

**Bible Studies for Ashfield Presbyterian**  
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## ***Introduction***

While America and China are the world 'superpowers' of today, in the Middle East in 605BC the superpower was Babylon. This empire arose with tremendous speed and all nations fell before it. When people saw the superpower of Babylon, they must have thought its power was unimaginable, its rule unshakable and its influence unstoppable.

Judah, too, falls to Babylon's might, and a Jewish man, Daniel, is taken captive by Babylon. His own land has been laid to waste and he's now a servant to the kings of Babylon. But even though Daniel serves these kings of Babylon, Daniel knows that it's God who is THE great and powerful king.

Daniel is certainly a man of uncompromising faith and you can't help but be inspired. While Daniel is prominent in this book that bears his name – it is God who is the centre of attention. It is impossible not to notice God's control over human kings, his sovereign power in seemingly unlikely situations, and his faithfulness to his people. We see kings rise and fall, and we see God's plan to establish a kingdom that will last forever.

The book of Daniel is an important bridge between Jews in the Old Testament, and Christians in the New Testament. Jesus uses Daniel's vision of 'one like a son of man' as a thinly veiled way to refer to himself as God's king whose kingdom will last forever. In fact, the way Jesus speaks of God's kingdom also smacks of Daniel. Then, in Revelation much of the apocalyptic imagery has similarities with Daniel's visions.

As we read Daniel we ought to be comforted by God's sovereignty and his faithfulness. We ought to be inspired by Daniel's tenacity and trust. And we can't help but gain a more complete picture of Jesus as our King. Daniel is the perfect book for the Aussie Christian battler... an encouragement to stick at it because God has got everything under control.

## ***The language(s) of the book***

One thing that's very interesting about the book of Daniel is that it's one of two Old Testament books (the other being Ezra) that was written in two languages. The opening and closing chapters were written in Hebrew (1:1-2:4a; 8-12) the distinct language of Israel. The middle section was written in Aramaic (2:4b-7:28) the language that was more broadly spoken across the middle eastern region at that time. A question worth pondering is, why was it written in this way?

## ***The shape of the book***

The book of Daniel is written in two fairly distinct halves. Chapters 1-6 retell some of the significant events that occurred during Daniel's lifetime. Then chapters 7-12 describe visions which Daniel saw. In fact chapter 7 is central not only to the book but to the themes of the book. It is chapter 7 that most clearly points us to Jesus – God's king, who will rule forever.

## ***A couple of quick tips on reading Daniel***

Like most of the Old Testament, it is important to read big chunks. Read a chapter or more at a time. As you read try to keep the rest of the 'story' in mind. Chapter one, sets the scene for us and gives pointers for how we should be reading this book. The first two verses draw our attention away from the human plight of Daniel and the people of Israel and focus our attention on the battle between kings, and the battle between man-made religion and the creator God. This is a book about kings that come and go. And it is a book about God and His King who will rule forever.

Daniel's visions, in the second half of the book have become known as 'apocalyptic' in genre. This can be a little off-putting – so as you read do two things. Firstly, try to understand the 'big picture' without worrying so much about the details. Secondly, where there is no interpretation given, be slow to form your own conclusions. Enjoy the intriguing and exciting book of Daniel!

# **Study 1— Is God Dead? Daniel 1**

## **What happened?**

1. **Read Daniel 1:1-2.** Here we have a very brief description of a power struggle. Who are the major players, and who is ultimately in control?
2. Given the great promises given by God and how great Israel once looked, what might those who survived the Babylonian onslaught (like Daniel) have been thinking about Israel?
3. Given that all those precious temple items had been carried off to the temple of the Babylonian god – what might they have been thinking about God?
4. **Read Daniel 1:3-7.** What do you think Nebuchadnezzar is trying to do by selecting certain men of Israel? v3-5
5. What very obvious way do the Babylonians use to demonstrate to Daniel and his friends that they have been now incorporated into Babylonia? v6-7

*Note: the Hebrew names incorporate part of the Hebrew words used for 'God' and 'Lord'. The new names that are selected for these four men incorporate names of the Babylonian gods. This is just another way of saying – you now belong to us.*

## **Why did it happen?**

*There's a bigger issue here that we need to understand. Why would God give Jehoiakim into Nebuchadnezzar's hands?*

### **Read 2 Kings 23:36-24:6**

6. What circumstances led to Nebuchadnezzar attacking Judah and Jerusalem?
7. In what ways had God warned that this would happen?
8. **Read Jeremiah 24:1-10.** How does this help us understand what God is doing?

*Way back in Moses' day God predicted that this would happen (Deut 28-30). It is all part of a bigger plan.*



### ***And for how long?***

Daniel outlived a number of kings.

9. Have a go at constructing a timeline of the kings who ruled in Babylon while Daniel was there (Read 1:1, 5:12, 5:30, 6:28, 1:21).

*Cyrus is the king who lets the Israelites return to Jerusalem and rebuild the city walls and the temple (Ezra 1:14). Now notice the significance of 1:21 - Daniel lived through the entire span of the exile!*

*God did not forget his people. He is still working to a plan of restoring them – a plan that will ultimately lead to Jesus.*

### ***In the meantime...***

10. **Read Daniel 1:8-20.** So far Daniel and his friends are fairly obliging – they accept a Babylonian education and a Babylonian name change. But at a certain point they say ‘no’. What do they refuse and why?

