

Knowing the Bible: Daniel

A 12-week Practical Study Series on the Book of Daniel

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Week 1: Overview

Overview

The book of Daniel is a favorite for Sunday school teachers and students alike. And for good reason. It has all the makings a great story—memorable characters, cliff-hanger drama, and science fiction-like visions. It's like *Harry Potter* meets *Lord of the Rings* with a dash of *Star Wars* thrown in!

Yet therein lies a potential danger. Because the human actors and events are so fascinating, we are tempted when studying this book to fix our gaze on the human plane. But when this happens we can inadvertently lose sight of the fact that this book is ultimately not about Daniel or his three friends, but about God and his victory in the world.

Sure, the book of Daniel tells Daniel's story—and a fascinating and instructive story it is. But the main purpose of Daniel is to reveal to us who God is—his character, his purposes, his way of working in the world for the good of his people. The main lesson of Daniel, then, is not, as is often assumed (and taught!), *Dare to be a Daniel!* Rather, the main point is this: *Dare to trust in Daniel's God!*

The story of Daniel is about the story of God and his victory in the world. For God is the sovereign Lord of history, the one who establishes kingdoms and brings them down. From the opening chapter and the story of Daniel's exile to Babylon, to the closing chapter and its vision of the future, we see how God achieves his victory in the world.

Placing It in the Larger Story

The book of Daniel, named after and written by Daniel in the sixth century BC, records the events of Daniel's life and the visions he saw from the time of his exile in 605 (1:1) until the third year of King Cyrus in 536 (10:1). Sweeping in scope, the book deals with the rise and fall of various world empires. But these historical events are seen through the lens of God's sovereign control of things, and thus serve a pastoral purpose to encourage the Jewish people during a critical time in their history. The Jews were in exile, suffering at the hand of pagan rulers who cared little for God or his people. They had every reason, then, to wonder whether God was in control, and whether he would deal with the situation—for his own glory and the good of his covenant people.

Key Verse: “I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed” (7:13–14).

Date and Historical Background

While some scholars have placed the writing of Daniel in the second century BC, there is good reason to believe that Daniel himself is the author of this book and that it was composed in the sixth century BC. This was a tumultuous time in the ancient Near East, and a crucial moment in the life of God’s people. The book of Daniel opens against the backdrop of the rise of the Babylonian empire, which had recently toppled the mighty Assyrian empire. The book closes some seventy years later, with the overthrow of the Babylonians by the Persian empire under Cyrus. It was the strategy of the Babylonians to bring to Babylon the “cream of the crop” of the peoples they conquered; the Persians reversed this process by returning the exiles to their homeland. The events of the book of Daniel take place between these two major world-changing events: the rise of the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar and the displacement of the Babylonians by the Persians under Cyrus roughly seventy years later.

Outline

- 1) Daniel and the Three Friends at the Babylonian Court ([Dan. 1:1–6:28](#))
 - a) Prologue ([Dan. 1:1–21](#))
 - i) Daniel and his friends taken into exile ([Dan. 1:1–7](#))
 - ii) Daniel and his friends remain undefiled ([Dan. 1:8–16](#))
 - iii) Daniel and his friends promoted and preserved ([Dan. 1:17–21](#))
 - b) Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of a great statue ([Dan. 2:1–49](#))
 - i) The dream and Nebuchadnezzar’s threat ([Dan. 2:1–13](#))
 - ii) Daniel’s response and prayer ([Dan. 2:14–24](#))
 - iii) Daniel interprets the dream ([Dan. 2:25–45](#))
 - iv) Nebuchadnezzar promotes Daniel ([Dan. 2:46–49](#))
 - c) Nebuchadnezzar builds a great statue ([Dan. 3:1–30](#))
 - i) The nations worship Nebuchadnezzar’s statue ([Dan. 3:1–7](#))
 - ii) Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego preserved in the fiery furnace ([Dan. 3:8–29](#))
 - iii) Nebuchadnezzar promotes Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego ([Dan. 3:30](#))
 - d) Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of a toppled tree ([Dan. 4:1–37](#))
 - i) Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and its interpretation ([Dan. 4:1–27](#))
 - ii) Nebuchadnezzar’s humbling ([Dan. 4:28–33](#))
 - iii) Nebuchadnezzar’s exaltation ([Dan. 4:34–37](#))
 - e) Belshazzar’s feast ([Dan. 5:1–31](#))
 - i) An idolatrous feast ([Dan. 5:1–4](#))
 - ii) An unreadable message ([Dan. 5:5–9](#))
 - iii) A forgotten interpreter ([Dan. 5:10–12](#))
 - iv) A message of judgment ([Dan. 5:13–31](#))
 - f) The lions’ den ([Dan. 6:1–28](#))
 - i) Daniel promoted ([Dan. 6:1–3](#))
 - ii) The administrators plot to remove Daniel ([Dan. 6:4–15](#))
 - iii) Daniel preserved in the lions’ den ([Dan. 6:16–24](#))
 - iv) Darius acknowledges the power of Daniel’s God ([Dan. 6:25–27](#))

- v) Daniel preserved until the end of the exile ([Dan. 6:28](#))
- 2) The Visions of Daniel ([Dan. 7:1–12:13](#))
 - a) The vision of four great beasts and the heavenly court ([Dan. 7:1–28](#))
 - i) The four great beasts ([Dan. 7:1–8](#))
 - ii) The Ancient of Days judges the beast ([Dan. 7:9–12](#))
 - iii) The coming of the Son of Man ([Dan. 7:13–14](#))
 - iv) The interpretation of the vision ([Dan. 7:15–27](#))
 - v) Daniel's response ([Dan. 7:28](#))
 - b) The vision of the ram, the goat, and the little horn ([Dan. 8:1–27](#))
 - i) The vision of the ram and the goat ([Dan. 8:1–14](#))
 - ii) The interpretation of the vision ([Dan. 8:15–26](#))
 - iii) Daniel's response ([Dan. 8:27](#))
 - c) Daniel's prayer and its answer ([Dan. 9:1–27](#))
 - i) Daniel's prayer concerning the 70 years ([Dan. 9:1–19](#))
 - ii) Gabriel's answer: 70 sevens before the promised redemption ([Dan. 9:20–27](#))
 - d) Daniel's vision of the final conflict ([Dan. 10:1–12:13](#))
 - i) A heavenly messenger brings news of heavenly conflict ([Dan. 10:1–11:1](#))
 - ii) A detailed vision of future earthly conflicts among nations ([Dan. 11:2–45](#))
 - iii) The promise of resurrection to glory or shame ([Dan. 12:1–4](#))
 - iv) How long until the end? ([Dan. 12:5–13](#))

Week 1: Daniel 1:1-7

The Place of the Passage: This first chapter introduces the book as a whole by describing how Daniel and his three friends were deported to Babylon, where they were educated in Babylonian culture ([Dan. 1:1-7](#)). Daniel's faith is put to the test, and the chapter ends with Daniel and his three friends being promoted into the service of King Nebuchadnezzar.

The Big Picture: [Daniel 1:1-21](#) shows us how a sovereign God accomplishes his purposes and achieves his victory by sending Daniel and his three friends into exile in Babylon.

Questions for Discussion

Read through the complete passage for this study, [Daniel 1:1-21](#). Then review the questions below and write your notes on them concerning this introductory section to the book of Daniel.

1. Daniel and His Friends Taken into Exile (1:1-7)

The opening verse sets the stage for Nebuchadnezzar's conquest of Jerusalem (v. 1). But what comes next is a bit of a shocker: "And *the Lord* gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand . . ." (v. 2). Why would Daniel ascribe ultimate responsibility for the capture of Jerusalem to the Lord? What does this teach us about Daniel's view of God? And what does this imply about human agency?

Verse 2 draws considerable attention to "the vessels of the house of God," mentioning that they were seized by Nebuchadnezzar and carried off to Babylon. Take a close look at this verse. Given all the things that could have been mentioned, why draw attention to the fate of the temple vessels? Note as well where they end up—in the house of Nebuchadnezzar's god, "the treasury of his god" (v. 2). What is the significance of this?

Why does Nebuchadnezzar go to all the trouble of deporting some of the Jews to Babylon? What strategy might he have in deporting members of "the royal family and nobility" in particular (v. 3), and then training them in the culture and customs of the Babylonians (v. 4), as well as providing for them materially (v. 5)?

Week 2: Faith in Exile (1:8–21)

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2. Daniel and His Friends Remain Undefined (1:8–16)

Notice how verse 8 begins with a sharp contrast: “*But* Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king’s food” (v. 8). Why did Daniel believe eating the king’s food or drinking his wine would defile him?

Verse 9 tells us that God gave Daniel “favor and compassion.” How does the Lord’s favor and compassion manifest itself in Daniel’s life in these verses? What concrete evidence could we point to?

3. Daniel and His Friends Promoted and Preserved (1:17–21)

This first chapter climaxes when King Nebuchadnezzar tests Daniel and his three friends in their learning. And the text isn’t bashful about telling us they pass the test with flying colors; in fact, it says they were “ten times better” than anyone else. Why, though, do you think this point is emphasized?

Verse 21 looks, at first glance, to be an incidental historical detail tacked onto the end of the story: “And Daniel was there [in the court of the King of Babylon] until the first year of King Cyrus.” Who is King Cyrus? And why do you think this is mentioned? What does it say about Daniel? What does it say about God?

Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of [Daniel 1:1–21](#) for your own life today. Consider what you have learned that might lead you to praise God, repent of sin, and trust in his gracious promises.

NOTES

GOD GAVE. A simple subject-verb combination is used three times in the opening chapter of Daniel: “the Lord gave . . .” (1:2), “God gave . . .” (v. 9), and “God gave . . .” (v. 17). Arguably, these three “God-gives” shape the flow of this chapter and the division of its paragraphs (vv. 1–7, 8–16, 17–21). But more importantly, this simple expression captures the good news about what God has done in Christ: “For God so loved the world, that *he gave* his only Son” ([John 3:16](#)). What a wonderfully succinct way to express the heart of the gospel, the meaning of grace, and the story of Scripture—*God gave!* And yet, surprisingly perhaps, we find this glorious theme right here in the opening chapter of the book of Daniel.

DEFEAT AS THE PATH TO VICTORY. We’re taken aback when we read in verse 2 that the Lord is the one who ultimately gave Jerusalem into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. In a book designed to show the victory of God, this is a counterintuitive way to begin. And yet this is the gospel story—defeat is the path to victory. Before Jesus wears the crown, he bears the cross. The Son of God, the Davidic Messiah, is first the Son of Man, the suffering servant who must tread the lonely path of humility and suffering and even death. “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” ([John 12:24](#)). So, too, this is the way of the gospel in our lives: we share in Christ’s suffering, “becoming like him in his death,” before we “attain the resurrection from the dead” ([Phil. 3:10–11](#)).

EXILE AS COVENANTAL CURSE. We will miss the full import of the opening chapter of Daniel if we fail to see the exile of the Jews to Babylon in light of the covenant curses threatened for failing to keep the stipulations of the Sinai covenant. Both Leviticus (26:14–45) and Deuteronomy (28:15–68) provide an extensive list of the curses that will come upon Israel if they fail to abide by the terms of the covenant. Note that the climactic curse of the covenant is the *exile* of the nation itself ([Lev. 26:33](#); [Deut. 28:64](#))—viewed as a death sentence for a capital offense (i.e., apostasy/idolatry). We are therefore to understand the dramatic events of [Daniel 1](#) as the fulfillment of the curses threatened centuries earlier (cf. [Jer. 25:1–14](#)).

BLESSING TO THE NATIONS. The book of Daniel envisions the Jews living in exile among the nations. Jeremiah prophesied of this situation, and his counsel to the exiles was clear: “seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare” ([Jer. 29:7](#)). Even though exile is an expression of God’s judgment upon the nation, the Jews are nevertheless to seek to bless the people among whom they dwell. Daniel and his friends, among others, are hauled off to Babylon, yet we see them embody this commitment to bless Babylon. The story of Daniel’s life can thus be seen as a partial fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham: that his offspring would be a blessing to the nations ([Gen. 12:3](#)).

SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD. The God of Daniel is sovereign over men and nations. Indeed, from the start we are confronted with the Lord’s sovereignty over the events of history and human circumstances. Daniel is clear that it was the Lord who ultimately orchestrated the fall of Jerusalem ([Dan. 1:2](#)). So too we learn in chapter 1 that God works in and through the most seemingly mundane details and decisions of life: the Lord is responsible for the favorable reception Daniel receives from the chief of the eunuchs (v. 9), the nourishment the four young men receive from only a vegetable diet (v. 15), and the acquisition of knowledge and insight through their study of Babylonian culture (v. 17). There is a compatibility between divine sovereignty and human agency; these are not to be set in opposition but understood as different perspectives on the same unfolding events.

CHRIST AND CULTURE. Perhaps no book in the Old Testament presents more material for thinking about the Christian presence in the world, or what has classically been referred to as the relationship between Christ and culture. Daniel and his three friends display a readiness to engage in the culture and customs of the Babylonians, and yet this clearly has limits. Daniel does not simply accommodate to the host culture of the Babylonians. At the same time, he does show a high degree of acculturation: acquiring both learning and skill in “all literature and wisdom” of the Babylonians (v. 17). This provides a good case study for thinking about the challenge of being in the world, but not of the world ([John 17:15–16](#)).

Week 3: Nebuchadnezzar's Dream of a Statue (2:1–49)

The Place of the Passage

This chapter provides our first dramatic look at Daniel as an interpreter of dreams, and God as a revealer of mysteries. The story is self-contained, though its themes will reappear in later chapters of the book of Daniel. Especially significant is the division of history into earthly empires represented by Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a great statue and its interpretation. It is worth noting that this chapter introduces the portion of Daniel that was originally written in Aramaic. The chapter ends with Daniel and his three friends being promoted, which prepares the way for the events to follow in chapter 3.

The Big Picture

In [Daniel 2:1–49](#), we see that God is the God of gods and Lord of kings because he is the revealer of mysteries.

Questions for Discussion

1. The Dream and Nebuchadnezzar's Threat (2:1–13)

Verse 1 tells us that Nebuchadnezzar was deeply troubled by his dreams. Why do you suppose that was? In the ancient world, dreams were viewed as communication from the gods and thus thought to anticipate the future. How does understanding this shed light on Nebuchadnezzar's response?

Nebuchadnezzar called together a group of people who were trained to interpret dreams: "the magicians, the enchanters, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans" (v. 2). What was unusual about Nebuchadnezzar's request? How did the Chaldeans respond?

2. Daniel's Response and Prayer (2:14–24)

Daniel requests an audience with Nebuchadnezzar to interpret his dream. Why, in the flow of events in this passage, is this such a bold and faith-filled thing for Daniel to do?

After God reveals the dream to Daniel, he praises God as the one “to whom belong wisdom and might” (v. 20). But he also goes on to praise God for giving him this same “wisdom and might” (v. 23). In this context, what does it mean for God to have wisdom and might and then give it to Daniel?

3. Daniel Interprets the Dream (2:25–45)

In what ways does Daniel ensure that God alone gets the credit for being the revealer of mysteries?

In verses 36–43 Daniel describes the content of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. The parts of the statue represent four kingdoms, beginning with the “head of gold” (v. 38), which is Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian empire. Compare how these four kingdoms are described. What is the significance of each of these descriptions?

Daniel sees that a stone shall strike the image, destroying it (v. 35). In light of verses 44–45, what is this stone? How does this relate to what Jesus says about his own life and ministry?

4. Nebuchadnezzar Promotes Daniel (2:46–49)

Nebuchadnezzar is amazed at what Daniel was able to reveal to him. He falls down prostrate and pays homage. But to whom? And yet how does that relate to what Nebuchadnezzar says in verse 47?

Daniel graciously asks the king to appoint his three friends to important positions in the empire, while Daniel stays in the court of the king (v. 49). How does this prepare for the situation in chapter 3?

Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of this passage for your own life today. Consider what you have learned that might lead you to praise God, repent of sin, and trust in his gracious promises.

NOTES

SEEK MERCY. When Daniel is confronted with a truly desperate situation, the prospect of death, he doesn't despair. Instead, he calls upon his three friends "to seek mercy from the God of heaven" (v. 18). This is a gospel-laced response to crisis. It's the kind of reaction Jesus invites from his followers, regardless of their circumstances or situation in life. "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened" ([Matt. 7:7–8](#)). Daniel found this promise of Jesus to be gloriously true. And the only right response was adoration: "To you, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise" ([Dan. 2:23](#)).

INCARNATION. When Nebuchadnezzar confronts his wise men with an impossible request, namely, to tell him not only the interpretation, but the content of his dream, they respond in a way that exposes the limits of human wisdom: "The thing that the king asks is difficult, and no one can show it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh" ([Dan. 2:11](#)). An honest confession, to be sure, but one that the gospel overturns: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us," the opening chapter of John's Gospel declares, "and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" ([John 1:14](#)).

AN EVERLASTING KINGDOM. When Jesus entered into public ministry, he came preaching the gospel of God, which was an announcement of the dawning of the kingdom of God in his own person and work ([Mark 1:14–15](#)). Many centuries before, Daniel got a glimpse of this good news, the coming of an everlasting kingdom (vv. 44–45). Indeed, he saw the stone the builders would reject—the stone that became the cornerstone (v. 35; [Matt. 21:42](#)). And he understood, as Jesus demonstrated, that the initiative to establish this kingdom rests, not with man, but with God (v. 44). Ultimately, this kingdom shall reach its consummation with the dawning of a new heaven and new earth ([Rev. 21:1](#)), at which point we will be able to say, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever" ([Rev. 11:15](#)).

MYSTERY. In [Daniel 2](#), God stands forth as the "revealer of mysteries" (v. 47). In Daniel, as well as the rest of the Bible, the word "mystery" is not intended to refer to something cryptic or clandestine; rather, it refers to what God has yet to disclose about his purposes for the world. When God reveals to Daniel the mystery of Nebuchadnezzar's dream (vv. 18–19), Daniel is thus given insight into how history is going to unfold according to God's sovereign, saving plan. The apostle Paul speaks of this mystery in several of his letters (see [Rom. 11:25](#); [Eph. 3:1–10](#); [Col. 1:25–26](#)). This mystery "was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith" ([Rom. 16:25–26](#)).

REVELATION. The Christian faith is rooted in the fact of divine revelation. Apart from God's gracious self-disclosure, there would be no Christianity. [Daniel 2](#), then, puts its finger on an important theological truth: divine revelation, or the fact that God "reveals deep and hidden things" (v. 22). But this chapter also reminds us of the goal of revelation: doxology, or the adoration and worship of God, which we see exemplified in both Daniel's (vv. 20–23) and Nebuchadnezzar's response to God's revealing his mystery (vv. 46–47).

