

A close-up, front-facing portrait of a lion's head. The lion has a thick, golden-brown mane and a focused, intense expression. Its eyes are a deep amber color, and its nose is visible in the center. The lighting is warm, highlighting the texture of its fur.

DANIEL

SERVING THE KING

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INTRODUCTION

The world has seen many superpowers rise and fall. In the Middle East in 605BC it was Babylon. This empire rose 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 fell to Babylon's might, and Jews were taken captive into Babylon. Among them were four young men: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah who in time became servants to the kings of Babylon. Their own land had been laid to waste and they were serving foreign kings, but they knew that their God is THE great and powerful king.

Daniel and his three friends are certainly men of uncompromising faith and you can't help but be inspired. Yet, 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' (Dan 7:13) as a thinly veiled way to refer to himself as God's king whose kingdom will last forever. In fact, the way Jesus speaks in the Gospels of God's kingdom echoes what we read in the book of Daniel. Then, in Revelation, much of the apocalyptic imagery has similarities with Daniel's visions.

As we read Daniel we will be comforted by God's sovereignty and his faithfulness. We will be inspired by Daniel's tenacity and trust. And we'll gain a more complete picture of Jesus as our King. Daniel is the perfect book for Christians living in any age, under any superpower because it gives us 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, in narrative form, some of the significant events that occurred during Daniel's lifetime. Then chapters 7-12 describe visions that Daniel saw. 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 the book of Daniel in big chunks. Read a chapter or more at a time. As you read, try to keep the rest of the 'story' in mind. Chapter 1 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 earthly 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 are 'apocalyptic' literature. We often use this word to describe momentous or catastrophic events, or visions of the destruction of the world. Natural disasters – bushfires, floods, fierce storms – are frequently described as 'apocalyptic'. But "the word 'apocalypse' means a 'revelation' or 'unveiling', so that an apocalyptic book claims to reveal things which are normally hidden and to unveil the future." (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Church*, 1997, page 82) These 'hidden things' may be in the present, the near future, or the distant future. The 'revealing' often comes through accounts of dreams or visions of strange and catastrophic events, hence our use of the word to describe natural disasters.

Reading apocalyptic literature can feel strange, so as you read the book of Daniel 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.

"The fact that God rules is a vital message of encouragement. And the challenge to God's people to live distinctively in the light of his rule is a message the Church, particularly in the West, needs to hear and obey." (Fyall and Sydserff, *Teaching Daniel*, 2016, page 21)

Enjoy studying the intriguing and exciting book of Daniel!

DANIEL 1: IS GOD DEAD?

What power struggles do you find yourself engaged in?

1. **Read Daniel 1:1-2.** In these two verses we have a very brief description of an ancient geo-political power struggle. Who are the two kings?

Skim through chapter 1. Make a list of all the verses where God acts. Who is in control of these events?

2. **Read 2 Kings 23:36-24:20.** What circumstances led Nebuchadnezzar to attack Judah and Jerusalem?
3. **Read Jeremiah 24:1-10.** How does this help us understand what God is doing by giving Jehoiakim, and later his son Jehoiachin, into Nebuchadnezzar's hands?
4. Given God's promises to his people, and how great Israel once looked, what might those who survived the Babylonian onslaught (like Daniel) have thought about Israel's future when their king was delivered into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar?
5. So many precious temple items have been carried off to the temple of the Babylonian god – what might the Jews have been thinking about God?
6. **Read Daniel 1:3-7.** Here we read about the first 'wave' of Jews taken in exile in Babylon. What do you think Nebuchadnezzar is trying to do by selecting certain men of Judah to serve in his courts? (1:3-5)
7. What do the Babylonians do to show that Daniel and his friends now been incorporated into Babylonia? (1:4-7)



The Jews being marched into Babylonian exile

8. **Read Daniel 1:8-20.** From the beginning of their time in Babylon, Daniel and his friends seem fairly obliging – they accept a Babylonian education and a Babylonian name change. But there comes a point when they say ‘no’. What do they refuse to do, and why (1:8)?

