

St. Mark's Lutheran Church
Adult Bible Study - November/December 2024
The Book of Daniel

Study Guide

Lesson One: Introduction and Historical Background

1) How does Daniel fit into the history of Israel?

- Daniel's life spanned the 7th and 6th centuries BC from about 623-538 BC. He was taken to Babylon as a young man in 605 BC when Nebuchadnezzar, ruler of the Babylonian empire, conquered and destroyed Jerusalem.
 - a) "Over a twenty year period, beginning in 605 BC, the armies of Babylon invaded Judah three times, smashing Judah's armies, plundering and destroying their cities, and leading thousands of Jews (mostly those of noble and royal birth, including Daniel), into exile in Babylon ... In 586 BC, Jerusalem, with its beautiful temple was destroyed" (John Jeske, The People's Bible, NPH, 1985, p. 2).
 - b) See 2 Kings 24-25, 2 Chronicles 36, and Daniel 1:1-2 for the history of Jerusalem's destruction and the beginning of the Babylonian captivity.
 - c) See the timeline below for a framework of how Daniel's life fits into the history of Israel:

1010-970 BC	King David - all Israel united under David in 1003 BC)
970-930 BC	King Solomon
931-586 BC	The kingdom split - Israel (northern ten tribes) and Judah (southern two tribes). Israel and Judah each had 19 kings during these years.
605-530s BC	The years of the Babylonian captivity.
530s-430s BC	Groups of Jews returned to Judah under Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah.
400s-5 BC	The "Silent Years" (Intertestamental Period); Israel ruled successively by the Medes, Persians, Greeks (Alexander the Great), Ptolemies, Seleucids, Jewish Hasmodians (years of self-rule), and Romans.
5/6 BC	The birth of Christ

- Questions to consider:
 - a) Why had God raised up the nation of Israel? (See Genesis 12:3; Exodus 19:3-6; Isaiah 43:21)
 - b) Is God's purpose for us any different? (see 1 Corinthians 10:31)
 - c) Can we see any evidence that our country is following a similar path to that which brought about the downfall of Judah?
 - d) What evidence shows that God is displeased with what he sees in America today?
 - e) What truth (expressed throughout the book of Daniel) is a comfort which modern-day Christians have as they survey today's world?
- Daniel was a gifted man chosen (among others) for important positions in the Babylonian government.
- Daniel was a man of great faith who steadfastly remained loyal to God even when surrounded by the corruption of the Babylonian royal court.

2) Why did God allow Israel to endure the adversities of defeat, destruction, and exile?

- The Jews had fallen away from God.
 - a) “They (the Jews) became indifferent to the Word and the will of Jehovah ... they ignored and sometimes even persecuted the prophets God sent to speak to them and call them to repentance” (Jeske, p. 2).
 - b) In spite of the judgment of God in exile, Israel remained a chosen nation - the nation God used to carry out his good intentions toward all humanity (see Psalm 147:19-20). In other words, the Messianic Promise would still be fulfilled - for all nations.
 - c) “A new order of things would come through the promised Messiah. God would gather his special people ... not from just one nation, but from all nations on earth” (Jeske p. 3).
 - d) Through the prophet Jeremiah God foretold that Judah, as a nation, would survive and return after 70 years (see Jeremiah 25:7-11 and 29:10-14).
- God turns difficult experiences into blessings for his people by bringing them to repentance and a renewed trust in him (see Romans 8:28).
- Questions to consider
 - a) Why had God raised up the nation of Israel? (See Genesis 12:3; Exodus 19:3-6; Isaiah 43:21)
 - b) Why did God permit his people to be taken into exile?

3) What was life like for the Jews in exile?

