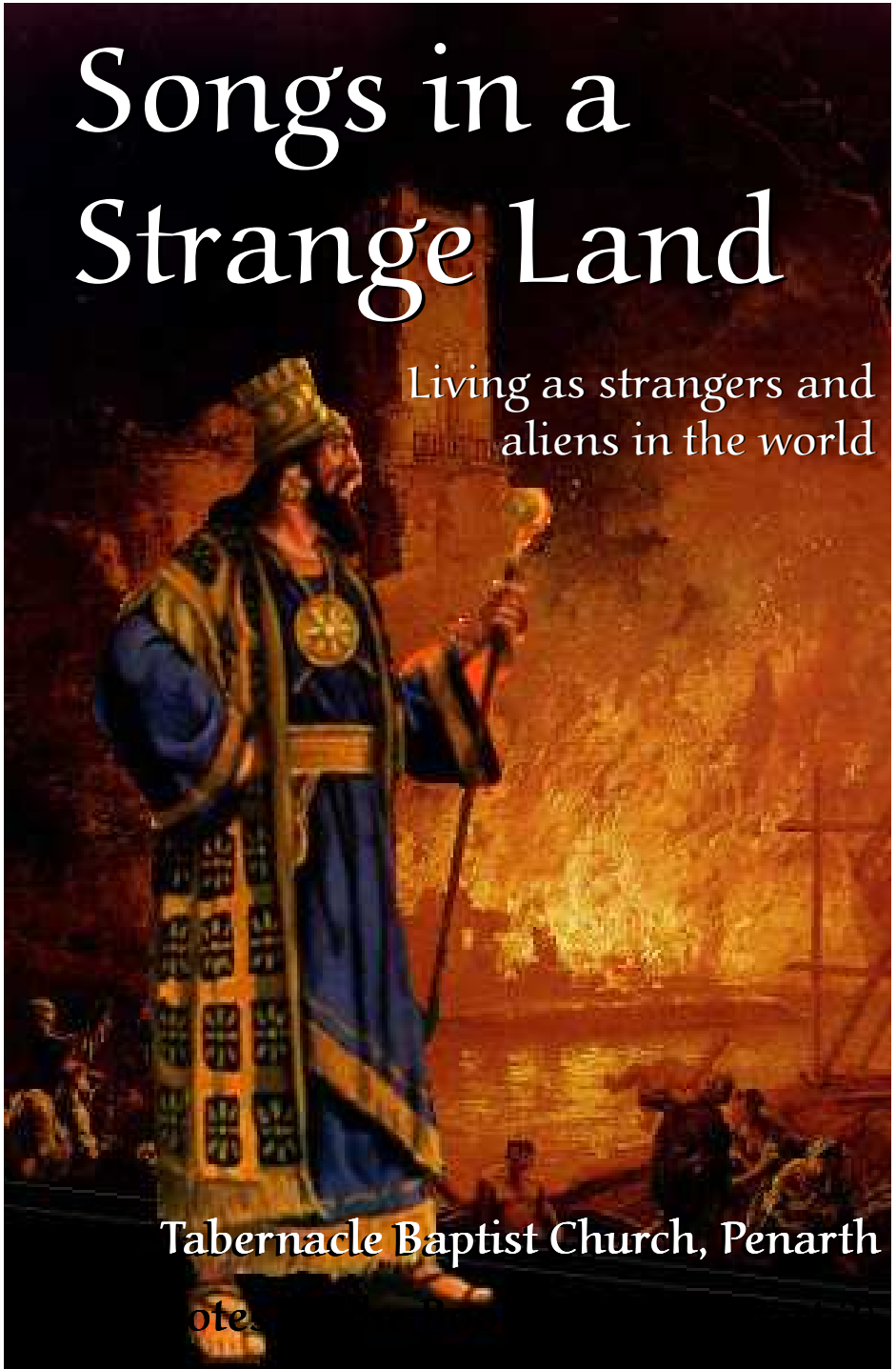


Songs in a Strange Land

Living as strangers and
aliens in the world

Tabernacle Baptist Church, Penarth

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Contents

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Studies in the Book of Daniel

