

MYSTERY AND MAJESTY

**12 Bible studies on
Daniel
for Chinese returnees**

Leaders' guide

Prepared for the Return

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INTRODUCTION

THE PREPARED FOR THE RETURN SERIES

There are hundreds of Bible study guides out there, so you might well be wondering "Why have a special set of Bible studies for returnees?"

Returnees to China (those going home after a period of studying or working abroad) face a huge variety of challenges to their Christian faith. Some of these challenges are common to all Christians, while others are unique to returnees. These Bible studies aim to help returnees to think through a number of these challenges in light of God's word to equip them to stand firm in Christ when they return home. The studies will be most useful for those preparing to return soon or who have recently returned, but they can also be easily adapted for use with anyone!

These studies have been written out of a conviction that it is God's word which best equips Christians to stand firm, rather than any special programme, which is why these studies go through a book of the Bible rather than a series of topics. Our hope is that this will encourage and equip returnees to continue reading God's word on their own, rather than feeling helpless now that they no longer have a leader to study with or a programme to work through. The application questions aim to apply God's word to specific situations faced by many returnees.

The resource is designed for a group to work through; they can also be adapted for use in one-to-one Bible studies. This study pack is intended to help equip anyone leading such a study, and a group members' edition is also available.

DANIEL

Packed with distressing dreams, radical rescues and perplexing prophecies about "the end", Daniel is a book that many shrink from studying in detail beyond the story of Daniel in the lion's den, a few verses about the Son of Man, and some lessons from Daniel's prayer life. But time spent grappling with the puzzles of Daniel is infinitely rewarding! In a world which would love to fool us into thinking that secular authorities and values hold ultimate power and deserve our full allegiance, Daniel's vivid imagery draws back the curtain to reveal reality: the Lord rules over every nation, every ruler, every twist and turn of history. In a world where God's people seem insignificant and easily oppressed, Daniel unveils our significance in God's eternal purposes. In a world that seems out of control, Daniel proclaims the certain conclusion which God is bringing history towards.

These lessons, of deep relevance to each one of us, are particularly pertinent to returnee friends seeking to stand firm in faith back home where visible influence lies in the hands of the political elite and the materially wealthy, and where faith so often meets with sneers or threats. Our prayer for these studies is that the book of Daniel would give returnees eyes to see the spiritual reality of the world they live in so that they may stand firm in faith to the end.

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS RESOURCE

The Bible studies in this resource contain four main elements:

1. Personal Study (before the Bible study)
2. Open Discussion
3. Focussed Discussion
4. Response

Each stage is important because Bible study is hearing God speak together. This means thinking carefully about what God is saying and having space to share these things with each other. Not only does this help us get more out of Bible study, it also trains us to read God's word ourselves and speak about it with others back home, rather than relying on a Bible study leader to do the hard thinking and give the 'right answers'.



Personal study

The first three studies aim to introduce this concept gently. It might be unfamiliar for many at first, but it's worth persevering with encouraging group members to spend time in personal study before the Bible study meeting. The notes encourage group members to highlight and mark things on the text, so you could consider printing a copy of Daniel for everyone to mark-up as they wish.



Open discussion

Some individuals or groups find this comes more naturally than others! This is an opportunity for people to share whatever they want to from their personal study: what excited them; what confused them; what seems really important in the passage, etc. As long as group members are talking about the Bible passage, anything goes! It's likely that group members will mention significant features of the passage that you want to spend more time on in the Focussed Discussion. Giving them the opportunity to point these things out for themselves helps them see this really is what God is saying; it's not just the direction the Bible study leader decided on.



Focussed discussion

You may not need to use all the questions suggested as the open discussion may have already covered some content. We hope the Bible study will be lively and open, not tiresome and repetitive! This is a chance for the leader to help the group gain clarity on the meaning of the passage and draw conclusions about its main message. This is important as it will help ensure the main thing God's saying in a passage is the thing the group hears most clearly and focusses on responding to. The sections on Two Perspectives and Purpose that appear in many studies are a way of transitioning from the Focussed Discussion to the Response section.



Response

The book of Daniel is extremely vivid, using dreams and picture language to teach big lessons about God, his kingdom and the world we live in. Daniel aims to radically change how we view the world, seeing it through the lens of God's kingdom rather than that of human authority. Many response questions focus on this deep change of perspective, revisiting it from different angles in different chapters. Make sure to spend good time on these “worldview” questions since it's as we get our thinking straight that we're equipped to live changed lives, as Daniel 11:32 says: “The people who know their God shall stand firm and take action.”

DANIEL 1 | EXILES!



PERSONAL STUDY

We strongly recommend spending some time before the Bible study familiarising yourself with the passage. This will help you get more out of this incredibly rich book, and will also help teach you to read the Bible for yourself. Each study includes suggestions for ways to use this “personal study” time.

Read 2 Chronicles 36 to understand some historical background to Daniel and his situation. Look for links with Daniel 1 (especially Daniel 1:1, 2, 21).

Starter question: While living overseas, what things made/make you especially aware of being an “outsider” who didn’t belong? How did this feel?

Read Daniel 1

It’s important to consider the historical background to Daniel. Unlike most of the history books of the Old Testament, Daniel is not set in the land of Israel but in the city of Babylon, capital of the mighty Babylonian Empire.

Discuss: Why were the Israelites not in their own land? Why was this a desperate situation for them? Consider the answer from a human perspective and from God’s perspective.

(See Daniel 1 and look back over 2 Chronicles 36 from personal study above. The historical background, map and timeline on the next page might also help)

From a human perspective, these events can be explained as an expansionist superpower (Babylon) occupying the small territory of Judah/Israel, and subjecting Israel’s king to the king of Babylon. But from God’s perspective, these events were God’s judgment on Israel, his chosen people, because they had abandoned him and his ways (Daniel 1:2, “The Lord gave...”; see also 2 Chronicles 36:15-17).

King Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem on three separate occasions, each time taking away some of its inhabitants as exiles. Daniel was part of the first group to be exiled to Babylon, in 605 BC. By 587 BC Jerusalem and its temple had been thoroughly destroyed (see Timeline below)

Historical Background

- Israel's Northern Kingdom had already been destroyed over 100 years previously, leaving only the Southern Kingdom (also known as Judah), whose capital was Jerusalem
- “The land of Shinar” and “the Chaldeans” both refer to Babylon
- Throughout the Bible Babylon represents humanity in hostility to God

MAP



TIMELINE





OPEN DISCUSSION

Read Daniel 1 again. What does the narrative particularly draw our attention to?
(For example, repeated words and themes? Places where the narrative slows down?
Turning points in the story?)



FOCUSSED DISCUSSION

Verses 3-7 describe Babylon's strategy. Consider the education and special treatment that Daniel and the other “noble youths” received. What do you think the rulers of Babylon hoped to achieve through this programme?

Names in the Bible are meaningful!

Original name:

New name:

Daniel = “God is my judge”

Beltshazzar = “Bel, protect his life” (Bel was the chief Babylonian god)

Hananiah = “The Lord shows grace”

Shadrach = “Command of Aku” (Aku was the Babylonian god of the moon)

Mishael = “Who is what God is?”

Meshach = “Who is what Aku is?”

Azariah = “The Lord helps”

Abednego = “Servant of Nebo” (Nebo was the Babylonian god of wisdom)

This was an assimilation programme: the young elite were taken to the capital city of the Babylonian Empire and subjected to “re-education”, aimed at making them forget their own home and culture and become loyal servants of Babylon. Even their names were changed (see above). This was a very well-crafted plan!

From verses 8-21, what did Daniel decide to do? What was the result? Why did this result happen?

Daniel and his friends come out on top in the end! In verses 15 and 18-20, they are seen to be superior to all those around them. This is because of God's work on their behalf (9,17).

Why did Daniel refuse the king's food and wine and choose instead vegetables and water? The answer is not entirely obvious; God's people were indeed forbidden to eat certain meats (such as pork), but not all meats, nor were they forbidden to drink wine. Whatever the precise reason, Daniel felt that this food and wine would “defile” him (verse 8), and so he resolved not to eat it.

TWO PERSPECTIVES

Throughout the book of Daniel we see the interplay of two perspectives. One is the human perspective: the on-the-surface world. The other is God's perspective: the hidden reality.

On-the-surface, Babylon and King Nebuchadnezzar enjoy supreme power. How is their power displayed in this chapter?

They overpower Jerusalem and take Israel's elite into captivity (1,3-4).

The vessels from God's temple's are put in the house of Babylon's god (2).

Nebuchadnezzar has authority even to change the names of the exiles from Judah to names that exalt the power of his gods. Babylon's assimilation programme aims to re-educate them so that they become loyal servants of Babylon, not God (3-7).

However, this chapter also reminds us to look to the hidden reality, where it is God who rules. How do we see his power in this chapter?