- Life in exile was hard, but God did not abandon his people.
 - a) The Babylonians were benevolent rulers in that they allowed the Jews a “considerable measure of liberty” (Jeske, p. 4). They (the Babylonians), like all nations and empires, were controlled by the “hand of God.”
 - b) The prophet Jeremiah urged the Jews to make the best of their situation (see Jeremiah 29:5-7).
 - c) Some Jews grew prosperous in exile. When they had the opportunity to return many years later, many chose to stay in Babylon.
 - d) In spite of these factors, living in exile must have been difficult for believing Jews. See Psalm 137, which puts into words the heartache that they felt (see Psalm 137:1-4).
- God gave his people comfort and assurance while in exile.
 - a) Faithful Jews needed assurance that their time of exile was not a condemning judgment but a purifying one. They needed to have God speak to them in Babylon, and God did speak.
 - b) Daniel was God’s chosen voice/instrument to remind the Jews that they were still the focus of his great plans for the salvation of all people.
- Questions to consider
 - a) Was it wrong for the Jews to be content to stay in Babylon?
 - b) What was the most difficult aspect of exile for believing Jews?
 - c)

4) The book of Daniel is a **divine revelation**.

- What means did God use to endow Daniel with divine revelations?

- a) God's revelation to Daniel is a "miracle through which God God pulled back the veil and showed (his people) truths that otherwise would not have been known" (Jeske, p. 6). Daniel states repeatedly that the "revealer of mysteries" showed him what was going to happen (see Daniel 2:19, 29; 7:1; 8:1; 10:1; 8:16; and 9:22) through dreams he was allowed to interpret. They (the revelations) gave him (and God's people) insight and understanding.
 - b) Throughout the book of Daniel, God revealed that all earthly kingdoms would, one after another, go down to defeat and disgrace. God's rule is supreme! His rule, and only his, is everlasting. "World powers may have their day, but God will have the last word" (Jeske, p. 7). Therefore, the message of the book of Daniel is a comfort for the people of God.
- Can we be sure that Daniel wrote the book?
 - a) Daniel repeatedly refers to himself in the first person.
 - b) Jesus quoted from the book and referred to the words as being "spoken ... through the prophet Daniel" (see Matthew 24:15).
 - c) Although doubting scholars claim that it is impossible to predict events that lie in the future, Christians trust that our God controls the future. He can and did choose messengers to reveal events that lie in the future (as Moses, Joseph, and the OT prophets did). God's faithful people will put their trust in everything recorded in the Bible, which is the full counsel of God.
 - Questions to consider
 - What is the miracle of revelation?
 - What is it that sets Christianity apart from all other world religions?

*God has spoken by his prophets, spoken his unchanging Word,
Each from age to age proclaiming God, the one, the righteous Lord,
In the world's despair and turmoil one firm anchor holds us fast;
God is King, his throne eternal, God the first and God the last. (CW 639, st. one)*

Lesson Two: God's Man in the King's Court

Daniel 1:1-21

- 1) Historical background of the fall of Jerusalem
 - The Assyrian empire's decline began with the fall of Nineveh, its capital, in 612 BC to the Babylonians. A power struggle for supremacy in the Middle East ensued among three mighty kingdoms: Babylon, Assyria, and Egypt. This had negative effects on the kingdom of Judah.
 - a) Pharaoh Neco of Egypt joined Assyria in its struggle to stem Babylon's growing power. When King Josiah of Judah also "went up to the Euphrates River to help the King of Assyria" (see 2 Kings 23:28-30) in 609 BC, Pharaoh Neco warned Josiah not to interfere. Josiah did not listen, and he was killed in battle (see 2 Chronicles 35:20-24). Josiah's son, Jehoahaz, became the new king of Judah; however, after three months Neco removed Jehoahaz from Judah's throne and replaced him with Josiah's second son, Eliakim, (who was renamed Jehoiakim).
 - b) Ultimately, the Babylon army, led by Nebuchadnezzar, defeated the Egyptians at Carchemish (605 BC). This battle has been called one of the most significant in world

history. It certainly had an impact on God's people. Egyptian domination of Judah ended; Babylonian rule would follow.