*It's not straightforward why they refuse the food and insist on a vegetarian diet. From 10:3 we know they ate Babylonian food including meat at other times. But in this instance they knew that if they did eat this food, they will 'defile' themselves (1v8). Even though they now had Babylonian names and a Babylonian education, they understood that it was drawing the line at this point which will keep themselves pure and set apart for God. A passage like Deuteronomy 28:45-52, tell us that Israel is exiled in Babylon in the first place because they ignored the warnings of God and compromised themselves with the nations around them. It seems Daniel and his friends are determined not to repeat the failure of their ancestors.*



*The Jews being marched into Babylonians exile*

11. How did God affirm Daniel in his actions?

12. So did Nebuchadnezzar get what he wanted (v5)?

*As this chapter begins, it all looks awful for Israel. The nation has been defeated and more than that, with the transfer of vessels from one temple to another, it looks as if God has been defeated. But remember – God is actually the one behind this. And by the end of the chapter we see that God is the one to bring victory. It may not be a victory in military terms but by the end of the chapter we do see that God is the one who rescues Daniel, and the Babylonians and their gods are shown to be no match for God and his people. As though to demonstrate this beyond any doubt, the writer concludes the chapter by telling us that Daniel lived there until King Cyrus, the king who eventually defeated the Babylonians.*

13. In what way is Daniel an example for us to follow?

### ***Some things to pray about...***

Pray that we would continue to gain a better understanding of what it means to have Jesus as our king. Pray that we would trust God and live for him – particularly when it's not easy.

### ***The Kingdom of God***

In Mark 1:14-15 we read about Jesus' message“

*14 After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 15 “The time has come,” he said. “**The kingdom of God is near.** Repent and believe the good news!”*

Jesus proclaimed the coming of God's Kingdom – but it's not a new kingdom! We can see the kingdom of God taking shape right through the pages of the Old Testament. For example, in the Garden of Eden we have a snapshot of the kingdom – with God ruling over his people, in the special place he had made for them. The only problem was that Eve and then Adam chose not to live under God's rule. Their actions began a long cycle of rebellion followed by judgement, mercy, restoration, and rebellion again. Welcome to the problem of 'sin' – an issue with which each of us are intimately familiar.

In the Old Testament God gives glimpses of a final and complete restoration of his kingdom – a kingdom that will be even better than Eden because sin and rebellion will be dealt with. A kingdom where God will rule over his people, forever. The basis for this restoration will be God's faithfulness to his people, and to his promises.

One of the key promises is God's promise to Abraham. Let's remind ourselves of what God promised Abraham.

#### **Read Genesis 12:1-3.**

What does God promise Abram (before he changed his name to Abraham)?

How do we see this promise to Abraham shape events, even to today?

The way in which God punished rebellion, the way in which mankind continued to rebel against God time after time, and the way in which God remained faithful to his promises all serve to help us understand and appreciate what it means to live in God's Kingdom, with Jesus as our King. That's where the book of Daniel fits in. Reading Daniel gives us a feel for what it means to live in this world while we wait for the full benefits of God's kingdom to be revealed. It also adds to the bigger picture of what God's kingdom, and God's king will be like.

Discuss: Why didn't God just send Jesus immediately after Adam and Eve sinned?

## ***Study 2— Lord of the Kings: Daniel 2 & 7***

In the two chapters of Daniel we're looking at today Daniel is given a picture of what future rulers will be like. It's scary stuff too. Kings and Kingdoms will come along. They will be powerful. And they will oppress God's people. But along with the scary things that will take place, Daniel is also given insight into how God won't let their power go on forever. The suffering they cause will come to an end. God's people will be given relief. Eventually, God will intervene and do something wonderful.

In Daniel 1:7 we saw that God gave Daniel the ability to understand dreams. In chapters 2 and 7 we're going to see this ability in action. It may take a bit of time, but it's well worth it - **Read Daniel 2 and 7.**

1. When you compare chapters 2 and 7, what is the different role that Daniel has in each instance?
2. From the dream of chapter 2, use the statue picture to mark what each part is made of . Also using the statue, mark what each part represents according to Daniel's interpretation of the dream.
3. From Daniel 7, draw each of the beasts that are described there. Have a go – you don't have to be a Rembrandt!



4. When you compare the two dreams from chapter 2 and 7, what are the similarities?

*Daniel says in 2:38 that Nebuchadnezzar is the head of gold, the first kingdom. It's reasonable to suggest that the first beast of chapter 7, a lion, is also Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah 4:7 and 50:44 both describe the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar, as a lion. But we also need to be careful when we try to pin down each element of these dreams to a specific person or event in history when no specific interpretation is given.*

At this point it's worth pointing out that Daniel 7 is an example of 'apocalyptic literature', which has been notoriously hard to make sense of. You'll actually find the apocalyptic style of writing in others parts of the bible as well - Isaiah, Zechariah, Mark 13 and Revelation. Some features of this sort of writing include:

- strange imagery – such as a bear with 3 ribs coming out of its teeth!
- symbolic use of numbers
- dreams and visions
- repeating numbers

People have always tried to match elements of apocalyptic dreams and vision to events and people in history. But perhaps the more important thing to do is to get a sense of the big picture, the way repeating patterns work and the overall sense of what's going on. There may be instances where a part of a dream relates to a specific event in history, but these dreams also show us how God lets things happen in the world in an on-going way.