WISDOM. The book of Proverbs famously asserts that wisdom, or insight for right living, begins with the fear of the Lord ([Prov. 1:7](#)). [Daniel 2](#) both illustrates and reinforces this theme. God is the one "to whom belong wisdom and might" ([Dan. 2:20](#)). And yet God gives this wisdom to those who seek it with reverent trust, as Daniel and his three friends did (vv. 18, 23). To glean such wisdom is to get to the heart of what theology is meant to be—rightly knowing who God is.

Week 4: Nebuchadnezzar Builds a Great Statue (3:1–30)

The Place of the Passage

In [Daniel 3:1–30](#), we see the faith of Daniel’s three friends put to the test. Nebuchadnezzar erects a great statue and commands all people to fall down and worship it. Daniel’s friends refuse and are thrown into a fiery furnace. But God delivers them from this peril and vindicates his own power in the eyes of Nebuchadnezzar, who responds (as we saw in [Daniel 2](#)) by ascribing praise to the God of Israel and honoring Daniel’s three friends.

The Big Picture

In this chapter we see God’s power at work, rescuing his people from a most perilous situation, which serves to confirm that “there is no other God who is able to rescue in this way” (3:29).

Questions for Discussion

1. The Nations Worship Nebuchadnezzar’s Statue (3:1–7)

The statue Nebuchadnezzar builds is different from the one he saw in his dreams. What is the difference? And what does this suggest about Nebuchadnezzar’s view of himself and his empire?

When describing the dedication of the great statue, these verses contain some seemingly unnecessary repetition: for example, the list of officials present (vv. 2–3) or the list of musical instruments used (vv. 5, 7). What effect is created by this repetition? Is it positive, or negative? And what does it say about the people involved?

2. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego Preserved in the Fiery Furnace (3:8–29)

Daniel’s three friends refuse to pay homage to the statue erected by Nebuchadnezzar, and are therefore to be thrown into the fiery furnace. Look closely at their response to Nebuchadnezzar in verses 16–18. How confident are they of being delivered from the fiery furnace? What other fate do they consider a possibility?

Much to his surprise, when Nebuchadnezzar looked into the fiery furnace he saw not only the three friends alive and well, but a fourth man with them, who looked “like a son of the gods” (v. 25). Who is this person? And what does his presence with the three friends, in the fiery furnace, teach us about

God's relationship to his people? You may find it helpful to read [Isaiah 43:2](#) before answering this question.

This passage is careful to describe how the three friends appeared after they came out of the fire: "The hair of their heads was not singed, their cloaks were not harmed, and no smell of fire had come upon them" ([Dan. 3:27](#)). What does this teach us about God's ability to protect and care for his people?

3. Nebuchadnezzar Promotes Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (3:30)

Compare the endings of [Daniel 2](#) and 3. What common themes do you see? What larger message is this intended to convey about God's victory and the faithfulness of God's people?

Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of this passage for your own life today. Consider what you have learned that might lead you to praise God, repent of sin, and trust in his gracious promises.

NOTES

DELIVERANCE. This chapter provides one of the most powerful examples of deliverance in all the Bible. Yes, the faith and courage of Daniel's three friends is truly remarkable (3:17–18). But even more so is the deliverance God achieves for them, so that not a whiff of smoke can be detected on them, even after having been in the fierce heat of the fire for some time (v. 27). It is hard to imagine a more complete deliverance than that one—that is, until you come to the New Testament, and consider the fiery furnace of hell, and the deliverance God accomplishes through his Son, on behalf of his people, to rescue them from "the wrath to come" ([1 Thess. 1:10](#)).

THE FOURTH IS LIKE A SON OF THE GODS. Having commissioned his people to take the gospel to the ends of the earth, Jesus assures them of his continual presence with them: "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" ([Matt. 28:20](#)). The apostle Paul understood the reality of Christ's presence to sustain him in the midst of trying circumstances: "He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us" ([2 Cor. 1:10](#)). So, too, do Daniel's three friends, as they enjoy the manifest presence of the preincarnate Christ shielding them from an otherwise certain death in the fiery furnace. This fourth person in the furnace, whose appearance is "like a son of the gods" ([Dan. 3:25](#)), provides a wonderful glimpse into the way in which Jesus Christ, "the great shepherd of the sheep" ([Heb. 13:20](#)), walks with his people even "through the valley of the shadow of death" ([Ps. 23:4](#)).

IDOLATRY. [Daniel 3](#) provides a classic case of fallen humanity’s tendency to worship idols. Ever since Adam and Eve inverted the creational order by heeding the words of the Serpent, rather than trusting in the provision of God ([Genesis 3](#)), humankind has had a built-in tendency to want to construct idols in the place of God. And while these have not always taken the form of statues, humanity has consistently and cleverly found ways to exchange the glory of God for “images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things” ([Rom. 1:23](#)). The Old Testament prophets combatted this issue constantly (see [Isaiah 40–48](#)), as did the earliest Christians, as they took the gospel into the cultural centers of first-century paganism (see [Acts 17:16–32](#)). God promises, however, to one day rid the world, and the human heart, of false gods: “and the Lord alone will be exalted in that day” ([Isa. 2:17](#)).

PERSECUTION. The persecution of Daniel’s three friends has been the experience of God’s people down through the ages. Ever since God put enmity between the Serpent and the Seed of the Woman in [Genesis 3](#), the people of God have encountered persecution from anti-God forces in the world. The antagonism between these two peoples, and the persecution that results, is a theme that runs through the pages of Scripture—and, sadly, down through the pages of human history. The earliest Christians, of course, knew of the reality of persecution at the hands of both Jews and pagans; in fact, in [Galatians 4](#) the apostle Paul provides a fascinating redemptive-historical reading of the friction that existed between Abraham’s offspring ([Gal. 4:21–28](#)). He then adds this sober postscript: “But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, *so also it is now*” (v. 29).

CHRISTOPHANY. Although God the Son did not make his dwelling among us in the flesh until the time of the incarnation, the Old Testament provides a number of suggestive anticipations of the incarnation, when a human figure suddenly appears on the scene in the service of God. Analogous to a theophany, scholars call these episodes Christophanies, literally, Christ-appearings. Perhaps the most intriguing is found in [Genesis 18](#), when the Lord appears to Abraham and talks to him ([Gen. 18:1–2](#); see also [Gen. 32:22–32](#)). Many students of the Bible believe we have another Christophany here in [Daniel 3](#), with the sudden appearance of this one who is like “a son of the gods” (v. 25) and rescues Daniel’s three friends.

CHURCH AND STATE. The New Testament is clear that Christians should submit to authorities ([Rom. 13:1](#)), showing proper deference and respect to political officials and governmental systems ([1 Pet. 2:13–17](#)). The followers of Jesus aren’t to be renegades or political rabble-rousers. And yet submission to authorities does have a limit; in this fallen world, governments can issue decrees that directly contradict the will of God. In such cases, the path of wisdom is to do as Daniel’s three friends did in the face of state-sponsored idolatry, and express your conscientious objection, while at the same time being willing to embrace the consequences of such a stand. We see Peter and the other apostles taking a similarly bold yet costly stand because they were motivated by the conviction that “We must obey God rather than men” ([Acts 5:29](#)).

Week 5: Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream of a Toppled Tree (4:1–37)

The Place of the Passage

This passage centers upon another of Nebuchadnezzar’s dreams, this time of a toppled tree. Daniel, who did not make an appearance in the previous chapter, returns to the scene as the one to interpret Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. The toppling of the tree is intended to teach Nebuchadnezzar about the pre-eminence of the God of Israel, a lesson he learns only by being humbled ([Dan. 4:33–37](#)). This chapter can be viewed as parallel with [Daniel 5](#), where Belshazzar is similarly confronted with his own pride, though the outcome is decidedly different.

The Big Picture

[Daniel 4:1–37](#) teaches that God is able to humble those who walk in pride (v. 37).

Questions for Discussion

1. Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream and Its Interpretation (4:1–27)

[Daniel 4:1–3](#) provides an introduction to the events recorded in this chapter. Nebuchadnezzar declares that he wants to show “the signs and wonders” that the Most High has done for him (v. 2). What specific “signs and wonders” does he have in mind? Why does he also affirm God’s everlasting kingdom in this context (v. 3)?

Nebuchadnezzar’s dream involves a giant tree being chopped down by “a watcher, a holy one,” who came down from heaven (v. 13). But this angel, or heavenly messenger, is instructed “to leave the stump of its roots in the earth” (v. 15). What is the meaning of leaving the stump?

Daniel says that Nebuchadnezzar will experience this humbling until he acknowledges that “the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will” (v. 25). But what would it mean for Nebuchadnezzar to be humble? What would be the telltale signs (see v. 27)?

2. Nebuchadnezzar's Humbling (4:28–33)

Verse 29 tells us that a whole 12 months separated the initial warning Nebuchadnezzar received and the judgment against him to bring about his humbling. What does this imply about God's ways with us?

Nebuchadnezzar experiences a thorough humbling at the hand of the Lord: “He was driven from among men and ate grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair grew as long as eagles’ feathers, and his nails were like birds’ claws” (v. 33). Why is this a fitting punishment for the sin of pride?