The act of invading Israel was only possible because "the Lord gave" Israel into Nebuchadnezzar's hand (2).

In verses 9 and 17 God brings Daniel and his friends to a position of prominence. Even in Babylon, God raises his men to rule!

These two perspectives highlight a battle raging between two powers: the kingdom of God and the kingdom of humans in rebellion against God. This battle has its roots in the very first chapters of the Bible. Babylon (or Shinar) first appears in the Bible in Genesis 11 as the location of the Tower of Babel, representing human power banding together against God's rule - the rebellion of Genesis 3.

This gives huge significance to the story of Daniel and his friends - they are not just lonely prisoners in a strange land; they are representatives of God's kingdom, captured by God's enemies.

PURPOSE

God speaks with a purpose! He wants to change those who hear his word. To understand God's purpose for us, we'll start by considering the purpose of these words for the earliest generation of readers.

Compare 2 Chronicles 36:22-23 and Daniel 1:21. Where were the earliest readers of Daniel likely to be?

This book must have been finished after the first year of King Cyrus. This was the year when the Israelites began to return home from Babylon. Therefore these things were recorded for those who had already returned to Israel.

This book was written for “returnees”! These Israelite readers weren't returning home from studying abroad, but from exile in an enemy nation.

Returnees' experience of returning home can be both sweet and bitter. The Israelites looked forward to experiencing the abundant revival of their nation, as God had promised. So why did this returnee generation still need to learn the lessons of the exile period? Although they were back home, they experienced nothing of God's abundant blessing. Their country was weak, they had no king, and they were few in number. From many angles, it seemed that the exile was not in fact over.



RESPONSE

Consider the experiences you discussed in the starter question. Many returnees look forward to returning home and enjoying a feeling of belonging. But whether we're abroad or in our own country, as Christians we are always exiles, sojourners, “outsiders”.

When does being a Christian feel like being a foreign minority in a hostile land?

For Daniel, staying faithful to the Lord meant that he had to go against the flow and take a stand. As a Christian, how might you need to go against the flow?

(Consider attitude and actions; your life overseas and life back home)

This chapter reminds us that God always rules, even when he seems absent. In the end, Daniel's stand for God was worth it (v15, 18-20). But you might be wondering, what does this mean for us? Should we always expect going against the flow to end well for us? Read on to find out!

What can we praise God for from this chapter? What can we ask him for?

DANIEL 2 | REVEALER OF MYSTERIES



PERSONAL STUDY

Daniel is a great read! The incidents it records are vivid, powerful and often funny. This literature is intended to be read aloud, so before the Bible study read chapter 2 out loud and note down anything that particularly strikes you.

Or if you prefer drawing, why not draw a picture in the space below that captures the feel of the chapter?

Starter question: Think about the people around you. What sources do they use to help them understand the world we live in? (eg parents, social media feeds, academic books)

Read Daniel 2 together as a group, then spend another 10 minutes quietly re-reading it by yourself. As you do so, take a pen and mark:

- Repeated words or ideas
- Turning points in the story
- Links to previous chapters in Daniel
- Things that look important
- Things that surprise you
- Things you don't understand



OPEN DISCUSSION

Spend 10 minutes sharing and discussing the things you noticed above.



FOCUSSED DISCUSSION

Select from the questions below to focus your discussion on some main points from the chapter. You may have already covered some areas in the open discussion.

What is the main thing God is praised for in v20-23, 47?

He has wisdom to reveal “mysteries”: things that are usually hidden from people.

How do we see this to be true of God in the chapter?

He alone can reveal and explain the king's dream. All the wise men are hopeless. Daniel only knows the dream because God tells it to him (28).

What does Nebuchadnezzar's dream reveal about future events?

How does the imagery of the dream (such as the great statue, the stone, the great mountain) deepen our understanding of these events?

There will be four mighty kingdoms, beginning with the current kingdom of Babylon, ruled by Nebuchadnezzar. But in the end God will set up an eternal kingdom which will destroy all these other kingdoms and fill the whole earth.

The imagery helps us imagine how mighty the four kingdoms appear on the surface and how intimidating it feels to live under their rule. The stone that strikes them and immediately destroys them helps us feel the sudden and total nature of their downfall. The great mountain filling the whole earth represents that God's rule will completely obliterate all human kingdoms forever.

PURPOSE

Consider the Israelite reader (remember what we learned about them last time: they are “returnees” from exile, who returned to Israel with great expectations of renewal, but met a disappointing reality).

How would this dream and its interpretation shape their understanding of the world they lived in?

How would it change their perspective on the hostile powers that ruled over them?

They lived in a world where mighty empires such as Babylon seemed invincible and eternal. This vision would remind them that this might is only temporary, and that all human kingdoms will one day be broken by God's kingdom, which will reign forever.

Why do you think it would be so important for God's people returned from Babylon to know that God is the revealer of mysteries?

The “mystery” revealed here is so different from their current experience. It would be tempting for them to fill their minds with the imposing might of enemy regimes and forget that there is more going on than meets the eye. God wants them to let him teach them about reality, rather than have their thinking shaped by what they see and feel.

In this chapter, only the first kingdom (Babylon) is identified. In later chapters of Daniel we learn more about the precise fulfilment of this vision in history, culminating in God's eternal kingdom through “a stone cut from a mountain by no human hand”. The New Testament identifies this stone, God's “mystery” as Jesus Christ, who has now been revealed as the ruler of all nations (see Ephesians 2:20, 3:3-6). As we consider our own response, we can rejoice that God has revealed far more of his plans to us than he did to Daniel. But like Daniel, God's revealed truth still contrasts with the “on-the-surface” world we encounter daily.



RESPONSE: TWO PERSPECTIVES

Last time we considered two perspectives: the on-the-surface world and the hidden reality. Here we discover that only God can reveal the hidden reality. We also begin to glimpse this hidden reality as Nebuchadnezzar's dream reveals God's perspective on world history.

Think about the world you live in and its on-the-surface perspective. What people or organisations appear to be in control?

How does this chapter help you understand the hidden reality of those people or organisations? What differences are there between the on-the-surface world and the hidden reality?

Think back to the starter question and the different voices you encounter each day. Which ones give an on-the-surface perspective? Which ones speak of the hidden reality? How will this chapter shape who you listen to?

DANIEL 3 | THE SET-UP



PERSONAL STUDY

As with chapter 2, read the chapter aloud by yourself. Then read it again slowly, marking the things we looked out for in chapter 2. This will help you grow in confidence in reading the Bible for yourself:

- Repeated words or ideas
- Turning points in the story
- Links to previous chapters in Daniel
- Things that look important
- Things that surprise you
- Things you don't understand

Read Daniel 3



OPEN DISCUSSION

Spend 10 minutes sharing and discussing the things that most struck you from your personal study.



FOCUSSED DISCUSSION

Select from the questions below to focus your discussion on some main points from the chapter. You may have already covered some areas in the open discussion.

How does the account make the reader feel about :

a) Nebuchadnezzar?

He has impressive, fearful power! For example: the vast height of his statue; his ability to command all officials from all provinces to gather and worship the image; the intense heat of the fiery furnace.

But the account is also full of irony: the long, repeated lists of official titles (2, 3, 27) and musical instruments (5, 7, 10, 15) create an atmosphere of empty pomp. The gold statue is vast and intimidating, but the account emphasises again and again that it has been “set up” by men (this phrase is repeated 9 times!). The same word appeared in 2:21 to tell us that kings themselves are “set up” by God. The gold image echoes Nebuchadnezzar's vision in chapter 2 (see 2:31-32,37-38), in which the great image was ultimately toppled and destroyed. This irony pokes fun at Nebuchadnezzar and his regime, exposing that what seems to be mighty, terrifying power is in fact just empty show.

b) Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego?

Because of their loyalty to God and refusal to bow to the image, they are in terrifying danger: they face Nebuchadnezzar's “furious rage” and are condemned to death in the overheated fiery furnace (13,19-23). They appear to be helpless and hopeless.

Despite this, they have unshakeable belief that God's power is far greater than Nebuchadnezzar's (16-17), and they are determined to worship only him - they are even willing to die for him (18,28).

In the end, they are miraculously raised up by God: not only rescued from death, but commended and promoted (30).

TWO PERSPECTIVES

What differences are there between the on-the-surface world and the hidden reality in this chapter?

In particular, what does this chapter teach us about the clash between God's rule and Babylon's rule (representing the rule of humanity in rebellion against God)?

On the surface Nebuchadnezzar appears so mighty, but in reality he is merely set up by God. He has no real power.

On the surface Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego appear weak and at the mercy of Babylon's hostility, but in reality God's power is on their side to protect and raise them up. On the surface God seems absent as the world is commanded to worship the might of Babylon. In reality, he is the only God worth worshipping.

