
DANIEL

thriving in turbulent times

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Study 1 *Read — Daniel 1:1-8*

“In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God. And he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god.” — Daniel 1:1-2

Overview

The book of Daniel opens with the king of Judah (God’s people) being besieged and overtaken by the evil Babylonians (see Revelation 14:7-8), and then some of God’s people are taken from Judah into exile in Babylon (vv. 1-3). While this would cause many questions and fear for God’s people, we also see a glimpse of God’s sovereignty, goodness, and faithfulness to his promises as it was actually the “Lord who gave” Judah into the king’s hand (v. 2). You see, the book of Daniel, like the entire Bible, isn’t about Daniel’s power, goodness, courage, and faithfulness; it is about God’s power, goodness, and faithfulness to rescue his people despite their disobedience and faithlessness (see 2 Kings 20:12-19; Isaiah 39).

Daniel is one of the people taken into exile and commanded to learn and live under the Babylonian king. We see in Daniel what it ought to look like to live in light of who God is what he has promised, despite being surrounded by people of different worldviews, ideologies, and religious views. While many may believe they ought to completely separate from the culture or to be against the culture, God calls Daniel to stay faithful to him and help bring God’s reign to a godless culture.

Jeremiah 29 was written to those who were in captivity in Babylon: “Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens, and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare, you will find your welfare.” (Jeremiah 29:4-7)

Daniel ultimately points to Jesus, who left the very presence of God to enter the brokenness of this world. God sent Jesus into the world not to condemn it, but in order that the world might be saved through him (John 3:17). As God has sent Jesus and as God sent Daniel, God sends us to bring about his kingdom in the world today (John 17:15-18).

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3. Read John 3:16-17. How does Jesus being given by God for the sins of the world bring eternal life? How does receiving eternal life through Jesus shape how one lives in the world?

4. What do we learn about Daniel and his friends in verses 3-8? What would have made it challenging for them to stay faithful to God in the midst of their situation?

In which situations do you find it hardest to remain faithful to Jesus?

5. Read Jeremiah 29:1-14. How does Jeremiah call God's people to live and relate to the culture around them?

What does it look like to live as "exiles" today? (See 1 Peter 1:1)

As you go...

- Discuss where you feel pressure to pollute the purity of your dedication to God. What causes this pressure?
- Talk about what it looks like to live among people who don't believe in God in a way that points them to Jesus and the beauty of life in his kingdom.
- Who do you know who doesn't live under the reign and rule of Jesus that you can begin to intercede for, invest in, and invite to follow Jesus over the next days, weeks, and months?

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Prayer

God, we thank you that you are sovereign, that you are in control and reigning and ruling over all things in this world – from kings and kingdoms to the very details of our lives. We thank you that you are a good God who loves us and works all things for the good of those who love you. We thank you that you can even use the evil and brokenness in this world and in our lives for good and for your purposes.

We pray that we can see you as the hero of the story of Daniel – it is your power, your presence, and your faithfulness that rescues and keeps Daniel and ultimately rescues and keeps us. God, empower us to stay faithful to you and spread your reign throughout the world.

Prayer requests

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Study 2

Read — Daniel 1:8–21

“But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king’s food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself. And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs…” — Daniel 1:8–9

Overview

After being overtaken and taken as captives by Babylon, Daniel and the people of God begin to navigate what it looks like to stay faithful to their God while in exile. The good news we see from the start is that, although they are not in their land, they are with their God. Verses 9 and 17 declare God’s presence, protection, and provision with the simple words, “God gave.”

This passage, and this entire book, reveals to us God’s faithfulness despite his people’s faithlessness (2 Timothy 2:13) as the people of Israel were sent into exile (see Leviticus 26:33, 39 and Deuteronomy 4:27, 28:64). God continually pursues his people, “gives favor and compassion” (v. 9) to them, and uses them to bring flourishing in the world as they trust in him and follow him (vv. 17, 20).

This points us to Jesus – he brought God’s kingdom to bear on this world through his life, death, and resurrection. Jesus, through his faithfulness and obedience, “increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.” (Luke 2:52). Where we are faithless, Jesus was faithful for us and empowers us to live lives of faithfulness and flourishing.

God placed Daniel and his friends in a unique position and place and gave them favor there. They became a blessing to those who had taken them captive and served in a way that caused the society and culture where they were exiles to flourish (v. 20; see also Jeremiah 29:5-7). We can trust that as we obey God, no matter the circumstances he has placed us in, he will give us his presence, protection, and provision and cause his kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven.

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Message notes and application

Write down notes as you listen to the sermon and read the text. What is the main point of the text? What catches your attention, challenges, or confuses you?

Passage Questions

1. Like Daniel, we are part of a kingdom that is not our kingdom. What does this passage show us about engaging the culture while keeping a distinct identity?

2. What is Daniel's role in seeking to follow God in his circumstances? What is God's role?

How does knowing "God gave" instill confidence in us to engage in our communities?

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3. How does our obedience work with God's presence, provision, and protection in our lives?

Where have you experienced God's presence, provision, and protection through your obedience in a challenging circumstance?

4. Read Daniel 1:11-16. How does Daniel use wisdom and knowledge of his particular circumstances to stay true to God? Where do we see God's faithfulness and favor?

5. In what way did God put Daniel and his friends in a unique position to be a blessing to their captors and bring his kingdom to bear on the culture/society where they found themselves?

In what unique positions and places has God placed you? What does it look like to be a blessing and bring God's kingdom to bear where you are?

6. How does this passage point us to Jesus and our need for him?

As you go...

- Discuss God's grace, goodness, and glory in your life as "he gives" despite ways we turn from him.
- Talk about specific areas/spheres you live in and what it looks like to engage those areas yet not compromise your obedience to God.
- How can you be a blessing and bring God's kingdom to bear in your present circumstances?

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Prayer

God, we thank you for your faithfulness even in our faithlessness. God, we thank you for your presence, provision, and protection of us in all of our circumstances. Father, we thank you that “you gave” – we thank you that ultimately “you gave” your one and only Son to take on our sin and bring us eternal life. Help us to follow Jesus, who came and dwelt among us and loved us while we were still sinners, and dwell among and love people who are far from you that they may know you, the one and only true God.

Prayer requests

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Study 3 *Read — Daniel 2:1–23*

“And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever.” — Daniel 2:44

Overview

Chapter 2 opens with the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar “troubled” and unable to sleep over a vivid dream he had. Later we learn that it was a dream about the fall of the Babylonian kingdom – and that the dream would come true. At this point, the king is asking for what seems to be the impossible – he is asking that the wise men explain the meaning of the dream, but with absolutely no description of what the dream was. However impossible the wise men believe the request is, the king is clear that the result of not meeting the request is death for ALL the wise men, including Daniel.

With his life on the line, Daniel responds by boldly going to the king to meet his demands and do the seemingly impossible. But Daniel doesn’t go alone – Daniel gathers his people, and they go to God in prayer and praise (vv. 18–23), trusting that God will be with them and empower them. It is Daniel’s knowledge and trust in God (2:20–21) that gives him the ability to meet the king’s demands (2:28–30).

