



This Week's Reading:

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Happy Sunday, friends!

I hope you're more excited about the final five chapters of our Daniel Bible Reading Plan than I am about writing this email. Although I love writing about the Bible, these five chapters of Daniel are particularly difficult. The Book of Daniel is about to take a completely different tone—instead of narrative stories that read like mini-adventure tales, now you're going to be reading about

Daniel's visions, and, fair warning, they are full of strange imagery.

But, whatever you do, don't give up!

There are some incredibly important and powerful themes in these chapters. Rather than getting nitty-gritty and interpreting every detail in these visions (many scholars for generations have debated these details), I'm going to take the 60,000-foot view and try to get to the underlying themes behind these visions.

This final section of Daniel is crucial to understanding the main themes of the book, and if you join me in looking closely at them, I think you'll find they provide crucial guidance for you and me today also.

So, with that in mind, happy reading!



Alex Johnston

Director of Content & Communications

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About the Reading

[Monday | Daniel 8](#)

Chapter eight details the second vision given to Daniel. And it's at this point where the book returns to Hebrew, rather than Aramaic. In this vision, Daniel sees two key figures—a ram and a goat. In the Old Testament, leaders were often symbolized by animals. So we're meant to understand that the ram and goat are leaders, likely of a particular kingdom or group of people. It's suggested that the ram likely refers to the King of Persia, the goat, Alexander the Great.

The ram is described as a great kingdom, with no one who could stand against it—until the goat comes along that is. These two leaders clash with each other, and the stronger goat breaks the horn of the ram (representing a sort of tearing down of the kingdom's leader). Now it's the goat's turn to become a great kingdom. And this is the way of the world—kingdoms come and go who rule through violence and force. One tears down another, until an even stronger kingdom comes to remove that kingdom from power. And over and over the cycle continues.

The commentary I'm reading for Daniel puts it like this:

“Empires rise and fall as they successively overreach themselves in arrogance. And sometimes they reach a pinnacle of climactic evil and violence against God and God's people. But eventually they are overthrown by God. And in the end – the ultimate end, as distinct from the many partial “endings” that history illustrates – God will finally destroy all that opposes him and establish his own reign fully and forever.”

Out of the goat comes another horn that turns its attention toward the “glorious land,” AKA Israel. We're told this goat even tramples down some of the stars of

heaven! Stars can sometimes refer to spiritual beings in the Bible, so it's possible this is a symbolic way of talking about how the goat is no longer waging war just against the kingdoms of this world, but also now against God's kingdom on earth and in heaven. This is further evidenced by the fact that we're told the sanctuary was overthrown and the burnt offerings were taken away. These are things associated with Jerusalem and the center of religious power.

Then two holy ones appear. One asks the other, essentially, *how long will these things last?* How long will God's people have to live under the goat's rule? The other answers, it will be 2,300 evenings and mornings before the sanctuary is restored.

What are we to make of this?

First, don't worry about math. Many scholars have tried to figure out the exact dates corresponding to the number 2,300. And because one morning and one evening equal one day in Hebrew thought, it's like to mean just what it says: 2,300 days. But are we to take that as a literal number or a figurative one? I think it's figurative. In other words, the author is putting a time stamp on the rule of the goat. There is an end date; The goat will not rule forever.

Here's another point to notice—it's not Daniel asking these questions about when the end will come. Two holy ones (heavenly beings) are discussing the matter, which goes to show that God cares about the affairs of this world, particularly when it impacts God's people. God will not allow these violent kingdoms to continue forever. Eventually, the cycle will be dismantled and a new kingdom installed.

And, look, if you have a hard time with these visions, don't worry! Even Daniel confesses to not being able to understand them. That should give us all comfort.

Questions:

- Where do you see the pattern of warring kingdoms continuing today? Why do you think all of our human ways of trying to resolve these conflicts ultimately fall short in the long run when it comes to peace?
 - What does this chapter reveal to you about the character of God?
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Tuesday | Daniel 9

Of the last five days reading, this has to be my favorite. Daniel 9 is a beautiful portrait of confession and mediation. Daniel pours his heart out to God as a plea for mercy and forgiveness, not just for him, but on behalf of all God's people.