PURPOSE

The vision of chapter 2 revealed a world where hostile empires such as Babylon seem invincible and eternal, yet will one day be broken by God's kingdom which will reign forever. Chapter 3 is a picture of what it's like to live in this world as people belonging to God's kingdom.

What does chapter 3 tell us about the experience of God's people living in a world hostile to God? Why is it important for them to know this?

The world's rebellion against God is often directed at God's people. God will mightily save his people from all hostility but they often experience deep persecution first. Ultimately it's worth staying faithful to him, no matter the cost.



RESPONSE

Spend time thinking through how this change in perspective should shape our attitudes when we find ourselves in similar situations. We've used Materialism as a worked example, but we suggest you think through in-depth application to other areas too (for example: the pressure to go along with family expectations for marriage and children; the temptation to deny being a Christian in the workplace).

<p>What things in our societies (overseas or back home) seem to hold fearsome power, like King Nebuchadnezzar? (eg a person, group, set of values)</p>	<p><i>Materialism: We feel like we must have certain status symbols and maintain a certain standard of living.</i></p>	<p><i>Other examples ...</i></p>
<p>What pressures do we face to “worship” them? (note: this pressure will likely be more subtle than a golden statue!)</p>	<p><i>We devote ourselves to earning and owning more and more. This can influence our daily habits of Bible reading and prayer and prevent us from fully investing in church life or spending time with family. We compare and compete with others.</i></p>	

<p>How does this passage change how you view these things?</p> <p>Can you laugh at their empty pomp, as this account does?</p>	<p><i>The status, security and comfort promised by wealth are ultimately empty, leaving us constantly striving for more and more, never satisfied. But God alone offers true honour and security.</i></p>	
<p>What would it look like for us to refuse to worship these things?</p> <p>What risks or costs might be involved in this?</p> <p>How does this chapter show us that the cost is worth it?</p>	<p><i>Refusing to worship money might look like giving a portion of our income to church in order to support full-time Bible teachers. Or it might look like choosing a job with a lower income in order to have more time for gospel ministry.</i></p> <p><i>This has costs, eg being unable to afford expensive presents for our parents, or having less money to spend on our children's education. It might make some people look down on us, or misunderstand us.</i></p> <p><i>But God is the true ruler of the world whose kingdom will last forever and he mightily rescues his people who trust him. Worldly wealth and status are empty and fleeting.</i></p>	

We may not experience immediate rescue and exaltation as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego do here, just as verse 18 suggests: they didn't know for certain that God would choose to save their lives in this instance. When Christians refuse to bow down to other "gods", there may well be costs to our career, relationships, or in the most extreme cases, some even die for their faith. These decisions are deeply painful and often complex. You may feel that your questions and concerns aren't dealt with by this passage, but keep reading, as Daniel continues to address these themes.

In such situations, what help does Daniel 3 give Christians? What questions do we still have about this?

The issues raised here are highly emotional, and group members (and leaders!) may push back against the call to suffer for our faith in Jesus. When discussing particular trials faced by Christians in China, those of us living overseas may be told "It's easy for you to say, but you don't understand the situation..." As Bible study leaders we should be sensitive to this, while continuing to let the challenge of God's word ring out. In this study it may be best to focus on identifying the alternatives that Christians are tempted to worship and how Daniel 3 shapes our attitude to them. Discussions about costly living will be revisited in Daniel 6. Keep a note of the questions that are raised here and return to them in future studies.

Pray for God's strength to trust his power and stay loyal to him.

Did Daniel really happen?

You may have questions about whether the things recorded in Daniel are historical. Some doubt whether events like those of chapter 3 could actually happen - miracles like people being thrown into fire yet coming out unharmed seem too far-fetched! They also question the later chapters of Daniel where Daniel has visions that predict in detail events that took place several hundred years after his death (such as chapter 11). So they claim that these must actually have been recorded after the events took place by someone who used Daniel's name and wrote as if predicting the future.

Firstly, manuscript evidence supports an early date for Daniel.¹

The Jewish historian Josephus (writing in the 1st century AD) described an event from 332 BC where Alexander the Great was shown the book of Daniel - clearly Josephus believed Daniel to have been written by then (ie before the events it records).

Also, by the 2nd century BC Judaism was split into many sects, each of which accepted different books as being inspired. The fact that the book of Daniel was accepted across sectarian divisions suggests that it was written and accepted as Scripture long before these sects formed.

At least eight copies of Daniel were found with the Dead Sea Scrolls, dating from around 125 BC, the time some people suggest Daniel was written. But if the book had only recently been written, it is highly unlikely that so many copies would have found their way into this collection of books that were already considered to be authoritative Scripture. Non-biblical texts from the same period also refer to Daniel as Scripture, suggesting that the book had been widely accepted for some time.

Secondly, the historical nature of Daniel makes logical sense.

Daniel is a book written to people who lived at a time when God's people were weak and persecuted. Its aim is to show them that no matter their personal experience, God is more powerful than any kingdoms or their false gods. God alone knows and reveals the future (2:22), therefore God's people can trust what he says about their eternal future. God rules the world, and human rulers are strong or weak because he makes them so (2:21, 4:34-35). God can even raise the dead (12:1-3), therefore it's worth trusting God even at great personal cost.

But if the events in Daniel didn't really happen, or were recorded by someone hundreds of years after Daniel, this aim makes no sense. Knowing that God predicted your tribulation centuries in advance helps you to "stand firm and take action" (11:32) when this tribulation comes; if this was recorded afterwards then it offers no comfort, no evidence that the God you are suffering for is any greater than the gods of your persecutors. Knowing that God is powerful to save his people from extreme threats - even death - gives his people the

¹ See Hamilton Jr., James M. (2014) *With the Clouds of Heaven*, NSBT, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, pp 30-37

strength to endure hardship for him, whereas made up stories offer no solid comfort. It wouldn't make sense to make up these events!

Thirdly, Daniel is consistent with other archaeological evidence.

An example of this is the case of Belshazzar, described in chapter 5 as the last king of Babylon. Until the 19th century there was no evidence other than the book of Daniel for Belshazzar's existence, leading liberal scholars to cast doubts on Daniel's historicity. But in 1854 the Cyrus Cylinder was discovered, dated 540 BC, naming Belshazzar as son and regent of Nabonidus, the last known Babylonian king. This also explains why Belshazzar makes Daniel "third ruler in the kingdom", not second (Daniel 5:29) - Belshazzar himself was number 2. The fact that external evidence has not yet been found to corroborate a biblical event should not lead us to conclude that the event is ahistorical, or that that no further evidence exists!

Finally, if we believe in a God who made the universe, then nothing is too hard for him. For humans, doing miracles or predicting the future are impossible, but for God these things are easy.

DANIEL 4 | MADNESS AND MAJESTY



PERSONAL STUDY

As with chapter 3, read the chapter aloud. Then read it again slowly, marking:

- Repeated words or ideas
- Turning points in the story
- Links to previous chapters in Daniel
- Things that look important
- Things that surprise you
- Things you don't understand

Starter question: Who is the most powerful person in the world? What different answers might people give to this question, and why?

Read Daniel 4



OPEN DISCUSSION

Spend 10 minutes sharing and discussing the things that most struck you from your personal study.



FOCUSSED DISCUSSION

Select from the questions below to focus your discussion on some main points from the chapter. You may have already covered some areas in the open discussion.

Consider the imagery used in this chapter:

- a) **How does the image of the tree's greatness (10-12, 20-22) make you feel about Nebuchadnezzar?**
- b) **How does the image of the tree being chopped down (13-17, 22-23) make you feel about him? How about the comparison to a beast (15-16, 23, 25, 32-33)?**

Read Genesis 1:26-28 which describes God's original design for humans. How does this increase our understanding of Nebuchadnezzar's greatness, and his humbling?

Humans were designed to exercise God's dominion over the earth and all the creatures in it. Nebuchadnezzar's original position reflects this (11-12) but his humbling represents him becoming like an animal, not a man (15-16, 33 etc).

What lesson is this intended to teach the reader? How does it help us understand the hidden reality?

As repeated in verses 17, 25 and 32, "the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will".

No matter how mighty a king or empire may appear, they are entirely in the Lord's hands: all their power comes from him, and he can just as easily remove it.

How does the imagery of this chapter teach the reader this lesson more deeply than by simply telling us "God rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will"?

It helps us understand how easily God can take someone who appears to be the ruler of the world, and strip everything away from them, making them little greater than an animal. It's a vivid exposé of the illusion of human greatness, and God's surpassing greatness in contrast.

TWO PERSPECTIVES

How does this chapter build on what we've seen already in chapters 1-3 about God and human kings?