5. From last week's study, what is the terrible situation the Israelites find themselves in at the time of Daniel?
6. From Daniel's dream in chapter 7, how would you describe the beasts and the way they go about ruling?

7. How does this vision of the beastly kingdoms fit with the experience of Israel at the time of Daniel?

8. In chapter 1 we saw that Nebuchadnezzar's rule and authority over Israel was given by God. Nebuchadnezzar was God's instrument in the world. In Daniel's dream of chapter 7, we see this principle again. Next to each of the verses over, indicate how we see that God is really the one in control.

7:4

7:5

7:6

7:12

9. In the dreams of chapters 2 and 7, what is the thing that ultimately happens? What happens to the world's kingdoms?

### **What Kingdoms?**

Here are three different ways the four kingdoms of chapter 2 and 7 have been understood:

**Option 1:** The four kings specifically mentioned in Daniel 1. Nebuchadnezzar 2. Belshazzar, 3 Darius, 4. Cyrus.

**Option 2:** Four kingdoms that go beyond the time of Daniel: 1. Babylon 2. Media 3. Persia 4. Greece.

**Option 3:** Four kingdoms that go even further beyond the time of Daniel: 1. Babylon 2. Media-Persia and 3. Greece 4. Rome (ie. the time of Jesus).

Those who see some reference to the kingdom of Greece usually say that there is a particular connection between the boastful wicked horn who oppresses the saints and Antiochus IV, the Syrian Greek King of the second century BC. Antiochus attacked Israel and set up his own god in the Jerusalem temple.

10. In Daniel 7, the other 'character' that is introduced is the 'saints of the Most High' v18, 22, 25, 27. What will be their experience?

11. Knowing these realities (questions 8, 9, 10), how should this help God's people (in any time) when they feel the oppressive power of the world's kingdoms?

12. How would you describe the Son of Man 7:12-14?

13. How would you describe His kingdom?

14. **Read Acts 7:54-56.** What similarities are there between the vision that Stephen has of Jesus, and Daniel's dream (7:13-15). What does this imply about Jesus?

*The picture of Daniel 2 & 7 is glorious. In fact it gives us a way into understanding all of history. There are forces which are anti-god. They are beastly and un-human. They set themselves up against God and his people. We see this happen in Daniel's time. It happened with Jesus himself who was murdered. It happened with the early church. We still see it happening today.*

*But we understand that God is the Lord of the Kings (from Nebuchadnezzar's own mouth! 2:47). God is in control. And God will send his appointed King Jesus to bring final judgement to all. There will be victory, the saints will be vindicated and the saints will receive the kingdom of God.*

*Are there times in your life when you have felt completely overwhelmed by:*

- *the way the world is going?*
- *the way things are going for you because of the forces at work in the world?*
- *the cost you have to pay for being a Christian?*

*How does Daniel encourage you as you face these circumstances?*

### ***Some things to pray about...***

Thank God for his sovereign power and control over everyone and everything. Pray that we would honour those who are placed over us – while still serving our true king – Jesus. Pray that we would serve God from the heart, and not just with our mouths. Pray for the perseverance to keep trusting and living for him. Pray for people we know of who are suffering under rulers who are 'beastly' in the way that they rule.



## Study 3— Courage Under Fire: Daniel 3 & 6

Growing up, was there ever a more exciting Bible story than ‘Daniel in the Lion’s Den’?! But to really understand what’s going on with this dramatic rescue story, we need to get a handle on the situation that the Israelites find themselves in, living in the land of Babylon.

Remember the historical background from study 1. God had rescued the people out of Egypt and shown himself to be their powerful and saving God. In response God expected that they love and show allegiance to him. The famous 10 commandments tell us this, “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them”. (Exodus 20:2-4).

But the sad fact is, Israel in their history constantly strayed from the one true God and followed after the gods of the nations around them. That’s why God eventually allowed Israel to be attacked. It’s because of God’s promised punishment that what’s left of Israel finds itself now living in the foreign empire of Babylon.

The idols of Babylon’s gods would have been everywhere the Jews looked. A paving stone has been discovered in the ruins in Babylon that reads, ‘I Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, paved this road with mountain stone for the procession of Marduk, my lord. May Marduk my lord grant me eternal life.’

But upon arriving in Babylon, the circumstances of their exile may have surprised them. They actually weren’t brought there to be prisoners, but to settle as free citizens. They could build houses, take on any employment, engage in agriculture. The words of the prophet Jeremiah reflects this situation: This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: “Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.” (Jeremiah 29:4-7)

It’s in this situation where the Israelites now have to work out how to live as God’s people. And it would have raised lots of questions for them. What does it mean to be faithful to God when living in a foreign land? How much should they engage with the culture around them? When should they take a stand to be different and is it worth the cost? They were the sort of questions that would have been important to them. And they are still very important questions for us today.

### Read Daniel 3

For an Israelite, it would have generally been comfortable to live in Babylon. But there was the tyrannical ruler Nebuchadnezzar who everyone knew not to mess around with. Passages like 1:10, 2:5-6; 3:13, 19 show us that King Nebuchadnezzar is a guy who could have done with some anger management classes! Chapter 3 give us a situation where Daniel’s friends make a bold decision under pressure from the king, and then have to face the consequences.



Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the Fiery Furnace (1863) by Simeon Solomon

1. What is the stand that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego take?
2. Why do you think Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego act in the way they do?
3. What does Nebuchadnezzar doubt (v15) and what is the 'gist' of the response that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego give in verses 16-18?
4. What do you these men expect from God in this situation?

Let's turn to the similar story of Daniel and Darius, the new ruler in Babylon.

**Read Daniel 6:1-18.**

5. In verses 1-5, what are the qualities of Daniel that come through?
6. What is the plan of the Babylonian officials?



*Daniel's answer to the king, by Briton Riviere*

7. Why is it such a cunning plan?
8. Do you think Daniel knew others would see him through the window?
9. Imagine you don't know what happens next after Daniel is thrown in with the lions:

Imagine you're the king - what might you be thinking and feeling at this point?

Imagine you're the officials - what might you be thinking and feeling at this point?

Imagine you're Daniel, what might you be thinking and feeling at this point?

10. At the end of the furnace and lion episode, how do the Babylonian rulers respond? What do they say about the God of the Jews?

### ***Thinking about Daniel and Us***

11. The three friends of Daniel in chapter 3 seem to have great confidence that God will rescue them from the fire. And God does! Daniel himself is rescued from the lions in Daniel 6. Should Christians similarly today expect rescue from painful situations? Why/Why not?

*Passages like Timothy 3:12 tell us that those who follow Jesus will suffer for it. Pain and suffering is simply part of 'the package' of being Christian. But the lesson from Daniel 3 and 6 is that God is with his people. We may not really know who that figure in the fire was, but the big point is God was with them. That God will stick with his people is also the promise that is given to those who follow Jesus. Check out Matthew 28:20 and Romans 8:37-39.*

12. In our own day, what are the situations where Christian people can show themselves to be different even when it may cost them?
13. Can you think of specific examples where yourself or others have done what they know to be right, even when it was painful?
14. In Daniel we see that the Babylonian rulers acknowledge that God is the one who saves and it's His powerful kingdom that will go on forever. How do Christians today understand that God is the one who saves and that God will establish His kingdom that will go on forever?
15. How is this understanding of God a comfort for Christian people who face pressure and persecution today?

### ***Some things to pray about...***

Pray that we would have the courage to live up to our convictions, rather than 'going with the flow'.

## **Study 4— How the Mighty Fall: Daniel 4 & 5**

*Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, and Libya. In the past year all of these countries have seen the extraordinary end of decades-long, often brutal, regimes of their dictatorial Presidents. A year ago, their citizens could only dream that such events could occur.*

*Leaders and governments come and go. That's what we observe if we wait around long enough. And when we see it, it can fill us with all sorts of emotions— elation, joy, disappointment, despair.*

*But one thing that may be a new perspective for us is that behind the rising and falling of governments—God is at work. In a very dramatic way, this is what we'll see in chapters 4 and 5 of Daniel. As the book has been constantly teaching us, we'll be reminded again in this study that the kingdoms of the world are ultimately under God's control. And as we'll see today, because God is the ultimate King, leaders in this world would do well to pay attention to Him.*

### **Read Daniel 4**

*This chapter starts in a very unusual way that's supposed to grab our attention. For the first time in the book of Daniel, the writing takes the form of 'direct speech' ie. this is what I want to tell you'. Having this style of writing makes us sit up and take notice. But more than that, the person who is speaking is Nebuchadnezzar, not a person from Israel, the family of God, but this foreign false-god worshipping king. But on top of that, this king is speaking in a way to address us—'To the peoples, nations and men of every language, who live in all the world'. All together, this shows us that what is about to be said, is going to be worth listening to!*

1. From verse 4, Nebuchadnezzar starts to tell us his story. According to verse 4 what is the situation he finds himself in?
  
2. What makes this bloodthirsty tyrant king so terrified? v5
  
3. List the different elements of the dream that Nebuchadnezzar had.
  
4. After the Babylonian magicians and enchanters have a go and fail (v7), Daniel arrives and he provides the interpretation of the dream. According to Daniel, what is the meaning of this dream, and how does it come to pass?

*This vision was given to Nebuchadnezzar to tell him what will happen in the future. Even though there may have been a chance to avoid the fulfillment of this dream (v27), Nebuchadnezzar doesn't pay heed and the vision becomes reality. There are a number of lessons in this – for Nebuchadnezzar and us.*

5. What should have been Nebuchadnezzar's attitude to the Lord, the Most High ? (v17, v25 v34-35)
  
6. From this understanding of God—what should have been his attitude to his own kingship? (also read v30, v37)
  
7. What type of kingship should Nebuchadnezzar have exercised? (v27)

*Nebuchadnezzar had to learn the lesson that the Lord Most High is the sovereign king over all earthly authorities. God sets up kings to rule and he can just as easily bring them low again. In this sense all authorities in the world have a delegated rule from God. And therefore their attitude should be one of humility. It's interesting that the Israelite kings were urged to rule in righteousness and with mercy and justice (Deuteronomy 17:14-20; Psalm 72). But because all powers are given their position from God, all powers on the earth should similarly rule with justice and serve the needs of those under them. These were lessons Nebuchadnezzar had to learn the hard way!*