3. Nebuchadnezzar's Exaltation (4:34–37)

What does Nebuchadnezzar mean when he says he “lifted his eyes to heaven” (v. 34)? What immediately follows as a result of his doing that?

Nebuchadnezzar experienced “still more greatness” after he was restored (v. 36). Clearly, he has learned that the humble will be exalted. But what is the main lesson he takes away from this experience (see v. 37)?

Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of this passage for your own life today. Consider what you have learned that might lead you to praise God, repent of sin, and trust in his gracious promises.

NOTES

DIVINE PATIENCE. We’re tempted to pass over quickly the fact that Nebuchadnezzar was given a whole year before God executed his judgment upon him for his pride (v. 29). This reminds us that God is exceedingly patient with us—even in our hard-heartedness, pride, and rebellion. Sadly, we’re prone to forget or even presume upon God’s “forbearance and patience” (see [Rom. 2:4](#)). Yet the gospel teaches us that God is indeed “slow to anger” ([Ex. 34:6](#)), and is therefore “patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance” ([2 Pet. 3:9](#)).

THE HUMBLE SHALL BE EXALTED. While the main lesson we are to take away from the example of Nebuchadnezzar is that those who exalt themselves shall be humbled ([Dan. 4:37](#)), we see the reverse in his story as well: namely, that the humble shall be exalted (v. 36). This was, of course, a recurring theme in the teaching of Jesus. In fact, this is one of the great gospel paradoxes, something Jesus himself embodied so beautifully through his sacrifice and service: “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” ([Mark 10:45](#)). The gospel now calls believers to “humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you” ([1 Pet. 5:6](#)). A life of humble cross-bearing will lead to a life of sharing in the glory of God at the resurrection ([Phil. 3:10–11](#))!

REACHING TO HEAVEN. Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of a great tree whose top “reached to heaven” ([Dan. 4:11](#)) is eerily reminiscent of another structure forged in the depths of man’s pride—the Tower of Babel, which was intended to have its “top in the heavens” ([Gen. 11:4](#)). Both of these episodes reveal the insidious and self-aggrandizing nature of pride; they also clearly reveal how God reacts to such displays of self-exaltation: the Lord of heaven cuts both down to size! Interestingly, ancient Babylon is the geographic setting for both. No wonder Babylon serves in Scripture as a symbol for all that is corrupt in the world ([Revelation 18](#)).

THE PHYSICAL EFFECTS OF SIN. One of the intriguing theological issues raised by this story is the relationship between sin and our physical bodies. Is it simply coincidental that God’s judgment on Nebuchadnezzar’s pride would take the form of a mental breakdown, where he loses his mind, so that he’s no longer able to enjoy the company of other rational human beings but has to make his home among the beasts of the field? Or is it merely incidental that when Nebuchadnezzar has “lifted [his] eyes to heaven,” he finds his reason returns to him ([Dan. 4:34](#))? In the Western world, we’re tempted to operate with a mind-body dualism that severs the connection between sin and our physical bodies. But this story invites us to ponder their interconnectedness.

JUSTICE. Having been severely humbled, Nebuchadnezzar doesn’t impugn God’s character, or bellyache that his treatment was unjust. Rather, he confesses that “all his works are right and his ways are just” (v. 37). This is a remarkable statement coming from the lips of a man who lost not only his power and authority but also his mind, and who was not only driven out from the company of men but was made to dwell among animals! And yet this pagan king’s humble confession teaches us that God’s punishment always fits, and never exceeds, the crime, regardless of how severe it may appear to our darkened minds.

Week 6: Belshazzar's Feast (5:1–31)

The Place of the Passage

In [Daniel 5:1–31](#), we are introduced to Babylon's last monarch, Belshazzar, and thus brought chronologically to the end of the Babylonian empire. The chapter describes the events of a great feast hosted by Belshazzar; it's a show of royal power, bounty, and self-satisfaction. Ironically, in the midst of the feast, Belshazzar is confronted with a message of divine judgment—the writing on the wall (v. 5). And that very night, he loses his life, when the city and thus the empire is overtaken by Darius the Mede (vv. 30–31).

The Big Picture

This chapter teaches the sober truth that sometimes people can become so hardened that they're beyond the point of redemption, so that the only thing remaining for them is judgment.

Questions for Discussion

1. An idolatrous Feast (5:1–4)

Belshazzar is enjoying a lavish feast for many, many guests. He decides, however, to drink wine out of the vessels of gold and silver brought from the temple in Jerusalem (v. 2; see 1:2). Of course, it's not as if they ran out of drinking utensils and thus had to resort to drinking out of the temple vessels. So why, then, do you think Belshazzar chose to do so? What do you suppose he was trying to say with that gesture?

Although Belshazzar was not literally Nebuchadnezzar's son, the text still refers to him as his "father" (v. 2). Why is that? What is the significance to Belshazzar, or to the message of this story, to draw a close connection between these two rulers of Babylon?

2. An Unreadable Message (5:5–9)

While Belshazzar sees the fingers of a human hand appearing and writing on the wall, he cannot read the message. Nevertheless, he is overtaken with extreme fear, so much so that "his limbs gave way" (v. 6). Why is his immediate reaction one of fear and dread? And why does it get worse, so that he is "greatly alarmed" (v. 9)?

3. A Forgotten Interpreter (5:10–12)

The queen mother enters into the chamber to tell Belshazzar of the existence of Daniel, who had become well-known as a person of “light and understanding and wisdom” (v. 11). She encourages Belshazzar to consult with this Daniel, and refers to him by his Babylonian name, Belteshazzar, which probably means “O Lady [wife of the Babylonian god Bel], protect the king!” Why is the mention of his Babylonian name so ironic in this context?

4. A Message of Judgment (5:13–31)

Daniel alone is able to interpret the writing on the wall. But before he gives Belshazzar the message, he first compares him to King Nebuchadnezzar (vv. 18–23). What are the points of similarity and the points of difference between Belshazzar and Nebuchadnezzar? It may be useful to review [Daniel 4](#) as well.

The writing on the wall is a collection of Aramaic words, “Mene, Mene, Tekel, and Parsin,” which are measures of weight, listed in decreasing order. Presumably, the king’s wise men could have read these rather basic terms. But they were evidently unable to understand their meaning and implications. If the terms are read as verbs, the meaning becomes, “Numbered, numbered, weighed, and divided,” which is the meaning Daniel gives to them (5:26–27). How does Daniel then apply this message to Belshazzar? What does it mean for him, and for his kingdom?

Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of this passage for your own life today. Consider what you have learned that might lead you to praise God, repent of sin, and trust in his gracious promises.

NOTES

THE CRY FROM THE CROSS. In this story, the writing on the wall is a declaration of divine condemnation. God has tolerated Belshazzar's pride and rebellion long enough; the time has come for justice to reign. As such, this story reminds our fallen world that we too, like Belshazzar, ought to see the writing on the wall. Indeed, as the apostle Paul says, "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" ([Rom. 1:18](#)). Are we not all liable to the same fate that met Belshazzar? And yet God, in his grace and mercy, has set forth his Son to be a sin offering for us, so that instead of having to see the writing on the wall, we can hear the cry from the cross: "It is finished!" ([John 19:30](#)). "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" ([2 Cor. 5:21](#)).

WORSHIP OF IDOLS. During the revelry and merrymaking which was Belshazzar's great feast, things come to a crescendo when Belshazzar not only defiles the vessels of the temple but indeed praises "the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone" ([Dan. 5:4](#)). This is outright blasphemy and open rebellion against God, the Maker of heaven and earth, who alone deserves all glory, honor, and praise. Ironically, as pride exalts a man, he is all the more willing to prostrate himself before idols. We see this pattern again and again in the Bible, as the prophets polemicize against the folly of worshiping graven images in whom there is no life (again, see [Isaiah 40–48](#)). So, too, the apostle Paul critiques the idols of Athens, declaring that these images are merely human products, "formed by the art and imagination of man" ([Acts 17:29](#)).

WILLFUL IGNORANCE. Because of sin, human beings have the ability to induce within themselves a willful ignorance of the truth, so that what should be obvious to them is nevertheless lost upon them. They're ignorant of it, not because they lack exposure to it but because they choose to deny what is plain to them. We see willful ignorance in Belshazzar, which only multiplies his guilt before the Lord. He no doubt has heard what happened to Nebuchadnezzar, how he was humbled by the God of Israel and, once restored, gave God praise ([Daniel 4](#)). But in his pride and folly, Belshazzar seems blissfully unaware of this. And yet we learn from the apostle Paul that willful ignorance operates in every fallen heart, as people suppress the knowledge of God to such an extent that they become ignorant of him—even to the point of denying his existence as they worship idols ([Rom. 1:18–23](#)).

DIVINE JUDGMENT. While God is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, his mercy does have limits. It is indeed possible for someone to become hardened beyond the point of redemption. Hebrews warns of this as a possibility: "if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries" ([Heb. 10:26–27](#)). Belshazzar experienced God's definitive judgment against his sin. But Hebrews warns that those who are privileged to know about the good news of Jesus Christ are liable to an even more severe judgment should they reject this knowledge and profane Jesus' sacrifice (v. 29).

