



7 studies in Daniel

For individuals, groups & 1:1

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Introduction to Daniel

Our Sunday teaching and Bible study series takes us to the book of Daniel. Daniel is a unique book in a number of ways. We find Daniel in the Old Testament between the so called major prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel) and the minor prophets (Hosea, Joel and Amos, etc.). Daniel's contents are a combination of historical narrative and prophetic vision. It is written in two ancient languages, Hebrew and Aramaic. The Hebrew Bible also seems to have difficulty placing Daniel within its structure (The Law, the Prophets and the Writings). One would expect to find Daniel in the section called the Prophets, however it is located in the Writings along with Job, Psalms, and Proverbs, etc. Daniel has however been an extremely important book, apparently read by Jewish High Priests, (through the time of Jesus), in preparation for the Day of Atonement. Even today the book of Daniel stirs many debates and varied interpretations when preached and studied in the Christian church.

Before we begin our study series in the book of Daniel some background information will help us to understand it's context and message.

Where do we find Daniel in Biblical history?

The nation of Israel was divided into two kingdoms, the northern kingdom of Israel whose capital was Samaria, and the southern kingdom of Judah whose capital was Jerusalem. Both kingdoms lurched from faithfulness to disobedience, a few kings remained faithful to the covenant with God, but most did evil in the sight of the Lord.

After repeated warnings, through the prophets, of coming judgement, the northern kingdom of Israel (Samaria), fell to the Assyrian nation in 722 BC, never to be re-established as a kingdom again. Despite this terrible example of the judgement of God, the southern kingdom of Judah, in the face

of continued prophetic warning, suffered a similar event. On three occasions the Lord allowed Nebuchadnezzar king of the Babylonian empire to ravage Judah. The first occasion in 605 BC at the Battle of Carchemish, Nebuchadnezzar defeated Judah's ally Egypt and carried away many Judeans including Daniel and his friends (Dan 1:1) to Babylon. Then in 597 BC Nebuchadnezzar returned and occupied Jerusalem, again carrying away many Jews. Finally in 586 BC the vassal Jewish king Zedekiah was removed and Jerusalem (including the Temple) was totally destroyed.

The Lord on this occasion decreed through the prophets that Judah's exile would last c70 years and that they would return to rebuild the city and the Temple. So, it is during this period of Jewish exile in Babylon, that Daniel writes and prophesys through vision.

Who was Daniel and when was his book written?

As mentioned, Daniel was a young Jewish man taken into captivity, by the Babylonians. It is evident that he was well educated (1:4) and likely to have been of noble birth (1:3) faithful to God in his observance of the Law (1:8) and the responsibilities of the covenant. It is this man Daniel who has been traditionally regarded as the author of the Biblical book Daniel. Writing between 605 BC and the return of the exiles under the Persian King Darius c522 BC. There is no compelling reason to date the authorship of the book much later (c200 BC) as some scholars today would argue.

How is the book Daniel compiled and what is its literary form?

The structure of the book is straight forward. The first six chapters mostly supply historical events, Daniel's personal experience. Speaking in the third person recounts his interactions with a number of Babylonian and Persian kings. Clearly demonstrating the Lord's intervention into his and

others lives, through their faithfulness. Then chapters seven to twelve, speaking now in the first person, Daniel receives visions and the literary genre takes a necessary apocalyptic form (much like sections of the book of Revelation) as he describes the details of these visions. Here Daniel prophetically foretells Israel's lot at the hands of a number of Gentile kingdoms. Interestingly some commentators describe chapter 11 verse 35b as a transition to more eschatological themes.

An important note: Whether or not specific images, symbols, characters and signs can be ascribed to any particular historical person, nation or event, the nature of the apocalyptic genre is the communication of broad themes affirming the character of God in current or future circumstances.

Why then was the book written and what are the themes communicated?

It seems that the book, written in an environment of persecution, subjugation and enslavement, was written to bring encouragement, hope and confidence that the God of the heavens had not abandoned them. Despite their circumstances and the judgement attendant to them, that the Lord their God, the God of their Fathers, the covenant keeping God would remember covenant and show mercy. To this end the message that permeates every verse of the book of Daniel is the sovereignty of the "God of heaven" over all rulers, kings, nations, circumstances and events! Nothing, no one, stands in the way of him executing His will and purpose. Therefore, his people can trust and have confidence in Him and respond in love and obedience.

Further reading & references

"Daniel" Norman W Porteous, SCM Press 1979.

"Daniel" Joyce Baldwin, IVP 2009.