- c) After Carchemish, Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem. This time, unlike attacks on Jerusalem in the past which were repulsed because of divine intervention - e.g., the defeat of Sennacherib and Assyria during Hezekiah's reign (see 2 Chronicles 32), Jerusalem fell in 605 BC. Nebuchadnezzar did not destroy Jerusalem at this time, but took steps to subjugate the Jews.

- Questions to consider

- a) Why didn't God protect Judah as he had in the past? (see 2 Chronicles 36:5-8; Jeremiah 22:17; and Jeremiah 36)
- b) Nebuchadnezzar could have completely crushed Judah. Why didn't he? (two reasons - see Jeske, p. 12-13)
- c) What message were the Babylonians leaving with the Jews by seizing sacred vessels from the temple in Jerusalem and placing them in the temple of their gods?

2) The deportation of Jewish soldiers, the royal family, members of the nobility, and "best" young men to Babylon

- Challenges faced by those chosen by the king for special service (see Daniel 1:3-6)
- Daniel's resolve to "serve God rather than men" (see Daniel 1:8-14)
- God's blessings toward the young men who remained faithful to him (see Daniel 1:15-21)

- Questions to consider

- a) What reason did Nebuchadnezzar deport members of the royal family and the brightest and best of the young Israelites?
- b) What purpose did God have in permitting Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (new "Babylonian" names: Beltashazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) to undergo special training for the king's service?
- c) Contrast the meanings of Daniel's Hebrew name and his Babylonian name.
- d) Besides the name changes, what other changes were ordered for the young men? Why and how did Daniel object?
- e) How did the LORD show that he stood by these young men who refused to violate their consciences? What scriptural principle did these young men display by their courage and commitment to the LORD? (see Matthew 6:33)
- f) Besides improved health and appearance, what other blessings did God grant the four young men? What use did Daniel make of these gifts from God?
- g) Where did Daniel live during his entire stay in Babylon?
- h) When King Cyrus of Persia in his first year as king conquered Babylon in 538 BC, Daniel was still alive. How many years had Daniel spent in Babylon by this time?
- i) How important do you think Daniel's influence was on the direction of the government and its treatment of the Jews?
- j) Can you think of another great servant of God who was trained in a foreign land? (see Acts 7:21-22)

*Fear not, I am with you, O be not dismayed,
For I am your God and will still give you aid;
I'll strengthen you, help you, and cause you to stand,
Upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand. (CW 800, st. 2)*

Lesson Three: Four Passing Empires and a New Everlasting Kingdom

Daniel 2

- 1) Why was King Nebuchadnezzar troubled by his dream? (see Daniel 2:1)
- 2) Note the year of Nebuchadnezzar's dreams. How can we tell that this must have happened while Daniel was still in training? (compare Daniel 1:5 and 2:1)
- 3) How do we know that Nebuchadnezzar's dream was sent by God? What other dreams recorded in the Bible followed a different path toward their interpretation? (see Genesis 41 and Matthew 1:20-21 and Matthew 2:19-21)
- 4) When Nebuchadnezzar turned to his astrologers first for the interpretation of his dream, why did he say to them, "**Tell me what my dream was** and interpret it"? (see Daniel 2:5 and comment from Jeske p. 28-29)
- 5) What do Nebuchadnezzar's methods show about his temperament? (see Daniel:2:5-6 and Jeremiah 52:10-11)
- 6) How would the failure of Nebuchadnezzar's astrologers affect Daniel and his three friends? Explain how Daniel responded to this immediate danger. (see Daniel 2:12-13)
- 7) What gave Daniel the confidence needed to intervene and bring resolution to this dangerous situation? (refer to Daniel 1:17) Why did God allow Daniel and his friends to have this "near death" experience?
 - A comment from Luther: "It is (at times) God's way to empty us first before filling us with his blessing. Before God leads us into the light, he lets us experience darkness; before we can enjoy the blessings of life, we must learn what death is."
 - Are there other examples recorded in the Bible when believers endured hardship before receiving deliverance?
- 8) What do Daniel's actions and words (even before God revealed the dream's meaning) show us about his faith? (see Daniel 2:18)
- 9) After God revealed the mystery to him in a vision, what truths about God did Daniel include in his prayer of thanks? (see Daniel 2:20-23)
- 10) What exemplary traits should we note about the way in which Daniel addressed the king before telling him what his dream meant? (see Daniel 2:27-28)
 - Discuss this statement: "Christianity is **revealed** religion; all other religions are **natural** religion." Is this true or false?
 - Note this statement from the People's Bible: "Through the miracle of revelation God has pulled back the veil and uncovered many of his sacred secrets ... He has shown us truths we otherwise would not have known - truths about who we are, who God is, and what his loving plan is for us ... and what we have done to ruin that plan, and what he has done to restore it" (Jeske, p. 35).
- 11) What does Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream show us about God's hand of control over the events of history? How should we view the great mysteries of God? Evaluate each of the following statements:
 - The history of empires is all determined by events that unintentionally (randomly) overlap; what happens is all a matter of chance.

