

A STUDY OF DANIEL

STUDY GUIDE

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Faith Under Fire



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BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

Faith Under Fire

A STUDY OF
Daniel

Craig West
Heath Kirkwood
Tom Howe



 **BaptistWayPress®**

Dallas, Texas

*Faith Under Fire: A Study of Daniel—
Connect 360 Bible Study Guide*

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How to Make the Best Use of This Issue

Whether you're the teacher or a student—

1. Start early in the week before your class meets.
2. Overview the study. Review the table of contents and read the study introduction. Try to see how each lesson relates to the overall study.
3. Use your Bible to read and consider prayerfully the Scripture passages for the lesson. (You'll see that each writer has chosen a favorite translation for the lessons in this issue. You're free to use the Bible translation you prefer and compare it with the translation chosen for that unit, of course.)
4. After reading all the Scripture passages in your Bible, then read the writer's comments. The comments are intended to be an aid to your study of the Bible.
5. Read the small articles—"sidebars"—in each lesson. They are intended to provide additional, enrichment information and inspiration and to encourage thought and application.
6. Try to answer for yourself the questions included in each lesson. They're intended to encourage further thought and application, and they can also be used in the class session itself.

If you're the teacher—

Do all the things just mentioned, of course. As you begin the study with your class, be sure to find a way to help your class know the date on which each lesson will be studied. Here are some suggestions to guide your lesson preparation:

- A. In the first session of the study, briefly overview the study by identifying for your class the date on which each lesson will be studied. Lead your class to write the date in the table of contents on pages 7–8 and on the first page of each lesson.
- Make and post a chart that indicates the date on which each lesson will be studied.
 - If all your class has e-mail, send them an e-mail with the dates the lessons will be studied.
 - Provide a bookmark with the lesson dates. You may want to include information about your church and then use the bookmark as an outreach tool, too. A model for a bookmark can be downloaded from www.baptistwaypress.org under the “Teacher Helps” menu.
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Faith Under Fire

A Study of Daniel

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Introducing

FAITH UNDER FIRE

A STUDY OF DANIEL

Daniel is a book of prophecy written to educate and encourage the exiled Jews by revealing future tribulations and kingdom promises. It was also written to display God's sovereign power through miracles. There are many prophetic interpretations especially in the last half of this book. These chapters contain Bible prophecy, much like the book of Revelation. The challenge of the book of Daniel is interpretation. Please understand that the interpretations written in this study guide may or may not align with your specific beliefs. With that said, use this book, as a road map, to help you navigate which path, and/or interpretations to follow. Your opinions are valuable so enjoy the vibrant class discussion that will, more than likely, occur when discussing these lessons.

Background on the Book of Daniel

Daniel grew up as a good Jewish boy in Israel. As a teenager, possibly around 15 years of age, a foreign enemy conquered his nation and he was taken captive and placed in a different culture, a different environment with different people who spoke a different language and ate different food. Here he would spend the rest of his life successfully exalting God by living a **faith under fire**.

The book begins in 605 B.C. when Babylon conquered Jerusalem and deported many Jewish captives including Daniel and his three friends. It continues to the eventual demise of Babylonian supremacy in 539 B.C. when the Medo-Persian army conquered Babylon (5:30-31) and even goes beyond that to 536 B.C. (10:1). After his kidnapping, Daniel spent the rest of his life (another 70 years or more) successfully exalting God by his character and service. He certainly made the most of the “opportunity” God had given him. And throughout this book, Daniel passionately remembered his home as evidenced in his writings.

The Book of Daniel in Our Day

Can you trust God when your world falls apart? Daniel did. He lived close to God all the days of his life, serving Him faithfully and with great integrity in a foreign land. Daniel teaches us that God is faithful and He is in control.

The Book of Daniel was written to encourage the exiled Jews living in Babylonia by revealing God’s continued plan for them. This gave the Jews a great hope for the future even though their past was filled with great heart-break and pain.

This 14-week study is about God’s sovereign power through great miracles and Bible prophecy. It also serves as a wonderful reminder of the power of prayer in a Christian’s life. As a result of this study, our prayer is that your faith will be strengthened and you will have a deeper dependence on the power and providence of God.