Refusal to eat the royal food and insist on a vegetarian diet can't be explained as just a refusal to eat something outside the Jewish food laws. In 10:3 we read that Daniel fasted from "choice food", "meat" and "wine" for a period of three weeks – so we know he did eat Babylonian food, including meat, at other times. In 1:8, however, we read that Daniel and his friends knew that if they ate Babylonian food, they would 'defile' themselves. They were drawing the line at this point to keep themselves pure and set apart for God. Perhaps Daniel and his friends are determined not to repeat their ancestors' failure to remain holy to God.

9. How did God affirm Daniel's actions (1:17-20)?

10. Did Nebuchadnezzar get what he wanted (compare 1:20 with 1:5)?
11. What does 1:17-20 tell us about the pursuit of 'secular' learning and occupations?
12. How do Daniel's actions and God's response, in this chapter, help us draw the line between living as Christians "in the world" rather than "of the world"?

At the beginning of chapter 1, 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 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 we 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.

PRAYER POINTS

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.

DANIEL 2: LORD OF THE KINGS

This chapter gives us 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, we see that Daniel is also given insight into how God won't let the power of these kingdoms 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.

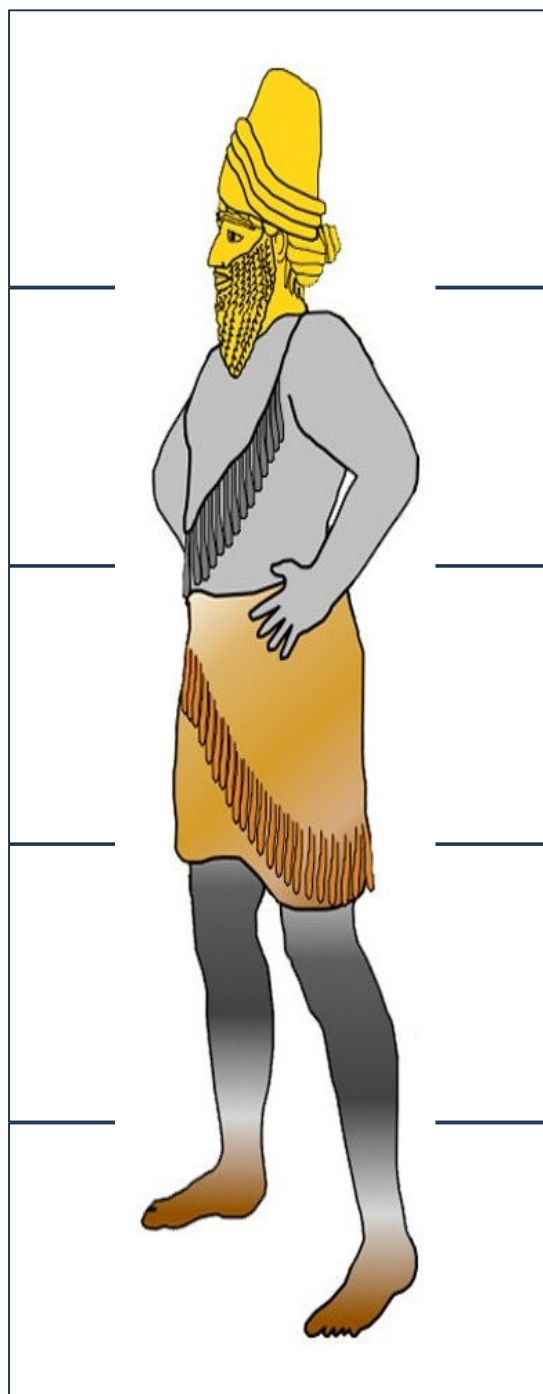
In Daniel 1:7 we saw that God gave Daniel the ability to understand dreams. In chapter 2 (and again in chapter 7) we're going to see this ability in action.

Read Daniel 2.

1. When do the events in this chapter occur? (2:1) At this time, what was Daniel's role in the royal court?
2. Why does Nebuchadnezzar refuse to tell the details of the dream to his magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers? (2:5-9)

Why are they not able to describe the dream or interpret it? (2:11)

3. Why was Daniel able to describe the dream and interpret it? (2:17-19, 27-28)
4. From Daniel's explanation of the dream, mark on the picture what each part of the statue is made of. Then mark what each part represents according to Daniel's interpretation of the dream.