God reveals to Daniel both the king’s dream and its interpretation, which ultimately reveals the destruction of Babylon as well as other kingdoms. Daniel reveals the promise that a “stone,” which represents God’s eternal kingdom (2:44), will crush these other kingdoms. This stone that will conquer all earthly kingdoms is the cornerstone, Jesus Christ (see Luke 20:17–18), who later comes on the scene with the message for all to “repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand.” Jesus conquers the effects of sin and overcomes evil through his life, death on the cross, and resurrection to reign on the throne today as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Just as Daniel lived in light of God’s presence and provision, so we are to live in light of God’s presence and provision through Jesus Christ. In *The Gospel According to Daniel*, Bryan Chapell expounds, “More of Christ’s rule will cover the earth as the time unfolds, but Christ’s kingdom is already here and its progress has already begun. Despite current hardships and heartaches, the greatest thing possible in all creation has occurred already, Jesus shattered the powers of Satan by taking the penalty for our sins on himself at Calvary. Then our Savior rose in victory over death, showing that he had defeated sin’s power.”

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Message notes and application

Write down notes as you listen to the sermon and read the text. What is the main point of the text? What catches your attention, challenges, or confuses you?

Passage Questions

1. What “troubles” you and causes sleep to “leave you”? (What worries you, weighs on your mind, causes you to be anxious?)
2. What is the king asking of the wise men (vv. 3, 5-6, 9), and what is the result if they don’t comply (vv. 5, 9, 12-13)? How does Daniel respond, and what gives him the confidence to do so (vv. 14-30)?

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3. Daniel is in a dire situation with seemingly no hope (vv. 10-11). How does Daniel's knowledge, trust, and reliance on God show us how to live?

4. God reveals himself to Nebuchadnezzar through a dream and through Daniel (2:27-30). Where and with whom has God placed you, and how can you make his Word known and intelligible to them?

5. Read Daniel 2:31-45 in light of Jesus bringing God's kingdom through his life, death, and resurrection. How does seeing the cross as the act that smashed every other rival kingdom make you more grateful for it and more challenged by it?

6. In Daniel 2, we see Daniel faithfully and humbly serve God by doing his job well and pointing to God's glory when given the chance (vv. 19-23, 28, 37, 44), which results in others acknowledging God (2:47). What does it look like for you to serve God where you are?

As you go...

- Daniel's life was on the line, yet he prayed and then was calm. Dwell on what truths about God you need to know and believe in order to do the same.
- Think about who God is and his provision, faithfulness, and promises in the past, present, and future. Talk about how that shapes your perspective of any hard things you are in the midst of.
- Where has God placed you, and what does it look like to serve God there and point to and praise him when given the opportunity?

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Prayer

Heavenly Father, we come to you with Daniel's prayer – acknowledging your sovereignty and your goodness and trusting that all your good and glorious plans are going to come to fruition.

"Blessed be the name of God forever and ever,
to whom belong wisdom and might.
He changes times and seasons;
he removes kings and sets up kings;
he gives wisdom to the wise
and knowledge to those who have understanding;
he reveals deep and hidden things;
he knows what is in the darkness,
and the light dwells with him.
To you, O God of my fathers,
I give thanks and praise,
for you have given me wisdom and might,
and have now made known to me what we asked of you,
for you have made known to us the king's matter."

–Daniel 2:20-23

Prayer requests

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Study 4 *Read: Daniel 3:1–30*

“...But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.” — Daniel 3:18

Overview

Daniel 3 tells the familiar story of how God saved Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the fiery furnace. The momentary reverence King Nebuchadnezzar displayed for Daniel’s God in Daniel 2 seems to have faded, and he builds an image of gold that all in Babylon are to worship when they hear music play. At sixty cubits tall and six cubits wide (approximately ninety feet tall and nine feet wide), the image is meant to impress; it’s a testament to the king’s power and pride. Any who do not bow and worship are to be thrown into a fiery furnace.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, three Jewish men who now hold prominent positions over the affairs of Babylon and undoubtedly have some enemies, refuse to worship the image. The storybook tellings of these three men can make it seem as though they have superhuman faith and confidence that God will rescue them from danger, but a closer look at their story reveals three men who simply trusted and obeyed. In verse 16, they are given another chance to save their own lives by worshiping the image of gold, and their response is significant. They declare that their God is able to save them, and then in verse 18 continue with, “But if not...”

They don’t know what God is going to do. They know that God is able, and they trust in his goodness and sovereignty even if it means being delivered from the king’s hand through death. As Bryan Chapell states in *The Gospel According to Daniel*, “Biblical faith is not confidence in particular outcomes; it is confidence in a sovereign God. We trust that he knows what we cannot discern, plans what we cannot anticipate, and secures our eternity in ways beyond our fathoming.”

When they chose to obey, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego most likely had no idea how God was about to use them to display his glory. The three men are bound together and thrown into a furnace heated seven times more than its usual temperature – hot enough that it killed the king’s mighty men who delivered Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into the flames. But when King Nebuchadnezzar looks to see what should be their remains, he instead sees four men walking in the fire, completely unharmed. Some believe the fourth man to be an angel of God, and some believe it to be the preincarnate Jesus. No matter whom it was, God was certainly with them. Not a hair was singed, their cloaks were not burned, and they didn’t even smell of smoke.

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Message notes and application

Write down notes as you listen to the sermon and read the text. What is the main point of the text? What catches your attention, challenges, or confuses you?

Passage Questions

1. Can you think of a time in your life when your faith was shaken?

2. Think of a time when you (or someone you know) put faith in certain outcomes you wanted God to bring about rather than in God and his perfect wisdom. What is the danger of building our faith on what we want God to do rather than on who he is?

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3. Read 2 Chronicles 20:1-12. How is Jehoshaphat's faith similar to that of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego?

4. Hebrews 11:6 states that God "rewards those who seek him," but the rest of Hebrews 11 makes it clear that the reward doesn't always look as we want it to look – at least not within our lifetime. How do stories of people of faith from the Bible encourage us to trust in God's sovereignty, no matter the circumstances?

5. Look at the following verses and list some of the attributes of God. How does knowing who God is and his gift of Jesus make it easier to trust and obey?

Jeremiah 10:12

Isaiah 40:13

Romans 11:33

1 John 1:5

Psalms 103:8

Lamentations 3:22

John 3:16

As you go...

- Because of who God is and what Jesus did for us on the cross, we not only have reason to trust and obey – we have somewhere to turn when we don't obey. Ask God to show you where you might be walking in disobedience. Repent and ask God for the strength to walk according to his Word.
- In community group, or with other friends and family, share stories of God's faithfulness. Celebrate how God has helped you along the way.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to show you someone you can encourage this week. Remind them that God is able and he is near.

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Prayer

Heavenly Father, you are good, trustworthy, and able. I know that you work all things for your glory and our good. Help me to trust you even when I don't understand your ways.

Holy Spirit, teach me to walk in obedience. Make me alert to your voice and your stirring.

