



Introduction

For some of us, the book of Daniel contains familiar stories like Daniel and the lion’s den or the fiery furnace of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. But, it’s important that our understanding of this important prophetic book doesn’t end there. The book of Daniel helps refine our understanding of kingdom and covenant in the Old Testament.

Daniel, like Ezekiel, lives with God’s people in exile in Babylon. While there is an overlapping of the two prophets, it’s not clear if the two knew each other. They are from different regions of Babylon. The Daniel mentioned in Ezekiel 28: 3 may or may not have been the same as the author of the book of Daniel.

What is clear, however, is that a change of location for God’s people does not signal an end to God’s kingdom or his covenant with his people. These key theological concepts are clarified and expanded in the book of Daniel. They extend beyond the boundaries of Israel and point to the faithfulness of God that surpasses the sin of his people. The book of Daniel is an unfolding answer to two important questions that faced the Jews in captivity: ‘Is Israel’s God truly God?’ (as compared to the gods of the Babylonians), and ‘Will God forgive the sin of His people and have fellowship with them again?’

The answer to both questions in the book of Daniel is a resounding yes and as such it is a wealth of prophetic revelation with profound implications for future fulfillment in God’s kingdom. Daniel is referred to often in the book of Revelation. Both books affirm that the end is certain, when believers will hear the voices of angels saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever” (Rev. 11:15).

Daniel Reading Plan

December 2	Daniel 1 – 2
December 3	Daniel 3 – 4
December 4	Daniel 5 – 6
December 5	Daniel 7 – 8
December 6	Daniel 9 – 10
December 7	Daniel 11 – 12

The reading plan for the book of Daniel follows the schedule of the Reformation Study Bible. Each day, a guide is written to help the reader through each chapter with commentary on the historical context of the passage. Feel free to adapt this to your own schedule.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 2

Read: **Daniel 1 & 2**

The opening verse gives the reader the timeframe of the book – during the reign of Jehoiakim of Judah, and Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. There are two passages in the Old Testament that record the details of the attack on Jerusalem – 2 Kings 23:34-24:7 and 2 Chronicles 36:4-8. The success of this siege is implied in the next verse, which details items taken from the temple. Nebuchadnezzar also instructed the taking captive of some of the royal family, a prophecy from 2 Kings 20:18. Certain criteria was commanded; young men without “blemish, of good appearance, and skillful in all wisdom.” Daniel, along with Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, was in this group. We will come to know Daniel’s three friends by their Babylonian names, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

These young men resisted assimilation into the Babylonian system in that they resolved not to eat or drink of the food set before them by their keepers. It wasn’t because the food wasn’t kosher – that is, prepared according to Jewish dietary laws – or that it had first been offered to idols, but only that they intended to eat simple vegetables and drink only water. In this way, they showed dependence upon God and not Nebuchadnezzar. For ten days they stayed on this diet and were seen to be in better physical condition than the others who had eaten the king’s food.

The theme of these verses is covenant distinctiveness. Despite any pressure to conform to the standards of the Babylonians, God gave these four young men exactly what they needed as they put themselves in God’s hands. It’s hard not to see the relevance for today! We too live as aliens in this world, for our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20). God’s future plans for

Israel and Babylon involved Daniel and his three friends. Out of all the captives brought to Babylon, they were given special gifts by God for their tasks. We see this come to the forefront in chapter 2.

The primary point of this chapter is the triumph of Daniel's wisdom over the wisdom of the Babylonian wise men. The conflict begins with Nebuchadnezzar's dream. He desired from his wise men both the essence of his dream and its interpretation, something they couldn't achieve. Daniel gets word of this right before the killing of these wise men, and along with his three friends, they "seek mercy from the God of heaven." God reveals to Daniel Nebuchadnezzar's dream and its interpretation in a night vision. Crisis averted.

What we should note is Daniel's prayer of praise (vs. 20-23). The Lord alone has the power to control world events and is the Giver of wisdom. For believers today, God gives us His wisdom through His Word. Keep reading!

When Daniel appears before Nebuchadnezzar, he is quick to point to God as the source of his knowledge. He then recounts both the dream and its interpretation. The dream teaches us that God gives every earthly kingdom its glory and power. While Nebuchadnezzar may have wondered what kingdoms would come after his, it's the final kingdom that we see will "fill the whole earth." Our eyes should always be fixed on ultimate things as we await His kingdom!