5. How does Daniel explain the “rock that struck the statue and became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth”? (2:35, 44-45)

6. The purpose of the Nebuchadnezzar’s dream was to reveal something ‘hidden’ about the future. Nebuchadnezzar learns something about the future of his kingdom and those that will come after it. But is there another purpose to the dream? (2:20-23, 30, 45b-47)

7. What does this chapter tell us about who gives power to earthly kings? Compare this with Isaiah 9:2-7. Count the number of geo-political conflicts in the world today - what does this chapter tell us these world events?

8. How does knowing the God of gods, Lord of kings, Revealer of mysteries make a difference to the way we live in a world that looks bleak and is full of political and personal power battles?

PRAYER POINTS

Pray through this passage from Isaiah 9:2-7.

*² The people walking in darkness have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.*

*³ You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy;
they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest,
as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder.*

*⁴ For as in the day of Midian’s defeat, you have shattered
the yoke that burdens them,
the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor.*

*⁵ Every warrior’s boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood
will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire.*

*⁶ For to us a child is born, to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

*⁷ Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end.
He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.*

The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

DANIEL 3: COURAGE UNDER FIRE (PART 1)

In this chapter we read the first of two well-known rescue stories told in the book of Daniel: the rescue of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego from a fiery furnace. In chapter 6 we find the second story: the rescue of Daniel from the lions' den. To really understand what's going on in these stories, we need to get a handle on the situation that the Israelites find themselves in, living in the land of Babylon.

In response to God's rescue of his people from Egypt, he expected them to love and show allegiance to him, and to worship no other gods (Exodus 20:2-4). But despite the warnings given by many prophets, Israel followed the gods of the nations around them. That's why God eventually allowed Israel to be attacked and exiled in Babylon.

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)

But in Babylon, the idols and statues of that nation's gods would have been everywhere the Jews looked.

It's in this situation that the Israelites had to work out how to live as God's people. What would 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? Important questions then, and still very important questions for us today.

Read Daniel 3

For an Israelite, it would have generally been comfortable to live in Babylon. But Nebuchadnezzar was a tyrannical ruler (see 1:10, 2:5-6; 3:13, 19). Daniel's friends make a bold decision under pressure from the king, and then must face the consequences.

1. What do we learn about Nebuchadnezzar at the beginning of this chapter?

3:1 (compare with 2:36-35)

3:4-7

2. What does 3:8-12 tell us about the extent of the assimilation of the Israelites into Babylonian society?
3. What is the stand that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego take? (3:4-6)
4. Why do you think Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego act in the way they do? What do you these men expect from God in this situation? (3:16-18)
5. What do we learn about Nebuchadnezzar from the conversation he has with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego?

3:13

3:15

3:19-23

6. What is the outcome of Nebuchadnezzar's punishment of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego?

3:22

3:24-25

3:26-27

3:28-30

7. Any thoughts on who the fourth person in the furnace is? (3:25)



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

8. What motivated Nebuchadnezzar's actions in 3:28-30?

9. What have you learned about how God rescues his people? How does this give us hope (3:17)? And what is the challenge for us (3:18)? Should Christians today similarly expect rescue from painful situations? Why/Why not?

10. Can you think of specific examples where yourself or others have done what they know to be right, even when it was painful?

11. In Daniel we see that the Babylonian rulers acknowledge that God is the one who saves, and that only His powerful kingdom 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?

How is this understanding of God a comfort for Christian people who face pressure and persecution today?

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.

PRAYER POINTS

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

DANIEL 4&5: HOW THE MIGHTY FALL

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 this: 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. 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'. This style of writing makes us sit up and take notice.

1. From verse 4, Nebuchadnezzar starts to tell us his story. What was the situation that he found himself in (4:5)?
2. This is not the first time Nebuchadnezzar has had a strange dream. What's different about his response this time? (6:7-8)
3. List (or draw) the different elements of the dream that Nebuchadnezzar had.
4. After the Babylonian magicians and enchanters fail to interpret the dream (4:7), Daniel provides the interpretation. According to Daniel, what is the meaning of this dream? Can Nebuchadnezzar avoid the dream becoming a reality?

This dream was given to Nebuchadnezzar to tell him what would happen in the future. Even though there may have been a chance to avoid the fulfillment of this dream (4:27), he doesn't pay attention, and so the dream becomes reality. There are a number of lessons in this – for Nebuchadnezzar, and for us.

