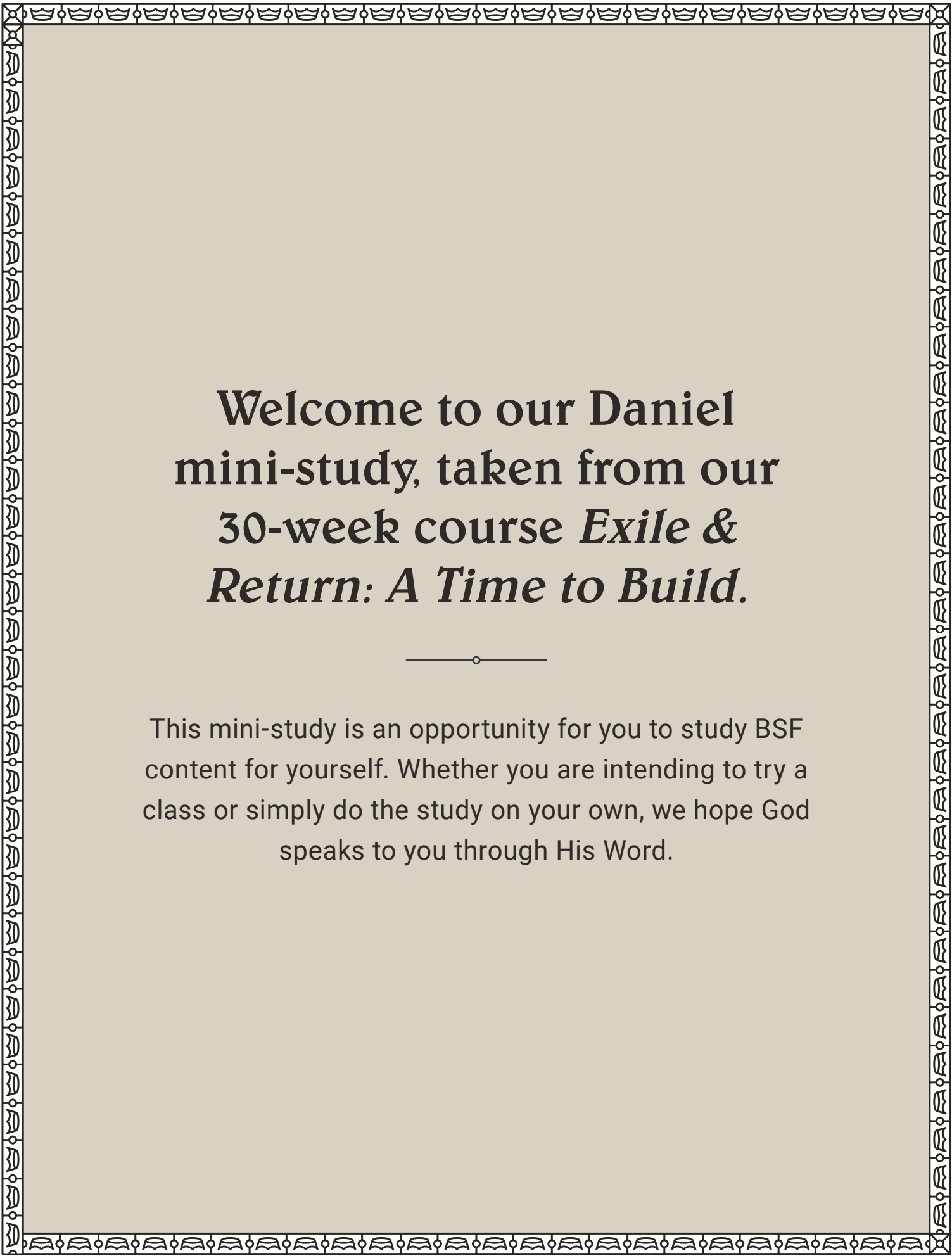


Exile & Return

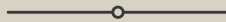


Daniel

BUILD WITH INTEGRITY



Welcome to our Daniel mini-study, taken from our 30-week course *Exile & Return: A Time to Build*.



This mini-study is an opportunity for you to study BSF content for yourself. Whether you are intending to try a class or simply do the study on your own, we hope God speaks to you through His Word.



What is BSF?

Bible Study Fellowship is a global community of 500,000 men, women, students, and kids studying God's Word together. Each year, BSF groups study for 30 weeks, either in person or online.

How does the Bible study work?

This sample study includes three lessons. Each lesson takes one week to complete.

To get started:

1. Read and answer the questions for the assigned passage each day.
2. If completing the study in a BSF group, discuss your answers collectively each week.
3. Listen to the weekly teaching on the week's passage (with your group or via the recorded audio lecture).
4. Read the notes with the passage's historical background and life application.

Repeat for each lesson!

How do I join BSF?

If a friend has invited you to join their group, simply attend with them. Otherwise, to find a class in your local area, or to join a BSF Online group, go to join.bsfinternational.org.

We hope you enjoy using this four-fold approach to exploring God's Word in community with others. Thanks for choosing to study with Bible Study Fellowship!





Truth and Strength in Exile

Lesson 3 Questions

Read and answer the questions for the assigned passage each day. If completing the mini-study in a BSF group, answer the questions before the group meets to discuss the answers.

First Day

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. What new insights did you receive about God's resurrection power after listening to the lecture?
2. How have the notes encouraged you in regard to God's provision for you today, for your future, and for eternity?

Second Day: Read Daniel 1:1-7.

Daniel and three of his friends were exiled from Judah and taken to Babylon.

3. a. Read 2 Chronicles 36:14-17 and Daniel 9:11-14. What circumstances led to Judah's exile?
- b. What set apart the young men chosen for the king's service from the other exiles?
4. Why might the Babylonians have given new names to Daniel and his friends? What were they trying to accomplish?
5. a. What parts of Daniel's and his friends' identity were taken from them?

- b. Personally, what defines your identity?

Third Day: Read Daniel 1:8-21.

Daniel encountered a challenge in his training program.

- 6.
 - a. Why did Daniel object to the prescribed diet for those being trained for the king's service?
 - b. What manner and means did Daniel use to reach a solution? What was the result?
- 7.
 - a. How can followers of Christ work within ungodly systems without betraying the principles of their faith or falling into sin? Give examples.
 - b. What blessings come from standing firm in the convictions of your faith, especially when your actions are countercultural?
- 8. Describe a time you were asked or commanded to compromise an important belief or practice. How did you respond? What was the result?

Fourth Day: Read Daniel 2:1-23.

King Nebuchadnezzar demanded to know the meaning of a troubling dream.

- 9. Describe Nebuchadnezzar's problem, his attempted solution, and his "impossible" demand.
- 10. What did Nebuchadnezzar fail to understand that even his advisors realized?
- 11.
 - a. What lessons stand out to you from Daniel's response to the challenge he faced?
 - b. How might you follow Daniel's example when faced with your next difficult or seemingly impossible challenge?

Fifth Day: Read Daniel 2:24-49.

Daniel described and interpreted the Babylonian king's dream.

12. a. Compare Daniel's and Arioch's words and actions when they approached Nebuchadnezzar. What does Daniel's approach reveal about him?

b. In what ways do people take credit today for what only God can do? In what ways might you do this?
13. a. From verses 31-45, what do you learn about earthly kingdoms, as represented by the various materials of the statue in Nebuchadnezzar's dream?

b. What do you learn about God's eternal kingdom?
14. a. Read Matthew 7:24-27; 16:16-19; 21:42-44; Romans 9:33; 1 Corinthians 10:1-4; and 1 Peter 2:4-10. How is the rock Daniel spoke of represented in the New Testament?

b. Read Isaiah 45:23-25 and Philippians 2:10-11. How does Nebuchadnezzar's response to his dream's interpretation represent the way the world will respond when Christ returns?

c. What comfort, courage, and assurance do you receive from this truth?

Sixth Day: Review Daniel 1–2.

Our faithful response to God reveals His greatness.

15. How do Daniel's humble and faithful actions while living in an unbelieving culture encourage you to live out your faith in today's world?

No homiletics assigned for Group and Administrative Leaders.

 **Next step: Listen to the lecture.**

Lecture

Now that you have completed the daily questions, listen to the teaching based on this week's passage. If you are part of a group, you will hear the lecture during your weekly gathering. If you are doing this study on your own, listen to the recorded audio lecture.



There are two ways to listen to this week's audio lecture.

Option 1: Go to bsfinternational.org/trybsf.

Option 2: Scan this QR code.

Lecture Notes

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Next step: Read the lesson notes.

Lesson 3 Notes

Daniel 1–2

Dig deeper into this week's passage by reading the lesson notes with the passage's historical background and life application.

Focus Verse

"Then Daniel praised the God of heaven and said: 'Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are his.'" (Daniel 2:19b-20)

Outline

- Overview of Daniel
- Holding Fast in Exile – Daniel 1
- A King's Dream – Daniel 2

Engage

Human nature is infamously fickle. We tend to present ourselves differently in various scenarios. The way we behave, talk, or treat others at home can differ vastly from the way we interact in the office, at school, in church, or within our friendships. People almost involuntarily conform to who they are expected to be or want to be in particular environments. **Belonging to God calls us to live with integrity in every relationship and situation.** How we act reflects our deepest convictions about God, ourselves, and the world.

The book of Daniel reveals a man of God who followed in the footsteps of many heroes of the faith who glorified God as they obediently led and served others.¹ Daniel confronted unique situations—exile, ostracism, scheming, and the threat of death—with complete dependence on God. His life proclaimed God's majesty and magnificence. **Our faithful response to God reveals His greatness.** God placed Daniel in a particularly trying time in Israel's history for a particular purpose. In persistent obedience, Daniel pointed to the one and only God amid the darkness of an unbelieving world.