### **Read Daniel 5**

8. Chapter 4 and 5 of Daniel are clearly linked. In Daniel's conversation with King Belshazzar, he mentions the episode of Nebuchadnezzar. We're supposed to see a contrast between these two kings. What would you say are the similarities and the differences between the two:

<i>Nebuchadnezzar</i>	<i>Belshazzar</i>



Given the past with Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar should have known better. But he willfully rejects the rule of God. He refuses to humble himself and acknowledge that he owes his existence, let alone his kingship (v23) to God. With the taking of the gold and silver goblets, it was like he was flagrantly throwing down the gauntlet and challenging God. So God brings deadly judgment on him. That very night, Belshazzar is assassinated, and a new ruler arrives on the scene, Darius.

9. Think back to the first study where we looked at the situation the Israelites find themselves in—in exile under the power of foreign kings. What impact would have these stories have had on them?

10. Isaiah 52:13-53:12 appears to be talking about a king-like figure. How does this king-like person exercise his rule?

11. How does Jesus exercise his rule (Mark 10:35-45) and what is that rule contrasted with?

*The words: Mene, Tekel and Parsin were aramaic words related to weights and measures. Mene = minah (600g). Tekel = a shekel (10g). Parsin = half minah or half shekel. At the time these words would have been readily understood, but the difficulty was interpreting what theses words meant as they eerily appeared on the wall. It seems a word-play is at work. 'Mene' is related to another word meaning 'numbered'. 'Tekel' is related to another word meaning 'weighed'. And 'Parsin' is related to another word meaning 'divided'. This was the basis for Daniel's interpretation.*

*God has numbered the days of Belshazzar's reign and it is about to come to an end. His rule has been weighed and has been found wanting. And his kingdom would soon be divided and given to the Medes and Persians.*

*Another part of the Old Testament sums up the attitude of Belshazzar and God's judgement on him, 'Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall' (Proverbs 16:18).*

12. Write down the relationships you are in where you have authority:

In what ways do you fail to exercise authority in the way God desires, that follows the example of Jesus?

What specific things can you do differently?

### ***Some things to pray about...***

Pray for ourselves and for the way we use authority. For those over us, that they would rule with justice and mercy. And give thanks that in Jesus we can know what perfect servant leadership looks like.

## Study 5— What is the World Coming To?: Daniel 8

*In chapter 7 we first encountered a style of writing known as ‘apocalyptic’. Read page 8 again if you want refresh your memory on how we should approach this type of writing. But from chapter 7 to the very end of the book of Daniel, ‘apocalyptic’ is what we read. Throughout these chapters Daniel is given a series of strange visions that are not for the faint hearted!*

*Daniel himself is troubled and terrified by what he sees (7:28, 8:27, 10:11, 16-17). Daniel is almost overwhelmed by the sight of powerful beast-like forces rallying against God and against his people. But at the same time Daniel is given insight into the way God is at work to save his people and bring judgement on all those who would dare stand against Him.*

*When we studied chapter 7, a note of caution was given—be careful about trying to tie every element of apocalyptic imagery to one particular moment in time. In fact apocalyptic works to give us the building blocks to understand history at any point in time. But when we get to the vision of chapter 8, it does take us to specific historical events. We know this because an interpretation is given.*

### Read Daniel 8

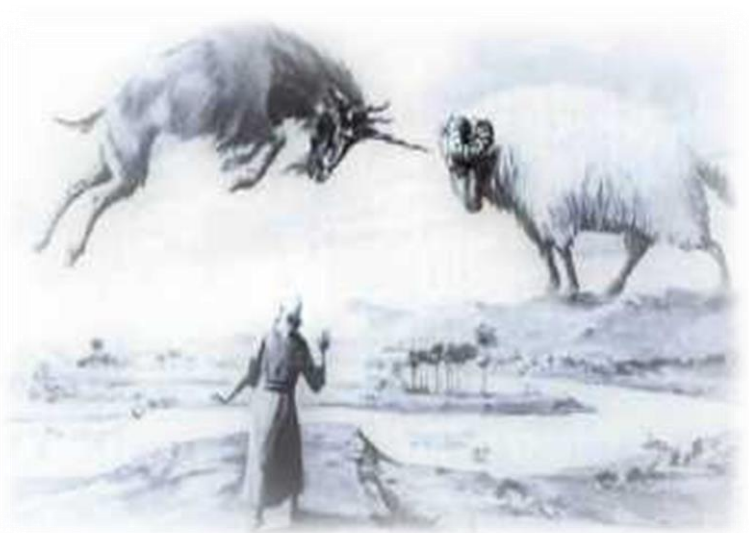
8:1 tells us the setting for when Daniel had this vision—in the 3rd year of the reign of Belshazzar, the Babylonian King (two years after the vision of Ch 7). In the vision, Daniel is transported to the ‘citadel of Susa in the province of Elam’. In Daniel’s day, Susa was an insignificant town that would later become the centre of the Persian empire that would eventually supersede Babylon. So even before we get to the content of the vision, we’re given a very strong hint that the vision is concerning a future time.

In the following table are some of the crucial elements of the vision in verses 1-14. Write down the interpretation of these elements given in verses 15-27.

