

Daniel

Student Copy

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Table of Contents

Lesson 1	Introduction
Lesson 2	Daniel and his friends taken into exile (Daniel 1:1-21) – Part 1
Lesson 3	Daniel and his friends taken into exile (Daniel 1:1-21) – Part 2
Lesson 4	Daniel and his friends taken into exile (Daniel 1:1-21) – Part 3
Lesson 5	Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream of a Great Statue (2:1-49)
Lesson 6	Nebuchadnezzar Builds a Great Statue (Daniel 3:1-30)
Lesson 7	Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream of a Toppled Tree (Daniel 4:1-37) Part 1
Lesson 8	Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream of a Toppled Tree (Daniel 4:1-37) Part 2
Lesson 9	Belshazzar’s Feast (Daniel 5:1-31)
Lesson 10	The Lion’s Den (Daniel 6:1-28) – Part 1
Lesson 11	The Lion’s Den (Daniel 6:1-28) – Part 2
Lesson 12	The Vision of the Four Great Beasts (Daniel 7:1-28) Part 1
Lesson 13	The Vision of the Four Great Beasts (Daniel 7:1-28) Part 2
Lesson 14	The Vision of the Ram, the Goat, and the Little Horn (Daniel 8:1-27)
Lesson 15	Daniel’s Prayer and Its Answer (9:1-27) – Part 1
Lesson 16	Daniel’s Prayer and Its Answer (9:1-27) – Part 2
Lesson 17	Daniel’s Vision of the Final Conflict (10:1-12:13)
Lesson 18	Summary and Conclusion

Lesson 1 – Introduction

1. Are there any specific questions that you hope to have answered through this study?
2. Do you have any ideas of how aspects of Daniel’s message are fulfilled in the New Testament?
3. What aspects of the visions of Daniel have confused you?
4. There is an old song that says: “Dare to be a Daniel, dare to stand alone; Dare to have a purpose firm, dare to make it known.” Or better stated, “Dare to trust in Daniel’s God? Can one person make a difference? Explain.
5. Read Chapter 1, verse 8. Verse 8 says that Daniel “purposed in his heart...not to defile himself.” The idea here is that he made up his mind or resolved not to compromise his principles. How does someone do this? What is involved in having firm purposes and enduring commitments? What is the downside in making these kinds of spiritual decisions? What is the upside?

6. Clearly, there is a difference between holding to a belief and entering into a conviction. A conviction is, in the words of one unknown writer, “nothing more than a belief with its boots on...ready to march ready to fight, ready to die.” Do you agree? How would you distinguish the two? Which of the two words better describes your faith at this point in your life? Why?

 7. Read Daniel Chapter 1. First define the word sovereignty. Then circle phrases or words in Daniel 1 that point to the sovereignty of God. How does this opening story set the table for the rest of the book? Why was the sovereignty of God such an important topic to the Israelites? Why might they have had reason to question God’s sovereignty?
- Next week, we will begin going deeper into the study of the book of Daniel, beginning with Lesson 2 and Chapter 1.

Lesson 2: Daniel and his friends taken into exile (Daniel 1:1-21) – Part 1 Background

Read the entire first chapter – Daniel 1:1-21 and be prepared to answer the following questions.

The Big Picture: Daniel 1:1-21 shows us how a sovereign God accomplishes his purposes and achieves his victory by sending Daniel and his three friends into exile in Babylon.

1. In addition, read and explain the historical background of Daniel chapter 1. This may be found in 2 Kings 23:34-24:6.
2. What happened to Judah when it was besieged by the Babylonians? Why did God allow this?
3. What kind of situation did Daniel and his friends leave behind in Judah? Why do you suppose Jehoiakim turned out to be so evil when his father Josiah had been such a godly man?
4. Read Verse 2. Why would Daniel ascribe ultimate responsibility for the capture of Jerusalem to the Lord? What does this teach about Daniel's view of God? And what does this imply about human agency?
5. Verse 2 draws considerable attention to "the vessels of the house of God," mentioning that they were seized by Nebuchadnezzar and carried off to Babylon. Given all the

things that could have been mentioned, why draw attention to the fate of the temple vessels? Why is it significant that they ended up in the house of Nebuchadnezzar's god, "the treasury of his god".

