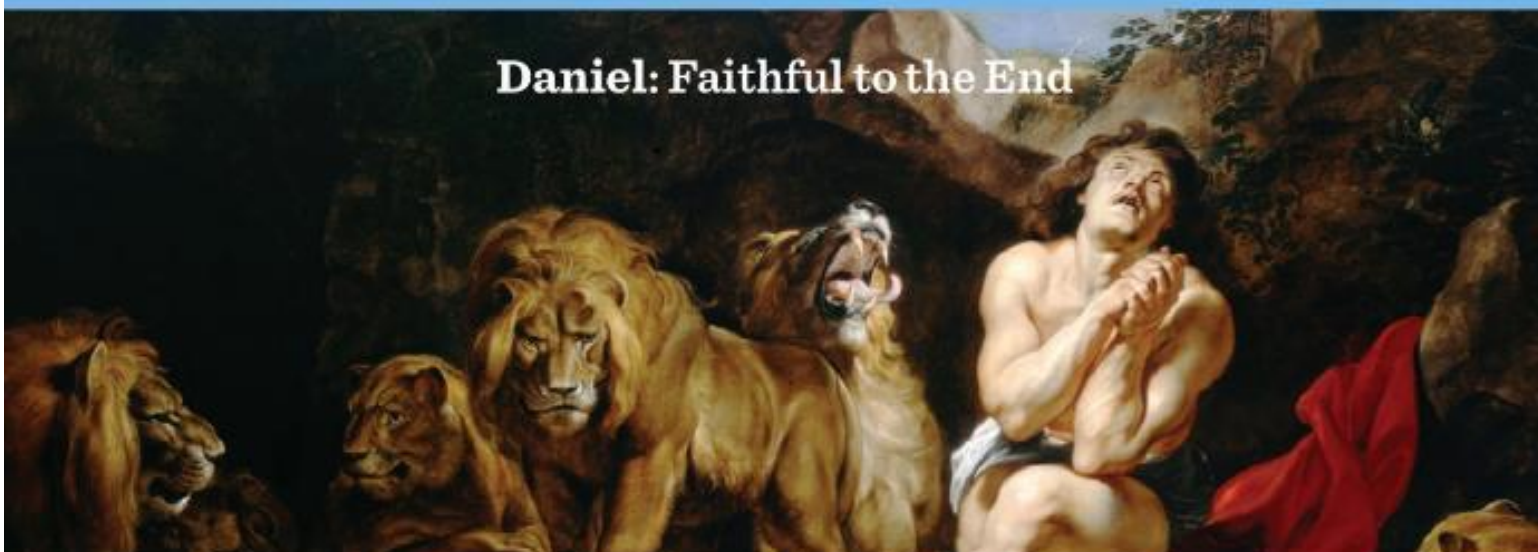


Session Eight

Daniel: Faithful to the End



Daniel in the Lion's Den by Peter Paul Rubens

A. Establish the Context

Ezekiel's hopeful visions of God's glory and continuing presence came at a crucial time in Israel's history: the painful years surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem. During this time, the exiled remnant of Judah had to acclimate to the realities of separation. Israel was originally twelve tribes inhabiting the Promised Land and ruled by a descendant of David from Jerusalem. Not one of these markers of their covenant identity remained after 587 BC. Ezekiel's visions and promises aside, the people have a long road ahead of them—seventy years of exile, as Jeremiah foretold. And they are living in the lap of an empire that must seem like a beast: ruthless, demanding, and voracious; crushing and absorbing all opponents. It would be easy to doubt the "I AM" and pay allegiance instead to Babylon. How will the people of Judah muster the scraps of faith that remain and hold strong until the promised restoration? And even after that—how will they live out their faith under continued foreign domination?

The answer to those questions and a stellar example can be found in the book of Daniel. Taken into captivity as a teenager with the first wave of exiles in 605 BC, this faithful young man rises to power in the court of King Nebuchadnezzar and remains through the reigns of Belshazzar and Darius the Mede.¹ Daniel lives long enough to see the rise of Cyrus the Persian, who will send exiles home to rebuild Jerusalem. From youth to old age, his life bears dramatic witness to the way God protects those who are faithful in trial. And the events of his life and the visions he is granted send the strong message that in spite of appearances, God has everything under control. He can be trusted because the nations that oppose him will be put down, one after the other, until only God's kingdom and justice remain.

The book of Daniel is an unusual text on several counts. Unlike the prophets before him, Daniel does not speak the "Word of the LORD" to the people of his day. Like them, though, he speaks prophetically of things to come. He also speaks of the future bodily resurrection of God's people—a complement to Ezekiel's "valley of bones," but also the most specific description of God's plan for the human body to this point in the Old Testament.

