

DANIEL

FAITH ENDURING THROUGH ADVERSITY

A 13-LESSON STUDY

REFORMED EXPOSITORY
BIBLE STUDY

JON NIELSON

and IAIN M. DUGUID

DANIEL

REFORMED EXPOSITORY BIBLE STUDIES

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P U B L I S H I N G

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SERIES INTRODUCTION

Studying the Bible will change your life. This is the consistent witness of Scripture and the experience of people all over the world, in every period of church history.

King David said, “The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes” (Ps. 19:7–8). So anyone who wants to be wiser and happier, and who wants to feel more alive, with a clearer perception of spiritual reality, should study the Scriptures.

Whether we study the Bible alone or with other Christians, it will change us from the inside out. The Reformed Expository Bible Studies provide tools for biblical transformation. Written as a companion to the Reformed Expository Commentary, this series of short books for personal or group study is designed to help people study the Bible for themselves, understand its message, and then apply its truths to daily life.

Each Bible study is introduced by a pastor-scholar who has written a full-length expository commentary on the same book of the Bible. The individual chapters start with the summary of a Bible passage, explaining **The Big Picture** of this portion of God’s Word. Then the questions in **Getting Started** introduce one or two of the passage’s main themes in ways that connect to life experience. These questions may be especially helpful for group leaders in generating lively conversation.

Understanding the Bible’s message starts with seeing what is actually there, which is where **Observing the Text** comes in. Then the Bible study provides a longer and more in-depth set of questions entitled **Understanding the Text**. These questions carefully guide students through the entire passage, verse by verse or section by section.

It is important not to read a Bible passage in isolation, but to see it in the wider context of Scripture. So each Bible study includes two **Bible Connections** questions that invite readers to investigate passages from other places in Scripture—passages that add important background, offer valuable contrasts or comparisons, and especially connect the main passage to the person and work of Jesus Christ.

The next section is one of the most distinctive features of the Reformed Expository Bible Studies. The authors believe that the Bible teaches important doctrines of the Christian faith, and that reading biblical literature is enhanced when we know something about its underlying theology. The questions in **Theology Connections** identify some of these doctrines by bringing the Bible passage into conversation with creeds and confessions from the Reformed tradition, as well as with learned theologians of the church.

Our aim in all of this is to help ordinary Christians apply biblical truth to daily life. **Applying the Text** uses open-ended questions to get people thinking about sins that need to be confessed, attitudes that need to change, and areas of new obedience that need to come alive by the power and influence of the Holy Spirit. Finally, each study ends with a **Prayer Prompt** that invites Bible students to respond to what they are learning with petitions for God's help and words of praise and gratitude.

You will notice boxed quotations throughout the Bible study. These quotations come from one of the volumes in the Reformed Expository Commentary. Although the Bible study can stand alone and includes everything you need for a life-changing encounter with a book of the Bible, it is also intended to serve as a companion to a full commentary on the same biblical book. Reading the full commentary is especially useful for teachers who want to help their students answer the questions in the Bible study at a deeper level, as well as for students who wish to further enrich their own biblical understanding.

The people who worked together to produce this series of Bible studies have prayed that they will engage you more intimately with Scripture, producing the kind of spiritual transformation that only the Bible can bring.

Philip Graham Ryken
Coeditor of the Reformed Expository Commentary series

INTRODUCING DANIEL

The book of Daniel records the life and visions of the man of the same name, a Judean born into a noble family during the latter part of the seventh century B.C. He was taken into exile in Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar in 605 B.C., while still a young man, and spent his whole life in exile, though he did live long enough to see the promised return of the exiles to Judah begin to take place in the days of Cyrus, almost seventy years later (Dan. 6:28). During his lifetime, many of his fellow countrymen joined him in exile in Babylon, especially after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. The book's **main purpose** is to encourage believers to live as strangers and exiles in a world that is not their home and never will be (cf. 1 Peter 2:11), while at the same time seeking the *shalom* (well-being) of the city, town, or village in which God has providentially placed them (cf. Jer. 29:7). The book has a particular resonance for believers who are being violently persecuted for their faith.