Verses	Event	Interpretation (15-27)	Verses
3	“I looked up, and there before me was a ram”		
3	“with two horns”		
5	“suddenly a goat with a prominent horn between his eyes came from the west”		
7	“I saw him attack the ram furiously, striking the ram and shattering his two horns”		
9	“The goat became very great, but at the height of his power his large horn was broken off, and in its place four prominent horns grew up”		
10	“It grew until it reached the host of the heaven, and it threw some of the starry host down to the earth and trampled on them”		
11	“It set itself up to be as great as the Prince of the host; it took away the daily sacrifice from him, and the place of his sanctuary was brought low”		

## **A view into history**

Mede and Persia is the empire that came after Babylon. It was a united empire with the Persian part arising later and becoming superior in power (one of the horns was longer than the other but grew up later). Under King Cyrus who we read about in Daniel 1:21, the empire extended its boundaries and no other nation could stand against it (it charged toward the West and the North and the South; none could rescue from his power. He did as he pleased and became great).



But at the time of the Persians, another figure arose who would dominant the world stage—a Greek known as Alexander the Great. The Persian empire was easily overthrown by Alexander (suddenly a goat with a prominent horn between his eyes came from the west; the ram furiously, striking the ram and shattering its two horns; None could rescue the ram from his power).

Alexander achieved unprecedented dominion, from Italy to India in an unbelievable time. The conquests of Alexander are recorded in a Jewish piece of writing known as *I Maccabees 1*. It says,

*Alexander of Macedon, son of Phillip, had come from the land of Kittim and defeated Darius, king of the Persians and Medes, whom he succeeded as ruler, as first of Hellas. He undertook many campaigns and gained possession of many fortresses, and put the local kings to death. So he advanced to the ends of the earth, plundering nations after nation; the earth grew silent before him, and his ambitious heart swelled with pride.*

But just as Alexander's power looked complete, he died suddenly in 323BC at the age of 32 (at the height of his power the large horn on the goats head was broken off). Alexander had no natural heir and so his empire was divided amongst four of his generals (four prominent horns replaced the one prominent horn of Alexander). From one of these generals arose another leader Antiochus IV (out of one of the them came another horn).

In 167BC Antiochus invaded Jerusalem. His soldiers entered the temple (the surrender of the sanctuary), slaughtered a pig on the altar of the Lord and dedicated the temple to his Greek god (the rebellion that causes desolation). In fact history records that Antiochus took the meat of the pig and tried to make some Jews eat it. Those who refused to eat, he cut their tongues out then burnt them on the temple altar. It was a time of great persecution for the Jews (the host that will be trampled underfoot).

1. According to 8:25 what will be the outcome of this ruler?
2. How is this a similar outcome to what happens to the kingdoms in the visions of Daniel 2 and 7?

## **The pattern of things**

If Daniel 7 gave us broad insight into the way the world works and how God is at work in history, Daniel 8 focuses in on an example of the way theses forces will be at work in a particular moment in history. But this doesn't mean chapter 8 is there just for our historical/prophetic curiosity.

*This vision was meant to say something to the people of Daniel's time. And it's meant to say something to us today. It's helpful to realise that the pattern of: 1. a ruler rises up 2. he proudly asserts himself over God and attacks God's people and 3. God brings judgement on that ruler—is a recurring theme. Fill in the following table to see where else this pattern is in the bible.*

	Isaiah 14:3-23 'The King of Babylon'	2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 'the man of lawlessness'
What is sinful in their attitude and actions?		
What is their impact if any on the people of God?		
How does/will God respond?		

*Revelation has some big similarities with the book of Daniel—it contains strange beasts with horns who rise up against God. These beasts attack God's people and force the world to worship their image. Revelation is another scary apocalyptic vision. And when you read of Revelation (check out chapter 12 and 13 sometime) you wonder - how is God going to defeat these beasts? How will God respond to such proud and wicked rule? How will God make himself known that he is the true King? The answer is—it all centres on Jesus. And in keeping with the apocalyptic style, you might think that God will portray Jesus' rule with the symbol of magnificent animal who has great power and majesty.*

### **Now Read Revelation 5:1-14.**

3. What is so surprising about the animal who appears?
4. What does this say about the path that Jesus takes to become the King and ruler?
5. How is Jesus so different to the beasts in Daniel and Revelation?

