

LIVING FAITHFULLY IN EXILE



He is the living God, enduring forever; his kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion shall be to the end.



DANIEL





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Sources / Abbreviations

- Baldwin** Joyce Baldwin, *Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary*, IVP, 1978.
- Boice** James Boice, *Daniel*, Baker Books, 1989.
- Chapell** Bryan Chapell, *The Gospel According to Daniel*, Baker Books, 2014.
- Davis** Ralph Davis, *The Message of Daniel*, IVP, 2013.
- Duguid** Iain Duguid, *Daniel*, P & R Publishing, 2008.
- ESV** *English Standard Version*
- ESVSB** *English Standard Version Study Bible*, Crossway, 2008.
- Ferguson** Sinclair Ferguson, *Daniel*, Nelson, 1988.
- Helm** David Helm, *Daniel For You*, The Good Book Company, 2015.
- Longman** Tremper Longman, *Daniel: The NIV Application Commentary*, Zondervan, 1999.
- NIV** *New International Version*
- NLT** *New Living Translation*
- Wright** Christopher Wright, *Hearing the Message of Daniel*, Zondervan, 2017.

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LIVING FAITHFULLY **DANIEL** IN EXILE



Study One

Kings, Kingdoms and the Sovereignty of God

Daniel 1:1-7

Have you read the book of Daniel? is a very different question than *Have you read both halves of the book of Daniel?* But we are getting ahead of ourselves...

Daniel was a Jew who was deported some 1000 miles from Jerusalem to Babylon in the year 605 B.C. Daniel never went *home* again. He remained in Babylon for the rest of his life. While there, Daniel quickly ascended the ladder of social and political prominence. And when the Babylonians were overthrown by the Medo-Persian empire, Daniel remained a person of tremendous influence. Although he lived probably 70-plus years of his life as an exile in a foreign land, he remained faithful to his God.

So why ask the question, *Have you read both halves of Daniel?*

Because, as we will discover, the first and second halves of Daniel are startlingly different in content and genre. At first glance, this can seem hopelessly confusing.

Daniel 1-6 might be titled *The Adventures of Daniel in a Foreign Land*. And, yes, these chapters are adventurous! They have provided the raw material for countless Sunday school lessons through the centuries, even as they have inspired many to remain faithful in the face of insurmountable odds. We find Daniel in the Lion's Den and Daniel interpreting dreams. We find Daniel's three friends in that famous fiery furnace. Then there is good old Nebuchadnezzar eating grass like a cow and the famous handwriting on the wall story (giving employers a way to fire employees ever since, i.e. *Hey, read the writing on the wall!...*).

But then we get to Daniel 7-12. We might call this half of the book *The Visions of Daniel From a Foreign Land*. There we find visions of beasts. One looks like a lion, another has three ribs in its mouth, and still another looks like a leopard that happens to have four wings. We also meet someone called The Ancient of Days, someone referred to as a son of man, and we hear a lot of talk about 70 weeks, a ram and a goat, a message from Gabriel, and so on.

So what is the book of Daniel about? A paragraph from the ESV Study Bible summarizes the purpose of the book accurately:

The central theme of the book of Daniel is God's sovereignty over history and empires, setting up and removing kings as he pleases (2:21; 4:34–37). All of the kingdoms of this world will come to an end and will be replaced by the Lord's kingdom, which will never pass away (2:44; 7:27). Though trials and difficulties will continue for the saints up until the end, those who are faithful will be raised to glory, honor, and everlasting life in this final kingdom (12:1–3).

Read Daniel 1:1-7. Other than some names that are difficult to pronounce and even more difficult to spell, what stands out in these verses? What questions come to your mind on your first (or second) reading?

Re-read 1:1-2. We might quickly pass over 1:1. *Nebuchadnezzar...came to Jerusalem and besieged it.* One sentence in Daniel, but a sheer horror for the people of Judah.

The book of Lamentations chronicles the utter devastation of Jerusalem after the Babylonians left the city in ruins. For example, the food shortage is such that people are resorting to eating their own dead. But more than human suffering is in view in 1:1. As Gleason Archer writes,

When they leveled Yahweh's temple to the ground and burned its ruins, the Babylonian troops served notice to all the world that their gods were mightier than Yahweh, no matter what titles the Hebrews gave him. [The religion of the Jews] was exposed to universal scorn as an empty fraud. (Archer, p. 3)

Or as David Helm observes, *For the people of God, these horrific events would seem to signal that all the promises of God, centuries in the making, were now evaporating like the morning mist into thin air.* (Helm, p. 15)



Has there been a time in your life when the promises of God seemed to be *evaporating into thin air*? If appropriate, share this with your homegroup.

The distance from Jerusalem to Babylon is some 1,000 miles. What do you think this trek was like for Daniel?

Now look at Daniel 1:2. What is the shock of this verse? Who gave Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar?

Have you ever had your plans for your future suddenly disrupted? In other words, what events in your life felt like the Babylonians invading your Jerusalem?

Look at verses 3-7. Who are the main characters of this book so far? Specifically, what do we learn about Daniel and his friends?

In this section we ought not to miss the attempt by the Babylonian governors to completely assimilate Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah into their new surroundings.

These four are good looking, intelligent, able to teach, etc. But they are also given the king's food and wine, sent to *Babylonian school* for three years and expected to fit in perfectly within their new culture. In a word, the four main characters of the story are being brainwashed intentionally by the powers of Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar has the power to bring Judah to her knees, but there is an important psychological battle going on. The King's overthrow of the Jews would only be successful if he could, eventually, turn the Jews into Babylonians. How does the king hope to accomplish this?

Sinclair Ferguson points out Nebuchadnezzar's step-by-step plan to turn Daniel and company into emissaries for his political purposes.

- First, they are isolated. They are far from home, separated from their regular public worship of God. They are not hearing the word of God taught, nor are they in fellowship with many of God's people.
- Second, they are indoctrinated. They are taught the *literature and language of the Chaldeans* (v. 4).
- Third, they are compromised. They enjoy a special, and probably very good, diet of the king's food and wine.
- Fourth, they are re-identified. They are given Babylonian names. The king is trying to put still more distance between these four individuals and their rootedness in Yahweh.

Look at the above list and think of your own life. What are some specific ways you have been tempted to compromise your faith and assimilate thoroughly into the world in which you live?



Read 1 Peter 2:11. There Peter calls his readers to see themselves as *foreigners, sojourners, strangers* and *exiles* (depending on how the verse is translated). As a Christian, what do you think it looks like to have the mentality of an alien in our culture?

Praying the Passage: Daniel 1:1-7

- Consider that Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Jerusalem and the subsequent Babylonian exile resulted from Israel's failure to heed the warnings of the prophets. Spend some time revering the God who patiently loves and warns us, whose judgments are right and true, and who is sovereign over nations.
- Consider the 4-part Babylonian plan in the study guide to assimilate Daniel and his friends to Babylonian ways. Confess the ways our culture is pressing you into its mold.
- Ask God to raise up more godly men and women like Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in our local context, as faithful leaders resisting cultural accommodation in a time of exile.
- **SBCC Missionary Focus:** Praise God for SBCC workers who go to other places, learn languages and cultures, and share the good news with those who desperately need to hear it. Pray especially for Brendon and Naomi Y (in SE Asia) and Chad and Martha Earl (in Papua New Guinea) as they work to learn new languages and translate God's Word into those languages.

Notes



Study Two

Living Faithfully in Babylon

Daniel 1:8-21

When Jesus prays for his future church on the last night of his life (John 17), he prays,

I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. (John 17:15-16)

Centuries before the time of Jesus, Daniel lives faithfully in Babylon, but he refuses to be a full-blooded Babylonian.

Read Daniel 1:1-21. In verses 8-21, our passage for this week, what are the issues Daniel and his friends face?

As a Christian, where do you face some tension being *in* your city, but not *of* your city?

Read 1:8. There is some question as to why Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. Several views are popular:

Some think Daniel and friends are trying to stay away from foods that are ceremonially unclean. But this doesn't seem likely because the Old Testament does not prescribe a vegetarian diet and drinking wine is never forbidden (though drunkenness is condemned).

Others think these four youths are trying to avoid eating foods that had been previously offered to idols, thus contaminating themselves spiritually.

Another view holds that Daniel and friends become vegetarians for health reasons. It

has been pointed out that the Old Testament knows nothing of our modern notions of the health benefits of a meat-free diet (see Psalm 63:5 for example!).

The note from the ESV Study Bible¹ sheds more light when it says,

Daniel and his friends avoided the luxurious diet of the king's table as a way of protecting themselves from being ensnared by the temptations of the Babylonian culture. They used their distinctive diet as a way of retaining their distinctive identity as Jewish exiles and avoiding complete assimilation into Babylonian culture (which was the king's goal with these conquered subjects). With this restricted diet they continually reminded themselves, in this time of testing, that they were the people of God in a foreign land and that they were dependent for their food, indeed for their very lives, upon God, their Creator, not King Nebuchadnezzar.

James Boice says verse 8 is the most important verse in Daniel chapter 1. What is so important, this commentator says, is Daniel's *resolve*. Daniel could have enjoyed his newfound position in the king's court, including the great food. Instead, he draws a definitive line in the sand. Boice points out that we might think of Daniel's decision as a *small thing*.

Yet that is just the point. For it is in the small matters that great victories are won. This is where decisions to live a holy life are made—not in the big things (though they come if the big things are neglected), but in the details of life. (Boice, p. 22)

Can you name some *details of life* in which you are submitting to God in light of your identity as his child?

How might Daniel 1:8 challenge you further?

¹ ESV note on Daniel 1:8-16



Verse 1:11 contains a detail we might miss. Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah are still going by their Hebrew names. There is no indication the four young teenagers were obstinate in this, but apparently they eschew their Babylonian names (1:7) to remind themselves of who they are.

Daniel = *God is my judge*

Hananiah = *The Lord is gracious*

Mishael = *Who is what God is (i.e., Who is like God)*

Azariah = *The Lord is a helper*

Do you keep any tangible signs or reminders around you to help you remember who you are? Share with your group.

Read 1:15. Notice the two key words in this sentence. Daniel and friends were *better* and *fatter* (NIV: *healthier* and *better nourished*) than those who ate the king's food.

The success of Daniel and company flows from the grace of God. Notice the repetition of the phrase *God gave* (1:9, 17). Ultimately, it was God himself who gave Daniel and friends their success.

Commenting on 1:17, Ralph Davis writes,

Naturally this does not mean the youths do not study and toil and invest themselves in their studies. They surely do. But it means that God's goodness attends, surrounds and prospers their work and so explains their success. (Davis, p. 35)

Name some successes you've had in life. What role did your hard work play? How do the words *God gave* apply?

In what sense would you say today's church finds itself in a similar situation to Daniel's in Babylon? In other words, in what areas do you sense that the culture in which you live is creating values different from those of your Christian faith?