- As claimed by astrologers, history is determined by the stars.
- History is determined by God.
- There are some things hidden to human minds that only God can reveal.
- The big truths (bigger than the patterns of nations and history) about the sinner's relationship to God are likewise mysteries to sinful human minds.
- "The sinful mind is hostile to God" (Romans 8:7) ... "But God has revealed those things to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches everything, especially the deep things of God" (1 Corinthians 2:10).

12) What are the important components of Daniel's interpretation of the king's dream?

- Notice that Daniel humbly and immediately gave credit to God and used his appearance before King Nebuchadnezzar as an opportunity to testify and boldly give glory to God (see Daniel 2:27).
- What was meant by the "days to come"? (see Daniel 2:27-30)
- Of what substances was the statue that Nebuchadnezzar saw made? What happened to the statue? (see Daniel 2:31-35)
- What words spoken by Daniel (see Daniel 2:37-38) showed his understanding that "the authorities that exist are established by God" (Romans 13:1)?
- What part of the statue represented the Babylonian kingdom, that is, Nebuchadnezzar's dominion? (see Daniel 2:38)
- After Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom was gone, which kingdoms would replace it? (see Daniel 2:39-43)
 - a) The kingdom that followed Nebuchadnezzar's dynasty (the silver chest and arms of the statue) was _____.
 - b) The bronze kingdom (the belly and thighs of the statue) was _____.
 - c) The iron and clay kingdom (the lower legs and feet of the statue) was _____.
- How did the dream portray the division within the strong fourth kingdom? (see Daniel 2:41-43 and comments from Jeske)
- What was the most powerful force that brought about the collapse of the fourth kingdom? (see Daniel 2:44-45)
- Is it possible that Nebuchadnezzar's dream covered the entire period from Nebuchadnezzar's day down to the end of time on earth? (see Daniel 2:44 and compare with Revelation 11:15)
- What different type of conquest would come that "will never be destroyed"?
 - a) "The four empires described in Nebuchadnezzar's dream have long since crumbled into dust, but the Church of believers gathered by the gospel of Christ will never be destroyed" (Jeske, p. 46)
 - b) Jesus promised that the gates of hell will not be able to overcome the Church and its message of the gospel (Matthew 16:18).

13) The repercussions and aftermath of Daniel's interpretation

- The final, complete fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy still lies ahead of us. When will that happen?
- How did King Nebuchadnezzar react to Daniel's interpretation of his dream? (see Daniel 2:46-49)
- What transition in Daniel's career occurred at this time? What "promotion" was given to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego?
- What similarities do we see when we compare the life of Daniel in Babylon, who was a ruler in Babylon from the 590s to the 530s BC, with the life of Joseph in Egypt, who lived over 1000 years earlier?
- In what ways are the messages of Daniel's prophecy/interpretation also messages that our world today needs to hear?