It exemplifies the vision of chapter 2: God can easily bring low the most highly exalted human kings, for he is the supreme ruler. In contrast to Daniel and his friends who begin in vulnerable insignificance and ascend to prominence, Nebuchadnezzar starts in a position of exalted influence and descends to sub-human madness.

PURPOSE

King Nebuchadnezzar was one of the greatest rulers of one of the greatest empires in history. Imagine God's people reading this incident. What impact would it have on them?

It would remind them where the true balance of power in the world lies: entirely with God, and not with human kingdoms, even though God's people Israel seemed so weak and other kingdoms so mighty.



RESPONSE

The aim of this chapter is fairly straightforward: it is for the reader to *know that God rules all human kingdoms and gives them to whom he pleases*. But what does it mean to really deeply know this, such that it shapes our worldview and daily life? The questions below should help you to “meditate” on this truth, considering it from different angles.

Consider your own country's leaders. Do you really believe that God rules over them?... that all their position and authority were given to them by God?... that God does what he wants with them?

What makes it difficult to believe this? When does it look like the opposite is true (ie that human rulers are more influential than God)?

How does Daniel 4 help you to believe that God rules all human leaders and does what he wants with them?

Why is it important to have this perspective on rulers and kingdoms? How might this perspective impact your life and decisions? Think of some specific examples.

DANIEL 5 | FROM HEIGHTS TO DEPTHS



PERSONAL STUDY

Read the chapter aloud. Continue to look out for:

- Repeated words or ideas
- Turning points in the story
- Links to previous chapters in Daniel
- Things that look important
- Things that surprise you
- Things you don't understand

In addition, look for similarities between this chapter and chapter 4.

**Starter question: Which country would you be most afraid to live in as a Christian?
Which world leader(s) do you think pose the greatest threat to Christians?**

Read Daniel 5



OPEN DISCUSSION

Spend 10 minutes sharing and discussing the things that most struck you from your personal study.



FOCUSSED DISCUSSION

Select from the questions below to focus your discussion on some main points from the chapter. You may have already covered some areas in the open discussion.

Compare this chapter with chapter 4: What are the similarities? What are the contrasts?

Similarities

- The king: proud and self-important
- He has a vision which alarms him
- None of the wise men can explain it, but Daniel can
- 5:18-21 recaps the events of chapter 4, including its main lesson: “the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will”
- In both cases the vision comes true, humbling the king

Contrasts

- Belshazzar's pride includes explicit derision of God
- Nebuchadnezzar is given time to repent; Belshazzar's downfall is immediate
- Nebuchadnezzar humbles himself and honours God; Belshazzar doesn't.
- Nebuchadnezzar is restored in the end, while Belshazzar is killed and his whole empire falls

How does this passage add depth to the big lessons of chapter 4?

Chapter 4 emphasised that “the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will”. This phrase is repeated in 5:21, indicating that this is still the main lesson, seen through the example of a different Babylonian king.

Belshazzar's pride is more extreme than Nebuchadnezzar's: Nebuchadnezzar ascribed the glory of his kingdom to himself, while Belshazzar directly sets himself against the Lord in 5:3-4. His downfall is also more extreme: he is not only humbled for a time, but he and his empire are permanently destroyed. Thus God's supremacy over human rulers is portrayed all the more clearly.

TWO PERSPECTIVES

Use the table to contrast the different perspectives on Belshazzar and God:

	On-the-surface world (1-4)	Hidden reality (5-31)
Belshazzar		
God		

**What is the main thing this passage teaches about God?
What is the main thing it teaches about human rulers?**

PURPOSE

As noted above, the original readers of Daniel's account of these events would be Israelites who were no longer under Babylonian rule, since the Babylonian empire fell in 538 BC as recorded in Daniel 5:30-31. However, despite having returned to their land, Israel remained a weak nation, plagued by hostile powers around them. Unlike in Daniel 5, they did not see the immediate humbling of rulers who opposed God.

Why would the lessons of Daniel 5 be important for them to know?



RESPONSE

Consider regimes in today's world which high-handedly oppose God. This may be blatant, direct, even violent opposition to Christians, or it may be a more subtle silencing of Christians. Use the examples you mentioned in the starter question.

How does this passage impact your view of these regimes?

Imagine the rulers of these regimes in the shoes of Belshazzar in Daniel 5. How should this impact the attitudes and actions of Christians in these regimes?

How does this passage help us pray for Christians who are persecuted for their faith? Spend some time doing this now (whether Christians you know personally or those you have read about).

DANIEL 6 | FROM DEPTHS TO HEIGHTS



PERSONAL STUDY

Read the chapter aloud. Continue to look out for:

- Repeated words or ideas
- Turning points in the story
- Links to previous chapters in Daniel
- Things that look important
- Things that surprise you
- Things you don't understand

In addition, look for similarities between this chapter and chapter 3.

Starter question: Think back to your discussion on chapter 3. What areas did you mention where staying faithful to Jesus might be costly?

Read Daniel 6



OPEN DISCUSSION

Spend 10 minutes sharing and discussing the things that most struck you from your personal study.



FOCUSSED DISCUSSION

Select from the questions below to focus your discussion on some main points from the chapter. You may have already covered some areas in the open discussion.

From this chapter, what is your impression of the following characters, and how does the on-the-surface situation contrast with the hidden reality?

a) Daniel?

On-the-surface, Daniel's situation is hopeless! He's caught in a trap that he can only escape by compromising his love for God. The law against him "cannot be changed" as emphasised in verses 8,12,15,17. He is above reproach and deeply committed to God, but sent to certain death in the den of lions.

However, having God on his side, death cannot touch him. God rescues him "because he had trusted in his God" (23), and his opponents are destroyed.

b) King Darius?

Although he is king of the world's mightiest empire and his laws are binding, he is trapped by his own position: he is powerless to change the law that he has been tricked into passing. His labours to rescue Daniel are unsuccessful (14). He appears mighty but in reality is ineffectual.

c) God?

Once again, God is shown to be superior to all human rulers, supernaturally rescuing Daniel from death and displaying his power to King Darius. Verses 26-27 praise his eternal kingdom and his mighty rescue.

Verse 23 explains that Daniel is unharmed "because he had trusted in his God". Think back over what we learned about God in chapters 4-5. How does this persuade you that Daniel was right to trust God, even in the face of such danger?

What similarities are there between this chapter and chapter 3?

PURPOSE

For Israelites reading Daniel, staying faithful to God may prove costly. It may even cost some their life. How do you think they would feel reading this chapter? How might it help them in difficult situations?

Daniel's experience here shows the reader that God can mightily rescue his people. In fact, his being thrown down into the lions' den and sealed behind a stone represents certain death - while his being found alive and well the following morning and taken up out of the den represents a kind of resurrection. This would provide encouragement even to those facing death: God can raise the dead!

Daniel's own willingness to risk his life (with no guarantee of deliverance) sets a challenging example of refusal to compromise.

In chapters 4-5 we considered what God's rule means for human powers who set themselves up against God's authority: he will bring them low. In this chapter (as in chapter 3), the focus is on what God's rule means for his people who trust him: he will raise them up. Why is it important to know both these things?



RESPONSE

Think back to the areas you discussed in the starter question, where staying faithful to Jesus comes at a cost. What might it look like in practice for you to respond like Daniel in these areas? Why would this be difficult?

This is an opportunity to revisit the discussions begun in chapter 3. As group members grapple with the idea of taking risks and counting the cost for following Jesus, it may be helpful to consider some concrete examples of situations returnees may face. You could use personal examples from the group or returnees they know; or you could use one of the case studies to be discussed in the final study, on page 53.

How does Daniel's experience help you face these situations? How can you use this chapter to help you know God and trust him in these situations?

Read Luke 12:4-7 and Revelation 2:8-11. How do these passages provide further help for us as Christians when we suffer for our faith?

DANIEL 7 | THE HIGHEST THRONE



PERSONAL STUDY

Read the chapter aloud. Continue to look out for:

- Repeated words or ideas
- Turning points in the story
- Links to previous chapters in Daniel
- Things that look important
- Things that surprise you
- Things you don't understand

In addition, look for similarities between this chapter and previous chapters in Daniel (especially chapter 2).

Imagine being in each of the scenes described in the vision: what do you see/hear/feel/smell? Draw the scenes if this will help fire your imagination!

Starter question: What is the most scary dream you can remember having? Why was it so terrifying?

Read Daniel 7



OPEN DISCUSSION

Spend 10 minutes sharing and discussing the things that most struck you from your personal study.

Apocalyptic Literature

From this chapter onwards, the book mostly contains accounts of Daniel's visions. These seem pretty wacky to us! We might be tempted to avoid them as they seem hard to understand. However, this type of writing is known as “apocalyptic” - a word which means “to uncover/reveal” - so the aim of these visions is to reveal a message, *not* to obscure it! How does this work?