Who would you say are the *gods* of our cultural environment? What does worship of these *gods* entail?

Can you name an example you have seen within your Christian community of a person who has deliberately, because of their identity in Christ, acted in a way that's contrary to our culture's values? Share stories with your group.

Reflect on Tremper Longman's comment on Daniel 1.

It is striking how the contemporary church finds itself in a situation similar to Daniel's. We too live in a strange land. We have seen how Daniel was taken from the shadow of the temple and forced to live in a land that worshiped idols...

Christians today should understand that we too live in a *toxic* culture, that is, a culture that stands at odds with our faith. The god of modern culture is not the God of the Bible, but is ultimately the self. This strange god demands worship that creates values different than those of Christianity. (Longman, p. 62)



Praying the Passage: Daniel 1:8-21

- Praise the God who grants us favor (v. 9), who is the author of all knowledge and wisdom (v.17), and whose wisdom is far superior to the wisdom of this world (v. 20).
- Consider Daniel's resolve to discipline his appetites for the sake of God's purposes (v. 8). Ask God where He wants you to say no to the pleasures, comforts, and privileges of this world, and offer your body to him as a living sacrifice.
- Pray for integrity, discipline, and supernatural wisdom for Christians in government and other positions of leadership and influence in our community and nation.
- **SBCC Missionary Focus:** Pray for our SBCC workers involved with various college ministries to pay attention to spiritual disciplines, stay distinct, and proclaim that their success flows from the grace of God. Remember Chris Comstock (CRU at UCSB), Julie Day (IVCF in San Diego), Jen Hu (CRU at UCSB), Tim and Kim Notehelfer (Int'l Students, Inc.), Austin and Kristin Stockfisch (Fellowship of Christian Athletes at UCSB, SBCC, Westmont and local high schools), and Jeff and Robyn Wood (CRU at UCSB).

Notes



Study Three

Nebuchadnezzar's Nightmare

Daniel 2:1-30

Have you ever had a friend who wants to tell you about his dreams? Perhaps he goes into exhausting detail and tells you a long version of a dream you would rather not hear. Daniel 2 is all about the king's dream, but there is a twist—he doesn't want to recount the dream himself! Read on to find out more...

Verses 1-30 are an exciting, sometimes humorous read. Enjoy this story before going on in this study. Write down any notes, thoughts or questions your reading brings to mind, but above all, enjoy a great story.

Verse 1 opens on the second year of the king's reign and already he is having *divinely inspired nightmares* (Ferguson). Nebuchadnezzar is about thirty years old. Eight years earlier the Assyrians had fallen to Babylon, and now Babylon has ascended to be the world's greatest power. Nebuchadnezzar has successfully engaged the Egyptians in battle and has control of Syria and Israel (see Helm, pp. 29-30). In other words, one wouldn't think this king would be troubled in spirit, as verse 1 indicates.

One background detail will help us understand the restlessness of the king's soul and his earnest desire to have the dream interpreted. In the ancient Near East, dreams were thought to be *shadows of future events*.

A king's dreams had significance for the nation as a whole, and the interpretation was important so that the king might take steps to be ready for the events the dream anticipated, or even to counteract them. (ESVSB on Daniel 2:1)

With the above in mind, re-read 2:3-11. Notice the huge stakes in this game!

Read verses 12-14. Compare Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar. Notice the irony in the way this story is told. The powerful one is troubled, the weak one is at peace. Nebuchadnezzar frets while Daniel, now in a form of slavery, is calm and confident.

Read these verses carefully. What can you learn from Daniel in the way he faces a seemingly desperate situation?

One commentator says of verses 17-18, *Daniel may be self-assured, but he is not self-reliant.* (Helm, p. 33) What does Daniel do upon hearing the news of Nebuchadnezzar's dream?

What do you think it means to *seek the mercy of God* in verse 18?

When you are distressed, what does it look like to you to seek God's mercy?

We would be remiss if we did not notice the power of group prayer. Daniel does not pray alone; rather, he prays with his three friends for God's protection and insight.

Have you asked friends to pray for and with you when you were facing an extremely perplexing situation? Describe the experience and share with your homegroup.



Respond to and be encouraged by the following quotation by D. A. Carson.

The Western church needs nothing more urgently than groups of believers, unknown, unsought, privately, faithfully, without promotion or fanfare, covenanting together to seek God's face, praying urgently for what is best as we contemplate the day of Jesus Christ—praying, in short, for revival. What would the end of these things be? God is sovereign and full of compassion: who knows what he might do?¹

In what ways do you, or could you, give attention to praying together with other believers for the big purposes of God to be fulfilled in his church?

Look at verse 19. God answers Daniel's prayer. What does Daniel do? He prays again, this time with a torrent of praise. Examine Daniel's praise (2:20-23). List the specific things Daniel finds for which he gives praise and thanks, and let these lists shape your prayer time together as a homegroup.

Verses 27-30 are priceless. Daniel has his audience before the king. He is there to save the day, so to speak, for all the *enchanters*, *magicians*, and *astrologers* of Babylon. Their lives hinge on Daniel's performance before Nebuchadnezzar!

¹ *A Call to Spiritual Reformation* p. 137

What do Daniel's words to the king communicate about who God is?

Respond to the following. How could Daniel 2 prompt you to use your voice in the world in which you live?

Daniel told the king that God was speaking to him, through the dream. We are to tell the world that God is speaking to it, through Jesus. The world needs people who understand and can clearly state God's word to the world. Wherever God has placed you, remember this: He has a word to be made known. He has placed you in a line of work where others need to hear your voice. (Helm, p. 35)

Much of our passage in this section of Daniel has been centered on prayer and praise. Use the following quotation to spur your thinking and prompt your prayer as a homegroup.

Prayer, praise, and proclamation are all spiritual responses to crises that shift attention from our abilities to God's. These responses humble us by making us realize we are ultimately dependent on God's influence rather than our initiative. We confess our weakness by prayer, praise, and proclamation so God's strength will meet no barrier of pride in us. For when we acknowledge our need is greater than we are, God's supply is more sufficient than we can imagine. (Chapell, p. 45)



Praying the Passage: Daniel 2:1-30

- Consider saying out loud as a group Daniel's great offer of praise to God in vv. 20-23. Add praises in your own words to God as you amplify and personalize the praises offered by Daniel.
- Praise the Lord, the God of grace, that He answered Daniel's friends' prayer for mercy and wisdom, and also answers our prayers!
- Consider Daniel's humility in acknowledging God as the revealer of mysteries (v. 30). Confess ways we have taken credit for ourselves and failed to acknowledge God as the author of every good and perfect gift.
- Pray that God may trouble rulers and kings in our day with dreams and visions, and that wise Christians like Daniel may point these leaders to the sovereign God of all history.
- **SBCC Missionary Focus:** Praise God for using dreams and visions in the Muslim world to draw Muslims to faith in Jesus. Ask him to send more! Pray for workers like Nashat and Labib with the Palestinian Bible Society to have wisdom like Daniel's as they point to the Truth when their Muslim neighbors relate dreams and visions. Ask God to use the Crescent Project to educate Christians on ways to share Christ's love with their Muslim neighbors.

Notes



Study Four

Kingdoms and Kingdom

Daniel 2:31-49

Here we go! Our passage this week contains the first of the visions or dreams we find in the book of Daniel. This one is, perhaps, the easiest to read and understand because Daniel himself is the interpreter.

Do you remember Daniel's praise from last week? When God answered the prayers of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, Daniel blessed God! Consider again 2:21:

*He changes times and seasons;
He removes kings and sets up kings...*

In many ways, the rest of this chapter is a commentary on these two lines of praise.

Before going on in this study, read Daniel 2:31-49. At the outset, don't try to interpret anything. Simply read the passage, preferably aloud. Make a note or two of those things which stand out. Keep the following outline in mind:

2:31-36 The dream itself (What Nebuchadnezzar saw)

2:37-45 The dream interpreted (What Daniel saw)

2:46-49 Nebuchadnezzar's reaction

Read verses 31-35. Without interpreting anything, make a list (or chart?) of what is contained in Nebuchadnezzar's dream. If you are creative you may want to draw this dream.

The Dream Itself (What Nebuchadnezzar Saw) - 2:31-36

What is your preliminary understanding of the last part of verse 35?

But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

The Dream Interpreted (What Daniel Saw) - 2:37-45

Read Daniel's interpretation of the king's dream. The vast majority of students of this book believe that Daniel is giving a broad outline of the coming kingdoms, from Babylon through the Roman Empire.

Babylonian Empire (625–539 B.C.)	Medo–Persian Empire (539–331 B.C.)	Greek Empire (331–63 B.C.)	Roman Empire (63 B.C.–A.D.476)	Future Events
head of gold (vv. 36–38)	chest and arms of silver (vv. 32, 39)	middle and thighs of bronze (vv. 32, 39)	legs of iron; feet of iron and clay (vv. 33, 40–43)	messianic kingdom stone (vv. 44–45)

With the above chart in mind, what do you think is the main message of the king's dream?

What lessons are contained in the dream that would profit us as twenty-first century readers?



Vector in on w. 37-38. How do you think this made the king feel?

Daniel makes it clear to Nebuchadnezzar that everything he has is a result of God's decision. What do you have in life? Make a list of those things that might make you feel as though you had a *head of gold* (a job, a house, a high school diploma, a child, etc.). How can you cultivate the sense that everything you have achieved and attained in life is ultimately a gift from God?

While the details are a bit confusing, what is clear from Daniel's interpretation is that each of these kingdoms is temporary and fleeting. Verse 39 in the Aramaic¹ text is startling: *But after you...* There will be a time in the very near future when Babylon will be displaced. As Ralph Davis writes,

Kings and kingdoms, presidents and dictators, democracies and tyrannies and monarchies come and go and enter the landfill of history. (Davis, p. 46)

Have you ever thought of the United States eventually entering *the landfill of history*? How could this passage both challenge and comfort us?

¹ Daniel 2:4 through 7:28 was written in Aramaic, not Hebrew. There have been many academic guesses as to why, although we won't explore them here.

Verses 44-45 form the climax of Daniel's interpretation. The God of heaven, we learn, will set up a kingdom unlike the temporal kingdoms of the world. James Boice is surely right when he says, *Understanding this is both easy and hard.* (Boice, p. 37)

This part of Daniel's interpretation corresponds to the stone that we read of in 2:34-35. The stone fills the whole earth eventually.

What does verse 44 say about this coming kingdom?

As commentators point out, we can identify this rock with Jesus Christ. Consider Psalm 118:22:

*The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone.*

Now notice what the New Testament writers do with this verse. Read and enjoy these verses together as a homegroup.