6. Read verse 3. Why does Nebuchadnezzar go to all the trouble of deporting some of the Jews to Babylon? What strategy might he have in deporting members of the "royal family and nobility" in particular.

7. What was the purpose of Nebuchadnezzar training them in the culture and customs of the Babylonians (verse 4), as well as providing for them materially?

Take Aways:

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Lesson 3: Daniel and his friends taken into exile (Daniel 1:1-21) – Part 2 Background

Read the entire first chapter – Daniel 1:1-21 and be prepared to answer the following questions.

1. For what qualities did the Babylonians look when selecting candidates from among the Hebrews for potential royal service?

2. Read verse 6-8. The first step in indoctrinating these young was to give them new names. Research and fill in the following table.

<i>Old Name and its meaning</i>	<i>New Name</i>	<i>Meaning of New Name</i>

3. Even though the Babylonians changed their names, they continued to pray and worship their God. Everything about their speech and behavior reflected their belief in Yahweh and their utter rejection of the pagan gods of Babylon. This is a crucial lesson for you and me today. What is it?

4. What was the purpose of the Babylonians attempt in altering the identity of these four young Hebrew men by changing their names?

5. You were not created to be like any other person. Your role is to be the one and only irreplaceable you that God created you to be. Do you truly believe that you are the person God says you are? God's Word tells that, as people who have received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, we are: (Research the following terms).
 - Righteous: (See Romans 3:21-22; 5:19; 10:4)

 - Forgiven (See Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:13-14; 1 John 1:9; 2:12)

 - Destined for eternal life. (See John 3:16; 3:36; 6:40; 17:3; Romans 6:23; 1 Timothy 1:16; Titus 3:4-7; 1 John 5:11).

 - Indwelt by the Holy Spirit. (See John 7:37-39; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; Ephesians 1:13)

- Beloved of God. (See John 14:21; Romans 1:7; 1 Thessalonians 1:4; 2 Thessalonians 2:16).

6. Read Proverbs 4:23. What does it mean to “keep your heart with all diligence”? How does this command apply to what Daniel and his friends faced?

Take Aways:

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Lesson 4: Daniel and his friends taken into exile (Daniel 1:1-21) – Part 3 Background

Read the entire first chapter – Daniel 1:1-21 and be prepared to answer the following questions.

1. Notice how verse 8 begins with a sharp contrast: “But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king’s food”. Why did Daniel believe eating the king’s food or drinking his wine would defile him?
2. Verse 9 tells us that God gave Daniel “favor and compassion.” How does the Lord’s favor and compassion manifest itself in Daniel’s life in these verses? What concrete evidence could we point to?
3. The first chapter climaxes when King Nebuchadnezzar tests Daniel and his three friends in their learning. And the text isn’t bashful about telling us they passed the test with flying colors; in fact, it says they were “ten times better” than anyone else. Why, though, do you think this point is emphasized?
4. In 1 Samuel 2:30 God says, “those who honor Me I will honor.” What are some practical ways you can honor God in the midst of a pagan culture that worships everything but the one true God?

5. Verse 21 looks, at first glance, to be an incidental historical detail tacked onto the end of the story: “And Daniel was there (in the court of the King of Babylon) until the first year of King Cyrus.” Who is King Cyrus? And why do you think this is mentioned? What does it say about Daniel? What does it say about God?

6. Write a brief paragraph on the following statement..and compare it with the exile experience of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah and our present day experience as Christians. Be ready to share with the class. **“This Land is Not Our Home!”**

3. Nebuchadnezzar called together a group of people who were trained to interpret dreams: “the magicians, the enchanters, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans: (v. 2) What was unusual about Nebuchadnezzar’s request? How did the Chaldeans respond?

4. Read Daniel 2:14-24. Daniel requests an audience with Nebuchadnezzar to interpret his dreams. Why, in the flow of events in this passage, is this such a bold and faith-filled thing for Daniel to do?

5. After God reveals the dream to Daniel, he praises God as the one “to whom belong wisdom and might” (v. 20). But he also goes on to praise God for giving him this same “wisdom and might” (v. 23). In this context, what does it mean for God to have wisdom and might and then give it to Daniel?

6. What similarities do you see between the situations faced by Daniel and Joseph? What differences are apparent? How are the two men alike?