The point of these visions is not merely to tell the reader what will happen in the future, but to teach them the true nature of these future events, so that they understand the *meaning* of what they will experience. The visions do this by appealing to the imagination. To illustrate this, consider Picasso's *Guernica*, painted in 1937 in reaction to the Nazi's devastating bombing of the town of Guernica:



Such a work functions very differently to a photograph. In some ways, the painting is *more real* than a photograph as it documents not only the events that took place, but the “truth” behind them: in this case, the horror, anguish and chaos of the bombing. Likewise, the vivid visions in Daniel teach not only facts about the future, but how to interpret and respond emotionally to these facts.

So rather than being afraid of or confused by these visions, we should let them teach us the hidden reality of the on-the-surface world; let them train our imagination to see our experience through God's eyes and not human eyes.



FOCUSSED DISCUSSION

Read the notes about Apocalyptic Literature. If you haven't covered this in the open discussion, share your answers to the final personal study question:

Imagine being in each of the scenes described in the vision: what do you see/hear/feel/smell?

(make sure you discuss the beasts of v1-8; the Ancient of Days in v9-12; the son of man of v13-14; the war of v21-27)

Some things you might discuss:

Feel the nightmarish horror of standing by the sea watching these monsters emerge one by one, grotesque and bloody, with iron teeth and bronze claws, tearing and trampling and destroying. Imagine the most monstrous of them trampling on the people of God.

Then see a great throne of fire, like the furnace in ch3, rising far higher than all these beasts, and a blindingly white figure seated on it, served by a vast crowd of people. He sits as judge, the books open before him representing everything that has ever been done on the earth: he has all the footage from all the surveillance cameras, even looking into people's hearts! He pronounces judgement and the monsters are destroyed.

In contrast to the beasts, there then comes a man. Imagine every country on the world map and every people group being given to him as his kingdom. Imagine him replacing the harmful regimes of the beasts and ruling supreme over the whole world; a dynasty that will never end.

Why is Daniel's response in verses 15 and 28 a reasonable one?

This is the stuff of nightmares and cold sweats! The nightmares discussed in the starter question should help us to grasp this.

What do these visions tell us about the future of God's people? What will happen to them, and how will it feel?

(Don't worry if your answers are quite vague; the next few chapters will give more specifics)

The beasts represent four mighty kingdoms who will come to prominence one after another over the region where God's people are situated. Their rule will be brutal and fearsome. In particular a ruler from the last kingdom will violently set himself against God's people and have some degree of success. But in the end God will judge and destroy this kingdom, giving dominion over all kingdoms on the earth to a "son of man" (13-14) and to "the saints" (18,22,27).

Look back to Nebuchadnezzar's vision and its interpretation in 2:31-45. What similarities are there between the visions of chapters 2 and 7?

Both speak of a succession of four mighty kingdoms, climaxing in a fourth kingdom of iron. In the time of this kingdom, God will break the power of all these kingdoms and set up one eternal worldwide kingdom.

Taking chapters 2 and 7 together, what picture do these visions paint of:

a) the four kingdoms?

Mighty, impressive and harmful, yet temporary and at the mercy of God's greater might. Portrayed as 'subhuman' (statues and beasts).

b) God's kingdom?

Eternal, universal, having ultimate power. This is God's kingdom, yet it is ruled by a 'son of man' (this phrase just means a human). His rule will be given to 'the saints' - all God's people (see verses 18, 22 and 27).

TWO PERSPECTIVES

What is the hidden reality that we are to understand about these kingdoms? How is this different to the on-the-surface perspective?

On the surface, for those who live under the four kingdoms they seem to have ultimate control, doing what they wish. God's people seem weak and abandoned by God. This chapter shows us that these mighty regimes are merely "beasts" - created by God, under his rule, and subject to his judgment which will ultimately destroy them. His people will ultimately rule the world eternally!

PURPOSE

For the Israelite reader of Daniel, the beasts described in this vision represent kingdoms that currently ruled over them, or that would arise in the future.

Why would it be important for them to know this hidden reality about these superpower kingdoms, about God, and about God's eternal kingdom?

This perspective would prevent them losing heart and doubting God's rule when their day-to-day experience feels as if the beasts are in charge and God is absent. It reminds them who is truly in control, and where the future is ultimately heading.



RESPONSE

While these four beasts refer to four specific historical kingdoms (more on this in chapter 8), Daniel sets them up as a pattern, many aspects of which are typical of superpowers and their dealings with God's people throughout history, including the present day.

However, we're not in exactly the same situation as Daniel's Israelite reader. Jesus identifies himself as the Son of Man of verses 13-14 (for example, see Mark 13:26, 14:62), and he has been crowned King of the world by his death and resurrection. We currently live in a "now but not yet" time, where Jesus' kingdom is advancing as the gospel spreads, but we do not yet experience the destruction of all other regimes or our own reign with Jesus in glory.

Consider how Daniel's vision maps onto the world you live in, with the help of the following questions:

- **Consider influential rulers or ideologies: in what ways are they like the beasts of Daniel 7? How does this make you feel as a Christian?**
- **Imagine God on his throne (9-10), enacting the judgment of verses 11-12. How does this make you feel as a Christian?**
- **Imagine Jesus receiving global rule (13-14), and sharing it with us eternally (18,22,27). How does this make you feel as a Christian?**
- **If we truly had this perspective on the world, how might it impact our actions?**

DANIEL 8 | ATTACK!



PERSONAL STUDY

Read the chapter aloud. Continue to look out for:

- Repeated words or ideas
- Turning points in the story
- Links to previous chapters in Daniel
- Things that look important
- Things that surprise you
- Things you don't understand

In addition, draw the different scenes depicted in the vision (or write a description of what you would put in each frame if you prefer!)

Read Daniel 8



OPEN DISCUSSION

Spend 10 minutes sharing and discussing the things that most struck you from your personal study.

Apocalyptic Imagery

These “apocalyptic” visions use symbolism which feels strange to us but would have been familiar to Daniel's Israelite reader. It's a bit like the way a dragon represented the power of the emperor in imperial China: everyone understood the symbolism without requiring explanation. Here are two examples:

1. **Horns:** Horns represent power, especially of a king or kingdom (see 8:20-23; also 7:7-8 and 20-21)
2. **2300 evenings and mornings:** Numbers in apocalyptic literature are likely to be symbolic, and certain numbers have particular significance. 7 is an important number, symbolising completeness, so a period of 3.5 years (half of 7) often means a limited time. This was hinted at in 7:25 which spoke of “a time, times and half a time” (1 time + 2 times + half a time = 3.5 times). “2300 evenings and mornings” in verse 14 could refer to 1150 days (1150 evenings + 1150 mornings = 2300), which is close to 3.5 years. Other time periods approximating 3.5 years appear in Daniel 12:11-12. This signifies a time that feels long, but is limited, its end having been determined by God.



FOCUSSED DISCUSSION

Select from the questions below to focus your discussion on some main points from the chapter. You may have already covered some areas in the open discussion.

Choose three words to describe: a) the ram b) the goat c) the little horn

This is an opportunity to consider the frightening mood of the vision.

How does the vision make Daniel feel? (15-17, 27) Why do you think he feels like this?

He doesn't understand and is frightened. Following the explanation he is utterly overwhelmed. The vision speaks of terrifying events: mighty powers, destructive wars, the trampling of God's people and the defilement of God's temple. No wonder Daniel is terrified to think that these events are what the future holds for Israel.

How does Gabriel interpret the vision? (verse 19 onwards)

The ram represents the Medo-Persian Empire. The goat represents the Greek Empire. The little horn represents a powerful king from the later period of the Greek Empire who will cause great destruction, in particular against God's people. In the end he will be broken.

Think back to the four kingdoms predicted in chapters 2 and 7. How do the events of chapter 8 fit with those predictions?

According to 2:37-38 Nebuchadnezzar is the “head of gold”: the first kingdom. Thus it follows that the second kingdom is Medo-Persia and the third is Greece. We are not told the identity of the fourth. The following table sets out the links between the different visions:

Empire	Chapter 2: Statue	Chapter 7: Beasts	Chapter 8: Ram, Goat
Babylon	Head of gold	Like a lion, with eagle's wings and man's mind	-
Medo-Persia	Chest and arms of silver	Like a bear, devouring flesh	Ram
Greece	Middle and thighs of bronze	Like a leopard, with four wings and four heads	Goat
[unnamed but refers to Rome*]	Legs and feet of iron and clay	A terrifying, strong beast with iron teeth	-

** Various features support the identification of the fourth kingdom as Rome. It was during the Roman Empire that Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension began the rule of God's eternal kingdom. Daniel does not name this kingdom, perhaps to indicate that this final empire also functions to represent the culmination of all human rule in opposition to God and his people.*

PURPOSE

Think of the Israelite reader, returned from Babylon thanks to King Cyrus of the Medo-Persian Empire (see verse 20).