Matthew 21:42-44

1 Peter 2:6-8

As Boice points out,

These passages (and others) make clear that the rock of Nebuchadnezzar's dream is Jesus Christ—a divine Christ, "not made by human hands"— and the mountain of the dream is his kingdom....The difficult part (of our understanding) has to do with the place in human history where that great kingdom is to be located. Is it in the present, here and now? Does it refer to the church and its expansion throughout the world?... Or does it refer to the kingdom of Christ still to come? (Boice, pp. 38-39)

Grapple with this as a homegroup. What do you think?



Nebuchadnezzar's Reaction - 2:46-49

Nebuchadnezzar's response in verses to Daniel's interpretation is right by half. On the one hand he honors Daniel and Daniel's God. But, on the other hand, the king does not repent and acknowledge his own impotence and dependence on God.

[Repent] is just what Nebuchadnezzar did not do. He asked no questions either about the future or about Daniel's great God. Relieved that he was the head of gold and that his fears were groundless, he concerned himself with the present, and with the man who had met his need. (Baldwin, p. 94)

In this study we are considering the wonder of God's kingdom and the certainty of his rule and reign. How have we played the role of Nebuchadnezzar in our time and place, concerning ourselves mainly with the here and now and ignoring the coming kingdom?

Conversely, what does it look like to be fully and joyfully engaged living here and now—going to work, raising children, enjoying friendships, paying the bills, etc.—and still long for the future, when Christ will return and rule this world in a perfect way?

Praying the Passage: Daniel 2:31-49

- Once again acknowledge that God is sovereign over all history, and that only He can give dominion, power, might and glory to earthly rulers (v. 37-38). Acknowledge the gifts and places of dominion He has given you personally.
- Praise him for an eternal kingdom we will enjoy forever.
- Confess ways that we or the American church have seen our own nation as invincible, or have placed our hope in this present world instead of the coming eternal kingdom of God (v. 4). Pray that we might see our true citizenship in the kingdom to come.
- Pray for the rulers of this world, that God would reveal himself to and warn them, as He spoke to and warned Nebuchadnezzar. Pray they might repent.
- **SBCC Missionary Focus:** Again, praise God for using dreams to draw Muslims to himself! Pray for our workers, Charles and Bev Kohl, as they serve Muslims, trafficked women, and refugees. Ask God to give them wisdom, hope, stamina, and joy.

Notes



Study Five

But If Not

Daniel 3:1-18

Of course King Nebuchadnezzar should know better by now, but when we open Daniel 3, we find the king reverting to idolatry. As Bryan Chapell points out, *No longer content to control merely the labor of his Jewish captives, he attempts to control their hearts and minds.* (Chapell, p. 49)

Before going on in this study, read these 18 verses. If you have a bit of thespian in you, read it dramatically and loudly! What jumps off the page at you on your first reading?

The Image and Its Worship - 3:1-8

David Helm draws our attention to three features of this image.

First, its size and location. The image was built on the plain of Dura and it must have been stunning at sixty cubits (about 90 feet) tall. On the other hand, it was only six cubits (9 feet) in circumference.¹ That such a structure could stand erect without toppling is something of an architectural wonder in itself.

Second, the image was to be worshipped. 3:1-7 are primarily about the dedication ceremony of this image in Babylon. Two times we read that *every kind of music* was played at the event (v. 5, 7). The guest list (v. 2-3) shows that everyone who was anyone was expected to be there.

But the third feature of this spectacle is perhaps the most important. Seven times in the passage we read the words *set up*. Read through the passage and take note of each time this phrase is used, particularly as to who is doing the setting up.

¹ The cubit varied in size from nation to nation in the ancient Near East. Some believe this monument was roughly 9 feet in diameter.

The words *set up* come in the context of 2:21. There we learn that it is Yahweh who *sets up* kings and removes kings.

The repetition is intended. We should recognize, without ever having to be told, what Nebuchadnezzar is doing here. He's setting up something meant to impress others and celebrate himself. The hint should hit home. The king is looking to leave a legacy. And in pursuing a legacy, he has failed to grasp that God, alone, is the one who sets kings up in the world. (Helm, p. 47)

From this week's passage, describe the contrast between what 2:21 says about God as opposed to the king's attitude and actions.

While the statue in Nebuchadnezzar's dream in chapter 2 only had a gold head, this image is covered entirely in gold. Nebuchadnezzar appears to be trying to counteract the dream God gave him about the temporary nature of his kingdom.

Certainly none of us has built a pillar to ourselves in the desert, but we live in the era of the *self*. Our culture encourages continual self-promotion and the building of our own personal empires. Describe a way in which you have been tempted, like Nebuchadnezzar, to solidify, memorialize, or glorify your successes.

What do you notice about the difference in Nebuchadnezzar's attitude between 2:46-49 and the beginning of chapter 3?



Where have you seen this kind of shifting allegiance in your own life—from intimacy with God to self-absorption? What were the contributing factors or temptations that took you there?

There certainly is a lesson for us in comparing these two sections of Daniel. As one commentator points out, Nebuchadnezzar *had experienced religious conviction without spiritual conversion*. Respond to the following:

The important thing about our worship is its object. Do we worship God or ourselves? The test of whether worship is God-centered or centered on ourselves will be found in the question: Do we worship God according to his revelation or according to our own disposition? In worship, the statement “How I like to worship...” is irrelevant. All that matters is how God chooses to be worshipped: “True worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship him (John 4:23)”. (Ferguson, p. 65)

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego - 3:8-18

Enter the Chaldeans! Sometimes translated as *astrologers*, these men are the magicians, the diviners, the enchanters of the land. What charge do they bring to Nebuchadnezzar?

Re-read 3:13-15 carefully. Notice the three terrifying words in v. 15, *burning fiery furnace*. As Davis points out, *The prospect of roasting tends to motivate*.

Look at w. 16-17. Some commentators point out a deficit in our English translations with regard to v. 17. They make it sound as though our three faithful friends are responding to the threat of the fiery furnace. For example:

ESV *If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us...*

NIV *If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us...*

But other commentators point out that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are answering not the threat of being burned to a crisp, but rather the question of whose god is God? In other words, they are answering Nebuchadnezzar's question in verse 15, *And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?*

If that is the case, their answer in verse 17 should be translated,

If our God exists, whom we worship, he is able to deliver us from the furnace of burning fire; and from your hand, O King, he shall deliver. (Archer, p. 54)

In other words, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego have staked their lives on the fact that their God is God, and the prospect of burning alive because of their conviction is a small matter.

Have you ever had your conviction tested in a way that showed whether or not you believe that your God is God?

Verse 18 contains the most pregnant words in this passage, *But if not...* Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego want Nebuchadnezzar to realize that they trust Yahweh, whether or not he saves them from the furnace.



Compare the following verses:

Acts 20:24

2 Timothy 4:6

Read Hebrews 11:32-40 as a homegroup. Consider the word *others* in verse 36. Some, by faith, prevailed. *Others* suffered enormously. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego might have been immolated in seconds in the furnace. God would still be God!

In uttering the words *But if not...*, Daniel's three friends show that they do not presume God will deliver them from the flames. Do you find yourself presuming that God will give you a *flame-free* life? What might help you adjust this expectation?

Respond to the following quotation:

Biblical faith is not confidence in particular outcomes; it is confidence in a sovereign God. We trust that he knows what we cannot discern, plans what we cannot anticipate, and secures our eternity in ways beyond our fathoming. Our trust is not in the quantity or quality of our belief. Our trust in God is not built on insights we possess or wishes we manufacture. (Chapell, p. 53)

Wrap up your thinking from this study. What principles come from this dramatic story that you can apply to your relationship with God this week?

Praying the Passage: Daniel 3:1-18

- Tell God that we will worship him and him alone. Tell him He is greater than all the idols we have set up with our hands or set up in our minds.
- Name the cultural or family pressures we face to deny Christ and worship other gods. Pray for Christians in our church and nation to have courage as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did.
- Extend your prayers to the persecuted church around the world. Pray for a faith that perseveres regardless of outcome (v.18).
- **SBCC Missionary Focus:** Praise God for strengthening his servants. Pray for Young Life Santa Barbara, that the leaders will stand tall for righteousness and encourage all participants to do likewise. Pray for the students who attend—for believers to be strengthened in their faith and for pre-believers to choose to enter the Kingdom.



Study Six

No Smell of Fire

Daniel 3:19-30

Before we jump into part two of the story of the fiery furnace, let's review what we saw last week.

First, Nebuchadnezzar builds a spectacular statue and demands his subjects to bow down and worship it on the threat of death. Ultimately, Nebuchadnezzar is commanding his people to worship Nebuchadnezzar.

Second, in verses 8-18 we saw the gutsy resistance of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego who refuse to worship any god but God. These three men possessed certainty in their faith in God, fiery death or not (2:18).

Now we come to the third part of our chapter. In 3:19-30 we see *that even in death, God will see his loved ones through. He did for these three men; he did supremely for the Lord Jesus; and so he will, too, for us.* (Helm, p. 54)

We are well-primed to jump into this story. Read Daniel 3:19-30. Make a list of any details that are surprising or unexpected.

Did you notice the repetition of the words *fiery furnace*? They come up six times in our verses and three times in last week's passage. Why do you think the author is so repetitive?

What did such a furnace look like? Gleason Archer is helpful:

Apparently there was no door or screen to hide the inside of the furnace from view. Judging from bas-reliefs (carvings), it would seem that Mesopotamian smelting furnaces tended to be like an old-fashioned glass milk-bottle in shape, with a large opening for the insertion of the ore to be smelted and a smaller aperture at ground level for the admission of wood and charcoal to furnish the heat. (Archer, p. 56)

Throughout the Bible, fire is associated with both the judgment of God and the refinement of God. God destroys the wicked towns of Sodom and Gomorrah with fire (Genesis 19:24); the prophet Malachi sees fire as a tool of God to refine his people (Malachi 3:1-4). Again, Helm:

Fire destroys; but it also tests, and reveals the true nature of something—our ministry, and even our faith. Fire will burn us up or it will be the occasion of God's salvation. (Helm p. 55)

When have you faced a furnace in your life, whether a *furnace of refinement* or a *furnace of God's judgment*? What can you share about this with your homegroup?

What was your experience of God's deliverance?



In verses 24-25, what happens in the fiery furnace of our current passage? What does Nebuchadnezzar see?

Much ink has been spilt, so to speak, speculating on the identity of the fourth man in the furnace. Is this a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus in the Old Testament? Is this an angel sent to protect Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego? The text doesn't say. What are your thoughts?

Read verses 26-27. How do the three men emerge? What details does the author want the reader to know, and why?

Look at verse 27. In one sense it would be dangerous to read and apply this story too casually. In this verse we find that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego emerge from the fire not even smelling like smoke! Some might read the story as a fairy tale, thinking, *Since God spared these three, surely I will never be burned.*

But, of course, in our experience, many of us are thrown into the furnace and we are burned beyond recognition. Believers suffer maladies and injustices hard to imagine (as this study was being written, news of yet five more believers being killed for their faith in Nigeria came through on Morning Star News). Clearly, God does not spare every believer who goes into Nebuchadnezzar's furnace. At least, he does not spare us in the way we might like to be spared.

