

CORE Seminar

Spring 2024

Book of Daniel: Part 1 [Chapters 1-6]

Week 1: An Introduction to the Book of Daniel and a dive into Psalm 137

WELCOME

Welcome!

Thank you all for signing up for this CORE Seminar on **The Book of Daniel**. If some of you didn't realize this is the Seminar that you signed up for – we still welcome you!

This Seminar will cover the first 6 chapters of Daniel. So, each week we'll dive into a particular section of Daniel and at the end of each participant guide you will have the Scriptural content for next week's lesson. Please read AND study ahead. This will make our time more interesting as we grow together and learn together.

Before we begin there are a couple of things we should go over:

- Max length of each night should be 2 hours – this includes food/ fellowship and study. If it goes over, it is ok to get up and leave.
- Each week we will have a food designation –

Everyone ready? Let's Pray...

PRAYER

INTRODUCTION

Fellow-Christian, we live in trying times. Nations are convulsed, thrones are tottering, crowns are falling, confusion reigns, and men's hearts are failing them for fear! We cannot but feel; but we ought not to fear. There is enough to make us watch and pray — but not enough to deject or cast us down The Lord reigns. Our Savior has all power in Heaven and in earth. He directs every event, and will overrule every occurrence for the fulfillment of his word, and the good of his beloved people. "He works all things after the counsel of his own will." Men may rage, infidels may blaspheme, professors may murmur, and real Christians may be filled with alarm; but He says, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure." The Lord sits above the water-floods, he remains King forever! Therefore, let no man's heart fail him. Let us look to the divine word. Let us look out for the Lord's hand. There is the rainbow of mercy in every cloud; but only the eye of faith can discern it.

Counsel and Comfort

James Smith, 1865

I know this sounds like it could have been preached by Pastor Jacob this morning... but it wasn't.

- This was in 1865 and spoken by Pastor James Smith.
- These words speak to the events of his day and I would argue – do a pretty good job of speaking to the events of our day.

The book of Daniel was written approx. 2500 years ago

- And the words of Daniel do a pretty good job of speaking to the events of our day.
- The words of Daniel are as current as today's newspaper – or online news...

So now is as good a time as any to ask the question:

What do we know about Daniel?

I don't know what you know about the book of Daniel:

- It might be diets, or fiery furnaces, or lion's dens OR strange visions.
- Our understanding might be the lyrics of a kids song where we are encouraged to “*dare to be a Daniel.*”
- But in some churches, the only time that the book of Daniel is discussed is about the time we preach on Revelation or begin a talk about end times.

This is unfortunate, because although the book of Daniel was one of the last books written in the Old Testament, it communicates the **future hope** that the story of God is building towards – and that future hope is in Jesus Christ!

What should we know about Daniel?

So, as we study the book of Daniel, we should seek to understand the immensity, the sovereignty, and the unstoppable power of God.

- For God is the sovereign Lord:
 - The One who **establishes** kingdoms and rulers.
 - And, also the One who brings them **down**.

He is also the God who provides for His people. He allows them to continue to sing the **“Lord's song,”** even when they are in a foreign land.

And last, as we study this book – at least the first six chapters – our understanding of God will grow. As we read each story of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, the Holy Spirit will lead us to truly understand how **BIG** God was to His people - then, and how **BIG** He is to us - now.

- We will also see this understanding grow in Daniel. Through each trial and through each situation, Daniel learned that his faith grew as he knew and trusted God – the object of his faith.

QUICK REMINDER OF WHERE WE ARE IN BIBLICAL HISTORY

Who wrote this book?

Daniel wrote this book. [Daniel 9:2 & 10:2/ Matthew 24:15]

- **Daniel 9:2**
 - ² in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years.
- **Daniel 10:2**
 - ² In those days I, Daniel, was mourning for three weeks.
- **Matthew 24:15**
 - ¹⁵ “So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand),

What is the Message of the book of Daniel?

In this book, we learn that:

- God knows all
- God controls all
- And He rescues.

God is sovereign over ALL worldly powers, history, and kingdoms – This is the main message!