1. **Faithful examples:** Genesis 6:8-9; 12:1-3; 45:4-7; Exodus 3; Joshua 1:1-6; 1 Samuel 13:14

Overview of Daniel

The books of Isaiah, Jeremiah (who also likely wrote Lamentations), Ezekiel, and Daniel comprise the Major Prophets of the Old Testament. This designation reflects not the greater importance of these books but their longer length, as compared with the 12 shorter books known as the Minor Prophets (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi). **These prophetic books help fill out the storyline of the Old Testament.** They add depth and perspective regarding God's deeper work within and beyond the recorded events.

Who Is Daniel?

His role: Exiled to Babylon as a teenager, Daniel served kings in faith, humility, and excellence; through prophetic dreams and visions, he foretold the future of empires and end times.

His message: God's sovereignty over all empires

An image to remember: The lion's den

The Setting

The book of Daniel spans the bulk of the author's life, from his first days of exile from Judah to his senior years in Babylon. Because of Israel's chronic disobedience, God orchestrated its exile through the invasion of the enemy nation of Babylon, the world's greatest power at that time.¹

About 50 miles (80 km) south of modern-day Baghdad, Iraq, Babylon's power peaked during the time of Nebuchadnezzar. Though Babylon was sacked by Assyria in 689 BC, Nebuchadnezzar's rehabilitation projects made Babylon the largest city in the known world. **At the height of its power, architectural marvels, advanced learning, and idolatry filled Babylon.** Like all worldly kingdoms, however, Babylon soon lost its luster and fell to Cyrus of Persia in 539 BC. In reality, God took down Babylon.²

The Author

Daniel was a contemporary of the prophet Ezekiel and arrived in Babylon nearly a decade before him. Born into a family of nobles in Jerusalem, Daniel likely enjoyed a privileged status in his native land. His youth, strength, intelligence, and vigor made him a desirable asset to his captors. Daniel entered Babylon as a teenager and spent the rest of his life there, living into at least his mid-80s.

Daniel likely wrote the first half of this book (chapters 1–6) in the early part of his life and the second half (chapters 7–12) in his later years. The book covers more than 70 years of Daniel's life and nearly 500 years of history. While his home, nation, and people suffered God's discipline for their persistent rebellion, Daniel remained steadfast in hope, faith, and obedience. Daniel's story spotlights God's greatness as it highlights Daniel's exemplary character.

The Structure

Daniel reads like two separate books. Written as a third-person narrative, chapters 1–6 recount life in Babylon's royal court. In these accounts, Daniel modeled godly living as an exile. He humbly served even those who did not believe in the one true God without compromising his faith.³ The second half, chapters 7–12, presents first-person apocalyptic prophecy. These passages foretell events in the near future for Israel as well as future judgment during the end times, also known as eschatology. The vivid imagery assures God's people of His ultimate control and victory. The prophetic visions of Daniel 7–12 reinforce the themes of the court stories of Daniel 1–6.

1. **Judah's exile:** 2 Chronicles 36:14-17; Daniel 9:11-14

2. **Babylon's demise:** Isaiah 47

3. **Life of faith as exiles:** Jeremiah 29:5-7

Language provides another distinction in this book. The book of Daniel was written in Hebrew from 1:1 through 2:3, switches to Aramaic through the end of chapter 7, then returns to Hebrew until the end of the book. Because the court stories pertain to the Babylonian and Persian Empires, they were perhaps meant to include a Gentile audience.

The Aramaic portion of the book (2:4–7:28) reveals a chiastic (ABCCBA) structure. **In a chiastic arrangement, the first half of the book mirrors and complements the second half.**

A. Dream of four kingdoms – Daniel 2:4b-49

B. Three friends in the furnace – Daniel 3

C. Daniel interprets Nebuchadnezzar's dream – Daniel 4

C. Daniel interprets handwriting for Belshazzar – Daniel 5

B. Daniel in the lions' den – Daniel 6

A. Vision of four world kingdoms replaced by fifth – Daniel 7

The Purpose

The book of Daniel encourages God's people. The original Jewish exiles in Babylon and faithful believers throughout the ages have drawn hope and strength from Daniel and his three fellow countrymen modeling faithful living in a hostile world.

The court stories of Daniel 1–6 motivate God's people to resist compromising their faith. Daniel models how God's people may express their God-given gifts and talents and serve with humility, wisdom, and excellence in an unbelieving world. **Through our faithful service, others may see glimpses of the Creator's glory and be drawn to the redemption He offers.**

The visions of Daniel 7–12 foreshadow greater persecution to come, a call to obedience, assurance of final victory, and acknowledgement of widespread martyrdom. Certainly, Jewish people experienced persecution and martyrdom at the hands of Antiochus Epiphanes in 167-164 BC and during the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Daniel's prophetic visions foretell the persecution of Christians through the ages, which will accelerate in the last days when Christ's final victory over Satan will introduce the new heaven and new earth.

The book of Daniel connects with the New Testament, particularly the book of Revelation. Daniel identified the "son of man"⁴ and "the abomination that causes desolation."⁵ He described a beast with seven heads and 10 horns⁶ and a boastful "little horn."⁷ Daniel wrote of the "Ancient of Days,"⁸ thrones of judgment,⁹ and the casting of the starry host from heaven.¹⁰ Like Joseph in Genesis, Daniel prefigures attributes of Jesus Christ, the suffering, righteous servant who paves the way to freedom for those who follow Him.

4. **Son of Man:** Daniel 7:13; Matthew 24:30; 26:64; Mark 13:26; 14:62; Luke 21:27

5. **Abomination:** Daniel 9:27; Matthew 24:15; Mark 13:14

6. **Beast:** Daniel 7:7; Revelation 12:3

7. **Little horn:** Daniel 7:8; Revelation 13:5

8. **Ancient of Days:** Daniel 7:9; Revelation 1:14

9. **Thrones of judgment:** Daniel 7:9; Revelation 20:4

10. **Stars cast down:** Daniel 8:10; Revelation 12:4

● Holding Fast in Exile – Daniel 1

A Nation Taken – 1:1-2

The Southern Kingdom of Judah fell due to the nation's downward spiral of disobedience.¹¹ **Failure to obey and abide in the Lord always brings consequences.** More than a century earlier, in 722 BC, then-superpower Assyria overtook the larger Northern Kingdom of Israel. The tragic exile should not have surprised the Israelites. Through Moses, the Lord had warned He would scatter them if they rebelled and failed to keep His covenant.¹²

Judah's fall occurred in three stages, with exiles taken to Babylon in waves. First, Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah in 605 BC during King Jehoiakim's reign. The Babylonians took many of the ruling class and the temple vessels but retained the king as a vassal, a ruler subservient to the Babylonian king. The second wave began when Jehoiakim refused to pay further tribute to Babylon, resulting in Babylon's attack in 597 BC.¹³ Jehoiakim's son Jehoiachin succeeded him and ruled for eight years before being taken captive to Babylon along with Judah's leaders, leaving only the poor behind.¹⁴ In the final blow, Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem in 586 BC, ransacked the temple treasures,¹⁵ and destroyed the city.¹⁶ As prophesied, Judah's exile would last 70 long years.¹⁷ The Southern Kingdom of Judah received the same punishment as the Northern Kingdom but experienced a different ultimate outcome, as God preserved the nation of Judah to bring His promised Messiah.

Cultural Campaign of Conformity – 1:3-7

Daniel, a teenager from a noble family, was among those taken in the first Babylonian siege against Judah. As spoils of conquest, Daniel, his friends, and other fellow Hebrews were stripped of their home, status, and dignity. These key people were considered merely prized possessions carried from occupied Judah to Babylon, no different than the temple treasures.

King Nebuchadnezzar's distinct design for cultural absorption included Daniel. The Babylonian king chose the best and brightest from among the captives to mold and meld into Babylonian culture. Already advantaged among Jewish royalty or nobility, Daniel and his three friends were among those "without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace." The three-year Babylonian assimilation scheme offered these young men access to the finest excesses of their captor country.

The indoctrination program was a form of Babylonian branding. The young men received new names honoring Babylonian deities in an attempt to sever ties with their Hebrew identity. Daniel, whose name means "God is my judge," was renamed Belteshazzar, meaning "Bel, the chief Babylonian god, protects." Hananiah ("Yahweh is gracious") became Shadrach ("command of Aku, the moon god"). Mishaël ("Who is like God?") became Meshach ("Who is what Aku is?"). Azariah ("Yahweh is my helper") became Abednego ("servant of Nabu, the god of wisdom"). As the book of Daniel unfolds, however, the faithful witness of these young men proves that a culture's labels do not define God's people. **The faithful find their true identity unshakable in God alone, despite cultural pressure.**

11. **Judah's downfall:** 2 Kings 24:2-4; Jeremiah 12:7-9; 25:1-11; Ezekiel 23:23-24

12. **Lord's judgment:** Leviticus 26:14-39; Deuteronomy 4:25-28; 28:58-64

13. **Jehoiakim:** 2 Kings 24:1-7

14. **Jehoiachin:** 2 Kings 24:8-17

15. **Temple treasures:** Ezra 1:11

16. **Jerusalem's fall:** 2 Kings 25

17. **70 years:** 2 Chronicles 36:21; Jeremiah 29:10; Daniel 9:1-2; Zechariah 1:12; 7:5

Daniel's Desire for Devotion – 1:8-16

Although the Babylonians forcibly altered their names, the four Hebrews would retain steadfast allegiance to God. They humbly submitted to the authority of their earthly captors but remained faithful to their God, refusing to dishonor Him. Their prescribed diet posed a challenge. Daniel saw partaking in the royal food and wine as defilement. Was it because the food had been dedicated to idols or that eating certain animals was prohibited by Jewish law?¹⁸ Or would the food hone their appetite toward dependence on Babylonian luxury rather than God's sufficiency? In any case, their intent remained clear. Because they belonged to God's chosen people, they chose to honor God.