Here's the background. The exile had actually been predicted many years before it happened, first in Deuteronomy, and then by the prophet Jeremiah. But the people's restoration back to the land was also foretold.

“For thus says the Lord: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place.”
(Jeremiah 29:10)

Did you catch that? The Israelites believed they would be in exile for seventy years before God would bring them back to the promised land. And for Daniel, that 70 years would be nearing its ending. So how does Daniel respond? He prays.

Daniel honors God, describing God as the one who keeps the covenant, even as the people break their end of the bargain. God's love is steadfast (loyal). Daniel then confesses in great detail the sins of the people.

- They turned away from God.
 - They didn't listen to the prophets who spoke for God.
 - They didn't follow God's laws or obey God's commandments.
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Because of this, what God warned of so long ago through Moses in Deuteronomy 30:15-18 has come to pass. God allowed a foreign kingdom to come upon Israel and rip them from the land.

Finally, Daniel, in light of God's character and human failure, appeals to the grace and mercy of God. He asks that God would turn God's wrath away from Jerusalem, but not because the people deserve it! Daniel says it's for God's own name He ought to do this.

*“For **we do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness**, but because of your great mercy. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive. O Lord, pay attention and act. Delay not, for your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people are called by your name.”*

The idea that God grants mercy to people not because of their righteousness, but due to God's own faithfulness and grace is central to the biblical story. It's the truth that underlines all of Scripture. We don't deserve God's love, and there's nothing we can ever do to earn it. But God has worked through all of human history, ever since The Fall in The Garden, to save us because that's how much God loves us!

What happens next would have likely felt like a gut punch for Daniel.

Gabriel appears and speaks to Daniel, telling Daniel that he is greatly loved by God. But there's something he must understand. While Jeremiah spoke of the exile being 70 years long, Gabriel reveals that the truth is actually more grim. There are many troubles ahead for God's people, including wars, desolations, and floods. And none of it will come to an end for more like 490 years.

Again, 490 is not likely supposed to be used as a literal number. More likely, it's combining to symbolic numbers, the 70 year of Jeremiah 29 alongside what Lev. 26:28 describes as a sevenfold period of discipline because of sin.

For Daniel, this must have been heartbreaking. He goes from looking forward to the day when he might see his homeland again, to having no doubt that day will never come for him, nor for generations after him.

The good news is that it will end. The exile will not go on forever. As difficult as that must have been for Daniel, I wonder if he would still find hope in the promise of God to one day restore the people...

Questions:

- God loves us and works to save us, even though we don't deserve it. Do you believe this to be true for you? Why or why not? Are there ways you still fight to earn God's love even though we know that's not actually how it works?
- How do you think you would have responded to finding out you would die in exile if you were in Daniel's shoes?

Wednesday | Daniel 10

Now, back to the visions. This one comes while Daniel is in a period of mourning. He's eating no meat, wine, or delicacies (this is where you'd lose me). Daniel looks up and sees this figure of one like lightning, with eyes like flames and legs of bronze. The sight is enough to send Daniel to the ground, in a deep sleep.

A hand touches Daniel and he hears, "Fear not, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words."

God is not distant. God hears Daniel's words and has sent this messenger to Daniel because of them. THAT is a powerful case study for the importance of prayer, don't you think?

The messenger then claims that he was held up by the Prince of Persia for 21 days until Michael, a chief prince, came to help. This is where it gets interesting. Some scholars, including Dr. Michael Heiser, believe the Prince of Persia to refer to a dark spiritual being. And it would seem to make some sense because Michael is believed to be an angel and is referred to as the Chief prince in the same sentence. While the previous visions of Daniel have

described the violent warfare between earthly kingdoms, this then would describe the struggles that are simultaneously taking place in the spiritual realm between forces of good and evil.