Week 7: The Lion's Den (6:1–28)

The Place of the Passage

This chapter presents the famous passage of Daniel in the lions' den. This passage has much in common with [Daniel 3](#), when Daniel's three friends are delivered out of the fiery furnace. In this case, however, it is Daniel, rather than his three friends, who is tossed into a near-death situation; and it takes place under Darius the Mede, and thus happens to Daniel much later in his life. At this point, not only is he an old man, but he has served the empire faithfully for decades. All of this serves to heighten the dramatic tension, and to sweeten the irony when Daniel is both delivered from death and made to prosper during the reign of Darius and indeed even into the reign of Cyrus the Persian (v. 28).

The Big Picture

[Daniel 6:1–28](#) demonstrates that God, who saved Daniel from the power of the lions, can be trusted to deliver and rescue his people from the most perilous or hopeless of situations.

Questions for Discussion

1. Daniel Promoted (6:1–3)

Clearly, Daniel is a responsible and faithful senior servant of the empire. In the opening verses of this chapter, what indications do we have of Daniel's trusted status?

2. The Administrators Plot to Remove Daniel (6:4–15)

How does Daniel's faithfulness and reliability pose a challenge to the administrators in their plot against him? What do they think is their only chance of catching Daniel doing something wrong?

Reread the Gospel accounts of the trial of Jesus. How does the administrators' plot to remove Daniel resemble the Jews' strategy to see Jesus condemned to die? What motives underlie each?

The administrators hatch a plot to catch Daniel violating the king's decree. They persuade the king to issue an edict prohibiting making petitions to any god or man other than King Darius. Presumably, they knew that this would be a problem for Daniel. What does this imply about their knowledge of Daniel's life? And how is that supported by what we read of Daniel's response to the edict (see 6:10)?

3. Daniel Preserved in the Lions' Den (6:16–24)

Although Darius regrets the impact of his decree upon Daniel, he goes ahead with the decision to put him into the lions' den. But clearly he is not happy about having to do so. What evidence from the text shows this?

According to Daniel, why did God deliver him from the lions' den (vv. 21–23)? Is there anything surprising or perhaps unsettling to you about what Daniel says? If so, what is it? And why?

4. Darius Acknowledges the Power of Daniel's God (6:25–27)

From Darius's perspective, why did God deliver Daniel from the lions' den? And what does God's deliverance of Daniel reveal about who God is?

5. Daniel Preserved until the End of the Exile (6:28)

How are the events described at the close of this chapter (v. 28) similar to those of the previous chapters? Would you say preservation is a theme of the book of Daniel? If so, how would you state that theme in your own words?

The closing verse of this chapter mentions not only Darius the Mede but also Cyrus the Persian (v. 28). Why is the mention of Cyrus so significant? Read [2 Chronicles 36:22–23](#) and [Ezra 1:1–3](#).

Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of this passage for your own life today. Consider what you have learned that might lead you to praise God, repent of sin, and trust in his gracious promises.

NOTES

RESCUED FROM LIONS. The gospel delivers us not only from sin but from Satan. Scripture presents the Devil in a number of forms: sometimes he is a serpent ([Gen. 3:1–14](#)), sometimes a great dragon ([Rev. 12:9](#)), sometimes disguised as an angel of light ([2 Cor. 11:14](#)). The apostle Peter reminds us that our adversary also “prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” ([1 Pet. 5:8](#)). This fallen world is truly, then, a lions’ den. And yet Jesus has overcome the Evil One through his death and resurrection; so, too, shall we, by faith in Christ’s shed blood for us. “Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” ([1 John 5:5](#)).

ENTRUSTING HIMSELF TO HIM WHO JUDGES JUSTLY. Although [Daniel 6](#) is ultimately about God’s deliverance of Daniel from the power of the lions (v. 27), we nevertheless glean much from Daniel’s valiant and courageous faith. He is steadfast in prayer, knowing that it may well cost him his life (v. 10). And he is silent before his accusers, even though he knows they want to see him removed only because of their own jealousy. Tossed to the lions, Daniel is thus a type of Christ, who similarly was falsely accused by those who wanted to put an end to his life. And yet, in the midst of the swirl of false charges and allegations, Jesus did not retaliate or revile in return. In fact, he uttered not a word. Instead, he “continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly” ([1 Pet. 2:23](#)). And by so doing, he accomplished salvation for us. As Peter goes on to say, “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed” (v. 24).

ANGELS. Angels play a vital role in the purposes of God. The book of Hebrews calls angels “ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation” ([Heb. 1:14](#)). Sometimes they are deployed by God as his messengers; at other times, they are sent by him to protect his people. We have a powerful example of their protective role in this chapter, as we learn that it was an angel who “shut the lions’ mouths” so that Daniel’s life would be spared ([Dan. 6:22](#)). Angels played a similar role in the rescue of Lot from Sodom and Gomorrah ([Genesis 19](#)), the protection of Elisha and the Israelites from the king of Syria ([2 Kings 6:17](#)), the deliverance of Peter from prison ([Acts 5:19–20](#)), and the rescue of Paul from those who sought to take his life ([Acts 27:23–25](#)). Truly, the Lord “will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways” ([Ps. 91:11](#)).

SIGNS AND WONDERS. Throughout Scripture we see God vindicate his name and advance his purposes through the use of “signs and wonders,” powerful manifestations of the presence of God in the world. Darius recognizes that the deliverance of Daniel is nothing less than the working of God’s “signs and wonders” ([Dan. 6:27](#)). The downtrodden Israelites were delivered from Egyptian bondage through similar means: “And the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great deeds of terror, with signs and wonders” ([Deut. 26:8](#); see [Ex. 7:3](#); [Neh. 9:10](#); [Jer. 32:20](#)). So, too, does God advance the gospel in the lives of people with “signs and wonders” done by the apostles ([Acts 5:12](#)). Similar manifestations of the powerful presence of God attended the apostle Paul’s ministry among Gentiles, verifying its authenticity and guaranteeing its effectiveness (see [Rom. 15:17–19](#)). Signs and wonders are God’s way of bearing witness to his presence and direction in the world ([Heb. 2:4](#)).

COMMON GRACE. One of the most intriguing features of this chapter of Daniel is the reaction of King Darius to the news that Daniel has violated his edict and must be put to death. Darius is “much distressed” by the situation ([Dan. 6:14](#)), even to the point of fasting through a sleepless night (v. 18). And yet this is a pagan king, not a member of God’s family. Nevertheless, his conscience is burdened by what he sees taking place. We can’t help, then, but see in this story clear testimony to God’s common grace, his restraining of those outside of his covenant purposes, in a way that causes them to bless those who are inside of his covenant purposes. Paul experienced similar largesse when he stood trial before King Agrippa ([Acts 26](#)). Perhaps this is why he later enjoined believers to pray “for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way” ([1 Tim. 2:2](#)).

Week 8+9: The Vision of the Four Great Beasts (7:1–28)

The Place of the Passage

[Daniel 7](#) marks a significant transition in the book. This and the subsequent chapters describe Daniel's visions of the future. Far from being mere apocalyptic speculation, however, these visions are intended to encourage God's people in the midst of their exile. The overarching message of these chapters is that God is triumphantly in control of the unfolding of history, and thus has good purposes in store for his beleaguered and persecuted people. In this chapter, we are presented with Daniel's vision of four beasts (or kingdoms), and God's plan to vindicate his people and establish his everlasting kingdom (vv. 13–14).

The Big Picture

In [Daniel 7:1–28](#), God reveals not only how the future will unfold from Daniel's perspective, but also how he will achieve his victory and establish his everlasting dominion over the kingdoms of men (vv. 13–14).

Questions for Discussion

1. The Four Great Beasts (7:1–8)

Note that the vision Daniel receives in this chapter takes place during the first year of Belshazzar's reign (v. 1). The events of this chapter therefore are chronologically prior to the events of chapters 5–6. Why do you think this chapter appears here, rather than earlier in the book?

Review the content of Daniel's vision in these opening verses. What is the author trying to communicate through the imagery of darkness (7:2), the blowing of four winds (v. 2), the stirring of a great sea (v. 2), and the appearance of mutant beasts out of all of this frothy chaos (vv. 3–8)? What does this teach us about history, and earthly kings and kingdoms?

Students of the book of Daniel continue to debate the identity of the four beasts mentioned in this vision. Consulting the *ESV Study Bible* would be of help. But what can we say with some assurance about these beasts?

2. The Ancient of Days Judges the Beasts (7:9–12)

Verse 9 marks a change of scene, moving from the stormy seashore setting of verses 1–8 to an altogether different setting. How would you describe this new setting? What does the juxtaposition of these two very different scenes communicate?

At the center of this scene is the Ancient of Days (v. 9). How is he described? And what is this meant to convey about his character and purposes?

3. The Coming of the Son of Man (7:13–14)

Daniel sees a figure riding on (“coming with”; v. 13) the clouds of heaven. What does that suggest about the nature or status of this figure? Who else in the Bible rides on the clouds of heaven (see, for example, [Ps. 104:3](#); [Isa. 19:1](#))?

Although this figure is clearly in some sense divine, Daniel sees that he is like “a son of man” ([Dan. 7:13](#)). How might this shed light on Jesus’ favorite self-designation, “Son of Man” (see, for example, [Mark 2:10, 28; 8:38](#))?

4. The Interpretation of the Vision (7:15–27)

While (as we saw in chapter 2) many scholars have identified the four beasts with Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome, the larger point to be gleaned from Daniel’s vision is the ongoing conflict and chaos of earthly powers, until the Ancient of Days establishes his everlasting kingdom (v. 18). How is this a hopeful message?

