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To the Director

This student folder contains nine study leaflets and the enrichment magazine. Remove the center staple and distribute the leaflets as indicated in the leaders guide. This magazine should be distributed at the first session for use throughout the course.

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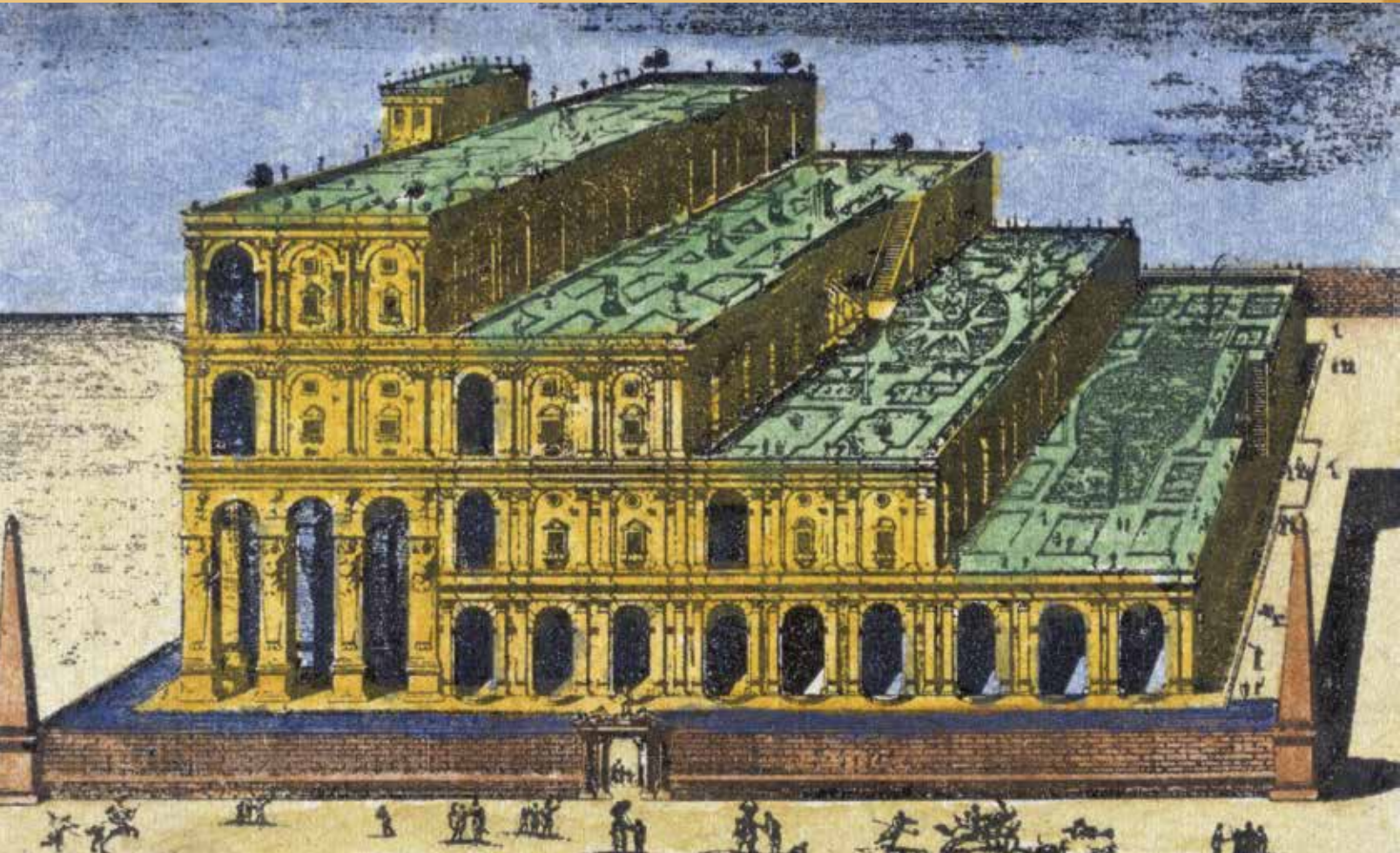
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Kings of Babylon/ King of Persia

Daniel carries the first accounts of an Israelite serving a foreign king since Joseph served Pharaoh in Egypt centuries earlier. Daniel entered the service of Babylonian kings as a boy, but lived long enough to see Babylon fall to the Persians.