5. How did Nebuchadnezzar regard his kingship and his achievements? (4:30) What does this suggest about his view of the Lord, the Most High?

6. What should have been Nebuchadnezzar's attitude to the Lord, the Most High? (4:17, 25, 34-35). What difference would this have made to his kingship? (4:27)

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, because of this, their attitude should be one of humility. 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

7. Chapter 4 and 5 of Daniel are clearly linked. In Daniel's conversation with King Belshazzar (5:18), he mentions the episode of Nebuchadnezzar. We're supposed to see a contrast between these two kings. Use the box below to note the similarities and the differences between them:

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

Given what Belshazzar knew about Nebuchadnezzar, he should have known better than to wilfully reject the rule of God. But he refuses to humble himself and acknowledge that he owes his existence, let alone his kingship (5:23) to God. By taking the gold and silver goblets that had been set apart for use in the temple in Jerusalem (Dan 1:2), and using them for his own personal feasting, 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.

8. Think back to the first study where we looked at the situation the Israelites find themselves in: exile under the power of foreign kings. What impact should these stories have had on Belshazzar, and then on Darius?

9. God has promised a king who will lead in a godly way. What do we learn about that king, and the way he leads, in these passages:

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Mark 10:35-45

10. We all have 'authority relationships'. Sometimes we have authority over other people, and sometimes we are under the authority of another person. How do these two chapters challenge our understanding of how we should exercise authority over other people?

How do they challenge our understanding of how we should submit to the authority of those God has placed over us?

What specific things can you do differently?

PRAYER POINTS

Pray for ourselves and for the way we use, and respond to, authority.

Pray for those over us, that they would rule with justice and mercy.

Give thanks that in Jesus we can know what perfect servant leadership looks like.

Going Deeper: Seeing the writing on the wall

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 they meant as they 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 had numbered the days of Belshazzar's reign and it was about to come to an end. His rule had been weighed and he was found wanting. And his kingdom would soon be divided and given to the Medes and Persians.

The imagery of the writing on the wall is so powerful that the phrase has entered into the English language as an idiom suggesting doom or misfortune to come, or sometimes an unpleasant outcome that can't be avoided. "He saw the writing on the wall after he managed that customer so badly", meaning "he knew he would lose his job over the way he managed the customer."

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).

DANIEL 6: COURAGE UNDER FIRE (PART 2)

In chapter 3 we read about God's amazing rescue of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. In chapter 6 we have a similar story with different characters: Daniel and Darius, the new ruler in Babylon.



Daniel's answer to the king, by Briton Riviere

Read Daniel 6

1. What do we learn about Daniel in verses 1-5?

2. What is the plan of the Babylonian officials? (6:6-9)

Why is it such a cunning plan?

3. Do you think Daniel knew others would see him through the window? (6:10)
4. Imagine you're the king - what might you be thinking and feeling after Daniel is thrown in with the lions at this point?

Imagine you're the officials?

Imagine you're Daniel?

5. What are the outcomes of Darius' punishment of Daniel?

6:23

6:24

6:25-27

6:28

6. What similarities do you see with these outcomes, and what happened when Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were thrown into the furnace?
7. Should Christians today similarly expect rescue from painful situations? Why/Why not?
8. In our own day, what are the situations where Christian people can show themselves to be different even when it may cost them?
9. Can you think of specific examples where yourself or others have done what they know to be right, even when it was painful?
10. In Daniel we see that the Babylonian rulers acknowledge that God is the one who saves and that it's His powerful kingdom that will go on forever. How can Christians today live under this truth?
11. How is this understanding of God a comfort for Christian people who face pressure and persecution today?

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.

PRAYER POINTS

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

DANIEL 7: THE ANCIENT OF DAYS & THE SON OF MAN

In Daniel 2 we read of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, and the interpretation of it that God gave to Daniel. The great statue in the dream represented a series of kingdoms to follow the Babylonian empire, all of which would ultimately fall. We also learned that the God of gods, Lord of kings, would one day establish a kingdom that would never be destroyed (2:44).