There is no explicit claim to **authorship** within the book. The opening narratives about Daniel and his friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, are in the third person, as is the introduction to the apocalyptic visions in Daniel 7:1. The visions themselves are in the first person, recounted by Daniel himself. It is customary in scholarly circles to assume a late date (and therefore **audience**) for the book, somewhere during the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175–164 B.C.), since the apocalyptic visions include precise predictions of numerous well-attested historical events between Daniel's own day and the mid-second century. This later date was also a time of great persecution for the Jewish community, when the writings of Daniel would undoubtedly have found a fresh relevance among God's persecuted people.

Because of the accuracy and specificity of these predictions, many

scholars assume that they must have been made after the events that they describe. But if God is truly sovereign over history, then it makes sense that he would demonstrate that reality by means of genuinely predictive prophecy, such as is found in Daniel 8–11 (see Isa. 44:6–8; 46:8–11). The Lord’s claim to be able to predict the future would remain empty if he never followed through and demonstrated the truth of his claim through fulfilled prophecy. The fact that the Lord is able to predict the future in such detail testifies to his sovereign control over all of history, in exactly the same way that his remarkable deliverances of Daniel and his friends do. This demonstration of the Lord’s existence and power would have been intensely relevant to a Jewish audience in the sixth century B.C. Living in exile in Babylon, they would have been continually bombarded by propaganda for Marduk and the other false gods of the Babylonians, especially after Jerusalem’s fall to the Babylonian army. Even though Daniel’s hearers would not themselves live to see the fulfillment of those prophecies, the very existence of them would have strengthened their faith in the reality and power of Israel’s God. How much more should they serve to encourage believers today, who can see their exact fulfillment!

Other reasons have also been advanced for assigning a late date to the book, such as the presence of Persian and Greek loan words in it. However, given the widespread trade connections of Babylon at its height, there is no reason why such words could not have been in currency in Daniel’s day (if indeed they are from these languages, and not separately derived from other sources). It is true that there remain some historical conundrums in the book to which we do not yet have definitive answers, such as the identity of Darius and his relationship to Cyrus. But our knowledge of this time period is far from complete, and other alleged discrepancies have been resolved. For example, until recently, it was claimed that Belshazzar could not have been a real person as described by Daniel: we have a complete list of Babylonian kings, and the king reigning when Babylon fell to the Persians was Nabonidus. However, more recent archaeological studies have uncovered references to “Bel-Shar-Utsur,” the son of Nabonidus, who was co-regent with him for part of his reign, governing Babylon during his lengthy absences from the capital. It is not clear how a writer composing a *de novo* account in the second century B.C. would have even known Belshazzar’s name. There is therefore no solid reason to believe that the

book was composed long after Daniel's time, or that it does not accurately record Daniel's own experiences and apocalyptic visions.

As for its **structure and themes**, the book of Daniel divides into two parts in terms of genre. The opening narrative, chapters 1–6, explores models of how Daniel's Jewish compatriots might live faithfully in exile, seeking the *shalom* of the city where God had placed them (see Jer. 29), while resisting the pressure to assimilate to Babylonian culture and religion. These stories would have provided immediate help to the exiles, as well as guidance for generations of believers since then, for the normal mode of existence of God's people in this world is as sojourners and exiles in an often hostile environment. The book of Daniel assures the Lord's people that he is with them, even in the most difficult and painful experiences of life (Dan. 3:24–25). The Lord is able to protect them against their pagan oppressors if he so chooses, but even if not, faithfulness to him is more precious than life itself (Dan. 3:17–18). The book also shows proud and boastful Nebuchadnezzar being humbled by God, before finally being restored to his former position, now with a new appreciation of God's existence and power (Dan. 4). God is the one who raises up and brings down kings and empires, no matter how boastful their claims about themselves may be. History records a continual succession of such empires, which come and go without leaving a lasting legacy. Meanwhile, God is building his own kingdom, which is a kingdom without end.