¹ While Daniel, Josephus, and ancient Jewish commentaries mention King Darius, this royal figure is absent from Babylonian historical accounts. Scholars are still debating his identity.

For this and other reasons, Daniel has been connected to both the wisdom tradition and the prophetic tradition. Therefore, Daniel is listed with the “Writings” in the Hebrew canon² rather than among the prophets, while the Greek version of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, places Daniel between the major and minor prophets. This placement is followed by Christian Bibles. While most of the book is written in Hebrew, Daniel 2:4–7:28 is written in Aramaic. In addition, some portions are in Greek,³ which are included in the Septuagint version of Daniel and can be found in Catholic but not Protestant versions of the Bible. As for the dating of the book, many scholars argue for authorship in the second century BC during the time of the Maccabees, while others provide support for the traditional dating four centuries earlier, in its historical setting.

Daniel can be divided into three parts.

- Daniel 1–6 *Narrative* (the story of Daniel and his three fellow captives in Babylon)
- Daniel 7–12 *Apocalyptic* (four visions that reveal the sweep of history from God’s perspective)
- Daniel 13–14 *Narrative* (more stories of Daniel from the Septuagint version that are not included in the later Hebrew canon)

Ultimately, Daniel provides hope and courage to people of any generation who strive to live faithful lives in “spiritual Babylon”—in cultures that demand the worship of many gods, not the One God; in the midst of temptation, trials, and persecution; in the shadow of hostile governments and rulers. In the words of King Darius, “The God of Daniel ... is the living God, enduring forever; his kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion shall be to the end. He delivers and rescues, he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth” (Daniel 6:28; NAB 6:27).

B. Read the Story

Read Daniel 1–7, 9, and 12 before you answer the questions. These chapters will give you the highlights of the book, focusing on the narrative portion. Next, locate the prophet Daniel on the *Timeline* Chart, paying attention to the time period and pertinent events of the time, to the rulers he served under, and to his location.

Going Deeper (optional): To get the entire story and message of this prophet, read the entire book of Daniel.

As always, pray before you read.

C. Take a Deeper Look

Answering these questions will draw you into the heart of the story. If you do not understand something, make a note of it to bring up in the small-group discussion.

² The “Writings” also include 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Song of Songs, Ruth, and Esther.

³ The Greek portions include a long prayer inserted in Chapter 3 as well as all of Chapters 13 and 14.

DANIEL IN NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S COURT (DANIEL 1-6)

These chapters are full of empowering stories of faith in dire circumstances. Daniel and his companions represent the "faithful remnant" God nourished, protected, and guided during these seventy painful years of Babylonian exile.

1. Read Daniel 1. What kind of person is Daniel as a teenager?
2. Daniel and his companions are given new names, as noted in the following chart.

HEBREW NAME	MEANING	BABYLONIAN NAME	MEANING
Daniel	"God is my judge"	Belteshazzar	"Bel protect the king!"
Hananiah	"Yahweh is gracious"	Shadrach	"Command of Aku [the moon god]"
Mishael	"Who is like God?"	Meshach	"Who is like Aku?"
Azariah	"Yahweh is a helper"	Abednego	"Servant of the shining one [Nego or Nebo]"

Read CCC 203. What is significant about the way these names are changed?

WHO ARE THE CHALDEANS?

Throughout these early chapters, Nebuchadnezzar consults magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and Chaldeans.⁴ These function like political consultants: They are well-educated, "wise men" who are trained in literature, writing, and administration, as well as in interpreting dreams and telling the future. They study the stars like modern-day pundits study economic tables and other signs of the times. By interpreting signs they read in the heavens, they aim to provide messages from the gods to guide the king.

3. Read Daniel 2:1-23, in which Nebuchadnezzar poses a seemingly impossible question: not only "interpret my dream," but also, "what did I dream?"
 - a. Learning that he is slated to die along with the wise men who cannot tell the dream, Daniel seeks an audience with the king. What does Daniel intend to do, and how does he prepare?

⁴ "Chaldean," or "astrologer," as some Bibles translate it, is both a title and a nationality. Chaldea was a common name for Southern Mesopotamia. (You may recall that Abraham was called out of "Ur of the Chaldees.") The eleventh dynasty of the kings of Babylon, which began in 620 BC with Nabopolassar and ended with King Nabonidus and his son Belshazzar, is known as the Chaldean Dynasty. During that time, "Chaldean" was virtually synonymous with "Babylonian."