- Do we find comfort in this?
- Earthly kingdoms rise and fall BUT God’s kingdom endures FOREVER!
 - His kingdom brings judgment to those who oppose Him
 - And Salvation through Christ to those who honor Him as God
- Understanding this is the unifier and theme of not only the first 6 chapters but of the entire book

What is the purpose of the book of Daniel

Daniel is like a survivor's book for believers.

- Daniel begins directly following the first deportation of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in **605 BC**. [2 Kings 24]

At this point Nebuchadnezzar developed a very wise strategic vision. **From the southern kingdom**, Babylon takes the “cream of the crop” of the peoples they conquered: the royalty; the aristocracy; the young people of wealth, talent and promise [Isaiah 39:6-7]– and then takes all of them off to Babylon.

- This includes Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.
 - Or *Beltshazzar, Shadrach, Meshack and Abednego* – if you prefer their Babylonian names.

Imagine the situation – You are relocated to a new city:

- To receive a new **name**.
- To learn a new **language**.
- To wear different **clothes**.
- And, receive an **education** – a Babylonian one at that.

And this is your life – for the rest of your life.

- And this is the position that Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah find themselves.

And this whole book is about how these guys struggle to maintain faith and hope and faithfulness to God in the midst of this foreign land.

The reason we are exploring this book is because it has so much to teach us about how to remain faithful to God in a dominant culture that surrounds us.

- **A culture – with a values system – that pressures and works against an attempt to maintain faith and hope in our God.**
- Because for most of history, God's people have found themselves as the **minority** – surrounded by a culture that doesn't live like us, and doesn't know God like we should know Him.
- These cultural pressures are constantly pressing against us and they create this persistent battle and struggle to answer “**What does it mean to remain faithful to God in the new and foreign culture – where everything is working against you.**”

For Israel, the question they asked themselves is this, **“How can we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?”**

PSALM 137

“HOW CAN WE SING THE LORD’S SONG IN A FOREIGN LAND?”

Psalm 137 is an exile poem. It is a lament over Israel’s defeat as a nation and the people’s deportation 500 miles east to Babylon – where they became slaves of the Babylonians.

- Derek Kidner once remarked of **Psalm 137** that “Every line of it is alive with pain.” The psalmist starts weeping in verse 1 and continues lamenting on through to verse 9 and the call for ultimate justice against those who raised their hand against God’s people.

This is not a Psalm of joy, not a Psalm of thanksgiving.

The whole Psalm is a longing to get back to normal in a very real sense. And normal in the Old Testament was in the promised land where God had settled his people with the temple in the middle of his people, surrounded by the walls of Jerusalem, where they dwelled in God’s presence continually. And they are longing for that when they’re in exile.

[1-3] Mourning by Babylon’s rivers.

***By the waters of Babylon,
there we sat down and wept,
when we remembered Zion.***

**²On the willows there
we hung up our lyres.**

**³For there our captors
required of us songs,
and our tormentors, mirth, saying,
“Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”**

QUESTION: How does the Psalmist describe the emotional state of the Israelites in exile?

- **Who requested that the exiles sing the “songs of Zion”?**

The first three words of the Psalm are promising: “By the waters.” In the agrarian world of the psalmist water meant the difference between life and death.

- Throughout the Psalms and the rest of the Old Testament water often symbolizes God’s blessings freely poured out.
- But here in Psalm 137 we soon learn that this is not the Jordan River. These are the waters of Babylon, the mighty nation that laid siege to Jerusalem, overtook the city, and led tens of thousands captive.

The immense **rivers of Babylon** said to the exiled one, *you’re not home any more*. As they **remembered Zion**, they wept.

What do you think they wept over?

- They wept over the death of so many loved ones
- They wept over the loss of almost everything they owned.
- They wept over the destroyed city of Jerusalem and her great temple.
- They wept over the agony of a forced march from Judea to Babylon.
- They wept over the cruelty of their captors.
- They wept over the loss of such a blessed past.
- They wept over the forced captivity of their present.
- They wept over the bleak nature of their future.
- They wept over their sin that invited such judgment from God.

The Psalmist is **not only weeping**, but he reached to hang up his lyre on the branch of a willow tree somewhere along the Tigris or Euphrates River in this cradle that gave birth to the ancient civilization [137:2].

