

# INTRODUCTION

DANIEL 1:1-2 AUGUST 29, 2018

We are going to begin a study through the Book of Daniel here on Wednesday nights. So you can find your way over to Daniel chapter 1 and verse 1. You'll find it after Ezekiel and before the Minor Prophets like Hosea, Joel and Amos.

Even if you're not a fan of superhero movies, you've got to marvel at what the folks over at Marvel studios accomplished earlier this year with their film *Avengers: Infinity War*. What they did had never been done before in the history of cinema. For over a decade, the studio had been working a plan, bringing together *dozens* of beloved characters that had been featured in 18 different movies, culminating in a blockbuster hit that was praised by over 80% of movie critics and over 90% of the 48,000 fan reviews on RottenTomatoes.com.<sup>1</sup> The movie is described this way: "An unprecedented cinematic journey ten years in the making...*Avengers: Infinity War* ably juggles a dizzying array of heroes...and the result is a thrilling, emotionally resonant blockbuster that (mostly) realizes its gargantuan ambitions."<sup>2</sup> As far as film history goes, they packed more into one movie than perhaps has ever been done before.

The Book of Daniel is relatively short in comparison to the other Major Prophets or some of the Books of the Law. You can get through Daniel in about an hour. But when you read through it, you find that there is an incredible amount of material in its 12 chapters. It's just bursting at the seams! By the time you read the last verse, you'll have been exposed to not only some of the most memorable stories in the Bible, but also the memoirs of a war refugee, an ancient history lesson on one of the great cities and empires of the world: Babylon. A study of fulfilled prophecy concerning Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome. Prophecy concerning the first and second comings of the Messiah. A great deal of prophecy concerning the end of human history, covering the Tribulation, the reign of the AntiChrist, and the establishment of Christ's Kingdom on the earth. You'll see God's dealings with the nation of Israel, God's plan for the Gentile nations. You'll learn things concerning the doctrines of suffering, calling, angels and sovereignty. You'll see vivid examples of what it means to be faithful and to pray, to evangelize and how to live with integrity in your daily life. How to trust God. What it means to be *in* the world but not *of* the world. You'll see what Biblical holiness looks like. You learn how to live with self-control and how to show grace to our enemies, how to forgive and how to be a peace with those around you. You'll see great and astonishing visions from heaven. Oh and there's Theophany in there too: which is a Pre-Incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ.

All of that in an hour of reading! *Infinity War* has got nothing on the Book of Daniel!

Generally speaking, the book divides pretty well into two halves. Chapters 1 through 6 are largely telling stories of things that happened to Daniel and his 3 friends. We know them as Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego. Then chapters 7 through 12 focus mostly on the prophetic visions Daniel receives which give insight into the flow of human history from the Babylonian empire all the way through to the Great Tribulation and the Second Coming of Jesus to earth.

When it comes to Bible prophecy, we *cannot* overstate Daniel's importance. Dr. John Walvoord writes:

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/avengers\\_infinity\\_war](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/avengers_infinity_war)

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

*“...the book of Daniel is essential to the structure of prophecy and is the key to the entire Old Testament prophetic revelation...Daniel alone reveals the details of God's plan for both the nations and Israel.*

*The book brings together and interrelates great themes of prophecy as does no other portion of Scripture.”<sup>3</sup>*

Daniel's book is so key and so significant and so *accurate* it has, understandably, been the target of attack from those who refuse to believe the Bible, especially since the 17th century. Daniel is incredibly specific in many of its prophecies, naming empires individually and in order. And so, critics who say, “a writer cannot know the future”, try their best to prove Daniel was not written in the time or by the man it says it was. Rather, it must've been faked many centuries later. Unfortunately for them, the weight of evidence, archaeology, logic and truth stands against their claims. In hundreds of years, they have yet to make any conclusive charge against the reliability of this book.

I won't spend a lot of time on the refutation of these critics. If you want to dive into that, I'd recommend Walvoord's commentary. Instead, we want to feast on this remarkable text and enjoy each portion, being encouraged on the many levels that it addresses us.

Daniel *is* mostly categorized in our minds as a book of prophecy, and as *students* of prophecy it is incredibly valuable. But it's not *just* that. It's a Book of many wonderful treasures, which not only enrich our understanding of the future, but enhance our day-to-day lives right now. Because it's not just a timeline, it is the story of important characters. We have Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abed-Nego, Nebuchadnezzar and Darius. Each of these fellows give us immense lessons on how to live life.