Daniel's respectful response toward his captor coalesced with God's invisible sovereignty—guiding the official's regard toward Daniel. Gently, yet persuasively, Daniel sought "permission not to defile himself this way." He proposed a mutually beneficial plan: give Daniel and his friends vegetables and water for 10 days, then compare their appearance with those who ate the royal food. After 10 days, their superior fitness was evident, and they were allowed to continue their healthy and God-honoring practice. More than proving the superiority of Daniel's diet, this outcome fortified Daniel's allegiance to God, and the officials took notice. God showed favor to Daniel and his friends to forward His purposes through their lives.

The Blessing of Obedience – 1:17-21

God honors obedience. As Daniel and his friends remained faithful to God, their Lord blessed them with "knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning." They were not of the world, but they were in the world. In a less-than-ideal environment, they came to understand the culture while remaining faithful to God. Because they were steadfast in the small things, God blessed them with bigger things.

God also gave Daniel an extraordinary and supernatural gift of understanding visions and dreams. This gift would serve not only his captor king and this Gentile nation but also God's faithful people of all generations, as the rest of this prophetic book confirms. Through Daniel's prophetic voice, God would speak His truth to His people about His eternal plans. **God gives strength and encouragement to His people through His people.**

At the conclusion of their training, the four teenagers were presented to King Nebuchadnezzar. They excelled among their peers and even beyond the more experienced servants in the kingdom. This earned them the privilege and responsibility of entering the king's service. **Daniel's service would last the entire 70-year span of Judah's captivity in Babylon, from the reign of Nebuchadnezzar to Cyrus.**

● A King's Dream – Daniel 2

The Impossible Dream – 2:1-13

In the ancient world, dreams were believed to foretell future events. **Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that so vexed him that he lost sleep, unable to understand its meaning.** The troubled tyrant resorted to commanding his "magicians, enchanter, sorcerers and astrologers" to not only interpret the dream but to relay his dream's content. Failure would mean violent death.

18. Food prohibitions: Leviticus 11:1-47; Deuteronomy 14:3-20

Peace in the Promises

The Doctrine of the Fulfillment of Prophecy

God, who is not bound by time, knows the end as well as the beginning. In Daniel 2, God revealed the succession of earthly kingdoms and history's trajectory toward the coming eternal kingdom. **Through biblical prophecy, God reveals His truth and plans to the world.** Everything God foretells remains unchangeably true, though we struggle to fully understand what He reveals. Fulfilled prophecy validates the Bible and reveals God's sovereignty over the rise and fall of world powers. God sent the Messiah, Jesus Christ, fulfilling many Old Testament promises in amazing detail. Fulfilled prophecy also reveals that God's kingdom is distinct from worldly empires that rise and fall. This amazing record of fulfilled prophecy allows God's people to trust His promises that have not yet been fulfilled. This includes the second coming of Jesus Christ in the end times.¹

Refusing to believe what the Bible foretells discounts all God has done and ignores what He promises to do. If we fail to trust God to fulfill what He has promised, we essentially call Him a liar. Discarding biblical prophecy about the future means rejecting irrefutable evidence of the glorious work God has already accomplished, as promised, and leaves us despairing and defeated.

To believe in prophecy's fulfillment means living with unabashed hope. The glorious reality of prophecy—fulfilled and yet-to-be fulfilled—allows God's children to look beyond their circumstances toward God's greater plan. God promises His children a glorious future—an eternity in His presence. Until that day, believers in Jesus Christ can live in priceless joy as God continues to unfurl His promises in accordance with His divine timetable.

1. Second coming: Daniel 2:44-45; 7:7-28; 9:24-27; 12:1-4

Unable to reason with an unreasonable ruler, the king's servants pleaded with him. The king asked for supernatural power these servants did not possess. Ironically, these "wise men" unintentionally alluded to the Son of God and Son of Man to come, when they exclaimed in verse 11, "What the king asks is too difficult. No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among humans." Six centuries later, God would become flesh in the person of Jesus Christ and dwell among people.¹⁹ The servants' mortal shortcomings only stoked the king's fury. He ordered the execution of all the wise men of Babylon, including the freshly trained Hebrew recruits.

Daniel's Response – 2:14-23

Prayer is crucial in any believer's confrontation of a confounding problem. Daniel's dependence on God was the key to his success. In stark contrast to the impetuous nature of a murderous tyrant, a humble immigrant servant responded with "wisdom and tact." First, Daniel asked for time before offering the service of his God-given gift. Next, he transparently shared the predicament with his friends. They did not try to formulate an escape plan, as we might do. In unity and trust, they took this life-and-death problem to the only appropriate place: the God of heaven.

19. Jesus among humanity: John 1:14

God revealed the dream and its meaning to Daniel. **There is no appropriate response to God's provision other than outright praise and thanksgiving!** Daniel praised God, declaring His sovereignty and wisdom. He thanked the "God of my ancestors," grateful for God's answer to prayer.

Daniel's Description – 2:24-35

After Daniel asked Arioch to take him to Nebuchadnezzar to share the interpretation of the dream, the king's commander tried to claim credit for having found the solution. **By contrast, Daniel steadfastly gave glory to God.** When Nebuchadnezzar asked Daniel if he could explain the dream and its meaning, Daniel replied, "No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries."

While Daniel knew Nebuchadnezzar had the power to take his life, he understood that God is the true author, sustainer, redeemer, and source of eternal life. God gave this Jewish exile the ability to tell and interpret the king's dream. In doing so, Daniel planted a seed of witness to the one true God that God would water over time within this Gentile king. At the same time, Daniel saved the lives of others, prefiguring Christ, who came to save us from spiritual and eternal death.

Daniel said the king's God-given dream revealed mysteries to come. He described what Nebuchadnezzar saw: an amazing statue with a head of gold, whose elements decreased in value down to feet of baked clay. Then a rock made not of human hands struck the clay feet and demolished the statue, which was swept away and forgotten.

Daniel's Interpretation – 2:36-45

All dominion and authority belong to God, who delegates human authority, including oversight of this vastly wealthy nation. **Nebuchadnezzar's rule was not eternal.** Babylon would be succeeded by other kingdoms, represented by elements of lesser value in this statue—silver, bronze, and iron. Scholars nearly universally agree that the empires reflected in the visions of Daniel 7–8 were as follows: Medo-Persia (silver), led by Cyrus beginning in 539 BC²⁰; Greece (bronze) under Alexander the Great in about 331 BC²¹; and Rome (iron), which began its rule in Palestine in 63 BC.²²

Like Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon, the successive kingdoms would rule ruthlessly, without acknowledging God. Each kingdom would eventually be crushed and blown away by the rock, which represents God.²³ **In the end, only God's kingdom will endure forever and never be destroyed.**²⁴

The King's Response – 2:46-49

The evidence of Daniel's supernatural gift overwhelmed the king. Daniel knew the details of his troubling dream and pronounced its dire interpretation. Babylon's monarch fell prostrate and declared, "Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and the revealer of mysteries." As Daniel's narrative demonstrates, God continued to work on this proud king's heart. **At this moment, Nebuchadnezzar tasted and pondered God's majesty.**

20. **Medo-Persia:** Daniel 8:20

21. **Greece:** Daniel 8:21

22. **Rome:** Daniel 8:22

23. **Rock or stone:** Psalms 18:2; 118:22; 144:1; Isaiah 26:4; 28:16; Matthew 7:24-27; 16:17-19; 21:42-44

24. **Eternal kingdom:** Exodus 15:18; Psalms 9:7; 45:6; 145:13; Isaiah 9:7; Lamentations 5:19; Daniel 4:3; 4:34; 6:26; 7:14, 27; Micah 4:7, 13; Luke 1:33; Revelation 11:15

Recognizing Daniel's humble wisdom and courageous actions, the king promoted his newest wise man to a powerful position, entrusting him to oversee all his wise men. **Our faithful response to God reveals His greatness.** The Lord's fame would begin to spread. At Daniel's request, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were also granted influential roles, allowing God's light to shine even more broadly and brightly into the darkness of an idolatrous people.

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Daniel and his three friends were torn from their home and forced to live under oppressive rule in a foreign land. Their captors recognized that the youths' privileged upbringing and evident potential could benefit Babylon. However, these faithful four remained focused on a greater glory than the gaudy kingdom of Babylon. The One who called them sons of His kingdom sovereignly placed Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah in an oppressive place so His glory would resound through them.

Babylon could change their names, but nothing would change the wonder of their God.

Daniel offered Nebuchadnezzar and his servants, as well as his own friends a simple yet courageous witness to his eternal King. He demonstrated humble respect toward his captors, loving empathy toward the threatened, honest courage toward the king, and complete dependence on God. **Though young, Daniel's maturity and wisdom reflected his devotion to the Lord.** Through the best and worst of circumstances, God offers His people opportunities to bear witness to Him.

Apply It

Because of his ancestors' rebellion, Daniel found himself in a situation beyond his control. However, Daniel chose to respond faithfully. **Rather than bemoan his circumstances, Daniel trained his focus on God.** Though he likely experienced difficult days, Daniel exhibited exemplary and consistent trust in God. As a righteous servant of God and like the One his visions would describe, Daniel suffered because of the sins of others, served both captors and captives, empathized with others' troubles, exercised his supernatural gifts for God's glory, and was a man of prayer. In times of duress, struggle, and oppression, is your focus on your predicament or on God's glory? How might you trust that God has given you the opportunity to bear witness to His power—exactly where you are?

Daniel's life did not seem fair. Babylon was not his home. Daniel served the Babylonians yet lived differently from the culture around him. **God's people today also live as exiles in a foreign territory.** The full reality of our kingdom is yet to come. Until Jesus returns, believers serve as ambassadors to the one whose life, death, resurrection, and ascension give eternal life to those who believe in Him. How deeply do you desire for others to know the Lord? We are called to do good works and stand firm in our faith while living in a world that has rejected Him. Indwelt with the Holy Spirit, those who abide in Jesus bear lasting fruit, allowing others to taste and see that the Lord is good. How has God gifted you to give this world a taste of the eternal kingdom to come?

Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream pointed to a future day when all nations will acknowledge God's eternal kingdom. **Jesus will return and rule His kingdom forever.** Are you ready? Are you excited? Where has God placed you to tell His story?

Unwavering Faith and Uncompromising Humility

PEOPLE OF
THE PROMISE:
EXILE & RETURN

LESSON 4

SCRIPTURE:
DANIEL 3-4



Lesson 4 Questions

First Day: Read Lesson 3 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. How did the lecture strengthen your courage and commitment to faith in God?
2. How did the notes encourage you to withstand the prevailing cultural currents that run counter to God's design?

Second Day: Read Daniel 3:1-18.

Nebuchadnezzar's idolatrous edict placed faithful exiles in a precarious position.

3.
 - a. Describe Nebuchadnezzar's proclamation and what it might have revealed about his heart.
 - b. What was wrong about the king's command?
4. Give some possible reasons behind the actions of the astrologers. (See also Daniel 1-2.)
5.
 - a. What did the response of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to the king reveal about their faith?

- b. How does your faith shape your response when life's circumstances press in on you?

Third Day: Read Daniel 3:19-30.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego faced the king's fury and a fiery fate in a furnace.

- 6.
 - a. Why do you think the king became so enraged? Give possible reasons for his anger.
 - b. What happened as a result of Nebuchadnezzar's anger?
- 7.
 - a. What did the king see in the fire, and what was his response?
 - b. What does God show us in this scene about humans' right and ability to judge?
- 8.
 - a. What stands out to you regarding the king's change of heart toward the three condemned men?
 - b. When has a truth about God radically changed your thoughts and actions?

Fourth Day: Read Daniel 4:1-27.

Daniel interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's troubling dream.

- 9.
 - a. What might have moved the king to tell his story by writing the letter recorded in chapter 4?
 - b. Who was the king's audience, and what was the king's attitude in composing this declaration?
- 10.
 - a. Briefly describe Nebuchadnezzar's dream and Daniel's interpretation.
 - b. Consider the nature and meaning of the king's dream. Of what might the tree remind us?
(See also Genesis 2:9; 3:14-24; 11:5-9 or any other relevant Scriptures.)

11. a. What lessons about God's priorities and human values emerge from the king's dream and Daniel's interpretation?
- b. What do you learn from Daniel's advice to the king in verse 27?

Fifth Day: Read Daniel 4:28-37.

Nebuchadnezzar's dream was fulfilled.

12. a. What prompted the fulfillment of the king's dream? Describe what happened. How was he restored?
- b. In what ways have you acted similarly to the king? What was the result?
13. Consider Nebuchadnezzar's actions in Daniel 1–4. What lesson did God seem to be teaching the king? How did his attitude toward God change?
14. a. What attributes of God do you see on display through His dealings with Nebuchadnezzar?
- b. What attributes of God do you see at work in your relationship with Him?

Sixth Day: Review Daniel 3–4.

God reveals His glory to call us to worship Him alone.

15. In what way did God reveal His glory in Daniel 3–4? How has God displayed His glory to you this week? How have you responded?

No homiletics assigned for Group and Administrative Leaders.

Next step: Listen to the lecture.

Lecture Notes

This image shows a full page of blank, lined paper. It features approximately 20 evenly spaced horizontal grey lines across its entire width, providing a guide for handwriting or typing. The background is a clean, solid white color.

Next step: Read the lesson notes.

Lesson 4 Notes

Daniel 3–4

Focus Verse

“How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; his dominion endures from generation to generation.” (Daniel 4:3)

Outline

- Faith in the Furnace – Daniel 3
- From Heights to Humility – Daniel 4

Engage

What keeps a person from hearing, believing, or following God? This world offers many distractions to deter us from faith. Human accomplishments may lead to laser-focused efforts to build power, status, and worldly acceptance. People see God’s wonders on the earth or in the sky but foolishly worship the created rather than the Creator.¹ Humanity’s mutiny never surprises God. Infectious rebellion began in His perfect garden with the first man and woman He created, and now it permeates all people.² We seek self-autonomy, not God. **God pursues foolishly proud people, strategically revealing His glory in diverse ways.**

God alone is the Creator and provider of all things. Only He is worthy of worship. God patiently invites all people into a relationship with Him. He meets people where they are but leads His own to think less of themselves and more of Him. Daniel’s friends—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—recognized God’s supremacy as they humbly but firmly refused to bow to a man-made idol. King Nebuchadnezzar, however, painfully learned to humble himself before God. God deserves wholehearted worship from all creation. Willingly or unwillingly, every person will one day submit to God and His authority. God will receive the worship He deserves. **God reveals His glory to call us to worship Him alone.**

-
1. **Worship of the created, not the Creator:** Romans 1:25
 2. **Rebellion against God:** Genesis 3

● Faith in the Furnace – Daniel 3

Interestingly, Daniel 3 is the only chapter of this book that does not mention Daniel by name. Perhaps his elevated status in the royal palace busied him elsewhere.¹ Though Daniel is absent from this momentous episode, the witness of God Almighty radiates throughout the passage. Daniel was not the only exile who remained loyal to God. **The devotion of three men—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—offers a warning against idolatry and an encouragement to remain faithful, even to the point of death.**

-
1. **Elevated status:** Daniel 1:18-21; 2:48; 4:9

A King's Idol – 3:1-3

King Nebuchadnezzar unveiled a grand monument on the plain of Dura, south of the city of Babylon.

A statue 90 feet (27 m) high and 9 feet (2.7 m) wide towered over a forced celebration. Probably a tall, needle-shaped obelisk, the lean and looming golden image was likely influenced by the king's earlier dream.² Perhaps the design indicated a defensive effort against the prophecy that other kingdoms would overtake Nebuchadnezzar's domain.

Did the monument honor the king, a deity, or Babylonian culture? The answer is unclear, but the statue could represent all three. Most bricks in the kingdom bore stamps with Nebuchadnezzar's name to highlight his power.³ Regardless, a king with an overinflated ego created an enormous monument in honor of a colossal kingdom. **What colossal idolatry!**

In a strategic power move, Nebuchadnezzar summoned multiple levels of officials, listed in order of importance, to test their loyalty within the king's administration. Satraps, known as protectors of the kingdom, supervised the largest divisions of the empire. Governors oversaw regions or provinces within the satraps' territories, or satrapies. The "other provincial officials" could have been the caste that included Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. **This assembly of influential men represented a consolidation of the king's power, authority, and allegiance.**

A King's Command – 3:4-7

Nebuchadnezzar, an autocratic king, demanded and commanded displays of allegiance throughout Babylon. Wielding the threat of horrendous death, he seemed not to understand that coerced worship yields insincere praise.⁴ **As the king's golden object of pride towered, the public crier loudly proclaimed the cue, the command, and the consequence.** When the music played, the people would worship the idol or die in a blazing furnace.

Only three faithful Hebrew men dared to defy the king's command. The king's forced and false worship foreshadows the persecution of the church⁵ and reverence to the beast⁶ in the end times. **This unfolding scene discloses the potential costliness of spiritual integrity.**⁷

A King's Fiery Fury – 3:8-18

The disobedience of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did not escape the notice of some of the king's astrologers, who seized the opportunity to weaponize loyalty to their monarch. Did their vile animosity arise from hatred toward Jews or a desire to homogenize Babylonian culture? Perhaps they were fueled by envy since the king found these three men "ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom."⁸ How quickly the king's astrologers seemed to forget Daniel's intercession on their behalf when he successfully interpreted the king's dream.⁹

Sin knows no bounds. With murderous malice, the astrologers exaggerated and personalized their charge. They claimed that the three Hebrews paid no attention to the king, his gods, or his idol. Stoked

2. **Statue dream:** Daniel 2:24-45

3. **King's self-praise:** Daniel 4:29-30

4. **False worship:** Isaiah 29:13

5. **Persecution of the Church:** Acts 8:1-3

6. **Worship of the beast:** Revelation 13:12-18

7. **Cost of faith:** Matthew 24:9; Luke 21:16-17; John 16:2; Acts 7; Hebrews 11:37-39; 1 Peter 4:12-14; Revelation 2:9-10; 17:6; 20:4

8. **Hebrews' superiority:** Daniel 1:20

9. **Daniel's interpretation:** Daniel 2:14-45

Perfect Justice

The Doctrine of the Judgment of Believers and Unbelievers

King Nebuchadnezzar's condemnation of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego portrays the inability of human beings to deliver righteous judgment. These men suffered unjustly because they remained faithful to the one true God. **Only God can judge humanity adequately, perfectly, and righteously.**

Every person sins, rebelling against God and His standards for life. All people deserve God's just condemnation. Though the world rejects this thought, God will judge everyone and render their eternal sentence of either life or death. **In love and grace, God offers humanity an undeserved gift—the atoning blood of Jesus Christ, the perfect Lamb of God who took the judgment we deserve.** God's Son died in the place of all who put their faith in Him, so we may have eternal fellowship with God.

