



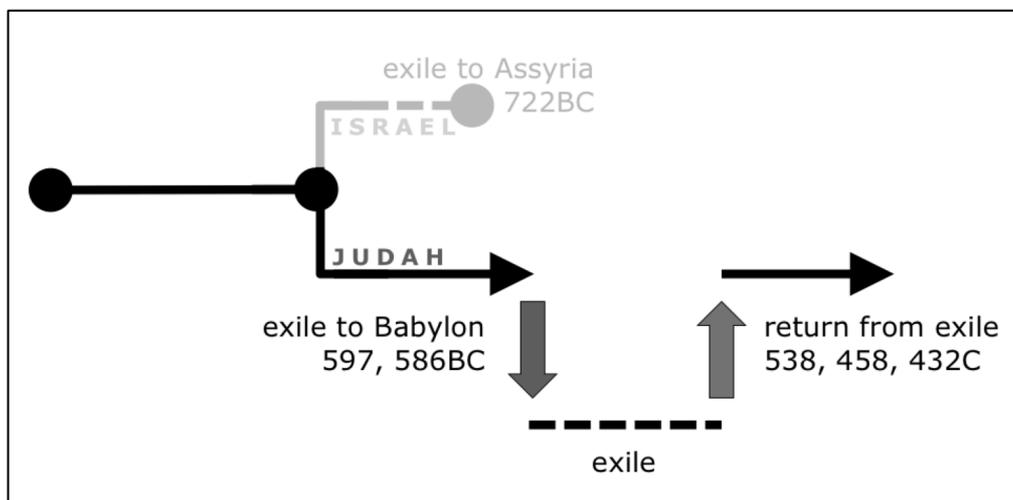
# AN INTRODUCTION TO Daniel

PTCORNHILL

Nigel Styles / SEGP Sept 2017

## Background

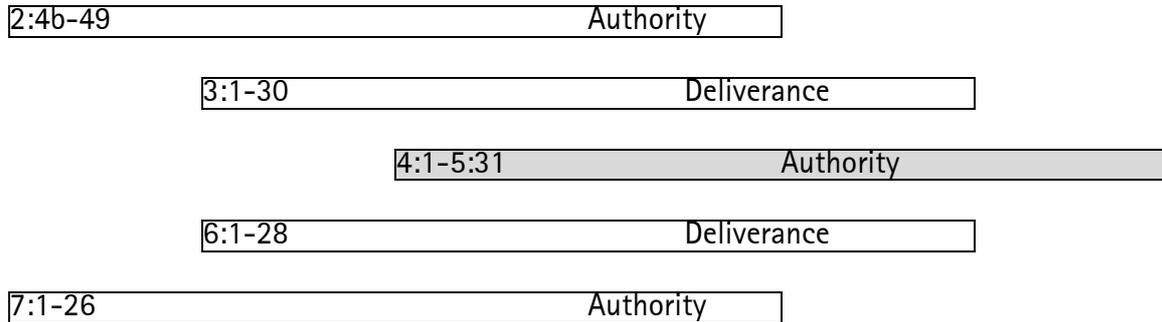
*Daniel* has lots of chronological markers, so we can date the storyline exactly:



Year BC	Time ref	Event	Story	Daniel age?
620 ?		The birth of Daniel		
605	1:1	Daniel carried into exile	Dan 1	15
603	2:1	Nebuchadnezzar's dream	Dan 2	17
580 ?		The fiery furnace	Dan 3	
580-70 ?		Nebuchadnezzar's humbling	Dan 4	
562		Death of Nebuchadnezzar	pre 5:1	58
552	7:1	Vision 1	Dan 7	68
550	8:1	Vision 2	Dan 8	70
539	5:30-31	Belshazzar's feast	Dan 5	81
539/8	9:1	Vision 3 (after Daniel's prayer)	Dan 9	81
539	6:1	The lion's den	6:1	81
539	Ezra 1	Cyrus edict re return		
538		First return from exile	Ezra	
536	10:1	Vision 4	Dan 10-12	84