So, if believers are martyred in Nigeria, and everywhere are subject to the normal burdens of living in a fallen world (the burdens of cancer, ALS, heart disease, economic loss, etc.), what does this passage mean?

Consider a promise made to God's people a few centuries before the time of Daniel:

*When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you.
For I am the Lord your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.
I give Egypt as your ransom,
Cush and Seba in exchange for you.
Because you are precious in my eyes,
and honored, and I love you,
I give men in return for you,
peoples in exchange for your life.
Fear not, for I am with you;
I will bring your offspring from the east,
and from the west I will gather you. (Isaiah 43:2-5)*

Consider also:

Romans 12:12

Hebrews 13:5-6

See also Philippians 4:4-6, paying careful attention to the words, *The Lord is at hand...*

How might these passages speak to a believer experiencing suffering or facing death?



In chapter three, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego stand up to the idol on the plain of Dura by refusing to bow down and worship. In our time we have more subtle, but no less real, idols that command our worship (idols of wealth, prestige, sensual pleasure, etc.). When we stand up to our idols, like our three Hebrew friends, *we had better be prepared to experience their wrath.* (Duguid, p. 55)

Can you think of a time in your life in which standing up to an idol cost you something? Describe what this looked like.

Daniel 3 forms a unit. In 3:15 we find a defiant Nebuchadnezzar. *Who is the god who will deliver you out of my hand?* The clear implication is that there is none. But in 3:28-30 we have come full circle. First Nebuchadnezzar decrees death to any who do not bow down and worship before his own image, but in 3:29 he promises to tear to pieces any who speak against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. If nothing else, this passage should prove to be a great comfort. In the end, every knee will bow and every tongue confess that our god is God (Philippians 2:10).

As we have seen repeatedly in our study of Daniel, this passage ultimately points us to Christ. Jesus was cast into the flames of crucifixion, and he was not delivered. To put it consistently with our passage, he got burned to a crisp. But his immolation was ultimately for our salvation.

This furnace story tells of deliverance but it is also about worship. Daniel 3 means to tell me that the only matter that matters is that I keep the first commandment even if it kills me. (Davis, p. 58)

Respond to Daniel 3 as a homegroup in worship.

Praying the Passage: Daniel 3:19-30

- Praise the God who delivers his people. Thank him for his deliverance in this passage, and remember other ways in which He has delivered throughout history and in your own life.
- Praise God for sending a fourth to walk alongside those in the fiery trial in v. 25. Remember and thank him for times you have been supernaturally encouraged in trial.
- Pray for courage and boldness to stand firm for those in your homegroup and in our church who are facing fiery trials.
- **SBCC Missionary Focus:** Pray for fellow believers globally who are going through fiery trials. Pray especially for the P. people whom the Dycks work with in their adopted South American country. Pray for leaders in that country to bow their knees to the Lord and lead the nation in a manner pleasing to God. Pray the P. people will grow stronger and the Dycks will be able to continue providing Bible study helps to the growing church.



Study Seven

Nebuchadnezzar's Nightmare

Daniel 4:1-18

The first half of the book of Daniel is a collection of stories that tell profound theological truths. By taking these stories one at a time we might miss the proverbial forest for the trees. Commentator Ralph Davis points out that the point of Daniel 2 is that God reveals, the point of chapter 3 is that God restores, and the point of Daniel 4 is that God rules. (Davis, p. 60)

Chapter 4 is a unit and we should be aware of how it fits together:

- Nebuchadnezzar's opening testimony: The sovereignty of God (v. 1-3)
- Report of Nebuchadnezzar's dream (first person) (v. 4-18)
- Report of Daniel's interpretation (v. 19-27)
- Report of fulfillment of Nebuchadnezzar's dream (v. 28-33)
- Nebuchadnezzar's closing testimony: The sovereignty of God (v. 34-37)

With the above in mind we can see that the author of Daniel is putting the conclusion of this story at the beginning, showing us all that happened, and then restating the conclusion at the end: God rules!

Before going on in this study, read Daniel 4 in its entirety. These 37 verses make for exciting reading. Enjoy. Note any details that jump off the page. What questions arise on your first reading of this passage?

As the chapter opens, we are probably somewhere in the middle of Daniel's life in Babylon and toward the end of Nebuchadnezzar's reign. This chapter opens with a decree from the king. What does it say? To whom is it addressed?

Notice the emphasis on the kingdom—not of Nebuchadnezzar, but of God himself.

*His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
And his dominion endures from generation to generation. (4:3b)*

Helm lends insight into how this opening decree fits into the whole chapter, and indeed, the whole Bible:

The first three verses of Daniel 4 raise the question: *How has God made his kingdom known to the king?* The rest of the chapter reveals the dramatic ways and lengths to which God will go to make his kingdom rule known in ways that bring forth words of praise from among those who did not know him previously. (Helm, p. 62)

In verse 4, God speaks to Nebuchadnezzar when things are going great in his life. Nebuchadnezzar has spent his life pursuing power and privilege; now he has both. The king is *at ease* in his house and *prospering* in his palace; he doesn't have a care in the world. Life is a beach.

Enter Yahweh. The king has *a dream that made [him] afraid*.

Does God tend to speak to you most when things are going well, or in the dark valleys of your pilgrimage? Why do you think this is so?

Nebuchadnezzar spent his life pursuing power and privilege. What are you pursuing in life—i.e., what constitutes *the good life* for you?



If God wanted to cause you to rethink your life, what kind of *dream* might he give you?

Verse 7 presents familiar territory. Nebuchadnezzar's first response is to call *the magicians, the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the astrologers*. In other words, in spite of paying homage to Daniel's God previously (4:1-3 and elsewhere), Nebuchadnezzar is at heart a pagan.

Who, or what, are the *magicians, enchanters, etc.* of our time?

To whom, or what, do you turn during times of trouble in your life?

Look at verse 10-12. List the details Nebuchadnezzar gives us about the tree in his dream. Remember, this is a dream. How big is the tree? How much food does its fruit provide? Etc.

In verse 13 we find a *watcher* who is both holy and from heaven.¹ What happens when *the watcher* comes down from heaven?

As in chapter 2, the professional interpreters of dreams are either unable or unwilling to interpret the king's dream. Can you think of a time when you had an opportunity to speak a difficult truth to those more powerful than you? Share with your homegroup what happened.

Verse 15 is a bit cryptic at this point. But, as readers of the entire chapter know, this is the heart of the dream. God will humble the proud king. We will see this in detail in study 8.

In verse 17, we see the meaning of the dream. What is the point? Compare 2:21.

Gleason Archer helps us understand why a huge tree is the focus of the dream.

The portrayal of man in his pride as a lofty tree is a familiar OT symbol: "The Lord Almighty has a day in store for all the proud and lofty... (and they will be humbled), for all the cedars of Lebanon, tall and lofty, and all the oaks of Bashan" (Isaiah 2:12-13; cf. Isaiah 10:34). (Archer, p. 61)

¹ For early readers of this text, the identity of *a watcher* would have been immediately recognizable. The watcher was an angel, one who dwelt among the host of heaven. In fact, 1 Enoch (part of the apocrypha, and not written by Enoch!) is often referred to as *the Book of the Watchers*, because in it the angels are described as watchers. (Helm, p. 71)



Cedars of Lebanon, oaks of Bashan, the huge tree in Daniel 4:10-12... If your pride was described in tree-like terms, what kind of tree would you be?

Perhaps the above is a bit abstract, but everyone struggles with pride. As C. S. Lewis said, pride is *the great sin*. Pride is at the root of every sin. Examine your own life. Where do you find *the great sin* creeping into your soul?

Respond to the following quotation by Lewis. Pray for yourself and for those in your homegroup that God would reveal your pride and that you would repent of it.

There is one vice of which no man in the world is free; which everyone loathes when he sees it in someone else; and of which hardly any people, except Christians, ever imagine that they are guilty themselves. I have heard people admit that they are bad-tempered, or that they cannot keep their heads about girls or drink, or even that they are cowards. I do not think I have ever heard anyone who was not a Christian accuse himself of this vice.¹

When we open the gospels in the New Testament we find the fulfillment of Daniel 4. Jesus comes, saying, *Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand!* Matthew goes so far as to draw attention to the exile in Babylon as he chronicles the genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1).

¹ This quote is from the opening paragraph in *Mere Christianity, The Great Sin*.

How does this *big picture* of your salvation within the kingdom of God shape your understanding of your faith?

Take a moment to revisit 4:3 for a good note to end on this week. God is sovereign!

Praying the Passage: Daniel 4:1-18

- Ponder the statement of God's sovereignty and power in v. 3. Spend some time as a group adding your own praises to these.
- Praise God that we belong to his kingdom, and for the humble king we have in Jesus.
- Note that God confronts Nebuchadnezzar in the midst of his prosperity and pride. Confess and repent of your reliance on your prosperity, and how it may blind you to God's word for you.
- Ask God to confront the rulers of the earth as He confronted Nebuchadnezzar. Pray for wise, Spirit-filled Christians to have access to these leaders and to lead them to repentance.
- **SBCC Missionary Focus:** Thank God for believers who have come to the attention of government leaders. Pray for our workers serving with Sports Outreach in Kenya and Uganda, as they serve the poor. Government leaders have noticed and encouraged them in their work. May many come into the Kingdom because of their faithfulness.



Study Eight

Eating Grass

Daniel 4:19-37

After last week's study we are well prepared to enjoy and be challenged by the second half of Daniel 4. Remember the overall structure of Daniel 4.

- Nebuchadnezzar's opening testimony: The sovereignty of God (w. 1-3)
- Report of Nebuchadnezzar's dream (first person) (w. 4-18)
- Report of Daniel's interpretation (w.19-27)
- Report of fulfillment of Nebuchadnezzar's dream (w. 28-33)
- Nebuchadnezzar's closing testimony: The sovereignty of God (w. 34-37)

Before going on in this study guide, read Daniel 4:19-37, or better yet, read the entire chapter. Again, make some notes on what stands out. What questions does your reading bring to mind?

Look at verse 19. Why do you think Daniel has the reaction he has to Nebuchadnezzar's dream?

Notice the second half of verse 19. Here Daniel is standing before the king who has, in a sense, held him captive all of his adult life. Daniel knows this dream is not good news for the king. Yet, Daniel *wants the content of the dream to refer to someone else, and the fallout from the dream to be transferred to them as well.* (Helm, p. 74) What does this say about Daniel?

Consider your own attitude toward the rulers of our time. How could you attempt to combine compassion and truthfulness in the way you think of and pray for your leaders?

How is it with your heart toward those who don't know God? What attitudes or practices could help you grow in tenderness and compassion toward those who are outside of God's kingdom?