Those who reject God and His sovereign right to judge will receive what we all deserve—eternal, agonizing separation from Him. Seeming success in this earthly life—position, possessions, and good deeds—will not be enough. **To die without turning to Christ for salvation means facing God's punitive judgment without another opportunity to turn to Him.** Those who do not turn to Christ in this life await eternity in hell, a place of torment, weeping, and unending suffering.¹

Recognizing our sinfulness and God's rightful position as righteous judge elevates the gift of salvation in Christ. God's people can live with assurance of eternal life with Him. The indwelling Holy Spirit inspires and empowers believers to do good works that glorify God and serve His people. God promises an evaluative judgment and rewards for believers' works after their earthly lives. Because of Christ, eternal life for believers is promised and secure, and they are forever free from sin's deserved condemnation.²

1. **Eternal punishment:** Matthew 18:6-9; 25:31-46; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10; Jude 1:7, 13; Revelation 19:11; 20:10, 14-15

2. **No condemnation:** Romans 8:1-2

with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Daniel's friends, seeking the truth about this accusation and issuing an ultimatum. The pantheistic, proud king assumed he held ultimate authority. They would bow as commanded or die in a blazing furnace from which no god could rescue them.

The three men chose to trust eternity's King rather than bow to Babylon's king. Without defense and with due respect, they vowed their allegiance to the one true God, come what may. "If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand," they declared. "But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up." Nebuchadnezzar erroneously believed he determined their fate. Daniel's condemned friends knew better. Only God—their Creator, Lord, and true King—was worthy of their resolute trust.

Facing the Fire – 3:19-23

Though he would eventually be humbled by God Himself, prideful Nebuchadnezzar's rage became more inflamed by the men's refusal to bow to his sovereignty. **God sometimes allows people to spiral downward in sin before rescuing them.** Nebuchadnezzar's foolishly proud anger escalated.¹⁰ He ordered the furnace to be heated seven times hotter. Perhaps a beehive-style oven or kiln, the furnace likely had an opening at the top where the men would be thrown in, with a door on the side for viewing.

In a public show of seeming control, the king ordered the strongest soldiers to bind the men and throw them into the furnace. **The intense heat of the blazing furnace cost these soldiers their lives—a vivid example of the unintended collateral damage that always accompanies sin.** Rather than being thrown in, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fully clothed and firmly tied, “fell into the blazing furnace.”

Freedom in the Flames – 3:24-27

King Nebuchadnezzar saw something utterly unexpected. Instead of witnessing three disobedient servants devoured by flames, an awestruck king saw not three but four men in the fire—unbound, unharmed, and walking. Amazed, he exclaimed that the fourth man looked “like a son of the gods.” **The deadly furnace beamed God's beacon of miraculous deliverance, power, and sovereignty.**

Scripture does not explicitly identify the fourth man. Certainly, the king rightly recognized him as a divine being. Nebuchadnezzar may have witnessed a Christophany, the preincarnate presence of our Savior, Jesus Christ, who unbinds God's children from the ravages of sin and death. Other possible Christophanies appear in Scripture, including a visitor to Abraham before Sodom and Gomorrah's destruction and the man who wrestled with Jacob at Jabbok.¹¹ Some suggest the fourth man was an angel. Either way, the fourth man undeniably represented God's presence and protection. **The Lord's presence with believers in troubled times gives assurance that suffering for His sake gives God glory.** Indwelt by the Holy Spirit and standing on Jesus's promises, believers always have “another” with them as they journey through life.¹²

The king immediately recognized the men's resolute faithfulness, the very quality for which he condemned them earlier. Nebuchadnezzar shouted into the fiery furnace, “Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!” The title “Most High God” was often used for God by non-Jews, meaning the highest of many gods.¹³ Nebuchadnezzar was not denying the Babylonian cultural gods but recognizing some supremacy in the Hebrews' God.

Miraculously, the three men—obediently adhering to God's first two commandments to have no other gods nor worship any idol—emerged unharmed and without smelling like smoke. Though fire was a means of death in Babylon, fire also often symbolizes God's divine presence.¹⁴ Like the burning bush that communicated God's presence to Moses, these three men of faith were not consumed. God not only delivered them from the fire, He accompanied them in the fire. **God's presence fuels believers' courage to remain faithful to Him.**

10. **King's deathly, prideful anger:** Proverbs 16:14; 29:23

11. **Possible Christophanies:** Genesis 18; 32:22-32

12. **Never alone:** Matthew 28:20; John 14:15-23

13. **Most High God:** Genesis 14:18-24; Mark 5:6-8; Acts 16:16-18

14. **Fire:** Exodus 3:2; 13:21; Deuteronomy 4:11-12; Psalm 18:8; Acts 2:1-4

Praise and Promotion – 3:28-30

The miracle of the furnace may have warmed the king's heart toward the Hebrews, but Nebuchadnezzar was not yet willing to exclusively worship the one and only God. He credited the men for their conviction that moved them to defy even the king. He also decreed a hedge of protection around all who would worship “the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.” **Jewish faith became a declared and legitimate religious ideology in Babylon.**

Nevertheless, Nebuchadnezzar had not yet committed himself to Yahweh. Little did he realize the prophetic truth of his own declaration that “no other god can save in this way.” All faithful Jews, including these three freshly promoted young men, believed in the Messiah to come. **The Lord Jesus Christ would declare His unrivaled sovereignty and authority as the way, truth, and life.**¹⁵ No one but Jesus can save.

From Heights to Humility – Daniel 4

After giving his account of God's miraculous deliverance of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, Daniel pivoted to focus on King Nebuchadnezzar. In an undated letter that was seemingly more a public proclamation than personal correspondence, the king shared a synopsis of his spiritual rise, fall, and rehabilitation. **Nebuchadnezzar transparently told his story, demonstrating the fleeting nature of the world's riches, the perils of pride, and God's great offer of redemption.**

A King's Witness – 4:1-3

The king's demeanor and historical accounts place this letter in the latter part of Nebuchadnezzar's reign. With Babylon enjoying relative peace from her conquests, the king wished great prosperity to all—a common prologue in Eastern correspondence. **With pleasure, Nebuchadnezzar humbly prepared his recipients to hear of “the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God” had performed for him.**

Nebuchadnezzar witnessed God's work over many years through four specially gifted Hebrew exiles. Daniel's divine acumen in interpreting the king's dreams and the miraculous scene at the fiery furnace offered Nebuchadnezzar great opportunities to see God at work. **Now it was time for the king to detail his own transformation, which began with a disconcerting dream.**

A Puzzling Dream – 4:4-18

The king's monologue opens like the confessional of a transformed man. At the height of personal contentment and prosperity, Nebuchadnezzar experienced a troubling dream that Babylonian wise men could not interpret. This time, he did not threaten death for their failure.¹⁶ While Scripture does not say why the king did not seek Daniel first, Nebuchadnezzar eventually sought the help of his Jewish “chief of the magicians.”

In 4:2, Nebuchadnezzar used the common pagan term “Most High God,” indicating he did not yet believe in the exclusivity of the one true God. The king included Daniel's Babylonian name, Belteshazzar,

15. Jesus's exclusive claim of salvation: John 3:16-17; 14:6

16. Death threat: Daniel 2:5, 12-13

and noted that “the spirit of the holy gods” was in him. **At this point, the king did not fully recognize God’s superior wisdom.** Still, he noticeably shifted attention to a divine power beyond himself.

Nebuchadnezzar dreamed of a towering tree reaching the sky, visible to the whole world and a source of abundant food and shelter. A heavenly messenger commanded the tree be cut down and its branches trimmed, leaves stripped, and fruit scattered, and the animals dispersed. The remaining stump and roots were to be bound with iron and bronze in the grass of the field. The dream’s protagonist would become demented and live among the animals “till seven times pass by for him.” This likely meant seven years or an indefinite but significant length of time. The dream’s message seemed undeniable, even to the pagan king, who proclaimed: “The Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of people.”

A Perplexing Interpretation – 4:19-27

The king’s dream so terrified Daniel that he needed the king’s encouragement to share its meaning. Perhaps Daniel’s regard for the king or concern for the people caused his pause. At the king’s prompting, Daniel honestly and courageously revealed that the tree did not represent Babylon’s enemies but the king himself. While powerful, prosperous, and the envy of the world, the king would be driven from power and live among the wild animals until he acknowledged the sovereignty of God Almighty. What a shocking message!

Daniel explained that the tree in his king’s dream represented an earthly kingdom bent toward life and rule apart from God’s sovereignty. The tree represented Satan-fueled, pride-driven aspirations of godlikeness, like those of Adam, Eve, and their descendants.¹⁷ The Bible clearly warns about the consequences of pride.¹⁸

The dream, however, was not without hope. The stump, protected by iron and bronze, would remain as a foothold. Nebuchadnezzar would experience restoration when he acknowledged the heavenly kingdom that rules over all earthly kingdoms. Daniel respectfully called his king to active repentance: “Therefore, Your Majesty, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue.”

A Prophecy Fulfilled – 4:28-33

God patiently gives humanity ample opportunity to repent from sin. For whatever reason, a year elapsed. Did Nebuchadnezzar neglect Daniel’s warning due to pride, forgetfulness, or ongoing disregard of God’s sovereignty? The king’s ego remained intact. He gazed upon Babylon’s grandeur from the roof of his royal palace and exclaimed, “Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?” Despite all God’s gracious warnings, the king gave God no credit for his powerful kingdom. Nebuchadnezzar claimed for himself honor due only to God and believed only the pleasures of his earthly kingdom brought him life and joy.

As the boastful words escaped the king’s lips, a heavenly voice immediately declared and delivered what the dream had promised. All Nebuchadnezzar’s riches, accomplishments, and power could not save him from God’s decree: “He was driven away from people and ate grass like an ox. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird.” The proud king became a wild beast, true to God’s promise.

17. **Like God:** Genesis 3:4-5; Isaiah 14:13-14

18. **Pride’s consequences:** Genesis 3:14-24; 11:5-9; Isaiah 14:15, 22-27

Perhaps God gave the king over¹⁹ to a rare mental disorder known as boanthropy, which causes victims to assume the countenance of cattle. Nebuchadnezzar's humiliation in the dew-drenched fields placed him lower than the animals God created to act this way. Just as God did not design this human king to be a beast, neither is humankind designed to be God. **To give glory to ourselves rather than to God is insanity.** This prideful king was temporarily cut off from what it means to be a human—made in God's image and designed to glorify Him. His debased state reveals a bitter, stark portrayal of human life lived apart from God.