FAITH UNDER FIRE: A STUDY OF DANIEL

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Lesson 3	The Dream Revealed	Daniel 2:31-49
Lesson 4	Cool in the Furnace	Daniel 3:1-30
Lesson 5	Put Out to Pasture	Daniel 4:1-37
Lesson 6	The Handwriting on the Wall	Daniel 5:1-31
Lesson 7	Living in the Lion’s Den	Daniel 6:1-28
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Easter Lesson	Because He Lives	Matthew 28:1-10

Additional Resources for Studying the Book of Daniel¹

- Daniel L. Akin. *Exalting Jesus in Daniel (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary)*. Nashville, Tennessee: Holman Reference, 2017.
- James Montgomery Boice. *Daniel. An Expositional Commentary*. Ada, Minnesota: Baker Books, 2006.
- Iain M. Duguid. *Daniel. Reformed Expository Commentary*. Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing, 2008.
- James Harman. *Daniel's Prophecies Unsealed: Understanding the Time of the End*. Maitland, Florida: Prophecy Countdown Publications, 2018.
- Paul R. House. *Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary* (Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries). Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2018.
- David Jeremiah. *The Handwriting On The Wall: Secrets From the Prophecies of Daniel*. Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishing, 1992.
- Clarence Larkin. *The Book of Daniel* (Illustrated). Scotts Valley, California: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2017.
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- John MacArthur. *MacArthur Bible Studies Book 5. Daniel: God's Control Over Rulers and Nations*. Nashville, Tennessee: W Publishing Group, 2000.
- J. Vernon McGee. *Daniel. The Prophets*. Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishing, 1995.
- Dwight L. Moody. *Daniel. Man of God: Being a Man of Character in a Babylon World* (Revised Edition). Chicago, Illinois: Aneko Press, 2018.
- John Phillips. *Exploring the Book of Daniel (John Phillips Commentary Series)*.

Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Productions, 2004.

Ronald W. Pierce. *Daniel. (Teach the Text Commentary Series)*. Ada, Minnesota: Baker Books, 2015.

Charles R. Swindoll. *Daniel: God's Pattern for the Future*. Nashville, Tennessee: W Pub Group, 1996.

John F. Walvoord. *Daniel. The John Walvoord Prophecy Commentaries*. Chicago, Illinois: Moody Publishers, 2012.

John C. Whitcomb. *Daniel (Everyday Bible Commentary Series)*. Chicago, Illinois: Moody Publishers, 2018.

Warren W. Wiersbe. *Daniel (The Wiersbe Bible Study Series). Determining to Go God's Direction*. Colorado Springs, Colorado: David C. Cook, 2012.

Notes

1. Listing a book does not imply full agreement by the writers or BaptistWay Press® with all of its comments.

lesson 1

A Diet for Success

MAIN IDEA

Hard times not only build character, but they also reveal it. How a person handles difficulties says a lot about that person's beliefs.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

When you have faced a difficult situation, how did you handle it and what did it reveal about your faith?

STUDY AIM

To learn to trust God when my world falls apart

QUICK READ

As a teenager, Daniel was taken captive to a foreign land, but he chose to serve God faithfully in a hostile environment.



Introduction

As a younger man, I studied music education in college. One of the first things I learned about a piece of music was that the melody appears repeatedly for the listener. It serves as a point of connection between composer and audience. It takes the smaller sections of the piece, and like a jigsaw puzzle, the melody places them together until the overall picture is revealed.

In a similar fashion, the melody of the book of Daniel repeats itself over and over: God is sovereign over all things, including the kings and kingdoms of this world. As a young man, Daniel was forcibly removed from his homeland and carried away to a place he'd never seen. It would have been completely understandable had Daniel allowed the circumstances of exile to overpower him and lead him to despair. Thankfully, he did exactly the opposite; He used those circumstances as motivation for his faith in God to grow and flourish during a season under fire.

Through this study, it is my prayer that you allow God to deepen your trust in His plan, your faith in His timing, and your dependence upon His power for each day.

Daniel 1:1-21

¹ In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. ² And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God. And he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god. ³ Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobility, ⁴ youths without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace, and to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans. ⁵ The king assigned them a daily portion of the food that the king ate, and of the wine that he drank. They were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time they were to stand before the king. ⁶ Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah

of the tribe of Judah. ⁷ And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names: Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego.

⁸ But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself. ⁹ And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs, ¹⁰ and the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king, who assigned your food and your drink; for why should he see that you were in worse condition than the youths who are of your own age? So you would endanger my head with the king."

¹¹ Then Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had assigned over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, ¹² "Test your servants for ten days; let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink.

¹³ Then let our appearance and the appearance of the youths who eat the king's food be observed by you, and deal with your servants according to what you see." ¹⁴ So he listened to them in this matter, and tested them for ten days. ¹⁵ At the end of ten days it was seen that they were better in appearance and fatter in flesh than all the youths who ate the king's food. ¹⁶ So the steward took away their food and the wine they were to drink, and gave them vegetables. ¹⁷ As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. ¹⁸ At the end of the time, when the king had commanded that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁹ And the king spoke with them, and among all of them none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Therefore they stood before the king.