What do you think was Daniel's tone of voice as he spoke the words of verses 27-29 to the king? If you have any actors in your homegroup have them read these words with a few different intonations (angry, compassionate, frightened, flat). Enjoy!

In verse 22, Daniel draws attention that Nebuchadnezzar's *greatness has grown and reaches to heaven*. His word choice may look back to the building of the tower of Babel (see Genesis 11:4). Both those building the tower in ancient times, and Nebuchadnezzar in his own time, wanted to build a monument to themselves. How do we do this in our time and culture? How might you do this in your life?



In verse 25, God's correction of Nebuchadnezzar is severe: the king temporarily loses his mind and eats grass. We are not told exactly how long Nebuchadnezzar will endure the judgment of God. *Seven periods of time* refers to fullness or completion—in other words, the king will remain in his animal-like state until God's discipline is complete. When will that be? The answer is in the last part of our verse.

God cuts Nebuchadnezzar down because of his pride. Share a time when you have sensed that God humbled you to turn you around.

In verse 27, Daniel calls the king to repentance, including specific details for what that repentance looks like. How does the king respond? How does the interval between Daniel's charge and 4:28-30 inform your answer?

In verse 29, Nebuchadnezzar was *walking on the roof of the royal palace*. Actually, this king had three spectacular palaces! What is at the heart of Nebuchadnezzar's boast in verse 30?

Do you ever catch yourself making a similar boast in your own heart over the things you think you have accomplished? Describe what form these thought processes take for you.

Read verses 33-37. The king's pride proves to be his undoing. He has been living in a fantasy world of his own choosing—a reality in which he himself is god—and his mind becomes distorted. At what point is his *sanity* or *reason* restored?

Twice in this section Nebuchadnezzar says, *my reason returned to me*. Now the proud king looks to heaven and sees not his own accomplishments, but rather God's glory. The king is now *reasonable* and he praises God, for he has finally acknowledged the true and appropriate order of the universe—in which God is God, and Nebuchadnezzar is not.

Martin Luther wrote a Small Catechism to teach families about the Christian life. This Protestant reformer was adamant that we praise God not only for the big things of life, but for the little things as well. When we have an accurate understanding of the true order of the universe and our own place in it, we will do no less. Respond to and practice this kind of praise with Martin Luther from the sixteenth century.

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

What is meant by this Article?

Answer: I believe that God has created me and all that exists; that He has given and still preserves to me my body and soul with all my limbs and senses, my reason and all the faculties of my mind, together with raiment, food, home, and family, and all my property; that He daily provides me abundantly with all the necessaries of life, protects me from all danger, and preserves me and guards me against all evil; all which He does out of pure, paternal, and divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me; for all which I am in duty bound to thank, praise, serve, and obey him. This is most certainly true.



Praying the Passage: Daniel 4:19-37

- Praise the God who exalts (vv. 20-22) and the God who humbles (vv. 31-33).
- Acknowledge to the God that all we have, and all we have succeeded in, is a gift from him (v. 25), as opposed to the work of our own hands (v. 30). Confess and repent where we have taken credit for ourselves (v. 30) when credit is due to God.
- Once again, ask God to confront the rulers of the earth as He confronted Nebuchadnezzar. Pray for wise, Spirit-filled “Daniels” to have access to these leaders and to call them to repentance. Pray for God to humble the proud as He humbled Nebuchadnezzar.
- Pray for non-believing friends and family to raise their eyes toward heaven, so that their sanity may be restored (or granted for the first time!).
- **SBCC Missionary Focus:** Praise God for humbling us as a way to draw us to himself. Pray for the workers at our local SB Rescue Mission and our own Homeless Ministry to have grace, compassion, and wisdom as they serve the many humbled guests who visit them. May God provide healing and wholeness to all.

Notes



Study Nine

Writing on the Wall

Daniel 5:1-16

Notice the first words of chapter 5, *King Belshazzar*. Say what? We thought Nebuchadnezzar was king... Well, he was. But as we say, *That was then... But this is now*. Archeological evidence, not discovered until the mid-nineteenth century, shows us that at the opening of Daniel 5 Nebuchadnezzar has been dead for 23 years. There have been four kings between Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar. Daniel has been in Babylon nearly 70 years. He is an old man in the twilight of his life.

And Babylon? Babylon is in the twilight of her existence. By the end of chapter 5, just a few hours after the beginning of chapter 5, the nation will have collapsed. The Persians had been attacking Babylon for some time, but this chapter contains the record of a feast to honor the gods of Babylonia! And what a feast it was.

We might ask, if the Medes and the Persians were just outside, why have a party with all that wine? Wouldn't that leave the city vulnerable? The Babylonians felt impregnable, invincible. The city was surrounded by six walls made of over fifteen million bricks, along with a 262-foot moat. As Old Testament scholar Paul Ferguson writes, they *had not remembered that all the bricks were made of mud*. (cited in Davis, p. 64)

Read Daniel 5, focusing especially on 5:1-16. The following outline may help you as you read:

1. The Feast Described (5:1-4)
2. The Writing on the Wall (5:5-9)
3. The Queen's Comment (5:10-12)
4. The King's Charge to Daniel (5:13-16)
5. Daniel's Interpretation (5:17-28)
6. Daniel's Exaltation and Babylon's Demise (5:29-30)

Make note of those things that stand out as you read (especially in 5:1-16). What questions come to mind?

Verses 1-5 encapsulate what one commentator called *the breathtaking arrogance of the king*.

Again, the armies are at the gate and Belshazzar is getting drunk on the fine wines of Babylon. But there is more going on here than the abuse of alcohol. What does the author want us to notice particularly about what is taking place at this party?

While we are not sure of the details, it appears that Belshazzar is mocking the God of Daniel.

Here is where Belshazzar's profanation surpasses that of Nebuchadnezzar. He uses God's holy goblets to toast the lifeless idols of his own religion. He spits in God's eye, as it were, and then goes over to a statue that he himself has created (v. 4) and expects that lifeless hunk to protect him from what is to come. (Longman, p. 137)

What are some examples of ways people in our time mock the God of the Bible by their behavior?



Let's press in to this question again. Respond to the following by Ralph Davis. Speaking of the temple goblets Davis writes,

We may put it crassly: contempt for God's 'stuff' is the same as contempt for God himself. If you arrive, let's say, at your office and find that your desk, chair, filing cabinets, briefcases, coffee-maker, computer, pictures and knick-knacks are all sitting in the hall outside your office door, your immediately get the point. It is not merely that your stuff is out but that *you* are out. So Belshazzar's demeaning of Yahweh's vessels was his way of demeaning Yahweh. Belshazzar was not simply a drunken slob but a profane slob. (Davis, p. 74)

Belshazzar is a model of the proud, wealthy man, self-sufficient and feeling invincible. Compare the following passages of Scripture.

Proverbs 18:12

Luke 12:16-20

Galatians 6:7-8

What habits or practices help you to confront and deal with pride in your life?

Read verses 5-9. God will not long be mocked. What is the first word of 5:5?

Think of a time when God went to some lengths to get your attention because of some sin in your life. What was that like? How did you respond?

Picture the scene in verses 10-12. Daniel is about 80 at this time. He has led a life of integrity and faithfulness in Babylon. As far as we know, Daniel has not been a key player in the world of Babylonian politics. But he has been faithful. And here a queen remembers and says, *Get Daniel; maybe he can help.*

How can we live our lives in such a way that when we are old we will be called upon? What does faithful living in Babylon mean to you?

Read verses 13-16. Finally Daniel arrives. What does the king get right and where is he very confused about Daniel?

Based on their knowledge of you and your life, what do you think your non-believing family and friends would say about the God whom you serve?



Iain Duguid has a comment in his commentary that provides a fitting conclusion to our passage (to be continued in study 10).

Daniel 5 is a “Eureka” moment, in which the true nature of the young Babylonian king, Belshazzar, is exposed, along with the emptiness of his gods. For all their boasted pomp and show and in spite of all their gold and glory, Belshazzar and his gods are found wanting and exposed as empty and insubstantial when they are weighed in God’s balance. They can offer nothing that we should envy, nor can they threaten anything by which we should be intimidated. Rather we should pity those whose hope and glory are built on such insubstantial foundations. (Duguid, p. 78)

Praying the Passage: Daniel 5:1-16

- Revere the God who will tolerate no other gods before him (Exodus 20:3). Pray that we in our church and in the American church may forsake our idols of gold, silver, bronze, iron, and wood, and recover an appropriate fear of the one true God.
- Ask God to bring a redemptive fear to those around us who have carelessly worshipped idols or mocked the God of the Bible. Pray for a fear that results in repentance and new life.
- Thank God for times when He has intervened to surprise you, trouble you, or get your attention. Thank him for the good that produced in you.
- Ask God to raise up more servants like Daniel, who for a lifetime respectfully and faithfully spoke the truth in a hostile culture, even as He was forgotten or ignored.
- **SBCC Missionary Focus:** Praise God for his faithful servants whose labors may or may not be seen and remembered. Pray for Antun and Marija Koprivnjak, who serve faithfully in Croatia. Ask God to encourage them, help them with various health issues, and to continue to use them to touch the lives of their neighbors.

Notes



Study Ten

A Hand From Heaven

Daniel 5:17-30

The drama of Belshazzar's feast continues in the second half of chapter 5. Read and enjoy 5:17-30. To help place these verses in context review the outline of Daniel 5 at the beginning of study nine.

What does Belshazzar promise Daniel if he can interpret the writing on the wall?

Notice Daniel's immediate response in verse 17. David Helm offers a lighthearted paraphrase:

You can keep all of your clothes and costume jewelry for yourself. Or, by the looks of it, there are any number of jesters surrounding you tonight who might like a party favor on their way out. But as for me, O King, I've got no use for stuff like this—truth be told, I emptied out my dress-up drawer long ago. I'll read the message for you—but you can keep your gifts. (Helm, pp. 95-96)

Daniel has the moxie of a mature man when standing before power. How are you cultivating a similar boldness in your own life? As you grow older are you growing more bold or less in your spiritual confidence?

In verses 18-22, Daniel recounts to Belshazzar an episode from Nebuchadnezzar's life that is familiar to the reader. Why does he do this? Notice the twice-repeated words from Daniel to the king, *But you...* (5:22, 23).

Look at verse 22. Notice the words, *though you knew all this...* Belshazzar's problem is not ignorance, but insolence (Davis, p. 78). In one sense this is everyone's story. This is Romans 1:21 from another source:

For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

It is very possible to have a right knowledge of God and act to the contrary. What keeps your mind and heart humble and contrite before God?

Verses 22-23 form the conclusion of Daniel's speech to the king before he interprets the writing on the wall. What was the real sin of Belshazzar for which he was being judged?

How might you be prone to the same sins?

Read and discuss Ezekiel 14:1-5. Can you identify some of the *idols of your heart*?