How would this vision about the future make them feel?

What answers would it give them?

What questions would it leave them with?

The reader likely expected that after return from exile they would begin to experience the restoration that God had promised his people: security, prosperity, dominion, and God's eternal presence. But this vision looks far into the future, to an empire which has not yet arisen, and tells them that in those days they will be oppressed, destroyed, and the temple (verse 13: “sanctuary”, representing God's presence amongst his people) would be defiled.

Why do you think God chose to tell them about these events in advance?

How would it particularly help the generation of Israelites who lived at the time of the “little horn”?

It reassures them that even these horrific experiences were not outside God's control. Just as his promises of turmoil proved true, so they could trust his promises of deliverance and restoration (verses 14,27).

How would the content we've seen previously in Daniel 1-7 help them to endure these things?

*Chapter 1 introduced a battle between the kingdom of God and rebellious human kingdoms
Chapters 2 and 7: God will ultimately crush human kingdoms and establish his eternal kingdom where his people will reign
Chapters 3 and 6: God will raise up his trampled people who trust him
Chapters 4 and 5: God will bring low exalted human kingdoms.*



RESPONSE

These events were fulfilled in 168 BC when the Greek king Antiochus IV Epiphanes attacked Jerusalem, slaughtering many Jews and desecrating the temple by setting up an altar to the god Zeus in it (we'll see more about this in chapter 11). However, as mentioned in the previous study, this pattern of hostile powers oppressing God's people is one which repeats from age to age.

Jesus uses the language of this chapter to speak about the time between the cross and his return (compare Mark 13:14 with Daniel 8:13, also 9:27 and 11:31). So we can draw lessons from these visions for our experience today as Christians.

How do we experience or hear of similar attacks against Christians today?

How does Daniel's vision help us endure these attacks?

(You could discuss the following aspects)

- **The fact that these things were predicted in advance**
- **The fact that God has promised a final end to these persecutions, with the oppressor broken and God's people restored.**
- **The lessons about God learned from Daniel 1-7**

DANIEL 9 | MORE TO COME



PERSONAL STUDY

Read the chapter aloud. Continue to look out for:

- Repeated words or ideas
- Turning points in the story
- Links to previous chapters in Daniel
- Things that look important
- Things that surprise you
- Things you don't understand

In addition, read Jeremiah 25:8-14 and 29:10-14 and consider how these provide background to Daniel's prayer in this chapter. The Jeremiah 25 prophecy dates from the year of Judah's first exile to Babylon (the year that Daniel was taken to Babylon), and the Jeremiah 29 one came after the second exile 8 years later (see Timeline page 7).

Read Daniel 9



OPEN DISCUSSION

Spend 10 minutes sharing and discussing the things that most struck you from your personal study.

You will find it helpful to cover:

a) repeated ideas in the chapter

Most strikingly, Daniel speaks again and again of the people's sin, such as verse 5 which lists four different ways of describing sin. The prayer is full of these ideas, and they appear again in verse 24.

b) the chapter's broad structure

The passage can basically be divided into Daniel's prayer (1-19) and God's response (20-27).



FOCUSSED DISCUSSION

1-19: Daniel's Prayer

What does Daniel ask for? How much of his prayer is requests? What else does his prayer include?

Only at the end of the prayer (v16-19) does Daniel actually make his request! He asks God to listen to his prayer, to turn away his anger from Jerusalem and forgive his people's sin. The first part of the prayer focusses on confessing the people's rebellion against God, and describing the curses God has brought on the people.

Why does he ask for this? Why his request appropriate? Use the Jeremiah references from the personal study section to help answer this question.

Daniel appeals to God's character of steadfast love and mercy (3,9,18) and the fact that Jerusalem is known as God's holy city: God's own reputation is at stake here (17,18,19), so for God's own sake Daniel asks him to forgive his people.

Daniel's request is also based on his knowledge of God's promises, particularly his word given through the prophet Jeremiah, as mentioned in verse 2. God had told his people that their exile to Babylon was a punishment which would last for seventy years, after which they should seek God in prayer and he would bring them back to their own land. As Daniel sees the end of seventy years drawing near, he asks God to do what he has promised.

What is Daniel's attitude as he prays? Why is this attitude appropriate?

Daniel prays with deep humility and repentance, recognising the weighty seriousness of sin. Even though he is not personally responsible for all the rebellion mentioned in the prayer, he knows that as part of the people of Israel he is implicated, and so approaches God with reverent confession. He does not presume on God's mercy.

20-27 God's Response

Through his messenger Gabriel, God gives an answer to Daniel's prayer in verses 24-27. Some details may seem difficult, but consider the main things that Daniel is told, in light of what he asked for in verses 1-19.

In what ways is this answer what he had hoped for? In what ways is it not quite what he had hoped for?

God tells Daniel that he will indeed answer his prayer: verse 24 speaks of an end to sin, atonement for iniquity and everlasting righteousness - this is the forgiveness that Daniel longed for. God will "anoint a most holy place", in answer to Daniel's request for the temple (the "holy hill" of verses 16 and 21).

However, the timescale is far longer than Daniel expected. The seventy years of exile in Babylon are over, but there are another "seventy sevens" (sometimes translated as "seventy weeks") to come before these things are fulfilled.

"Seventy sevens"

As mentioned in the previous study, numbers in apocalyptic literature are usually symbolic. The number seven symbolises completeness while multiplying by ten indicates bigness. Leviticus 25:8 told the Israelites that after "seven times seven years" (ie 49 years) they should celebrate a "year of jubilee" when all captives would be set free. Thus Daniel 9:24 speaks of $7 \times 7 \times 10$ years, symbolising the ultimate year of jubilee: final liberation from sin for God's people, rather than a literal 490 years (note: a literal translation of verse 24 is "seventy sevens", although some Bible versions translate "sevens" as "weeks").

The "anointed one" of verse 26 who "shall be cut off and shall have nothing" predicts the coming of Jesus at the climax of this period. By his death he will fulfil the great events of verse 24 (the Hebrew for "anointed one" is "Messiah").

The visions of chapters 7 and 8 have already introduced the idea that in years to come God's people would experience times of turmoil under hostile powers, before enjoying final deliverance and victory. Chapter 9 describes this time of turmoil in terms of "seventy sevens", indicating that it is a type of spiritual exile and slavery. The Israelites have physically returned to their land, but spiritually they are still exiles, under calamity and curse as a result of their sin, suffering at the hands of "the prince who is to come" (26). They are to wait for the coming of an "anointed one" or Messiah whose suffering will bring an end to their spiritual exile.

Consider the whole of Daniel 9. How does it highlight the significance of the problem of sin?

The background to Daniel 9, and indeed the whole of Daniel, is God's people's exile to Babylon. This chapter highlights that it was the Israelites' sin that sent them into exile, and this problem is so deep that it will not be solved by their return from Babylon to Israel. They must continue as spiritual exiles for centuries to come; the true deliverance that they await is a deliverance from sin and not just Babylon.

TWO PERSPECTIVES

Consider the on-the-surface world: Imagine if the Israelites had to face the events of the “seventy sevens” without the vision of 9:22-27. What conclusions might they draw about the battle between God's rule and rebellious human rule?

Experiencing a “troubled time” lasting for centuries it would be easy for the Israelites to think that God had abandoned his people; that their spiritual exile would never end. During this period, rebellious human rule seems to have the upper hand, even destroying the city (Jerusalem), the sanctuary (the temple) and an “anointed one” (Israel's king). It would be easy to question whether God is really mightier than his enemies.

Now consider the hidden reality: How does the vision of 9:22-27 change the Israelites' perspective on the battle between God's rule and rebellious human rule? What's surprising about how this battle will be fought?

The vision teaches the Israelites that even their times of trouble and defeat are decreed by God and under his control. Even as human rebellion strikes at the heart of God's anointed king, this is all part of God's plan to answer Daniel's prayer by putting an end to sin, and ultimately destroying God's enemies (verse 27 “the decreed end”). In this way God's people will finally be freed from their spiritual exile.

Surprisingly, it's through God's own anointed king being cut off that he will ultimately break rebellious human rule, rescuing his people from sin.

PURPOSE

Consider the Israelite reader of Daniel, living at some point during the “seventy sevens”. How would this chapter help them understand their experience? How should they respond?

They shouldn't be surprised that they experience “a troubled time” (25). Neither should they lose hope, because God has promised verse 24: a resolution to their true problem.

They should respond by waiting eagerly for the Messiah of verse 26, and should continue to pray in humble repentance like Daniel because their spiritual exile is not over yet and the reason for this is the weightiness of their sin.



RESPONSE

Are we in a similar or different position to the Israelite reader? The answer is, “both”! On one hand, we are very different to them because the Messiah has come, sin has been atoned for by his death, and our spiritual exile is over: we enjoy God's presence through his Spirit living in us.