Lord, crush the idols in my life. Forgive me for looking to lesser things for satisfaction and for seeking my own comfort and safety instead of seeking your guidance and stepping out in faith. Give me a willing heart as I walk in the steps you have laid out for me.

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Study 5

Read: Daniel 4:1–37

“Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble.” — Daniel 4:27

Overview

In Daniel 4, King Nebuchadnezzar – the same king who forced all in his kingdom to worship idols and would send even the wisest men to their deaths on a whim – testifies to what God has done for him. Though it may at first seem like this transformation is a direct result of witnessing Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego’s miraculous rescue, it quickly becomes clear that something else has happened in Nebuchadnezzar’s life. The miracles he witnessed in the past left him in awe but didn’t change his heart. God, in his wisdom, knew that it would take something more personal to bring Nebuchadnezzar to a place where he could really see God for who he was. But first, God gave Nebuchadnezzar a dream of warning, which is where Daniel returns to the scene.

Though it’s unlikely that they spent large amounts of time together on a day-to-day basis, Daniel was a constant in Nebuchadnezzar’s life. Daniel was ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over the wise men of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar believed Daniel to have the spirit of the holy gods, and he knew he could turn to Daniel for interpretation. And as Daniel faithfully answers Nebuchadnezzar’s call and listens to his dream, it’s apparent that Daniel cares. He’s visibly shaken by the interpretation, because it looks like destruction for the powerful king. As a faithful servant, Daniel offers the king counsel and encourages him to practice righteousness and be spared what is to come, but Daniel is unable to control the king’s behavior.

Through the events of Daniel 4, we learn that God is the one in charge and that we cannot gain what he gives. For twelve months, Nebuchadnezzar tried to change his ways, but his pride came bubbling back to the surface one day as he surveyed his kingdom and asked, “Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?” As the words were still in the king’s mouth, a voice from heaven reminded Nebuchadnezzar of the previous warning, and all that the king built was taken away.

God’s mercy doesn’t always look how we want or expect it to look. Nebuchadnezzar most likely would not have chosen to spend seven lengths of time living among animals and eating grass like an ox, but it ended up saving his life. Even the threat of losing everything and suffering humiliation wasn’t enough to change Nebuchadnezzar – he had to go through it. God, in his grace and infinite wisdom, allowed him to go through it. And when he came back to his senses, Nebuchadnezzar didn’t curse God for humiliating him and ruining the power and reputation he had worked so hard to build; he praised God for being right and just and humbling those who walk in pride.

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Message notes and application

Write down notes as you listen to the sermon and read the text. What is the main point of the text? What catches your attention, challenges, or confuses you?

Passage Questions

1. Society celebrates "self-made" success. In what areas do you face temptation to take full credit and expect celebration for your deeds or accomplishments?

2. Read Isaiah 64:6. When relying on our own strength and righteousness, what are our righteous deeds like to God? Why was it impossible for Nebuchadnezzar to successfully follow Daniel's counsel and practice righteousness before being humbled? How does this point us to the gospel of Jesus?

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3. Read Matthew 20:1-16 in light of the stories of both Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar. How is God's mercy and justice different from our human understanding of justice?

4. How can the way in which Daniel lived out his faith encourage you and shape the way you live? Give specific examples of Daniel's actions, character, and attitude.

5. God's punishment and mercy for King Nebuchadnezzar was personal. He knew what it would take to get Nebuchadnezzar's attention. When have you seen God work in a personal way?

As you go...

- Take some time to read and meditate on Psalm 139, celebrating the fact that our mighty God understands you completely, loves you more than you can comprehend, and knows how to get your attention.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to bring to mind someone who seems beyond saving. In your community group, or with other friends and family, pray that God will do a dramatic work in this person's life and that they would know him.
- Look for ways to encourage and pour into the life of someone who is new to faith in Christ or seeking to grow in their faith. Trust that God has equipped you with all you need.

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Prayer

Lord, you are mighty to save. No one is beyond your reach. Increase my faith as I pray for those you have put in my life who need you.

As Nebuchadnezzar prayed, "How great are your signs, how mighty your wonders! Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures from generation to generation. All your works are right and your ways are just; and those who walk in pride you are able to humble."

I love you, Lord, and I trust you. Help me to faithfully follow you. Use my life to bring glory to your name.

Prayer requests

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Study 6

Read: Daniel 5:1–31

“Immediately the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace, opposite the lampstand. And the king saw the hand as it wrote.” — Daniel 5:5

Overview

After Nebuchadnezzar's dramatic conversion, it would be reasonable to think that a change may have happened in Babylon. But years after King Nebuchadnezzar's death, the Babylonians are still worshipping false gods and celebrating power and extravagance. While King Nebuchadnezzar's story tells of God's amazing mercy toward those who in humility turn to him, King Belshazzar's story demonstrates God's judgment on the unrepentant.

Though aware that the Persian army was seeking to overtake Babylon, King Belshazzar thought his kingdom was secure and held a great feast in honor of his gods. At the king's command, the gold and silver vessels that had been taken from the temple in Jerusalem were brought out, and the king and his company drank wine from them while praising gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone. And then the warning came. Fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the wall.

When no one could read or interpret the words, the queen remembered Daniel, now an old man, and how God had given him wisdom and understanding to interpret dreams in the past. Again serving faithfully, Daniel entered and spoke to the king. He testified to what God had done in King Nebuchadnezzar's life, condemned King Belshazzar's pride, idol worship, and mockery of God, and gave him the interpretation of the inscription on the wall. It was a warning from God: The days of the kingdom were numbered, and it would soon be divided and given over to the Medes and Persians. All of Belshazzar's perceived might was not enough to save his kingdom, and his end would come that very night.

Belshazzar knew about God, but he lived an unrepentant life. He used the things of God for his own purposes and amusement. In the same way, we can't recognize that Jesus died for us but then treat his grace as Belshazzar treated the temple vessels. When we take notice of the risen Savior but then continue in unrepentant greed, anger, lust, and pride, we are making a mockery of God and misunderstanding his grace.

In *The Gospel According to Daniel*, Bryan Chapell points out that “the cross stands both as God's ultimate warning of the consequences of sin and as the greatest expression of his love for sinners. If God did not love, he would not so graciously warn.” God is just, and his anger is righteous. If we turn to him in humility, he is faithful to save, but he does not promise protection for those who walk in defiance and ignore the warning he has given in love.

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Write down notes as you listen to the sermon and read the text. What is the main point of the text? What catches your attention, challenges, or confuses you?

Passage Questions

1. What are some modern-day examples of how people behave like Belshazzar, disregarding God and acting as though their kingdom is too great to fall?

2. Where do you find yourself putting faith in the walls you've built to protect yourself?

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3. Read the following verses. It's often easier to think about God's love and grace than to think about his justice and wrath. Why is it beneficial to understand both the easy and challenging attributes of God?

Galatians 6:7

Romans 1:8

Ecclesiastes 12:14

4. Read Jeremiah 17:5-13. In what ways does this scripture both encourage us to trust and rest in the Lord and emphasize the weight and seriousness of sin?