7. Read Daniel 2:25-45. In what ways does Daniel ensure that God alone gets the credit for being the revealer of mysteries?

8. In verses 36-43 Daniel describes the content of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. The parts of the statue represent four kingdoms, beginning with the “heads of gold” (v. 38), which is Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian empire. Compare how these four kingdoms are described. What is the significance of each of these descriptions?

Lesson 6: Nebuchadnezzar's Builds a Great Statue (Daniel 3:1-30)

Read the entire chapter of Daniel 3:1-30 and be prepared to answer the following questions.

The Big Picture: In this chapter we see God's power at work, rescuing his people from a most perilous situation, which serves to confirm that "there is no other god who is able to rescue in this way" (3:29). This chapter provides one of the most powerful examples of deliverance in all the Bible.

1. Read Daniel 3:1-7. The statue Nebuchadnezzar builds is different from the one he saw in his dreams. What is the difference? And what does this suggest about Nebuchadnezzar's view of himself and his empire?
2. When describing the dedication of the great statue, these verses contain some seemingly unnecessary repetition: for example, the list of officials present (vv. 2-3) or the list of musical instruments used (vv. 5, 7). What effect is created by this repetition? Is it positive or negative? And what does it say about the people involved?
3. Daniel's three friends refuse to pay homage to the statue erected by Nebuchadnezzar, and are therefore to be thrown into the fiery furnace. Look closely at their response to Nebuchadnezzar in verses 16-18. How confident are they of being delivered from the fiery furnace? What other fate do they consider a possibility?
4. Much to his surprise, when Nebuchadnezzar looked into the fiery furnace he saw not only the three friends alive and well, but a fourth man with them, who looked "like a son of the gods" (v. 25). Who is this person? And what does his presence with the three friends, in the fiery furnace, teach us about God's relationship to his people? You may find it helpful to read Isaiah 43:2 before answering this question.

5. This passage is careful to describe how the three friends appeared after they came out of the fire: “The hair of their heads was not singed, their cloaks were not harmed, and no smell of fire had come upon them” (Dan. 3:27). What does this teach us about God’s ability to protect and care for his people?

6. Compare the endings of Daniel 2 and 3. What common themes do you see? What larger message is this intended to convey about God’s victory and the faithfulness of God’s people?

7. Read Acts 4. How is the situation in Acts 4 similar to the events of Chapter 3 of Daniel. What principles are at stake?

8. Read Romans 13. If Christians are to obey their civil leaders how do we explain the behavior of the Hebrew men in chapter 3 and the apostles in Acts 4? When does God approve of civil disobedience?

9. Complete this paragraph: “God, whom I serve, is able to _____. But if not, let it be known that I will _____ and I will not _____.”

Lesson 7: Nebuchadnezzar's Dream of a Toppled Tree (Daniel 4:1-37) Part 1

Read the entire chapter of Daniel 4:1-37 and be prepared to answer the following questions.

The Big Picture: Daniel 4:1-37 teaches that God is able to humble those who walk in pride (v. 37)

1. Daniel 4:1-3 provides an introduction to the events recorded in this chapter. Nebuchadnezzar declares that he wants to show “the signs and wonders” that the Most High has done for him (v.2). What specific “signs and wonders” does he have in mind? Why does he also affirm God’s everlasting kingdom in this context (v.3).
2. Nebuchadnezzar’s dream involves a giant tree being chopped down by “a watcher, a holy one,” who came down from heaven (v.13). But this angel, or heavenly messenger, is instructed “to leave the stump of its roots in the earth” (v.15). What is the meaning of leaving the stump?
3. Daniel says that Nebuchadnezzar will experience this humbling until he acknowledges that “the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will” (v. 25). But what would it mean for Nebuchadnezzar to be humble? What would be the telltale signs (v. 27)?
4. Verse 29 tells us that a whole 12 months separated the initial warning Nebuchadnezzar received and the judgment against him to bring about his humbling. What does this imply about God’s ways with us? Make a list.

5. Nebuchadnezzar experiences a thorough humbling at the hand of the Lord. What is it? Why is this a fitting punishment for the sin of pride?

6. What does Nebuchadnezzar mean when he says he “lifted his eyes to heaven” (v. 34)? What immediately follows as a result of his doing that?

