



Group Discussion Guide

For group meetings from August 23 afternoon through August 30 morning

From the introductory note in the English Standard Version:

Exiled to Babylon in 605 b.c., Daniel was one of several young men chosen to serve in Nebuchadnezzar's court. When Persia conquered Babylon in 539, Daniel was again given a position of power. He remained faithful to God in both of these hostile environments. From the interpretation of dreams, to the familiar stories of the fiery furnace, the lions' den, and the handwriting on the wall, to the prophetic visions, the recurrent theme is God's sovereignty over human affairs. In the historical sections (chs. 1–6) God supernaturally rescued Daniel and his friends. The rest of the book consists of visions of future judgment and deliverance by the Messiah. Some of Daniel's prophetic themes are echoed in the New Testament, especially in Revelation.

Daniel 1

Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah were four young men who were part of either the Jewish royal family or nobility, who were taken to Babylon when King Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem and took captive many of God's people. These four men were chosen to serve in the Babylonian king's court and be assimilated into Babylonian culture. They were taught the language and customs of their captors, they were given new names and were even given a new diet to follow. However, Daniel led an effort not to eat of the king's food and drink the king's wine, and after 10 days of eating vegetables and drinking water, all four of them appeared healthier than those who ate the king's food. While it is possible that Daniel did this so as not to violate the dietary restrictions in the Levitical law, it also is possible that he declined the king's food to remain free of the king's influence and therefore keep serving God as his highest priority.

Key verse: But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself. (Daniel 1:8)

Daniel 2

King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that disturbed him greatly, and he commanded his wise men to tell him what his dream was and give him the interpretation. They told the king that what he was asking was impossible; that they could not know what he dreamt if he would tell them. At that point, the king ordered all the wise men to be executed. Once Daniel found out, he told the king to schedule a time when Daniel could come and give him the dream and its interpretation. He then told his three Jewish brothers to pray and ask God to give him the dream and its meaning so they would not be killed. God answered this prayer and gave Daniel a vision in the night that revealed the content and meaning of the dream. Their lives were

spared, King Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged the power of God, and Daniel's three companions were promoted within the kingdom.

Key verses: *Daniel answered the king and said, "No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. Your dream and the visions of your head as you lay in bed are these: (Daniel 2:27–28)*

Daniel 3

As a demonstration of his power (actually of his pride), King Nebuchadnezzar had an image of gold fashioned and then ordered all the people to bow down and worship this statue when they heard music played. Anyone who did not would be thrown into a fiery furnace. Some Babylonian officials went to the king and told him that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego did not serve the gods of the empire and would not worship the golden image the king had made. The king flew into a rage, had the furnace heated much hotter than the normal level, and had the three Jewish men thrown into the furnace. Although the furnace was so hot that some of the soldiers who threw them in died immediately, the three men were not harmed by the fire. The furnace must have been made in such a way that the king could see what was happening inside, because he saw the three men walking around unharmed, along with a fourth man who had the appearance "like a son of the gods." This demonstration of God's power forced the king to again acknowledge His power and respect the faith of the three men who refused to worship anyone else.

Key verses: *If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up." (Daniel 3:17–18)*

Daniel 6

King Nebuchadnezzar eventually died and the throne was passed to King Belshazzar who was assassinated. This caused the kingdom to fall into the hands of Darius, who was of the Medes. Daniel was promoted to a high-ranking position in the kingdom and King Darius had plans to make him second in command "because an excellent spirit was in him." The officials who would be under Daniel conspired against him and used the king's pride to convince him to sign a law that no one in the kingdom could worship anyone other than the king. Daniel knew about the new law, but continued to spend time in prayer to God three times a day. This was simply his practice; the law of God did not specifically instruct His people to pray in this way. The king was forced to throw Daniel into a den filled with lions, though he did not want to execute him. The morning after Daniel was thrown into the den, the king came to see if Daniel had somehow survived. He called out to Daniel who answered and confirmed that God had sent an angel to shut the mouths of the lions and spare his life. As a result, the king executed the officials who had conspired against Daniel, along with their families. He also made a decree that everyone in the kingdom must recognize and fear God, who had delivered Daniel.

Key verse: *When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three*

times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously. (Daniel 6:10)

Daniel 9

Daniel realized the time was nearing for the restoration of the temple in Jerusalem, and he was led to pray in intercession for himself and his Jewish brothers and sisters. This was a prayer of confession. He acknowledged the sin of his people that had led them to be exiled to Babylon. He asked God to forgive their sin and allow for the restoration of the temple according to His mercy and so that His name would be glorified once again through the Jewish nation. Daniel then received a visit from the angel Gabriel who brought to Daniel a timeline of future events, based on 70 weeks. This is commonly understood to mean “70 periods of 7” not necessarily 70 weeks. It has been interpreted to mean 70 periods that each are made up of 7 years.

For a more detailed explanation of the seventy weeks and how they connect to what Jesus taught in Matthew 24, watch this week’s devotion by following this link:

<https://vimeo.com/450051898>

Key verse: O my God, incline your ear and hear. Open your eyes and see our desolations, and the city that is called by your name. For we do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness, but because of your great mercy. (Daniel 9:18)

Discussion Questions

1. We don't typically consider eating a certain type of food as "defiling ourselves" (unless we know our stomach won't handle it well). Can you think of something that you would consider to "defile" you? Can you imagine a situation wherein that would be forced on you unless you chose to say something? Describe this to the group.
2. How are you inspired by Daniel's commitment to staying pure in the way he believed God had commanded him? What would it take for you to display this same type of resolve?
3. Daniel seemed to be in an impossible situation as the king demanded that someone tell him the contents and meaning of his dream. What impossible situation are you facing now ... something that requires God's help? Tell the group and allow them to pray for you.
4. Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah directly violated the king's order that they must bow down and worship the image he had created. Their punishment was execution by being burned in a furnace. How does this give you perspective regarding persecution? Do you think you could respond as they did in Daniel 3:17-18? Why or why not?
5. New king, same dilemma ... Daniel is told he must worship only King Darius, but instead he chooses to continue to worship God several times a day even though he faces execution in a den of lions. Why do you think it was important for Daniel to spend time with God like this? How does his practice of prayer inspire and/or challenge you?
6. Daniel spent time praying for Israel, and for the restoration of Jerusalem. God's name was tied to His people, and Daniel petitioned God to once again glorify Himself through the rebuilding of the city and the temple. Can we pray for our nation in this same way, though God's name is not tied as directly to America as it is to Israel? Or should we instead focus our prayer on the church – the group of people who do in fact claim to follow God?