Verse 25 finally offers the interpretation of the writing on the wall, *MENE, MENE, TEKEL, AND PARSIN*. While this may sound like a good name for a rock band, actually these words are Aramaic and list a series of weights and measures. A note in the ESVSB is helpful:



The words are clearly Aramaic and form a sequence of weights, decreasing from a mina, to a shekel (1/60th of a mina), to a half-shekel. It was not that the king and wise men could not read them, but they failed to understand their significance for Belshazzar. Read as verbs (with different vowels attached to the Aramaic consonants), the sequence becomes: "Numbered, numbered, weighed, and divided." The Lord had numbered the days of Belshazzar's kingdom and brought it to an end because he had been weighed in the balance and found wanting (v. 27). The repetition of "numbered" may suggest that it will occur quickly.

How does Daniel interpret these words in verse 26?

MENE

TEKEL

PERES (the singular of *PARSIN*)

What lessons about God's judgment do we learn from Daniel chapter 5? List these and discuss as a homegroup.

Respond to the following quotation. Most of those reading this study guide *know all this* (5:22). Our problem is not so much in our heads as in our hearts.

For Belshazzar and his hardened heart, the game was over. The writing had been on the wall. But, it is not so for us. As the curtain falls on Babylon, it does so with a lesson for us all. You and I are to walk in humility; we are to honor God. Who among us can read this chapter and not be warned again of the hubris of the human heart? As Jeremiah foretold, it is deceptive above all things. With relative ease, we can lift up our hearts against God. May we be kept from Belshazzar's sin on that fateful night! May we never live in a way that raises a "toast" to our own 'gods"! (Helm, pp. 99-100)

And while we are at it, respond to a similar comment by Ralph Davis:

The transition from Belshazzar the Chaldean to Darius the Mede took only a night (30-31). We must not think, however, that this account is merely about Belshazzar; it's about Presbyterians and Baptists and Anglicans and Pentecostals who have hidden Belshazzar-attitudes and who have never listened to the testimony of Belshazzar's predecessor: 'those who walk in pride he is able to abase' (4:37). But what really haunts us here is that little phrase *that very night* (30). It suggests that Belshazzar joins the ranks of King Saul and Judas Iscariot—and the rich man in Luke 12:20—in sharing the hopeless darkness outside of God's truth (Davis, pp. 80-81)



Praying the Passage: Daniel 5:17-30

- Once again acknowledge that God is sovereign over the kingdoms of the earth (v. 21). Acknowledge that He is sovereign over your kingdom, and whatever places of dominion He has given you. Thank him for these things!
- Confess our tendency to forget or harden our heart to the lessons learned by previous generations, just as Belshazzar ignored the lessons learned by Nebuchadnezzar. Pray that we might be a people who remember and treasure the truths of God's word!
- Pray that we and our missionaries might pass on Biblical truth to the generations not yet born.
- **SBCC Missionary Focus:** Pray for our sister church in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, and the Guardaria (preschool) they run. The workers' desire is to keep the children's hearts soft toward God and see them (and their parents) enter into his Kingdom. Pray for government leaders in Honduras to have humility pleasing to God and to rule with justice.

Notes



Study Eleven

Praying toward Jerusalem

Daniel 6:1-28

Okay, let's play a word association game... For those who have some familiarity with the Bible, if I say *Moses*, you might be likely to say, *Ten Commandments*. If I say *Daniel*, you will probably say *lions' den*. Daniel 6 contains the most famous story in the whole book and it is something of a literary masterpiece.

The context for Daniel 6 comes in the last verse of chapter 5. *And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old.*

Belshazzar the Chaldean king was killed and there is a new king on the throne, representing a new kingdom over the exiles.

Before going on in this study, read Daniel 6. Enjoy the story itself. What are the elements of storytelling employed to keep the reader in suspense? What surprises are in store for the reader?

Daniel's Clever Opponents - 6:1-9

In verse 2, Daniel is called one of three *high officials* of the new kingdom (*administrators, commissioners*, in other translations). What is their job? Why are they there?

In verses 3-5, Daniel is rising to the top. Why? Examine verse 3.

How might this instruct us in our time with regard to the way we serve our employers?

In the midst of graft and corruption on every hand, Daniel stood out as a man governed by a sense of loyalty and integrity that stemmed from his right relationship with God. (Ferguson, p. 118)

What is the plan of Daniel's opponents?

How does Daniel 6:1-9, and this whole passage, show the conflict between the kingdom of this world and the kingdom of God?

How and where have you experienced this conflict...

...In your home?

...With your friends?

...In your work?



Commenting on 6:1-9, Ralph Davis finds two lessons that are pertinent to us and to our times. Reflect on and discuss the following:

This section contains a two-pronged message for Israel's exiles: see how gracious God is in giving you favour among your captors and even with kings, therefore, don't despair; and see how *costly* it may prove to remain faithful when you are favoured, therefore, don't make an idol out of human favour. One never knows when the Tuesday morning may come when one must let go of human favour to stay faithful to God. (Davis, p. 85)

Ponder the words of Jesus in John 15:19 with the above quotation in mind. What would it look like if evangelical believers became so *worldly* that the *world* ceased to hate them?

1 Peter 5:8 reads, *Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.* How can you practice being *sober-minded* and *watchful* in order to protect yourself from the devil in 2018?

Daniel's Faithfulness and the Fear of Darius - 6:10-24

Verse 10 may be the climax of the passage. Notice the immediate and subversive act of prayer by Daniel. He doesn't flinch.

Consider the following quotation:

Prayer is a subversive activity [that] involves a more or less open act of defiance against any claim by the current regime. -Eugene Peterson

Can you think of a time when you understood your prayers to be an act of subversion? Describe how you prayed.

The Bible never commands us to pray while facing Jerusalem, nor even suggests it. Nevertheless, Daniel does this. Why? How could a similar attitude inform our own prayers?

Daniel prayed, with his window open, three times daily. It was not difficult for his detractors to catch him in the act.

[S]urely God could have closed their eyes as easily as he later closed the mouths of the lions, so that Daniel could have prayed unhindered. Could he not in this way have spared Daniel from the whole ordeal? Certainly he could have done that, but his purpose was not to save Daniel *from* trials but to save Daniel *through* trials. ...there were lessons that Daniel and those around him would learn, that could be learned only by Daniel going into the den of lions. (Duguid, p. 97)



Think of a time when God saved you *through* a trial and another time when God saved you *from* a trial. From which did you learn the most and grow the most?

Daniel prays three times daily. What are your prayer habits and disciplines? How can your homegroup encourage you in this?

What about Daniel's posture in prayer? He kneels.

Kneeling in prayer is not a matter of indifference—it reminds you of your *true position*. It's as if you say, 'I am a servant. He is the King. I do not live in a democracy but under a monarchy. He is not my errand boy. I never present my demands. I am always a beggar at the throne of grace, I never forget it is a *throne*.' (Davis, pp. 88-89)

Try practicing this posture of prayer as a homegroup. How does kneeling change the way in which we pray?

Look at 6:13. The accusation Daniel's opponents make against him is in fact, accurate. Daniel refuses to obey the king's edict. He worships Yahweh three times daily! How does the worship of God show itself in your life on a day-to-day basis?

Read verses 16-20. It is no small irony that in this famous Bible story that every Sunday school boy and girl knows well, the focus is actually not on Daniel, but on the king.

Read verses 16-20 again. What is the portrait the author paints of King Darius?

What do you make of this? Why would the author of this chapter focus on the king's anguish rather than Daniel's fear or Daniel's faith?

6:21 Finally, Daniel speaks. We haven't heard from him yet. What does he say?



God delivers Daniel from the lions' den, but often believers are devoured. As we noted in our study of Daniel 3, often we go into the furnace of affliction and are burned thoroughly. How can this chapter comfort those who are suffering greatly?

Daniel emerges in this story as a man of great faithfulness. Here he is, perhaps near ninety years old, and he has the courage of his convictions. Here is a lesson for us. Respond to the following by Os Guinness:

When an imperceptible bow would have saved Daniel's three friends, they defied King Nebuchadnezzar's idolatry at the threat of being burned alive. When simply closing a window and drawing his curtains could have saved Daniel himself, he chose to risk the lions rather than mute his allegiance to God...What then of us? Are we living in light of the great cloud of witnesses and martyrs who have gone before us?

Guinness goes on to argue that the *comfortable conditions of the modern world* might be more dangerous to our faith than persecution.¹ What do you think? How have the comfortable conditions of your life affected your spiritual resolve?

¹ Os Guinness, *Impossible People*, p. 29.

In verses 23-34, Daniel is delivered from the lions' den, but the lions are still hungry. Sinclair Ferguson points out, *The dark side to Daniel's deliverance is the judgment that falls on those who had sought to destroy the kingdom of God.* (Ferguson, p. 130) At one level, this is simply the way the Persians administered punishment. Entire families paid for the crime of the father. But at a deeper level this reminds us of Jesus, who went into the lions' den and was not delivered.

Like Daniel, Jesus was falsely accused by his enemies and brought before a ruler, Pontius Pilate, who sought unsuccessfully to deliver him from his father's fate, before handing him over to a violent death. Like Daniel, Jesus was condemned to die, and his body was placed into a sealed pit so that his situation could not be changed by human intervention. Jesus' trial went even deeper than Daniel's however: he did not merely suffer the threat of death, he went down into death itself. Although Jesus was innocent, he suffered the fate of the guilty ones. There was no angel to comfort him with the presence of God in his pit; on the contrary, he was left in the blackness utterly alone and abandoned by God, suffering the fate that we, the guilty ones, deserved. (Duguid, p. 103)

Verses 25-27 close the biographical portion of Daniel. What is the message to us who read this book centuries after it was written?



Praying the Passage: Daniel 6:1-28

- Use the words of 6:26-27 to fear and reverence Daniel's God and our God! Add your own praises to these. Remember his acts of deliverance through history and in your life.
- Praise God for rescuing us from the den of our own sin and instead casting Jesus into judgment in our own place.
- Confess how we fall short of Daniel's utter dependence on God and devotion to prayer (v.10). Confess our prayerlessness and that of the wider church.
- Pray that God might make you excellent in your work and above reproach in every way, just as Daniel was (v. 3).
- Pray for Christians in government who, like Daniel, are both exceptionally gifted and full of integrity.
- Remember the persecuted church that faces death all day long (Romans 8:36). Pray for supernatural faith and courage, and for deliverance that brings glory to God.
- **SBCC Missionary Focus:** Ask the Lord to protect all his workers serving far from their homes. May God provide each strength of character and integrity so that their witness for him will be pure and compelling. Pray for each Mission Nanny who serves families around the globe to be faithful to God and a huge blessing to the families they work with.

Notes



Study Twelve

Four Ugly Beasts, The Ancient of Days and One Like a Son of Man

Introducing Daniel 7-12

Where is God when it hurts? The question has been asked for millennia. During times of suffering internally and during times of persecution externally, God's people need constant reassurance that God is there, that he is in control and that he loves us.