7. What was the final outcome of this whole experience? Did Nebuchadnezzar really change?

Lesson 8: Nebuchadnezzar's Dream of a Toppled Tree (Daniel 4:1-37) Part 2

Read the entire chapter of Daniel 4:1-37 and be prepared to answer the following questions.

The Big Picture: Daniel 4:1-37 teaches that God is able to humble those who walk in pride (v. 37)

1. If you were to sum up in one sentence the message of chapter 4 and what we learned from last week's lesson what would that be?
2. Read Acts 12:20-23. What ways were Herod similar to Nebuchadnezzar? Why is it that power seems to so often go hand in hand with pride? How did the outcomes of the men differ?
3. Read Proverbs 3:34 and 1 Samuel 2:30. What light do these passages shed on the events of chapter 4?
4. What was Nebuchadnezzar's opinion of Daniel?

5. Do you think Daniel was perhaps a bit anxious when he spoke the words of 4:27? Why or why not? What are the potential risks for speaking hard truths to hard hearts?

6. What lesson(s) can you learn from Daniel's willingness to call on King Nebuchadnezzar (the most powerful man in the world at this time) to repent?

7. How does a person remain humble?

8. As you think back over your lifetime, what government leaders and elected officials would you classify as genuine public servants? Is your list a long one? Why?

9. Why is it so common for those with immense God-given talent and those who are able to accomplish great things to forget the One ultimately responsible for their success?

Takeaways from Lessons 7 & 8

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- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Lesson 9: Belshazzar's Feast (Daniel 5:1-31)

Read the entire chapter of Daniel 5:1-31 and be prepared to answer the following questions.

The Big Picture: This chapter teaches the sober truth that sometimes people can become so hardened that they're beyond the point of redemption, so that the only thing remaining for them is judgment.

1. Spend some time researching and defining the following words that relate to this lesson.
 - a. Blasphemy
 - b. Judgment –
2. What are some of the most outrageous, most public challenges to the reality and holiness of God that you have witnessed in recent years? Is this kind of anti-God sentiment and behavior increasing and becoming more brazen, or has sacrilegious activity always been this extreme?
3. Describe the mood of Belshazzar's feast. What was happening in the palace? What about outside the palace? Of what prideful act was Belshazzar guilty?
4. What supernatural event took place during this royal banquet? What did it mean?
5. How did Daniel become involved in this situation? What was his reputation?

6. Read Ezekiel 28. Many Bible scholars believe that this passage in Ezekiel has a dual meaning; that is, it refers not only to a human king but also to Satan. Without getting into that discussion, what does it say about the king of Tyre? In what ways were he and Belshazzar alike? What was their root problem?

7. What was the content of Daniel's interpretation and challenge to Belshazzar? What was his tone as he talked with this Babylonian ruler? Does verse 29 surprise you? Why or why not?

8. Daniel had a very good reputation, even among the pagans. How does one develop such respect among unbelievers?

9. How effective are you at speaking hard words of truth to others? Are you too blunt and harsh? Are you too reluctant to make waves? Is loving confrontation a natural ability, a supernatural gift or a skill that can be developed? Why?

6. Reread the Gospel accounts of the trial of Jesus. How does the administrator's plot to remove Daniel resemble the Jews' strategy to see Jesus condemned to die? What motives underlie each?

7. The administrators hatch a plot to catch Daniel violating the king's decree. They persuade the king to issue an edict prohibiting making petitions to any god or man other than King Darius. Presumably, they knew that this would be a problem for Daniel. What does this imply about their knowledge of Daniel's life? And how is that supported by what we read of Daniel's response to the edict (see 6:10)?

8. How did Daniel respond to this attempt by enemies to trap and destroy him?

9. Although Darius regrets the impact of his decree upon Daniel, he goes ahead with the decision to put him into the lions' den. But clearly he is not happy about having to do so. What evidence from the text shows this?

Lesson 11: The Lion's Den (Daniel 6:1-28) – Part II

Read the entire chapter of Daniel 6:1-28 and be prepared to answer the following questions.

The Big Picture: Daniel 6:1-28 demonstrates that God, who saved Daniel from the power of the lions can be trusted to deliver and rescue his people from the most perilous or hopeless of situations.