- Large willow trees grew on the shores of the great river, and because there were no songs left in these captives, they **hung** their **harps** on those willow trees.
- “We notice that although the exiles were unable to sing the songs of Zion in Babylon, they nevertheless did not break their harps in pieces or throw them in the stream. Instead they hung them on the poplars, presumably saving them for what would surely be a better day.” (Boice)

The Babylonians, his captors, wanted to hear him sing a song of Zion. But the Psalmist could not bring himself to comply.

- This was the cruel demand of **the Babylonian captors. They mocked the Israelites and** asked them to sing one of the famous **songs of Zion**. The ones who **plundered** the people of God now wanted them to entertain them. Yet there was no song left in them...

[4-6] A vow to remember Jerusalem, even in **exile**.

*How shall we sing the Lord's song
in a foreign land?*

⁵ *If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
let my right hand forget its skill!*

⁶ *Let my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth,
if I do not remember you,*

*if I do not set Jerusalem
above my highest joy!*

QUESTION: How does the Psalmist express the depth of his longing for Jerusalem?

- **What role does memory play in this Psalm, and how is it connected to the idea of identity?**

Derek Kidner was right. **This is a psalm of sadness and pain.** Such depth of sorrow is felt vividly in the wrenching question asked in verse 4, **"How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?"** Though their conquerors wanted them to sing for their own amusement, the song simply wasn't there. The songs of God's people were more than performances; they came from their relationship with God. It would take a long time to sing those songs **in a foreign land.**

The foreign-ness of that place was palpable. It threw the Psalmist off balance. How could he sing? In fact, so foreign was that place that the Psalmist makes extreme vows so as to steel himself against the possibility of forgetting Jerusalem. May his right hand, the hand that skillfully plays the lyre, fail him and may his tongue stick to the roof of his mouth **[137:5-6].** The psalmist raises a significant question. How do we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?

One of the most striking things about this question in **Psalm 137** is that the Psalmist does not answer the question. He never tells us how we sing the Lord's song.

Do you think Israel ever learned to sing the "LORD's song" again?

- YES!

To answer that question we have to look elsewhere to the exilic and post-exilic prophets and to the historical books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther.

In **Nehemiah chapter 8**, Israel is back in the land. No longer at the rivers of Babylon, they are gathered at the square in front of the Water Gate. In their midst, Ezra stands on a podium, a podium made just for this occasion, and he reads the Law, the Five Books of Moses, from morning until midday. Nehemiah richly textures his record of the event with detail. We see the people giving attention to God's Word. Eyes forward, leaning in, rapt attention—this is the very Words of God that they did not hear in that foreign land. And after paying attention, the people paid their devotion. Heads are bowed and faces are to the ground, as they worship the Lord **[Nehemiah 8:6].**

We learn from this tragic and dark night of Israel how to sing the Lord's song in a foreign land. We learn of courage to stand against power. We learn of the power of earnest prayer and of a simple prayer ushered in total reliance upon God. We also learn of the centrality of the Word of God. We learn of the necessity of devotion in a foreign land.

QUESTION: Psalm 137 shows us that it is difficult to sing the Lord's song in a foreign land.

- **Do you think that we are in a position where we are required to "sing the Lord's song in a foreign land"?**
- **Are we often required or asked to do things that might go against our Christian character?**

CONCLUSION

Two Main Themes of Daniel

1. All Kings and Kingdoms of this world will come to an end and will be replaced with our Sovereign King and His Kingdom which will never pass away.
2. The Trials and difficulties will continue for the saints – all the way until the end. Those who persist will be raised to glory in the final kingdom!

Outline for how we will study Daniel:

- **March 3rd: Daniel 1: Daniel's Early Years**
- **March 10th: Daniel 2: King Neb's Dream**
- **March 17th: Hangout Night**
- **April 7th: Daniel 3: Fiery Furnace**
- **April 14th: Daniel 4: King Neb's Pride and Humility**
- **April 21st: Daniel 5: The Handwriting on the Wall**
- **April 28th: Daniel 6: Daniel in the Lion's Den**
- **May 5th: Hangout Night or Summary of Daniel**

PRAYER

QUESTION TO CONSIDER AS WE STUDY DANIEL

- **What is going to fuel and motivate long-term faithfulness over the course of a whole life?**
- **What is going to motivate that for you and I?**