Who were these kings Daniel served, who ruled over great empires stretching from modern-day Egypt to modern-day Iran? Let's explore a little about each one, especially concentrating on the kings mentioned in the Book of Daniel.



Nebuchadnezzar, Founder of an Empire

Nebuchadnezzar was crown prince to his father Nabopolassar, who had assumed the throne in 626 BC. In the spring of 605 BC, Nebuchadnezzar set out west from Babylon on a campaign of conquest. During the summer, Nabopolassar died. In the middle of his campaign, Nebuchadnezzar rushed home to claim the throne. He returned to his army and completed a successful campaign that included subjugating Jerusalem and taking captives (including Daniel) whom he led back to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar became the founder of the Babylonian Empire, which stretched from the Persian Gulf to Egypt and lasted until Babylon was conquered by the Persians in 539 BC.

In many ways, Nebuchadnezzar proved to be a successful king, but he met with some setbacks. He attempted to invade Egypt in 601 BC, but could not conquer it. This encouraged kings in Syria and Palestine to rebel, including King Zedekiah in Jerusalem (2 Kings 24:18–25:30; 2 Chronicles 36:11–21). In 587 BC, Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem. He destroyed the temple and deported the remainder of Judah's citizens to Babylon. From 585 to 572 BC, Nebuchadnezzar besieged the Phoenician coastal city of Tyre. Although he never conquered Tyre, he did pacify it, enabling him to dominate all of Phoenicia (modern-day Lebanon).

A builder, Nebuchadnezzar took pride in his various projects. (See Daniel 4:30.) He constructed many new temples dedicated to the Babylonian gods. (This may provide some of the background to his erection of the idol in Daniel 3.) He completed the palace begun by Nabopolassar and constructed impressive triple walls to protect Babylon. He also is credited with creating the famous Hanging Gardens of Babylon for his Median wife who missed the lush foliage of her native land.

At Nebuchadnezzar's death in 562 BC, Babylon had reached the pinnacle of its power. It is no wonder that Daniel's first four chapters testify to the power and pride of this greatest of Babylonian kings.

Successors to Nebuchadnezzar

A period of instability followed Nebuchadnezzar's death. Daniel mentions none of his successors except the final one: Belshazzar, the son and co-regent of Nabonidus. Due to its instability, Babylon was weakened and ultimately became ripe for conquest by Cyrus of Persia.



Amel-Marduk (Evil-merodach) succeeded his father, Nebuchadnezzar, in 562 and reigned for two years. Although he is not mentioned in Daniel, he freed King Jehoiachin of Judah from prison (2 Kings 25:27). In 560, he was assassinated by his brother-in-law Nergal-shar-usar (Neriglissar), who ruled until 556. Upon his death, his young son Labashi-Marduk reigned for nine months until he was assassinated.

Nabonidus and His Son Belshazzar

The Babylonian throne was then seized by Nabonidus (Nadunaid). He may have married the widow of Nergal-shar-usar to legitimize his claim to the throne. Nabonidus reigned until Babylon fell to Cyrus in 539 BC. He proved to be singularly unpopular in Babylon, so he installed his son Belshazzar as co-regent and voluntarily exiled himself to the Arabian desert for some ten years. When the Persian army approached, Nabonidus went out to meet Cyrus in battle at Sippar two days before Babylon fell. His troops were routed by the Persians. Nabonidus fled. He later returned to Babylon (after its fall to the Persians) and surrendered himself. Cyrus allowed him to live the remainder of his life in Carmania.