1. According to Daniel, why did God deliver him from the lions' den (vv. 21-23)? Is there anything surprising or perhaps unsettling to you about what Daniel says? If so, what is it? And why?
2. From Darius's perspective, why did God deliver Daniel from the lions' den? And what does God's deliverance of Daniel reveal about who God is?
3. How are the events described at the close of this chapter (v. 28) similar to those of the previous chapters? Would you say preservation is the theme of the book of Daniel? If so, how would you state that theme in your own words?
4. The closing verse of this chapter mentions not only Darius the Mede but also Cyrus the Persian (v. 28). Why is the mention of Cyrus so significant? Read 2 Chronicles 36:22-23 and Ezra 1:2-3.
5. Just as Daniel's colleagues were jealous of his success, the brothers of Joseph were jealous of his favoritism. What do these episodes demonstrate about the power of unchecked jealousy? What prompts such deep emotion?

6. The story of Joseph is a powerful example of God's sovereignty. How do you see the sovereign hand of God in chapter 6?

7. What strikes you about Daniel's habit of prayer? Why do you think he was so committed to this discipline? How much do you depend on God and yearn for His presence and power? What needs to change?

8. Daniel was spared and delivered; other saints (for example, John the Baptist; Matthew 14:10-11; Stephen-Acts 7:59) were not. Why? How does God get glory from the martyrdom of His children?

9. When Daniel's enemies went digging through his personal life in their attempt to accuse him of something illegal, the worst they discovered about him was that he was a man of prayer! If someone were to secretly bug your house and follow you everywhere, what would that person learn about you? Would he or she find evidence that would undermine your credibility? What specifically needs to change in your life today?

Take Aways from Chapter 6

- 1.

- 2.

Lesson 13: The Vision of the Four Great Beasts (Daniel 7:1-28) Part II

Read the entire chapter of Daniel 7:1-28 and be prepared to answer the following questions.

1. Read Verse 9. Verse 9 marks a change of scene, moving from the story seashore setting of verses 1-8 to an altogether different setting. How would you describe this new setting? What does the juxtaposition of these two very different scenes communicate?
2. At the center of this scene is the Ancient of Days (v.9). How is he described? And what is this meant to convey about his character and purposes?
3. Daniel sees a figure riding on (“coming with; v. 13) the clouds of heaven. What does that suggest about the nature or status of this figure? Who else in the Bible rides on the clouds of heaven (see, for example, Ps. 104:3; Isa. 19:1)?
4. Although this figure is clearly in some sense divine, Daniel sees that he is like “a son of man” (Daniel 7:13). How might this shed light on Jesus’ favorite self-designation. Son of Man” (see example, Mark 2:10, 28; 8:38)?
5. While (as we saw in Chapter 2) many scholars have identified the four beasts with Babylon, Medo-Persia Greece, and Rome, the largest point to be gleaned from Daniel’s vision is the ongoing conflict and chaos of earthly powers, until the Ancient of Days establishes his everlasting kingdom (v. 18). How is this a hopeful message?

6. Describe the sequence of events that will result in the saints possessing the kingdom (see vv. 19-27). How does this compare with what we know of the unfolding of the end times from the New Testament, especially the book of Revelation (see Revelation 18-22)?

7. Consider Daniel's response to the vision and its interpretation (see v. 28). Is that a surprising response? How might you have expected him to respond? Why do you suppose he responded as he did?

8. Daniel's vision of God says that "the hair of His head was like pure wool." What should we gather from this, and what conclusions should we not make?

9. What Daniel saw defied human words and explanations; yet, he sought to put it into words, nonetheless, knowing that the words could never fully do justice to what he had seen. Thus the descriptions given should not be taken as literal. Why is it dangerous to speak of what God looks like? How would you describe God for a small child?

Lesson 14: The Vision of the Ram, the Goat, and the Little Horn (Daniel 8:1-27)

Read the entire chapter of Daniel 8:1-27 and be prepared to answer the following questions.

The Big Picture: This chapter encourages God's people to continue to remain faithful in the face of persecution and the rising and falling of the kingdoms of this earth.

1. Spend some time researching and defining the following word that relates to this lesson.
 - a. End Times:

2. Daniel sees a ram with two horns, one of which is longer than the other (v. 3). Scholars have tended to identify the ram with the Medo-Persian empire. If this is the case, what is the significance of the different horn lengths?

