

DANIEL

Daniel Introduction

The stories and visions in the book of Daniel comprise one of the most fascinating and challenging portions of the entire Bible.

For many, the familiar tales of Daniel in the den of lions or the three faithful Israelites in the fiery furnace form the first (and often only) impression of the book, yet there is so much more to the story.

The narrative and visions invite the reader to view the world from a different perspective, to see the allure of empire and conquest, money and power, not as beautiful but as beastly. In short, the reader is invited to see things from Yahweh's perspective, and then respond accordingly.

Daniel was written during a tumultuous time in Israel. Foreign nations, with foreign kings and foreign gods, had overtaken God's land and scattered His people. For many, their ancient religious traditions were under attack and the people found themselves desperate for God to intervene and rescue them.

How should God's people respond? Should they go along with the systems of empire in order to survive, or should they fight back? What does faithfulness to God look like when every circumstance suggests God has abandoned you? How will God bring redemption and restoration for His people, and when will He finally act?

How to Read Daniel Responsibly

The book of Daniel has both inspired and troubled readers for centuries. Yet this book is not merely a collection of fascinating stories. The wise reader must learn to extract the theological and moral implications. Theologically, these narratives demonstrate that God is still with His people to bless them, even under the yoke of an oppressive empire. Morally, these stories teach that loyalty to Yahweh requires courage, especially when you find yourself in a culture that is hostile to the things of God.

Besides the familiar stories of Daniel, much of the book contains detailed apocalypses, or revelations. These can be difficult for modern readers to understand and often lead to confusion or misinterpretation. This type of writing belongs to a genre that scholars refer to as apocalyptic literature. Its purpose is to show its readers God's perspective on earthly events. It enabled them to see even tragic and evil world events and empires through the lens of God's ultimate redemption story, and to live with courage in the moment.

Outline of Daniel

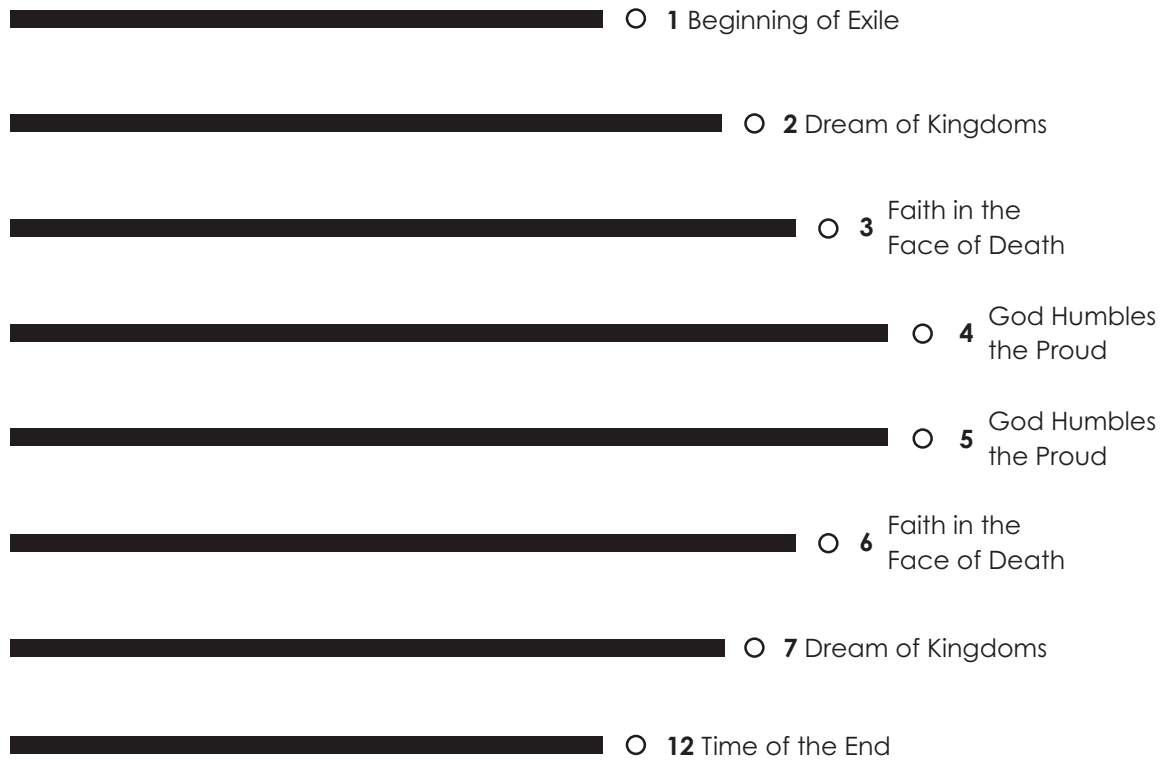
The book of Daniel is notoriously difficult to outline for two main reasons:


1. Chapters 1-6 form what are often called "Court Tales," and tell stories of palace intrigue, courage, and supernatural visions. These stories are set in the ancient palaces of Babylon, Media, and Persia. Chapters 7-12 shift to revelations or visions concerning ancient geopolitical events. The purpose of the visions is to encourage the reader to trust that Yahweh remains in control even when the forces of evil and empire swirl around.
2. Daniel was written in two different languages: Hebrew and Aramaic. Chapter 1:1 - 2:4a were written in Hebrew, then chapters 2:4b - 7:28 were written in Aramaic, with chapters 8-12 returning to Hebrew.


Similar to Esther, chapters 2-7 form a chiasm. Chapters 2 and 7 mirror each other, as do chapters 3 and 6, and then 4 and 5. Chiasms are used to highlight certain features of a piece of literature, often with the central sections taking the most prominent position. Here, in chapters 4 and 5, exalted pagan rulers are brought low. The point is clear: God humbles the proud but exalts the humble.


The book of Daniel is meant to be carefully read and meditated upon. To the book of Daniel we now turn...


Chiastic Structure





-  ○ **1** Beginning of Exile


-  ○ **8** Prophetic Details of Coming Kingdoms


-  ○ **9:1-23** Daniel Prays for His People


-  ○ **9:24-25** Decree to Rebuild

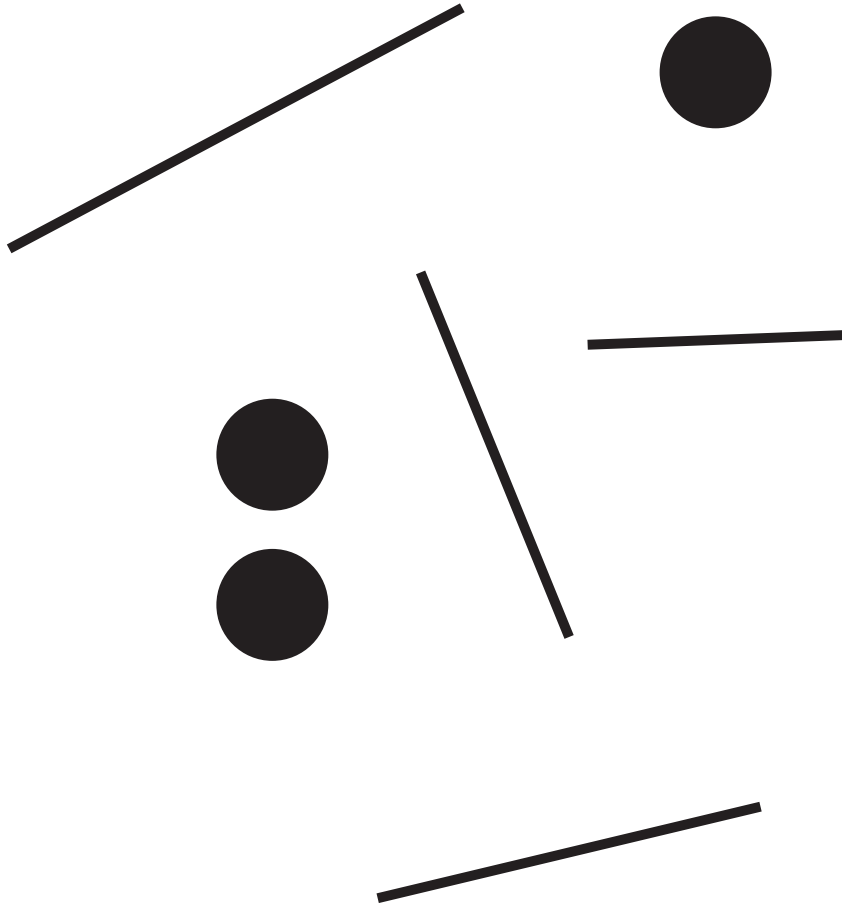
-  ○ **9:26** The Messiah is Cut Off

-  ○ **9:26-27** Decree to Destroy

-  ○ **10** Daniel Prays for His People

-  ○ **11** Prophetic Details of Coming Kingdoms

-  ○ **12** Time of the End



Faithful Living as an Outsider

The story of Daniel is set in a time of tragedy and uncertainty.

The people of ancient Israel were under attack. Internally, unfaithful leaders continued to compromise with evil, eroding the morality of the entire nation. Externally, invading nations threatened Israel's sovereignty.

God's chosen people were mired in generations of idolatry and sin. God's enemies were on the doorstep and threatened to destroy everything. All hope seemed lost when the armies of Babylon finally invaded. Many of Israel's best and brightest were kidnapped and carried into foreign lands with foreign gods.

How would they fare in such a place? How could things get this bad? And more importantly, where was God in all of this?

The prophet Jeremiah had warned Israel that this very scenario would happen if they didn't repent of their sin. He instructed them that should this occur, they should pray for their new home and bless their new city, even if those who lived there oppressed them.

The narrative of Daniel begins with a group of Jews who find themselves forced to serve in the court of a pagan king. So, what should they do? What will become of them if they choose faithfulness to Yahweh? How will they respond to temptations to compromise?

● 1 Beginning of Exile

○ 2 Dream of Kingdoms

○ 3 Faith in the Face of Death

○ 4 God Humbles the Proud

○ 5 God Humbles the Proud

○ 6 Faith in the Face of Death

○ 7 Dream of Kingdoms

○ 12 Time of the End

Passage for the Week

Daniel 1

Day One

Read Jeremiah 29:1-14

What does Jeremiah instruct his readers to do when they find themselves in the pains of exile? What does Yahweh promise to do for His people in the midst of their exile?

Day Two

Read 2 Kings 24

What were the internal forces which caused Judah (the name for the tribes in southern Israel) to decline? What were the external forces which threatened Judah? What is the tone of this chapter?

Day Three

Read Daniel 1:1-7

Why do you think the King of Babylon ordered the chosen Israelites to eat the best of the his food? What do you think his motives are? How would you feel to have your name changed by an invading army? What would that do to you psychologically?

Daniel 1 Outro

This story of four young Hebrew men politely refusing the king's food might seem like a relatively trivial matter, but there's a clue in the text that there is more to the story. The chapter begins and ends with some key dates: Daniel's exile to Babylon (605 BC) and the end of his government service (538 BC). His 67-year career in Babylon began with the seemingly small decision not to compromise his beliefs about diet. Take some time to reflect on your own choices. Are there places where you are making minor compromises that could have big effects later? As we will see, Daniel's devotion to the Lord will serve him well in Chapter 2.

Day Four

Read Daniel 1:8-16

What irony do you see in this passage?

Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah refuse the best of their occupiers food in order to remain faithful to God. What is the tone of this passage of Scripture?