	Page
Introduction to Daniel Part 2	2
1 A dream of four beasts	4
2 Superpowers at war	6
3 Kneeling on God's promises.	8
4 Spiritual Warfare	10
5 Worlds at war	12
6 Darkness before deliverance	14

Introduction to Daniel: Part 2

This series of Small Group studies follows on from “Songs in a strange land: part 1” which looked at the first 6 chapters of the book of Daniel. The book of Daniel itself is divided into two parts. The first part was written in Aramaic (sometime called Chaldean in the ancient world) and is made up primarily of historical narrative. The second half of the book of Daniel is less well known by most Christians (the lion’s den, the fiery furnace and the writing on the wall make much better Sunday school lessons!) As well as being less well known, it is more difficult to understand. Written in Hebrew this second part of the book is made up of apocalyptic/revelatory material, and it is this section that we will be looking at in our small groups over the next few weeks. **Some of these studies have a lot of questions to get your discussion started. Do not expect to always be able to answer all of them in one session! Feel free to pick and choose some of the questions, or extend a study over 2 weeks if necessary.**

Apocalyptic literature is different from prophetic material in so much as it is primarily intended to be an encouragement to people during times of hardship and persecution. For this reason some Biblical scholars believe that Daniel was written down many years after the events they describe, probably during the Maccabean persecution of the Jews in or around 165 BC. However, other writers (including, some of you will notice, the author of the introduction to Daniel in the NIV Study Bible) argue for an earlier, contemporaneous date.

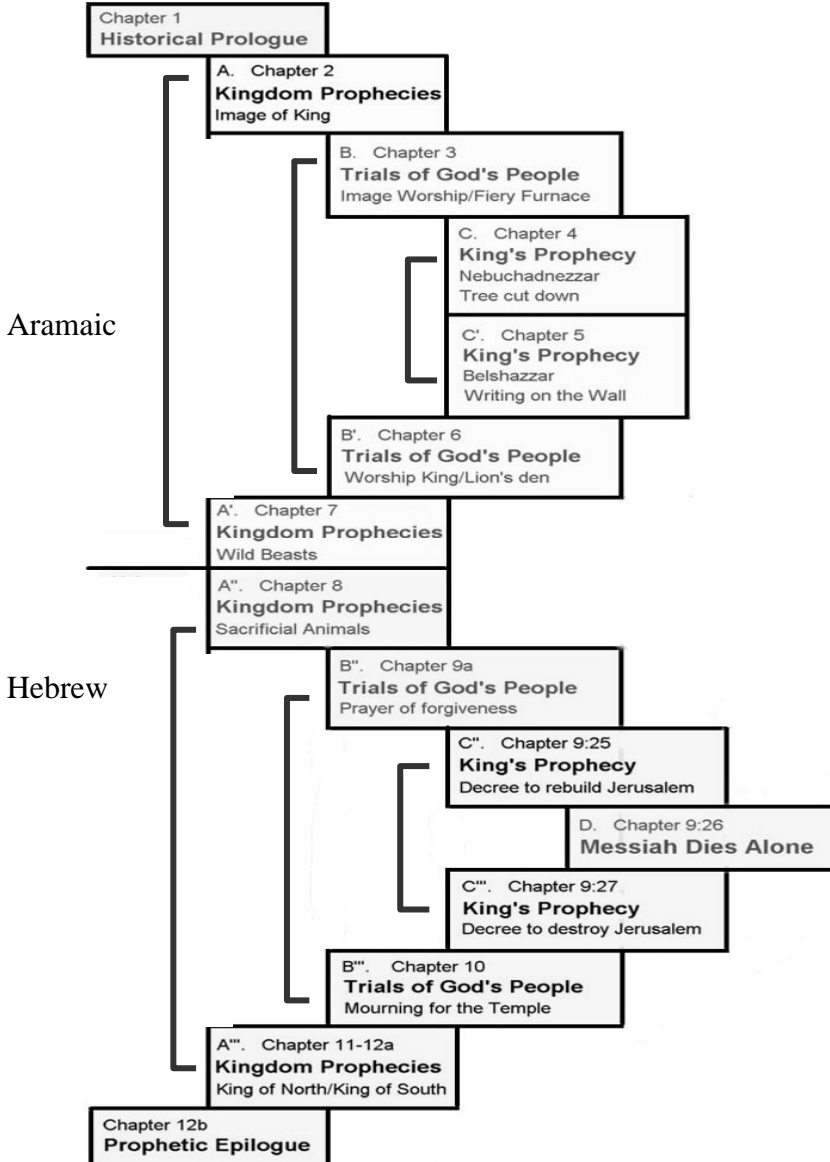
This controversy is settled to some extent by the claims of the Bible itself. Jesus himself confirmed Daniel’s existence and referred to him as ‘a prophet’ (Matthew 24:15), Jesus also quotes from the latter chapters of the book of Daniel and takes Daniel as an authoritative revelation of truth from God (Matthew 24:30, Luke 21:27).