On the other hand, 1 Peter refers to Christians as “exiles” (1:1,17, 2:11) because we still live in a hostile world, battling with sin and waiting for the ultimate end of those who oppose God and his people.

How should this chapter impact your attitude towards sin?

Consider Daniel's prayer. As Christians, what can we learn from the way Daniel prays, particularly regarding confession of sin?

Think about Daniel's earnest longing for the end of exile (eg verse 3), and how earnestly the Israelite reader would have longed for the coming of the “anointed one”. How does this make you grateful for Jesus, and for the times we live in?

DANIEL 10:1-11:35 | STAND FIRM AND TAKE ACTION



PERSONAL STUDY

Read Daniel 10:1-11:35 aloud. Continue to look out for:

- Repeated words or ideas
- Turning points in the story
- Links to previous chapters in Daniel
- Things that look important
- Things that surprise you
- Things you don't understand

This passage contains a very long description of a vision which runs all the way to the end of chapter 12! Compare this passage (especially 11:28-35) with the visions in chapter 7, 8 and 9:24-27 - what similarities are there between them?

Starter question: When does it feel as if world events are out of control? Think of some examples from today's world.

Read Daniel 10:1-11:35



OPEN DISCUSSION

Spend 10 minutes sharing and discussing the things that most struck you from your personal study.



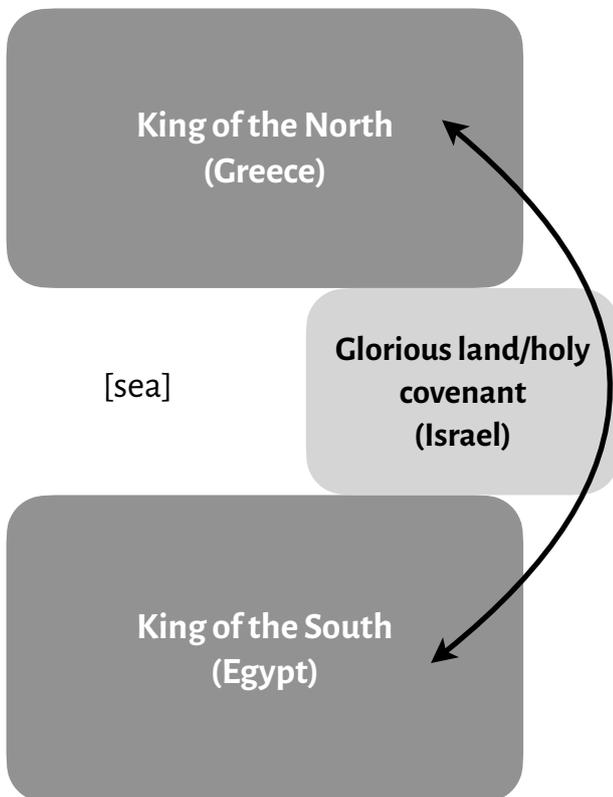
FOCUSSED DISCUSSION

10:1-11:1 function as an introduction to the words spoken in chapter 11.

How should these verses impact the reader's attitude to the words that follow in chapter 11? Consider: What does Daniel see? What does he hear? How does he respond?

11:2-35 contain a description of future events. What are the main things that will happen? What will be their impact on God's people? (don't worry about all the details - of which there are many!)

This basic map might help:



Two kingdoms (the north and the south) will war against each other in a long series of battles that go back and forth. God's people (situated in between these two kingdoms) will be caught up in the middle of this turmoil; the armies of north and south must pass through Israel to attack each other.

From 11:24 the action focuses on one "contemptible person" - a ruler from the north (Greece, see verse 2) who will arise with great might and attack the king of the south (Egypt, see verse 8). However, he will be forced to withdraw (11:29-30) and in fury he will turn on Israel (the 'holy covenant', 11:30), defiling the temple and winning over many amongst God's people, while others stand firm and take action (11:32).

This "contemptible person is the same as the "little horn" of chapter 8 (Antiochus IV Epiphanes of Greece - see page 37)

TWO PERSPECTIVES

Imagine living through the events of chapter 11 without knowing anything of the hidden reality. How would it feel for God's people (Israel)?

The two kingdoms of the north and the south seem to be the mighty ones in control of world events (for example, 11:3, 5, 10, 13). God's people seem to be at the mercy of their destructive power - a small, insignificant pawn in the hands of the major players in world history (11:16, 28-35). It would be easy for God's people to feel that God had abandoned them, or was powerless against these mighty nations.

In what different ways does this passage give God's people a glimpse of the hidden reality?

Consider:

- **the vision of the speakers in chapter 10**

Human power can't compare with the terrifying majesty of God's representatives

- **the description of 'princes' in 10:13, 20, 21 (these most likely refer to heavenly beings: angels who fight for different nations)**

On-the-surface, it appears that history is in the hands of human rulers. However, this vision tells us that these events are the visible results of invisible spiritual battles: it is really God who stands behind the rise and fall of human kingdoms.

- **the fact that these events are foretold several centuries before their fulfilment?**

This vision is dated 'in the third year of Cyrus' (10:1), namely 535 BC. The events described in most detail (11:28-35) took place in 168 BC (see page 37), almost 400 years later. For God to tell future events in such detail, he must hold the future in the palm of his hand.

PURPOSE

How should God's people respond when they experience these things (11:32-33)?

God's people are to know their God, and so be strengthened to stand firm and take action. They are to make many others understand. They should beware "flattery" of those who would cause them to compromise (32,34).

Think back to the experiences of Daniel and his friends in the Babylonian court (especially chapters 3 and 6) - how do they help illustrate what this response means in practice?

Daniel and his friends provide examples of living this way: because they knew God's authority and power to rescue, they were faithful to God when faced with pressure to bow to Nebuchadnezzar's statue (chapter 3) or to stop praying to God (chapter 6). They stood firm in trusting God and acted in a way that put God first. They did not shrink back from speaking to others of their trust in God.

How would the visions of 10:1-11:35 help Israelite readers to respond in this way?

The experience of these events would be dreadful - but as things unfold exactly as God had foretold in this vision it would give them great confidence that God is indeed the king of kings who "removes kings and sets up kings" (2:21). He is in control. Therefore it's worth living for him, whatever the cost.



RESPONSE

Look back to your answers to the starter question. How does this passage shape your view of international events that seem out of control?

Consider the situations discussed in previous studies, where Christians face pressure from society to compromise our faith and go along with the mainstream. In these situations, what would it mean in practice for you to "know your God, stand firm and take action"? (11:32)

How do the visions of this passage encourage you to do these things?

DANIEL 11:36-12:13 | THE END



PERSONAL STUDY

Read Daniel 10:1-11:35 aloud. Continue to look out for:

- Repeated words or ideas
- Turning points in the story
- Links to previous chapters in Daniel
- Things that look important
- Things that surprise you
- Things you don't understand

In addition, consider why this passage is an appropriate ending to the book of Daniel? Think about themes from previous chapters that appear again, or questions which are resolved.

Read Daniel 11:36-12:13



OPEN DISCUSSION

Spend 10 minutes sharing and discussing the things that most struck you from your personal study.



FOCUSSED DISCUSSION

The phrase “the time of the end” (or similar expressions) appears multiple times in this passage. What do we learn about this “end”?

Some angles to consider:

- What do we learn about the period between Daniel's time and “the end”? (11:36-12:1, 12:9-13)
 - *Proud rulers will rise against God, appearing to be honoured, influential and fearsome*
 - *They bring real threat and harm to God's people (verse 41: the “glorious land”)*
- What will the end be like for God's people? (12:1-3)
 - *They will be rescued as the dead rise to eternal life as if they had been only sleeping!*
 - *They will shine like stars forever, denoting glory and influence*
- What will the end be like for others? (12:2)
 - *They will also be raised from death, but to shame and everlasting contempt*
- How will the end contrast with present experience for both groups?
 - *Those who oppose God in the present often seem to be on the side of honour and might, but they will be brought utterly low. Those who trust God in the present seem to be trampled - even killed - by these mighty regimes, but in the end will enjoy eternal life and honour.*

How does this description add to other descriptions of the end time in Daniel? (see 2:44-45; 7:25-27; 9:24, 27)

Previous visions tell that God's kingdom will defeat and destroy all other kingdoms, and that God's people will rule in his kingdom forever. There will be an end to sin, and everlasting righteousness will come in.

This passage adds the idea of resurrection to this picture: God's people will be raised from the dead to rule in his kingdom; his enemies will be raised from the dead to face condemnation. Death is not the end!

In verses 6 and 8, Daniel and others wish to know more about the time of the end. What are they told? What are they not told?