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 3

Read: **Daniel 3 & 4**

Chapter 3 begins with Nebuchadnezzar building a statue of gold. Perhaps he was trying to counteract the dream of chapter 2? The location of the statue is significant. The Babylonian plain was the location for the building of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11. It had a two-fold purpose: to make a name for the people and to prevent the people from being scattered. Nebuchadnezzar's statue had the same two purposes in mind – to make a name for himself and to provide a unifying symbol for the kingdom.

All the people were to bow down and worship the image at the sound of music. Everyone did. Except for Daniel's three friends (Daniel himself is absent from this narrative). What follows is the story of the fiery furnace. It's the story of the pressure to conform to the world around us. While we may not have to face a challenge as these three men did, we fight the same battle over lesser issues. Will God be my primary allegiance, or will I bow down to worldly idols that are constantly in front of me?

What we see in the furnace with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego is the presence of a fourth person. Whether this is a Christophany (an appearance of Christ before His incarnation) or an angel we cannot tell. But it displays God's presence with believers in their times of trial. This is

a reminder of Isaiah 43:2, “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.”

Daniel chapter 4 is about the journey from pride to humility, and its star is Nebuchadnezzar himself. He has yet another dream, and Daniel is called to interpret it. The vision was of a great tree that symbolized Nebuchadnezzar and his empire. But messengers from heaven were commanded to cut it down, leaving only a stump. This prophecy would happen over a period of 7 years, during which the mind of Nebuchadnezzar would change to the mind of a beast. His kingdom would be restored to him when he acknowledged that “Heaven rules” (v. 26). The rest of the chapter is the fulfillment of this prophetic dream. Twelve months passed without incident, perhaps causing Nebuchadnezzar to be a sign that the warning could be ignored.

But after boastful words about his own “mighty power,” the interpretation of the dream came true, and Nebuchadnezzar lost his power and position. Only when he acknowledges the power of God is he restored.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 4

Read: **Daniel 5 & 6**

Chapter 5 picks up after the death of Nebuchadnezzar, with Belshazzar now ruling as king. He sends out invitations for a great ball which turned into a picture of utter depravity. In the middle of the feast, a hand appeared to write on the wall (this is where we get the phrase, “handwriting on the wall”!) Not even the wise men of Babylon can interpret the writing. Enter the queen, who reminds Belshazzar that Daniel had interpreted dreams for Nebuchadnezzar. He is brought before the king who promises him that he will be made the number three man in the kingdom if he can interpret the handwriting on the wall.

After Daniel refuses the offer of a reward, he rebukes Belshazzar for his failure to humble himself, given what had happened to his predecessor, Nebuchadnezzar. He had profaned the temple vessels by using them while praising false gods. But he goes on to interpret the writing. The short phrase pronounced the end of the great Babylonian kingdom, as that very night the Medes and Persians entered the kingdom.

In so many ways, we are functional Belshazzars. We don’t have access to ancient cups of gold, but we have invested things God has given us like our jobs and our health, our love of comfort and our relationships, our achievements and status with such great importance and pride, that we too would be found wanting should any of these come under threat. We have not honored God as we should by our obedience, our faithfulness to immerse ourselves in His Word, or our refusal to conform to the world around us. How often do we need to be reminded of James 4:6, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” We daily need that grace.

Chapter 6 has Belshazzar replaced as king by Darius the Mede. Daniel continued to serve as Darius appoints him as one of the three new administrators over the other provincial rulers. But even as Daniel was faithful to God, he was not Mr. Popular among his peers. Take note especially of the reason Darius appointed these three: "so that the king might suffer no loss." Corruption in the government was obvious. The 120 satraps (we don't know exactly what that word means, but they were high rulers) were ripping off the kingdom. Maybe they were skimming off the top of collected taxes and using the monies for themselves. Whatever the dishonesty, jealousy reared its ugly head. Darius had plans to set Daniel over the whole kingdom, and the 120 satraps weren't having it.

Persistence in prayer. Daniel had learned that. Three times a day, Daniel went to his upper chamber with the windows wide open and prayed. So his enemies knew they would have to concoct a scheme to bring Daniel's faith and his obedience to Darius in conflict. So they introduced a new law in effect for 30 days, that no one was to petition any god or man except the king himself or be thrown to the lions.