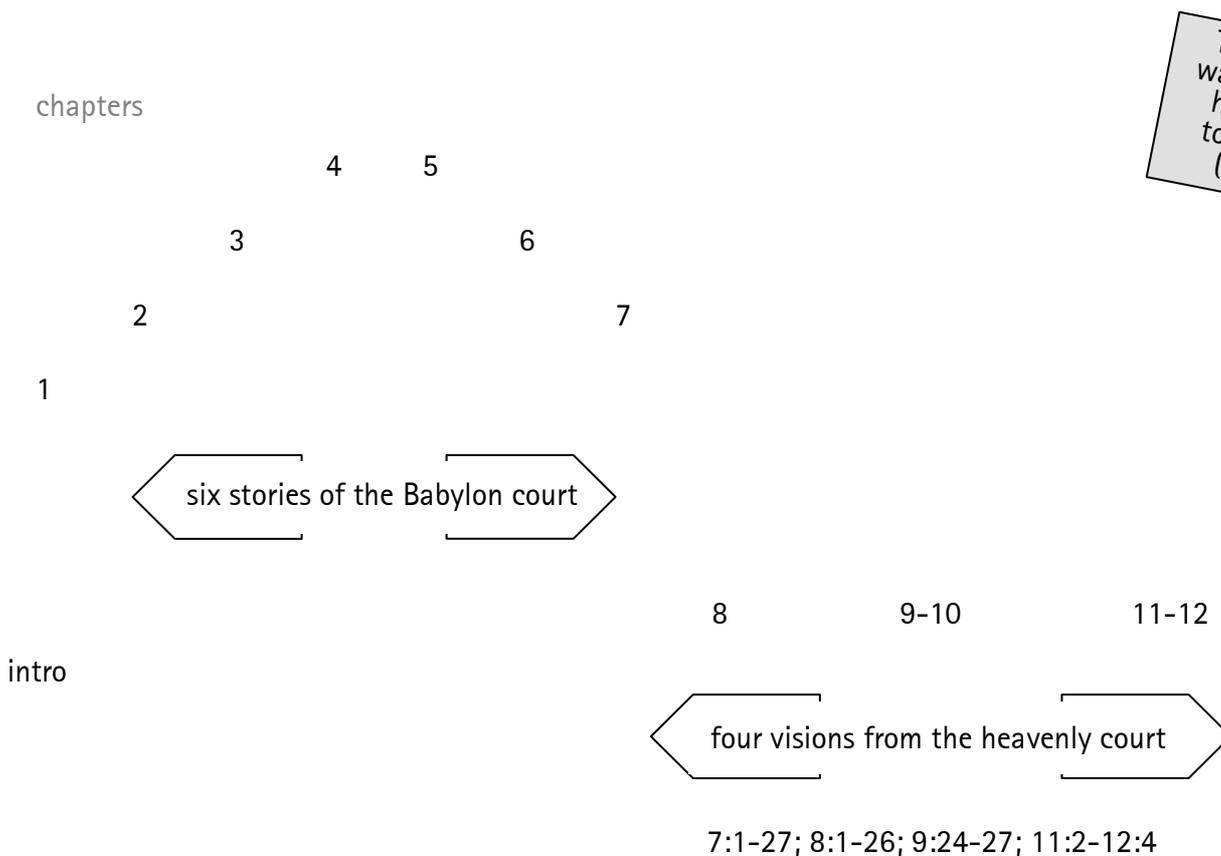
## Structure: a first look

*Daniel* offers one of the clearest 'chiasms' of the Bible. There may be subtler ways of titling each section, but this is a fairly-well-accepted shape of the first half of the book:



So, the two central chapters 4 and 5 are the pivotal stories of the 'history' section of the book, inviting the reader to compare Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar.

## Courts and a chiasm





## Revelation: visions and vagueness

*Daniel* uses two different styles of writing:

- ch 1-6 = 'history'
- ch 7-12 = 'apocalyptic'

Why?

'Apocalyptic' is a style of writing which *Daniel* shares with *Revelation* (and, arguably, with some other sections of the Bible, eg Mark 13). It is certainly different from most other prophetic writing (and in the Hebrew canon, *Daniel* is understandably placed not with 'the Prophets', but with 'the Writings').

It seems likely that this form of writing began in order to meet the crisis of the 'end' of the nation in 587/586BC. Foreign powers now exercised mastery, and the people of God were in retreat and under persecution: the question at such a time is the future of salvation history (and Israel's place within it).