The latter portion of the book, chapters 7–12, is written in apocalyptic form. These dramatic visions have a message that dovetails with the themes of chapters 1–6. They provided encouragement and hope to the marginalized exiles, reminding them that it is the Ancient of Days who is the judge of the living and the dead, not the Babylonians (Dan. 7:9–10). A succession of world empires would become ever more frightening and menacing toward God's people, but the Lord would rule sovereignly over all the complex struggles of world history, and he would ultimately give the verdict on behalf of his saints (7:18). The times and seasons are in his hand, and the sufferings of his people are carefully measured out and limited by him. Apocalyptic literature uncovers for us the heavenly reality that stands behind the affairs of men and nations that we can see with our eyes—a heavenly reality to which we are mostly blind. It lifts the curtain and shows us the truth of the sovereign reign of our God in glorious color. It also reminds us that this present age

of conflict and suffering for God's people will soon be replaced by another age, an eschatological age of peace. It is worth remaining faithful to God in the meantime, therefore, no matter what the cost to us may be—even if it costs us our very lives—because the eternal future belongs to our God and to his faithful ones.

Part of the book of Daniel is written in the international diplomatic language of Aramaic, rather than Hebrew (Dan. 2:4–7:28), perhaps because these chapters deal with more universal concerns, rather than simply Israelite matters. That feature binds together the narrative and apocalyptic portions and highlights the chiasmic structure of chapters 2–7 (see below). At their heart, the two halves of the book have essentially the same message, which spoke to essentially the same audience of exiles, and speaks as well to all of us as their heirs: stand firm in the midst of the fiery furnace of life, for the Lord is with his people in their sufferings, and he will ultimately bring them through many trials to a joyful end.

OUTLINE

1. Narrative (1:1–6:28)
 - A. Prologue: Daniel and friends taken into exile and resisting assimilation (1:1–21)
 - B. Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a great statue (2:1–49)
 - C. Nebuchadnezzar builds a great statue (3:1–30)
 - D. Nebuchadnezzar brought low and restored (4:1–37)
 - E. Belshazzar's feast (5:1–31)
 - F. Daniel in the lion's den (6:1–28)
2. Apocalyptic (7:1–12:13)
 - A. First vision: four terrifying beasts and the Ancient of Days (7:1–28)
 - B. Second vision: the ram, the goat, and the little horn (8:1–27)
 - C. Daniel's prayer and its answer: the seventy weeks (9:1–27)
 - D. Third vision: wars and rumors of wars until the time of the end (10:1–12:13)

CHIASTIC ARRANGEMENT OF THE ARAMAIC SECTION

- A. Four earthly kingdoms and the kingdom of God (2:4–49)
 - B. God delivers his servants: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (3:1–30)
 - C. Nebuchadnezzar humbled and restored (4:1–37)
 - C. Belshazzar humbled and destroyed (5:1–31)
 - B. God delivers his servants: Daniel (6:1–28)
- A. Four earthly kingdoms and the kingdom of God (7:1–28)

Iain M. Duguid

Coeditor of the Reformed Expository Commentary series

Author of *Daniel* (REC)

LESSON 1

WHEN THE WORLD DOES ITS WORST

Daniel 1:1–21

THE BIG PICTURE

The book of Daniel begins at a very sad point in the history of Israel: the fall of Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and the exile of many of the people of Judah to Babylon. This exile comes as God’s judgment against his sinful people—a judgment that he has warned them about through the messages of his prophets many times. As part of Babylon’s victory, Nebuchadnezzar commissions a certain group of gifted and attractive young Israelite men to take part in a special program in Babylon. Daniel, along with three of his friends, is chosen to be part of this group—probably best understood as a kind of reprogramming enterprise to turn some of the best young Israelites into fully adapted Babylonians. In the passage you will study today, though, you will see Daniel and his friends clinging to their identity as people of the Lord, even in the midst of exile. We will read of God’s faithfulness to these brave and faith-filled young men as he grants them great favor and success. Because of God’s grace, even as Daniel and his friends reject the foods and practices of Babylon, they rise to the top of the ranks of those around them. God’s faithful plans for his people will continue—even during the years of exile.