### ***How Do You View the World?***

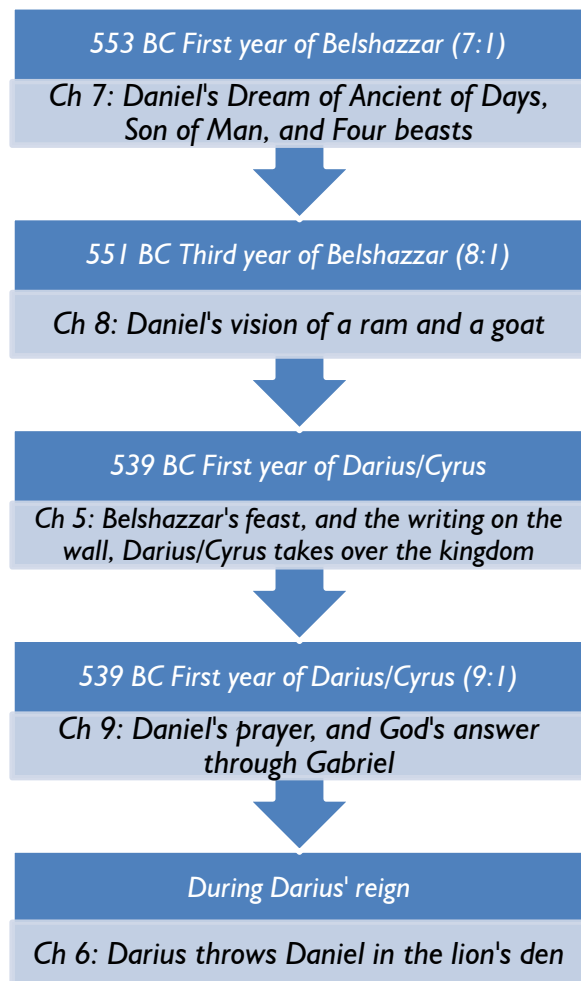
6. How has Daniel shaped the way you view worldly kingdoms and authorities?
7. How has Daniel shaped the way you might expect them to treat those who people who belong to God?
8. How has Daniel shaped the way you should view the future?

### ***Some things to pray about...***

## Study 6 – How Long, O Lord? Daniel 9

The events of chapter 9 occur in the first year of King Darius' reign in Babylon. This puts it chronologically immediately after Ch 5, and before Ch 6. (Likewise, Chapters 7 & 8 come before Ch 5 chronologically. (Check the time references at 7:1; 8:1; (5:30-6:1). 9:1; (6:1)

The timeline for these chapters looks something like this:



Perhaps Ch 9 comes after Ch 8 (although it is actually about 12 years later) because of the connection of themes involving **the rebellion that causes desolation in the temple** (8:13; 9:27). A holy one in the vision (8:13) asks, "How long until the vision is fulfilled?" Daniel seems to be investigating further the answer to this question as we come to Ch 9. Also, Gabriel (9:23), in his answer to Daniel's prayer, refers to a vision – probably the vision of Ch 8.

One of the prophecies the exiles in Babylon would, no doubt, have held on to would have been those of Jeremiah, such as Jeremiah 29, a letter sent to the exiles themselves. God tells them, through Jeremiah, to;

*5 "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. 6 Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. 7 Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."*

Daniel had committed himself to seeking the peace and prosperity of Babylon, while still remaining faithful to God. As time went on however, the next part of Jeremiah's letter assumed greater importance for Daniel.

### Jeremiah 29:10-14

*10 This is what the LORD says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. 11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. 12 Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. 13 You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. 14 I will be found by you," declares the LORD, "and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the LORD, "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile."*



1. Seventy years were drawing to a end! (See also Jeremiah 25:11). The time of God's deliverance was near. Nearly seventy years after King Jehoiakim's reign begins in 608 BC is 539 BC. What event happened then? (See timeline above)

How might this event have focussed Daniel's attention? (See Isaiah 45:1,13 where God promises to use Cyrus (probably another name for Darius) to deliver his people).

God's promise to bring Israel back from Babylon didn't cause Daniel to sit back, put his feet up, and wait for God to do everything. He obeyed God, and prayed for God to act.

**Read Daniel 9:1-19:**

2. How does Daniel describe God in this prayer?

3. How does he describe his people?

4. What does he ask God to do?

On what basis does he ask (16, 18, 19)?

5. Daniel's study of Scripture drove him to pray a prayer filled with Scripture. How could you use Scripture in your prayers?

6. If someone eavesdropped on your prayers recently, what conclusion would they draw about what concerned you most?

7. Daniel humbled himself before prayer. How do you prepare to meet your God?

How do you keep from viewing him as a "heavenly genie" who grants your every wish?

8. What aspects of God move you to pray? Why?

9. **Read Daniel 9:20-27:** In what sense do these verses serve as an answer to Daniel's prayer (9:23)?

Is it an answer that would satisfy you? Why/ why not?

10. What six things (9:24) happen within “seventy sevens”?

The first four of these purposes (to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, and to bring in everlasting righteousness) are God’s answers to Daniel’s earlier prayer where he grieved over his people’s sin, rebellion, disobedience and unrighteousness. To “seal up vision and prophecy” is to see them fulfilled – perhaps this answers Daniel’s lament that his people have not listened to prophecy (9:6, 10). To “anoint the most holy” probably refers to re-consecrating the most holy place (i.e. the temple) and is an answer to Daniel’s prayer (9:17) for God to look with favour on his desolate sanctuary and city.

Verses 24-27 are notoriously difficult verses. Scholars have dozens of different opinions. The Anointed One, the ruler (25) is Jesus. He will be cut off and have nothing. The ruler to come might be Antiochus Euphianes (167 BC) (see Daniel 8:13 c.f. 9:27) who defiled the temple, but did not destroy the city, or Caesar Augustus (AD 70) (see Mt 24:15) who destroyed the temple. His people will destroy the city and sanctuary, and he will confirm a covenant with many, will put an end to sacrifice and set up an abomination that causes desolation. This is in contrast to the Anointed One.

However, the big message is this (24): God is in control of the future – he has decreed it. He will finally and ultimately deal with sin and forgive his people, and bring in righteousness. However, for Daniel, it is not soon.

