

## **The Book of Daniel Overview and Reading Guide**

Daniel, along with some other young men, was taken from Jerusalem to Babylon by king Nebuchadnezzar in the first exile of Israelites in 597 to serve in his court . Daniel's name means "God has judged" and the book presents the images that God revealed to Daniel to emphasize God's judgment on evil kings and kingdoms. The book is divided into two major parts. Chapters 1-6 tell dramatic stories of Israelites maintaining their faithfulness to God in the face of persecution. Chapters 7-12 are visions given to Daniel which show the grand scope of God's future to bring down all earthly powers and raise up the faithful to "shine like stars forever" (12:3).

The book of Daniel has been studied extensively as some have attempted to use Daniel's visions to accurately predict the timeframe of the future that God has presented. Additionally, some have attempted to link particular animals in Daniel's vision to specific countries today (i.e., eagle=USA). While this may be a fascinating exercise in interpretation and mathematics, it may miss the bigger, enduring themes that God revealed to Daniel. While the images present in Daniel's visions are symbols, it is more helpful to connect them to universal themes than to specific entities or dates. For example: lion=royalty, ox=strength, eagle=speed, a hand=power, legs=stability, eyes=knowledge, the number 4=the corners of God's earth, 7 or 40=perfection or completion.

Finally, the major theme found in Daniel is how the faithful are to respond to earthly powers. The faithful do not fight back against the evil kings. They endure persecution, trusting entirely in God's long-range plan to set things right. This can be seen in the words of the young men just before they are thrown in the furnace, "If our God, whom we serve is able to deliver us, let him do so. But even if he does not, we will not worship your idol" (paraphrase of 3:17,18).

How does a message of prayerful, nonviolent resistance speak to us today in the face of a militaristic USA, "evil" regimes, and ISIS?