A King's Sanity Restored – 4:34-37

At the end of his prescribed time of animalistic confinement, the king, with no ability to speak, acknowledged God in the only way he could. **He raised his eyes toward heaven.** Instantly, God restored Nebuchadnezzar's sanity, along with the honor and splendor of the kingdom. He returned to Babylon's throne. Most importantly, the king voiced a properly transformed perspective of his Creator: "His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation."

Only a proper perspective of God grants us a proper perspective of ourselves. Nebuchadnezzar reigned over the greatest nation on earth at that time but neglected righteousness, oppressed countless people, and drenched himself with pride. The king had shunned God's previous intervention through Daniel's faithful witness. He failed to respond properly to the steadfast faith of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He ignored hauntingly prophetic dreams and a death-defying miracle in an intensely hot furnace. God found it necessary to temporarily remove Nebuchadnezzar's throne, possessions, and even his humanity to enable this proud king to see the light of His glory.

Scholars differ regarding Nebuchadnezzar's declaration at the end of this chapter. Did his glowing confession reveal he had renounced other gods and surrendered to the one true God? Only God knows whether the king continued to "praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven" through his final days. God not only creates us and gives us purpose in life, but He intimately knows the heart of every person.²⁰ True allegiance to the King of Heaven goes beyond verbal declarations of loyalty and involves bowing before His supreme authority and looking to Him alone for salvation. **God reveals His glory to call us to worship Him alone.** The omnipresent God never abandoned Nebuchadnezzar, even in the cow pasture. God met the humiliated king and gave him yet another chance to turn to Him. In infinite love and sacrifice, God graciously offers all people this same opportunity. God sent His Son into the world to save foolishly proud and wayward people—calling them to fulfill their highest calling and seek His glory.²¹

Take to Heart

Hold Fast

God put His glory and faithfulness on vibrant display, despite the worship-usurping efforts of a prideful king in a powerful yet oppressive nation. Angry King Nebuchadnezzar condemned men to death in a blazing fire because they worshipped God alone. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego confidently and courageously confessed their unwavering allegiance to God, who walked with them

19. **Given over to sin:** Proverbs 16:5; Romans 1:24-32

20. **God knows:** Romans 8:27-30

21. **Offer of salvation:** John 3:16-17

and delivered them from the consuming flames. God astonished a proud king who erroneously and persistently claimed personal power and glory apart from God. **Almighty God reigns over all people and kingdoms—both the proudly powerful and the humbly meek.** God remains faithful to the faithful. God also faithfully worked in King Nebuchadnezzar's life, even when he continued in rebellion.

Reliance on earthly position, possessions, and power can blind us to God's provision and supremacy. God often employs drastic measures to turn our attention back to Him. God humiliated Nebuchadnezzar, who ignored God's warnings and continually defaulted to self-glorification. A lengthy detour into the animal kingdom became necessary to cure him of his spiritual blindness. **Approaching God requires humility and repentance.** Only a right view of God and ourselves allows us to have a reconciled relationship with our Creator and experience His highest purpose for our lives.

Apply It

People of faith understand the limitations of life on earth and the glorious truth about God Himself.

The visible but delegated authority wielded by human governments and rulers rests beneath God's unlimited sovereignty. God calls His people to recognize the frail and fleeting nature of earthly power and worship Him alone. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego realized that a pompous king, a fiery furnace, and even death could not separate them from God's presence and care. Nebuchadnezzar came to realize God's supremacy through painful humiliation. What builds unshakable confidence in God within you? While we might profess bold faith in God on an easy day, unwavering trust in the God we worship emerges amid life's challenges. What current trial is testing and growing your faith? How are you experiencing God's presence and help?

What happens when you are pressed by a world that desires to shove God aside and bury His followers? Do you respond in pride like Nebuchadnezzar or in faith like Daniel's friends? Whether in a fiery furnace, a dew-drenched pasture, or anywhere in between, we can trust God to meet us right where we are. **God reveals His glory so we can respond to Him in faith.** Like Daniel's friends, will you boldly trust God even to the point of death? How do you react when, like Nebuchadnezzar, God puts you in a place of forced humility? God uses both our highest and lowest moments to call us to Himself. He is always at work to lead us to restoration and wholeness. How will you trust God to accomplish His work wherever you find yourself today?

Even in its fallen state, this world exudes beauty. God created the world to display His glory as a witness to His infinite character.²² However, despite God's lavish goodness, fallen humanity naturally claims credit for God's gifts and forgets Him. Like Nebuchadnezzar, people walk the halls of their personal kingdoms and exclaim, "Look at what I have done!" How can you recognize that God has provided everything good you enjoy? **People who understand who God is and who they are approach Him with humility and repentance.** By turning to Christ for salvation, we can simultaneously recognize our spiritual neediness and flourish through all God provides. Full of grace and mercy, God equips broken people to experience their ultimate, eternal purpose in this life as they anticipate eternity. Foolishly proud humans suppress the truth that all glory belongs to God, yet they cannot thwart God's sovereign plans. How will you align your thoughts and actions to the reality of God's sovereignty this week?

22. God's glory in creation: Psalms 8:1-4; 19:1-6; Isaiah 40:26; Colossians 1:16



Faith in the Darkness and the Den

Lesson 5 Questions

First Day: Read Lesson 4 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. What points in the lecture stood out to you regarding God's glory and human pride?
2. How did the notes help you think differently about God's presence in your life?

Second: Read Daniel 5:1-12.

At a great banquet, King Belshazzar needed help to understand a mysterious and troubling vision.

3. Describe the character of Belshazzar and the state of his spiritual life as revealed in these verses.
4. Give details of the supernatural event that struck fear into the king's heart and how he responded.
5.
 - a. When the queen entered, what did she say, and what solution did she offer for the king?
 - b. What stands out to you regarding the queen and her words? Why?

6. Recalling Daniel 1–4 and the experiences of King Nebuchadnezzar, what did Nebuchadnezzar learn that might have benefitted Belshazzar?

Third Day: Read Daniel 5:13-31.

Daniel explained the prophetic vision, which came true.

7. Who gave the Babylonian kings the right to rule, and what greater truth does this indicate? (See also Daniel 2:21 and Romans 13:1-2.)
8. Why do you think Daniel refused the king's reward but agreed to interpret for him? (See also Daniel 1:8, 17.)
9. As Daniel recounted Nebuchadnezzar's rule, what similarities and differences do you see between Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar? (Review Daniel 4 for help.)
10. What strikes you regarding the sudden end of the Babylonian Empire? (See also Daniel 2:44.) How does this influence your outlook on world powers today?

Fourth Day: Read Daniel 6:1-18

Jealous colleagues lured King Darius to enact a law to entrap Daniel.

11. a. From what you recall about Daniel in past lessons, what led Darius to appoint Daniel to an important leadership position in the kingdom?

b. What do you learn from this?
12. a. Considering Daniel's outstanding reputation, why might the other officials have wanted to seek ways to condemn him?

b. Read Romans 3:10-18. How do the officials' actions reflect the heart of fallen humanity?

13. Considering that he knew the king's edict was directed toward him, what impresses you about Daniel and his response?

Fifth Day: Read Daniel 6:19-28.

Miraculously, Daniel survived the night in the lions' den.

14. a. What similarities do you see between Daniel's experience that led to the lions' den and his friends' experience in Daniel 3 regarding the fiery furnace?
- b. What about the witness of Daniel and his friends amid harsh circumstances encourages you personally?
- c. When have you surrendered everything to the Lord in an especially challenging time?
15. a. In what ways does Daniel 6 remind you of Jesus's trial, condemnation, and victory over death? (Consider Acts 2:22-24; 3:13-16 or accounts from the Gospels you may know.)
- b. How did Daniel's rescue from death impact Darius, and how was God proclaimed and glorified?
16. a. Who or what was key to Daniel's ability to persevere through this and his previous trials?
- b. In what ways do Daniel and his faith inspire you?

Sixth Day: Review Daniel 5–6.

God's presence and purposes permeate every circumstance.

17. How does Daniel's faith encourage you to seek God and His presence amid this world's trials?

Homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders: Daniel 5–6

Next step: Listen to the lecture.

[illegible]

Next step: Read the lesson notes.

Lesson 5 Notes

Daniel 5–6

Focus Verse

“My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions.” (Daniel 6:22a)

Outline

- Writing on the Wall – Daniel 5
- Deliverance from the Lions’ Den – Daniel 6

Engage

Does your life ever feel out of control? A job change, a wayward child, or the shards of a broken dream can leave us floundering hopelessly. Despite our attempts to manage our lives, almost everything that matters is out of our control. Even careful planning cannot account for every twist and turn in life. Whether illness or invasion, economic downturn or political upheaval, the next moment can seem uncertain. Death is a breath away. Our lives rest within God’s righteous, omnipotent hand, not our own.

Daniel’s experiences in Babylon’s royal courts taught him to trust God. He demonstrated resilience through ongoing disruptions and life-threatening challenges. He lived entrenched in a world that opposed his values. Daniel’s steadfast faith in an unchanging God allowed him to stand firm regardless of what he faced. God’s presence and promises can bring peace to our souls and focus to our hearts. God will never forsake His people. He calls them to trust Him in this life and for eternity. **God’s presence and purposes permeate every circumstance.**

● Writing on the Wall – Daniel 5

Daniel 5 records events occurring on a single evening—the night before a Persian takeover of the Babylonian Empire. **The sacrilegious last supper of an idolatrous leader’s life proves again the temporal and temporary nature of a worldly king’s power.** By His divine sovereignty, the heavenly King ushered in Babylon’s demise, which He had declared through a prophetic dream in Daniel 2.

