolations of Jerusalem (cf. Jer. 25:11-12; 29:10). It seemed clear to him that the seventy years were now fulfilled, especially with the edict

of Cyrus the King (cf. 2 Chron. 36:22-23). So why does Daniel pray the prayer that he prays in chapter nine, confessing his sins and the sins of his people and asking God to turn His anger and wrath away from Jerusalem and to be merciful? Haven't these prayers already been answered now that the people are returning to their homeland? On the one hand, the answer is "yes," and on the other hand, Daniel feels that the answer is "no." The fulfillment of God's word—of Israel's resurrection from the dead—requires so much more than just a return to the land, it requires God's fullest blessings on His people as He takes them again to Himself and circumcises their hearts to love and fear Him. And so what does Daniel learn? He learns that while the seventy years *have* already been fulfilled, the full and the final restoration that he looked for at the end of seventy years—and which was typified and foreshadowed in the Jews' return to the land of Palestine at the end of seventy years—*that* full and final restoration would not actually be fulfilled until an additional period of seventy "sevens" had passed – in other words, a "sevenfold" seventy years (cf. Lev. 26:18, 21, 24, 28). That's how long the exile would last.

At the beginning of the next chapter of Daniel (chapter ten) we learn that Daniel has been fasting and mourning for three weeks. This is two years after the decree of Cyrus and Daniel's prayer in chapter nine. Why is Daniel fasting and mourning? Because even though the Jews have returned to the land, they're still a despised people with many obstacles and many enemies – and a people not yet having a circumcised heart. Why is Daniel fasting and mourning? Because he's still longing for the *end* of exile and the full restoration of God's people in nothing less than a resurrection from the dead. *It's in response to this deep longing* that another angel is sent to Daniel with the fourth and final vision of this book – a vision that ends in chapter twelve, where we read these words:

- Daniel 12:1–3, 13 — “At that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.”

In the opening verses of Daniel, we see that the entire book of Daniel is set very specifically and very carefully against the backdrop of exile – against the backdrop of death. The death of a people—of *God's* people. When we come to chapter twelve, we have one of the clearest references to resurrection in all the Old Testament. But this promise of resurrection didn't just come out of nowhere. It was ultimately foretold all the way back in Deuteronomy when God promised that after exile (*galuth*) He would gather His people again, even from the uttermost parts of heaven (Deut. 30:1-6). In the end, the resurrection and full restoration of the people from their long exile will only be accomplished in the physical and bodily resurrection of the dead. In Daniel chapter one, we read:

- Daniel 1:3–5, 19 — Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel... to **stand** in the king's palace... They were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time they were to **stand** before the king... among all of [the youths] none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Therefore they **stood** before the king.

On the one hand, this “standing” before the king was a result of God’s blessing. On the other hand, it was a constant reminder of the realities of exile and death. And so how can we not rejoice with Daniel in hope when we hear the angel’s words to him in the very last verse of chapter twelve:

- Daniel 12:13 — “But go your way till the end. And you shall rest and shall **stand** in your allotted place at the end of the days.”

Conclusion

Daniel is the wonderful and encouraging message of the awesome sovereignty of God in death and in resurrection – the sovereignty of God in the midst of exile (not only the exile of seventy years, but of seven *times* seventy years) and the sovereignty of God in finally bringing that exile to an end in the glorious resurrection from the dead and the everlasting rule of the one like a Son of Man. (It’s in this light that we can fully appreciate the structure and the outline of Daniel; see chart on p. 9.) Ultimately, then, Daniel is a message of the awesome, wonderful sovereignty of God *revealed to us* in the death and the resurrection and the eternal, never-ending rule of Jesus, the Messiah. Look with me at Hosea chapter five:

- Hosea 5:13–14 — When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah his wound, then Ephraim went to Assyria, and sent to the great king. But he is not able to cure you or heal your wound. For I will be like a lion to Ephraim, and like a young lion to the house of Judah. I, even I, will tear and go away; I will carry off, and no one shall rescue.