Day Five

Read Daniel 1:17-21

Daniel and his friends stand out among the captives and the citizens of the nation. Why? What do you think Daniel and his friends were feeling? What would you feel?

What was an occasion in your life when you felt like you were totally out of place? Where were you? What did you do? How did you feel?

Read Jeremiah 29:1-11

How would you summarize Yahweh's instruction to His exiled people in this passage? What stands out to you from this passage?

Read Daniel 1:1-7

What emotions would you experience if you were in the same position as Daniel and his friends?

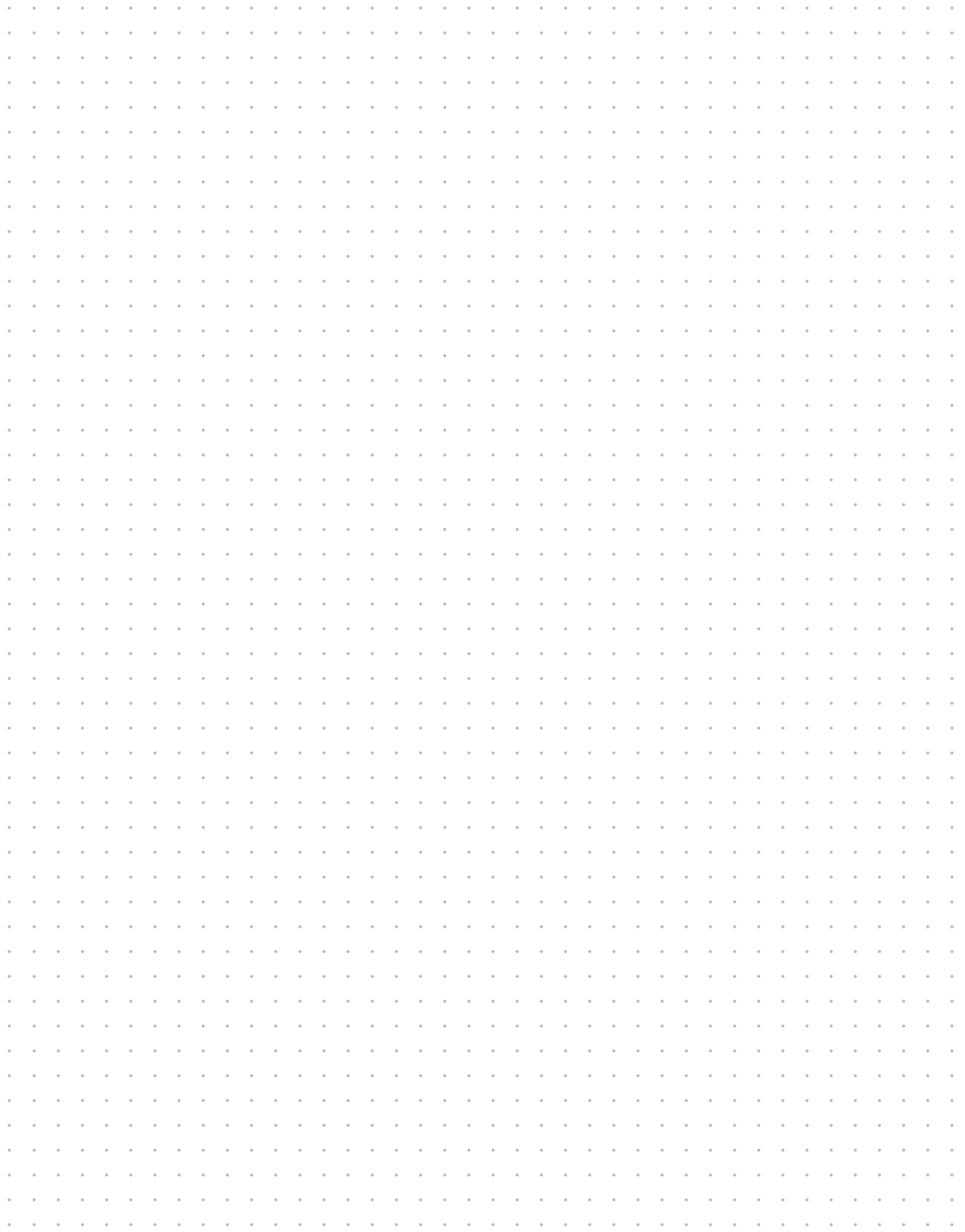
Read Daniel 1:8-16

Why do you think the Babylonian officials gave these Israelites the best food? In what ways do you feel compelled to compromise with the “best food” of your culture? Why do you think Daniel and his friends refused it? What parts of your culture do you feel compelled to reject? Is this tension difficult?

Read Daniel 1:17-21

What irony do you see in this passage?

What can you learn from this ancient story that you can apply to your world today? What choices are you facing that will test your nerve in your loyalty to God?





Daniel 2, 7 - 8

God's Sovereign Plan for the Nations

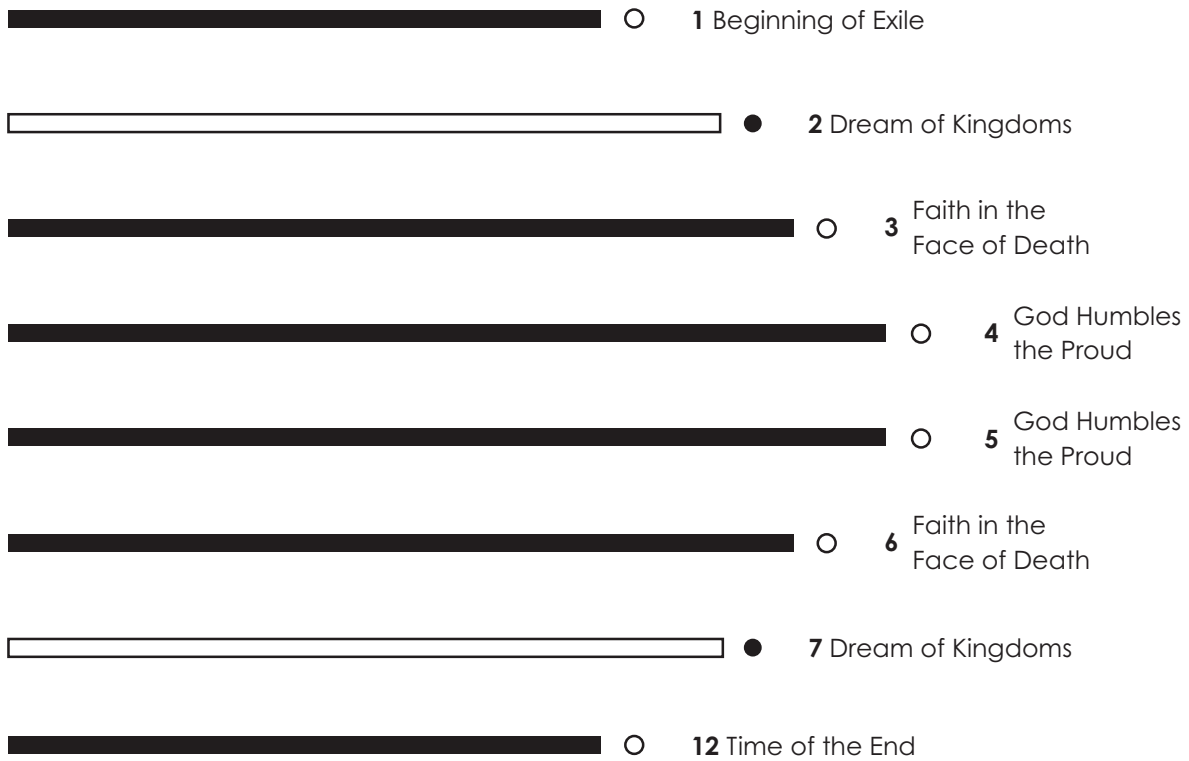
As the people of Israel languished in fear and uncertainty during and after the exile, they were likely asking, "Does God have a plan in all of this?". In chapter 2 (paralleled in 7 and 8), the question is answered with a resounding yes!

Beginning with Daniel 2, the pagan Emperor Nebuchadnezzar experiences a troubling dream and asks for its interpretation from his wise men, yet none can understand. God uses Daniel in a supernatural way to reveal the content and meaning of the dream. Following in Daniel 7, we see the author narrate another vision, this time experienced not by the pagan Emperor but by Daniel himself. Similarly, in chapter 8 God continues to reveal more details about Israel's future through Daniel's visions.

Chapters 2 and 7 - 8 are meant to provide contrasting perspectives. Each vision is about the rise and fall of earthly kingdoms clamoring for power and demanding allegiance. Nebuchadnezzar saw these empires as a beautiful statue while Daniel saw these coming empires as terrible beasts.

This challenges the reader. How do we view earthly power? Are we enamored with the passing glory of empire? Or do we recognize the rise and fall of kingdoms as destructive to humanity and a distraction from God's good plans?

Those who see beasts can take comfort. Both visions reveal that God's coming Kingdom will conquer the beasts of earthly power, and establish an everlasting reign of justice and peace under the Son of Man.



Passage for the Week

Daniel 2, 7 - 8

Day One

Read Daniel 2:1-23

Summarize the characters and their actions.

Circle the actions of God in verses 20-23.

Day Two

Read Daniel 2:24-30

Contrast the king and his wise men with Daniel and the God who reveals mysteries.

Day Three

Read Daniel 2:31-49

Underline the materials found in the statue in verses 31-35. Now mark those same materials in the interpretations of the dream in verses 36-43.

Contrast the kingdom described in 44-45 with the four earthly kingdoms.

Day Four

Read Daniel 7:1-28

Underline the descriptions of each of the four beastly figures.

Circle each time "Ancient of Days" or "Most High" appears in the passage.

Box the language of permanence and longevity which characterizes the Son of Man figure.

Day Five

Read Daniel 8:1-27

Underline the description of the animals and their horns.

Circle the nations mentioned in verses 20-21.

Consider how the visions affected Daniel (verse 27).

Daniel 2, 7 - 8 Outro

The dream of the statue disturbs Nebuchadnezzar so much that he can't sleep. Daniel's vision of the beasts alarms him and makes him go pale. The ram and goat vision puts Daniel in bed, sick for days. Yet, when we read these visions, we should be comforted by them, because they indicate that God is in sovereign control. This week as you read the news, as you hear about pain and loss, and as you deal with disappointment in your own life, reflect on the power of God over the affairs of people. Take your concerns to Him and be reminded that the God of Daniel is still in control.

What words would you use to describe the political environment in your country today?

Have you ever asked the question: Where is God in all of this? Maybe it was something going on in the world, or something you were dealing with personally.

Read Daniel 2:26-35

Where does Daniel place the credit for his success in aiding the king? Why is this important? What do you think this would say to the ancient reader, both Babylonian and Jewish?