- b. What does Daniel's prayer in 2:21-23 reveal about his knowledge of God?

4. Read Daniel 2:24-49.

- a. Nebuchadnezzar dreamed of a mighty and frightening image: a statue with a head of gold, breast and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron, and feet of iron and clay. What happens in his dream as he looks upon this image? (See Daniel 2:34-35.)

- b. What interpretation does God provide through Daniel to the king?

5. Read Daniel 3.⁵ Perhaps inspired by his dream, King Nebuchadnezzar builds an enormous golden image, sixty by six cubits (ninety by nine feet) in size. He orders everyone in the kingdom to bow before it or be cast into a furnace of fire. Daniel's compatriots, themselves in positions of prominence in the kingdom, refuse.

- a. Read the king's question and the men's answer in Daniel 3:14-18. What is really at stake in this trial? (See the end of Daniel 3:15.)

- b. What happens to the men who refuse to bow to the image, and how do they respond to their punishment?

- c. How does Nebuchadnezzar respond?

⁵ Text note: The section of Daniel 3 containing the prayers of Azariah and his companions was composed in Hebrew or Aramaic but then translated into Greek and preserved in the Septuagint. It appears in Catholic (but not Protestant) Bibles. Verse numbering varies with the translation. The RSV-2CE numbers its verses from 1-68 and sets the prayers off in italics between 3:23 and 3:24. [They are named as "song verses" in this session to avoid confusion; see question 6a.] The NAB inserts the hymn directly into the text as verses 24-90 and re-numbers the remaining verses so they flow consecutively.

6. The remnant of Judah has been exiled to the epicenter of worldly power and wisdom. The very fact of their exile seems to argue against the power of the LORD. Yet, when the LORD shows him the king's dream, Daniel says, "Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might" (Daniel 2:20). In the midst of a furnace, which might stand for the plight of Israel, Azariah and the others echo Daniel's praise in a powerful hymn.

Read song verses 28-68 in Daniel 3 (NAB 3:52-90) aloud.⁶

- a. What three categories of beings are called upon to praise and glorify God? For help with this question, see sections beginning with song verses 36, 52, and 60 in Daniel 3 (NAB 3:58, 3:74, 3:82).
7. Read Daniel 6. (Darius—"royal one"—is a Mede; he may have been a general appointed over Babylon, a governor with king-like powers.) What does Daniel's response to the king's decree show about the strength of his faith? (See Daniel 6:10; NAB 6:11.)

DANIEL'S VISIONS (DANIEL 7-12)

Here, the genre changes from historical narrative to apocalyptic writing. Daniel 7 introduces the major themes of this section, which include the power of the state opposed to God; the ultimate victory of God over all powers; and the promised future deliverance of his people and the establishment of his kingdom. Like much apocalyptic literature, it features dramatic, often bizarre images that can be frightening and hard to understand. We will look at the broad strokes of the visions.

8. Read Daniel 7, in which Daniel receives a vision of God's view of the coming kingdoms, one that parallels the vision Nebuchadnezzar received in Daniel 2.

⁶ Does the song sound familiar? This well-loved prayer is part of the prayers of the Divine Office, featured in Morning Prayer as an Old Testament Canticle.

- a. Fill in the empty boxes below to show how Daniel sees the kingdoms that Nebuchadnezzar sees as parts of a human image.

WORLD EMPIRES ⁷	NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S VISION (Daniel 2:32-33) A statue of a man	DANIEL'S VISION (Daniel 7:3-7, 7:20) Four beasts
1	Gold head	
2	Silver chest, arms	
3	Bronze belly, thighs	
4	Iron legs, Clay and iron feet	

- b. In Nebuchadnezzar's vision, a stone comes from nowhere and smashes the statue to nothing before growing to fill the earth. In Daniel's vision, God appears on a fiery throne and sits in judgment on the nations, destroying the last beast and taking away the dominion of the others. What does Daniel see next that corresponds to the stone in Daniel 2? (See Daniel 7:13-14.)

THE STONE AND THE SON OF MAN

The motif of the "stone" runs through the Old Testament and ends in our Lord Jesus Christ and his kingdom. For further study (optional), read the following Scripture passages and think about how they are connected.

Psalms 118:22

Isaiah 8:13-15

Isaiah 28:16

Matthew 21:42-44

Acts 4:11-12

1 Peter 2:6-8

Note that in Hebrew, there is even a "play" on the words "stone" (eben) and "son" (ben).

⁷ The visions propose a succession of world empires leading up to the establishment and spread of the kingdom of God. The traditional interpretation is that these world empires are Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. Other scholars identify them as Babylon, Media, Persia, and Greece (however, the Medes were never an empire on their own).