Structure and Form

It is worth reminding ourselves that the literary structure of Daniel takes precedence over chronology. Daniel was composed as a ‘double chiasm’. Chiastic or concentric structure is a common feature of ancient Hebrew poetry and literature. The following diagram is shown again to explain

the chiastic structure and shows the parallels between the historical narrative in the first half of the book and the prophetic writings of the second half:

Daniel -- Double Chiasm



Study 1 : A dream of four beasts (Daniel chapter 7)

The events of Daniel chapter 7 is dated by the author to “the first year of Belshazzar King of Babylon” which places them in or about 533 B.C. This means that the events of Daniel chapter 7 precede the events of chapters 5 and 6. The author deliberately tells the story out of sequence in order that it might fit into the overall literary (chiastic) structure of the book. If we accept the Chiastic theory of how Daniel was put together, then chapter 7 is the partner chapter to chapter 2.

Chapter 2 talks about Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a statue in four parts whilst chapter 7 talks about Daniel's dream of four wild beasts. Daniel tells Nebuchadnezzar in chapter 2 that his dream represents his kingdom and the kingdoms that will follow, whilst he tells his readers in chapter 7 (verse 17) that the four beasts also represent “four kingdoms that will rise from the earth”.

Having set out Daniel's dream and what it represents, the rest of chapter 7 is dedicated to providing some interpretation of the images. All these years later the question for us is “has this prophecy already been fulfilled completely in history, or is it talking about events still to happen?” If so, then what are these events, and how can we be better prepared for them through our study of scripture?

Read Daniel Chapter 7 together, maybe by taking a few verses each to share the reading.

Ice Breaker: What one question would you like to ask God about the future? Why do you want to know the answer?

- The sea is used in many prophecies to represent the nations of the world and the trouble and wickedness they can bring. It is ‘a symbol of the seething nations of the world and of the troubled lives of the unrighteous’ (Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary). In this

light how are we to understand Daniel 7:2-3? How are we to understand Revelation 21:1?

- Daniel sees four beasts which, according to verse 17, represent four kingdoms. The lion-like appearance of the first beast represents the kingdom's strength and majesty (compare this with the parallel description in Daniel 2) What characteristics of the second, third and fourth kingdoms are suggested by verses 5-7? Again use chapter 2 to inform your thinking
- What aspects of God's nature and power are suggested by Daniel's description of 'the ancient of days' in verses 9-10?
- The final beast is described as "terrifying, frightening and very powerful" and having 'ten horns' (Paralleled by the ten toes of the statue in Daniel 2) The ten horns are identified as ten kings that will come out from the fourth kingdom. However, after the ten kings comes 'another horn' (vs. 8) who is identified as one who will "speak against the most high and oppress the saints". (verse 25). How do you understand this 'other horn'? (see Daniel 11:36, 2 Thessalonians 2:4 and Revelation 13-5-6 for comparison)
- How can the vision of God given in Daniel 7:9-10 give us hope and stability when things are in turmoil?
- The final figure to appear in Daniels vision is "one like a son of man", which is a description of Jesus. What effect does his coming have on the inhabitants and rulers of the world?
- How is the way that "the saints of the most high" (verse 18) receive their kingdom different from the conquests of the four kingdoms?
- Daniel is told that the saints of the most high will share in the Kingdom with the "one who is the son of man". Read Matthew 19:28-29, Luke 22:29-30 and Revelation 1:6 and 14:12-14. What do you find most appealing and most daunting about the descriptions Daniel gives?