²⁰ And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom.

²¹ And Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus.

Pressured to Compromise Holiness (1:1-7)

Daniel's story begins with an international conflict: a pagan army attacks Jerusalem and spirits away the spoils of war: treasures from within the temple,

as well as members of the royal families of Israel (1:1-3). It's very likely that Daniel was in his early teenage years when this occurred (606 B.C.), as he was still alive when the exile ended seventy years later. Can you imagine how that must have felt, to be so young and separated from your home? The kingdom they once knew was now so far away.

For some time, Israel had been slowly sliding down a slope, away from holiness and toward their ultimate judgment from God (2 Kings 23:31—24:9). Captivity in Babylon would be the discipline for the people's sin of disobedience. Some encouragement can be found in Daniel 1:2, as Daniel records, "And the Lord gave..." Although hidden in the military action against Jerusalem, God has initiated this action for a divine reason.

Verse 4 records that soon after their arrival in Babylon, Daniel and three other Hebrew youth, among others, are selected to be a part of a very intentional assimilation effort. The Babylonians intended to remove any trace of the Hebrew culture by replacing it with a three-year intensive study of Babylonian culture and practices. Through studying archeological evidence, Tremper Longman III makes a strong case for these young adults being taught the art of divination (the practice of making predictions through interpreting celestial phenomena and omens). This pressure to learn and internalize a new culture was only one of the pressures Daniel and other Hebrew youth faced in this new world.

Verse 5 indicates the king intended to have a "final exam" of these new citizens, and evaluate their progress. He also provided a great luxury for them during the process! They would be given food and drink from the king's own table. However, it was not all good news. By changing the Hebrew names of these four young men to Babylonian names, the verbal testimony of God would be silenced (1:7). This most likely was an attempt to move the Babylonian gods into the minds of the captured exiles, and to speed along the process of forgetting their God in worship.

Daniel's name means "Elohim is my judge." Belteshazzar means "May Bel protect his life." Bel is one of the Babylonians gods; this would have been a direct affront to the Hebrews trained to revere and protect God's name. In similar fashion, cultures today try to remove the influence of God in schools, public meeting places, and literature. The pressure to compromise has not gone away.

Prepared to Pursue Holiness (1:8-10)

Daniel and the other Hebrew youth had been prepared as youngsters to faithfully follow God's leading. Based upon the timing of Daniel's birth (622 B.C.), we know it is highly likely that these noble persons grew up in Israel during the reign of Josiah, one of the greatest reformers of religious activity in Judah's history. Second Kings 22—23 indicates he not only restored the temple to its intended use, but he also called for personal and national repentance, deposed ungodly priests, and returned God's Word to the center of the temple worship. Daniel and the others were prepared for this experience during a time of uncompromising devotion to Yahweh.

Daniel realized that accepting the food from the king's table would present a problem for the Hebrews (1:8). Perhaps it was an issue with the *kind* of food that was being served. If the king served food that was prohibited in the dietary laws, then they would risk being unclean before God (Leviticus 11). Perhaps the food being served had been sacrificed to idols prior to its being set before them. If that were the case, then the Levitical prohibitions against idolatry would have convicted the youth of disobedience (Deuteronomy 6:13-15). A third option is that by sharing a meal with the king, there might have been tacit approval of the pagan king and his beliefs.

Food For Thought

Daniel and his friends had a godly upbringing in Israel that influenced their worldview. What advice would you give to a teenager or friend who asked about the following?

- Drinking alcohol
- Not wanting to exercise
- Reading books about other religious beliefs
- Smoking
- Dressing like an actor/actress

How could you help impart the truth of 1 Timothy 4:8 into the conversation?

Whatever the reason, the phrase “And God gave...” returns a second time, indicating that God was working behind the scenes to assure Daniel’s success (1:9). Daniel took a chance in asking to be excused from the king’s wishes for the young administrators, but he knew that honoring God was more important than pleasing a king. He was willing to remain holy before the Lord, regardless of the cost.

Even though the initial response was that of self-preservation, consider the chief of the eunuchs for a moment. If God was working in the heart of a pagan official, how much more so will He work in the heart of someone who is committed to faithfully following Him?

Empowered Through Personal Holiness (1:11-21)

Daniel wisely suggested that the king’s servant examine the Hebrews after ten days of nothing but water and vegetables to check their physical condition (1:11-12). Daniel acknowledged that the test would be up to Ashpenaz’s assessment. Based upon the results, the servant could do whatever he thought necessary. By choosing to remain pure before God, Daniel positioned himself to advance God’s reputation in the pagan kingdom.