Belshazzar, Nabonidus's son, is most famous for his role in the Book of Daniel. (Daniel's visions in Daniel 7 and 8 were received during Belshazzar's reign.) Belshazzar was made regent over Babylon during his father's reign, but he never ruled independently. This detail plays into the story of the handwriting on the wall in Daniel 5. In his urgency to have the handwriting read, Belshazzar offered to make the person who could read and interpret it "third ruler in the kingdom" (Daniel 5:7, 16, 29). Since Nabonidus was first, and Belshazzar second, "third ruler" was the highest office available in Babylon.

On October 12, 539 BC, the day after Belshazzar's banquet when Daniel read the handwriting on the wall, Babylon fell to the Persians. The great Babylonian Empire established by Nebuchadnezzar came to its end after only sixty-six years.

Cyrus, King of Persia

The conqueror of Babylon was Cyrus the Great, king of Persia. He figures prominently in Daniel and is mentioned by name in Daniel 1:21; 6:28; and 10:1. Cyrus was born about 590 BC, the son of Cambyses I of Persia and Mandane, daughter of the Median king Astyages. He reigned over Persia from 559



until 530. When Cyrus ascended the throne, Persia was a vassal state of the Medes. Early in his reign, Cyrus defeated the forces of his grandfather Astyages and reversed this relationship, making Media subordinate to Persia. He set his sights on the kingdom of Lydia (in what is now Turkey) and its famously rich king, Croesus. After conquering Lydia, he consolidated his power over the eastern parts of his empire and then marched on Babylon, conquering it in 539 and fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy (Isaiah 45:1; see also Jeremiah 51). Elsewhere in the Bible, Cyrus is best remembered as the king who allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem from the Babylonian captivity. He authorized the rebuilding of the temple destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, fulfilling another prophecy of Isaiah (Isaiah 44:28; 2 Chronicles 36:22–23; Ezra 1:1–3). Cyrus died when he was nearly seventy years old. He was buried in a tomb that still stands at Pasargadae in Iran. According to reports, the tomb bore an inscription that read along these lines: "Mortal! I am Cyrus, son of Cambyses, who founded the Persian Empire, and was lord of Asia. Begrudge me not, then, my monument."

Daniel, Servant of Kings

Whether or not they acknowledged the true God, these kings served Him, bearing the sword and establishing order in the world (Romans 13:4). Nebuchadnezzar even executed God's judgment on Judah for its unfaithfulness (2 Chronicles 36:13–17). Daniel served several of these kings. He lived to a ripe old age. His final prophecy took place in Cyrus's third year as ruler of Babylon, 536 BC.

Daniel lived at a time of great geopolitical upheaval. Through it all, God used the kings of Babylon and Persia to accomplish His goal of moving history forward to the ultimate goal of the birth of Jesus, the Messiah.

Political uncertainty besets our times too. God wants you to face the present and the future with courage and resolution, with faith. How can this be done?

Remember that His grip on our world remains just as firm now as it was then. He is moving our history toward its end, when Christ comes again as Judge of all and Savior of His Church. He is your Savior and Lord, and will remain so for all eternity.

Why Won't Daniel Eat the King's Food?

Standing up for one's faith and one's principles can be a lonely experience. Daniel and his friends Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (in Babylonian, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) could at least stand together. What's more, they had confidence that when they relied on God's promise and were determined to honor Him and His Law, *He* was with them. Their commitment to God was not produced by their own strong wills. The Holy Spirit gave them strength through the promises in God's Word.

But what principle were they defending? Why could they not eat the king's food? How did they accomplish a change in royal policy? Through the application of godly wisdom, Daniel and his friends successfully maintained loyalty to God.