3. Next Daniel sees a male goat that comes from the west across the face of the whole earth, "without touching the ground" (v. 5). If this is referring to Alexander the Great, what is the significance of this description?

4. Notice that even this mighty beast, which becomes "exceedingly great" and "strong" (v. 8) eventually has its own horn broken into "four conspicuous horns" (v. 8). What is the significance of this imagery?

5. In verses 9-14, we are told about a “little horn” who became exceedingly powerful- “even as great as the Prince of the host” (v. 11). Many scholars consider this to be a reference to Antiochus IV Epiphanes, a member of the Seleucid dynasty who reigned from 175-164 BC. According to a Jewish historical account of this period, Antiochus desecrated the temple and thus the land of Jerusalem and persecuted the Jews severely. How does Daniel’s vision in verses 9-14 depict those very trying circumstances?

6. Daniel’s vision culminates with the aggressive and bold action of the little horn. We learn that this one’s power will be great “but not by his own power” (v. 24). What does that mean? We also learn that this figure will rise up against the one whom this passage calls “the Prince of princes” (v. 25). Who is that referring to? And how does this Prince of princes respond to the little horn?

7. Read the following passages from 2 Thessalonians 2. What does Paul say here must occur before the Second Coming of Christ?

8. Re-read Daniel 8:27. How do you account for this effect (of the vision) on Daniel?

4. As part of Daniel's prayer, he says that to the Jewish people belongs "open shame" (Dan. 9:7). What does Daniel mean by this phrase? What other words and phrases does Daniel use to describe his people's sin?

5. In his prayer Daniel confesses that the "curse and oath that are written in the Law of Moses" have in fact been poured out on the people of Israel (v 11). He is referring to the curses of the covenant outlined in Leviticus 26:14-45 and Deuteronomy 28:15-68. Take a moment to review those passages and compare them with Daniel's prayer.

Daniel's Prayer	Leviticus 26:14-45	Deuteronomy 28:15-68

Lesson 16: Daniel's Prayer and Its Answer (9:1-27) – Part 2

Read the entire chapter of Daniel 9:1-27 again and be prepared to answer the following questions.

The Big Picture: In this chapter, we see that sin has consequences, but that the grace of God will triumph still.

1. Daniel offers several reasons for God to hear and heed his plea for mercy. What are these reasons? And what does this teach us about how we ought to plead with God?

2. Read Numbers 14:11-19. How does Moses's intercession for his people compare or contrast with the intercession of Daniel as recorded in chapter 9?

Daniel's Prayer in Chapter 9	Moses's prayer in Numbers 14:11-19

3. As in Daniel 8, so here the angel Gabriel is sent in response to Daniel's prayer. Look closely at Gabriel's initial words to Daniel (9:22-23). What does Gabriel say that ought to encourage Daniel?

4. Gabriel tells Daniel that "seventy weeks" have been decreed for the people of Israel before the exile is over. Students of the book of Daniel continue to discuss and debate the meaning of these "seventy weeks," with various interpretations being offered. Here you may want to consult the ESV Study Bible, 1607, for more information. But regardless of the meaning of the "seventy weeks," what is the main point of this for God's people?

5. What do we learn about the promised restoration of God's people from Gabriel's reply in verses 25-27? How will it come about? What phases will it involve? And what are the major events that will take place?

6. What does chapter 9 say about the Antichrist? How is he described? Verses to consider: Mark 13:14; 2 Thessalonians 2:3-10; Revelation 13:1-10.

7. Read Revelation 19:19-21. What does this reveal about the future of the Antichrist?

Lesson 17: Daniel's Vision of the Final Conflict (10:1-12:13)

Read the entire chapter of Daniel 10:1-12:13 and be prepared to answer the following questions.

The Big Picture: Daniel 10:1-12:13 shows us that despite conflicts, both earthly and spiritual, God will achieve victory in the world and will vindicate this people.

1. Spend some time researching and defining the following word that relates to this lesson.
 - a. Demon

2. We are told that Daniel received vision of a “great conflict” during the third year of Cyrus king of Persia (10:1). Two years earlier, some of the Jewish exiles were allowed to return to Jerusalem. But these Jewish returnees encountered problems. Read Ezra 1-4, which recounts the situation. Assuming Daniel knew about their trouble, what might this vision of a “great conflict” be intended to show Daniel, and through him, other Jews?