"The Book of Daniel" J C Whitcomb 'The Illustrated Bible Dictionary Part 1' IVP 1980.

Daniel Read Scripture Video on YouTube: <https://mytmb.me/dyavid>

Daniel Read Scripture Video download file: <https://mytmb.me/dvfile>

Study 1

Do you fit in?

1. Can you recall a time when you were aware that you did not fit in with the people or environment around you?

2. As a child, was there a food you refused to eat?
Do you eat it now?

3. Do you know what your name means?
Have you ever wished for a different name? Why or why not?

Read 2 Chronicles 36:15 - 23

"...they did not listen to me or pay attention..."

See Isaiah 5:4; 44:26; Jeremiah 7:13,25; 11:7; 44:4 - 6; Haggai 1:13; Zechariah 1:4;

4. What events are described in this section?

Read Daniel 1

Daniel makes a clear point right from the start, asserting the sovereignty of God in all these circumstances; in verse 2

"the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand"

*"for without wholehearted commitment to the Lord and obedience to his will there could be no wisdom. (Job 28:28)" (Baldwin p 63)
cf Colossians 1:9.*

5. Do you know anything about any other Old Testament promises or events that have led to this point?

6. In what ways is the treatment of Daniel and his friends part of the Babylonian attempt to destroy the culture and religion of Judah?

7. Why do you think the four men refuse the meat and wine, but are willing to eat vegetables from the same source, and accept their new names (which are taken from the names of foreign gods)?

8. What stand are the men taking by refusing some of the food?

9. For whose benefit are they taking this stand?

10. At what points in this episode do you see the sovereignty of God at work?

11. Why were the people of Israel likely to doubt God's sovereignty?

12. What makes it hard for us to believe that God "is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth" (Daniel 4:17)?

13. What do we lose if we lose sight of God's sovereignty?

14. Where are the dangers if we mis-judge where to draw the line in maintaining our distinct identity as Christians?

15. What choices might we make, to maintain our distinct identity as God's people?

Study 2

The Fall & Rise of Kingdoms

1. What's the most vivid dream you can remember?
2. Is there an historical figure or practice, or place, that you wish was still alive, in practice, or in existence today? Why?

Read Daniel 2:1 - 23

Chapter 2 presents a stark contrast. On the one hand human inadequacy, anxiety and desperation. On the other, confidence and trust that comes from knowing the "God of heaven". Daniel's song of thanksgiving connects God's action of revelation here to the mighty works of God to his forefathers.

3. Summarise the events in this episode.
4. Are there any themes in Daniel's prayer that tend to be missing from your prayers of praise and thanksgiving?
5. What lesson is taught in this section?

Read Daniel 2:24 - 49

Again, Daniel's God is revealed as supreme over all earthly kings, rulers and nations. The future too, is but a performance of His will. Even through the dream of an ancient despot king; and a succession of 'powerful' nations; the "God of heaven" will establish his eternal King and kingdom.

6. What is the content of the king's dream (v 31 - 35)?

7. What is the meaning of the dream as revealed by God (v 36 - 45)?

8. Summarise the meaning of the dream in a sentence.

9. How does the rock cut from the mountain "but not by human hands" (v 45) prepare us to notice the work of Jesus?

10. In what ways is the certainty of these outcomes emphasised in the section?

11. What future events of God's kingdom do we anticipate with the same certainty and assurance?

12. At what points in this episode do we see God's sovereignty at work?

13. Why do you think that many people today pay money to astrologers to hear their interpretation of events or of the future?

14. How is the "mood" by the end of chapter 2 different than in the opening verses of the book?

15. How does this confidence prepare us for the rest of Daniel's writing?

Study 3

The Fiery Rescue

1. What's the hottest you've ever been? Was it due to weather? Clothing? Workplace?
2. When have you most felt the pressure to conform?
3. Have you ever needed rescuing?

Read Daniel 3

Despite the need for some commentators to see "allegory, rather than historical events". (Baldwin p 82) All of the details, gold statue, (Isaiah 40:19) brick kilns, fire as means of execution, (Jeremiah 29:22) are attested to in biblical and historical records. Perhaps in contrast to the accolades and comforts afforded in earlier chapters, now Daniel's friends face suffering for their faith. However, their confidence is in "the God we serve is able to save us". As Baldwin states, "it is worth noting that they had to endure the ordeal of being thrown into the fire, but nevertheless their lives were spared. There is no suggestion here or elsewhere in Scripture, that the believer will be cushioned against trouble and suffering, except by the presence of the Lord with him in it' (Isaiah 43:2; John 12:26) (Baldwin p 83)