What did Daniel do? He could have shut his windows and pulled the blinds closed and prayed anyway. He could have prayed in private without anyone noticing. But that's not what he did. He went about his routine of prayer just as before. He didn't even ask God to deliver him from the edict. And that's the best test of the depth of your prayer life: how much time is spent asking God to change your particular circumstance and asking Him for things to be different, and how much time is spent giving thanks for what God has already done for you? God is not committed to our comfort, but He has promised to see us through the trials.

So we get to what is the most familiar account in the book of Daniel. Daniel in the lion's den. Read the narrative in vs. 14-24 and see the contrast between the experience of Daniel and Darius. Darius had a sleepless night in worry over Daniel, but Daniel is perfectly calm. God has protected and delivered him.

Before you ask the question of why other believers throughout time have been martyred and not delivered, understand what this chapter is signifying. It is a foreshadowing of what will occur on the final judgment day for all believers. Just as God judged Daniel and found him "blameless," so too all who are in Christ will be pronounced righteous and share in His glory, while unbelievers will suffer eternal torment.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 5

Read: **Daniel 7 & 8**

Today we begin a more complicated and often less familiar section of Daniel, but no less important than what we've read so far.

We go back in time to the reign of Belshazzar. Daniel has a dream of four beasts. Now, the temptation for readers is to try to figure out which kingdoms they represent. Some scholars believe the beasts don't refer to kingdoms at all, but the number of the beasts represents a symbol of completeness. If this is the correct interpretation, the message of chapter 7 is that life in this present age will continue to be this way until the end of the age.

But the focus on the chapter as a whole is not on the beasts themselves. The focus is on the day of coming judgment when the beasts will be conquered, and God will win the final victory. Daniel 7:16-18 points to this view: "I approached one of those who stood there and asked him the truth concerning all this. So he told me and made known to me the interpretation of the things. 'These four beasts are four kings who shall arise out of the earth. But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever.'"

Besides the Ancient of Days on the throne, the reader also sees one like a son of man coming with the clouds (7:13-14). This son of man is given an everlasting and indestructible kingdom. While most scholars believe this to be the pre-incarnate Christ, not all agree. Again, we must look at the focus of the heavenly throne room, where sits the One who will deliver the final judgment.

Chapter 8 details yet another vision Daniel receives which is of a ram and a goat. The ram has two horns, while the goat has just one. The goat destroys the ram and grows in power until its horn is broken, replaced by four new horns pointing in all four directions. The goat most likely represents Alexander the Great, who would be followed after his death by his four generals. Verse nine introduces the little horn, which will achieve great power and oppress God's people. When we think about the greatness of God, we may ask why God doesn't give the victory here. The answer is because of the peoples' own sin, which Daniel will pray a great prayer of repentance for in the next chapter.

Daniel sees that the sanctuary will be "trampled underfoot" (v. 13) for 2,300 evenings and mornings. Where else do we read of evenings and mornings? The creation account! This teaches that the little horn of Daniel 8 will be out to destroy creation itself. He will fail since God has numbered his days. Scholars have tried to figure out the significance of the 2,300 number, but suffice to say, we are intended to see a limited yet significant time of suffering for the people of God.

While Daniel is given a partial interpretation of this vision, the important thing for the reader to remember is that we have a sovereign God who directs all the events of man.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 6

Read: **Daniel 9 & 10**

As we read this chapter, the first thing we must notice is that this great prayer of Daniel's for the repentance for the people was affected by the reading of God's word, specifically passages from Jeremiah 25:11-12. Daniel understood the inspiration and authority of the writings of another prophet and sees that the captivity in Babylon will last 70 years, following which God will let His people return home to their land.

In this prayer (vs. 3-19) we can begin to see how we should pray ourselves. Daniel prayed for things God had already promised! He has promised us that He will complete the work He has begun in us; He has promised to give us the peace that passes all understanding when we are faced with trials. He has promised never to leave us or forsake us, and to one day bring in a new heaven and earth. If we want to pray like Daniel did, we should pray for God's promises to come to pass.

Daniel's prayer of confession and repentance brought an almost instant answer! God sent an angel with the answer even as Daniel prayed. This leads into what some Bible scholars have seen as the most difficult prophetic passage in the Old Testament.

As you read about the "seventy weeks," note that some scholars take this to mean a literal 490-year period. But not all! Remember Jesus' words to Peter in Matthew 18:22 when Peter asked how many times he had to forgive his brother. Jesus answered, "seventy times seven times" but no one has interpreted that to mean only 490 times. Instead, the reader should take note that God's period is not ours, remembering that He is not willing that any should perish. With this in mind, we wait patiently for the work of God in our lives and others.