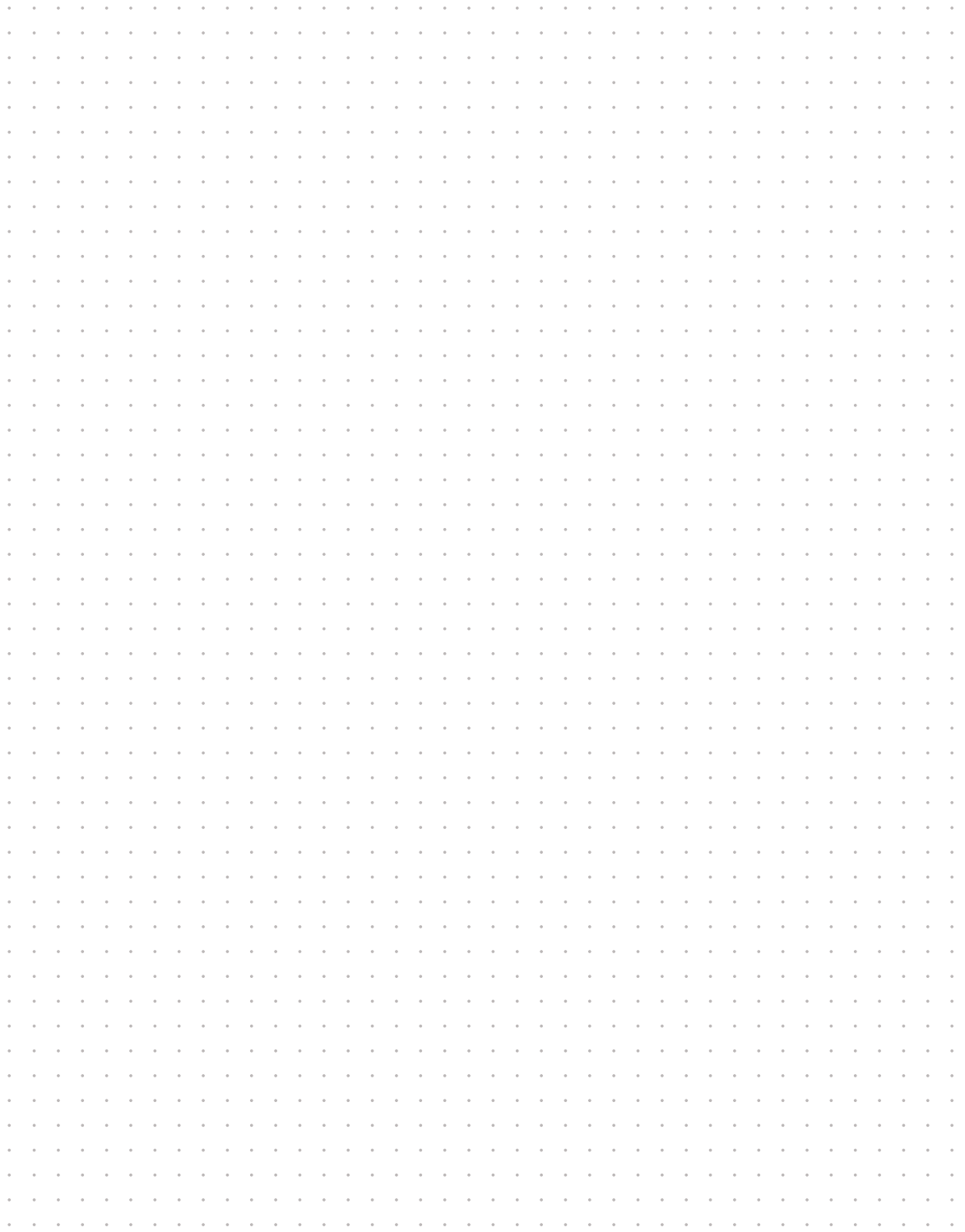
Read Daniel 7:1-8

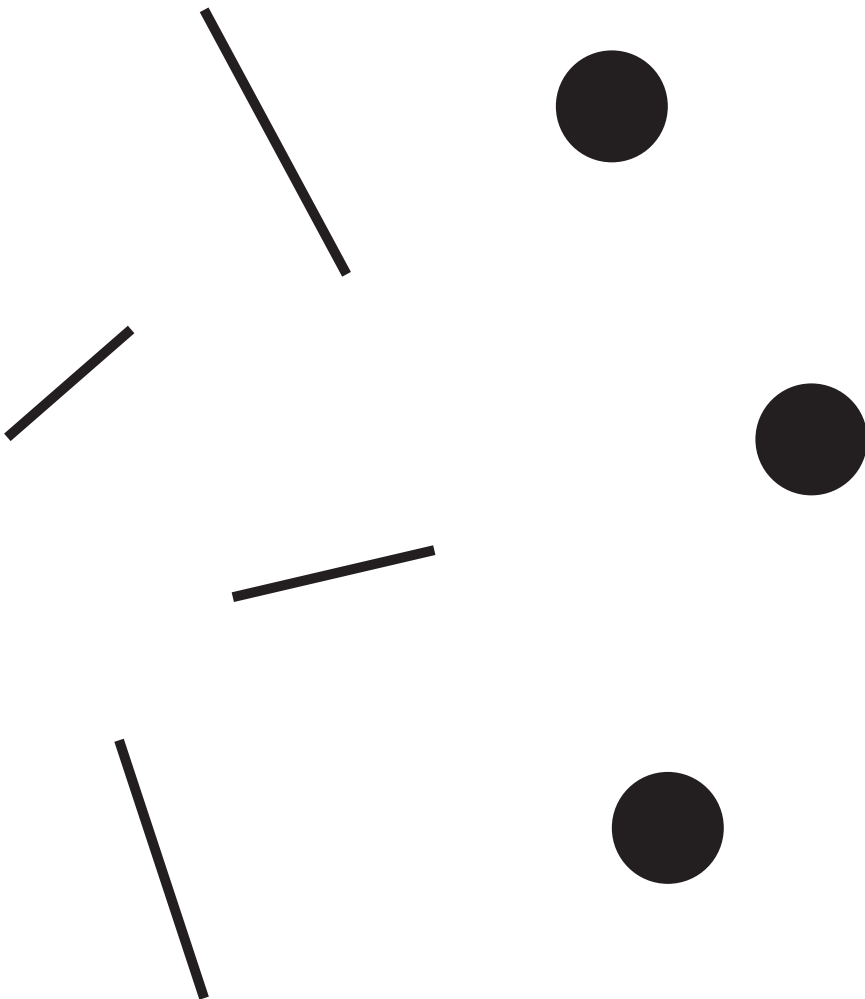
When the power-hungry king experiences the vision, he sees a beautiful statue. When Daniel, the man of God, experiences the vision of human kings and kingdoms, he sees hideous beasts. What can we learn from this? How should God's people view human power? Human kings and kingdoms?

Read Daniel 7:13-14

What is the Son of Man given? Compare this passage with Philippians 2:9-11.

How does knowing that God is ultimately in control and will sum everything up in Jesus (see Ephesians 1:10) as the true King of the Earth (see Matthew 28:20) effect how you will live today in the human kingdom in which you find yourself?





God Protects His People

C.S. Lewis in *A Grief Observed* makes the following astounding observation:

“You never know how much you really believe anything until its truth or falsehood becomes a matter of life and death to you. It is easy to say you believe a rope to be strong and sound as long as you are merely using it to cord a box. But suppose you had to hang by that rope over a precipice. Wouldn't you then first discover how much you really trusted it?”

As we continue our study of the book of Daniel, the characters within the story are faced with precisely that kind of moment: Will they remain loyal to Yahweh even when confronted with certain death? What, after all, was Yahweh worth to them?

The book of Daniel poses a similar question: What is your loyalty to God worth, and what would you be willing to trade it for?

For the exiles in Babylon, these kinds of questions confronted them every day, and for Jews in the centuries which followed, these questions remained. Early Christians were faced with similar questions in the Roman Empire, and those questions resound through millennia to challenge modern believers all over the world.

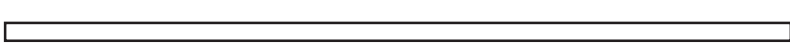
Daniel and his friends were confronted with a simple choice: either go along with the ways, customs, and idols in the surrounding culture or remain faithful to Yahweh with a zealous fervor.

The first option would result in peace, stability, comfort, and safety. The second with hostility, pain, fear, and possibly death.

Which would you choose?

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Passage for the Week

Daniel 3

Day One

Read Daniel 3:1-7

Underline the verbs of the passage.

Review verses 2:31-32 and 3:1. How do these two passages relate?

Day Two

Read Daniel 3:8-12

Underline the verbs.

What is taking place in this passage?

Day Three

Read Daniel 3:13-18

Notice the conditional statements ("if-then" statements) in the passage and mark them. What is their significance?

Day Four

Read Daniel 3:19-27

Underline the verbs.

Notice the irony in the passage.

Day Five

Read Daniel 3:28-30

Contrast Nebuchadnezzar's attitude in 28-29 to that of verse 13.

Why do you think the author ended the passage with the announcement of Nebuchadnezzar regarding the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego?

Daniel 3 Outro

In Daniel 2, there was a statue in a dream. In Daniel 3, it seems Nebuchadnezzar has made that dream a reality. Nebuchadnezzar's desire to be universally worshiped puts him at odds with the God of the Bible. God's power to save is put to the test, and God is vindicated. The hint is there in the text in the form of the fourth figure in the furnace: God is with His people in their time of need. This week, look for God's presence in your life. Where do you see God at work around you?

Discussion Questions

Name a time in your life that you had to tell the truth about something even though it would have been easier to lie.

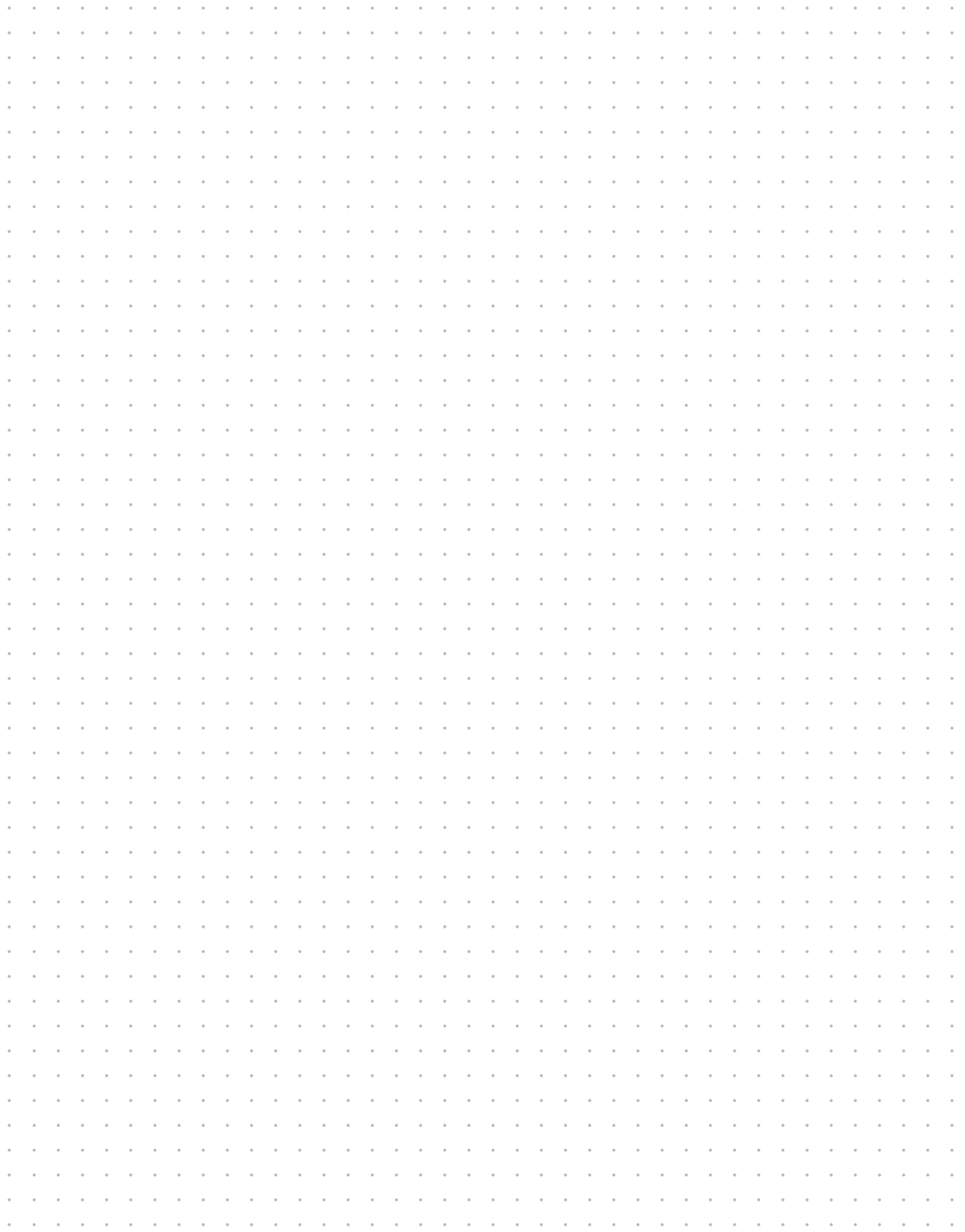
Nebuchadnezzar made a statue of gold and ordered that all people worship it.