The results of the examination were clear: not only were Daniel and the others better off physically than those who ate from the king’s table, but the Hebrews’ appearance was better than the one who ate and drank the richer things (1:15-16). Daniel and his friends kept themselves from being offensive to their pagan “host,” but more importantly, they did not dishonor God through the pressures of the culture. By continuing to follow God’s leadership in his life, Daniel was able to trust God in this moment where it literally could have been his life—and the three others lives—on the line.

No Wand Required

The Hebrew word *harṭōm* is translated “magician” and refers to those mentioned in Daniel 1:20, as well as those found in the time of Joseph (Genesis 41:8) and Moses (Exodus 7:11). The literal meaning of the word is “engraver” or “writer.” Their primary function was to write down the movements of celestial bodies to gain wisdom or knowledge from them. Although it can be assumed there were some tricks performed at various times, these magicians were advisors to Babylonians kings on virtually every matter of importance. They would read omens to study the future, employ rites and rituals to heal the sick, and attempt to interpret dreams.

Although Daniel and his friends entered into the king’s court, it should not be assumed they participated in, nor approved of, such practices. They would have been familiar with the Law’s prohibitions against sorcery (Leviticus 19:26, 31; 20:6, 27; Deuteronomy 18:10-11). While there were some who employed a more evil form of black magic, Daniel’s contemporaries were benevolent and protective of their king and kingdom.

Consider the ramifications of Daniel’s personal choices to remain holy. He had a powerful influence on every part of himself: body, spirit, and mind. His body was better because he trusted God to provide for his *need*, nothing more. His spirit was invigorated because God rewarded Daniel for his trust and obedience (1:17). His mind was sharpened, along with the three others, and God gave them wisdom beyond their years (1:20). A secular education in Babylon wasn’t something to be avoided or shunned; isolation from the ruling nation would not have provided Daniel with any particular benefit. Due to Daniel’s consistent behavior of holiness, God was able to use him *in the midst* of an ungodly culture.

Daniel also became a powerful influence over three influential Babylonian rulers. Based upon verse 21, we know that Daniel was present in the royal house of Babylon during the reigns of Nebuchadnezzar II (605-562 B.C.), Nabonidus (556-539 B.C.), and Belshazzar (556-539 B.C.). (Note: Belshazzar shared the throne with his father Nabonidus). God placed Daniel in a prime

position to bring godly influence at a national level, because Daniel made a choice to trust God's provision despite the concerns of the moment (1:20).

Finally, Daniel also influenced his three friends through choosing to remain holy in spite of worldly compromise. Even though all four received Babylonian names, Daniel was the one who resolved not to partake of the king's food. His three friends took up the challenge to be holy, and by the time of their trial by fire, Daniel is nowhere to be seen. It should not be missed, however, that God remained in the midst of these four youth (1:17).

Daniel's personal choices paid off for him, and the blessings he received from it rippled out from him like waves in the water after a large stone is dropped into it. We can rest assured that if we are following the Lord, there will come times in our lives—if they have not already appeared—where our faith will be challenged and we are pressured to compromise (2 Timothy 3:12). Will we dare to be a Daniel?

Implications and Actions

People of resolve aren't born...they are fashioned in the crucible of preparation. Most likely, the idea to test his Babylonian captors' will in the dietary offerings did not just appear in the mind of Daniel. For the better part of their lives, these Hebrew youth had heard of God's sovereignty, His provision for His people, and His protection over them. That is what encouraged Daniel to boldly step out; his faith had been fashioned by God over time.

When followers of Christ are pressured to compromise over things that God has indicated in His Word are important to Him, what makes us ignore His Will and choose that of the world?

Daniel's story ought to remind us that it is possible to have a godly life, and be able to have influence in this world. Too often, I find that I neglect one in an attempt to gain the other.

Do you believe in the power of those words, "and God gave..."? They have the power to change our whole perspective during times of great pressure.

Questions

1. If you had been Daniel, would you have spoken out against taking the king's food and drink?
2. In what situations in life do you find it hardest—or even feel it might be impossible—to remain faithful to Christ? What examples from culture are Christians being pressured to accept, or change their thinking?
3. What encouragement can you find from Daniel's encounter in this chapter for those situations?
4. What part of this lesson is most challenging for you? Why?
5. Being godly in the world is not necessarily opposed to being useful in the world. Does this challenge or encourage you? Why?

6. What part could you play in helping train the next generation to be like Daniel?

NOTES

1. Tremper Longman III, *Daniel, NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), p. 50.