Describe the sequence of events that will result in the saints possessing the kingdom (see vv. 19–27). How does this compare with what we know of the unfolding of the end times from the New Testament, especially the book of Revelation (see [Revelation 18–22](#))?

5. Daniel's Response (7:28)

Consider Daniel's response to the vision and its interpretation (see v. 28). Is that a surprising response? How might you have expected him to respond? Why do you suppose he responded as he did?

Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of this passage for your own life today. Consider what you have learned that might lead you to praise God, repent of sin, and trust in his gracious promises.

NOTES

SON OF MAN. We use a number of titles to refer to Jesus: Savior, Lord, Messiah, Son of God. Ironically, the one we use perhaps the least, Jesus used the most; it was his favorite self-designation, namely, Son of Man. Scholars have debated Jesus' use of the phrase, but evidence strongly suggests that he drew the phrase from this chapter of the book of Daniel (see vv. 13–14). As such, it is perhaps the most exalted self-designation he could have chosen, given the fact that this figure in Daniel clearly is a divine one. And yet Jesus is very careful how and when he uses this title. In Mark's Gospel, for example, the title appears fourteen times, with the overwhelming majority appearing only after Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi, when Jesus first begins to teach them that "the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again" ([Mark 8:31](#)). In other words, the exalted figure of [Daniel 7](#) is first the suffering servant who sheds his own blood for the sake of his people—a stunning gospel truth!

THE GIFT OF THE KINGDOM. We live in a world of godless forces, the kind of mutant beasts Daniel sees in rapid succession in his night vision (see [Dan. 7:1–8](#)). As such, the world often feels like it is out of control; so, too, do our lives. And yet here we recall the hope-giving assurance of our gracious Savior, Jesus, when he said to his followers, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" ([Luke 12:32](#)). This, of course, is the overwhelming message of the book of Daniel, and of this chapter in particular, namely, that God will eventually come and render judgment in favor of the saints of the Most High, and then give to them the kingdom—and it shall be forever theirs, world without end, Amen!

ANTICHRIST. Many students of Daniel have taken the “little horn” who made war with the saints and prevailed over them until the coming of the Ancient of Days ([Dan. 7:21–22](#)) to refer to that figure the New Testament calls the Antichrist. Jesus himself taught that during the end times Antichrist would come ([Matt. 24:15](#); [Mark 13:19](#)). So, too, the apostle Paul warns of his appearing ([2 Thess. 2:1–10](#)). In his first epistle, John catches us by surprise when he says, “Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come” ([1 John 2:18](#)). A little later on in this same letter, he identifies the “spirit of the antichrist” as anyone who denies Jesus has come in the flesh (4:3). This serves as a poignant reminder that the battle against antichrist is waged with truth and won by perseverance in the faith.

ALL PEOPLES, NATIONS, AND LANGUAGES. When the aged apostle John peers into the very throne room of heaven, he sees the twenty-four elders fall down in worship of the Lamb, and hears them sing a new song, celebrating the one who was slain and who by his blood purchased people for God “from every tribe and language and people and nation” ([Rev. 5:9](#)). This fourfold phrase appears in [Daniel 7](#), with the triumphant vision of the one “like a son of man” who is given dominion over the whole earth, so that “all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him” (v. 14). But this points us even further back to the original use of this kind of phraseology in [Genesis 10](#), in particular, the Table of the Nations, where we are given a record of the peoples of the earth “by their clans, their languages, their lands, and their nations” (vv. 5, 20, 31). This fourfold phrase is clearly intended to be inclusive of the whole of humanity, and in turn to represent the consummation of God’s global, missional purposes in redemption—gathering ransomed people from all the peoples of the earth!

DIVINE AND HUMAN. One of the more fascinating and inspiring portions of this chapter is the description of this figure who is presented to the Ancient of Days and receives the kingdom ([Dan. 7:13–14](#)). This figure is clearly divine, since no one but God rides on the clouds of heaven; but this figure, as Daniel sees him, is also clearly human as well—he is “like a son of man” (v. 13). This person is clearly subordinate in role to the Ancient of Days and yet is also given the authority of the Ancient of Days to have dominion over “all peoples, nations, and languages” (v. 14). This paradoxical interplay points us, of course, to the paradox of the incarnation itself, where we see the second person of the Godhead take on human flesh, and be “born in the likeness of men” ([Phil. 2:7](#)).

VIEW OF HISTORY. While these chapters are apocalyptic visions and thus call for caution in identifying various aspects of the vision with specific historical realities, what nevertheless does clearly emerge from this passage (and others like it in Daniel) is a particular theological interpretation of history—what is sometimes called the history of salvation. Unlike that of many ancient cultures, the biblical conception of history is linear, not cyclical. It has a definite beginning and end. And while the successive unfolding of earthly empires may appear repetitious and thus pointless, the Bible clearly envisions a sovereign God who is superintending it all and who will one day eradicate evil and put the world to rights.

Week 10: The Vision of the Ram, the Goat, and the Little Horn (8:1–27)

The Place of the Passage

[Daniel 8:1–27](#) presents another vision of the future from Daniel’s perspective. Like the preceding, this is a vision of successive earthly kingdoms, in particular, the Medo-Persian, Greek, and Hellenistic empires. Unlike earlier visions in Daniel, however, the interpretation of the vision in this chapter is more specific in its details. And although the transitions from one kingdom to the next will involve turmoil and suffering, God’s people are hereby encouraged to remain strong and steadfast, confident that God is in control and will achieve his victory.

The Big Picture

This chapter encourages God’s people to continue to remain faithful in the face of persecution and the rising and falling of the kingdoms of this earth.

Questions for Discussion

1. The Vision of the Ram and the Goat (8:1–14)

Daniel sees a ram with two horns, one of which is longer than the other (v. 3). Scholars have tended to identify the ram with the Medo-Persian empire. If this is the case, what is the significance of the different horn lengths?

Next Daniel sees a male goat that comes from the west across the face of the whole earth, “without touching the ground” (v. 5). If this is referring to Alexander the Great, what is the significance of this description? Notice, however, that even this mighty beast, which becomes “exceedingly great” and “strong” (v. 8), eventually has its own horn broken into “four conspicuous horns” (v. 8). What is the significance of this imagery? Here you may want to consult the *ESV Study Bible* notes on this section.

In verses 9–14, we are told about a “little horn” who became exceedingly powerful—“even as great as the Prince of the host” (v. 11). Many scholars consider this to be a reference to Antiochus IV Epiphanes, a member of the Seleucid dynasty who reigned from 175–164 BC. According to a Jewish historical account of this period, Antiochus desecrated the temple and thus the land of Jerusalem and persecuted the Jews severely. How does Daniel’s vision in verses 9–14 depict those very trying circumstances?

2. The Interpretation of the Vision (8:15–26)

In this section, the angel Gabriel appears to Daniel to provide the interpretation of the vision. You will notice that Daniel is given more specific detail about the historical circumstances represented by his dream; he is told, for example, that the two horns are the kings of Media and Persia (v. 20), and that the goat is Greece (v. 21). Why do you suppose that, in this case, Daniel is given a more specific historical interpretation of his dream? What benefit might that serve?

Daniel’s vision culminates with the aggressive and bold action of the little horn. We learn that this one’s power will be great—“but not by his own power” (v. 24). What does that mean? We also learn that this figure will rise up against the one whom this passage calls “the Prince of princes” (v. 25). Who is that referring to? And how does this Prince of princes respond to the little horn?

3. Daniel’s Response (8:27)

Read the closing verse of this chapter, which describes Daniel’s response. Does his reaction to his vision surprise you? Why, or why not? Why do you think he responds so dramatically, being overcome with sickness for some days? And how could he be appalled by a vision he did not understand?

Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of this passage for your own life today. Consider what you have learned that might lead you to praise God, repent of sin, and trust in his gracious promises.

NOTES

BUT BY NO HUMAN HAND. “And he shall even rise up against the Prince of princes, and he shall be broken—but by no human hand” ([Dan. 8:25](#)). Daniel’s vision reminds us that God’s people will find deliverance from whatever forces of evil are arrayed against them—but that it won’t come by any human hand. Rather, God himself, in and through the gospel, will intervene on behalf of his people: redeeming, rescuing, saving. Even in the throes of death, the gospel promises the hope of resurrection from the dead, something God alone accomplishes through the working of his sovereign and powerful Spirit ([1 Cor. 15:50–55](#)).

THE APPOINTED TIME OF THE END. Because this chapter contains more specific historical information than other chapters, we are encouraged with the fact that there is an “appointed time of the end” ([Dan. 8:19](#)). Indeed, this chapter gives quite specific time references related to the end times (see v. 14), all of which serve to bolster our confidence in the truth of God’s Word—that the end is coming, and indeed is even in sight. This would have been very good news to persecuted Jewish exiles in Daniel’s day; so, too, would it have been to the beleaguered believers to whom the apostle John writes in the book of Revelation. They are reminded, from the lips of Jesus himself, that the end is at hand. Jesus’ last words, in fact, are these: “Surely I am coming soon” ([Rev. 22:20](#)).

THE CONCENTRATION OF EVIL. This chapter presents a frightful picture of the potential of human evil, especially when it is concentrated in the power of the state. This has always posed a serious threat to the people of God. Recall the Tower of Babel many centuries earlier, the success of which would have, among other things, threatened the viability and security of God’s people ([Genesis 11](#)). The earliest Christians understood this well, as they lived under the power of the mighty Roman empire. Indeed, Jesus knew this all too well, as he stood before Pontius Pilate and was then turned over to be flogged and executed as a criminal against the state (see [Luke 23:1–25](#)).