Read Daniel 3:12-25

These three followers of Yahweh refused to yield. Why do you think these men were so confident even in the face of such extreme hostility?

Yet again in our passage we see irony on display. The guards of the fiery furnace end up engulfed by it, while those thrown in are preserved. How would this have given courage to the ancient Jewish reader living under foreign oppression? How does it build courage in you today?

What idols of the world are you finding it difficult to stand against? An idol is anything that competes with God for supremacy in your heart and life. What idols of the world must God's people courageously confront?





God humbles the Proud

Our study of Daniel has brought us to the center of a chiastic structure. If you recall from "How to Read Daniel Responsibly" on page 40, ancient Jewish authors will often place the most important points at the middle sections of their writings. Keep that in mind as we read the two stories. An important principle is being highlighted.


The book of Daniel teaches its reader to have perspective. When it appears that earthly powers are unstoppable, these stories remind the readers that God is ultimately in control.


We saw in the previous week how followers of Yahweh courageously preserved their loyalty to Him, even at the risk of death. Now, in these chapters, the unjust rulers meet their rightful fate: God, in His own timing, will indeed humble the proud and exalt the humble. These chapters, at the heart of this section of Daniel, remind us of one of the primary themes of the Bible: God is sovereignly in control of the affairs of men, bringing about His purposes, in His time, for His glory, and for our good.

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Passage for the Week

Daniel 4 - 5

Day One

Read Daniel 4:1-18

Mark the descriptive words of the tree before its condemnation in verses 11-12.

Mark the verbs describing the destruction of the tree in verses 14-17.

Day Two

Read Daniel 4:19-27

What is the tone of the passage?

Summarize in your own words the vision's meaning.

Day Three

Read Daniel 4:28-37

Underline the verbs in the passage.

Note the first-person pronouns (I, me, my) used by Nebuchadnezzar.

Day Four

Read Daniel 5:1-16

Note the different characters in the story.

Underline any language of fear, confusion, uncertainty, or anxiety.

Day Five

Read Daniel 5:17-31

Circle the reasons for which judgment has come in the passage.

What is the tone of Daniel's speech to the king?

Daniel 4 - 5 Outro

Two kings, full of pride and self-glorification, each humbled by the God of Israel. While these men both had it all in the eyes of the world, their failure to give honor to Yahweh cost them everything. Nebuchadnezzar was restored and worshiped God, but Belshazzar met his end. Perhaps it was because Belshazzar failed to learn from his father's error even though he knew all about it. This week, reflect on the areas of life where you tend to be prideful. How can you commit these areas to God? How can you walk in humility before Him?

Can you name a time in your life when you went into something overconfidently and later realized it, but it was too late?

Read Daniel 4:28-33

What might the story of Nebuchadnezzar's humiliation communicate to ancient Israelites living under foreign rule? What warning might it send to those who elevate themselves above God?

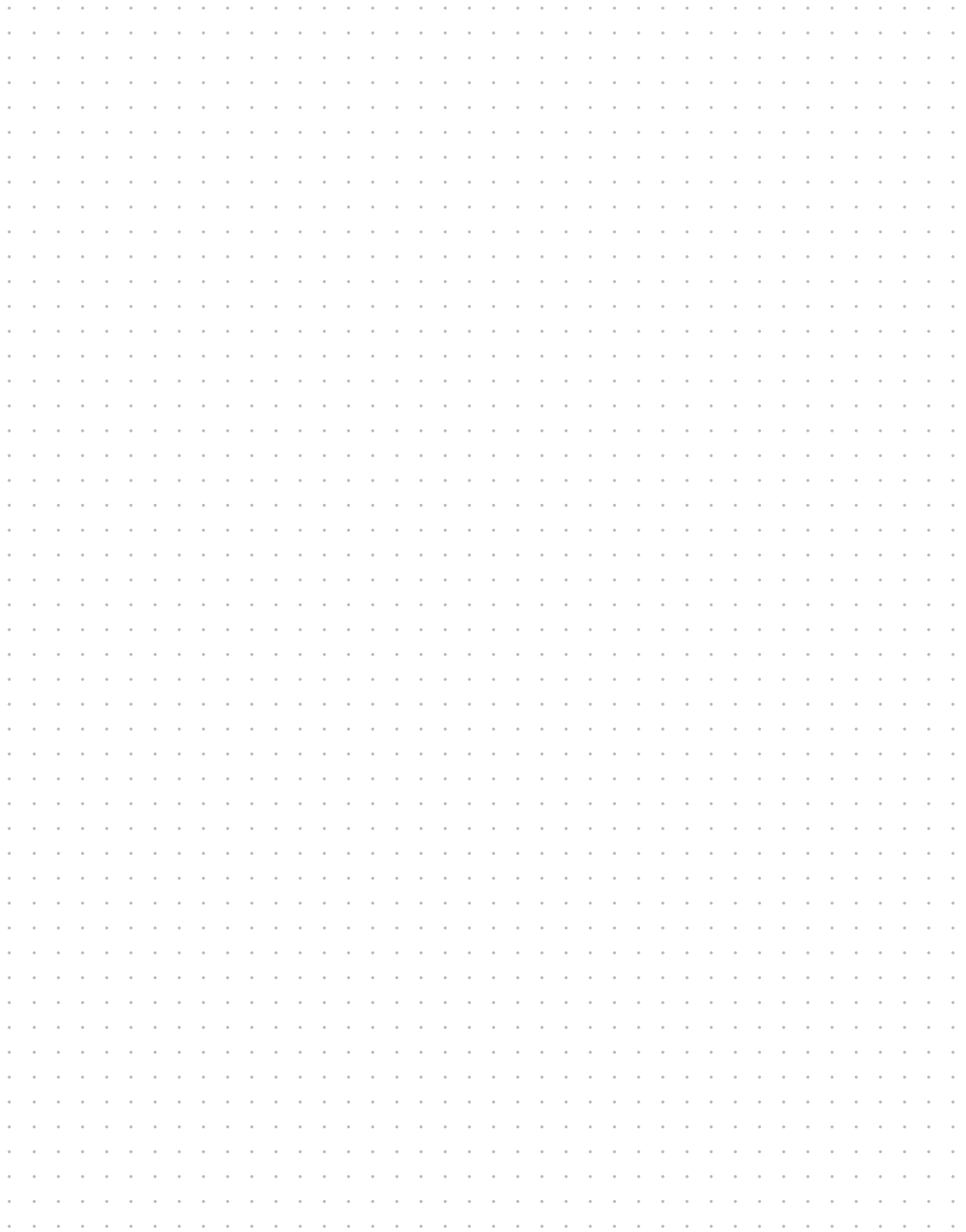
Read Daniel 5:1-9, 24-30

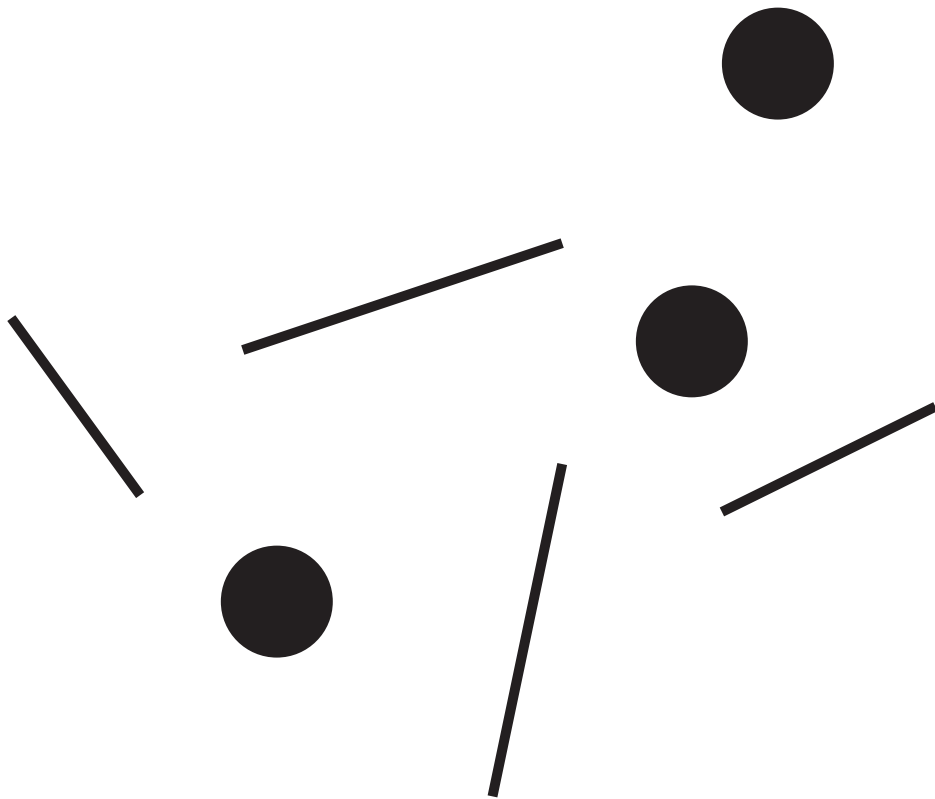
What did Belshazzar fail to learn from his father's mistake? How should these stories inform the way we live today?

Why would it be important for the audience of Daniel's narrative to see these two stories side-by-side? What is the overarching point that these two stories are making?

Have you seen the principle—God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble—ring true in your life? Explain.

Where do you place your source of confidence? How have you seen your confidence in the God of the Bible strengthened in your life? How can we encourage one another to find our confidence in God?





God Rewards Faithfulness

In the final “Court Tale” of the account of Daniel we find the most iconic and famous story in the entire book: Daniel in the lion’s den. By the time we turn to Daniel 6, the youthful exile we met in Daniel 1:1-7 has become a seasoned advisor to kings and emperors. After almost 40 years of service, Daniel is a trusted part of the government administration. He’s so trusted, in fact, that the king appoints him as administrator over the entire kingdom (Daniel 6:3). Predictably, this leads to jealousy and resentment among the other leaders, who set out to undermine Daniel.