5. What questions do you have about God's wrath and judgment? Look for scripture to help you understand God's sovereignty and justice. Discuss your questions and scripture in Community Group to help one another have a fuller understanding of God.

As you go...

- Read Matthew 27:27-54. Thank Jesus for his work on the cross and for the gift of repentance. Thank him for forgiving you and keeping no records of wrongs.
- If there is an area of your life where you feel like you're abusing God's grace by sinning again and again, seek out another believer you can confess to. Pray together that God will give you the strength to repent and walk in joyful obedience. Commit to praying for one another.
- Spend time praying and asking God about the parts of his character you may not understand. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you and teach you as you study the Word and learn more about God.

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Heavenly Father, you are perfectly just. Your wisdom is beyond my understanding, and I trust your ways. Be glorified in my life, and protect me from selfish pride. I don't want to live in a way that abuses your grace. Help me to understand the weight of my sin and the depth of your compassion.

Jesus, thank you for paying the price for my pride, greed, anger, and envy. Holy Spirit, lead me in the way everlasting. Keep me in your Word, and give me a greater sense of urgency as I share your truth.

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Study 7 *Daniel 6:1–28*

“When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously” — Daniel 6:10

Overview

While Daniel is often remembered by the great events in his life, like being delivered from a lion’s den, a deeper inspection of Daniel’s daily life and practices reveals why God was able to entrust Daniel with such an amazing life (Luke 16:10).

Many of us would have thrown in the towel if our life perpetually careened into the conditions and situations Daniel faced. But what looked out of control to outsiders was under the control of a sovereign God who is able to make all things work together for good for those who love him (Romans 8:28). It is often difficult for us to look at a life that has been filled with chaos, disappointment, and pain and imagine how God can create good out of it. But this is precisely what we see over and over again in the historical accounts of God’s people, and it is exactly what we see in the life of Daniel.

We are told in Daniel 6:3 that “Daniel became distinguished above all other high officials and satraps because an excellent spirit was in him.” God distinguishes and promotes his people through developing an excellent spirit in them. God’s method is to use all things that occur in our lives (good and bad) as the raw material necessary to shape something good in our lives (Jeremiah 18:5–6) – even being thrown to lions. When our lives may look out of control, God is never out of control and is using everything we face in life as the building materials to create an excellent spirit in us.

Daniel’s enemies sought to find some grounds to incriminate him but could find nothing. Their only hope was to attack him for his faith. Even in doing this, they ended up destroying themselves. In the middle of life’s challenges, Daniel did what he always did: He got “down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously” (Daniel 6:10). Daniel kept himself humbled before God, sought God in prayer, gave thanks for what God would do in his life, and never changed this method regardless of the culture, the pressure, or the circumstances that faced him. And God delivered him.

Daniel points us to the ultimate deliverer, Jesus Christ, whose faithfulness and obedience to the Father in the midst of chaos and pain delivered his people from ultimate death and brought eternal life.

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Message notes and application

Write down notes as you listen to the sermon and read the text. What is the main point of the text? What catches your attention, challenges, or confuses you?

Passage Questions

1. God promises continually in scripture that he will work good from horrible situations (Romans 8:28; Genesis 50:20). In light of this, why do you think we often doubt God's goodness in the face of hardship and trials in life?

2. Daniel's life was often one of setbacks, trials, and immense pressure and challenges. What qualities do you see in Daniel's life that you believe make his life notable and worthy to be examined?

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3. When faced with almost certain death in a lion's den, Daniel's first action was to get down on his knees. This was a physical demonstration of the true nature of humility in his heart (see also Daniel 10:12). Why do you think it is important that we always humble ourselves before God, especially in life's most difficult circumstances? (James 4:7, 10)

4. Daniel humbled himself and prayed. What do you think happens when we pray? (Jeremiah 33:3; James 5:16). Scripture teaches us to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Based on scripture's teaching on the power of prayer and the instruction to keep praying, why do you think prayer is often seen as a last resort rather than a beginning point in our lives?

5. In this passage, what do we learn about who God is and what he does? How does it point us to the ultimate deliverance we have through Jesus?

6. Daniel continued to follow God "as he had done previously." Why should difficult situations in our lives actually push us to draw closer to God rather than to abandon our relationship with God? Why do you think Daniel valued his relationship with God above the value of his own life?

As you go...

- This week look at your life through the lens of knowing that God is in complete control of your life and that, regardless of what the circumstances may look like today, God has already given you the victory.
- Look for at least one opportunity this week to share what you are learning about prayer in your relationship with Jesus.
- Spend some time in prayer this week – praying with the knowledge that God hears you, knows what you need, and is able and willing to meet your need.

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Prayer

Great and mighty Father, our Sovereign Lord, I humble myself before you today because I know that I can do nothing—but you can do everything. I know that you alone are God and that you are able to do all things well. I know that you love me and that you have the power to work any circumstance for my good.

I trust you completely with my life, regardless of the circumstances that face me today. I have no hope but you. You are my light and my salvation. You are my shield and my strong tower. I run to you and know that you will save me. I praise you for your goodness, I thank you for your sufficiency in my life. I thank you for making yourself available to me. I thank you for giving me wisdom and insight to know that you are God and that all things must bow beneath your sovereign will.

I call to you today, God, knowing that you hear me and that you will answer me.

Prayer requests

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Study 8 *Daniel 7:1–28*

And behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. — Daniel 7:12–14

Overview

There has been great discussion of Daniel’s prophecies, and different interpretations can be set forth as to the timing of these prophecies and their various meanings. While the study of Biblical prophecy is a worthwhile endeavor and something that should be undertaken, it is important that, in the study of Daniel’s Biblical prophecy, we don’t lose sight of some essential themes:

Sovereignty: God sits on the throne of his sovereignty, and all other creatures must stand before him and serve him. (Daniel 7:9–10)

Submission: Regardless of how great an evil or injustice may look for a time, it will ultimately be stripped of its power and destroyed beneath the throne of God’s dominion. (Daniel 7:11–12)

Superiority: There is one “like a son of man” who we know is JESUS, the living Word of God, to whom is given a kingdom of all authority over all people, nations, and languages. (Daniel 7:13–14)

While there may be debate among Christians over various interpretations, one thing that cannot be debated is that God is God alone, God is a just God, and, through Jesus Christ, God exercises his dominion over all things. When we understand this truth about God, prophecy becomes less about time and events and more about the sheer awesomeness of our Mighty God who sits in unchallenged authority over all things.

What does this mean to me? It means that, regardless what evil and injustice is unleashed in the world and regardless of what challenges may face me, God has complete power and dominion over all of these things, and they must submit to him. Not only that, but God has placed all of these things under the feet of Jesus and his body (the Church). The apostle Paul says it this way, “what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fill all in all” (Ephesians 1:18–23).

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Message notes and application

Write down notes as you listen to the sermon and read the text. What is the main point of the text? What catches your attention, challenges, or confuses you?