The answer of *Daniel* is that God's salvation is a promise held out to his faithful (rather than the nation as a whole any more). Nationalism disappears, to be replaced by a new universality, a world-encompassing judgment from which the kingdom of God will emerge. The most obvious themes are therefore:

- history has a cosmic significance, the interplay of principalities and powers
- Israel's God presides over all history and all nations (despite appearances to the contrary)
- God's kingdom will come by divine intervention (and what that kingdom is like)
- the emergence of 'one like a Son of Man' (7:13) as God's world ruler.

How does this interpret the 'history' sections of the book? It means that we should understand the stories of the rise and fall of Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar and Darius in the light of the 'apocalyptic' revelations of what God is doing behind the scenes, and in the light of these four themes in particular. God humbles both the Babylonian Nebuchadnezzar and the Persian Darius so that they recognize God's greater authority (4:3-37; 6:26-27), and even Belshazzar (who refuses to recognize it) is brought down on God's say-so (5:26-28, 30). The faithful Daniel outlasts them all (1:21).

Note that this is very different from how we usually treat the book: we usually feel that the stories are the 'easier' bits, and what I'm calling the interpretative explanations are discarded as too obtuse!

## Parables in Mark's gospel

In Mark 4:1-34, Jesus explains to his disciples that he has a deliberate ministry strategy: he has come to teach because that is the way that a magnificent harvest will be produced.

But alongside this main point, we observe that the way he teaches is by means of **parables**, and parables deliberately divide his hearers: there are some who are 'outside' who will hear but not understand Jesus' teaching, and there are others to whom, privately, he explains everything.

Those 'outside' have been blinded and deafened by God (just as he did to Israel in Isaiah's day), preventing them from repenting and being forgiven (10-12, 34-35). But this does not mean that parables fail to communicate anything to them, and Jesus still continued to teach the crowd in ways they could understand (33): the application of the story of v3-8 ('Hear O Israel' cf 21-25; Deut 6:4) was hardly obscure!

But for 'those around him with the twelve', for his disciples, Jesus' private seminar gave them an understanding that they otherwise lacked. For, of course, we, like them, have hearts that are so calloused that we cannot and will not hear or see unless and until God mercifully does give us 'the secret'.

This is, of course, very similar to *Daniel*. God is revealing himself to all - even pagans like Nebuchadnezzar. There is much for them to pay attention to, to hear, and to heed. But God also reveals to his own people the 'secrets' that are unseen, and would remain unseen unless revealed to us.



## Daniel 9:1-27

The context of Daniel's prayer:

Why is the exile to last 70 years? Piece together the significance of that number from these passages:

Leviticus 26: 18, 21, 24, 28 and 33-35

Jeremiah 25:8-14

Jeremiah 29:10-14

2 Chronicles 36:17-23

word going out (23)	the word of Daniel 9
	7 x 7
anointed one comes (25)	Cyrus' decree (Ezra 1)
building project troubled times	62 x 7
anointed one cut off (26)	Jesus' earthly ministry
strong covenant imposed sacrifice ends / abominations	1 x 7
decreed end (27)	Jesus' return

## 2 + 2 = 29

Apocalyptic writing uses numbers. Some commentators do interpret these numbers as giving us a definite timetable. However, certain numbers (eg 3, 7, 12) appear frequently, and others (eg 8, 9, 11) don't appear at all. (It would be unusual, even in the providence of God, if everything that needed to be numbered occurred only in such a limited range!) This suggests that these numbers are symbolic. Numbers are *qualitative* rather than *quantitative*. That is to say, they tell us about the *nature* of things rather than their *amount*. In English, we use the word 'dozen' this way, as in 'I've told you *dozens* of times' (meaning not 'the number of times I've told you divides exactly by twelve' but 'I've told you often enough').

The numbers seven/seventy are of rich theological significance, symbolising concepts like Creation, completeness, perfection and rest. Clearly in Daniel's mind as he prayed was the end of the Babylonian Exile and the restoration of God's people, the city of Jerusalem and the temple. While this vision clearly speaks of these events it looks beyond that 'exodus' and restoration to the ultimate and final Exodus and restoration. The return of the exiles from Babylon and the rebuilding of Jerusalem must have seemed to Daniel like a mountain peak after all these years in exile, but as he ascended that first mountain peak in the vision, he sees down the centuries to a mightier peak by far.