Keeping with Daniel’s chiasmic structure (see “How to Read Daniel Responsibly” on page 40) Daniel 6 parallels Daniel 3. In both stories, the faithful are challenged under penalty of death to direct their worship away from Yahweh.

Today, we can relate to the pressures these exiles felt to turn our focus away from God towards the things our culture worships. Can we, like Daniel, trust God to protect us, even when following Him puts us at odds with the world’s systems? The book of Daniel – and especially chapter 6 – challenges people of every era to answer that very question.


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Passage for the Week

Daniel 6

Day One

Read Daniel 6:1-9

Underline words used to describe Daniel's character.

Describe the motivations of the administrators opposing Daniel.

Day Two

Read Daniel 6:10-15

How does Daniel respond to the king's edict? Where does this indicate his loyalties lie?

Describe King Darius' dilemma; notice verse 14.

Day Three

Read Daniel 6:16-24

Circle all of the references to God and His actions.

How does God resolve Darius' dilemma?

Day Four

Read Daniel 6:25-28

How does Darius respond to the salvation of Daniel?

Day Five

Read Daniel 3:28-4:3

Compare and contrast this passage with Daniel 6:25-28. Compare to Esther 8:9-14.

Daniel 6 Outro

As we complete the "Court Tales" section of Daniel, what comparisons have you noted with the Esther narrative? How do King Xerxes and Haman compare to King Darius and the satraps of Daniel 6? Take to heart these lessons learned from Esther and Daniel 1-6 because the lens will shift in Daniel 7 from the past to the future. We now turn to the apocalyptic section of this incredible book.

Do you struggle to celebrate for someone else when they get something that you really wanted for yourself? Have you been disappointed by a friend who couldn't be happy for you because they were too jealous of your good fortune? Share with the group.

Read Daniel 6:1-15

Why do you think the satraps are jealous of Daniel? To what lengths are they willing to go to bring Daniel down?

Do you think Daniel's private life was "fair game" for these officials? Why or why not? Do you think Daniel could have remained faithful in his prayer life without exposing himself to their plot? Why do you think he didn't alter his routine?

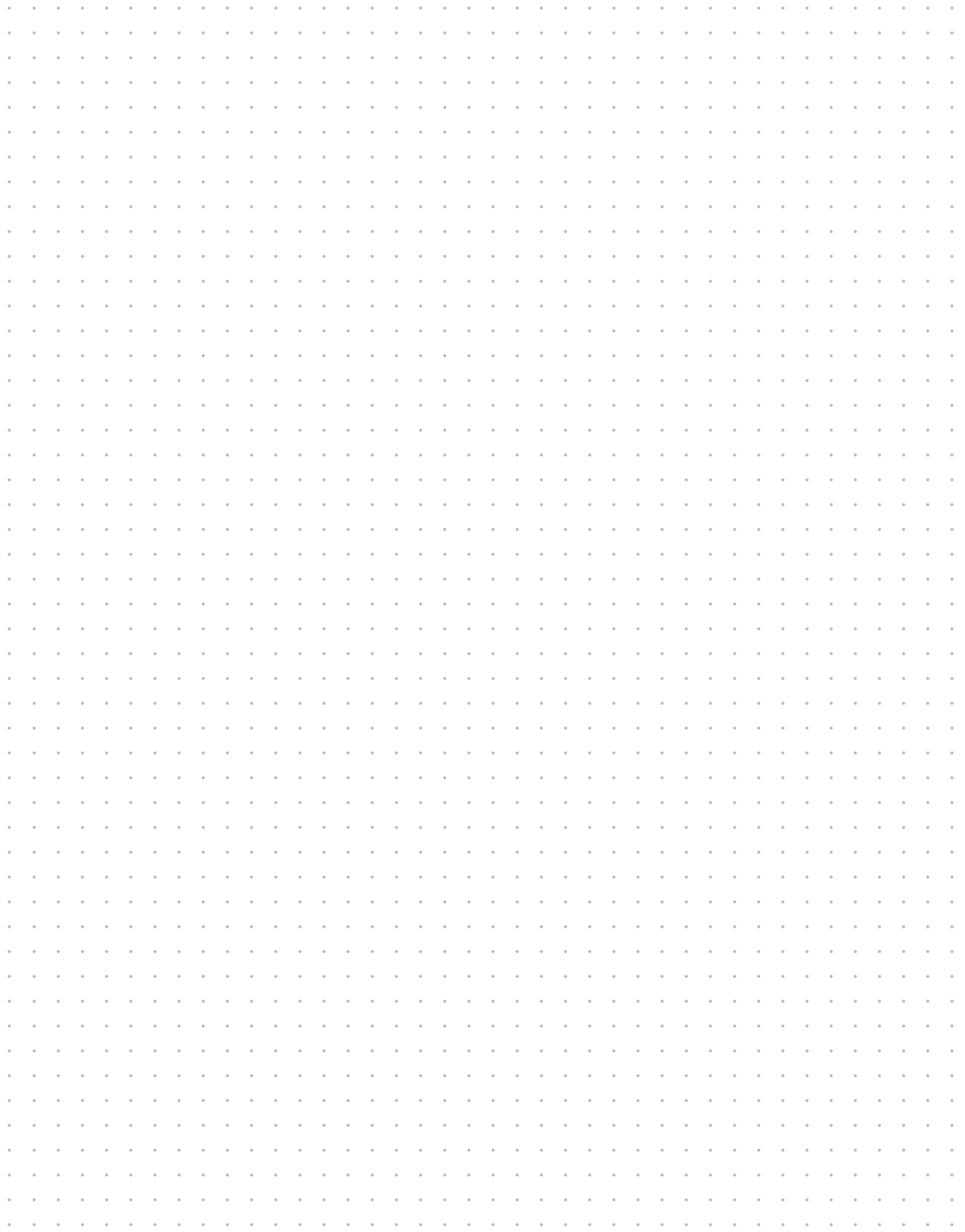
Read Daniel 6:16-28

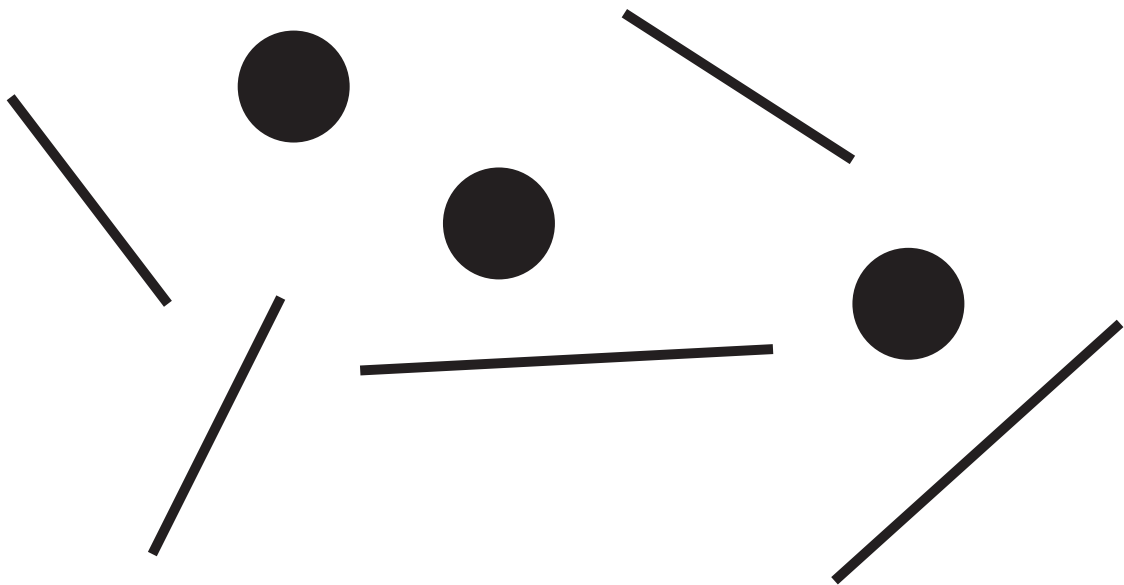
Do you remember other characters in the Bible who had sleepless nights like Darius? What do those characters have in common?

According to verse 23, why was Daniel unharmed? Why do you think Darius threw Daniel's accusers and their families into the lion's den?

What are some parallels you see between Daniel's story and the story of Jesus?

When have you experienced God's peace and presence in the face of a difficult situation? Share with the group.





Spiritual Battles with Earthly Consequences


We read different types of literature every day. We read novels and news articles, poetry and personal correspondence, obituaries and advertisements. In each case, we effortlessly understand that each distinct genre brings its own demands. We don't read a sports article the same way we read a text message. The literature of the Old Testament also has distinct genres; unfortunately, as modern readers of English translations, the differences aren't as obvious or intuitive.


When we entered Daniel 7, we encountered apocalyptic literature. In this genre, visions and dreams portray scenes that unveil mysteries and make predictions about the future. The word "apocalypse" derives from a Greek word meaning "unveiling" or "revelation" (hence the name of the last book of our Bibles). Daniel 7-12 is filled with visions and revelations that are rich in symbolism and can be surprising in their specificity.


We have already studied Daniel 7-8 as we looked at Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2. They reiterate many of the same themes as that dream, the interpretation of which brought Daniel fame and influence (Daniel 2:48).


We will begin our study of these prophecies with Daniel's final vision, recorded in chapters 10-12. These prophecies came to pass with stunning clarity and accuracy. We will then return to Chapter 9 and spend two weeks unpacking Daniel's prayer of repentance and his vision of the 70 weeks. We will see how Daniel predicted right down to the day the triumphal entry of Jesus some 560 years before they would come to pass.


But first, let's dig into the prophecies of Daniel's last recorded visions in chapters 10-12.


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Passage for the Week

Daniel 10-12

Day One

Read Daniel 10:1 - 11:1

Mark words or phrases that indicate Daniel's distress.

How does Daniel draw strength throughout the passage?

Day Two

Read Daniel 11:2-35

Note the rise and fall of each successive kingdom (see page 80).

Day Three

Read Daniel 11:36-44

How is this king different of those described in 11:2-35?

What makes him the same? (v 45)

Day Four

Read Daniel 12:1-13

How might verses 1-3 provide comfort to Daniel despite the uncertainty he faces in 8-10?

Day Five

Read Matthew 24:15-31

Why do you think Jesus references Daniel's prophecy in this passage?

Mark the warnings Jesus gives in verses 23-25.

Daniel 10-12 Outro

All the conflicts described in Daniel 10-12 took place exactly as Daniel described. These prophecies are so specific that many skeptics reject them as written after the fact. It isn't hard to believe that the God who knows the beginning and the end of all things would reveal these events to Daniel, the man "greatly loved" (Daniel 10:11). Now that we have seen the broad scaled prophecies about the future, let's turn back to chapter 9 and see what God has in store for the nation of Israel and the coming Messiah.

What is the most frightening thing you have ever experienced? What made that situation so scary? How did you respond physically and emotionally?