Study 2: Superpowers at war (Daniel chapter 8)

Daniel chapter 8 is the beginning of the chapters which were written in Hebrew. It describes events which happened about the year 551 B.C. “in the third year of king Belshazzar’s reign”. This means that the events described here again precede those of chapter 5. Whilst the event of chapter 7 came to Daniel in a dream ‘as he was lying on his bed’, the events of chapter 8 come to Daniel as a vision. As with his previous dream, this was a traumatic event which left him exhausted and ill for several days (verse 27). It is interesting to note that despite having such a vivid vision, and despite having it explained to him by the angel Gabriel (verse 16), Daniel still comments that the vision was ‘beyond understanding’ (verse 27). So, beware of anyone who wants to tell you the exact meaning, timing and interpretation of Daniel’s visions!

However, we can surmise from what Gabriel says that Daniel is presenting a dual prophecy, with a short-term fulfilment and a long-term greater fulfilment. The short-term fulfilment is in the persons of Alexander the Great and of Antiochus Epiphanies. However, Gabriel tells Daniel that there is a longer term fulfilment which will take place in the future “at the appointed time of the end” (verse 19). In other words historical events act as a mirror to the events of the end times.

Historically we can say that the ram probably represents the Medo-Persian empire which was overthrown by the Greeks under Alexander the Great. However, at the height of his power Alexander’s ‘horn’ was broken off with his premature death. After a period of turmoil, the Hellenistic world settled into 4 stable power blocks: the Ptolemaic kingdom of Egypt, the Seleucid Empire in the east, the kingdom of Pergamon in Asia Minor, and Macedon in south east Europe. Of these four kingdoms, the Seleucid Empire became particularly problematic for the Jews. Under Antiochus Epiphanies the Jews were severely persecuted and he made a determined effort to destroy the Jewish faith. Antiochus took divine epithets for himself and ordered the daily sacrifices in the temple be stopped (cf 8:11). He desecrated the temple, sacrificing and burning pigs in the sanctuary, and put to death anyone who kept Jewish traditions. Eventually the army of Judas Maccabeus recaptured Jerusalem and rededicated the temple to the Lord—an event still celebrated by the Jews in the feast of Hanukah. However, if what the angel Gabriel said is true, then these events will recur in some way in the future at the end times!

Read Daniel Chapter 8 together

Icebreaker: If God was to offer to show you snapshots of Wales' future as it pans out over the next 200 years in the same way he did with Daniel, what would you hope to see? Why?

- Look through chapter 8 again and pick out the main images of Daniel's vision in verses 1 to 14. Then match them against the interpretation of each image in verses 15-27. Are you able to match them with your knowledge of historic events?
- If you were a Jew living under the tyranny of Antiochus, how do you think you would feel when reading Daniels prophetic predications? What hope would they bring?
- What specific qualities can you see in this description which match those of Antiochus, and other tyrannical world leaders who are bent on world conquest? Could we apply these descriptions to any modern personalities or movements?
- In what ways would this chapter be an encouragement to Christians living under political tyranny today? What about Christians living with emotional discouragement, or spiritual attack?
- How does this chapter fit in with Daniel's main theme of God's absolute authority?
- What perspective does this chapter give us in understanding how God can permit evil?
- Daniel's prediction were fulfilled precisely and literally. How much should we expect that biblical predictions about the future will be fulfilled in the same way? Does this affect the way we read the Book of Daniel or Revelation, for example?

Study 3: Kneeling on God's promises. (Daniel chapter 9)

In Chapter 9 the action moves to the first year of the reign of Xerxes' son, Darius. This places the story in 539 or 538 B.C. Daniel 9:1 says that "Darius was made ruler" since it seems he was appointed to the position rather than inheriting it or taking it by force. Chronologically chapter 9 follows 5, and is in the same year of chapter 6, when Daniel was cast into den of lions. Whether Daniel has this great vision before or after he was cast into the lions' den is not clear.