- c. **New Testament Connection:** “Son of man” is the title Jesus most often uses to refer to himself. Read the following verses and record what you learn about Jesus as Son of Man.

- Matthew 25:31-32:
- Matthew 24:30:
- Matthew 17:12, 17:22-23:

SON OF MAN

In Matthew 16:13-23, Jesus calls himself “Son of man.” In doing so, he evokes Daniel’s image of the Messiah coming in clouds of glory to judge the nations. At the same time, by announcing his passion, he gives that title a new meaning more in line with Isaiah’s Suffering Servant: The Son of man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life for those he came to save. True, his kingship will mean he is raised high to heaven—but it will come about first through Jesus being lifted on the Cross (see CCC 440).

9. In Daniel 9, Daniel—who is now an old man—realizes that the seventy-year period of exile prophesied by Jeremiah is coming to an end.⁸ He goes before God in sackcloth and ashes, confessing the sins of the people and begging for forgiveness on their behalf. Read Daniel 9:16-19. For what does Daniel plead, and on what basis?
10. As Daniel continues in prayer, the angel Gabriel comes to enlighten him with “wisdom and understanding” of the future, because of God’s great love for him (Daniel 9:22-23). What, in general, does Gabriel tell him in Daniel 9:24?
11. Daniel is given further visions about the coming eras, in which the successive empires are the visible face of a battle in the heavens. In retrospect, we know that even after returning from exile, the Jews will live under a series of Gentile rulers for that 490-year period, which culminates at the time of Jesus Christ. Read Daniel 12:1-3. What hope is given to Daniel and, through him, to the people?

⁶ See Jeremiah 25:11, 29:10-14.

DANIEL 13-14

While most Protestant Bibles end with the vision of the resurrected in Daniel 12, the Catholic canon includes two additional chapters. Only Greek manuscripts of these chapters have survived (which is likely why they are not included in the final Jewish canon, as the Jews by that time had forbidden even the learning of Greek). Daniel 13 and 14 were part of the Old Testament canon of the early Church (the Septuagint), and their inspiration was confirmed at the Council of Trent. Many scholars believe these chapters most likely were originally written in Aramaic or Hebrew.

Daniel 13 gives us the story of Susanna, whom Daniel defends from false testimony. In the narrative, he is a young man (Daniel 13:45), and in some manuscripts, this story is placed in its proper chronological order earlier in the Daniel narrative. Daniel 14 contains two additional stories: Bel (Daniel 14:1-22; NAB 14:4-19) and the dragon (Daniel 14:23-42). In each narrative, Daniel uses his God-given wisdom to expose Babylonian worship as a cleverly devised sham. The message? Only the God of Israel is worthy of worship and devotion.

D. Application

This question will help you apply one of the key themes of the session to your life. After meditating on it, respond to God with a brief written prayer if you choose.

Daniel and his companions stand out in the Old Testament as remarkable examples of faithful lives lived in the face of inconvenience, opposition, and persecution. A hymn called “Dare to Be a Daniel” used to be sung in their praise:

Standing by a purpose true,
Heeding God's command,
Honor them, the faithful few!
All hail to Daniel's band!

Refrain:

Dare to be a Daniel,
Dare to stand alone!
Dare to have a purpose firm!
Dare to make it known.

What inconveniences, opposition, or persecution do you face in your life that might prevent you from worshiping God? What have you learned from Daniel's life and visions that might help you “dare to be a Daniel”?

Dear Lord ...

SESSION EIGHT TALK NOTES

Daniel: Faithful to the End**I. Setting the Stage**

- A.** Placement in Bible
- B.** Background
- C.** Spiritual wisdom for faithful living under fire
- D.** Babylon as a spiritual force
 - 1.** World powers, systems, structures opposed to God
 - a.** Genesis 11: Tower of Babel
 - b.** Revelation 18: the fall of Babylon
 - 2.** “The spirit of this world” (1 Corinthians 2:12)
 - a.** Seeks to displace God on the throne of our lives
 - b.** Aim to enslave humanity with false freedoms
 - 3.** Two strategies, physical and spiritual
- E.** Book of Daniel
 - 1.** Messages of hope
 - 2.** Structure
 - a.** Central apocalyptic visions (Daniel 7–12)
 - i.** The future fate of world powers
 - ii.** “Apocalyptic” = “unveiling”
 - b.** Two narrative “bookends” (Daniel 1–6 and 13–14)
 - c.** Message: ultimate triumph of righteousness