4. What is the conflict in this episode?

5. What are the choices before the three men?

6. How is Nebuchadnezzar's understanding of God different to that of the three men from Judah?

7. What do you notice about the men's response to the king in verses 17 - 18?

8. How does God save his servants?
What is unexpected or surprising in how God chooses to act?

9. Can you think of ways in which Christians feel the pressure to conform by joining in behaviour disobedient to God?

10. What was the expected consequence for obeying God and disobeying the king in this section?

11. What are the repercussions or consequences we fear when we feel the pressure to conform and join in disobedience?

12. What can we learn from this episode to help us resist the pressure to conform with disobedience?

13. Can you see the danger and folly of human pride and sinfulness at any points in this episode?

14. At what points do we see God's sovereignty emphasised in this episode?

15. What does this episode add to our understanding of God's protection of his people?

16. What do you expect that faith in God might cost you?

17. Is there any aspect of how God saves his people in this episode that helps you appreciate the salvation won for us in Christ?

18. What confidence do you have that you can live as Christ's faithful person in our world?

Study 4

The Real King

1. If you could have any tree at all in your garden, what would you choose? Why?

2. Have you ever had to bring bad news to other people and not wanted to do it?
How did you feel as you delivered it?

Read Daniel 4:1 – 27

Although the events of this chapter may raise questions of authenticity, (the king's decree, the king's illness and the king's repentance) all these events are supported in ancient literature, (Baldwin p 88,90, 96), removing doubt over its reality. We see again the revelation of judgement through dreams. The judgement is this: the proud will be made low" (4:23) cf (Proverbs 16:5,11:20,21; Psalm 40:4;)

3. Summarise Nebuchadnezzar's dream (v 10 – 17).

4. What is the meaning of the dream according to God (v 20 – 27)?

5. What is the choice faced by Nebuchadnezzar at the end of the dream?

Read Daniel 4:28 – 37

Without the “fall into frailty” the likelihood of repentance was remote. However, for Nebuchadnezzar, his suffering became the agent of grace, through which repentance, healing and restoration was possible.

6. What does God do to Nebuchadnezzar in fulfilment of the dream?

7. What do we learn about God through Nebuchadnezzar’s song of praise and the surrounding verses?

8. What differences can you see between verse 30 and verse 37?

9. How has Nebuchadnezzar arrived at the point where he acknowledges this?

10. Why does success and accomplishment make it difficult to acknowledge God?

11. How does our society see things differently to Nebuchadnezzar in verses 34 – 35?

12. Where do we see grace playing out in this episode?

13. What parts of this episode make you most thankful for Jesus?

14. What lessons are there for us in Nebuchadnezzar's experience?

15. Where are the signs of God's sovereignty in this episode?

Study 5

The Writing's on the Wall

1. Have you ever graffitied a wall? Or been tempted to?
2. Can you recall the biggest jigsaw puzzle you've ever completed?
3. Is there a lesson from history that you fear our society hasn't learned?

Read Daniel 5

There is quite a gap historically between chapters 4 and 5. With a change of king from Nebuchadnezzar to Belshazzar, Daniel finds himself involved in events that precipitate the end of the Babylonian empire. Belshazzar's banquet was to be the last event of his life, perhaps a "for tomorrow we die" party as the armies of the Medes and Persians were at his door. The kingdom fell into the hands of the Persian king Darius. Perhaps as the prophet Habakkuk alluded to in his book, the Lord, raising up the Babylonians as an instrument of judgement against Judah, was to seal their own judgement and destruction. Daniel appears unknown to the new king (5:13). And Daniel is clearly unimpressed with the king (5:17, 22, 23) and asserts that he rules only by the leave of the Lord of heaven (5:23). Daniel declares God's judgement and sovereignty over all earthly rule.

4. In 3:29 King Nebuchadnezzar (likely Belshazzar's grandfather) decreed that everyone must honour the Lord God. In what ways does this new king fail to honour God?