As we turn to the text, here's how the book opens:

**Daniel 1:1-2 - In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. <sup>2</sup> And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the articles of the house of God, which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the articles into the treasure house of his god.**

The year was approximately 605 BC. Nebuchadnezzar would lay siege to Jerusalem 3 times. This was the first. It had been prophesied by Isaiah 80 or 100 years earlier that this would happen: Babylon would come take the treasure of Jerusalem and the young men of the noble class.

Daniel and his 3 friends were among those young men taken as prisoners of war. Scholars estimate they would've been 15 or 16 years old. By chapter 12, Daniel will be in his 80s, still serving the Lord, still hearing from God, still receiving insight from the Scriptures.

These 4 Hebrews are going to show us an unblemished example of how to live a faithful, believing life, no matter the circumstances we face. They show us what it means to have a faith that can endure. Their trust in God had legs they could stand on. They went from being in the ruling class of Israel to prisoner-eunuchs in a pagan empire. They would see the king's favor one day and his fury the next. They would find themselves executing the law in the morning and then face execution *because* of the law by the afternoon. They would face temptation, isolation, pressure, hatred, but also be given wealth, expertise, influence and position. They live on the pages of Scripture as examples to us in all these settings. What does it mean to be a faithful believer in youth or in old

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<sup>3</sup>Walvoord, John *Daniel: The Key To Prophetic Revelation*

age? What does it mean to trust God when you're the most successful or the most persecuted? How are we to operate as servants of Jesus Christ who also have to work a secular job? What does it really mean to render to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's? These guys prove and demonstrate that these things *can* be done. And it can all be done with boldness, with integrity and in such a way that lives are changed by the power of the Gospel.

Now, if you're like me, you're prone to think, "Well, sure, Daniel can do that. After all, he's special. I'm not like him. He's like Captain America. They guy's a hero!"

But one of my favorite things about this book is that these guys *are not special!* Their stories are amazing. What God did through them is awe-inspiring. But I'd submit to you that, among the Old Testament characters, Daniel and his 3 friends are perhaps more like us than all the others. They were guys, living life. Got done with school, found themselves in a government job and were mostly minding their own business when all these things happen to them. They weren't wonder-workers like Moses or Elijah. They weren't giant-slayers like David. They were conquerors like Joshua. They were just guys who were being carried along by life, but had 1 defining characteristic. It's given to us seven times in the book here's one of those times, when king Belteshazzar brings Daniel into his party in chapter 5, and he says this:

**Daniel 5:14a - <sup>14</sup>I have heard of you, that the Spirit of God *is* in you.**

*Seven times* the spirit in Daniel is referenced. It was God's Spirit empowering these guys, leading these guys, showing them how to navigate these seemingly impossible circumstances and it was the Spirit that was using their situations to bring the knowledge of God to their city and the empire. In each of these stories we see Daniel and his friends simply making a heart decision to go God's way, to honor their Lord and obey Him and then it is *God* who accomplishes the great things in and through them.

This is a most important lesson for us as Christians. Because the same offer is made to us. We find ourselves in some job, in some city, maybe it's where we want to be, maybe it's not. No matter the circumstances, the Lord offers us His Spirit to fill us and build us and lead us and empower us so that we can be victorious in our lives and so that He can accomplish His plan through us. Daniel shows us that this isn't always *easy*, but it is always *possible*. The same filling that was available to him is available to us. In fact, we have an even *better* arrangement on this side of the cross as the Spirit *permanently* indwells us and because we now have the *completed* revelation of Scripture which gives us way more information and context and direction that Daniel had back in 605 BC.

And here's what we notice about Daniel and his friends. Along the way, as they are living out their faith and enjoying the power of the Spirit in their lives, they are thankful, they're gracious, they're effective and they're not fearful. Even when they're being made into eunuchs and cast into lions' dens and fiery furnaces, there's no anxiety. There's no desperation. Their faith has legs and they stand strong, which means we can too. Because we have a God who loves us and treasures us and is able to do all things according to His good pleasure.

And it pleases Him to do work in us. To make you and I into monuments of His love and power and grace, as He's done with Daniel, with Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego. It didn't require that they get some sort of special certification or that they beat out thousands of competitors. They didn't have to prove they were *worthy* of being used. No, they just made the decision in their hearts to go God's way. They decided from the beginning that they would be servants of the Most High God *no matter what*. And from there, the Lord did the rest. Taking even mundane things like their personal

prayer lives and bringing an incalculable amount of eternal fruit from it. He used their suffering to save the soul of one of the most wicked tyrants in human history.

The point is: We want to be characters like Daniel and the amazing thing is that we *can* be! That's what I hope we take away from our studies in this book, alongside a greater knowledge of God's plan for this world yet future, culminating in the glorious return of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who has not abandoned us, but is coming with a Kingdom, with His reward in His hand, and we get to serve Him today as He fills us and uses us.