The end of chapter 9 does reveal that the promised restoration of God's people would take place in three stages. Stage 1 – the first seven weeks – will run from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem to the time when it is finally complete. Some believe this decree to be of a human king, but other scholars believe it to be God's own decree in answer to Daniel's prayer in this chapter. The coming decree by Cyrus in 538 BC that allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem was the earthly response to a heavenly decision. This makes it difficult to attach time frames to the seventy weeks of time. Stage 2 – sixty-two weeks – will be a time of difficulty, which usher in Stage 3 – the final week – when the Messianic king will appear only to be cut off.

Whether you take the final verses of this chapter to take place in the future as some students of prophecy do, remember the context of this chapter. Daniel is ultimately concerned with the fate of God's covenant relationship with His people, and the seventieth week or seventieth seven could also be interpreted as a time of jubilee, in which God brings to restoration all things.

Daniel 9 can be a chapter that causes great debate when we fail to recognize the bigger picture here. We are to keep looking as Daniel did, for God to complete His purposes for His own.

Daniel received another vision in chapter 10. He was in a deep time of fasting and prayer, and the chapter details a great spiritual battle. A man in linen appears to him with the answer to the prayer which he had been delayed in delivering for twenty-one days by the “prince of Persia” – not a human prince, but a powerful spiritual enemy. The battle that took place only delayed the message, as Satan’s best activity against us cannot overthrow God’s purposes.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 7

Read: **Daniel 11 & 12**

Chapter 11 continues the vision that began in chapter 10, which will continue through the last chapter of the book. When you read this, it may sound familiar, because it contains some of the same details as in chapter 8.

Daniel’s vision begins with a summary of the Persian and Greek empires, with four kings of Persia followed by the kingdom of Greece. The first king of Persia is widely recognized as Cyrus and the fourth (and final) as Xerxes (Esther’s husband). He would invade Greece only to be defeated, leading to the demise of the Persian kingdom. The mighty king of vs. 3 is seen as Alexander the Great whose kingdom eventually was divided up among his four generals.

The predictions in vs. 6-8 were fulfilled exactly, as Ptolemy II (the king of the South) tried to make peace with Antiochus II (the king of the North) by sending one of his daughters to him to wed. That plan came to a bad ending as Antiochus’ wife Laodice found out about this and poisoned both him and his new wife and their son. It would be an interesting study to look at a verse-by-verse fulfillment of each prediction in this chapter!

As you read this chapter, again we are to take note of the significance of the history being reported here. The goal of relating all of the difficulties of the nations around them was to bring the trials of the people of God into perspective. Again, we learn to embrace God’s sovereignty in all things as we recognize He rules the world in every detail of history.

Chapter 12 is the final chapter of this book which details the coming day of judgment. By this time, Daniel has seen the release of his people to return to Jerusalem, but the books of Haggai and Nehemiah tell of the times of trouble the Jews have rebuilding their city. They were getting very discouraged! And yet, both Jeremiah and Ezekiel foretold of God doing a great work in the hearts of his people – a new heart and a new spirit that would be accomplished through the cleansing work of the Holy Spirit (Jer. 31:33; Eze. 36:26-27). But under Michael’s watchful care,

at least a remnant of Daniel's people will escape, those with a new heart, "whose name shall be found written in the book."

Daniel's instructions were to seal up the book until the time of the end. Two questions are asked in the closing verses, how long until these things will happen, and what will be the outcome? Taken together, the answers form a way of living in a broken world filled with sin. More numbers are read: 1,290 days and 1,335 days. While the first number is 3 ½ years, the second number adds 45 additional days, making it difficult to ascertain the correct interpretation. So what can we really understand? Two things – the times of difficulty are limited by the very mercy of God, and secondly, the timing of our trials even today is precisely known by our heavenly Father. He will not keep me in a trial one minute more than He has for me, which brings us comfort during those difficult times.

We made it! Finishing the book I hope you are aware that we are to live as Daniel did – called to be faithful in the present times and tasks God has called us to. For if Christ could endure the cross for us for the joy set before Him (Heb. 12:2), we can also endure far fewer trials with our eyes fixed on heaven.

***"And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above,
and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever."
Daniel 12:3***