3. Daniel is told by his angelic messenger that he was opposed by the “prince of the kingdom of Persia” for twenty-one days, but was eventually helped on his way by the angel Michael (10:13). Most scholars agree that the prince referred to here is a demonic being. If this is the case, what does this reveal about the nature of the unseen world around us?

4. How does Daniel respond to the insight he is given into the reality of spiritual conflict? What does the angel do in response to Daniel's reaction?

5. Jesus spoke about a coming intensification of trouble for God's people. Review his teaching on this topic in the Gospels (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21:5-36). What parallels do you see between them and what we find here in Daniel 12? And do you see ways in which the book of Daniel has informed Jesus' teaching?

6. Read Daniel 12:5-13. Daniel asks the angelic messenger two different questions. What are they? And why do you think these were paramount concerns for Daniel? How does the angel respond to the questions?

7. The angel tells Daniel that at the end of days, while the wicked will continue to act wickedly, "those who are wise shall understand" (Daniel 12: v. 10). What does it mean to be wise in this context? And what understanding will the wise have that the wicked will not?

8. As you read the spiritual warfare taking place behind the scenes in chapter 10, how are you motivated to pray differently this week?

Lesson 18: Summary and Conclusion

The Big Picture of Daniel

Daniel is a fascinating book, for many reasons. The opening six chapters contain some of the most dramatic and exciting narratives in the Bible. We also grow to admire the conviction and courage of Daniel and his three friends, as their faith is tested and put on display, so to speak again and again in those opening chapters. There is much to be gleaned by attending closely to the lives of these great saints of old.

But Daniel also intrigues us because of its visions, and the sheer scope of what it covers. Not only do we gain insights into Israel's own history, from exile to return, but we are also given a sweeping view of human history, from the rise of the Babylonian empire to the conquest and ultimate destruction of the Roman empire many centuries later. Daniel is thus a masterful blend of sacred and secular history; in fact, what we see is that these two histories are one, being closely intertwined by God's own design.

Furthermore, Daniel opens our eyes to the fact that there is always more going on than meets the eye. What we can gather with our five senses is not the whole story; indeed, it may be only a reflection of a more important story—a cosmic battle taking place in the heavenly realms, which we cannot see with our human eyes, but only with eyes of faith.

Ultimately, however, the book of Daniel is about God—his character, his plans, his purposes for the world. God is the main actor in Daniel, as he is everywhere in the Bible. And while we often have reason to be worried, if not discouraged, by the appearance of things all around us in our fallen and sin-racked world, the book of Daniel serves as a powerful reminder that God is on his throne and is sure to get his victory. What is more, one day God will put the world to rights, destroying unrighteousness and ushering in his eternal kingdom.

The whole premise of the book of Daniel is that Israel has failed to keep the terms of the Sinai covenant and thus has come under God's judgment and has been sent into exile. And yet the whole message of the book of Daniel is that God is not only merciful to forgive but also powerful to effect restoration and even return for his people. Even though the people of God may suffer in this life, they can bank on the fact that God will not abandon them but will one day achieve his victory in the world and their lives. This, of course, is the message of the gospel itself, and it is revealed to us in the person and work of Jesus Christ. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," Scripture says (Rom. 3:23), but God has provided a way to be right with him, "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (v. 24). And although we continue to endure suffering, we can rest confidently in our future victory in God and thus "rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Rom. 5:2).

1. If Daniel were given a vision of our society and its future, what major weaknesses and strengths do you think would be identified? Why? What do you think will happen in and to this country in the coming years?

2. Read 1 Corinthians 3:8, 2 Thessalonians 1:12, and 1 Peter 5:10. What do these verses say about the idea of eternal rewards and believers being given the privilege of reflecting God's glory?

3. What changes should we make in how we live in light of the Scripture's teaching about eternal rewards for faithful earthly service?

4. Given the stark reality and certainty of coming judgment, how will you pray differently this week? For unsaved friends, neighbors, co-workers? For world leaders? Why doesn't this truth sober us more?

5. Has Daniel brought new clarity to your understanding the gospel? How so?

6. What have you learned in Daniel that might lead you to praise god, turn away from sin, or trust more firmly in his promises?