THE CHAOS OF HISTORY, THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD. One of the impressions we get from Daniel’s vision of the rise and fall of empires depicts the sheer chaos and unpredictability of human history. And yet, at the same time, we are to see—in the midst of the contingencies of this same tumultuous series of events—a sovereign God who in fact causes the rising and falling of nations. Despite appearances, God is directing the course of human history, even down to the minutest of details. If we zoom in with a narrow lens, we see only chaos, but as we zoom out and view history through the wide-angle lens of God’s sovereignty, we realize that history itself tells a very different, more promising story!

Week 11: Daniel's Prayer and Its Answer (9:1–27)

The Place of the Passage

[Daniel 9](#) is a remarkable passage. From the opening verses we learn that Daniel discovers not only the reason for the exile of the Jewish people but also the number of years that must pass before their return. He gleaned this information from the prophet Jeremiah (v. 2), thus connecting this book and this chapter in particular with the whole sweep of redemptive history, from exile to return. The chapter itself consists of Daniel's prayer of penitence on behalf of his people, lamenting their sins and repenting of any wrongdoing, in the hope that God will hear his pleas for mercy and respond accordingly. The angel Gabriel, God's chosen messenger, is sent as a response to Daniel's prayer, and offers a word of reassurance that the end of exile is indeed coming.

The Big Picture

In [Daniel 9:1–27](#), we see that sin has consequences, but that the grace of God will triumph still.

Questions for Discussion

1. Daniel's Prayer concerning the 70 Years (9:1–19)

Daniel is motivated to pray after having read from the book of the prophet Jeremiah (v. 1–2). Read [Jeremiah 25:11](#) and 29:10–14 within their contexts. What does Daniel realize about the Jewish people's time in exile? How does this shed light on his motivation to pray?

As part of Daniel's prayer, he says that to the Jewish people belongs "open shame" ([Dan. 9:7](#)). What does Daniel mean by that phrase? What other words and phrases does Daniel use to describe his people's sin?

In his prayer Daniel confesses that the "curse and oath that are written in the Law of Moses" have in fact been poured out on the people of Israel (v. 11). He is referring to the curses of the covenant outlined in [Leviticus 26:14–45](#) and [Deuteronomy 28:15–68](#). Take a moment to review those passages and compare them with Daniel's prayer. Also review [Deuteronomy 30:1–10](#). How might this passage inform Daniel's prayer?

Daniel offers several reasons for God to hear and heed his plea for mercy. What are these reasons? And what does this teach us about how we ought to plead with God?

2. Gabriel's Answer: 70 Sevens before the Promised Redemption (9:20–27)

As in [Daniel 8](#), so here the angel Gabriel is sent in response to Daniel's prayer. Look closely at Gabriel's initial words to Daniel (9:22–23). What does Gabriel say that ought to encourage Daniel?

Gabriel tells Daniel that "seventy weeks" have been decreed for the people of Israel before the exile is over. Students of the book of Daniel continue to discuss and debate the meaning of these "seventy weeks," with various interpretations being offered. Here you may want to consult the *ESV Study Bible*, 1607, for more information. But regardless of the precise meaning of the "seventy weeks," what is the main point of this for God's people?

What do we learn about the promised restoration of God's people from Gabriel's reply in verses 25–27? How will it come about? What phases will it involve? And what are the major events that will take place?

Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of this passage for your own life today. Consider what you have learned that might lead you to praise God, repent of sin, and trust in his gracious promises.

NOTES

PLEAS FOR MERCY. "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" ([Luke 18:38](#)). This was the cry of a man who knew his situation was desperate and yet also held out the hope that the Son of David, Jesus of Nazareth, would be merciful. Daniel finds himself in a similarly desperate situation, as he recalls the terms of God's covenant and contemplates the sin of God's people. Without a hint of trying to downplay their plight, Daniel thus confesses on behalf of his people, "we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules" ([Dan. 9:5](#)). And while he freely acknowledges that the Lord has been entirely righteous in his care for and even his punishment of

Israel, Daniel still holds out the hope that God will yet be merciful to them. Thus, in his prayer he includes “pleas for mercy” (v. 3). God’s disposition to show mercy to hopeless sinners comes into clearest focus in the gospel. “According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” ([1 Pet. 1:3](#)).

EVERLASTING RIGHTEOUSNESS. The angel Gabriel promises Daniel that God himself will bring “everlasting righteousness” to his people ([Dan. 9:24](#)). Within the context of Daniel, this refers to the state of sanctity and holiness that will come about after the “seventy weeks” decreed for God’s people, which will “put an end to sin” and “atone for iniquity” (v. 24). But this points us to what God has accomplished in his Son, Jesus Christ, who has brought a definitive end to sin on the cross. As the book of Hebrews reminds us, “he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” ([Heb. 9:26](#)). As such, Jesus has truly become the believer’s everlasting righteousness. “And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption” ([1 Cor. 1:30](#)).

REPENTANCE, RESTORATION, AND RETURN. In [Daniel 9](#) we see that Israel will find restoration only through repentance. This is a common pattern we find in the Old and New Testaments: that genuine repentance, including the confession of sin, is the prerequisite to God restoring and renewing his people. We find this pattern outlined most clearly for us in [Deuteronomy 30](#), where Moses tells the people of Israel what to do once the curses of the covenant come upon them. They are to call the words of the covenant to mind, and return to the Lord in humility and repentance (vv. 1–2). When this happens within the people, God promises to return them to the land, to “gather you again from all the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you” (v. 3). Nehemiah reflects this same pattern in his prayer of confession ([Nehemiah 9](#)). And we see the apostle Peter draw on this same pattern in his sermon in Solomon’s portico: “Repent therefore, and turn back,” he says to the Jews, “that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus” ([Acts 3:20](#)).

GOD-CENTEREDNESS. Daniel’s prayer teaches us about the character of God, in particular, what God ultimately values. Even a cursory reading of Daniel’s plea reveals that this is a man praying out of a sense of deep need, even desperation. “O my God, incline your ear,” he repeatedly prays ([Dan. 9:18](#)). In light of the sin of his people, he knows he doesn’t have much of a leg to stand on in prayer. This is why he appeals to what God values most—the honor of his own name. Daniel thus prays in a most God-centered way, appealing to what God prizes above everything else: “Delay not, *for your own sake*, O my God, because your city and your people are called *by your name*” (v. 19).

ATONEMENT. In his response to Daniel’s plea for mercy, the angel Gabriel tells him that “seventy weeks” have been decreed for his people, in order to “atone for iniquity” (v. 24). Atonement is a central theological concept in the Bible, in both the Old and the New Testament. It refers to the reconciliation of a person with God, and is often associated with the offering of a sacrifice. Occasionally, the Old Testament will refer to human suffering as a means of atonement, as is implied here in [Daniel 9](#). But ultimately, Jesus Christ made atonement for the sins of believers. His death satisfied God’s just wrath against sinful humanity, just as Old Testament sacrifices symbolized substitutionary death as payment for sin.

Week 12: Daniel's Vision of the Final Conflict (10:1–12:13)

The Place of the Passage

The closing three chapters of Daniel form a single vision and bring the book to a fitting climax. With Daniel's final vision, the veil is drawn back and we are given clearer insight into spiritual battles that are reflected in earthly conflicts. While [Daniel 10:1–11:1](#) offers rather direct insight into the nature of spiritual conflict taking place in heavenly realms, [Daniel 11:2–45](#) goes on to provide rather specific insight into future conflict among earthly kingdoms. The final chapter of the book brings resolution to the whole, by directing our attention to the promise of glory or shame, resurrection or judgment (12:1–13). What ultimately matters is not how long this shall continue, which was Daniel's question (12:6), but how one ought to live *now*—in light of the certainty of God's final triumph (12:9–13).

The Big Picture

[Daniel 10:1–12:13](#) shows us that despite conflicts, both earthly and spiritual, God will achieve victory in the world and will vindicate his people.

Questions for Discussion

1. A Heavenly Messenger Brings News of Heavenly Conflict (10:1–11:1)

We are told that Daniel received vision of a “great conflict” during the third year of Cyrus king of Persia (10:1). Two years earlier, some of the Jewish exiles were allowed to return to Jerusalem. But these Jewish returnees encountered problems. Read [Ezra 1–4](#), which recounts the situation. Assuming Daniel knew about their trouble, what might this vision of a “great conflict” be intended to show Daniel, and through him, other Jews?

Daniel is told by his angelic messenger that he was opposed by the “prince of the kingdom of Persia” for twenty-one days, but was eventually helped on his way by the angel Michael (10:13). Most scholars agree that the prince referred to here is a demonic being. If this is the case, what does this reveal about the nature of the unseen world around us?

How does Daniel respond to the insight he is given into the reality of spiritual conflict? What does the angel do in response to Daniel's reaction?

2. A Detailed Vision of Future Earthly Conflicts among Nations (11:2–45)

While the historical details of this portion of Daniel are selective, they are nevertheless of so specific a nature as to lead some critical scholars to claim that this couldn't be predictive prophecy, but the writing of history which is only made to look like prophecy. Assuming that it is predictive in nature, however, what would be the point of Daniel receiving such a detailed account of future earthly conflicts? What useful purpose might that serve?

