

THRIVING in BABYLON

A STUDY OF DANIEL

SERMON TITLE: HOPE
SCRIPTURE: Daniel 10-12

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Sometimes life feels like it's all about survival. Sometimes it feels like all we can do is keep our head above water. This is true for everyone, but especially for followers of Jesus. As Christians, we are exiles, and that means that survival is doubly difficult. But God has not called us to just survive; he has called us to thrive. And the place that God called us to thrive is in Babylon - the place of our exile. With this in view, the book of Daniel is a perfect picture for us of what it looks like to be faithful in a foreign land that isn't our home. Daniel doesn't merely survive in Babylon. Rather, with God's help, he thrives there. What would it look like for us to do the same here in Greenville?

For about eight months now we've been trying to re-orient ourselves to the new reality we are living in today—the fact that as Christ-followers, we are now viewed by the dominant culture as irrelevant at best and dangerous at worst. One of the reasons we've chosen these studies in 1 and 2 Peter, and now in the book of Daniel is because it's becoming more and more clear that we are in the minority here in our country. We are living with the creeping sense that the best days of the church in this culture may be behind us and that the trajectory is not an optimistic one. And the more apparent all this becomes, if you're like me, it makes you wonder: *Why isn't God doing something about it? Why is God allowing evil and violence and chaos and just plain foolishness to be the "order," or rather, the disorder of the day? Why doesn't he step in and turn things around? Why would he want us to live like exiles in our own land?* Our questions are not unlike the questions Daniel wrestled with, especially as he began to see that the trajectory of the future of the Jewish people was not an optimistic one. And that becomes painfully clear in chapters 10-12. The fact is, there are no easy answers to most of our "why" questions. The question we really need to be asking is this: How do we remain faithful to God when you can't make sense of what he's doing in our world, our country, and in our lives? And chapters 10-12 help us answer that question. [Let's begin by watching an overview of the book of Daniel from the Bible Project.](#)

Last week, we saw in chapter 9 that Daniel discovered from the book of Jeremiah that the exile to Babylon would last 70 years and he does the math and he realizes the 70 years is almost over. So he prays to God, confessing his sins and the sins of his people, and he cries out to God to keep his promise. In answer to his prayer, the angel Gabriel comes and basically says to him, "Yes Daniel, the Israelites exiled in Babylon will return to their homeland after 70 years, but 70 years is not long enough to atone for their sins and to usher in the new age where God's eternal righteousness reigns. It's not enough to accomplish what you are hoping for. NO, God says it will be 70 "weeks," that is, 70 "sevens," which is 490 years. 490 years before God's final salvation comes to his people. Which we know is even longer than that, but, Daniel was thinking 70 years and Gabriel comes and says, "No, it will take seven times longer than that. *Bummer!* This is not good news. In fact, what Daniel learns here is that there will be centuries of *constant wars and rumors of wars until the time of the end.* (9:26). *Meaning*, God has decreed that the *beastly* kingdoms of men will make life hard, and at times, unbearable for the people of God. *In other words*, things aren't going to get better, *they will get worse*, until the time of God's final salvation. All that said, the point is, the revelation Daniel receives is not good news. It doesn't make sense to him and that's what we are about to see here in chapters 10-12.

Read 10:1-14 —some people think that this heavenly being was a pre-incarnate visitation of Jesus because the description here sounds an awful lot like the description of Jesus in the first chapter of the book of Revelation. *And that may be.* The problem I have with that view is that I have a hard time seeing Jesus needing help from the archangel Michael to battle demonic forces in order to get a message through to Daniel. So, I take it that this is a description of what many, not all, but many, heavenly beings might look like, *which would include Jesus in his heavenly form.* But suffice it to say, whoever this is we need to pay careful attention to what he tells us about what will happen *in the latter days*—for the *days yet to come.* The unfolding of the vision begins in 11:2.