Read Daniel 10:1-14

Why do you think Daniel, who had seen so much in his lifetime, was moved to fast for three weeks? (v. 2)

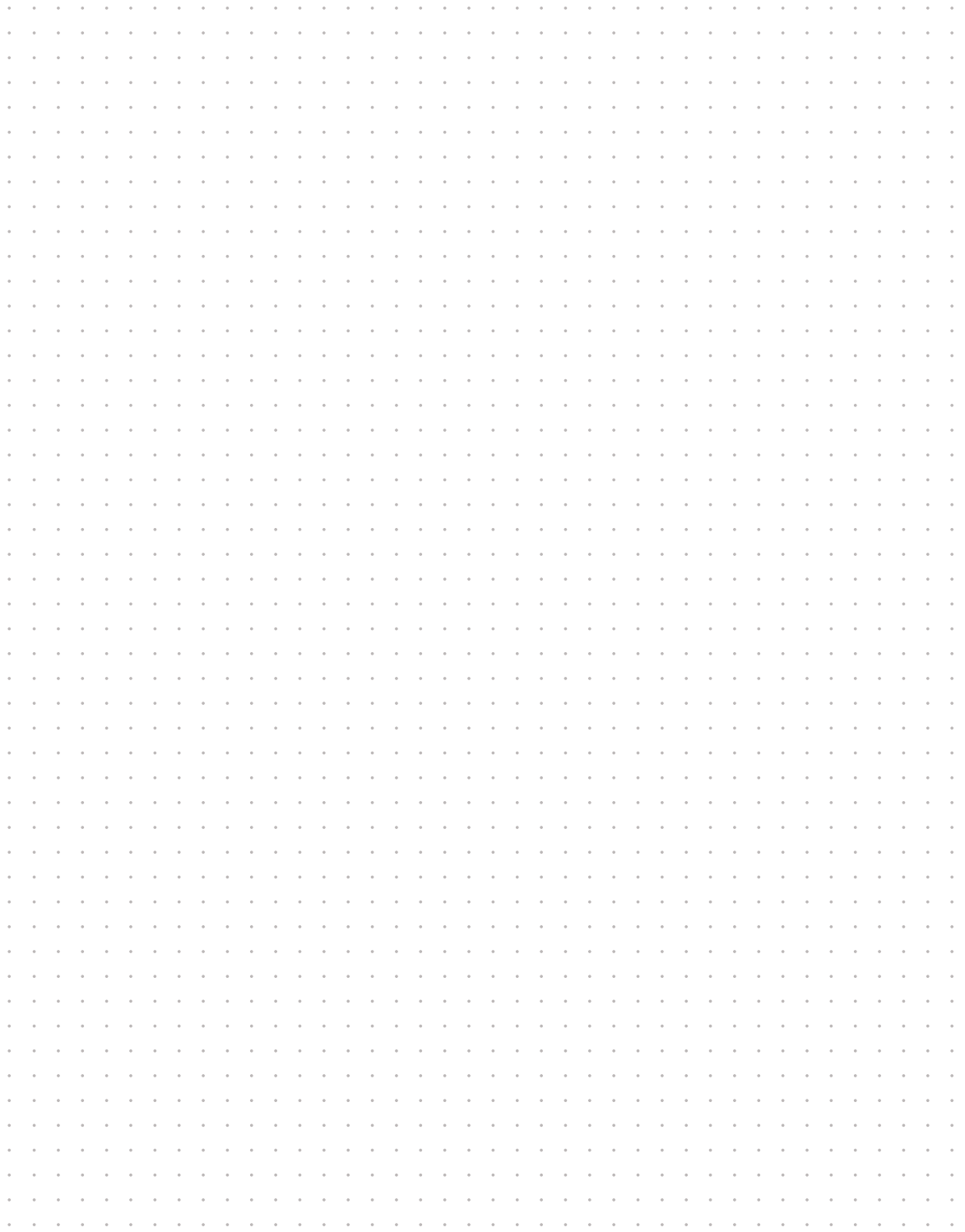
Daniel is entrusted with an important message. What important message has God entrusted to us? How can we take this message as seriously as Daniel takes the message God gave him?

Read Daniel 12:1-13

Verse 2 is the only time in the Old Testament that the words “everlasting life” appear. What does this tell you about how the book of Daniel anticipates and sets the stage for the New Testament?

Compare Daniel 12:4 and Revelation 22:10. Why are these commands different? What has changed?

Daniel confesses in verse 8 that he didn't fully understand, but he is told to go on with his life anyway. What are some things in your Christian walk that you don't understand? How can we help each other persevere in following Christ even when we don't understand everything we read or everything that is happening around us?



Prophecy in Daniel 10 - 12

Daniel 10-12 is a remarkable prophecy describing the kingdoms that would replace the Persian empire. After a prologue that describes the dramatic encounter between Daniel and the heavenly messenger in chapter 10, the contents of the revelation are revealed. Four rulers will arise in Persia (Daniel 11:2) followed by a division. The chart below shows how accurately the prophecy foretold the events that would unfold over the next 400 years.

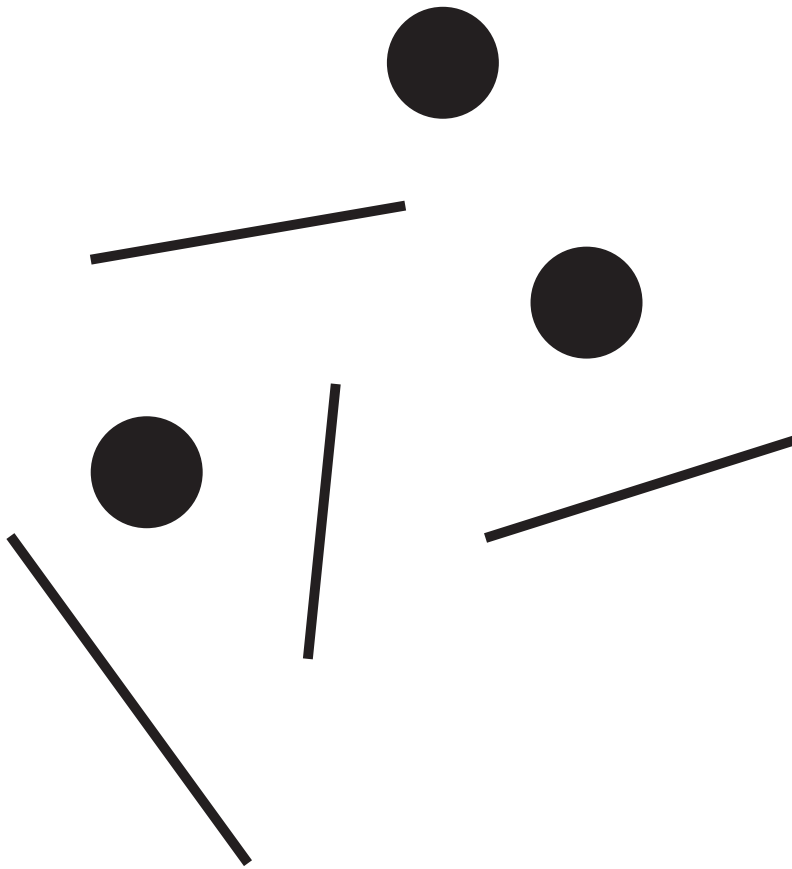
Daniel 11:2	Cambyses Pseudo-Smerdis Darius I Hystaspes Xerxes*	530-522 BC 522 BC 521 BC 485-465 BC
Daniel 11:3-4	Alexander the Great**	336-323 BC
Daniel 11:5	Ptolemy I Soter (South) Seleucus I Nicator (North) Antiochus I Soter (North)	323-285 BC 312-281 BC 281-262 BC
Daniel 11:6	Ptolemy II Philadelphus (South) Antiochus II Theos (North)	285-246 BC 262-246 BC
Daniel 11:7-9	Ptolemy III Euergetes (South) Seleucus II Callinicus (North)	246-221 BC 246-227 BC
Daniel 11:10	Seleucus III Soter (North)	227-223 BC
Daniel 11:11-15	Ptolemy IV Philopator (South) Antiochus III the Great (North)	221-204 BC 223-187 BC
Daniel 11:17	Ptolemy V Epiphanes (South)	204-181 BC
Daniel 11:20	Seleucus IV Philopater (North)	187-176 BC
Daniel 11:25	Ptolemy VI Philometer (South)	181-145 BC
Daniel 11:21-32	Antiochus IV Epiphanes (North)	175-163 BC

*Xerxes is known as Ahasuerus in the book of Esther. He was the most powerful and wealthy of the four kings identified in Daniel 11:2.

**Alexander has been foreshadowed in Daniel by the bronze belly and thighs of Nebuchadnezzar's image (2:32, 39b), the winged leopard (7:6), and the prominent horn of the goat (8:5–8). After Alexander's death, his empire was split into the north and south.

All of the events described in Daniel 11:1-35 have already come to pass. The rest of chapter 11 through 12:4 describe events that have yet to occur. These events will take place "at the time of the end" (Daniel 12:4). The events recorded in these verses take place in the "seventieth week" of Daniel's prophecy from 9:24. The book of Daniel ends with an assurance that the Lord's promises will be fulfilled, and blessing will come (12:12). The angel instructs Daniel, "go your way." This foreshadows the instructions Christ gave His followers in John 16:33, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

Chart adapted from J. Dwight Pentecost, "Daniel," in The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1367.




Daniel 9:1-19


Prayer of Repentance


Daniel 9 begins with a bit of a reset. The setting has changed. Daniel is now writing in the first year of the reign of a new ruler. During this time of transition and change, Daniel is studying the writings of the prophet Jeremiah and notices something.


The seventy years of desolation for Jerusalem predicted by Jeremiah have almost come to an end. Daniel's response to this discovery is a prayer acknowledged by some scholars as one of the greatest prayers in the Bible. Today this prayer serves as a model for how to approach the Lord with confession, repentance, and a request for Him to act.


As you study the prayer, notice that it is corporate in nature rather than individual. Meaning, it is meant to be prayed in community. Look for what the prayer can teach us about approaching God. Notice how our prayers should be guided by the nature and character of God.


-  ○ 1 Beginning of Exile


-  ○ 8 Prophetic Details of Coming Kingdoms


-  ● 9:1-23 Daniel Prays for His People


-  ○ 9:24-25 Decree to Rebuild

-  ○ 9:26 The Messiah is Cut Off

-  ○ 9:26-27 Decree to Destroy

-  ○ 10 Daniel Prays for His People

-  ○ 11 Prophetic Details of Coming Kingdoms

-  ○ 12 Time of the End

Passage for the Week

Daniel 9:1-19

Day One

Read Jeremiah 25:8-14

Write this reference next to Daniel 9:1-2 in your Bible or in your notes.

Day Two

Read Daniel 9:1-10

Notice the communal nature of the prayer. Put a box around the word "we" and the word "our" each time they appear.

Day Three

Read Daniel 9:11-15

Underline each reference to God. Why does Daniel use these words to describe Him?

Day Four

Read Daniel 9:16-19

Circle each request. What is Daniel asking God to do?

Day Five

Read Daniel 9:1-19

Pray the entire passage back to God, personalizing it where appropriate.

Daniel 9:1-19 Outro

Five days of studying, meditating, and praying this passage might have seemed repetitive and even a bit redundant. Yet, consider that Daniel said he fasted for three weeks when he heard from the Lord in Daniel 10:2. When we read the Bible, it should stir within us a spiritual awakening that leads to repentance. When we recognize who we are and who God is, we should be moved to worship Him. Then, when we make our requests, we should expect to see Him answer us. That's what we will see next as we finish Daniel 9.

When you were a kid, did you ever get caught doing something wrong as part of a group? How did you feel when you realized that you had been discovered doing the wrong thing? What happened next? Share with the group.

Read Daniel 9:1-3

Have you ever been reading the Bible and made a realization that changed your life? Share about that experience with the group.