They ask how long it will be till these things happen, and are told it will be “for a time, times, and half a time” (v8), or “1,290 days... 1,335 days” (v11-12). These are all roughly equivalent to 3.5 years (see note on Apocalyptic Imagery, page 35). As noted previously, numbers in

apocalyptic literature are usually symbolic, and the number 7 symbolises completeness, thus 3.5 signifies a limited time period. They are not told the exact timescale, but they are assured that it's under God's control, and that he has limited the time - the end will surely come. While many details are withheld from Daniel, he is told that there will be a distinction between the righteous and the wicked, and that he himself will be granted "rest" at the end.

Remember the big issue from chapter 9: although God's people physically returned from exile in Babylon from 538 BC onwards, spiritually they remain exiles. How does this passage increase our understanding of when the real end of exile will come?

True rescue from exile does not mean political deliverance from enemy nations, but spiritual deliverance from sin. It will not take place within the lifetime of Daniel and his friends; rather it will be experienced after death.

TWO PERSPECTIVES

How does the language used here help the reader to picture the reality of the end?

*Spend time imagining the dead rising, as if from sleep, and being divided into two distinct groups. Consider each in turn:
All who rebel against God face eternal shame and contempt.
All who belong to God's kingdom will shine like stars forever. This speaks of a real, physical future resurrection.*

PURPOSE

Why would it be so important for the Israelite reader to know what will happen in the end?

The book of Daniel describes remarkable instances of God's people being rescued from life-threatening situations. Yet for the Israelite reader, and for God's people throughout history, there is a real possibility that aligning with God in defiance of mighty human regimes will lead to dying for their faith. Faced with this, it changes everything to know that God promises resurrection from the dead: his faithful people will be raised to life, to reign forever in his eternal kingdom. His enemies will be raised to eternal punishment.

Although questions remain, why is what Daniel is told enough for the reader?

No matter what they experience at present, and no matter how long the “time of trouble” (12:1) lasts, they are assured that this time is limited. Staying faithful to God will ultimately be worth it!

In chapter 1 we considered a battle that has been raging since the very start of the Bible, between God’s kingdom and human kingdoms in rebellion against God. Finally here we read of an end to this battle as God wins ultimate victory for his people.



RESPONSE

As Christians, why is it so important for us to fix our eyes on this day of future resurrection from the dead? Why do we sometimes find it difficult to have this perspective?

Jesus alludes to Daniel 12:2 in John 5:24-29, saying *he* is the one who will call the dead out of their tombs to the resurrection of life, or the resurrection of judgment! John 11:43-44 demonstrates that Jesus’ word has this power as he calls a dead man out of his tomb. In John 20, he himself rises from his tomb.

How does knowing this about Jesus help you fix your eyes on your own future resurrection?

How does understanding the end help you “stand firm and take action” (11:32) in the ways discussed in the previous passage?

CONCLUSION: Responding to big themes from Daniel



PERSONAL STUDY

Re-read the whole of Daniel and reflect on the big lessons God has taught you through it:

- **How has Daniel helped you to “know your God” (11:32)?**
- **How has Daniel challenged your view of the world and how you live?**
- **How has Daniel encouraged you?**



OPEN DISCUSSION

Start by sharing things you thought about in your personal study.



FOCUSSED DISCUSSION



RESPONSE

We have suggested questions below to help you discuss two main themes in greater depth:

THEME 1: KINGDOM CLASH

A major theme of Daniel is the battle between God's kingdom and human kingdoms in rebellion against God. This battle is a big theme in the whole Bible, beginning with man's rebellion against God's rule in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3. Throughout the Bible the nation of Babylon represents the world in opposition to God's kingdom. Daniel teaches us how God's rule will ultimately triumph.

Where in Daniel have we seen this battle between God's kingdom and human kingdoms?

How does Daniel demonstrate that this battle is still a reality today?

What does God's victory look like...

- a) At Daniel's time?**
- b) For us now, after Jesus' first coming?**
- c) In the future, after Jesus' second coming?**

At Daniel's time, and for us now, God's victory isn't manifested in political influence, but through his people standing firm in faith in God, even though they appear weak and are trampled by oppressive, proud human regimes.

In Daniel 7, God reveals that he will triumph over rebellious human rule through the eternal rule of a perfect human king: the "son of man" (7:13-14). For us now, we know this son of man to be Jesus, who now rules the world (see Acts 1:9-11 where Jesus' ascension is described in similar language to Daniel 7:13). In fact, it is as human rebellion reached its height in crucifying God's anointed one that its power was broken, and the spiritual exile of God's people was ended (see Daniel 9:24-27).

God's victory will be experienced in full when the son of man returns to judge (see Acts 1:9-11 again), God's people are raised from the dead and reign forever with him (Daniel 12:1-3, 7:27).

Why would it be important for Daniel's Israelite reader to know about this battle and God's ultimate victory?

Why is it important for us to know this?

In particular, what difference does it make to know that ultimate vindication is after death?

THEME 2: TWO PERSPECTIVES

Throughout Daniel we've seen the interplay of two perspectives: the on-the-surface world and the hidden reality. These two perspectives offer two different understandings of the battle discussed above:

1. On-the-surface world: God's rule appears to be subjected to human rule; God's people oppressed by God's enemies
2. Hidden reality: Proud human rule is in God's hands, will be broken and God's rule through his people will be established forever

When does it feel like God is absent from: a) world events? b) your own daily experience?

How does Daniel's hidden perspective help at such times?

What lessons can we learn from the examples of Daniel and friends (Daniel 1,3,6)?

For example, they display real belief in God's power to raise the dead, which leads them to take a bold stand.

Daniel models a close walk with God in prayer (see 2:17, 6:10, 9:1-19)

For the returnee scenarios below, consider:

How does Daniel provide a different perspective on this situation?

In this situation, what might it look like in practice to trust God and stay faithful to him?

- Jing became a Christian overseas and recently returned to live with her parents while working at a university. Her parents are Party members and fear that if their daughter is known to be a Christian it could have repercussions for their own position, as well as making it hard for Jing to gain promotions and even risking her job. They have told her to stop attending church activities and to keep her faith private.

- Shu lives in a big Chinese city and works for a multinational company where life is fast-paced and work exciting. He attends a church which meets in groups of 10-15 in members' homes to avoid scrutiny from authorities. In his day-to-day life the demands and goals of his work feel more tangible and worthwhile than his Christian faith, which feels marginalised and insignificant. When working overtime clashes with church or Bible study, Shu feels more and more tempted to prioritise work.

- Wen speaks openly of her Christian faith with family and colleagues, but they don't take her seriously. She is regularly mocked for believing in heaven, hell and resurrection from the dead. When colleagues socialise after work they sometimes don't invite her because she refuses to join them in getting drunk.

Finish by praying for yourself and other Christians to stand firm, trusting God's perspective on reality, and living boldly for his eternal kingdom, both overseas and back in China.

APPENDIX: Structure of Daniel

The book of Daniel has a number of interesting structural features which help communicate its main message.

1. Language

Daniel is written in two different languages. 1:1-2:3 and chapters 8-12 are in Hebrew (the language of God's people), while 2:4-7:28 are in Aramaic (the global language of the day). This use of two languages reflects Daniel's main themes.

Firstly, the two languages offer two perspectives on the world. Aramaic corresponds to events that happen on the surface: things that all people can see. Hebrew points to hidden reality made known to God's people. It is easy for all to see the might of superpowers and empires who trample God's people at will. But only through God, the "revealer of mysteries" (2:47), can people know the reality of God's eternal purposes. The use of Hebrew to record the visions of chapters 8-12 underlines that God's people are key to God's plan to establish his eternal kingdom: he will end their spiritual exile (chapter 9) and the kingdom that will reign forever will be the kingdom of Israel's Messiah, the Lord Jesus.

Secondly, the movement from Hebrew to Aramaic and back to Hebrew mirrors the geographical movement of God's people. They are exiled from the land of Israel (corresponding to the Hebrew language), subsumed into Babylon which represents the nations in rebellion against God (corresponding to Aramaic), but God promises to bring them back to their land and establish his eternal kingdom through them (the return to Hebrew) - though Daniel teaches us to look beyond a physical return to Israel to a time when God will end spiritual exile by atoning for sin (9:24).

2. Chiasm structure of Daniel 2-7

The Aramaic portion of Daniel forms a chiasm (mirror structure), as set out below:

Chapter 2: Vision of four mighty human kingdoms. God will overthrow them and establish his eternal kingdom

Chapter 3: God's people sentenced to death by an anti-God regime, but raised up by God

Chapter 4: Anti-God regime exalts itself but is brought low by God

Chapter 5: Anti-God regime exalts itself but is brought low by God

Chapter 6: God's people sentenced to death by an anti-God regime, but raised up by God

Chapter 7: Vision of four mighty human kingdoms. God will overthrow them and establish his eternal kingdom