Passage Questions

1. When you consider the brutality of human history and its kingdoms, why do you think it is important to know that God is not disconnected from humanity but is willing and able to step in and correct it rather than letting humanity's evil run rampant without interruption? What confidence does this give you about God's willingness to intervene in the events of your own life?

2. In Daniel 7:13-14, it states that Jesus has been given "dominion" over all things. Why do you think it is important to know that Jesus has unchallenged authority and power over your life? What difference do you think you would see in your life if you willingly submitted to his authority in all areas of your life?

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3. In Daniel 7:15-18, some of Daniel's vision is explained and concludes with stating that "the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever." Knowing that God's kingdom is what we have been given as believers in Jesus (Matthew 16:19; Luke 10:18-20), why do you think we are often fear-filled rather than faith-filled when we look at the world and the circumstances around us?

4. In Daniel 7:19-22, Daniel says that this one "seemed greater" and warred against God's people but ultimately also had to submit to God and God's judgment. How should this affect you in your thinking about your daily life and the challenges you face? Have you ever had a time in your life where certain things seemed greater than what they really were? Explain.

5. Read Daniel 7:23-28. Based on the fact that God will always be faithful to his people, do you ever have trouble trusting God for things in your life? What do you think causes us to distrust God even though he has proven himself trustworthy?

As you go...

- This week, look at all the events that are going on in the world today. Take note of what troubles you or concerns you and bring these things to God in prayer.
- Look for at least one opportunity this week to share with someone what God can do in the midst of a broken situation. Describe to them how God has given you victory in a specific area of your life.
- Spend some time in prayer this week, praying about the needs of the world and over the various nations and leaders of the world. Pray that God's justice may be exalted in the world—starting with your own life.

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Prayer

Mighty God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we are awed by your amazing presence that fills the whole earth with your glory. We are humbled to know that you love us and that you are constantly working on our behalf to restore justice in the earth, even as we so often turn our hearts away from you.

We repent of ever thinking that anything is greater than you, and we know that all things in this world and all things in our lives must humble themselves before your great glory. For you alone are God. You alone are our Savior. You alone can do all things right. You alone deserve our worship. You alone have all dominion and authority in our lives through the powerful death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We submit ourselves to you. We submit our ways to you. We submit our thoughts to you.

Have your way, O God, in every area of my life. Forgive us for every point of rebellion where we have mistakenly believed that we were in control. We don't want control—we want you! Lead us by your Spirit, and enlighten us by your Word. We are lost without you. You are our God!

Prayer requests

DANIEL

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Study 9 *Daniel 8:1–27*

“By his cunning he shall make deceit prosper under his hand, and in his own mind he shall become great. Without warning he shall destroy many. And he shall even rise up against the Prince of princes, and he shall be broken — but by no human hand.” — Daniel 8:25

Overview

Much of the interpretation of Daniel’s vision found in this passage is explained relating to coming kingdoms which will overthrow the Achaemenid (first Persian) empire. God was showing him the subsequent empires of Alexander the Great, the four distinct Hellenistic kingdoms of Macedonia, Syria, Pergamum, and Egypt, and specifically the treacherous tyranny of the Syria-Seleucid emperor Antiochus IV Epiphanes. It is this horrible emperor, whose own peers called a “mad man,” that Daniel refers to in the final verses of this passage. The Jewish books of the Maccabees make his insane tyranny visible by describing his ruthless butchering of Jewish men, women, and children, his order that Zeus alone be worshiped as God, and finally the destruction of Jerusalem in 168 BC. Interestingly, today Antiochus is long gone and rarely remembered, while God is still Lord and God; the Jewish people are still in existence and even still living in Jerusalem, and Zeus is nothing more than a mythological fable. We learn much from this passage from Daniel because we see that, regardless how powerful a person or a situation may seem in a moment of time, their power wanes in the face of the Almighty God. This is true in prophetic history, and it is true in our own lives.

We learn from the eighth chapter of Daniel: (1) Antiochus was deemed as “mighty,” but God is Almighty; (2) Antiochus worked from a place of fearful destruction, but God works from a place of faithful construction; (3) Antiochus was great “in his own mind,” but God is great in reality; (4) Antiochus rose up against God, but he was “broken” by God.

While this is true of Antiochus, it is also true in our own lives. (1) When we deem something “mighty,” we must remember that God is Almighty over every person, situation, and thing we face (Deuteronomy 10:17); (2) When we are faced with destruction and fear, we believe in the finished work of Jesus and remember that fear is a bondage from which God has set us free (Romans 8:14–15); (3) When we are tempted to think we are great, we must remember that we are nothing without Christ (Romans 12:3); (4) When we are tempted to rise up in arrogance and do things out of selfish ambition, we must remember that following our own path leads to destruction—while following God’s path leads to life (Matthew 7:13–14). We learn from this prophecy of Daniel that God’s Word is absolutely true and that what God proclaims will most certainly come to pass – as history demonstrates this fact. Whatever the future may bring, we don’t cower in fear; we stand firm knowing that God is greater than whatever we face and that we have already overcome everything in Jesus Christ.

DANIEL

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Message notes and application

Write down notes as you listen to the sermon and read the text. What is the main point of the text? What catches your attention, challenges, or confuses you?

Passage Questions

1. In Daniel's prophecy he continually refers to various "horns." In the culture of Daniel's time, the horn of an animal symbolized its strength. In Psalm 18:2 David uses "horn" in this same sense when he says, "The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold." What do you believe is the strength of your salvation? Why do you think knowing this strength is essential when facing adversity in life?

2. We learned from Daniel's prophetic vision that, even though we are God's people, there will be times we will come under attack and the pressure can be intense. Read Psalm 20:6-8. Do you think it makes a difference where you place your trust? What is typically the result when you trust something that is untrustworthy?

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3. Daniel's prophecy makes clear that governments, rulers, and authorities in our life will rise and fall, often without notice. Knowing this, how should we view circumstances in our jobs, our government, or other places of authority where we see things we don't agree with? (1 Timothy 2:1-4).

4. In the history of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, we find a man who clawed his way to the top through deceit, murder, and ruthless treatment of other people for his own personal gain. In Proverbs 14:12 it states, "there is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death." Why do you think it is important to let God direct our promotion rather than us trying to promote ourselves? What does it mean to you to let God promote you?

5. At the end of our passage, it states that Antiochus "shall be broken – but by no human hand." This demonstrates that there will be times in life when our own strength cannot deliver the victory, but only God can bring it about – without any intervention by us. Read Zechariah 4:6. Can you define a time in your life when something would not have been done unless God did it? What do you think happens to us when we try and take on a God-sized job as our own? (e.g. think about this in context with trying to change another person).

As you go...

- This week, take an honest look at your life and ask God to reveal any arrogance that would be destructive to yourself and others.
- Look for at least one opportunity this week to serve someone else as Christ has served you in love.
- Spend some time in prayer this week praying for everyone in authority in your life and asking God to work his will and to draw them closer to God.