The 9th chapter of Daniel is one of the greatest chapters in the Bible and helps us to understand God's plan of redemption and prophecy. Chapter nine ties together the other visions in the book of Daniel, and unlocks their meaning. Here we find out how the "Son of Man" in Daniel 7 became the "Son of Man" in the New Testament. Gabriel sets a time frame for future events which is usually interpreted as being 490 years which will begin with "a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem" (see also Leviticus 25:8-24). Ezra was given permission to restore Jerusalem on the first of Nissan (8th April) 458 B.C. (see Ezra 7:3-26). 490 years on from that date brings us to the exact times for Jesus ministry, death and resurrection.

From this chapter, the event in Daniel known as the "Abomination of Desolation" is referenced by Jesus in Matthew 24:15.

The chapter begins with Daniel doing his Bible study and reading the book of Jeremiah. As he read Jeremiah's words, a couple of passages seemed to leap off the page at him (Jeremiah 25:8-12 and 29:10-11). God had promised that the exile in Babylon would last for seventy years. Daniel did a quick sum and calculated that the period was almost over! Daniel began to pray earnestly, and whilst he was still praying God answered his prayer by sending a messenger, Gabriel.

Read Daniel chapter 9 together.

Ice breaker: Tell your group about a time when you felt compelled to pray more earnestly and intently than usual. What prompted this time of prayer, and what was the result?

- God had promised through Jeremiah to release his people after seventy years of captivity. If God had promised, then why did Daniel still need to pray? (Jeremiah 29:10-14 may help you to answer this.)
- In verses 4-19, which aspects of God's character did Daniel appeal to as the basis for his requests?
- What failures of the nation of Israel are cause for God's judgement? How could we apply this passage to our own nation?
- Daniel is one of the heroes of the Jewish world, yet he constantly uses the plural pronoun 'we' in his prayer. Why does Daniel include himself in the confession? Again, how should we apply this passage to our own situation?
- In verse 24 Gabriel lists 6 things which will be accomplished for Israel. Were any of these accomplished when the people returned to Jerusalem from exile?
- Which were accomplished by the coming of the 'anointed one'?
- Are there any of these 6 things not yet accomplished? Explain.
- Some Christians think that the final 'seven' was fulfilled in 70 A.D., when the Romans destroyed the temple. Others think that it is still in the future when an evil ruler will make his appearance on the world stage. Yet others think that both these things are true, and ancient history will mirror end time events. How do you react to the possibility of a wicked world ruler arising in our generation? How do you think the worldwide church will respond?

Group exercise: If you have time, or want to put a session aside to do it, compose your own prayer of 'national confession' based on Daniel's prayer in 9:4-19. Take time to earnestly pray through your prayer.

Study 4: Spiritual Warfare

(Daniel chapter 10)

Wars, terrorist attacks, ethnic cleansing—our world moves from one crisis to the next. What happens around us seems to be totally out of control. We find ourselves frustrated and frightened because we can't seem to do anything to stop the terrible things that we see on our T.V. screens. No sooner have we given to one appeal or prayed for the ending of a crisis, than the next one comes into view. Some people have seen the events of the end times in all these disasters and crisis—but then they always have done! In the ancient world, middle ages and modern age there have always been prophets of the apocalypse predicting that current world events are foreshadowing the end time. Over the next few months look out for a film called *2012* directed by Roland Emmerich and starring John Cusack, and Danny Glover. It is scheduled for release on November 13th, 2009. The film purports to be a documentary cataloguing why the world will end in 2012. A Google search will reveal how seriously some people are taking this date.

Daniel chapter 10 records the last of Daniel's four revelations. In this chapter Daniels gains a new perspective on international events and he begins to see God's hand even in the clash of empires.

The events of this chapter are placed in the third year of Cyrus, king of Persia which was 539 B.C. This means that it took place very near to the events of chapter 9.

Read Daniel chapter 10 to chapter 11 verse 1.

Icebreaker: Have you ever had a conversation with a Jehovah's Witness about the end of the world? What happened? Has someone else tried to give you a date for the end times?

