

What the Book of Daniel Teaches Us... Daniel 1-12

Introduction

There are nine things that Daniel teaches us. These are not the only lessons that flow out of Daniel, but they are the ones that stand out to me. They are the points of application for my own life that I am taking away from my time spent in Daniel. I share them with you with the hope that they will serve you in some way to encourage your heart and challenge you to go further and deeper in our relationship with the Jesus that the book of Daniel points us too.

Babylon is not your friend. (Daniel 1)

The Spirit of the Age is the Spirit of Babylon. It counterfeits all that God has called good, it is attractive, and it is demonic. The Spirit of Babylon wants to assimilate you morally and spiritually into an identity that is contrary to the identity God has assigned to you; it promises life and thriving but it only means death for you.

In the case of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, the empire of Babylon sought to assimilate the three young men in the following ways: sexually (through castration), a change in names assigned at birth that served to remind them of the God they worshiped to names that honored the gods of Babylon, and pressure to trust Babylon over God by switching over to the king's diet from a diet prescribed to the Hebrew people by God. The first chapter of Daniel reminds us that it is indeed possible to live in a godless world while remaining God-ward in your life.

God is sovereign over seasons, kings, and kingdoms. (Daniel 2, 4)

God changes seasons just as he raises up kingdoms and he deposes them. Unlike the kings of earth, God is both infinitely wise and powerful. God is unchanging while having the authority to change times and seasons. God is infinitely sovereign; therefore, he alone removes and empowers kings. God holds the copyright of the script of human history that no one can change or alter in any way. Only God knows all things, and sees all things, therefore it is he alone who reveals mysteries and sees what is hidden. What Daniel 2 teaches us is that God is able to use evil and the worst of human intentions to accomplish his purposes; we learn from Daniel that all of history is moving in a direction that will culminate in the establishment of his Kingdom that will put down every empire raised against it including the Spirit of Babylon.

We learn from Daniel 4 that God, “**rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men**” (v. 17). As a result of the difficult lesson Nebuchadnezzar had to learn, he concluded that unlike his own kingdom, the kingdom of Daniel's God, “**...is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation**” (v. 34). What we learn from Daniel is that God does not get flustered because of who he is. He is infinitely sovereign, which means that he does not need to improve upon himself at all.

God does not exempt his people from suffering. (Daniel 3, 6)

The spirit of Babylon demands our allegiance, and most of the world gives it. The reason for this has been true of every generation according and is explained by the apostle Paul: **“In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God”** (2 Cor. 4:4). When we don’t give Babylon our hearts and our allegiance, it will typically respond with hate. This is why Jesus said, **“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you”** (John 15:18-19). Daniel and his three friends never wanted to go to Babylon, but they were taken by force. They were wrongfully treated, they were looked down upon, and there were multiple attempts by others to have them killed.

When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were cast into the fiery furnace, they had no assurance that they would be delivered from its flames. When Daniel was cast into the lion’s den, he was not given any real assurance that he would be delivered. Although these men were delivered from death miraculously, they were not delivered from the exile of Babylon and the way they were mistreated throughout their lives. God does not exempt his people from suffering.

God is patient, but his patience is subject to his holiness. (Daniel 5)

We learn of God’s patience with the exile of God’s people into Babylon, the tragic story of Belshazzar, and the future judgement of the nations. Judah was forced into exile after centuries of unheeded warnings from God’s prophets to repent from their sins. The Hebrew people ignored God’s warnings while God patiently gave them every opportunity to turn from their idolatry and sins, eventually God’s patience was exhausted.¹

Belshazzar was aware of how God humbled his father (see Daniel 4), yet he chose to dishonor God by drinking from the sacred, and doing what was immoral while praising his gods who were just as impotent and powerless as the king himself was. Belshazzar had lifted himself against the God of heaven (v. 20) who is “the Most High God” (vv. 18, 21), the “Lord of the heavens” (v. 23), and “the God in whose hand is your breath” (v. 23). So, a hand appeared out of nowhere and wrote on the plaster on the wall where Belshazzar could see, and upon seeing it, he was, **“greatly alarmed, and his color changed, and his lords were perplexed”** (v. 9). After Daniel was called into the king’s presence to interpret the message on the wall, he informed the king of its meaning: **“This is the interpretation of the matter: God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end; you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting; your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians”** (Daniel 5:25–28). That is exactly what happened: Belshazzar was killed, and his kingdom was given to another.

God is patient; however, there comes a time when his patience is exhausted over the sins of people and his holiness requires his wrath.

Evil kings and kingdoms will come and go, but the people of God will be given the Kingdom of God and will possess it forever, forever and ever. (Daniel 7, 9:24-27)

¹ See the first sermon in the Counter Culture Daniel series for more on why the exile happened.

Before the coming of God's kingdom, there will be other kingdoms that will come and go. Some of those kingdoms have been and will be more wicked and violent than others. We see this with the rise and fall of the empires of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome; God used and continues to use kings, kingdoms, and empires to accomplish his redemptive purposes that will ultimately result with the establishing of his Kingdom.

The kingdom we will be given is one that will not pass away, one that cannot be destroyed, and one that all peoples will serve. Here is what we are told in Daniel 7:13-14, **"I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed"** (Daniel 7:13-14).