(Fyall/Sydserrff: Teaching Daniel p 275)

Of course, 'we want relief from trials now. We expect Christian maturity now. We demand answers to prayer now. And God says to us, as he seems to be saying to Daniel and his people here (in 9:24-27): 'Now this is what I am going to do, but not right away; hunker down and settle into a long faithfulness toward your final hope' (D R Davis: The Message of Daniel p132).

## Two Messiahs?

The exile was caused by

- Nebuchadnezzar, who 'came to Jerusalem and besieged it' (1:1 cf 2 Kgs 24:10ff);
- the Lord, who 'gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand' (1:2 cf 2 Kgs 24:20).

It was a matter of

- Nebuchadnezzar's aggressive foreign policy;
- the Lord's promised covenant curses now fulfilled (eg Lev 26:14-39).

The return from exile involves two stages;

- a physical return from Babylon to 'the land';
- a return from covenant violation back to God, so that covenant relationship is renewed and restored.

You could describe those two stages in the return from exile like this:

- getting the people out of Babylon
- getting Babylon out of the people. (cf Gentry/Wellum: Kingdom through Covenant p538f)

The agent for the first is Cyrus. The agent for the second is Isaiah's 'Servant of the Lord'. Both are called the Anointed One, or 'Messiah'.

**Cyrus** takes the people of God from Babylon ...

To call a pagan emperor 'his anointed', a term usually associated with the kings or priests of Israel is not only unusual, but potentially offensive to God's people ... How can God call a Gentile king 'Messiah'? The answer is that he has been appointed and equipped by the Lord alone to fulfill a specific task for which the Lord has selected him ... So, all of the verbs in Isaiah 45:1-5 have Yahweh as their subject. Everything that Cyrus will achieve he does in and through the agency of the Lord, the unique and only deity, 'so that men may know that there is none besides me; I, the Lord, do all these things (6-7).

(D Jackman: Teaching Isaiah p198)

**Jesus** takes the people of God from judgement ...

The end of this exile, and the real 'return', are not now [for us] future events to be experienced in terms of a cleansed Land, a rebuilt Temple, an intensified Torah. The exile came to its cataclysmic end when Jesus, Israel's representative Messiah, died outside the walls of Jerusalem, bearing the curse, which consisted of exile at the hands of the pagans, to its utmost limit. The return from exile began when Jesus, again as their representative Messiah, emerged from the tomb three days later. As a result, the whole complex of Jewish expectations as to what would happen when the exile finished had come tumbling out in a rush. Israel's God had poured out his own spirit on all flesh; his word was going out to the nations; he had called into being a new people comprised of all races and classes, and both sexes, without distinction.

(N T Wright: The New Testament and the People of God p406)

## Daniel 8-12

Daniel 9 is at the centre of the longer section of chapters 8-12

Note the section dividers (provided by the word 'vision'):

vision 1	7:1
vision 2	8:1
vision 3	9:23
vision 4	10:1

Ch 8ff explains/unpacks how the universal 'vision' of ch7 applies to Israel (cf the emphasis on lack of understanding, and further insight given in 7:15-16, 28; 8:15-19, 27; 9:22-23; 10:2-3, 10, 18-21). In particular, ch 11 fills in the detail of the 'broad brush strokes' of ch 7-9 by describing history from Xerxes to Seleucus IV to Antiochus Ephiphanes. (cf D.R. Davies: *The Message of Daniel* [BST] pp 150-152 etc for a bullet-point summary of this history.)

The big themes in this section are ...

The reality we see	The reality God reveals
powerful kings	powerful King
God's people in chains	God's people with crowns

### Who is the 'one like a son of man' (7:13)?

Read Mark 14:62. What is Jesus predicting as he addresses the 'monsters' who wield power in his day? What links this verse with Daniel 7?



Rene Magritte:  
Son of Man (1964)

(Clue: who is - and who will be - in the dock and on the bench in this courtroom?)

Some have suggested that the fourth man seen in the fiery furnace (3:24-25) is an Old Testament 'epiphany' or appearance of the divine Son of God before he took on human form in the person of Jesus Christ.

But note:

- Nebuchadnezzar describes the fourth figure as both 'like a son of the gods' (25) and as 'angel' (28);
- since the account of the deliverance from the fire parallels the deliverance from the lions' den (in ch 6), it's likely that the 'angel' of 6:22 is the same as the figure in the furnace;
- Nebuchadnezzar is a pagan: 'we cannot allow a polytheist to be our decisive theological guide' (Davis);
- there are two figures variously described in ch 10. The first is 'clothed in linen' (5-6), and speaks with Daniel up to verse 14. The second is 'in the likeness of the children of men' (16), 'having the appearance of a man' (18) and speaks all the way up to 12:4.