Read Daniel 1:1–21.

OBSERVING THE TEXT

3. What do you notice about the narrator's mention of God's role in the defeat and exile of his people (1:2)? How might this be an important verse for setting the stage for the entire book? What theological truths are communicated here?

4. How does the narrator talk about the role of God throughout the rest of the narrative? In what ways is God active in this account?

5. While the narrator does not give details about the internal monologue or inner thoughts of Daniel and his friends, their actions certainly tell us much about who they are. What are some ways in which you would describe Daniel and the other young men, based on your initial reading of this passage?

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

6. Looking at Daniel 1:3–5, and particularly the specific commands of King Nebuchadnezzar, what seems to be his motivation in this special

program for some of the Israelite young men? What might he be seeking to accomplish over the course of three years?

7. What is significant about the changing of the names of Daniel, Haniah, Mishael, and Azariah (1:6–7)? What might the chief official in Babylon be seeking to signal to these young men?

8. Why might Daniel and his friends have refused to eat the royal food and wine that was supplied to them (1:8)? Daniel 10:3 indicates that Daniel did not permanently abstain from Babylonian food. What might these Israelite men have been communicating to the Babylonians—and perhaps to themselves as well—through their abstention?

9. Why is the result of the test (1:15–16) surprising, in human terms? How is this evidence of God’s hidden and faithful hand in caring for Daniel and his friends?

Whose Faithfulness?, pg. 14

The focus throughout this chapter is not simply the faithfulness of these four young men to their God, however. It is on God’s faithfulness to them. It was God who cause them to find mercy . . . in the eyes of their captors. . . . This outcome too was a mark of God’s faithfulness to these young men, honoring their commitment to him.

from Babylon. Read 2 Kings 20:16–18. What is the prophecy against Hezekiah that results from his actions? What can you conclude about his motivation for what he did, and why might God have reacted so strongly?

THEOLOGY CONNECTIONS

14. In describing Christ's purpose for the church, the authors of the Westminster Confession of Faith write: "Unto this catholic visible church Christ hath given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God, for the gathering and perfecting of the saints, in this life, to the end of the world: and doth, by his own presence and Spirit, according to his promise, make them effectual thereunto" (25.3). According to this affirmation, how might the church have a role in strengthening Christians who live in spiritual "exile" while on earth? In what ways can the church strengthen its sense of identity as God's people in the midst of a hostile culture?

15. For centuries, faithful Christians have sought to balance the commitment to remaining *undefiled* by the world with efforts to *engage* the world and its culture for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Extreme commitments to the former have sometimes resulted in separatist movements of various kinds, while some Christians have abandoned the uniqueness of the gospel in their efforts to connect with culture. Can

18. How must participation, service, and worship in the context of the local church serve to reinforce our ultimate identity, belonging, and citizenship? In what ways can the proclamation of the gospel in our churches remind us that we are exiles and that our foremost allegiance is to Jesus Christ?

PRAYER PROMPT

As you close this first lesson in Daniel with prayer, consider your role as an “elect exile” in this world through faith in Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:1). Like Daniel, you live in the midst of a fallen world, undergoing almost constant assaults on your faith. Ask God for strength to hold on to your identity in Christ, as you cling to his Word and link arms with his people. Thank him for a perfect and undefiled Savior who graciously saves defiled sinners like us, and pray that he would give you courage and strength to stand for him.