In 9:23 Gabriel encourages Daniel to consider the message and understand the vision (of Ch 8). Daniel is concerned, from the vision, that an evil power is working against God and his people. He sees in Jeremiah that relief looks imminent, and so he prays for God to act. However, Gabriel reinterprets Jeremiah’s prophecy for Daniel, pointing him to beyond the exile. He needed to think, not simply in terms of seventy years, but seventy times seven. This would be the point in time where God would *decisively* deal with his enemies.

*“God let Daniel know that although there might be a return to the land and to Jerusalem, his purposes would not be finally realised there. There was still a long way to go. These days were not the days of salvation. They were not the day of the Lord that so many had hoped for. That day was coming, but it was coming in the future.” (Andrew Reid, Kingdoms in Conflict, p204.)*

11. Summarise what Daniel 9 teaches about prayer

### ***Some things to pray about...***

Spend some time praying for your group and church along the lines suggested by Daniel 9.

## ***Study 7 - Go your way...: Daniel 10-12***

### ***Setting the scene...***

These three chapters are a record of what Daniel saw while he was standing near the Tigris River (Daniel 10:45 and 12:56). What Daniel saw was not a dream, and yet he was the only person who saw it.

As you read these chapters you'll notice that the vision is different from what we have seen so far in Daniel. There is no mention of beasts coming out of a sea, no bears, goats or horns. But there is talk of kings and rulers – which is what we have come to expect. You could say that this vision is more aural than visual.

Thankfully we are given a clear framework in which to understand this vision.

### **Read 10:14.**

1. What can you say about this vision which Daniel saw?
2. Read 10:1. At what point in the Babylonian exile did Daniel see this vision?

### ***...then looking behind the scene that has been set***

#### **Read Daniel 10:1-11:1**

Daniel 10:1 tells us that this vision concerns a great war (or that it was burdensome). In other words – it's not particularly good news.

3. There has been a lot going on in Babylon and the surrounding districts. In what ways is Daniel now given a look at what God has been doing 'behind the scenes'?
4. What do you think makes Daniel so afraid?
5. Daniel was rocked by what he saw. But how could what he saw have also been an encouragement to him?

### ***Looking into the future...***

The Babylonian exile is all but over. Cyrus has already issued the edict of return (Daniel 10:1 compared with Ezra 1:1) and the walls of Jerusalem are in the process of being reconstructed. The period of God's judgement of his people is meant to be winding up (Compare Deuteronomy 30:13). So what will happen now? Is everything OK again? Will the people of Israel finally enjoy peace with God, in the promised land of Canaan?

Sadly, it's not all good news. This vision of what will happen to God's people in the future (Daniel 10:14) is burdensome (Daniel 10:1) – there is more pain ahead!

Chapter eleven begins with a surprisingly detailed description of the struggle that will ensue between Persia, Greece and Rome. In fact, historians can align Daniel 11:1-35 with events in the region – even to the point of identifying Alexander the Great and Antiochus Ephipanes with the characters in Daniel's vision. We should not be surprised by this! We've already seen how Moses 'predicted' that God's people would be taken into exile (Deuteronomy 28). These events are just a 'real-life' example of the pattern which Daniel has been shown (in Daniel chapters 2 and 7 for example) – God sets up kings. God takes them down again. And God is working to a bigger plan.

But from Daniel's point of view – the sad thing is that God's people will be caught up in this turmoil.

6. **Read Daniel 11:2-45.** Note any references to God's people, Jerusalem or the temple.

7. So what can God's people expect in the future?

### ***... and seeing the end!***

The immediate future for God's people may be bleak. But there is an end in sight.

#### **Read Daniel 12:1-4**

8. What can we say about 'the end'?

9. And how does this compare with what we have seen in the rest of Daniel?

#### **Read Daniel 12:5-13**

10. What indications are there that Daniel is not to know when these things will be fulfilled?

11. What is Daniel told to do?

### ***Think about it...***

12. Where do we fit into this vision of the future?

13. What might it mean for *us* to take the advice which Daniel was given in Daniel 12:13?

The book of Daniel increases our appreciation of God's sovereignty – as we see the way that God sets kings up, and then takes them down – all the while working to his plan of establishing Jesus as the king who will rule forever. History goes round and round as it spirals on towards the end that God has in store – and God is there controlling every rotation in that spiral.

In this vision Daniel is given a glimpse ahead in time – and he is shown how God's people will fit into the spiral that is God's plan. While Daniel is not told when we will reach the end, he is given a glimpse of what the end will be like.

Daniel was physically rocked by what he saw. No doubt the awesomeness of the vision, combined with the bleak outlook for the immediate future, was upsetting to him. But surely he would have found some comfort in having seen behind the scenes – and in being reminded that God is working in ways that we are not able to appreciate. And surely he would have been encouraged by the glimpse of the end.

In the meantime Daniel must keep trusting and faithfully serving king Cyrus. But more importantly he must faithfully serve God – even when it means being different. Even when it means being persecuted. Just as we have seen on our way through this incredible book (eg Daniel 3 and 6 in particular).

As we look back into the past and forward into the future we have a much clearer understanding of God's plan than Daniel did. We have seen God's eternal king arrive on this earth – and we are waiting for him to return. In the meantime we go on serving THE king.

### ***Some things to pray about...***

Thank God for all the things we have talked about on our way through the book of Daniel.