II. The Strategies of Babylon (Physical and Spiritual)

- A.** Remove the wealth (sacred vessels, human treasure)
 - 1.** Daniel, Hananiah, Azariah, Mishael (Daniel 1:6)
 - 2.** Exiled more than nine hundred miles from home
 - 3.** Spiritual Babylon follows same strategy
- B.** Seduce with rich food and wine (Daniel 1:5–16)
 - 1.** An appeal to the passions
 - 2.** Eating would defile them
 - a.** Not kosher
 - b.** Meat sacrificed to idols

- c. Meals imply fellowship
 - d. Parallel in New Testament Corinth
- 3. Daniel “resolved that he would not defile himself” (Daniel 1:8)
 - a. A pre-determined attitude
 - b. Hebrew: He purposed in his heart, set it “like a pillar in the ground”
- 4. Daniel’s courage inspired his friends
 - a. 2 Maccabees 7:7-42 – young men refuse food of Greeks
 - b. Mother encourages to trust (language of resurrection)
- 5. Lessons for us
 - a. Decide in advance
 - b. Faithfulness in little things – build life of virtue
 - c. Gandalf in *The Hobbit*: importance of everyday deeds
- 6. Daniel and friends blessed for their faithfulness
- C. Give them new names, change identity (Daniel 1:6-7)
 - 1. Their Hebrew names are theophoric, recall God’s character
 - 2. The new names brand them as servants of Babylon
 - 3. Daniel, friends do not allow new names to change hearts

III. Narratives Demonstrate Faithfulness

- A. The fiery furnace (Daniel 3)⁹
 - 1. Nebuchadnezzar demands worship of himself
 - 2. The young men refuse (Daniel 3:16-18) and are thrown into fire
 - 3. They praise the LORD in the midst of the fire (Daniel 3:23-27)
 - a. An appeal to God’s mercy (Daniel 3:11-12)
 - b. Daniel 3, song verses 67-68 (NAB 3:89-90) litany: “His mercy endures for ever”
 - i. Liturgy of the Hours, Sunday morning canticle
 - 4. Nebuchadnezzar sees one “like the son of God” with them (Daniel 3:92, NAB)
 - a. Aramaic *bar elahin*, literally, “the son of God”
 - b. Compare Matthew 18:20
 - c. Praise as a sign to the world of God’s power
 - 5. The fruit of their faithfulness
 - a. Nebuchadnezzar honors God publicly
 - b. The young men are freed and honored

⁹ Note discrepancies in verse numbering among translations of Daniel (see text note on page 72).

B. Daniel and the lion's den (Daniel 6)

1. Seventy years later; Daniel is old, highly regarded
2. Jealous enemies plot to destroy him
3. Daniel continues habits of worship, the source of his strength
4. Result: Daniel vindicated, King Darius praises God
5. A powerful witness to Maccabees, later Christians

IV. The Importance of Perseverance in Faith, Even Under Fire

V. Conclusion: Prayer of Renewal¹⁰

¹⁰ For the text of this prayer, which is prayed at the close of each session, see page 12.

Prophets of the Return (538–167 BC)

INTRODUCTION TO SESSION NINE

Who would have believed that after less than a century of dominance over the Middle East, the powerful Babylonian Empire would be swallowed up by the Persians? (See the Persian Empire map on page 10.) This new world power, centered in what is today Iran, will shape the destiny of the Jewish people from 539 BC until the arrival of Alexander the Great two hundred years later (333 BC).

With the miraculous decree of Cyrus (Ezra 1:2-4), which had been foretold in Isaiah 44:28–45:1, the Jews return to their burned and broken land to begin the process of rebuilding the Temple and Jerusalem's protective walls. Many of the people move back to Judea in three "waves" of return from exile.

First Return 538 BC	Ezra 1:1–2:2	Cyrus' decree to return and rebuild the Temple. A large group of exiles returns, led by Zerubbabel.
Second Return 458 BC	Ezra 7	The priest Ezra is sent by Artaxerxes; he reinstates proper worship and teaches the Law.
Third Return 444 BC	Nehemiah 1–2	Nehemiah returns and rebuilds the Jerusalem walls.

Take a moment to look at the yellow "Return" period on your *Bible Timeline* Chart where those three returns are pictured as three yellow arrows. Notice the key events on the Chart and the people involved. These events form the backdrop for the prophets we are about to study.

God sends prophets to speak to those who have returned to the Promised Land to bring them hope. These prophets are Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. Find their names on the Chart. In Session Nine, we will get to know them before we move on to take a look at "New Testament and Modern Prophets" in our final session.