Daniel's Request

Daniel demonstrated his leadership qualities as he alone among his companions approached the chief eunuch to request permission to avoid the king's food and the defilement that would come with eating it. Bible scholars have sought reasons Daniel did not want to eat the king's food, requesting only vegetables and water. Among possible explanations are these:

a. These young men did not want to give the impression that they were bound to total loyalty to the king. This explanation may be partly true, if not pushed to the extreme. It seems Daniel had no problem with giving political loyalty to Nebuchadnezzar as long as he did not have to defile himself by worshiping pagan gods. This explanation probably played a minor part in Daniel's motivation, if any at all.

b. Daniel and his companions did not want to break the dietary laws found in the Pentateuch. What foods were prohibited to Israelites in the Law of Moses? Several categories of animals were deemed unclean and could not be part of a faithful Israelite's diet:

- 1) Four-legged animals that do not chew their cud and do not have a split hoof (unless an animal both parted the hoof and chewed the cud, it was unclean and could not be eaten, Leviticus 11:1–8; Deuteronomy 14:3–8)
- 2) Four-legged animals that walk on paws (Leviticus 11:27)
- 3) Sea and fresh-water animals that lack both scales and fins (Leviticus 11:9–12; Deuteronomy 14:9–10), such as shrimp and crab
- 4) Certain birds, especially those that are scavengers or raptors (Leviticus 11:13–19; Deuteronomy 14:11–18)
- 5) Insects that walk on the ground instead of hopping (Leviticus 11:20–25; Deuteronomy 14:19–20)

6) Creatures that “swarm on the ground,” including mice, rats, and many four-legged reptiles (Leviticus 11:29–30)

7) Animals that have many legs (e.g., centipedes) or no legs (e.g., snakes) (Leviticus 11:42)

This extensive list of unclean animals would explain Daniel's request to eat only plant matter (the Hebrew word does not mean only vegetables, but also indicates food that comes from plants). Since there are no unclean edible plants, this device would free Daniel from a long explanation of which types of meat he could and could not eat. However, it cannot provide a complete explanation, since wine was permissible under the Law of Moses, and Daniel 10:3 indicates that Daniel had no scruples against drinking wine (or eating meat).

c. Daniel was avoiding foods offered to idols. Eating these foods could be seen as his acceptance and endorsement of pagan worship. In the New Testament, St. Paul clarifies when a Christian may or may not eat food offered to idols (1 Corinthians 8–10). In general, he said: if someone sees one of God's people eating food offered to idols and is likely to assume that this is an endorsement of pagan worship, then a believer cannot eat such food. This could explain the reluctance to drink the king's wine, but it fails to explain the willingness to eat vegetable foods, since grains were often offered to the gods.

Perhaps a combination of the last two reasons best explains Daniel's request. He wanted absolutely to avoid breaking the dietary laws of the Pentateuch and also to minimize the eating of food offered to idols.

Honoring God While Obeying the Fourth Commandment

Although the chief eunuch does not grant Daniel his request, we are told that God gave Daniel favor in his eyes. The eunuch did not interpret Daniel's request as an act of rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar, but he did not grant this request either.

Daniel approached a lesser official with a new plan. This time he did not ask for a permanent change of diet, but only for a test period. That Daniel would ask for such a short test demonstrates his confidence that God would reward his faithfulness. At the same time, by suggesting that the steward alone could be the final judge of the experiment with a vegetarian diet, Daniel made clear that he was defying neither the steward's authority nor the king's order.