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Prayer

Holy God, creator of heaven and earth, I humbly bow before you and ask for your wisdom as I face another day. I know that you are the Most High God and you are above all things and that you guide your people into right paths. Open my ears that I may hear your voice. Open my eyes that I may learn from your Word. Change my heart to be submissive to your will and your way.

I repent for every time I have exalted myself before you and have thought arrogantly of myself and destructively of others. Change me, O Lord, to be like you—to know you and to love as you do. May I not fret over the cares of this world, but may I trust you with my life and all that I am – believing that you love me and that you will prosper me as you see fit.

I trust you, Lord. I know that you alone are God, and I humble myself to serve you with all of my life. I trust you with my past, my present, and my future, knowing that you are a good God and worthy to be trusted. Guide me now I pray.

Prayer requests

DANIEL

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Study 10

Read: Daniel 9:1–19

“Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.” —Daniel 9:3

Overview

In 1946, the United States was a year removed from the costliest war of the 20th century, less than a decade removed from the Great Depression, and still home to veterans of the American Civil War. The United Nations held its first meeting in Long Island. It's a Wonderful Life, featuring James Stewart and Donna Reed, was released in New York. Tide laundry detergent, Benadryl, Magic 8-Ball, and the Almond Joy bar were all introduced. And Presidents Clinton and Bush (42 and 43, respectively) were born.

Since then a host of countries have come into existence (Nigeria, Jamaica, Kazakhstan, et al) and some have gone away (Czechoslovakia and the USSR). Three different countries have launched manned spacecraft. The hard disk drive was invented. And Post-It notes were first introduced...and lest we forget the Segway, credit cards, the defibrillator, or hairspray. A LOT can happen in 70 years.

So when Daniel picks up Jeremiah 25 and reads that the 70-year captivity of Israel was about to end, we shouldn't imagine that he did so dismissively. After all, he was most likely around the age of 15 when he was deported to Babylon with the finest of Israel's youth and had spent the vast majority of his life in captivity. And because he was just a young man, he could remember the day that he left. He could remember what home looked like, what it smelled like, where he would go first when he got to go back. He could remember all of the family members and friends who had died in Babylon, away from their ancestral homeland and the burial grounds they thought they would use. He could remember 70 years of ill-treatment, 70 years of living under someone else's boot, 70 years of disconnect. And now, Israel's punishment was coming to an end.

But instead of shaking his fist at God saying, “We've paid you what we owe, now SEND US HOME!” or packing up all his things into a U-Haul, he prays. He prays not for a speedy delivery, but for forgiveness. He prays not for the ruin of his enemy, but for the hearts of his people to be opened. He prays that, through all that is about to happen, God's name and his glory would fill the earth

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Message notes and application

Write down notes as you listen to the sermon and read the text. What is the main point of the text? What catches your attention, challenges, or confuses you?

Passage Questions

1. Read through Daniel's prayer in verses 3-19. What was the basis of the nation's guilt? What are the specific things Daniel mentions? Collectively, what do they point toward? (See also Deuteronomy 29)

2. Throughout his prayer, Daniel goes back and forth between the nation's sinful acts and God's holiness. In *The Gospel According to Daniel*, author Bryan Chapell put it this way, "Apprehension of the true holiness of God always results in the acknowledgment of our unholiness." What are some things Daniel lists that point toward God's holiness? How does this act compare to Isaiah's encounter in Isaiah 6?

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3. After having looked at the sins of the nation and the holiness of God, Daniel's prayer of petition comes down to two basic requests. He prays for the good of the people (ie. - mercy for the nation) and the glory of God (ie. - for the sake of his own name on the earth). What are some things you've prayed for recently? How might these two categories shape the way you prayed for those things, or how you might pray in the future?

4. It would be easy to assume, after reading the narrative portions of this book, that Daniel lived an upright life. And yet, he unequivocally includes himself in the corporate confessions laid out in his prayer. At the same time, he certainly didn't live through all of the years of wickedness (hundreds of years) that led up to the exile. Why then does he presume to take responsibility to confess those sins? Should we follow that kind of pattern when we pray?

5. "When we truly perceive our responsibility to bear and confess the sins of others, then cynicism, sarcasm, and ridicule die in the church" (Chapell, p. 161). What are some ways we, as a corporate body, can assume and take responsibility to bear and confess the sins of others (as part of a church, a community, a nation)?

As you go...

- Confess who God is and what he has done for you and your community.
- Confess your own sins as well as the sins of your community in light of who God is.
- Petition the mercies of God for your sake and the sake of your community, for the glory of God.

DANIEL

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Prayer

"Work in me more profound and abiding repentance; Give me the fullness of godly grief, that trembles and fears, yet ever trust and loves, which is ever powerful, and ever confident; Grant through the tears of repentance I may see more clearly the brightness and glories of the saving cross."

- From The Valley of Vision

Prayer requests

DANIEL

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Study 11

Read: Daniel 9:20–27

“Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place.” – Daniel 9:24

Overview

When we think of answered prayer, oftentimes we do so through the way circumstances unfold around us. We pray earnestly for a new job, or new ministry opportunity, or the health of a loved one. We lay our petitions before God, and we wait. And then as the days, or weeks, or moments pass, we see how those circumstances unfold. We don't typically wait by the mailbox or expect the Lord to answer our prayers with a typed-up message. And yet there are a few places in scripture where we see the Lord's message brought to his people, or an individual, in an astounding and altogether peculiar way.

In Genesis 22, an angel of the Lord tells Abraham to pull back the knife and spare his son. In Joshua chapter 5, the Commander of the Army of the Lord meets Joshua the night before the confrontation with Jericho and reminds him who their real leader was. In Luke chapter 1, an angel of the Lord comes to Zechariah to foretell the birth of his son, John the Baptist. Likewise, the angel Gabriel comes to Mary to announce the coming of the Messiah and her role in his birth. In Luke chapter 2, the angel of the Lord returns after the birth of Jesus to announce his arrival to lowly shepherds, out in their fields tending their sheep.

Daniel 9 tells of one of these moments when God speaks through a messenger in a very direct way. As we saw last week, Daniel had been reading Jeremiah 25 when he realizes that the Babylonian Captivity his people had endured for some 70 years was about to be over. They would be going home. But instead of asking for help in preparing his things for departure, he asks the Lord to prepare the hearts of his people, to forgive them, and to restore their homeland.

Daniel's prayer is recorded in verses 3–19, with the Lord's response coming in verses 20–27. What is given as a response, while generally meant to encourage and enliven the captive people of Israel, has been the cause of a good bit of confusion for biblical scholars through the years. Unfortunately (or fortunately) the scope of this study does not allow an in-depth look at all the ink that has been spilt attempting to unlock the particular meanings behind the nuances of individual words and numbers. What we do hope is that you, like captive Israel, will find yourself encouraged to serve a God who answers prayer, and mightily at that.

DANIEL

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Message notes and application

Write down notes as you listen to the sermon and read the text. What is the main point of the text? What catches your attention, challenges, or confuses you?

Passage Questions

1. As a reminder, read through the record of Daniel's prayer in chapter 9, verses 3-19. If you were Daniel, how would you expect the Lord to answer this prayer? What would you hope he would do?