Here we have pictured the “death” of God’s people in exile. But then see what we read in chapter six:

- Hosea 6:1–2 — Come, let us return to the LORD; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up. **After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him.**

Here we have pictured the restoration of God’s people in resurrection – the end of their exile. And here is nothing less than a prophetic type and foreshadowing of Christ’s own resurrection from the dead on the third day! The Apostle Paul writes:

- 1 Corinthians 15:3–4 (Cf. Jonah 1:17; Mat. 12:40) — For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised **on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.**

It’s only in the death and the resurrection of *Jesus* that the exile of God’s people is finally ended in their own resurrection *with Him* to everlasting life in the Messiah’s everlasting kingdom – the kingdom that will never be destroyed.

The Book of DANIEL – God’s Sovereignty in Death and Resurrection¹

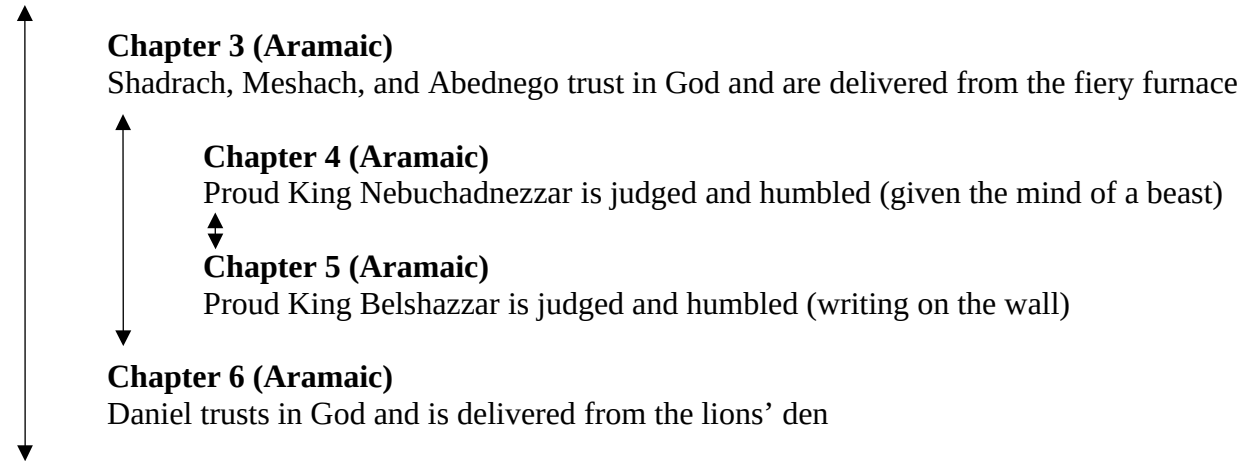
Chapters 1-6: Six “stories” (historical narratives)

Chapters 7-12: Four visions

Chapter 1 – Introduction and bookend with chapter twelve (DEATH) (Hebrew)

Chapter 2 (Aramaic)

Nebuchadnezzar dreams of four kingdoms followed by the kingdom of God (statue made of gold, silver, bronze, and iron)

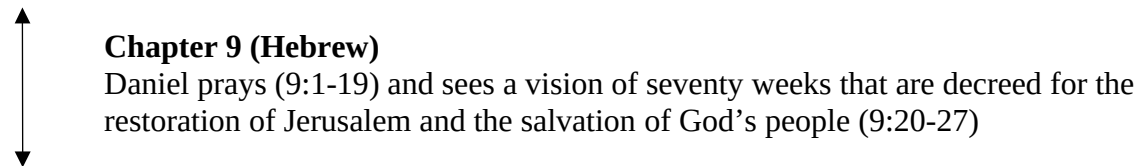


Chapter 7 (Aramaic)

Daniel sees a vision of four kingdoms followed by the kingdom of God (four beasts and one like a Son of Man)

Chapter 8 (Hebrew)

Daniel sees a vision relating to the second and third kingdoms (a ram and a goat) followed by the restoration of the sanctuary (8:14) and the destruction of a particularly powerful king who opposes God’s people (8:25).



Chapters 10-12 (Hebrew)

Daniel sees a vision relating to the second and third kingdoms, but especially to the third kingdom (cf. the king of the north and king of the south) followed by the resurrection and restoration of God’s people.

Chapter 12 – Conclusion and bookend with chapter one (RESURRECTION)

1 This “outline” of Daniel is an adaptation from and a combination of the outlines of Steinmann and Hamilton.