

## An Introduction to the Prophetic Section of Daniel

# The Chronology and Literature of Daniel

*Is the future really unalterable?* Yes. And no. It all depend on which sense we mean when we use the phrase.

### In what sense is the future alterable?

People have \_\_\_\_\_. We make real choices that bring about real consequences that determine, on some scale, the future.

- *Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Galatians 6:7-8*

### In what sense is the future unalterable?

In two senses.

First, actions are \_\_\_\_\_. These events will happen as God said no matter what people decide to do.

- *The Lord Almighty has sworn, "Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will happen. The Lord of Heaven's Armies has spoken—who can change his plans? When his hand is raised, who can stop him?" Isaiah 14:24, 17*

Second, human history will arrive at an \_\_\_\_\_. God has decided how history will end, and the conclusion is absolutely and eternally locked in.

- *I am God, and there is none like me. Only I can tell you the future before it even happens. Everything I plan will come to pass, for I do whatever I wish. Isaiah 46:9-10*

## The Chronology of the Book of Daniel

The book of Daniel is not laid out chronologically. It is laid out in two sections:

1. An \_\_\_\_\_ section (chapters 1-6). Within this section there are three dreams/visions given to kings that are interpreted by Daniel.
2. A \_\_\_\_\_ section (chapters 7-12). Within this section there are four dreams/vision given to Daniel that are interpreted by God.

### A chronology of Daniel

<u>Chronology</u>	<u>Event</u>	<u>King</u>	<u>Kingdom</u>	<u>Date</u>
Chapter 1	Captivity and training	Nebuchadnezzar	Babylon	605BC
Chapter 2	Statue dream	Nebuchadnezzar	Babylon	603BC
Chapter 3	The Fiery Furnace	Nebuchadnezzar	Babylon	587BC
Chapter 4	Tree dream	Nebuchadnezzar	Babylon	571BC
Chapter 7	Vision of the 4 beasts	Belshazzar	Babylon	553BC
Chapter 8	Vision of the ram & goat	Belshazzar	Babylon	551BC
Chapter 5	Belshazzar's feast	Belshazzar	Babylon	539BC
Chapter 6	Daniel in the Lion's Den	Darius	Persia	539BC
Chapter 9	The 70 Weeks	Darius	Persia	538BC
Chapter 10-12	The Warring Kingdoms	Cyrus	Persia	534BC

## The Literature and Figures of Speech in Daniel's Visions.

### Literary styles in Daniel

Human literature makes use of different styles that convey information in different ways. There is poetry (meter and rhyme); drama (written to be performed); prose nonfiction (written in sentences and paragraphs about real people, events, facts); prose fiction (same as nonfiction but about invented characters and events.) Meaning is derived from understanding the literary style used.

The Bible is a library containing literature. The various books in this sacred library use a number of literary styles. The ones used in Daniel 7-12 are:

- \_\_\_\_\_  
This is historical storytelling. Real events, real people, real consequences. Narrative shows what happened — but it doesn't always tell you explicitly what to think. You have to discern.  
Key features: Plot and character development, dialogue-driven scenes; theological meaning embedded in history
- \_\_\_\_\_  
Bringing correction and predictions to God's people. Prophecy often blends near-term fulfillment with long-range (even messianic) horizons.  
Key features: Calls to repentance; judgment warnings; future hope and restoration; symbolic actions
- \_\_\_\_\_  
This is symbolic, visionary literature. If you read apocalyptic like newspaper reporting, you'll get lost. It's symbolic theology.  
Key features: Strange, even bizarre imagery; cosmic conflict; numbers and images with symbolic or cryptic meaning

Richard Taylor on [The Gospel Coalition](#) website states:  
*"Of the many genres of biblical literature, apocalyptic is perhaps the most challenging to understand, due in part to its frequent use of figurative language and its adoption of strange and even bizarre imagery. Compared to relatively straightforward narrative texts of biblical literature, apocalyptic literature has an unfamiliar feel for many readers. [Interpretations] are anything but obvious, leading to reader confusion and disorientation."*

### Figures of speech in Daniel

Within each category we understand figures of speech. The literature of the Bible also uses such figures of speech. Daniel makes much use of figures of speech in recording his visions. Here are some examples.