2. Instead of answering Daniel's prayer circumstantially at this point, God sends a messenger, Gabriel. What are some of the benefits from receiving an answer to prayer in this way? What are the drawbacks? Would you rather have a better understanding of the situation, or a change in the circumstances?

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3. In verses 22 and 23, Gabriel makes clear the reasons Daniel has received his reply in the form of a vision and why it came so quickly. He is greatly loved. What have we seen in this chapter that would indicate a basis for that kind of regard? How does that encourage you as you pray?

4. Read through Daniel 9:24 and write down all that the Lord would do on behalf of his people and his city. How would this affect a people anticipating political, or some kind of military, intervention?

5. During the course of his prayer, Daniel specifically prays for the sanctuary, which had become desolate (v. 17). And while the vision in verses 24–27 points to restoration, we see the sanctuary eventually made desolate again. How does this compare to John’s vision in Revelation 21:22–27? How might that difference be encouraging for us today?

As you go...

- Spend some time thinking through and writing down all of the times you earnestly prayed for the Lord to intervene in a situation this past year. Give thanks and praise to God for those answered prayers.
- Confess the times when you doubted his goodness in your life, when you were uncertain whether his will would be done or you feared his will was not at all what you hoped for.
- Petition the Lord, again, to work on your behalf, on behalf of the people in your community, and on behalf of the nation.

DANIEL

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Prayer

God of heaven and earth, you hold all things together by the work of your good hands. Nothing good or ill happens in this world without you knowing it or ordaining that it should happen. Teach me to trust you more. Teach me to rest in your hand. Teach me to walk as if these things are true.

Prayer requests

DANIEL

Thriving in turbulent times

Study 12

Read: Daniel 10:1–21

“And he said, “O man greatly loved, fear not, peace be with you; be strong and of good courage.” And as he spoke to me, I was strengthened and said, “Let my lord speak, for you have strengthened me.”

–Daniel 9:19

Overview

Things don't always turn out the way we'd hoped for. Sometimes the car dies, and the mechanic tells you the “fix” will cost more than the value of the car itself. Sometimes the job you'd hoped for goes to another candidate. Sometimes you don't get to go home for Christmas. Anyone who tells you otherwise is probably trying to sell you something.

And while the Bible is full of stories where God's people find themselves on the other side of insurmountable odds (e.g. - the Exodus), we shouldn't forget the times they didn't. Moses led the Israelites in the wilderness some 40 years before being taken to the top of Mount Nebo where God told him he wasn't going into the Promised Land. Jeremiah preached for decades only to watch the unrepentant people of Judah taken into exile. John the Baptist boldly proclaimed the coming of the Messiah, spent his last days in a prison, and lost his head at the whim of a lesser king. At some point, each of them must have realized, “Hmmm, this does not look like it's going to turn out the way I thought it would...”

Then we turn to Daniel chapter 10. He's two years removed from the proclamation by King Cyrus that the Israelites can return home and the temple can be rebuilt. But instead of seeing Daniel amongst his people, enjoying their return and seeing the temple again with his own eyes, he's still in Babylon, standing on the banks of the Tigris River. He's given no indication of returning to Jerusalem after the decree. And as far as we know, he never did. Like Moses, God used him to prepare his people for great things, only to then have him sit back and watch as they went on without him.

Much had happened between Daniel's prayer in chapter 9 and the vision in chapter 10. Whatever encouragement Daniel felt from the hope of returning to Jerusalem had passed, and he was feeling rather alone, mourning in Babylon during the Passover, away from those who had returned. And to make matters worse, the rebuilding of the temple had stalled (see Ezra 3-4). It's here, at a time of great joy followed by great distress, that God sent yet another vision to Daniel – one that would shape the course of human history.

DANIEL

Thriving in turbulent times

Message notes and application

Write down notes as you listen to the sermon and read the text. What is the main point of the text? What catches your attention, challenges, or confuses you?

Passage Questions

1. Recount for the group the last time you earnestly prayed for something to happen, trusted in the Lord completely, and found the situation simply not turning out the way you thought it would. How did you handle the situation?

2. Read through Daniel 10:4-6 and draw some comparisons between it and both Acts 9 and Revelation 1:12-15. How are these comparisons helpful in understanding all that Daniel was experiencing in this vision?

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3. In Daniel 10:10, we see the first of three times the “man clothed in linen” (ESV) touched Daniel. What assurances and comforts came with this act in verses 10–14?

4. We see the second touch of the messenger in verse 16, this time on Daniel’s lips. What was the difference before and after for Daniel? Why would this be significant for a prophet (see Isaiah 6:1–8)? What can we learn from Daniel’s verbal response?

5. The third and final touch comes in verse 18. This touch had the opposite effect of the first. Instead of being weakened, Daniel is strengthened. What is fundamentally different between the two? (See John 20:19–23)

As you go...

- Be reminded of those times when the Lord’s presence was very real and full in your life. Perhaps, write down (or re-read, if you journal) all you learned and how you grew during that time.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to search your heart so that you might clearly know anything you desire to have more than Jesus, whether that comes by way of material things, relational status, certain comforts, or anything else that might pull at your heart.
- Read through and meditate on Psalm 24.

DANIEL

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Prayer

"Majesty unspeakable, my soul desires to behold Thee. I cry to Thee from the dust. Yet when I inquire after Thy name it is secret. Thou art hidden in the light which no man can approach unto. What Thou art cannot be thought or uttered, for Thy glory is ineffable.

"Still, prophet and psalmist, apostle and saint have encouraged me to believe that I may in some measure know Thee. Therefore, I pray, whatever of Thyself Thou hast been pleased to disclose, help me to search out as treasure more precious than rubies or the merchandise of fine gold: for with Thee shall I live when the stars of the twilight are no more and the heavens have vanished away and only Thou remainest. Amen."

– A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*

Prayer requests

DANIEL

Thriving in turbulent times

Study 13

Read: Daniel 11:1-45

“And as for me, in the first year of Darius the Mede, I stood up to confirm and strengthen him.”

—Daniel 11:1

Overview

The final three chapters of Daniel lay out a massive vision that would begin in the prophet's own day and extend far into the future. Beginning in chapter 11, the vision is revealed, and it is a dark one for God's chosen people. Daniel's nation is caught in between the struggle of two great kingdoms, referred to as the kings of north and south. These were the kingdoms of Egypt, which the chapter calls “south,” and Syria, which is called the “north.” The people of Israel and the city of Jerusalem itself were caught in the disputed territory between these two kingdoms, and this had devastating effects for God's people who sometimes joined one side or the other (v. 14).

The vision is broken down into three parts: War between north and south (11:2-20), The Contemtable Ruler (21-35), and the King who exalts himself (36-44).

The first twenty verses describe in intimate detail the affairs and tactics of these two kingdoms as they struggled to conquer each other without success. The detail is astounding when we consider that it was written more than 200 years before these events took place, between 320 and 180 BC. As writer Bryan Chapell puts it, “The details are so specific that critics...presume that this ‘prophecy’ must have been written after the fact” and the authorship falsified.