Showing Off at the Banquet – 5:1-4

The sounds of an approaching army seem hard to miss. Yet Scripture does not indicate whether King Belshazzar knew the imminence of his kingdom’s downfall. Greek historians mention drinking parties on the eve of Babylon’s fall to the Persians in October of 539 BC. We know that Belshazzar saw fit to throw “a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles.” **This grand party, filled with decadence, debauchery, and desecration, depicts evil’s deceptive and idolatrous grasp.** Heavy drinking, the presence of the king’s multiple wives and concubines, and irreverence toward God’s holy artifacts

Introducing King Belshazzar

Comparing historical records of Babylon with the biblical text requires some explanatory context to help untangle potential misunderstandings:

- Babylonian records show Nabonidus as Babylon's final king (556-539 BC), which leads to some confusion regarding the identification of Belshazzar as king of Babylon in Daniel 5. **Biblical scholarship appears to indicate Belshazzar as the son of Nabonidus, who ruled from Neima (now Saudi Arabia).** This would install Belshazzar as co-regent of Nabonidus in Babylon.
- While Daniel 5:2 refers to Nebuchadnezzar as Belshazzar's "father," the NIV notation provides further clarity. **The word "father" was a common term for "ancestor" or "predecessor."**
- **The queen who first appears in verse 10 is almost certainly not Belshazzar's wife.** This queen, who was absent from the banquet hall with the king's wives and concubines, is noted as the queen mother in the NIV. She would have been either the aged mother of Nabonidus or Belshazzar's mother.

from Jerusalem's temple paint the scene of a sacrilegious orgy in the name of false "gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone."

Belshazzar pridefully showed off the spoils of war, a common practice among conquerors. The gold and silver goblets were among the 5,400¹ temple treasures taken during Nebuchadnezzar's second invasion of Judah in 597 BC.² These items, which would eventually be returned to Jerusalem, had been exclusively designed as holy vessels in Jerusalem's temple. In prideful decadence, sinful men defiled items designed for the worship of the one true God. This flagrant idolatry, a prelude to Babylon's downfall, foreshadows sin's ultimate demise. Final judgment will come—by God's sovereign hand.³

Writing Appears on the Wall – 5:5-9

Amid the raucous revelry, a mysterious hand suddenly appeared and wrote on the wall of the banquet hall. The terror-stricken king's "face turned pale and he was so frightened that his legs became weak and his knees were knocking." **The king had every reason to be horrified—he saw the very hand of God.** Except for Jesus's physical presence on earth two millennia ago, God is unconfined by time or space,⁴ but this physical manifestation pointed to His imminent presence and power. God's actions in Scripture are often symbolized by His hand.⁵ Metaphorically, the power of His "finger" was responsible for the plagues against the Egyptians.⁶ His finger also wrote the covenant law on the stone tablets He gave to Moses.⁷

Fearful and desperate, Belshazzar called on his enchanters, astrologers, and diviners to decipher the message's meaning. He dangled before them a reward of purple clothes, a gold chain (indicating

1. **Temple treasures:** Ezra 1:7-11

2. **Second invasion:** 2 Kings 24:1-13

3. **Final judgment:** Revelation 18; 20:11-15

4. **God in spirit:** John 4:24

5. **God's hand:** Psalms 37:24; 95:4; Isaiah 5:25

6. **Plagues:** Exodus 8:19

7. **Law:** Exodus 31:18

royalty), and the third-ranking position in the kingdom. Belshazzar had clearly not heard of or learned from the experience of Nebuchadnezzar, whose “wise” men could not help him.⁸ True to form, the baffled false prophets could not interpret the writing. **Their king’s crippling fear increased.**

Daniel Called into Service – 5:10-16

The queen heard the commotion and entered the banquet hall. **Considering that Belshazzar’s life would end within hours, her greeting was ironic: “May the king live forever!”** With what appears as a mix of sarcasm and guidance, she continued, “Don’t be alarmed! Don’t look so pale!” The queen reminded Belshazzar of the former chief wise man⁹ who had proven himself more than capable “to interpret dreams, explain riddles and solve difficult problems.”

Daniel may not have been in active service at this point. Perhaps demoted or retired, Daniel would have been about 80 years old at this time. Scripture does not reveal why Belshazzar did not recall Daniel or his outstanding reputation. Could youthful indiscretion or his panic-stricken state explain his ignorance? Whatever the reason, the queen’s advice opened the way for Daniel to enter the scene.

Belshazzar benefitted from the queen’s counsel. She had either personally witnessed or heard about Daniel’s ability, character, and works. In apparent deference and respect, she called Daniel by his Hebrew name. She referred to Daniel’s relationship with “the spirit of the holy gods.” Nebuchadnezzar repeatedly used this phrase to explain Daniel’s source of wisdom.¹⁰ Her reference to Daniel’s “insight and intelligence and wisdom” recalls Daniel’s early service in captivity.¹¹ **The queen encouraged Belshazzar to summon Daniel for help.**

Daniel was brought before Belshazzar, who recounted the queen’s endorsement of Daniel’s unblemished record, humility, and excellent service to the kingdom. However, he also reminded Daniel of his status as a prisoner of war. He referred to Daniel as “one of the exiles my father the king brought from Judah.” **Still, the pagan king was at the mercy of this man of God.** Because the kingdom’s “wise men” could not explain the writing, Belshazzar extended the same offer of royalty and power to Daniel.

Daniel’s Response – 5:17-28

Daniel responded by telling Belshazzar to keep his rewards. Like the fine food he refused when he entered the kingdom,¹² worldly luxury held little value to this faithful servant of God. **Daniel’s trust rested in God, whose presence, provision, and power would deliver His will.**

Daniel then launched into a history lesson as he recounted the outright power and splendor of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign. The previous proud king had ruled over nations and peoples. He determined the life and death of his subjects. And yet God had dethroned Nebuchadnezzar. He became dehumanized until he acknowledged “that the Most High God is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and sets over them anyone he wishes.” This foundational truth stands before all humanity. Throughout his life, Daniel clearly believed that God ultimately appoints all worldly powers.¹³

Daniel then pivoted to the problem. While Nebuchadnezzar had eventually humbled himself before God, Belshazzar refused. This king stood without excuse. He should have learned from

8. **Nebuchadnezzar’s officials:** Daniel 2:2-13; 4:4-7

9. **Daniel’s promotion:** Daniel 2:48-49

10. **Spirit of the holy gods:** Daniel 4:8-9, 18

11. **Daniel’s excellence:** Daniel 1:20

12. **Refusal of royal food:** Daniel 1:8

13. **God determines rule:** Daniel 2:21; Romans 13:1-2

Nebuchadnezzar and surrendered to the Most High God. Instead, Belshazzar praised lifeless idols “of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or understand.” **Belshazzar rejected God, choosing to count himself as one of God’s enemies.**

While the worldly nobles, wives, and concubines held the desecrated temple goblets filled with wine, Daniel’s righteous anger flared. He declared his eternal King’s judgment upon this earthly king: “But you did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways.”

The Aramaic inscription—“MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN”—declared the king’s fate.

- The days of Babylon were about to end.
- Babylon was weighed on the scales and found wanting.
- Babylon would be divided and given over to the Medes and Persians.

Peres, the singular form of *Parsin*, sounds like “Persians.” The three words also may indicate Babylon’s decline in that the noun *mene* can mean *mina* and *tekel* can mean *shekel*—units of money in decreasing value—and *parsin* can mean “half.”

Nebuchadnezzar’s sin of boastful self-sovereignty eventually led to temporary loss of reason and basic humanity until he honored the true God. Belshazzar’s boasting quickly accelerated into blasphemy. **Lacking repentance, this king would lose not only his kingdom and his earthly life but also eternal life with God.**¹⁴

The Aftermath – 5:29-31

Despite Daniel’s earlier refusal of compensation, Belshazzar kept his promise and saved face by publicly rewarding Daniel. Daniel’s interpretation of the writing on the wall pointed to the king and kingdom’s demise. Accepting the reward after giving the interpretation confirmed that a bribe had not influenced Daniel’s words. **However, promotion by this king meant nothing because Belshazzar was killed that very night.**

In the wake of Belshazzar’s death and Babylon’s fall, “Darius the Mede took over the kingdom, at the age of sixty-two.” The identity of Darius is mysterious. Ancient records indicate Cyrus the Persian conquered Babylon in 539 BC, after bringing the kingdom of the Medes under his rule. Scholars suggest that Darius could either have been a Babylonian royal name for Cyrus or Darius was Cyrus’s general appointed to govern this region of his empire. (In any regard, Darius the Mede should not be confused with a later ruler named Darius—also known as Darius I, Darius the Persian, and Darius the Great. He ruled 521–486 BC and authorized the reconstruction of the Jerusalem temple to resume.)

The earthly kingdom of Babylon ended with one swift blow. Despite God’s divine message delivered through miraculous handwriting, the king’s heart remained hardened. He did not respond to the Lord’s intrusion into his world. Babylon’s infamous legacy remains—a name echoed in Revelation to represent worldly powers that oppose God and await His eternal judgment.¹⁵

14. **Eternal condemnation:** Romans 1:21-32

15. **Babylon’s fall:** Revelation 18

● Deliverance from the Lions' Den – Daniel 6

The well-known narrative of Daniel in the lions' den completes the court stories that comprise the first half of this book. This account may remind us of the peril Daniel's friends faced in the fiery furnace. This time, we see Daniel's ferocious faith in the face of death.

Daniel's Continued Excellence – 6:1-3

Daniel's reputation became recognized by the rulers of the new regime. Darius appointed the exiled Hebrew as one of three administrators overseeing the Medo-Persian kingdom's 120 satraps. Satraps governed and maintained the kingdom's provinces. Daniel's legacy of excellence led Darius to appoint him to preside over the whole kingdom. **Darius likely failed to recognize that Daniel's source of exceptional skill and humble service rested in his complete trust in God.** Daniel remained aware of God's presence and committed to His will in every aspect of his life.