In Daniel 7 there is more uncovering of 'hidden things' in the future of the world. Daniel's dream happens when the king is Belshazzar, who we have already met in chapter 5. This chapter is an example of 'apocalyptic literature', which, as we noted in the introduction, is notoriously hard to make sense of. There is strange imagery – such as a bear with 3 ribs coming out of its mouth! There are dreams and visions. And there is symbolic use of numbers. And the timeline of the book has folded back across the events of chapter 6. It's a lot to take in!

There's much debate among Christians about what each of the beasts in this chapter represent – which kingdoms, what times in history? In contrast to chapter 2, where God reveals who is represented by the statue's golden head – Nebuchadnezzar – the text of chapter 7 does not give us such detail. We 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.

Rather, 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 has control over everything that happens in the world.

1. Are there times in your life when you have felt completely overwhelmed by the way the world is going? Or by the way things are going for you because of the forces at work in the world? Or by the cost you must pay for being a Christian?

What encouragement do you hope Daniel will have for you as you face these circumstances?

1. **Read Daniel 7.** As you read, list (or draw!) each of the beasts that are described in this chapter.

2. How do these four beasts go about ruling their kingdoms?

3. Look back at your notes from the second study, Daniel 2. What are the similarities between Nebuchadnezzar's dream (ch 2) and Daniel's dream (ch 7)? What are the differences?

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

Going Deeper: Which Kingdoms?

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

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, causing great offense to the Jews under his rule.

5. Nebuchadnezzar's rule and authority over Israel was given by God. He was powerful, but was just God's instrument in the world. What does this chapter show us about how God worked?

7:4

7:5

7:6

7:12

6. In Daniel's dream, what ultimately happens? (7:13-14) Compare this to Daniel's explanation about the rock that brought down the statue in Nebuchadnezzar's dream in chapter 2. How would you describe the "one like a son of man" and his kingdom?
7. In Revelation 5 we also read about "thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand" voices praising One seated on a throne. What are some similarities between the two passages?
8. In Daniel 7, the other 'characters' that are introduced are the 'saints of the Most High'. (7:18, 22, 25, 27). What will be their experience of these events?
9. **Read Acts 7:54-56.** What similarities are there between Stephen's vision of heaven, and Daniel's dream (7:13-15). Who, then, is the Son of Man?
10. How does Daniel 7 help God's people (at every time in history) when they feel the oppressive power of the world's kingdoms?

The picture of God's kingdom that we have in Daniel 7, and its 'partner chapter' Daniel 2, is glorious. It gives us a way into understanding all of history. We know there are forces at work in the world that 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.

In contrast, we understand that God is the Lord of the Kings (even Nebuchadnezzar's said this, 2:47!). God is in control. And God will send his appointed King, the Lord 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.

PRAYER POINTS

- 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.

DANIEL 8: WHAT IS THE WORLD COMING TO?

In chapter 7 we first encountered a style of writing known as ‘apocalyptic’. This continues right through to the end of the book, in a series of visions given to Daniel.

These strange visions are not for the faint hearted! Daniel himself was troubled and terrified by what he saw (7:28, 8:27, 10:11, 16-17). Daniel was almost overwhelmed by the sight of powerful beast-like forces rallying against God and against his people. But at the same time Daniel was 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.



The ram and the he-goat, by T.K. Martin

As we move into these chapters, remember the word of caution about reading apocalyptic literature: we can expect to see the ‘building blocks’ to understand history at any point in time, but we shouldn’t try to tie every element of apocalyptic imagery to specific historical events, unless a clear interpretation is seen in the text. This is the case in chapter 8. Let’s read on!

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 eventually overtook Babylon. Even before we get to the content of the vision, we’re given a very strong hint that the vision is about a time in the future. 8:17 tells us “that the vision concerns the time of the end”, and 8:18 that these things “will happen later in the time of wrath”, but the question is: when will that time be?

1. In the following table are some of the crucial elements of the vision in verses 8:1-14. Write down the interpretation of these elements given in verses 8:15-27.

Verses	Event	Interpretation	Verses
3	<i>“I looked up, and there before me was a ram with two horns”</i>		
5	<i>“suddenly a goat with a prominent horn between his eyes came from the west”</i>		

7	<i>"I saw him attack the ram furiously, striking the ram and shattering his two horns"</i>		
9	<i>"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"</i>		
10	<i>"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"</i>		
11	<i>"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"</i>		

MAKING CONNECTIONS WITH WORLD HISTORY

The text itself tells us that the vision begins with the kingdom of the Medes and Persians, which 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." 8:3) 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. No animal could stand against him, and none could rescue from his power. He did as he pleased and became great." Daniel 8:4)

From this beginning, we can make connections between the rest of the vision, and events in the geo-political history of this part of the world.