Daniel humbled himself before the Lord in preparation to pray. What are some things we can do to humble ourselves before we approach the Lord in prayer?

Read Daniel 9:4-14

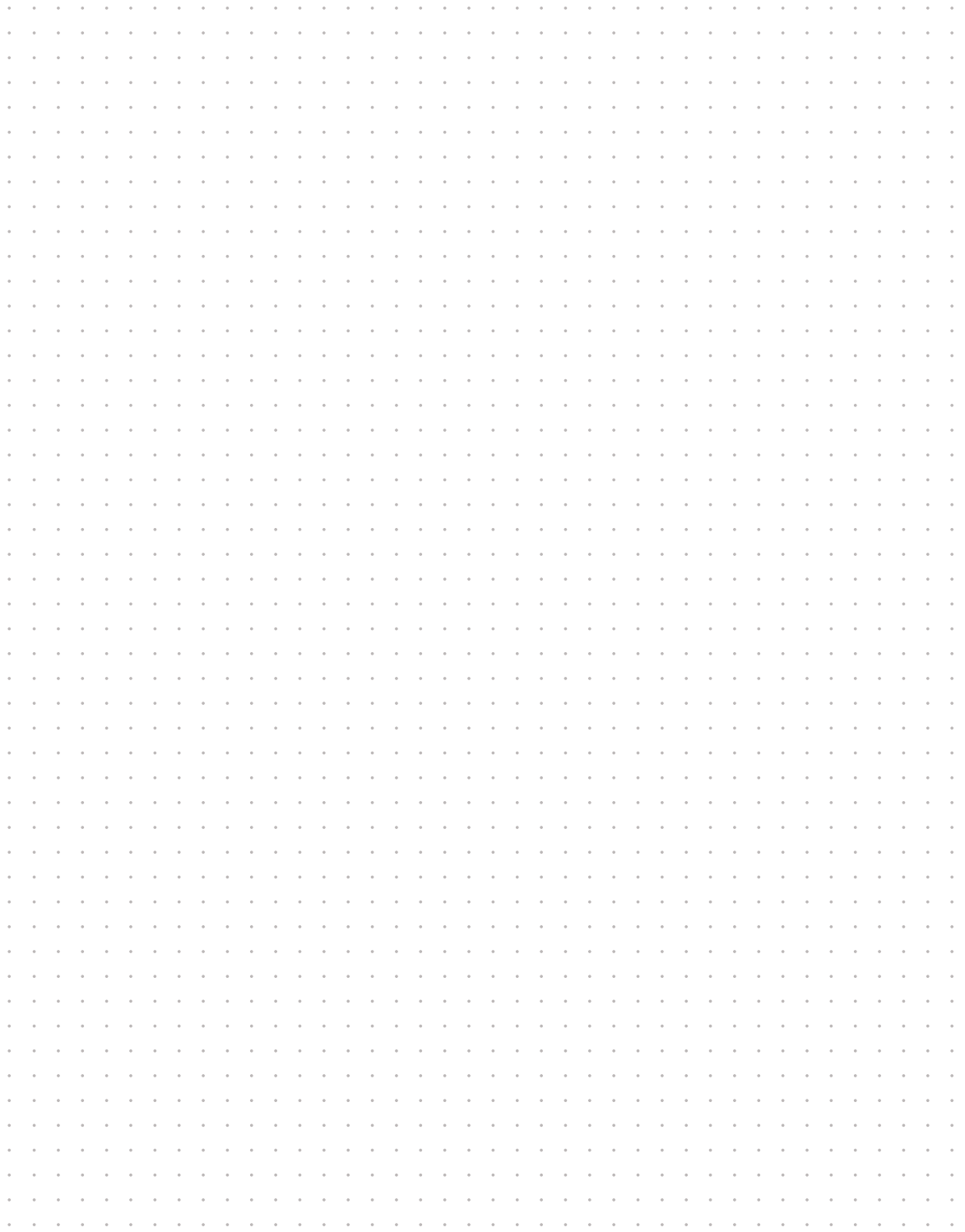
How does the character of God described in the passage elicit different confessions from Daniel? What aspects of God's character move you to pray?

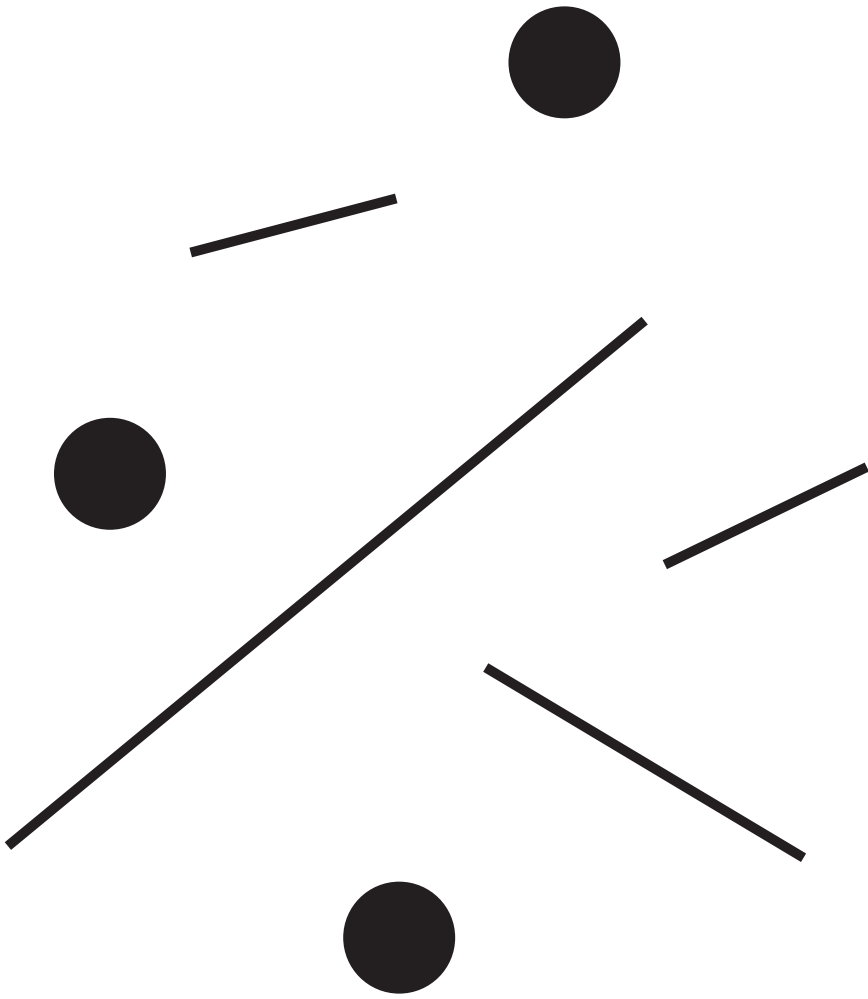
Read Daniel 9:15-19

How does Daniel expect God to answer his prayer? What are Daniel's final requests in verse 19?

What would the content of your most recent prayers reveal about your heart? How can you align your prayers with the heart of God?

Pray, asking God to hear, to forgive, to pay attention, and to act in specific ways. (Daniel 9:19)



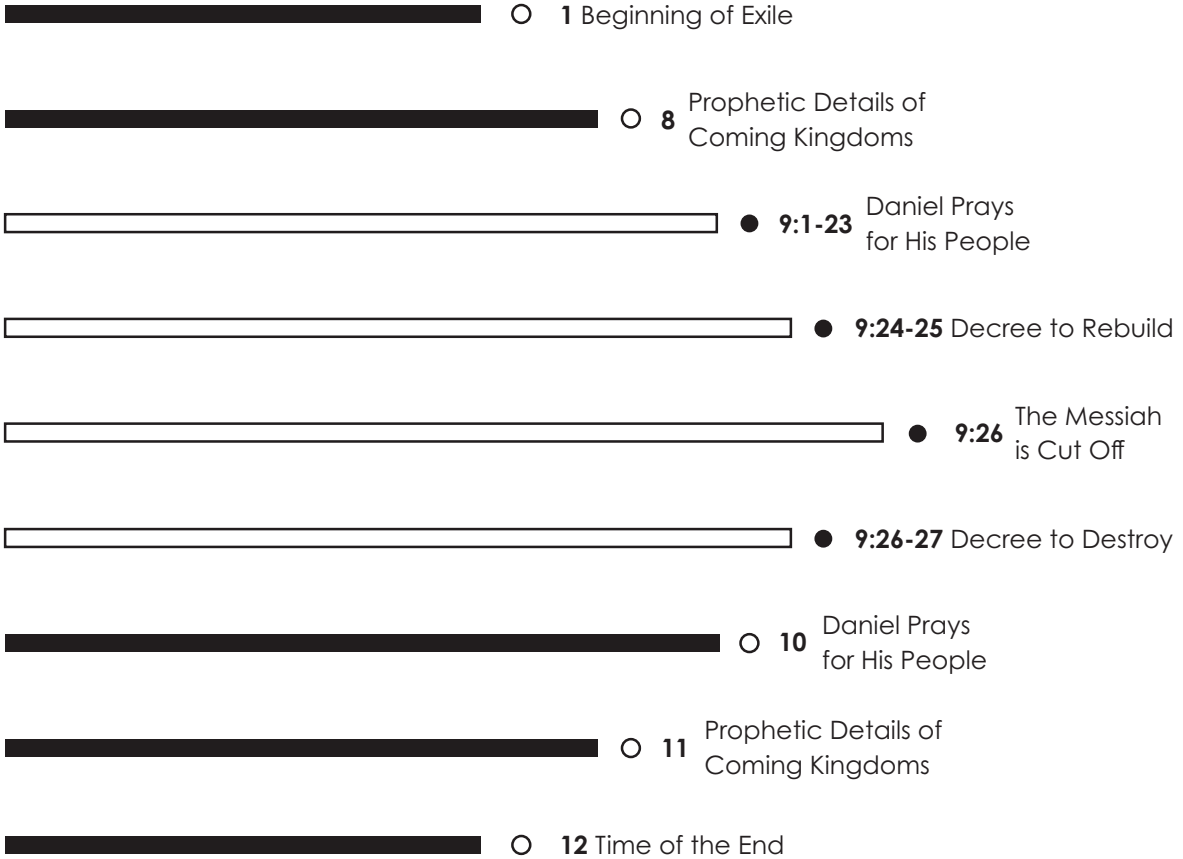


The Coming Deliverer

Most often, our prayers are interrupted by distractions, but our passage today depicts Daniel, seemingly mid-sentence in prayer, being interrupted with an answer from the one he prayed to. The angel Gabriel has been dispatched to give Daniel a vision and a revelation from God. What follows is a prophetic decree about the future of Israel. (v. 24)

The prophecy of the seventy “sevens” (sometimes translated as “weeks”) does not specify what the “sevens” are, but most commentators agree that based on the context they should be understood as years. Thus, seventy sevens becomes 490 years. Note that this 490-year time period has been “decreed” (v. 24). It is not dependent upon the actions of anyone, it has been set and established by God.

In your reading this week, reflect upon the six purposes that God said the decree would fulfill. Consider that prophecies often have both a near-term and long-term fulfillment. As you study, remember that we aren't just solving a biblical puzzle, trying to make one-to-one correlations between the scripture and modern-day events, people, or places. Rather, we are allowing the Word of God to call us into a closer walk with Him and strengthen our faith through what He revealed in this remarkable message to His beloved servant, Daniel.