Questions:

- What do you make of the idea that there are battles going on around us in the spiritual realm? Do you have a hard time believing in the presence of spiritual beings? Why or why not?
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Thursday | Daniel 11

Chapter 11 brings back the theme of kings and kingdoms, and it continues the vision that began in Daniel 10. Really, chapters 10-12 are connected.

We see the same pattern of kingdoms going against one another until there comes to be one great king—the king in the north. This king is more powerful and violent than any who goes before. Against him, no kingdom can stand.

Many scholars have debated who these kingdoms represent. But I don't want to get lost in that debate because it's not important when it comes to the true message of Daniel. This chapter is a study on the cycle we mentioned earlier. Kingdoms rule until a new, more powerful kingdom comes to displace them.

Look at how the king of the north is described:

- He does what he will—he defines good and not good for himself (the chief issue behind The Fall story in Genesis 3).
- He exalts himself above every god.
- He speaks against Yahweh.

The author paints this figure as the antithesis to God. He represents all that is wrong with the world. And verse 41 tells us that this king will come into the

glorious land (Israel) and when this happens, tens of thousands will die. This is a king bent on destruction.

Yet the last line of this chapter is significant. For all his might and power, this kingdom will come to an end just like all the others.

Questions:

- Look again at the list of sins that describe the king of the north. Are there any of these that hit close to home for you? Do you follow God's definition for good or define it for yourself? Do you believe you know better than God or exalt your needs above the wisdom we find in Scripture?

Friday | Daniel 12

Finally, we reach the last chapter in Daniel and the end of this final vision sequence. It describes a season of great persecution against God's people.

God's people are living in darkness, from where can they find their hope?

Daniel 12 describes a day that is coming when God's people will be delivered. What's being described here is the great Day of the Lord, the final judgment. Some we're told will go on to everlasting life while others will face everlasting contempt.

“And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.”

It's like the author is extending a hand to you, the reader. Which will you choose? Which future will you be part of? Will you be among the wise who shine like the sky? Or will you be among those who fall into the same pattern as the kings and kingdoms of this world?

Will you choose to be faithful to God, even when things look grim, or will you allow yourself to be shaped by the culture around you? Will you worship God or will you worship false idols and false kings?

This is what the Book of Daniel is all about.

Daniel chose to pray to God even when doing so could cost him his life. Daniel worshiped God.

The three friends chose not to bow down to the false statue. They worshipped God.

Nebuchadnezzar, and all those other kings, worshiped themselves and their own power.

All the people who were willing to bow down to the statue worshiped false gods who could do nothing to actually help them.

Who will *you* worship?

The question arises in this final chapter: How long? How long will it take before God comes to make all things right? And we're not given an answer, simply to say that there will be an end.

What do we do in the meantime? *Go your way!* Decide whom you will worship, who you will be faithful to, and do it! Then at the end of days, you will find rest and stand in your allotted place.

Questions:

- Who will you choose to worship? Will you worship the culture or false leaders, or other 'gods' that seek to steal your attention? Or will you choose to worship God? What does this look like for you practically? Are there things you need to give up or change your relationship with in order to be faithful to God?
 - What stands out to you about the Book of Daniel? What is God teaching you through this book? We'd love to hear from you!
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Dig Deeper

Resources:

- [Daniel - Son of Man](#) | Podcast from BEMA
- [Day of the Lord](#) | Video from The Bible Project

Discussion Questions:

1. God loves us and works to save us, even though we don't deserve it. Do you believe this to be true for you? Why or why not? Are there ways you still fight to earn God's love even though we know that's not actually how it works?
 2. What do you make of the idea that there are battles going on around us in the spiritual realm? Do you have a hard time believing in the presence of spiritual beings? Why or why not?
 3. Who will you choose to worship? Will you worship the culture or false leaders, or other 'gods' that seek to steal your attention? Or will you choose to worship God? What does this look like for you practically? Are there things you need to give up or change your relationship with in order to be faithful to God?
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