At the time of the Persians, another figure arose who would dominant the world stage—a Macedonian known as Alexander the Great. He easily overthrew the Persian empire (" ... suddenly a goat with a prominent horn between his eyes came from the west ... I saw him attack the ram furiously, striking the ram and shattering his two horns ... none could rescue the ram from his power). Under Alexander's rule, the ancient kingdom of Macedon became the dominant political state of Hellenistic Greece.

Alexander achieved unprecedented dominion, from Italy to India, in a very short time. The conquests of Alexander are recorded in a Jewish piece of writing known as 1 Maccabees. 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 ("... but at the height of his power his large horn was broken off ...", Daniel 8:8). Alexander had no natural heir and so his empire was divided amongst four of his generals ("... four prominent horns grew up toward the four winds of heaven." Daniel 8:8). Ptolemy secured control of Egypt; Seleucus took control of the eastern part of Alexander's empire; Antigonus

eventually had control over most of the empire; Lysimarchus failed to establish a dynasty in the region of Macedon.

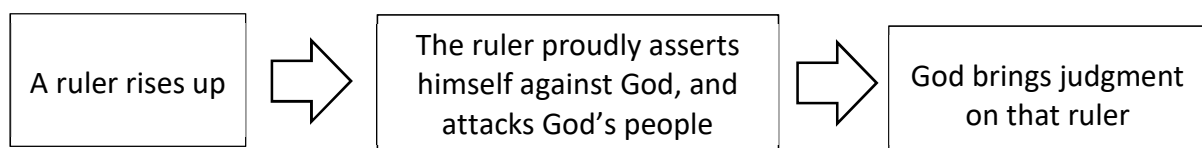
From Seleucus' empire there eventually arose another leader: Antiochus IV ("Out of one of them came another horn ...", Daniel 9) In 167BC Antiochus invaded Jerusalem. His soldiers entered the temple ("... the place of his sanctuary was brought low ...", Daniel 8:11), slaughtered a pig on the altar of the Lord and dedicated the temple to his Greek god ("... the rebellion that causes desolation ...", Daniel 8:13). 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, had their tongues cut out and then burnt them on the temple altar. It was a time of great persecution for the Jews ("... the host that will be trampled underfoot." Daniel 8:13).

2. According to 8:25 what will happen to the last ruler of Daniel's vision?
3. What similarities can you see between this outcome and the visions of Daniel 2 and Daniel 7?

THE PATTERN OF THINGS

Where 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 these forces will be at work in a particular moment in history. But the chapter is not there just for our historical/prophetic curiosity.

This vision recorded in chapter 8 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 recall the pattern seen in our reading so far in the book of Daniel:



4. Fill in the following table to see this pattern in two other parts of 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?		
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This pattern is also seen in the book Revelation, another book containing frightening apocalyptic visions. In Revelation we also see significant imagery from the book of Daniel. Revelation tells us of strange beasts with horns who rise up against God. These beasts attack God's people and force the world to worship their image. And when you read of this in Revelation (check out chapter 12 and 13) you may wonder how God will defeat these beasts. How will he respond to such proud and wicked rule? How will he make it known that he is the true King? The answer is: it all centres on Jesus. And in keeping with the apocalyptic style, you would expect God to portray Jesus' rule with the symbol of magnificent animal who has great power and majesty.

Read Revelation 5:1-14.

5. What is so surprising about the animal who appears?

6. What does this say about the path that Jesus takes to become the King and ruler?

7. How is Jesus so different to the beasts in Daniel and Revelation?

HOW DO YOU VIEW THE WORLD?