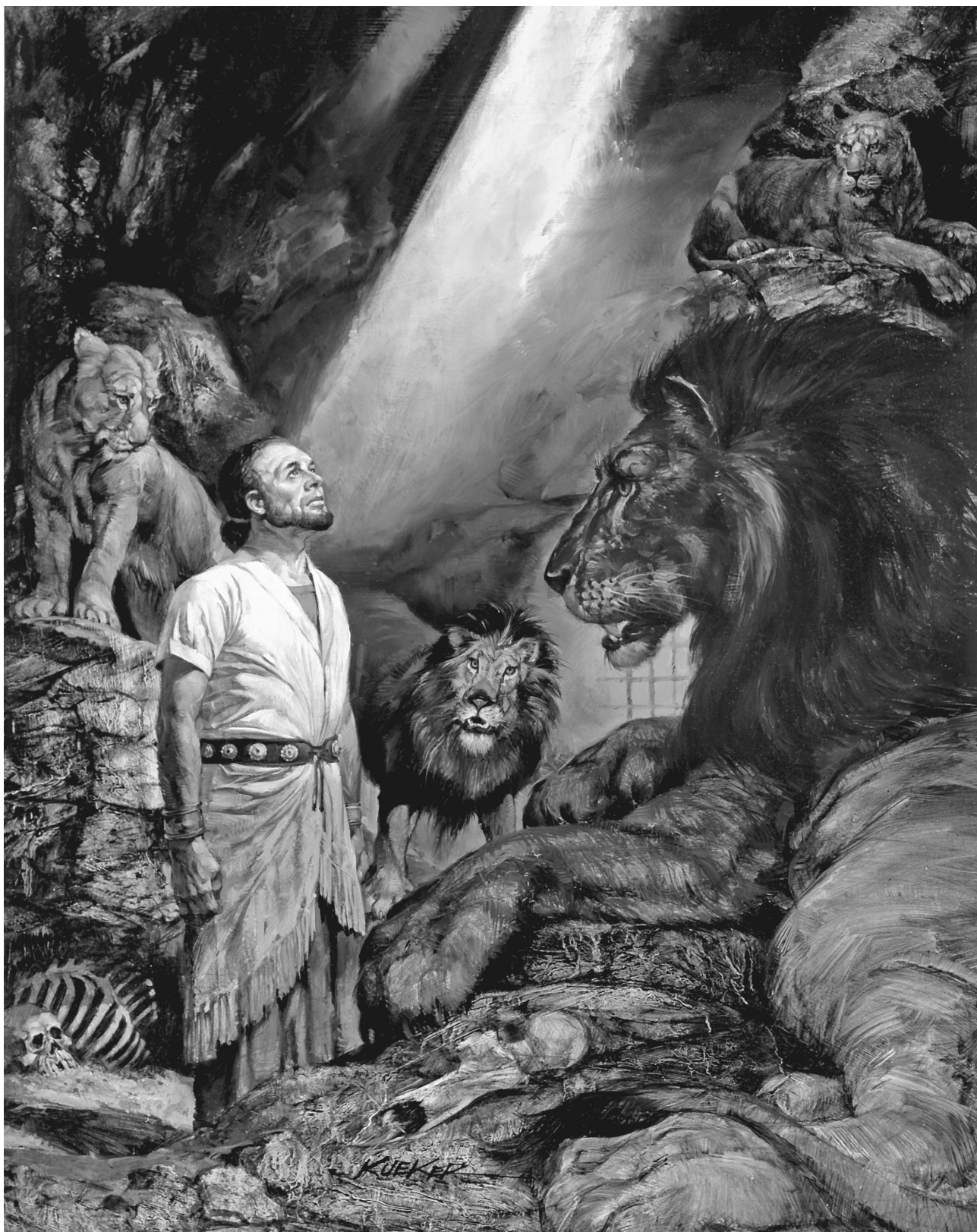
Daniel also was wise enough to recognize that authority is often divided among several individuals. Instead of defying authority and thereby breaking the Fourth Commandment, he sought out a different official who had more limited power and made a more limited request. In this way, Daniel avoided breaking the Fourth Commandment and was able to take a step toward his goal of not breaking the First Commandment or the dietary laws.

Daniel's Wisdom—A Gift from God

Daniel and his companions were careful to honor God's Law. They kept the first and greatest commandment—to honor God with all their heart, soul, and mind (Deuteronomy 6:5; Matthew 22:37–38). They also kept the second greatest commandment—to love their neighbor as themselves (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:39). By not defying the authority of Nebuchadnezzar and his administrators, they showed love toward their overlords and toward their fellow Judeans in captivity, for whom they set a good example. Today, you face God's commandments to love your neighbor while loving Him above all. Taken together, these orders can prove as tricky as they are tall.