We have seen these themes in chapters 1-6, but now the book will take an abrupt turn. Daniel 7-12 consists of a series of visions and prayers that are intended to give assurance to Jewish readers who are suffering under various foreign powers. The original readers would have been wondering, *If God is in control, then where is the kingdom he promised? Why is my life so hard?*

Daniel 7-12 states boldly—and repetitively—that in spite of all appearances, God is sovereign, his kingdom is coming, his people will prevail and God will be victorious. It is believed that the book was written by Daniel himself, and thus these chapters are prophecies of the immediate future and beyond.

Brace yourself; these visions are not easy to decipher. As David Helm writes, the genre shifts from storytelling to movie watching. (Helm, p. 117) We find in these chapters a series of somewhat confusing visions. But their overall impact is hard to miss. God's kingdom is coming; it will be worth the wait.

These visions are a kind of literature that scholars call *apocalyptic*. What is that? Ralph Davis is very helpful:

Biblical apocalyptic is a sort of prophecy that seeks to enlighten and encourage a people despised and cast off by the world with a vision of the God who will come to impose his kingdom on the wreckage and rebellion of human history—and it communicates this message through the use of wild, scary, imaginative, bizarre and head-scratching imagery. (Davis, p. 93)

Four distinct visions are included in these chapters, beginning in 7:1, 8:1, 9:1, and 10:1. One simple way to understand the coming chapters is to see the vision of chapter 7 as a summation of the whole of human history. Then, the visions in chapters 8-12 unpack various

parts of the big picture. As one commentary puts it,

[W]e see a succession of kingdoms that conveyed to the Israelites that it was not yet time for the kingdom for which they had been waiting. Certainly this would have been a disappointing message for the exiles to hear. The main significance, however, is the fact that in God's agenda, the mighty empires of the world come and go, and they will be superseded by the kingdom of God that will never be destroyed (2:44). This would give reason for continued hope. (Hill and Watson, cited in Davis, p. 25)

Four Ugly Beasts, The Ancient of Days and One Like a Son of Man

Read Daniel 7:1-28. Notice 7:1. We are going back to the time of king Belshazzar. Do you remember good old Belshazzar way back in Daniel 5? This chapter is out of sequence with the timeline thus far in Daniel.

Read Daniel 7:1-14. Make a note or two on the four beasts, the Ancient of Days and *one like a son of man*. What does the Bible say about each?

Four Ugly Beasts - 7:1-8

The first beast (v. 4)

The second beast (v. 5)

The third beast (v. 6)

The fourth beast (v. 7)

Notice how different the fourth beast is from the first three. What word that was used to describe the first three beasts is missing from the description of the fourth beast?



What comments, questions, or reflections do you have from last Sunday's teaching on this part of Daniel 7?

The Ancient of Days - 7:9-12

The transition of verse 9 is startling. *The loud, arrogant taunting of the fourth beast is abruptly interrupted as something else catches Daniels eye....* (Helm, p. 125)

What catches Daniel's eye?

Many visions in the Bible, both Old Testament and New Testament, present a picture of God on his throne (see Isaiah 6, Ezekiel 1, Revelation 20).

In Daniel's vision we see God himself on the throne. He is described as *the Ancient of Days*, or more literally, *the advanced of days*.

What does a throne signify?

Make a list of the things Daniel tells us about the Ancient of Days. What do we learn about God from this vision?

Respond to the last part of v. 9, *his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire*. What does the image of fire connote? Again, what do we learn about God from this picture?

What do verses 11-12 tell us about the way history will turn out?

How might this have been a comfort to the original readers of Daniel? How can this be a comfort to us?

What comments, questions, or reflections do you have from last Sunday's teaching on this part of Daniel 7?



One Like a Son of Man - 7:13-14

Notice the stark contrast of the *son of man* with the first three beasts. They are *like a lion, like a bear, like a leopard*. This one is *like a son of man*.

Where do the four beasts come from?

Where does the *son of man* come from? He comes *with the clouds of heaven*. In the Old Testament, over and over again, clouds are associated with the coming of Yahweh.

What was given to this *Son of Man*?

Who serves this *Son of Man*?

How would this section of Daniel 7 have comforted the original readers of the book? How could these verses comfort us?

Jesus' favorite self-description is *Son of Man*. Clearly Jesus sees himself as the fulfillment of Daniel 7. There are dozens of instances of Jesus referring to himself as the Son of Man. Let us look at what is perhaps the most dramatic.

Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" And Jesus said, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." And the high priest tore his garments and said, "What further witnesses do we need? You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?" And they all condemned him as deserving death. (Mark 14:61-64)

In what way does Jesus claim to be the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy? Compare Acts 7:56 in context.

Where is Jesus right now? How does this address the problems you are facing in your life currently?

What comments, questions, or reflections do you have from last Sunday's teaching on this part of Daniel 7?



Praying the Passage: Daniel 7:1-14

- Praise the Jesus who is the fulfillment of this passage. Use the words of vv. 9-10, 13-14 to help you praise him. Marvel at how much more awesome is the throne of God than any of the thrones of men.
- As you consider the 4 beasts of 7:4-7, tell Jesus about the kingdoms and forces of evil that threaten his people in our day. Ask him to strengthen and fight for us.
- **SBCC Missionary Focus:** God has always purposed to have members from all peoples, nations, tribes and languages know, love, and worship him (7:14). Praise God for the work of Mission Aviation Fellowship and their service of moving missionaries, locals, and supplies around in remote, hard-to-reach areas so that those groups “hard to reach” may enter the Kingdom. Pray for Larry and Linda Whiting as they continue to serve with MAF as mentors and facilitators.

Notes



Study Thirteen

The Everlasting Kingdom

Daniel 7:15-28

Further up and further in. To fans of the children's book series *Chronicles of Narnia* by C.S. Lewis, these words are familiar. They come at the end of the seven-part series, when the children are going to heaven. Or, to put it a bit differently, they are going to the everlasting Kingdom of God. Suddenly they understand; suddenly they are home at last.

There is a parallel in the second half of Daniel 7. Here the prophet seeks to discern the vision he has already had. Daniel ponders what he has seen and finds himself *anxious* and *alarmed* (v. 15), so he asks one of the bystanders in his vision to help him understand (v. 16). Now we have someone else explaining Daniel's vision.

Ralph Davis gives us a helpful visual outline of these verses. Read Daniel 7:15-28 with the following in mind:

Daniel's distress (v. 15)

Request for clarity (v. 16a)
Summary explanation (vv. 16b-18)

Daniel's desire about details (vv. 19-20)
Daniel's mini-vision (vv. 21-22)
Detailed explanation (vv. 23-27)

Daniel's distress (v. 28)

As you read look for the following:

The four beasts are identified in verse 17. Who, or what, are they?

What is the contrast in verse 18 to the four beasts?

With regard to the end of 7:18, compare

Revelation 5:9-10

Revelation 20:6

Indeed, Daniel 7:18 offers great comfort to believers through the ages. Respond to the following by Gleason Archer.

The reason for emphasizing the participation of God's people in the final kingdom seems to be that it is a literal, earthly kingdom, replacing the previous empires of man, rather than a spiritual domain, a sort of ideal kingdom of God consisting only of the Lord himself. (Archer, p. 93)

What are your thoughts on anticipating God's kingdom as an actual earthly kingdom?

In verses 19-22, Daniel dreads the fourth beast more than the others. Unpack these verses carefully. Without interpreting, what do these verses tell us about the fourth beast?



How has Daniel 7 as a whole shaped your understanding of history and of the future?

Read verses 23-27. The traditional understanding of the fourth beast is that it refers to the Roman empire, mightier than the Babylonians, the Medo-Persian empire and the empire of Greece. Perhaps this was the immediate fulfillment of Daniel 7 and the four beasts. But consider David Helm's insight:

We must get used to the idea that in this [type of literature], visions consistently collapse one epoch in time upon another.... This means that images or figures can apply to more than one period in history. This should keep us from following an overly rigid interpretive scheme. (Helm, p. 137)

In other words, while the immediate reference in 7:23-27 might have been the Roman Empire, these verses could also refer to those forces that stand against God and God's people throughout the ages.

How then could these verses comfort us? How could they comfort those who are suffering persecution in the present era?

Iain Duguid makes virtually the same point when he writes,

The identification of the beasts as four past empires is the exact opposite of the message of apocalyptic literature. For apocalyptic, nothing less than the beginning of the new age can change this world. Until the coming of this new age, the darkness will not lift significantly.... On such a view, the message of Daniel 7 is that life in this present age will *always* be this way until the end of this age. It is striking that the superpowers of our own age still customarily represent themselves by predatory animals, such as the Russian bear, the Chinese dragon, and the American eagle. (Duguid, p. 111)

Respond to the above. What does this understanding of Daniel 7 teach us about patriotism and nationalism?

In looking at verse 27, recall 7:16. Daniel, in his vision, is hearing the interpretation of his vision from an angel who is standing nearby. In the end, the angel assures Daniel with the promise of an *eternal kingdom*. How can this assurance comfort you?

What comments, questions and reflections do you have from last Sunday's teaching on this part of Daniel 7?



Praying the Passage: Daniel 7:15-28

- Consider our destiny as saints to receive the eternal kingdom of God (v. 18, 27). Ponder what this means and thank God for it!
- Acknowledge that the coming of God's kingdom in our lives and in history will be preceded by battle. Name the battles facing your homegroup right now, and ask God to intervene in them. Extend these prayers to the wider church battling among the nations.
- Pray for Christ to come back and rule and reign.
- **SBCC Missionary Focus:** Praise God for the strength He gives during persecution. Pray for Jamil and the work he does in the Middle East / North Africa region with the International Federation of Evangelical Students. Ask God to draw many students of the MENA region into his Kingdom and protect all those in IFES from turning away due to persecution. May his Kingdom expand!

Notes



Study Fourteen

A Model Prayer

Daniel 9:1-23

Prayerless churches are in a deep, silent rebellion against God. -Ben Patterson

How we pray is, perhaps, as important as *that* we pray. Daniel 9 gives us a tremendous model for prayer.

Daniel 9 is both easy and hard. Most of this chapter records a prayer that Daniel prays as the Jews are about to end their seventy years of captivity. That is the easy part. Then, after the prayer, the angel Gabriel shows up and speaks. That is the difficult part.

All in all, Daniel 9 gives us a marvelous model for prayer.

What a remarkable prayer is recorded in Daniel 9 for our learning and use! It gives us such a powerful model for our own praying, taking its place alongside so many of the Psalms which perform the same function. This is the kind of prayer that goes to the heart of God and finds God even more ready to answer than we are to pray...
(Wright, p. 204)

Before going on in this study take a few minutes and read the 17 verses that comprise Daniel 9. What stands out from your reading of this chapter and from the teaching you heard last Sunday?