Lesson Four: The Golden Image and the Fiery Furnace

Daniel 3

1) Nebuchadnezzar's statue

- Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream gave the king a glimpse of the future. He learned that his kingdom would collapse, that it would be followed by a succession of other kingdoms, and that finally God would set up a kingdom that would destroy all others and last forever. Although Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged the greatness of God in that moment by saying, "Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings," apparently the solemn messages of Daniel's interpretation made no lasting impression on his heart.
- We see in Daniel 3 that Nebuchadnezzar proudly continued his worship of false gods. He even used his authority to turn the people's attention away from the true God. He made a huge statue to represent the superiority of his kingdom and its gods. Then he commanded everyone to assemble and worship openly and publicly the image he had made. Furthermore, he made it clear that the consequence of disobedience to his command was death! (see Daniel 3:1-7)
- Was Nebuchadnezzar's command an idle threat? Apparently this was not the first time that the king had used fire to punish or threaten those that defied him. The famous Code of Hammurabi, an ancient set of Babylonian laws, refers to the use of fire to execute those who broke the laws of the king. (see Jeremiah 29:22)

2) Why did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego defy Nebuchadnezzar's command? What was the king's response? (see Daniel 3:8-15)

- Note that other Babylonian officials eagerly reported the disobedience of the three young men to the king (perhaps they were envious of the positions of importance and responsibility given to these "foreigners").
- Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did not yield to fear and the threat of death. "They were convinced there is a higher goal in life than staying alive" (Jeske, p. 54). They were steadfast in their commitment to obey God's commandments instead of earthly mandates. (see Deuteronomy 6:13)
- Does Nebuchadnezzar's offer of a second chance tell us anything? The king asked, "What god will be able to rescue you from my hand?" This was nothing less than "a challenge flung into the face of the Almighty" (Jeske, p. 58).

3) The reply that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego gave was a great confession of faith. (see Daniel 3:16-18)

- "They had no promise of a special miracle ... neither did they ask for one or expect one" (Jeske, p. 59).
- They trusted in God's grace and were willing to accept whatever he allowed to happen. (see 2 Timothy 1:12)
- Note how Daniel's words stated later in his book apply to this situation. (see Daniel 4:35)

4) What miraculous intervention did God provide? (see Daniel 3:19-27)

- Who was the fourth person who joined the three young men in the fiery furnace? (see Psalm 91:9-11)
- What other amazing details does Daniel's account include that make the miracle even more astounding?

5) What was Nebuchadnezzar's reaction to the miracle he had just witnessed? (see Daniel 3:28-30)

- Was this reaction an indication that Nebuchadnezzar had become a believer? If not, what purpose did the miracle serve? (note Jeske's comments p. 66-67)
 - Is the king's promotion of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego significant? (see Matthew 6:33)
- 6) Why does God permit his loyal children to face temptation and danger of the sort the three young Israelites faced? (see Matthew 24:9 and 2 Timothy 3:12)
- 7) What comforting truths does the history of the fiery furnace bring to the people of God? (see Matthew 10:28 and Isaiah 43:1-3)

Closing Hymn of Praise

The First Song of Isaiah (CW Blue 810)

Refrain (sung twice at opening):

*Surely it is God who saves me; I will trust in him and not be afraid.
For the Lord is my stronghold and my sure defense, and he will be my Savior.*

1) *Therefore you shall draw water with rejoicing from the springs of salvation.
And on that day you shall say, "Give thanks to the Lord and call upon his name." (sing refrain)*

2) *Make his deeds known among the peoples; see that they remember that his name is exalted.
Sing the praises of the Lord for he has done great things
And this is known in all the world. (sing refrain)*

3) *Cry aloud, inhabitants of Zion, ring out your joy,
For the great one in the midst of you is the Holy One of Israel. (sing refrain twice)*