God rescued Daniel and his friends from the moral dilemma in which they found themselves. He gave them favor in the eyes of the authorities. He granted them wisdom that enabled them to find a way to honor Him and the king simultaneously. God's favor toward them was a foretaste of God's favor in rescuing sinners from the seemingly inescapable forces of sin and death in the cross and resurrection of Christ.

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Intro Kit

God Prepares His Helpers

*Distribute before session 1 for use in session 1.
Use enrichment magazine pp. 2 and 18.*

Daniel 1:1–21

Resources for Worship

Use these resources for your daily study at home and at the week's assembly.

Hymn

Guide me, O Thou great Redeemer,
Pilgrim through this barren land.
I am weak, but Thou art mighty;
Hold me with Thy pow'rful hand.
Bread of heaven, bread of heaven,
Feed me till I want no more;
Feed me till I want no more.

When I tread the verge of Jordan,
Bid my anxious fears subside;
Death of death and hell's destruction,
Land me safe on Canaan's side.
Songs of praises, songs of praises
I will ever give to Thee;
I will ever give to Thee.

William Williams, 1717–91, abr.; tr. Peter Williams, 1722–96, st. 1, alt.; tr. William Williams, 1717–91, sts. 2–3
(LSB 918; EVaS disk 5, track 21)

Prayer

Mighty and supreme God, we praise You for being our Creator and Lord. For the sake of Your Son, forgive our pride when we try to be the captains of our own souls and masters of our own destinies. Guide, by Your Spirit, our study of Daniel that we may learn to trust Your direction for our lives and our world, through Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

Digging Deep

My Personal Study for Week 1

Day 1 • Read Daniel 1:1–2

1. Read Daniel 1:1–2. Why did God allow Nebuchadnezzar to take His people captive? Note the reasons in these verses (Manasseh, Jehoiakim, and Zedekiah were three of Judah's last four kings):

a. 2 Kings 21:1–6

b. 2 Kings 23:36–24:4

c. 2 Chronicles 36:11–21

2. Daniel 1:2 says, "And the Lord gave Jehoiakim . . . into his hand." How do these verses show this reality: Daniel 1:9, 17; and 2 Kings 24:2–3?

3. The word *Lord* in verse 2 is not in all capital letters. Such use of capital letters would refer to God's name *I AM (YHWH, Exodus 3:14–15)*. In 1:2, *Lord* (lowercase letters) refers to the sovereign God, the master and ruler of the universe. What does it mean to you to know that your caring Father is also the sovereign Lord?

6. How often do we look down on young people, or perhaps fail to think of them? How might we better deal with teens in our homes, churches, and community?

7. a. Put yourself in the place of Daniel and his friends. What thoughts and emotions might have run through their minds?

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Day 2 • Read Daniel 1:3–4

4. Daniel and his friends were carried to Babylon in the first deportation of 605 BC. Other deportations were in 597 BC (which included the prophet Ezekiel) and 586 BC (when Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed). Nebuchadnezzar brought into his court the brightest young men of captive nations. List the qualifications of the young men accepted into his training program.

b. How can you remain faithful when circumstances seem out of control?

5. Daniel and his friends, probably all teenagers, faced trials in Babylon. What do these passages indicate about God's attitude toward young people?

a. Jeremiah 1:4–7

b. Luke 1:26–33

c. 1 Timothy 4:12

.....
Day 3 • Read Daniel 1:5–7

8. Names meant more in the ancient world than they do today. Each of the young men's Hebrew names includes a reference to God. Some include the letters *-el*, one of the names for God. Others include the letters *-iah*, an abbreviation for *Jehovah*. The meanings of their Hebrew names are

Daniel—God is my judge

Hananiah—Jehovah is gracious

Mishael—Who is what God is

Azariah—Jehovah helps me

Their new names included names of Babylonian gods. Why did the Babylonians change their names?