In order to appreciate fully the prophecies in this chapter, you are encouraged to consult the *ESV Study Bible*, 1610–1617. It would be easy to get lost in the historical complexities, but that's not the purpose. What are you most intrigued by? What is new to you in all of this? What remains unclear? Where do you need to do some more study to shore up your understanding of the history here described?

3. The Promise of Resurrection to Glory or Shame (12:1–4)

Daniel is told that there will be an intensification of trouble at the end, "such as never has been since there was a nation till that time" (v. 1). It is within this context that he hears of both the promise of resurrection and the threat of "shame and everlasting contempt" (v. 2). How does the promise and threat relate to the news of a coming great tribulation?

Jesus spoke about a coming intensification of trouble for God's people. Review his teaching on this topic in the Gospels (see [Matthew 24](#); [Mark 13](#); [Luke 21:5–36](#)). What parallels do you see between them and what we find here in [Daniel 12](#)? And do you see ways in which the book of Daniel has informed Jesus' teaching?

4. How Long until the End? (12:5–13)

Daniel asks the angelic messenger two different questions. What are they? And why do you think these were paramount concerns for Daniel? How does the angel respond to the questions?

The angel tells Daniel that at the end of days, while the wicked will continue to act wickedly, "those who are wise shall understand" (v. 10). What does it mean to be wise in this context? And what understanding will the wise have that the wicked will lack?

Consider the closing verse of this chapter, indeed, of the entire book of Daniel: "But go your way till the end. And you shall rest and shall stand in your allotted place at the end of the days" (v. 13). What is the angel telling Daniel to do in practical terms? And is this the sort of closing comment you would have expected for this book? What might it have meant for the first readers of Daniel's message? What should it mean for us?

Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of this passage for your own life today. Consider what you have learned that might lead you to praise God, repent of sin, and trust in his gracious promises.

NOTES

NAMES WRITTEN IN THE BOOK. The angelic messenger assures Daniel that, despite the intensification of suffering near the end of history, those whose names are “found written in the book” shall be delivered (12:1). Not only here, but throughout the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, we see that God is a bookkeeper; he has written names in what is called the “book of life” ([Rev. 3:5; 17:8; 20:12, 15](#)). At the end of the book of Revelation this book is referred to as “the Lamb’s book of life” (21:27), underscoring the fact that it is only because of the sacrifice of the Lamb that anyone’s name is written in this book. This is a powerful image emphasizing the fact that God “knows those who are his” ([2 Tim. 2:19](#)), and indeed that he has chosen and predestined them “before the foundation of the world” ([Eph. 1:4](#)). Because God’s choice is sure, our salvation is as well. This is the assurance Daniel receives in this passage, but it is also the glorious truth made possible by the gospel. Therefore, as Jesus reminds his disciples, “rejoice that your names are written in heaven” ([Luke 10:20](#)).

GREAT TRIBULATION. The visions of Daniel, especially in chapters 11–12, indicate that evil will intensify toward the end of history, and that God’s people will therefore have to endure a severe time of testing. “And there shall be a time of trouble,” the angel says to Daniel, “such as never has been since there was a nation till that time” (12:2). Jesus, perhaps drawing on this teaching in Daniel, envisions a similar intensification of things in the last days: “For in those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, and never will be” ([Mark 13:19](#); see [Matt. 24:21](#)). John may refer to this intense period of trial and suffering when he sees the dragon enraged and making war on the people of God ([Rev. 12:17](#)). Understandably, this period of history has been referred to as the “great tribulation.” But regardless of when it comes, or what exactly it will be like, the message for God’s people is the same, whether from Daniel or Jesus: “But the one who endures to the end will be saved” ([Mark 13:13](#)).

SPIRITUAL WARFARE. Daniel refers to the conflict among earthly kingdoms, but what we learn is that this is reflective of a greater spiritual conflict taking place in heavenly realms. The New Testament supports this perspective. No small part of Jesus’ ministry was taken up with conflict with spiritual forces, in particular, demons (see, for example, [Mark 1:21–28](#)). And we remember what the apostle Paul says: “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” ([Eph. 6:12](#)). Satan and his minions exercise significant influence over this “present evil age” ([Gal. 1:4](#)); Satan is, after all, the “god of this world” ([2 Cor. 4:4](#)). Yet through the cross of Christ, God has effectively disarmed these spiritual forces arrayed against the church ([Col. 2:15](#)). Furthermore, we know from both Daniel and the rest of Scripture that their ultimate judgment is sure.

DOUBLE RESURRECTION. [Daniel 12](#) contains perhaps the clearest witness to the reality of resurrection anywhere in the Old Testament. “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt” (12:2). This is a stunning message of hope for the beleaguered Old Testament believers to whom Daniel writes; it is not unlike the promise Jesus gives in [John 5](#): “Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live” ([John 5:25](#)). But, as we see in Daniel, Jesus goes on to clarify that this resurrection will actually be a *double resurrection*, a resurrection that issues in both blessing and judgment: “those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment” ([John 5:29](#)). For those who die in Christ, a glorious resurrection awaits (see [1 Cor. 15:50–56](#)); for those who die in unbelief, there is only judgment.

Week 13: Personal Review

The Big Picture of Daniel

Daniel is a fascinating book, for many reasons. The opening six chapters contain some of the most dramatic and exciting narratives in the Bible. We also grow to admire the conviction and courage of Daniel and his three friends, as their faith is tested and put on display, so to speak, again and again in those opening chapters. There is much to be gleaned by attending closely to the lives of these great saints of old.

But Daniel also intrigues us because of its visions, and the sheer scope of what it covers. Not only do we gain insight into Israel's own history, from exile to return, but we are also given a sweeping view of human history, from the rise of the Babylonian empire to the conquest and ultimate destruction of the Roman empire many centuries later. Daniel is thus a masterful blend of sacred and secular history; in fact, what we see is that these two histories are one, being closely intertwined by God's own design.

Furthermore, Daniel opens our eyes to the fact that there is always more going on than meets the eye. What we can gather with our five senses is not the whole story; indeed, it may be only a reflection of a more important story—a cosmic battle taking place in the heavenly realms, which we cannot see with our human eyes, but only with the eyes of faith.

Ultimately, however, the book of Daniel is about God—his character, his plans, his purpose for the world. God is the main actor in Daniel, as he is everywhere in the Bible. And while we often have reason to be worried, if not discouraged, by the appearance of things all around us in our fallen and sin-wrecked world, the book of Daniel serves as a powerful reminder that God is on his throne and is sure to get his victory. What is more, one day God will put the world to rights, destroying unrighteousness and ushering in his eternal kingdom.

Questions for Consideration

Gospel Glimpses

The whole premise of the book of Daniel is that Israel has failed to keep the terms of the Sinai covenant and thus has come under God's judgment and has been sent into exile. And yet the whole message of the book of Daniel is that God is not only merciful to forgive but also powerful to effect restoration and even return for his people. Even though the people of God may suffer in this life, they can bank on the fact that God will not abandon them but will one day achieve his victory in the world and in their lives. This, of course, is the message of the gospel itself, as it is revealed to us in the person and work of Jesus Christ. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," Scripture says ([Rom. 3:23](#)), but God has provided a way to be right with him, "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (v. 24). And although we continue to endure suffering, we can rest confidently in our future victory in God and thus "rejoice in hope of the glory of God" ([Rom. 5:2](#)).

Has Daniel brought new clarity to your understanding of the gospel? How so?

Were there any particular passages or themes in Daniel that led you to a fresh understanding and grasp of God's grace to us through Jesus?

Whole-Bible Connections

Perhaps no other book of the Old Testament is as formative of the eschatology of the New Testament authors, and of Jesus himself, as is the book of Daniel. In it we are given a sweeping view of redemptive history, from the time of the exile to the time of Christ and beyond. We're also given a powerful picture of how the Abrahamic blessing unfolds through the lives of God's people, in this case Daniel and his three friends, into the lives of the nations, from Nebuchadnezzar the Babylonian to Darius the Mede.

How has this study of Daniel filled out your understanding of the biblical storyline of redemption?

Were there any themes emphasized in Daniel that help you to deepen your grasp of the Bible's unity?

Have any passages or themes expanded your understanding of the redemption that Jesus provides, which he began at his first coming and will consummate at his return?

What connections between Daniel and the New Testament were new to you?

Theological Soundings

Daniel has much to contribute to Christian theology. Numerous doctrines and themes are developed, clarified, and reinforced throughout Daniel, especially the sovereignty of God, the relationship of church and state, and the eschatological kingdom of God.

Has your theology shifted in minor or major ways during the course of studying Daniel? How so?

How has your understanding of the nature and character of God been deepened throughout this study?

What unique contributions does Daniel make toward our understanding of who Jesus is and what he accomplished through his life, death, and resurrection?

What, specifically, does Daniel teach us about the human condition and our need of redemption?

Personal Implications

God wrote the book of Daniel to transform us. As you reflect on Daniel as a whole, what implications do you see for your life?

What implications for life flow from your reflections on the questions already asked in this week's study concerning Gospel Glimpses, Whole-Bible Connections, and Theological Soundings?

What have you learned in Daniel that might lead you to praise God, turn away from sin, or trust more firmly in his promises?

Lastly, take a moment to look back through this study. Review the notes that you have written, and the things that you have highlighted or underlined. Reflect again on the key themes that the Lord has been teaching you about himself and about his Word. May these things become a treasure for you throughout your life—which we pray will be true for you, in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.