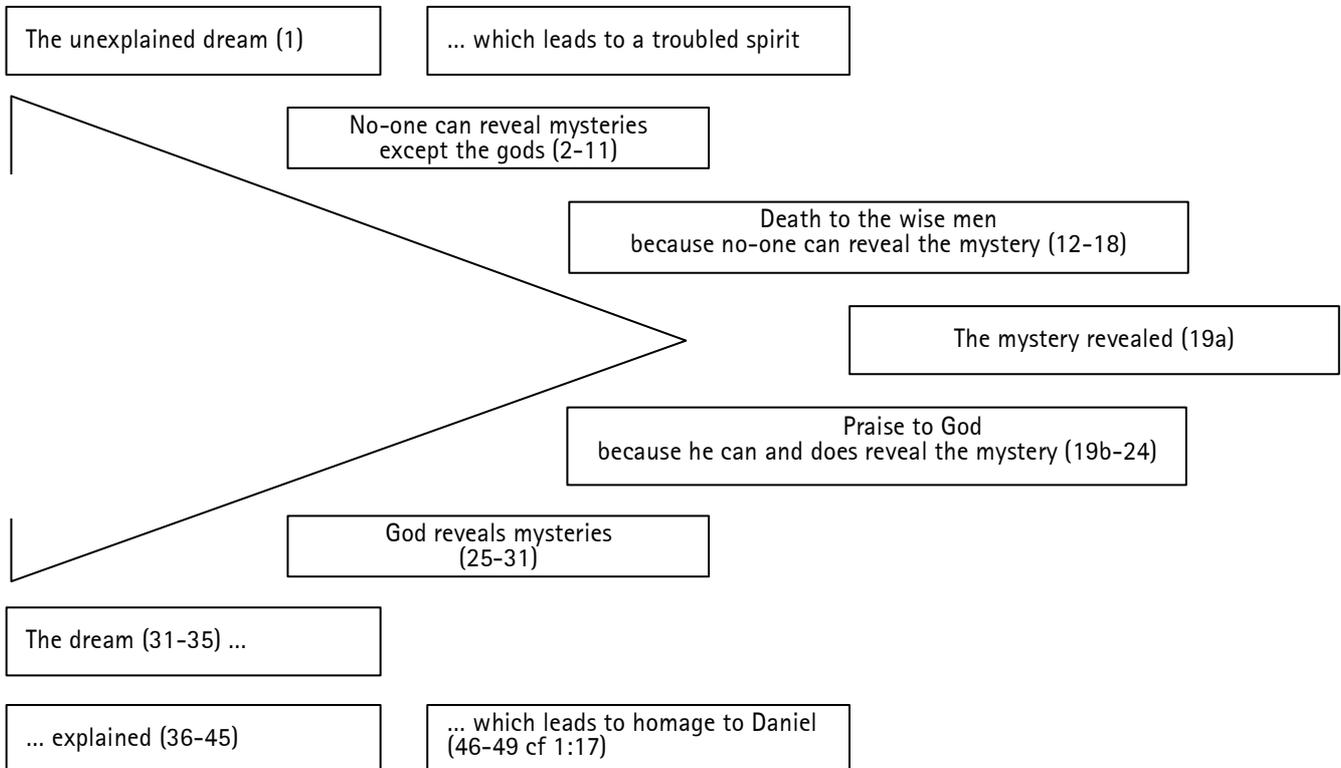
The more important theme is that the three are not delivered *from* the fire, but they are delivered *in* the fire (or even *through* the fire) (cf Rom 8:37). The four unbound in verse 25 contrast with the three bound in 24.

The deliverance comes about through the presence of a fourth person in their midst. The divine aide who camps round those who honour God and extricates them from peril (Ps 34:7) enters the fire himself to neutralise its capacity for harm. ... God's promise 'I will be with you' characteristically belongs to contexts of affliction and pressure (Exod 3:12; Isa 7:14; 43:1-3; Matt 28:20; Ps 23:4-5). The experience of God being with his people ... comes only in the furnace, not in being preserved from it.