5. What is the particular problem with Belshazzar's conduct at the banquet?

6. Are you aware of ways today that people mock God by treating holy things as ordinary?

7. Why does Daniel recite history (v 18 - 21) before he turns to interpreting the writing?

8. What would you say are the elements of divine judgment as captured in this episode?

9. What differences do you see between Belshazzar and Nebuchadnezzar?

10. How can a Christian person think about being “weighed” on God’s scales?

11. How is the divine judgement of sin we see at the cross similar to God’s judgment of sin here?
How is it different?

12. How do we see people today unable to understand God’s revelation of his plans and purposes?

13. In what ways do people today set themselves “up against the Lord of heaven” (v 23)?

14. How can we guard ourselves against the trap of ignoring or forgetting the testimony of previous generations?

Read Psalm 90

15. How does this Psalm, and Moses' very different approach to God, help us order our lives rightly?

Study 6

In the Lions' Den

1. Were you afraid of any animals when you were younger? What made you scared?

2. Describe a regular habit or routine that you never go without.

Read Daniel 6

There appears a seamless flow between chapter five and six. Daniel has lost none of his status under the new regime. In fact, promotion to higher authority and responsibility is the cause of jealousy and a plot to kill him. Now, like the events of chapter 3, Daniel faces death for his faith and practise. But unlike chapter 3 Daniel's sentence is for something he continues to do rather than something his friends choose not to do. Once more, deliverance comes from the 'Living God' in whom Daniel 'trusted'.

3. What's significant about Daniel's situation as this episode opens?

4. Summarise the events of this section.

5. What is the reason for the plan to sabotage Daniel?

6. How is this decree similar to that given in chapter 3?
How is it different?

7. What is Daniel's response to the decree?

8. What do we learn about God's protection of his servants through this episode?

9. Can we expect God to always intervene in this dramatic way for our salvation?

10. Where do we see God's sovereignty at work or acknowledged in this episode?

11. Where do we find ourselves torn between obedience to God and conformity to our society's expectations?

12. How does Daniel's experience help prepare us for those occasions when we're faced with the choice to obey God or conform to the expectations of others?

Read Hebrews 11:1 - 2 & 32:40

13. How does the author of the letter to the Hebrews encourage us not to see ourselves in the situation of Daniel and the other ancient people of God, but to learn from them?

14. If some enemy was trying to catch you out for being one of God's people, what evidence in your life would they point to?

15. Spend some time giving thanks that God is in control of time and circumstances.

1. What world leader, living or dead, would you most like to meet?

What questions would you ask them?

2. What images or words do people use to try and describe heaven?

Read Daniel 7

“Despite the welter of interpretations there is one thing above all that the chapter is proclaiming quite unambiguously: the Most High is the reigning king in heaven and earth. There is an opposition to his rule, formidable in appearance and powerful, but all the time the Most High is in control, even when his opponents seem most successful (7:26). Therefore those who are allied with him triumph also. No wonder the chapter has been called ‘the centre of gravity of the whole book’, and ‘one of the summits of scripture.’” (Baldwin p 115)

Daniel now speaks in the first person as he records the content of his visions. These visions were received during the events recorded in earlier chapters.

An interesting note is the personal toll receiving these visions had on Daniel physically and emotionally.(8:27; 10:1, 10, 11, 15, 18).

Daniel introduces a title that Jesus was to choose to use repeatedly of himself, many centuries later, ‘son of man’ (7:13)

3. Describe what Daniel sees happening in heaven.

4. What is the horn doing while these events unfold in heaven?

5. How does Jesus' repeated use of the title "Son of Man" for himself (82 times in the four gospels!) help us understand what is happening here?

6. What encouragement do you find in these verses, being able to see the heavenly perspective, when usually we only see the earthly?

Read Matthew 28:18 – 20

7. According to Jesus, how should we respond to the fact that he is the one given all authority over all nations?

Read Daniel 9

As the one through whom God has been revealing Himself while his countrymen are in exile, Daniel now takes responsibility in leading his people in corporate repentance. Appealing to his covenant keeping God, to remember what He promised through the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 29:10) to restore His people to Jerusalem after seventy years.

8. What do we learn about God and his work in the world through Daniel's prayer and its introduction?

9. How does the first half of the section help us understand verses 20 - 27?

10. What does this section tell us about how to approach the other visions in this second half of the book?

11. The Old Testament idea of the jubilee may lay behind the language of "seventy sevens" (v 24). Look at Leviticus 25:8 - 13 for some help in thinking about what God is promising here.

12. There is no unit of measure of time here, but elsewhere in the Bible, sevens of days or years are spoken of. Around 490 years would pass until the arrival of Jesus. How does this help us understand the six promises in verse 24?

13. How do you think Daniel and the people of Judah would have felt about the promise to “put an end to sin” (v 24)?

14. What encouragement do you find in the promises of verse 24?

Read Daniel 12:5 – 13

15. How does Daniel’s question and the angel’s answer help us as we seek to find answers and clarity in these and other visions and prophecies in the Bible?

16. What assurances are there in this section for Daniel?
What about for us?



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