Let's look at this chapter in outline:

1. Daniel's Situation (vv. 1-3)

Look at verse 1. In the *first year of Darius the son of Ahasueras* (or Xerxes)... While not everyone agrees, this is probably the same king known elsewhere as Cyrus the Great. As Wright points out, *the date matters*. (Wright, p. 189) This is the *first year* of this king's reign. Every reader in Daniel's original audience would have known that this meant: *Babylon has fallen!* It was Cyrus (Darius) who allowed the Jews to go back to Jerusalem (see Ezra 1).

At this point Daniel is an old man, probably in his eighties or even his nineties. He has spent his life in Babylon, serving God, serving the Babylonian government, yearning for a return to the homeland.

It is evident in these verses that Daniel has been studying the prophet Jeremiah, who speaks of Israel's exile in terms of a seventy-year period of time (see Jeremiah 25:8-11 and Jeremiah 29:10-14). Now these seventy years have almost come to completion.¹

Wouldn't you think with all this Bible study and the knowledge that the seventy years are coming to completion, Daniel would throw a party, sing some praise songs and preach a sermon at his local synagogue about packing our bags and getting ready to go home?

Well, not yet. First Daniel prays, and the contents of his prayer are startling.

2. Daniel's Confession (vv. 4-11a)

In verse 3, where does Daniel face as he prays? What does this remind you of?

If you don't mind marking your Bible, read through these verses and underline the plural personal pronouns, *we*, *our*. How many do you find? What do you make of this?

¹ *Seventy years* seems to be a rounded number. The exile, from the time the Babylonians took Jerusalem (587BC) to the decree of Cyrus (538BC) was only fifty years.



Daniel has been squeaky-clean in these pages, yet he confesses the people's sins as if they were his own. Count, and list, the ways in which Daniel describes his people's sin.

Commenting on these specific confessions, Christopher Wright points out,

This is no quick shallow apology, "Sorry, Lord, we messed up a bit there." This is deep awareness of the endemic, incorrigibly evil ways of a whole nation (note "all Israel," v. 11) for many generations. This is a history of stubborn rebellion and rejection of all warnings and pleadings by successive prophets. This is genuine contrition before their covenant God. (Wright, p. 196)

But, again, at this point, why not throw a party? What is Israel's deepest need at this—even more important than being restored to their homeland?

Generally we rush to asking God for *things* (healing, finances, safe travel, conversions, etc.). Daniel does the opposite in this prayer. Most of it is confession. How do these verses inform the ways in which you can pray?

3. Daniel's Affirmation (vv. 11b-14)

Notice in verse 13 how the sin of *prayerlessness* is embedded in Daniel's affirmation. How can Daniel's confession push you to greater depth in your prayer life?

We can see verse 14b as a summary of all that has come before in Daniel's prayer. [*F*]or the Lord our God is righteous in all the works that he has done, and we have not obeyed his voice. In other words, Daniel views the sufferings of God's people over these seventy years as an act of God's justice—his effort to draw his wayward people back into a close and loving relationship with himself by dealing with their sin.

Sometimes we are not to blame for our suffering...and other times we suffer as a direct result of our choices. How could v.14 inform your prayers for yourself when you are suffering as a result of your own sin?

4. Daniel's Request (vv. 15-19)

Look carefully at these verses. Make a list of Daniel's specific requests. On what basis does he ask for these things (see v. 17)?



Daniel's prayer is primarily concerned with the well-being of the people of God. How can we as individuals, homegroups and as a church pray likewise?

Few of us boast of a robust prayer life. How might these verses contribute to changing our commitment to and practice of prayer?

What comments, questions and reflections do you have from last Sunday's teaching on this part of Daniel 7?

Praying the Passage: Daniel 9:1-23

- Use Daniel's extraordinary prayer in 9:4-19 to guide your prayer. Try to devote at least 20-30 minutes to this! Consider breaking up into separate groups of men and women as you confess your sins.
- Marvel at the greatness, power, and covenant love of God (v. 4). Tell him how you have personally experienced this love.
- Read vv. 5-13, and spend time confessing your sins and the sins of our wider church body, including the sin of prayerlessness (v.13). How have we become like the culture instead of distinct from it?
- Read 11-14 and tell God the consequences of sin you have experienced. Consider the state of the American church, and the poor reputation/lack of impact we have in the wider culture.
- Read 15-19, and ask God for restoration and revival!
- **SBCC Missionary Focus:** As a nation we continue to deal with the sins of sexual immorality, abortion, and child abuse. Pray for Betsy Gray at Network Medical as she works with parents who find themselves in crisis pregnancies. Pray people will hear of Network Medical and avail themselves of the services provided. Pray also for Royal Family Kids Camp participants—both counselors and foster children. May many hearts be touched and many children know there is a God who loves them and cares about their needs. Praise God for Community 1:27 and each family who has adopted or fostered needy children. Ask God for wisdom, understanding, and patience for each parent.



Study Fifteen

Gabriel's Answer

Daniel 9:20-27

One Old Testament seminary professor presents a lecture on this section that he calls *Seventy weeks and twenty problems*.

Read these eight verses and you will quickly see what this professor means. Jot down any initial thoughts you have as you read.

Interpretations of this passage vary. Some see in these verses a detailed blueprint of the future, from the time of Daniel until the present. The problem, of course, is that every interpreter seems to see a somewhat different blueprint. At the other extreme, some simply throw up their collective hands saying, *I dunno*.

We can certainly agree with Ralph Davis when he writes,

What does all this mean? It means that if you are driving home late at night and tune in to the 'Prophecy Hour' on your radio and hear the preacher refer to 'what is perfectly clear in Daniel's seventy-weeks prophecy', you know he hasn't read the text carefully. (Davis, p. 129)

But, while little is *perfectly clear* in this passage, the overall message is clear, and this message is a fitting way to conclude our study of Daniel.

Gabriel Shows Up - 9:20-23

The angel Gabriel comes to Daniel. According to these verses, how and why does Gabriel come?

In verse 20, Daniel gets an answer to his prayer even as he prays it (*While I was speaking...*). Have you ever sensed an answer to prayer even as you prayed the prayer? Share with your homegroup what happened.

Look at verse 23. What is the connection between Gabriel's initial statement, *...for you are greatly loved*, and Daniel's prayer? How does prayer teach us of the love of God?

How have you experienced this?

Messiah Shows Up - 9:24-27

These verses are a hotbed of interpretation and we won't explore all the interpretive possibilities in this study. But let's not miss what is *fairly* clear.



Verse 24 speaks of *seventy weeks* (ESV). Literally the text says *seventy sevens*. Notice how we might format the words of this verse:

*Seventy weeks (or seventy sevens) are decreed about your people and your holy city,
to finish the transgression,
to put an end to sin,
and to atone for iniquity,
to bring in everlasting righteousness,
to seal both vision and prophet,
and to anoint a most holy place.*

Notice the six purpose clauses in Gabriel's message. What is the theme of the first three? And the second three?

What about the *seventy weeks*? Christopher Wright is helpful:

Daniel (and Jeremiah) are thinking "seventy years," but God says, "You need to think a lot further ahead than that. (The NIV translates "weeks" as "sevens" to make the point clear). Try seventy 'weeks' of years!" That amounts to literally 490 years, but again it is most likely that such significant numbers (seventy, and weeks), are rounded, approximate, and symbolic. (Wright, p. 206)

As a note in the ESV Study Bible points out, *...the important point is that God has appointed the amount of time, and thus his people should not lose heart.* (ESVSB on Daniel 9:24-27)

Read the following carefully:

The main thing to hold on to is this: when Daniel petitioned God to make an end to the 70 years of exile, the word he received was that it would take another "seventy sevens" before complete deliverance would be made! In other words, God wanted Daniel, and all Israel, to know that *getting home from Babylon* was not as straightforward as Jeremiah's vision made it seem. Israel would return to the land under the proclamation of Cyrus, but God's complete work of salvation would not come for another "seventy sevens" of time. (Helm, p. 168)

In other words, God was showing Daniel something of the coming Christ.

As Sinclair Ferguson points out,

It is almost instinctive to the New Testament Christian to see in these statements a prophecy of the work of Christ. He came to die for our sins that through him we might die to sin and be raised to a new life of righteousness (Romans 6:2, 18).... (Ferguson, p. 186)

Look again at 9:24 above. In what ways does Jesus fulfill the six purpose clauses in this verse?

Are you still here in this study? If so, let's look at one final verse. In 9:26 we see one final week after the 62 weeks that have come before. Confused? Relax, this study is almost over. Here is the way Ralph Davis summarizes these weeks.

7 weeks = relatively restricted time

62 weeks = relatively extended time

1 week = clearly climatic time

The New Living Translation interprets the text and may be very helpful. In this translation, 9:26 reads,

After this period of sixty-two sets of seven, the Anointed One will be killed, appearing to have accomplished nothing, and a ruler will arise whose armies will destroy the city and the Temple. The end will come with a flood, and war and its miseries are decreed from that time to the very end.

We can see hints of Jesus, *the Anointed One* who will be killed, and the Roman warrior Titus who came and utterly destroyed Jerusalem in 70 CE.

Read Matthew 24:15-16 and notice how Jesus himself understands this passage in the book of Daniel.



But, is the death of Jesus and the destruction of Jerusalem the final fulfillment of Daniel 9:26-27? It is likely that these verses have multiple fulfillments. Consider,

It will be helpful for us to remember that apocalyptic literature often has multiple horizons of fulfillment; and so it may well be that Daniel 9:24-27 also has multiple historical horizons of fulfillment. This could include the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, the death and resurrection of Jesus, and the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, as well as the final consummation that arrives with the second coming of Christ. (Helm, p. 167)

Does this way of interpreting this passage—and other apocalyptic passages of scripture—square with interpretations you have heard before, or not? Compare notes with your homegroup.

Consider this in light of our three weeks in Daniel 9. God answers Daniel's prayer with both encouragement and warning. God assures Daniel and Daniel's readers that he is in control, that in the end, he is sovereign and he will prevail. The message is to remain faithful, whether you live in Babylon, Jerusalem or Santa Barbara.

What comments, questions and reflections do you have from last Sunday's teaching on this part of Daniel 7?

What have been your main take-aways from this 15-week study of Daniel? How has this book enlarged your vision of God? How has this book sharpened your focus as you live in the Babylon of our time and place?

Praying the Passage: Daniel 9:20-27

- Praise God that the prayer of a righteous person (like Daniel or us!) is powerful and effective (James 5:16). Marvel that as soon as (Daniel) began to pray a word went out (9:23).
- Thank God that, like Daniel, we too are greatly loved (v. 23), and invited to approach God's throne.
- Ask God to preserve and strengthen his people as we wait for his return. Thank him that though the time seems long, it is finite, and a specific time has been decreed!
- Pray that friends and family may come to Christ in the time that remains.
- **SBCC Missionary Focus:** Pray for more workers for the harvest. "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." Is He calling you to go?