9. Who wrote the Book of Daniel? What does Jesus imply in referring to a term from Daniel, “the abomination of desolation” (Matthew 24:15)?

b. In such challenges, why is it helpful to remember not Daniel’s example but Daniel’s God?

10. Ezekiel lists Daniel with Noah and Job (Ezekiel 14:12–14). Consider the lives of Noah (Genesis 6:1–9:17) and Job (Job 1:1–22). What does Ezekiel’s association of these three say about Daniel?

13. What made Daniel’s request (Daniel 1:8) courageous? See Daniel 2:5; 3:6.

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Day 4 • Read Daniel 1:8–16

11. The royal food and wine from the king’s table (v. 5) would “defile” (v. 8) the Jewish trainees. The Jews could eat only “clean” meat. What were they forbidden to eat and why? See Leviticus 11:1–10, 13–19, 29–30, and 44–47.

14. Daniel did not give up when rejected. Next he talked to a steward and suggested a test. *Vegetable* here means “things sown,” and could have included grain. Bread could have been in this diet. What does Daniel’s persistence say about his relationship with God?

12. Jews could eat the “clean” animals only if these were butchered correctly, with the blood drained from the meat. They could eat no blood because the life was in the blood, as God had said. Babylonians did not set a kosher table. Also, meals at the king’s table were first dedicated to the gods. A portion of the wine was poured out to the gods. Meals thus celebrated Babylonian false gods. The trainees could have gotten out of their dilemma by saying, “We are captives. We must obey. God will excuse us.” But they didn’t.

15. Daniel’s unwillingness to disobey God’s clear Word was based on his trust in the Lord. He may have known God’s promises through Isaiah. What do these promises mean to you as you struggle with pressures to conform to the world’s demands?

a. Name situations where we are tempted to compromise because we believe the situation demands it.

a. Isaiah 41:13

b. Isaiah 52:11–12

16. In what way is the source and preservation of your faith the same as Daniel's? See Romans 10:17; Ephesians 2:8-9; and Philippians 1:4.

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Day 5 • Read Daniel 1:17-21

17. The king found that there were none like the four trainees (v. 19), and that they were "ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters" (v. 20). Think about the special gifts God has given you. Are you ever tempted to minimize them because they may not be "ten times better" than those of others? Explain.

18. What attitude would God want you to develop regarding those gifts?

19. Daniel served in a position of influence (see 2:48-49). He could exert influence on behalf of his people. In what ways do we have a responsibility toward Christians and the Christian Church in using our influence?

20. Daniel 1 shows how God cared for His exiled people, placing leaders in positions to help them. How does God's power working in the lives of Daniel and his friends comfort you?

God Reveals the Future

*Distribute before session 2 for use in session 2.
Use enrichment magazine p. 5.*

Daniel 2:1–49

Resources for Worship

Use these resources for your daily study at home and at the week's assembly.

Hymn

Holy God, we praise Thy name;
Lord of all, we bow before Thee.
All on earth Thy scepter claim,
All in heav'n above adore Thee.
Infinite Thy vast domain,
Everlasting is Thy reign.

Thou art King of Glory, Christ;
Son of God, yet born of Mary.
For us sinners sacrificed,
As to death a Tributary,
First to break the bars of death,
Thou hast opened heav'n to faith.

Holy Father, holy Son,
Holy Spirit, three we name Thee;
Though in essence only one,
Undivided God we claim Thee
And, adoring, bend the knee
While we own the mystery.