- ▶ \_\_\_\_\_ A phrase whose meaning can't be understood from its literal words. Example: "Break a leg" means good luck.  
*Daniel 7:2-3 - Daniel said: "In my vision I looked, and there before me were the four winds of heaven churning up the great sea. Four great beasts, each different from the others, came up out of the sea."*
  
- ▶ \_\_\_\_\_ A direct comparison between two unlike things, saying one thing is another. "Life is a journey."  
*Daniel 7:8 - As I was looking at the horns, suddenly another small horn appeared among them. Three of the first horns were torn out by the roots to make room for it. This little horn had eyes like human eyes and a mouth that was boasting arrogantly.*
  
- ▶ \_\_\_\_\_ A comparison between two things using like or as. "She ran like the wind."  
*Daniel 7:9 - As I looked, thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze.*
  
- ▶ \_\_\_\_\_ Deliberate, dramatic exaggeration for effect. "I've told you a million times."  
*Daniel 7:7 - After that, in my vision at night I looked, and there before me was a fourth beast—terrifying and frightening and very powerful. It had large iron teeth; it crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left.*
  
- ▶ \_\_\_\_\_ Giving human qualities or characteristics to non-human things. "The wind whispered through the trees."  
*Daniel 8:9-10 - Out of one of them came another horn, which started small but grew in power. It grew until it reached the host of the heavens, and it threw some of the starry host down to the earth and trampled on them.*

- ▶ \_\_\_\_\_ An indirect reference to a well-known person, place, event, or work. Calling someone a “Romeo” alludes to Shakespeare’s famous lover.  
*Daniel 8:10 - It set itself up to be as great as the commander of the army of the Lord*
- ▶ \_\_\_\_\_ When what is said or happens is the opposite of what is expected or meant. A fire station burning down is situational irony; saying “Oh great” when something goes wrong is verbal irony.  
*Daniel 7:11-12 - I continued to watch because of the boastful words the horn was speaking. I kept looking until the beast was slain and its body destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire. The other beasts had been stripped of their authority, but were allowed to live for a period of time.*

We interpret meaning accurately by understanding both literary style and figures of speech. Knowing them is critical to understanding. In the visions of Daniel, there is a lot of prophetic and apocalyptic literature styles. There are many figures of speech. So we need to get comfortable with them in discerning the meaning of Daniel’s visions.

### **Factors in Interpretation**

When attempting to properly interpret prophetic and apocalyptic literature that is filled with figures of speech, we need to be guided by sound principles.

Principle #1: **Start with** \_\_\_\_\_.

In several of Daniel’s visions, an angelic messenger explains portions of what Daniel saw. Those inspired explanations give us an interpretive framework for understanding the rest of the vision.

Principle #2: **Use Scripture to** \_\_\_\_\_.

When the same symbols appear elsewhere in Scripture and their meaning is clear, we should allow the Bible to interpret itself. Revelation, in

particular, echoes much of Daniel's imagery and often sheds additional light on what those symbols represent.

Principle #3: **Keep the \_\_\_\_\_ in view.**

Daniel's visions overlap and repeat. His four visions restate the same themes while adding clarity and detail. They should be understood together as one complementary whole, and always interpreted in light of the rest of what the Bible reveals.

Principle #4: **Use \_\_\_\_\_ to shed light on interpretation.**

Some of Daniel's predictions have already been fulfilled. By examining how and through whom those prophecies were fulfilled, we gain insight that helps us understand the meaning of the symbols and imagery connected to the predictions that remain unfulfilled.

Principle #5: **Use trusted \_\_\_\_\_.**

Many smart and gifted people who are committed to the authority and accuracy of Scripture have spent years studying these passages. Let their work help guide you as you seek to understand what the Bible is saying.

### Reflection and Discussion Questions

- ▶ What excites you most about studying the visions of Daniel? What makes you most apprehensive?
  - ▶ Why do you think God includes information about the future and end times to people? How does this information affect you? How do you think it should affect you?
  - ▶ How skilled would you say you were in interpreting the Bible? How could you get better?
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**Before the next session:** read Daniel chapter 7 at least 3 times in 3 different versions of the Bible. (Recommended versions: ESV, NIV, NLT)