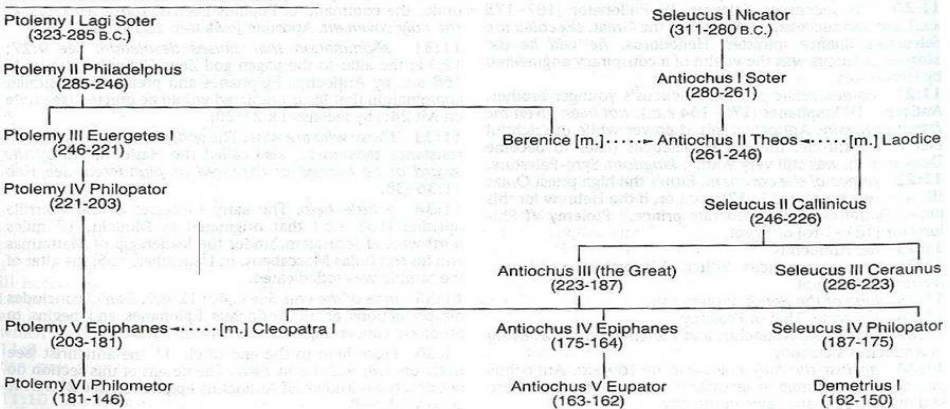
- Daniel seemed to live a strict religious life. Fasting, long periods of prayer and self denial were not, it seems, uncommon events in his life. Chapter 10 records another period of self denial (verses 2-3). What do you think is the relationship between Daniel's austere spiritual discipline and the fact that he had so many dreams, visions, conversations with angels and spiritual experiences? What can we learn for our own spiritual lives from this?
- Compare Daniel 10:5-6 with Revelation 1:12-16. Comment on these two descriptions
- We are told that the 'prince of the Persian Kingdom' resisted God's messenger and delayed the answer to Daniel's prayers. The common understanding of verse 13 is that the prince of Persia is some sort of territorial spirit or demonic power opposed to God's will. What does this 'unveiling' of demonic activity teach you about our world? Do we take this kind of power seriously in our prayers?
- If an evil power could hinder the answer to Daniel's prayers, then what does this indicate about our own need for help against evil spiritual forces?
- Does this passage help us to understand why our prayers seem to be answered slowly sometimes? How does the victory of the cross and the defeat of Satan fit into our thinking about spiritual warfare?
- A second 'prince' is identified in verse 20 who will also have to be battled. Read John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11 and Ephesians 2:1-2. Do you believe these spiritual powers opposed to the people of God are still forces to consider today? If so, what should we do about them?
- Michael appears in the books of Daniel, Jude (1:9) and Revelation (12:7). Based on the Revelation text, he is commonly thought of as commander of the Lord's armies. As a result of the title from Revelation it is also assumed that he is the captain of the "host of the Lord" encountered by Joshua in the early days of his campaigns in the Promised Land (Joshua 5:13-15). What is your opinion of Angels? Have you ever encountered one? Do you expect to? Do you believe that angels are protecting and fighting for you right now? (See Matthew 18:10, Acts 12:15 and Hebrews 1:14).

Study 5: Worlds at war (Daniel chapter 11)

Chapter 11 is another chapter where historic events bear out the truth of Daniel’s prophecy. As we have seen, after the death of ‘the mighty king’ Alexander, his empire was divided into 4 successor states. Ptolemy I Soter was a Macedonian Greek general under Alexander who became ruler of Egypt (323 BC—283 BC). In 305/4 BC he took the title of ‘pharaoh’. Seleucus I Nicator was an exile from Babylon who had escaped to Egypt. In 312 B.C. Ptolemy gave Seleucus 800 infantry and 200 cavalry with which to attack Babylonia. Picking up another 2000 troops along the way Seleucus quickly captured Babylon and became the first ruler of the Seleucid empire. This empire quickly eclipsed the Egypt of Ptolemy in terms of size and power.

After Ptolemy I’s death, his son took control of Egypt. His daughter, Bernice married the son of Seleucus, Antiochus II in order to cement an alliance between the two kingdoms. However, Bernice was soon ousted by Antiochus’ first wife (Laodice) whom he had divorced in order to marry Bernice, and later murdered by her. Bernice's brother, Ptolemy III Euergetes succeeded their father and set about avenging his sister's murder by invading Syria and having Laodice killed. This led to a series of wars, invasions and counter invasions.