Latin, c. 4th cent.; German version, *Katholisches Gesangbuch*, Vienna, 1774; tr. Clarence A. Walworth, 1820–1900, alt. (LSB 940; EVaS disk 5, track 11)

Prayer

O Lord, the whole world is in Your hands. So are our future and our eternal destiny. We praise You for revealing Your Son, Jesus Christ, as our way to eternal peace. By Your Spirit, give us understanding for the study of this section in Daniel. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Digging Deep

My Personal Study for Week 2

Day 1 • Read Daniel 2:1–6

1. King Nebuchadnezzar evidently had "dreams" (v. 1) regularly. One such dream troubled him so much he couldn't sleep. He thought one of the gods of Babylon was trying to tell him something. To what people did the true God reveal special information through dreams?

a. Genesis 28:10–22

b. Genesis 37:5–10

c. Genesis 41:1–40

d. Matthew 1:19–21

2. What was the threat of Nebuchadnezzar to his advisers (v. 5)? (Note: from verse 2:4b to the end of chapter 7, the Book of Daniel is in Aramaic, not Hebrew.)

3. How do verses 12–13 indicate that Nebuchadnezzar’s warning was no empty threat?

4. Daniel and his friends met the threat and remained faithful to the Lord. How can Daniel’s ability to remain faithful comfort you, no matter what person or problem you face?

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Day 2 • Read Daniel 2:7–16

5. Nebuchadnezzar demands that his astrologers tell him both his dream and its meaning. They cannot. What is their excuse (v. 11)?

6. Contrast the gods of Babylon (v. 11) with our God. How is the Lord different? See Matthew 1:23 and Psalm 46:1.

7. Verse 14 describes Daniel’s response to Arioch, the commander of the king’s guard, who was searching for the wise men to execute them. A person with prudence knows how to avoid giving offense. When is it especially important for us to speak with tact and wisdom? See Colossians 4:5–6.

8. Daniel took a bold step, going directly to the king (v. 16). Why did Daniel have such confidence? See Daniel 1:17.

.....
Day 3 • Read Daniel 2:17–25

9. Daniel explained the situation to his three fellow trainees and asked them to join him in prayer, “to seek mercy” (v. 18), so God would reveal the mystery. Why might Daniel have done that? See Matthew 18:19.

10. God didn’t tell Daniel about the dream or about its interpretation immediately. Instead, He revealed it to Daniel in a vision at night. What clues does this give us about our own prayers of petition? See Psalm 27:13–14.

11. *God* revealed the mystery. A huge difference between Christianity and all world religions, including that of the Babylonians, is that Christianity is “revealed.” These religions have been called “natural” religions. What does this word suggest? What are some equivalent terms?

12. Daniel, his life still in jeopardy, received the answer from the Lord that caused the king to spare him. What was his immediate response (vv. 19–23)?

13. After praising God for who He is and what He has done, Daniel got personal with his thanks and praise, using the words *I* and *You* (v. 23). Why can we feel comfortable in using this kind of personal language in talking to the sovereign God? See Romans 8:15.

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Day 4 • Read Daniel 2:26–35

14. Even before Daniel told the king what the dream was, he gave credit to God. With what words did Daniel describe Him—or really, introduce the Lord to Nebuchadnezzar—in verse 28?

15. Why did God send Nebuchadnezzar the dream and Daniel’s interpretation (vv. 28–30)?

16. Without going into interpretation, tell in your own words the story of the rock, the statue, and the mountain in verses 34–35, 45.

17. **Challenge Question.** Read 1 Peter 2:4–6. What meaning can you derive from the story you just told in light of these words?

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Day 5 • Read Daniel 2:26–49

18. Read Daniel 2:48 and think of Matthew 2:1–11. Those who came over a great distance to worship baby Jesus were Magi or “wise men.” What does this say about the long-term impact that the Lord made through Daniel’s life and witness in Babylon?

19. Daniel does not identify the second, third, and fourth kingdoms. (They will be explained more fully in chapters 7 and 8.) They are usually identified as Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. Compare verses 37 and 44 with Romans 13:1.

a. From where does all earthly power come?

b. How could that truth comfort Christians undergoing official persecution because they belong to Jesus?

20. When will all earthly kingdoms come to an end?
See 2 Peter 3:10–13 and Revelation 11:15.

21. The kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ will “never be destroyed” (Daniel 2:44). How does this promise impact your life on a day-to-day basis?