A Conniving Conspiracy – 6:4-9

Jealousy breeds contempt. **Daniel's rival administrators and satraps conspired to frame him with wrongdoing.** However, Daniel's pristine record left them without legitimate grounds for accusation. Instead, they focused on Daniel's faith in God amid an idolatrous culture as the issue upon which to usher in his downfall.

The conspirators hatched a proposal that appealed to the king's vanity. They urged Darius to adopt an unbreakable edict: "Anyone who prays to any god or human being during the next thirty days, except to you, Your Majesty, shall be thrown into the lions' den." Like poisonous spiders weaving a deadly web, Daniel's adversaries sought to seal the decree in the king's writing. Once sealed with his official confirmation, the decree could not be repealed without great embarrassment to the king.

Their insidious plan represented great care for details. The plotters understood that even the king was not above the law. **They knew Daniel faithfully considered God's law above any human law.** Like the accusers of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, the officials remained shackled by their fallen, sinful nature that sought to harm others for supposed personal gain.¹⁶ They weaponized a loyalty test to carry out a murderous plan to jealously eliminate their perceived rival.

Daniel's Ferocious Faith – 6:10-18

No idolatrous decree could turn Daniel away from his practice of kneeling toward Jerusalem three times a day in thankful and repentant prayer to God.¹⁷ **Unashamed, Daniel prayed with full knowledge that his obedience to God's will placed his life in jeopardy.**¹⁸

Knowing Daniel's routine and likely stationed within sight of his window, the schemers gathered all the evidence they needed to report Daniel's violation of the royal decree. They approached the king and inquired regarding his edict. Revealing they had found a perpetrator, they forced Darius to declare the death sentence: "The decree stands—in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed." **Not only had the officials entrapped Daniel, but they had also cornered their king.**

16. **Fallen nature:** Romans 3:10-18

17. **Prayer toward Jerusalem:** 1 Kings 8:35-36

18. **Unashamed:** Romans 1:16-17

When informed of the violator's identity, the king urgently but fruitlessly "was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort until sundown to save him." Reminded by the conspirators of the ironclad edict, Darius had no choice but to order Daniel's execution, "and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions' den." **Powerless and without hope, the king had nowhere else to turn but to the only One who had power to save Daniel.** Darius pleaded, "May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!"

Reluctantly, the king literally sealed the fate of his faithful servant. Pressing his signet ring into the soft clay surrounding the stone enclosing the lion's den assured no human intervention could save Daniel from the jaws of the lions. **Only a divine rescue could save Daniel from certain death.**

Surviving the Lions – 6:19-24

Following a sleepless night, King Darius rushed to the den. He urgently called out, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?" To the king's amazement, Daniel responded! **God had personally intervened, sending His angel to shut the mouths of the lions.**

Decades earlier, Daniel's three friends had emerged from the furnace uncharred. Now Daniel remarkably remained uninjured by the lions. Daniel reasoned that he had been "found innocent" in God's sight—much to the king's joyous delight. Like Nebuchadnezzar at the kiln, Darius had witnessed the saving power of Almighty God.¹⁹ Such death-defying survival indicated innocence in the ancient Near Eastern cultures. **More importantly, the resurrection-like deliverance prefigures the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who would defeat death and offer new life to all who believe in Him.**²⁰

History and life experience testify to the horrific reality that sin brings collateral damage. The men who bound Daniel's three faith-filled friends fell into the furnace to their deaths.²¹ Darius's officials who conspired against Daniel died a dreadful death in the lions' den along with their wives and children. God abhors sin and promises that the wicked will suffer for their evil acts.²²

King's Decree – 6:25-28

Like Nebuchadnezzar's letter to the nations,²³ Darius proclaimed God's majesty to the world. He reversed the irreversible decree he had been duped into signing with a proclamation that all must fear Daniel's God. Darius wrote words of praise that prefigured the spread of the light of the gospel that would announce Christ's resurrection to the world. **Even through the mouths and pens of worldly men, God provides the world with ample witness to His presence, power, and prerogatives.**

Daniel further prospered as he continued his service and witness to a world in need of God's presence. We can only speculate regarding the depth of Darius's confession. Did he, like Nebuchadnezzar, surrender to the living God? Daniel's witness and his life of consistent faith remain the primary focus of this narrative. He consistently acknowledged God's living, eternal, saving, and active power. **God's presence and purposes permeate every circumstance.** Unlike human empires, God's kingdom endures forever. He is to be revered by all.

19. God's saving power: Hebrews 11:33-34

20. Defeated death: Acts 2:24; Romans 6:4; 1 Corinthians 15:55; 2 Timothy 1:10

21. Captors' deaths: Daniel 3:22

22. The fate of the wicked: Psalms 9:15; 35:7-8; Proverbs 1:18-19

23. Nebuchadnezzar's decree: Daniel 4

Complete Confidence in the Living God

The Doctrine of Faith

Daniel's faith shone as a beacon of light against the darkness of life in Babylon. He steadfastly trusted the one true God and refused defilement from worldly pressures. Everyone has faith in something. For all held captive by sin's corruption, fallen faith—faith in self, possessions, fame, or false deities—is idolatry. **True faith is belief in the one true God—the Maker of heaven and earth and the Redeemer of humanity.**

Hebrews 11:1 defines faith as “confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.” **True faith places complete confidence in God's character and His power to perfectly accomplish His will and deliver all He has promised.** Through faith in Jesus Christ, sinners graciously receive salvation from sin's penalty and power. Indwelt and sealed by the Holy Spirit, believers accept the claims of the gospel as their own.¹ Those who trust Jesus Christ as their Savior² repent from sin and commit to follow Jesus Christ in this life and into eternity.³

Without faith in God, people rely only on their own logic, experiences, and faltering explanations to find meaning in this life—a literal dead end. Supposed freedom, fulfillment, and answers to life's challenges are limited to the people, places, things, and pleasures offered by this fallen world, which all will come to an end.

True faith in the true God changes everything. When we trust completely in Christ's finished work, we can stop expecting to please God through behavior modification or management. Our desire and ability to obey and follow God depend on His power, not our own. We welcome Him to work in and through us, knowing He will never forsake us. Our lives have purpose because we know God loves us with an everlasting love. We seek God's transforming power in our daily lives, recognizing the emptiness of the world's pressures and pleasures, which cannot compare with the joy of seeking, knowing, and obeying God. Life on earth is not a meaningless and fruitless journey. Instead, our time on earth allows our first steps toward our joyful eternity in the presence of our Creator. We need not fear the chaotic circumstances that often surround us. We are content in trusting that our faith can grasp what our minds cannot fully understand.

1. **Salvation:** John 1:12; 3:16; Acts 4:12; 16:31

2. **Savior:** John 6:37; 1 John 4:9-10

3. **Repent and follow:** Luke 9:23; 14:25-27; Acts 3:19; 20:21; Romans 12:1-2

● Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Daniel spent most of his life in exile, yet God preserved His servant to shed His light upon a dark, sin-filled land. **Suffering the consequences of his people's sin, Daniel may have lived in a foreign land, but he consistently sought the presence and will of the God he loved, worshipped, and trusted.**

Daniel acknowledged God as his source of strength throughout his life. He lived to seek God's greatness, not his own.

Daniel was brought to a raucous gathering that blatantly dishonored God. He humbly and courageously deciphered a divine edict foretelling the imminent fall of a global empire and foolish king. Later, when detractors conspired, Daniel trusted God to deliver him from certain death in a den of ravenous lions. In every circumstance, Daniel knew God would never forsake him, even though he lived in exile. His life demonstrated a durable call to trust God's will, ways, and sovereignty. **Persevering faith provides a profound witness to a watching world.** Daniel's resilient life impacted idolatrous kings who could not withhold their praise from the living God who endures forever.

Apply It

The finger of Almighty God pierced the darkness of an idolatrous banquet hall with tangible proof of His overruling sovereignty. God is everywhere and knows everything. Nothing exists outside His control. How, then, do we respond? **Honoring God's presence and power helps us discern His will.** Trusting God always involves some element of mystery—God is above us in every way. However, we gain clarity of His will for our lives when we invest in our relationship with Him through personal time in His Word, prayer, and worship. Daniel honored God by spending intentional and consistent time with God. When life's circumstances became threatening or murky, Daniel trusted in God's words, His will, and His ways. What Daniel knew to be true about God emboldened him to live by faith. How does what you know about God impact the way you face life? How will you respond, knowing God is with you, knows you, and has a plan for you?

We often look at a character like Daniel as if he possessed a brand of invincibility we will never experience. Did he ever cringe in fear or feel discouraged? Ultimately, Daniel's steadfast faith does not reveal his inherent strength but God's unwavering faithfulness. **Our thoughts, words, and actions reveal what we believe about God.** How can we see beyond our challenges to bear witness to God, no matter the cost? What emboldens us to trust God, come what may? God shines His light through our human weaknesses to reflect His character. On our own, we are powerless to stand strong or live boldly for Christ. We need the Holy Spirit living within us to transform, empower, and lead us in righteous living. Through faith in Jesus Christ, believers are redeemed from the penalty and power of sin and equipped to live for God in a world that turns its back on Him. Someday, in His eternal presence, believers will be freed from sin's presence. Knowing this, we can live courageously today!

Reflecting on Daniel's victory in the lions' den, former BSF Board Chairman James Montgomery Boice wrote, "God calls some to win by living. Others are called to win by dying. But in life or death God rules, and we are called to serve him. Will we do it? The world needs those who know God and who live for his righteousness even when the entire culture turns ferociously against it."²⁴ **May our almighty God empower us to live in His strength here on earth and for all eternity.**

24. James Montgomery Boice, *Daniel: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 72.

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