8. How has Daniel shaped the way you view worldly kingdoms and authorities?

9. How has Daniel shaped the way you might expect these kingdoms to treat people who belong to God?

10. How has Daniel shaped the way you should view the future?

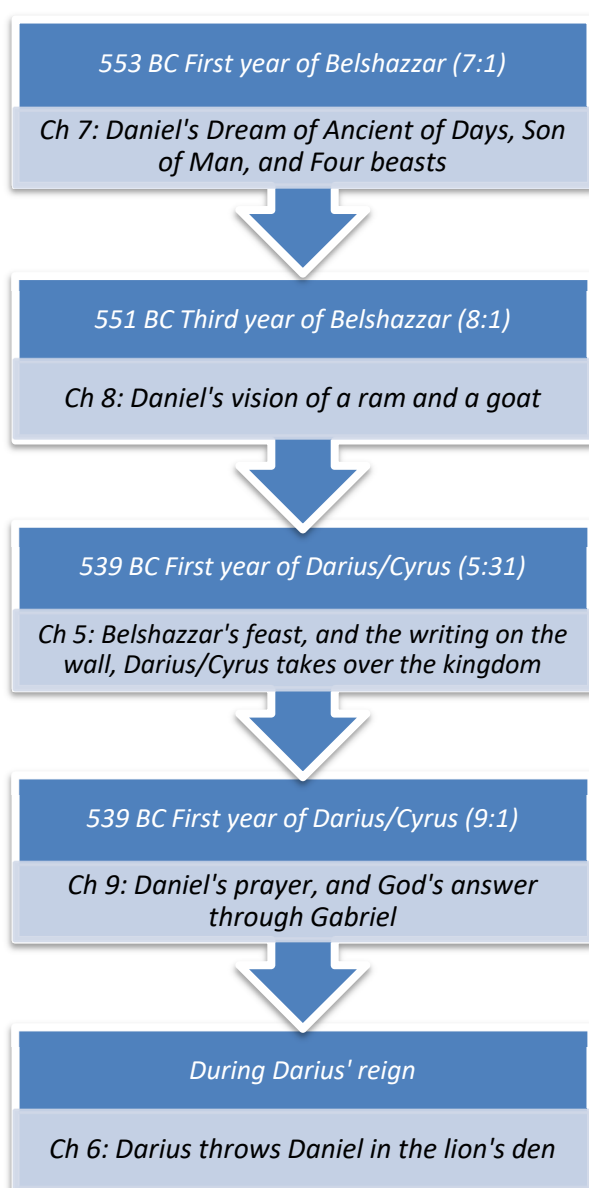
PRAYER POINTS

DANIEL 9: HOW LONG, O LORD?

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

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:



The events of chapter 9 come about 12 years after Daniel's vision recorded in chapter 8. Perhaps they are grouped together because both chapters speak of **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 chapter 9. Also, Gabriel, in his answer to Daniel's prayer (9:23), refers to a vision – probably the vision of chapter 8.

Read Daniel 9:1-19

1. Jehoiakim's reign began in 608 BC, and Nebuchadnezzar took him into exile in the third year of his reign. Daniel was reading Jeremiah's prophecy in the first year of Darius' rule – 539 BC. The seventy years were drawing to an end! (See also Jeremiah 25:11). The time of God's deliverance was near. Why might the change of king in Babylon 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).

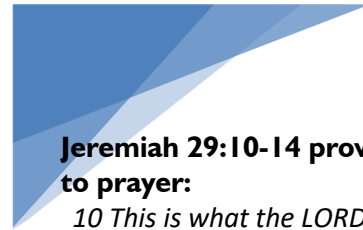
2. What does Daniel do with what he reads in Jeremiah's letter, which is God's Word to the exiles?

3. How does Daniel describe God in his prayer?

4. How does he describe his fellow Israelites?

5. What does he ask God to do? On what basis does he ask these things (9:16-19)? Write down the parts of Scripture that you think are echoed in Daniel's prayer.

6. What does Daniel's response to reading God's Word teach us about prayer for the church and prayer for ourselves? Write down some adjectives to describe Daniel's relationship with God and his response to God's character.



Jeremiah 29:10-14 provokes Daniel to prayer:

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."

Read Daniel 9:20-27

7. How do these verses answer Daniel's prayer?

8. If this was your prayer, would Gabriel's answer have satisfied you? Why/ why not?

9. What six things happen within "seventy sevens"? (9:24 and the following verses)

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 for God to look with favour on his desolate sanctuary and city (9:17)

Verses 24-27 are notoriously difficult. Scholars have many different opinions on what is being spoken about here. The Anointed One, the ruler is Jesus (9:25). He will be cut off and have nothing. The "ruler to come" (in the ESV "the prince who is to come") might be Antiochus Euphrosyne (167 BC) who defiled the temple, but did not destroy the city (compare Daniel 8:13 with 9:27). Or it may be Titus who did destroy the temple in AD 70 (see Mt 24:15). His people will destroy the city and sanctuary, confirming a covenant with many, putting an end to sacrifice and setting up an abomination that causes desolation. This is in contrast to the Anointed One.