John Goldingay: *Daniel* p 74-75

## Daniel 2:1-49

The story of ch2 is held together around three statements about god/God:  
 in verse 11  
 27-28  
 47



Where is the emphasis in this chapter? Is it 'that God reveals' or 'what God reveals'?

If it is 'that God reveals', then the **Theme Sentence** is:

As he sets up his eternal kingdom, God alone explains to us about the kingdoms in our world

Then the **Aim Sentence** is:

Read the Bible to understand the significance of events in this world

OR

Trust God to establish his eternal kingdom

BUT if it is 'what God reveals', then the **Theme Sentence** is:

God reveals that, behind this world's mighty kingdoms, he is setting up his eternal kingdom

Then the **Aim Sentence** is:

Be sure (especially when the evidence seems to deny it) that God's king will win

## Resources on Daniel

Joyce Baldwin: *Daniel* (Tyndale)

Dale Ralph Davis: *The message of Daniel* (BST/IVP)

Typical DRD exegesis! Very fresh, a wonderful way with words, good illustrations and sharp applications. And, of course, the usual crit that he doesn't 'take us to Christ' enough.

Less positive review here: <http://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/review/the-message-of-daniel>

Sinclair Ferguson: *Daniel* (The Preacher's Commentary Vol 21)

Aimed specifically at pastors, yet accessible to a general readership as well. Very helpful.

Bob Fyall and Robin Sydserff; *Teaching Daniel* (PT / Christian Focus)

Helpful for preachers and Bible study group leaders as it provides structure, sermon/study outlines etc.

John E Goldingay: *Daniel* (Word)

Sydney Greidanus: *Preaching Christ from Daniel* (Eerdmans)

Like his other books in this series, Greidanus provides an introductory 'Issues in Preaching Christ from Daniel' followed by eleven sermons (that cover the entire book) as 'models' of his 'Six ways to preach Christ' from the Old Testament.

James M Hamilton: *With the Clouds of Heaven: the book of Daniel in Biblical theology* (NSBT)

Top recommendation! Not a 'commentary' but a very stimulating (and fresh) introduction to many of the themes/issues you'll have to grapple with.

Review here <http://mydigitalseminary.com/with-the-clouds-of-heaven/>

David Helm: *Daniel for you* (The Good Book Company)

The introduction was superb, and really whet the appetite for what might follow. The rest of the book was faithful and very helpful, but disappointingly didn't develop the fresh ideas of the introduction much further.

Hear him interviewed by Nancy Guthrie in her podcast 'Help me Teach the Bible' at

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/help-me-teach-the-bible-david-helm-on-daniel>

John C Lennox: *Against the Flow: the inspiration of Daniel in an age of relativism* (Monarch)

This is very easy to read, and full of helpful connections between Daniel's age and our own. It therefore puts a lot of emphasis on Daniel the man as our model/example. You'd expect a Professor of Mathematics to go a bundle on the numbers - and he does: he's intriguing, persuasive, but, in my opinion, ultimately misleading!

Tremper Longman III: *Daniel* (Zondervan)

Some of the NIVAC commentaries are very helpful, while others overemphasize one or another feature of the series to the neglect of the others. Longman's commentary on Daniel is an example of one of the better works in the series. Longman's strength is in his literary analysis of the book.

E C Lucas: *Daniel* (Apollos)

Although Lucas does not settle firmly on an early or late date for Daniel (concluding that it is possible to make a reasonable case for either date), he has written a commentary that is worth consulting.

This commentary is slightly more technical than others, but all Hebrew and Aramaic is transliterated.

Andrew Reid: *Daniel: Kingdoms in Conflict* (Aquila Press)

A really useful shorter/accessible guide (- especially good for church members?)

O Palmer Robertson: *The Christ of the Prophets* (P&R Publishing)

An overview of the 'prophets' genre, and he manages to pack a lot into pp246-279 on Daniel.

Ronald S Wallace: *The message of Daniel* (old BST/IVP)

Now superseded by DRD.

E J Young: *Daniel* (Geneva Series of Commentaries)

An older commentary (1949) but still highly regarded.

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Tim Challies reviews his 'best commentaries on Daniel' here:

<https://www.challies.com/resources/best-commentaries-on-daniel>

Lots of Resources at The Gospel Coalition:

<http://resources.thegospelcoalition.org/library?f%5Bbook%5D%5B%5D=Daniel>