The Son of Man is Jesus; he is your deliverer and savior! The message of Daniel is that if the kingdoms of this world and Babylon may bring their worst, but they ultimately have no power over you because your citizenship rests in the hands of the King of kings and Lord of lords.

As followers of Jesus, our struggle is against our flesh and demons (Daniel 10)

Throughout the book of Daniel, we have seen glimpses of the spiritual war that wages beyond our physical sight, but it is not until we come to Daniel 10 that the curtain is pulled back just enough for us to peer into a world that is very real, and a world that we are very much a part of. There is a war that is being fought on a cosmic scale and it is in the middle of that war that we find ourselves. We find ourselves in this war with two fronts: on one front is the battle with our own sinful desires and on the other front is a battle that is with spiritual forces. However, Jesus died to rescue us from those two battles we had no real ability to win. Jesus died to deliver us from our sin and he died to transfer our citizenship from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. In my opinion, apostle Paul sums up the message of Daniel 10 this way: **"He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins"** (Colossians 1:13-14).

There are worse days to come, but God will sustain his people to endure such days (Daniel 8, 11)

If you are a Christian, the world who hates God will try to destroy you. There will be governments that will attempt to blot you out of existence, there will be evil kings and politicians that will seek to marginalize you as much as possible, and there will be an antichrist who will do all that he can to destroy you. Daniel warns us of this so that when such suffering and hatred comes our way, we will not be caught off guard by it or that our faith swallowed up by the fear of such days. What we are promised in Daniel 8 and 11 is that suffering and evil have a shelf-life and that God will not permit them to last forever. Reading Daniel should alert us to the same truth Jerry Rankin warns us about in his book titled *Spiritual Warfare*: "The devil is against us, the world is around us, and the flesh is within us, collaborating to defeat us in our Christian walk."²

Whatever evil may befall the people of God, Daniel encourages with these words: **"...the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action."** Then, at the right time, God

² Jerry Rankin, *Spiritual Warfare* (Nashville, TN B&H Publishing; 2009), p. 20.

intervenes by sending his Son to destroy the antichrist, crush the devil, and vindicate his people by giving them the kingdom.

The time of the end will be only the beginning when all of God's people will live happily ever after (Daniel 12).

There is a time when God will vindicate his people when holds accountable all peoples for their sins. We are told in Daniel 12:2-3, **“And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and 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”** (Daniel 12:2–3). The only thing that will separate the righteous from the wicked will be the cross of Jesus Christ. At the judgment, the people of God will be given the kingdom of God and will receive it forever, forever and ever. What will the receiving of the kingdom be like? We are told in Revelation 21:1-4 and 22:1-5, what is describe in these passages with what heaven will look like on earth:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” (Revelation 21:1–4)

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever. (Revelation 22:1–5)

I can live in a godless world and still remain God-ward in my life (Daniel's Testimony)

We are called and expected to live a life on mission regardless of where we find ourselves. One of the great lessons from the book of Daniel is discovered through the life of the prophet Daniel. Daniel was not a super Christian. Daniel was a human being just like you and me. Here are some of the things that stand out to me about Daniel and his three friends:

1. When Daniel was told that he would have to eat the king's food which would have violated his conscience, we are told that he, **“resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank”** (1:8). Daniel was not a jerk about it, he didn't make a big deal out of it, but instead, he discreetly and respectfully asked the chief of eunuchs who was in charge of Daniel to let he and his friends try out their diet for ten days. Daniel had faith that God was bigger than his circumstances.

2. When faced with the possibility of death after Nebuchadnezzar could not find anyone to interpret a dream he refused to share the details of, Daniel and his friends took their anxieties before God and prayed. We learn that this was a regular practice of Daniel throughout his life.
3. Every pagan king who knew Daniel, liked Daniel. I believe the reason for this is not because Daniel caved into the pressure to be like Babylon or the godless culture that surrounded him, but because he genuinely loved his neighbors and community who needed the God he knew to be true.
4. Daniel had a healthy understanding of authority, and when it came to his allegiances, God had all of his heart even at the expense of Daniel's own comfort and life.
5. Even though Daniel was innocent of the evils his people committed, he was able to identify with them corporately. Daniel 9:4-19 is one of the longest prayers in the Bible, and it serves as a model for the type of humility all of God's people ought to have. In his prayer, Daniel did not sugarcoat the sins of his forefathers and those of his generation; he identified with their sin in light of who God was and then prayed for them and for the forgiveness of their sins.
6. Even Daniel experienced anxiety about what was happening in his world and what would happen in the future, but continued to trust in the God who he understood to be bigger than his circumstances and bigger than whatever evils may come in the future.
7. The way that the book of Daniel concludes is the way Daniel lived his life. Not even Daniel understood everything that was revealed to him, for this is why he asked: "**O my lord, what shall be the outcome of these things?**" The answer he received is the same answer that is for us: "**Go your way till the end. And you shall rest and shall stand in your allotted place at the end of the days**" (12:13). In other words: "Live your life in light of what is coming by engaging the mission God has called you into."

The mission is as old as Genesis and has been given to every follower of Jesus today. Daniel's mission is our mission and is given by the same One who governs the rock who will level the empires of earth (2:36-45), the One who was in the fiery furnace with Daniel's three friends (3:24-25), and the One who was given "**...dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him... which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed**" (7:13-14). What does it mean to go our way until the end? Jesus, the One who the book of Daniel points us to told us:

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)