However we identify the "ruler to come", the big message is this: God is in control of the future – he has decreed it. He will finally and ultimately deal with sin, forgive his people, and bring in righteousness. For Daniel, this cannot come too soon.

Gabriel encourages Daniel to consider the message and understand the vision of chapter 8 (9:23). Daniel's vision has left him concerned that an evil power is working against God and his people, to the point of physical distress (8:27). In Jeremiah's prophecy Daniel discovers that relief appears imminent, and so he prays for God to act.

However, Gabriel reinterprets Jeremiah's prophecy, pointing Daniel to a time beyond the current exile. Daniel is being urged to think in terms not 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.)

10. Look back at your answer to the first question in this study. Now that you've looked closely at Daniel chapter 9, what can you do to keep from viewing God as a "heavenly genie" who grants your every wish? What can you do to prepare to meet your God in prayer?

PRAYER POINTS

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

DANIEL 10-12: GO YOUR WAY

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).

As we read these chapters, we'll encounter a vision that is quite different from what we have seen so far in the book of Daniel. What Daniel saw was not a dream, and yet he was the only person who saw it. 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. It might be said that this vision is more what is heard, than about what is seen.

God is in just as much in control of the details of world history as he is of the big picture. So in chapter 11 we'll find a lot of detail to point us toward that big picture. As we read, look for things that tell us about how God cares for his people, and about the way he advances his kingdom toward the end of human history.

When, and why, did God give Daniel this vision? The text itself tells us why.

Read 10:1, 12-14, and compare with 10:20-11:1

1. At what point in the Babylonian exile did Daniel see this vision?
2. What is it about Daniel that makes him the right person to receive the vision?
3. What is the 'big picture' that will be revealed in the details of the vision given to Daniel?

Read Daniel 10:1-11:1

Daniel 10:1 tells us that this vision held a true message that concerned a great war. An alternative meaning for the original Hebrew word is that the vision held a true message that was burdensome for the one who heard it, or who will experience it. Whichever way we read it, the vision does not – at least on the surface - bring particularly good news. And the messenger was terrifying.

4. What do you think makes Daniel, and the men who were with him at the start, so afraid? (1:4-11)
5. Linen was a cloth reserved for priestly garments. Gold (in the messenger's belt) is a sign of royalty. Lightning, in Scripture, is often a sign of a theophany (an appearance of God). Compare this description of the messenger in Daniel 10 with **Revelation 1:12-15** – who is this messenger?

6. 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 11 begins with a very detailed description of the struggle that will ensue between Persia, Greece and Rome. Historians can align Daniel 11:1-35 with events in the region – even to the point of identifying Alexander the Great and Antiochus Ehipanes 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.

Read Daniel 11:2-45

7. As you read, make notes of what is said about God's people, Jerusalem and the temple.

God's people	
Jerusalem	
The temple	

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

9. What does this chapter say to us about spiritual warfare? Who is it ultimately against? How do we see God rule in these tumultuous times? What will ultimately happen to those who oppose God?

... 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

10. What does this passage tell us about 'the end'?

11. What similarities are there with what we have already read in the book of Daniel?

12. Has 'the end' begun?

Read Daniel 12:5-13

13. Does Daniel find out when these things will be fulfilled?

14. What is Daniel told to do?

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR US?

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

16. 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. Evil may be great, but God and his power are greater.

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. He was offered comfort in through seeing behind the scenes and encouragement in 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).

Christians today can look back into the past, and forward into the future, with a much clearer understanding of God's plan than Daniel had. We have seen God's eternal king arrive on this earth – and we are waiting for him to return. And while we wait, we go on our way serving THE king.

PRAYER POINTS

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

Most of these studies are based on studies from Kenmore Presbyterian Church,
www.kpc.org.au,
and Mitchelton Presbyterian Church, *www.mpc.org.au*. Thanks guys!