Like in Daniel 8, the second part of the vision concerns a man that verse 21 refers to as the “contemtable ruler.” History would know him as Antiochus IV Epiphanes, a king of Syria during this era. Antiochus saw Israel as an enemy and sought to wipe the nation out by killing its people (including circumcised infants) and profaning the Jewish temple by sacrificing a pig on the holy altar.

The actions of this “contemtable” ruler are amplified in the third section, to beyond the actions of a simple, cruel ruler. Many scholars see the man in the final section of the vision as the epitome of evil: the anti-Christ. Thus a significant portion of Daniel 11 is spent casting a vision of evil so powerful that it will haunt the Jewish people for centuries. We have therefore arrived at the key question: Why? What would God paint such a vision for Daniel, who was surely repulsed at what he saw? Chapell asks and answers this question: “Why does God reveal these things to Daniel and to us? It helps to know that God knows.” It helps to know that, even if the way forward for us is dark, we know that our God is fully aware and in control. It was in the midst of this great darkness, as Isaiah 9 refers to it, that our Lord entered this world to bring light and offer hope. This message for Daniel and for us is clear: Even in darkness, trust the light of our Lord, and he will bring you through.

DANIEL

Thriving in turbulent times

Message notes and application

Write down notes as you listen to the sermon and read the text. What is the main point of the text? What catches your attention, challenges, or confuses you?

Passage Questions

1. In the midst of trials or difficult times, Chapell writes, "It helps to know that God knows." What does this mean to you? How does God's knowledge provide assurance along difficult pathways?

2. The detail of the vision would seem to suggest God told Daniel clear descriptions of events that would not occur for hundreds of years, including the reign and aftermath of Alexander the Great (the mighty king in 11:3). Are you skeptical about this assessment? What is the danger in agreeing with the skeptical statement, "this must have been forged after the fact"?

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3. During his final hours on earth, Jesus entered the great darkness of the Garden of Gethsemane and came out ready to face his trial as his Father intended. How can we face the darkness and trials that God gives to us and remain faithful in the midst of difficulty?

4. How might the Jewish readers of Daniel in the centuries after his death have used the words of this vision to remain strong no matter the circumstances? How should this vision provide assurance for us today as Christians?

5. Jesus quoted the words of Daniel 11 when describing how the Jewish temple would be destroyed in his day (Matthew 24:15-28). This was centuries after its destruction, centuries after Daniel, but before the time of Christ. Why do you think Jesus used this imagery? Do you think that he felt there was more than one way to correctly interpret Daniel 11? Why or why not?

As you go...

- The vision of this chapter shows that God is in control of the future. How will the assurance that God goes before and beyond all of the events of your life change the way that you think about him this week?
- Where are you experiencing darkness in your life? Talk with one another about an attribute of God that brings comfort.
- Talk about how knowing Jesus experienced darkness brings comfort, and go to him with the areas where you are experiencing darkness.

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Prayer

God, we thank you that you are reigning and ruling over all kingdoms as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. God, we live in a world that rejected you and sought our own power and ways. This has led to destruction and devastation since our first family, Adam and Eve. God, thank you that you know the wickedness in this world and in us, but you didn't leave us in it. Thank you for entering in and taking it upon yourself. Thank you for the hope we have in the midst of our pain and suffering. Thank you for Jesus, who took on darkness for us and promises to return to set all things right.

Prayer requests

DANIEL

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Study 14
Read: Daniel 12:1-13

“...But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” — Daniel 12:1b-2

Overview

While there are some portions of chapter 12 that are hard to understand or have been interpreted in various ways, the main themes, which are also the main themes of scripture, are evident. Daniel closes with truths of God’s power over all things, of rescue, of resurrection, of judgment of the wicked, and the promise of God reigning and ruling at the end of all things. We not only see rescue from distress (vv. 1-7), but God’s purposes and presence in the midst of distress (vv. 8-13).

Verses 1-4 speak of a time of trouble that is evident in the time of Daniel straight into our day. But the good news reveals that there will be a deliverer, one who will rescue. Ultimately, this points us to Jesus, who reminded his disciples not to rejoice over their power but to rejoice that their names were written in heaven (Luke 10:20).

Bryan Chapell unpacks the good news of both the resurrection and the judgment that is promised in this passage: “The vision reveals that those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, and those whose names are written in the book shall awake to everlasting life. This current physical life is not the end. Suffering and death do not have the final victory. No truth is dearer to God’s people than this...The message is simple: Because of Christ’s death and resurrection on our behalf, this life and its misery are not our final chapter. Everyone whose name shall be found written in the book will be saved from the pains of this life and from death itself. We shall see them again and shall be with them in the presence of the Savior. There will be a differentiation between those who are in the book of life and those who are not. Judgment is real. For those who have suffered at the hands of the wicked, the good news is that God will make things right, vindicate his people, and punish evil. Our God is just and ultimately judges. The scales will be balanced in and for eternity.”

Daniel closes with the encouragement that, despite the wickedness in the world, God’s people would be blessed and can rest in him. They can go about their lives trusting and serving him. The great promise at the end of the book of Revelation shows Jesus as the bright morning star who invites all to “come” to him. “And let the one who hears say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires the water of life without price....He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming soon.’ Amen, come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.” (Revelation 22:17, 20-21)

DANIEL

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Message notes and application

Write down notes as you listen to the sermon and read the text. What is the main point of the text? What catches your attention, challenges, or confuses you?

Passage Questions

1. How does this chapter excite you for the future? How might it change how you view and act in the present?

2. Where is there trouble in the world and in your life that would cause the need to be delivered (v. 1)?

Why is it loving for God to deal with evil and wickedness? What if there were no justice?

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3. In 2 Timothy 4:18, Paul states, “The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.” How do God’s promises of blessing, rest, and right standing with him at the end of days through Jesus shape what we are about today (and all of our days)?

4. How does knowing God is “above” – in control, over – the waters of life (both good and bad) bring comfort and confidence no matter our circumstances?

6. How has studying the book of Daniel changed your view of God, yourself, and this world?

As you go...

- Where have you experienced trouble and where do you see trouble in the world? Discuss how the promises of Daniel 12 shape your view of trouble.
- Think about and discuss how this chapter reveals our need for rescue and also how God has purpose in the midst of trouble.
- Journal some takeaways you have from the book of Daniel.

DANIEL

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Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are reigning and ruling over the waters of life and over all time. You are the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, and Jesus you hold all things in your hands. We thank you for the work of the Father, the Son and the Spirit in delivering us from the brokenness in our hearts, in our lives, and in this world. We thank you that you are a just God that hates sin and came to take it upon yourself so that we might have life.

We pray that we would live in light of who you are and in light of your promises. God we pray that you would work in the midst of our circumstances to refine us and make us more and more into the image of Jesus. Lord, we look forward to the day when you will come and make all things right. Until then, we will stand and rest in the finished work of Jesus, on our behalf, who has delivered us and written our names "in the book." Amen.

Prayer requests