Read 11:1-14, 31-32 — Basically, the vision in chapter 11 has to do with the outworking of Nebuchadnezzar's dream (chapter 2) and Daniel's earlier visions (chapters 7-8). There are 135 prophecies listed here that were fulfilled during the time just before Malachi and running up to Matthew! But all these visions—2,7,8-9,10-12—are all about the same thing. They're about how human beastly kingdoms *come and go, rise and fall*, one after another, and they're all basically the same. They will exalt their own national identity and authority and shake their fist in the face of God. They will redefine good and evil and they will succeed by violence and the death of the innocent. So in this final vision, Daniel gets an overview of human history focusing first, on the rise and fall of Persia, then Greece. And in revealing

the history of the Greek empire, it zeroes in on the rise and fall of a Syrian king named Antiochus Epiphanes (160s BC) who is also the little horn of chapter 8. But, what we are actually being told here and in all of Daniel's visions is that Antiochus Epiphanes sets the pattern for all the future beastly kingdoms that will follow. That is, there will be many "little horns" throughout history who exalt themselves and their kingdoms to the place of God. Those kingdoms will make life very hard for God's people, and this cycle of beastly kingdoms will continue until Jesus returns to set up his kingdom on this earth. And Daniel is sick about all this. It just didn't make any sense to him.

Read 12:1-12 — As chapter 12 begins, we fast forward to the far-away future, just before the return of Christ. First, of all in this chapter, the question is asked, "How long until all these astonishing things are fulfilled?" And Daniel is given time-frame answers that make no sense to him—*time, times, and half a time*—1290 days, 1335 days. If you are a student of prophecy you may think you know what those times mean, but not Daniel. It didn't make sense to him. And when Daniel asks, "Let me ask this another way, what will the outcome of all this be?"—he's told "Go your way. Don't ask any more questions. This prophecy is to be sealed until the final days." ...Not terribly satisfying. He's told, "Go your way—go back to your job—go back to your home—get your house in order—you're going to die—but hey, you'll rise again on the last day." ?!?!? If this is how it really ends then we have to ask what hope is there from Daniel's point of view? What in this world would move this man forward? How does he "go his way" and continue to be faithful and finish strong when there are still so many unanswered questions: What in the world would give him hope? ...What kind of hope moves God's people beyond disappointment, beyond suffering, beyond the piercing denial of personal desires? What kind of hope compels us to persevere and do so with great resolve? All those questions raise an even more basic question: What *is* hope anyway?

"Hope is the absolute expectation of coming good based on the character of God?" (John Mark Comer) It's not optimism or wishful thinking—hope looks forward to the ultimate good God has promised us in Christ. The fact is, Daniel could not have had the hope of God's ultimate salvation that we have. But he was looking for the coming of God's great salvation.

1Peter 1:10-13 — ¹⁰ Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, ¹¹ trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow. ¹² It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things. ¹³ Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming.

Do you see how many of the things Peter says here about the prophets of old are true of Daniel? He sought to understand these visions and what they meant for God's people in his days and in the days to come. He wanted to know the time and circumstances and the ultimate outcome that all the visions were pointing to. It was revealed to him that in sealing up the vision, he was serving God's people in a future day. And we saw how angels were longing to know how long till God's great salvation came to set things right.

For Daniel, and for us to remain faithful in a world becoming more and more hostile to our faith, we need a hope that is sure and secure. But first, we have to settle once and for all, we do not have to understand everything God is doing in our world and in our lives. Only then we are free to *set our hope*, not in the things of this broken world, but Jesus and the world to come when Jesus returns to make this world new. That world is our true home and destination. Whatever you put your hope in shapes your life. Have you set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ?

Discussion Starters: Let's change things up this week, have everyone open to Daniel 10-12

Beginning by asking: "From what you heard in Charlie's message today *What are some of the "AHAs" you had?* What new thoughts and insights did you have?" What did you hear that resonated with you?

When someone volunteers an "AHA" ask follow up questions to dig deeper and to keep the discussion going. Ask the group, "*Anyone else have this same "AHA"? What do you think about this insight?*" After you've exhausted topic, throw the original question back out to the group again, "*Who else had an "AHA"?*" Repeat the pattern above.

If someone says, "*I didn't really have an "AHA," it's more something I don't quite understand*" Then go that direction. Ask follow-up questions to help them clearly articulate the issue. "*Anybody else think about that/struggle with that?*" Ask the group for input, "*So, how would you answer that question?*" Whoever answers, ask follow up questions, ask for input from the group on that answer (*What do you think about that?*), etc.

It's been my (Charlie) experience that you can have a great discussion around this approach to community group conversations