Ptolemies and Seleucids



Even with this potted and incomplete history of the Seleucid empire, we begin to see how accurate the prophecy in the book of Daniel is. No wonder some scholars maintain that Daniel must have been written much later on, after the events had already happened!

As chapter 11 unfolds we see more and more complicated details of successions, wars, rebellions, uprisings and murders. Much of the conflict took place in the area we today call ‘the Holy Land’ and involves the persecution of the Jews and occupation of Israel.

Icebreaker: Do you find history fascinating or dull? What is your favourite period in history?

Read Daniel chapter 11

- Daniel 11:5-35 is concerned with the conflict between ‘the king of the north’ (Seleucid) and ‘the king of the south’ (Ptolemy), and is centred around Antiochus Epiphanes (who we heard about in study 2). Summarize Antiochus’ character and methods of operation from these verses.
- Antiochus invaded Egypt for the first time with relative success (11:25-28). The second time he met with some opposition and in his frustration vented his anger on “the holy covenant” (i.e. The Jews—11:29-31). What do we learn from verses 32– 35 about why God allows genuine believers to suffer at the hands of the godless?
- All of chapter 11 was in the *future* for Daniel. However 11:2-35 are *history* to us. What extra confidence does this give you in the power of scripture?
- How can the knowledge of God’s absolute authority and rule over history help us to stand firm when evil seems to triumph?
- What can we learn about the end times from chapter 11? Is this knowledge of any practical help to us today? How is it?
- Bible prophecy is best understood by comparing scripture with scripture. Do you understand your Bible well enough to be able to do this? What practical steps can you take to be better at it?

Study 6: Darkness before deliverance (Daniel chapter 12)

The final parts of the book of Daniel project Daniel into “the time of the end of the world”. The vision which continues from chapter 11 into chapter 12 focuses on the nation of Israel, but gives hope and encouragement to all believers during difficult times. The chapter begins with an encouragement and a discouragement. Michael, the protector of God’s people, will arise. However, at the same time there will be ‘great distress’.

Chapter 12 contains a specific reference to salvation for those whose name is written in ‘in the book’, and makes the first clear reference in scripture to the resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous. Daniel 12 also introduces the idea of a judgement at the resurrection on the last day, and the division of those destined for salvation from those destined for ‘shame’. In these instances the book of Daniel is more like the New Testament than any other Old Testament book.

God also makes it clear to Daniel that much of what has been revealed to him is a mystery and impossible to understand. According to God’s word here specific dates and times are impossible to calculate from the messages Daniel was given (12:9). Daniel is a book of reassurance and comfort, especially in difficult times, but in many ways it is not a guide book to the end times of the apocalypse!

Icebreaker: What aspects of Daniel’s character has been the greatest encouragement to you in your Christian life? What weaknesses in your life are exposed when you compare yourself to him?

Read Daniel chapter 12 together

- If you were reading this passage during a time of persecution and hardship, what would sound like bad news to you, and what would sound like good news?

- The defeat of the evil king and the deliverance of the godly will come through the intervention of Michael, the great prince. As a Christian, what do you understand from this ?
- Daniel was told to go on with his life, even though he didn't fully understand everything that God had shown him (12:9). Why might God give confusing and incomplete dreams and visions to people? What purpose does it serve?
- The natural question after seeing his vision is to ask, "when will all this happen?" (12:6) How would you summarize the answer given in 12:7? What might this answer mean?
- Books like the 'Left Behind' series, "The Late, Great Planet Earth" and the Frank Peretti novels have been very popular in recent years. What is your opinion of fiction like this? Is your knowledge of the end times based more on reading novels or based on reading the Bible? Why are novels such as these so popular?
- Compare Daniel 12:8-9 with Matthew 24:36 and Acts 1:7. If God does not want us to know times and dates, why has he revealed so many details about the end time in Daniel, Ezekiel, the Gospels and Revelation? What is the purpose of God in the book of Daniel?