Passage for the Week

Daniel 9:20-27

Day One

Read Daniel 9:24

Write out the six objectives the decree will accomplish.

Day Two

Read Daniel 9:24-27

Underline each number, put a box around each event decreed.

Day Three

Read Leviticus 26:27-35 and 2 Chronicles 36:17-23

Consider how these passages relate to the prophecy of Daniel 9:24-37.

Day Four

Read Nehemiah 1:1 - 2:8

Note similarities between Nehemiah's prayer and Daniel's prayer in 9:3-19.

Day Five

Read Daniel 9:24-27; Zechariah 9:9; Psalm 118:26; Luke 19:38, 24:25-27

Note how the life and ministry of Jesus fulfill many of the decrees in Daniel 9:24-27. Write down the ones that are still waiting to be fulfilled.

Daniel 9:20-27 Outro

Daniel 9 is one of the most challenging yet rewarding passages in the Bible. Using the accompanying chart, consider how accurate these decrees were as they predicted the coming of the Messiah who would be cut off. God has fulfilled all He said. Now we await the final "week" (seven-year period). We should expect it to be fulfilled with exacting specificity just as the first 69 "weeks" were, and just as Daniel 10:1-11:35 were fulfilled. May our study of this passage – and the whole book of Daniel – strengthen our faith in the God who is sovereign over all, and may it increase our sense of urgency to share the good news of Jesus Christ with those who remain outside of His saving grace and deliverance from sin and judgment.

How is the world different today than you imagined it 10 years ago? How is it different from how you thought it would be when you were a child? What do you imagine will be different 10 years from now? How about 20 years from now?

Read Daniel 9:20-23

How is this passage connected to the prayer found in Daniel 9:3-19? How does studying Daniel's prayer affect your understanding of 9:20-23? What does this passage teach us about God hearing and answering prayers?

Read Daniel 9:24-27

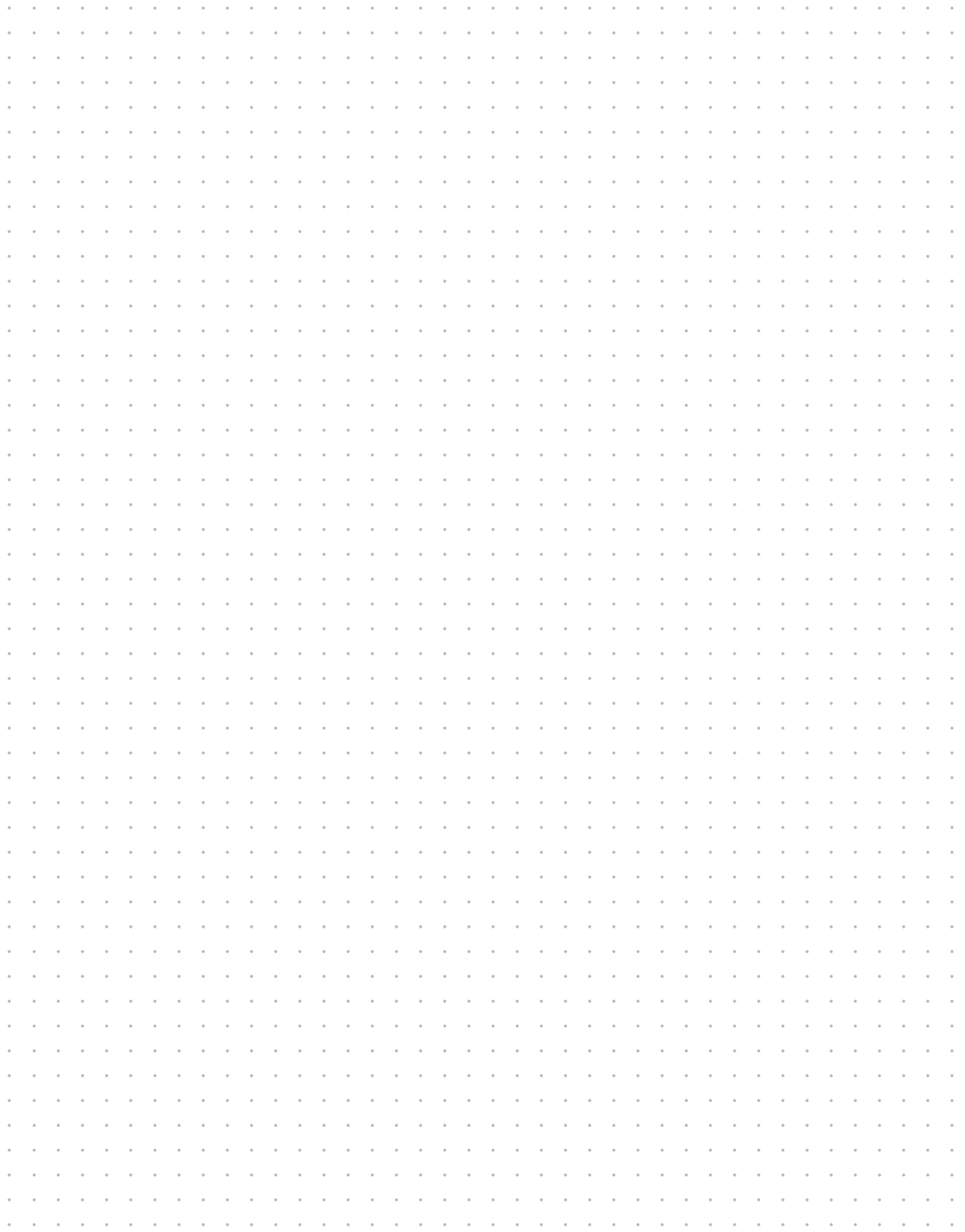
What are the six things this decree will do according to verse 24? Take a moment to talk about each of the six effects and what they mean.

Verse 26 speaks of "an anointed one" (or messiah) being cut off 483 years later. How did Jesus fulfill this prophecy?

Read Matthew 24:15-21

How is this passage connected to Daniel 9?

So much of human history is covered in these four brief verses! Not every question will be answered in one discussion, but perhaps this study will lead you to further discoveries as you study what the Bible teaches about the future. What has the Lord taught you in this study of Daniel? How will you continue to grow in the areas that Daniel and Esther have challenged you?



Understanding Daniel 9

Background

According to Daniel 9:1, Daniel received this prophetic message during the first year of the reign of Darius (538-537 BC).

To understand this prophecy, we must go all the way back to Exodus 23:10-11. There, God commands Israel to allow the land to rest every seven years. Because Israel disobeyed this command for 490 years (thus missing 70 of the commanded sabbatical years), they would be forced to let the land rest during their captivity (2 Chronicles 36:21). Daniel, reading the work of Jeremiah, realized that Israel's 70-year captivity was drawing to an end (Jeremiah 25:11, Daniel 9:2). After his prayer of repentance (Daniel 9:3-19), God dispatched the angel Gabriel with a message for Daniel that concluded with the prophecy of the "seventy sevens." Although Daniel was praying about Israel's immediate return to the land, God was revealing something more... much more! He was going to assure Daniel of His plans to keep His promises by sending the Messiah.

Prophetic Language

The "seventy sevens" of the prophecy (rendered "seventy weeks" in some translations) are best understood as groupings of years. Each group of seven, therefore, represents seven years. Daniel realized that the 70 year captivity was due to the "seventy sevens" or (490 years) that preceded the captivity. Now, after 70 years in exile, God was delivering a prophecy about the next 490 years (70 x 7).

According to Daniel 9:25, the beginning of the 490 years is connected to the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem. While there are three decrees to rebuild Jerusalem mentioned in the Bible, the one that most correlates with Daniel's prophecy is the decree issued by Artaxerxes in Nehemiah 2:1-8.

This decree has a specific date attached to it in scripture. According to Nehemiah 1:1, these events occur in 445 BC during the Hebrew month of Chislev, our November/December. The decree to rebuild was issued a few months later in the Hebrew month of Nisan (March/April) of 444 BC (Nehemiah 2:1).

Dating the Prophecy

The prophecy indicates there would be seven years until the completion of the restoration project. This would be followed by 62 sets of seven years when Jerusalem would experience "troubled time" (Daniel 9:25). After the total of 69 sets of seven years (or 483 years) had passed, the anointed One (or Messiah) would appear, and be cut off (Daniel 9:26).

Since the Jews (and most other ancient people) used a lunar calendar, their year had twelve 30-day months. Thus a Jewish year consisted of 360 days (rather than our more precise solar calendar with its 365.24219875 days per year).

So, let's do the math:

69 sets of 7 years made up of 360 days each is $69 \times 7 \times 360 = 173,880$ days.

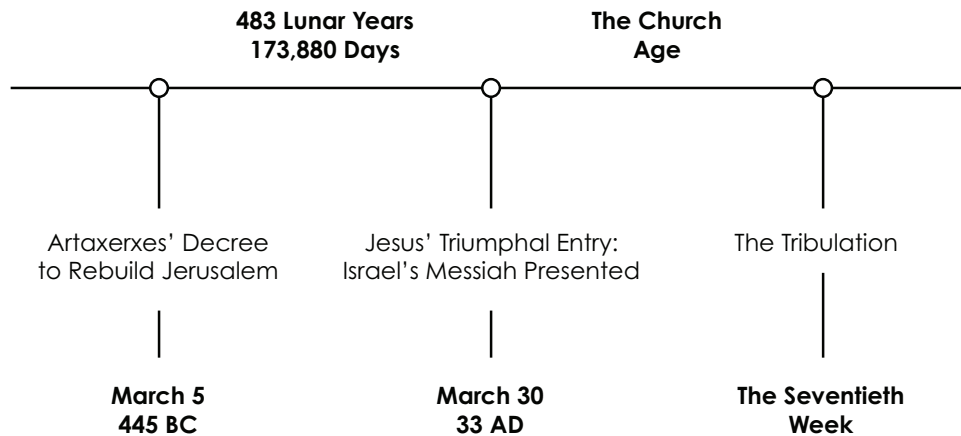
Beginning with Artaxerxes' decree to rebuild Jerusalem on Nisan 1 (March 5) 444 BC, if we calculate the date 173,880 days later, we arrive at March 30, 33 AD. We believe this is the EXACT DATE of Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem (Matthew 21; Mark 11; Luke 19; John 12).

As predicted in Zechariah 9:9, Jesus presented Himself to Israel as the Messiah and true King. Four days later, on Nisan 10 (April 3), 33 AD, Jesus was crucified, or using Daniel's language, He was "cut off." With His resurrection the following Sunday, Jesus set the stage for the next major era in salvation history, which we call the Church Age. Jesus called it the "times of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24). Daniel's predicted seventieth week was still to come.

So What About the Seventieth Week?

Today, we await the seventieth week of Daniel's prophecy. In that final seven-year period, which Jesus calls "the tribulation" in Matthew 24:29, there will be worldwide devastation (Revelation 6-9, 16). After this final seven-year period, Christ will return and set up His Millennial Kingdom on the earth (Matthew 19:28, Revelation 20:1-6).

In the four short verses that close Daniel 9, the exact date of the Triumphal Entry followed by the crucifixion of Jesus is described, and the summation of salvation history in the seventieth week is predicted. As you further explore prophecies concerning the end times in the Bible, a proper understanding of Daniel 9:24-27 will be a major interpretive key.



Adapted from *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* by Dr. Harold Hoehner, pages 97-121.