

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

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.

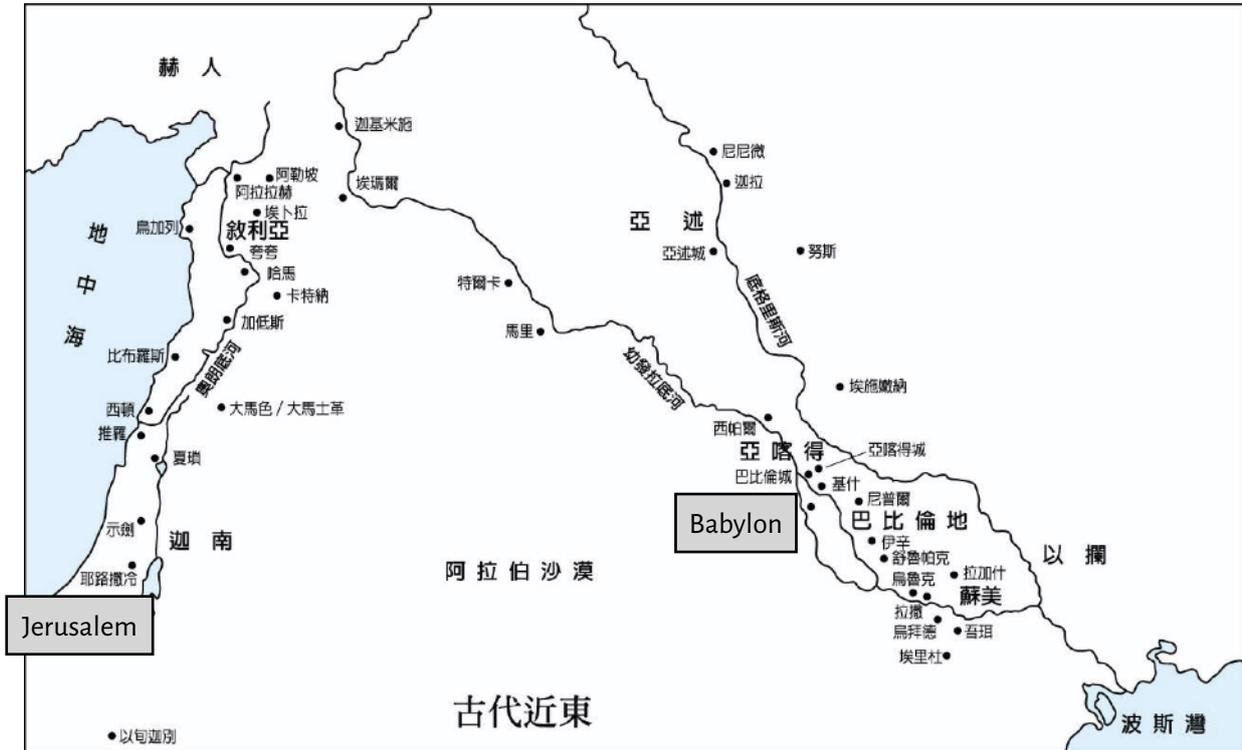
Discuss: Why were the Israelites not in their own land? Why was this a desperate situation for them?

(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)

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)

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

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?

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?

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 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 didn't prevent him from prospering (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?

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

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?

PURPOSE

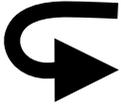
Consider the Israelite reader (remember what we learned about them last time: they are “returnees” from exile, who returned to Israel with great expectations of renewal, but met a disappointing reality).

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?

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?

In this chapter, only the first kingdom (Babylon) is identified. In later chapters of Daniel we learn more about the precise fulfillment 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?

b) Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego?

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, as introduced on page 9)?

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?



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? 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. 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?

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 at least 200 years 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?

What is the main point of this chapter? How does it help the reader understand the hidden reality?

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"?

TWO PERSPECTIVES

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

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?



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?

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

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? How does it impact your view of God?

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?

b) King Darius?

c) God?

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?

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?

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 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. We shouldn't seek to match all the specific details with historical events, but rather grasp the general impression of the vision.



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)

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

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)

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? What new information do we learn about in chapter 7?

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

a) the four kingdoms?

b) God's kingdom?

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?

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?



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

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

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

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

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 identify 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?

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”?

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



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

b) the chapter's broad structure



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.

1-19: Daniel's Prayer

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

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

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

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?

“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 slaves 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?

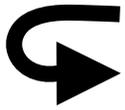
TWO PERSPECTIVES

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?

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?

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?



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

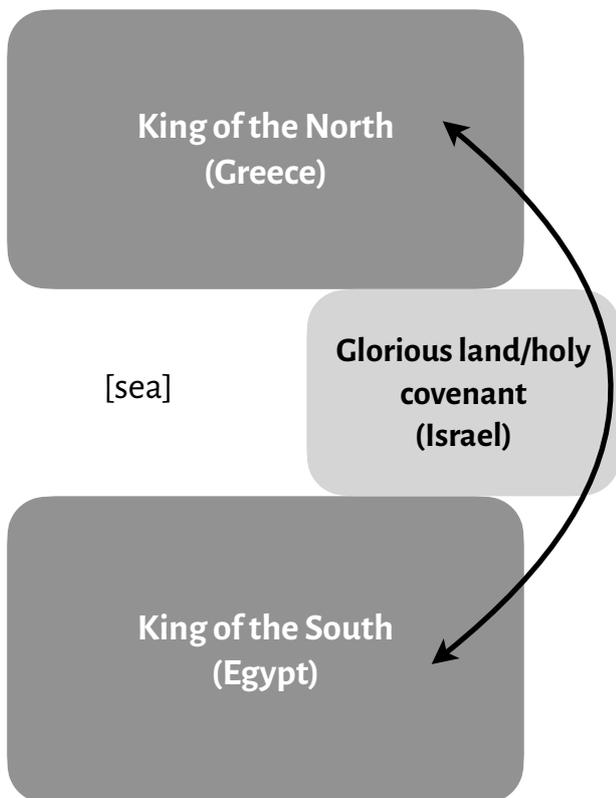
Select from the questions below to focus your discussion on some main points from the chapter. You may have already covered some areas in the open discussion.

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:



PURPOSE

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

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?

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



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 11:36-12:13 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

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.

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)
- What will the end be like for God's people? (12:1-3)
- What will the end be like for others? (12:2)
- How will the end contrast with present experience for both groups?

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

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?

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?

TWO PERSPECTIVES

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

PURPOSE

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

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

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?**

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 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.

- Wei 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, Wei feels more and more tempted to prioritise work.

- Shu 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