

DANIEL

BIBLE

STUDIES

TERM 3

2015



Introduction

Daniel is an exciting, fun, challenging really weird book. Stories from the first half make it in to kids Bibles and have become childhood memories for many. Even in the first half though there are bits that the kids Bibles avoid. By the second half of the book things get really weird as Daniel is shown scary visions of the future.

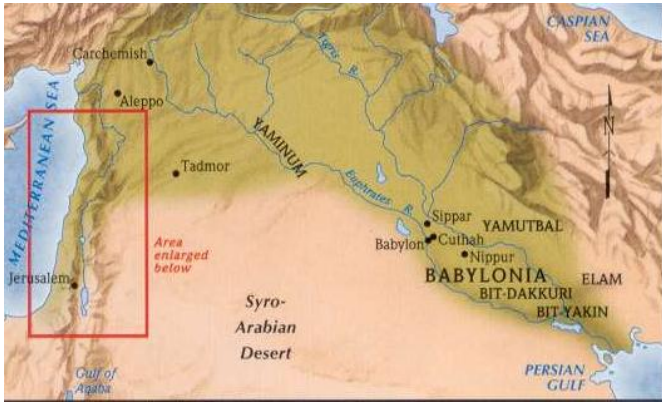
Daniel lived at the end of the 7th Century into the 6th Century BC. He was probably around 90 when he died! For years before this God had been warning his people to come back to him and stop sinning. Finally he said enough was enough. He raised up the Babylonian empire to conquer Judah and deport many of its people to Babylon. You can read about it in 2 Kings 24-25. Daniel was among the first group of people to be taken into exile. There are three big questions for him and his friends. 1 – Is God still in control? 2 - how do we live for God in a world where we have no land or political power of our own. 2 - what does the future hold for God's people. This book answers all three questions.

The second half of Daniel is what is known as apocalyptic literature. The book of Revelation is the biggest example of it in the Bible, and it draws much of its imagery from Daniel. It gives us an insight into both the future (for Daniel) and the spiritual reality behind the physical world we see. This type of writing depends on symbolism to make its point (e.g. nations are depicted as beasts to show how, in their sin, they act in a sub-human way – less than God made them to be.)

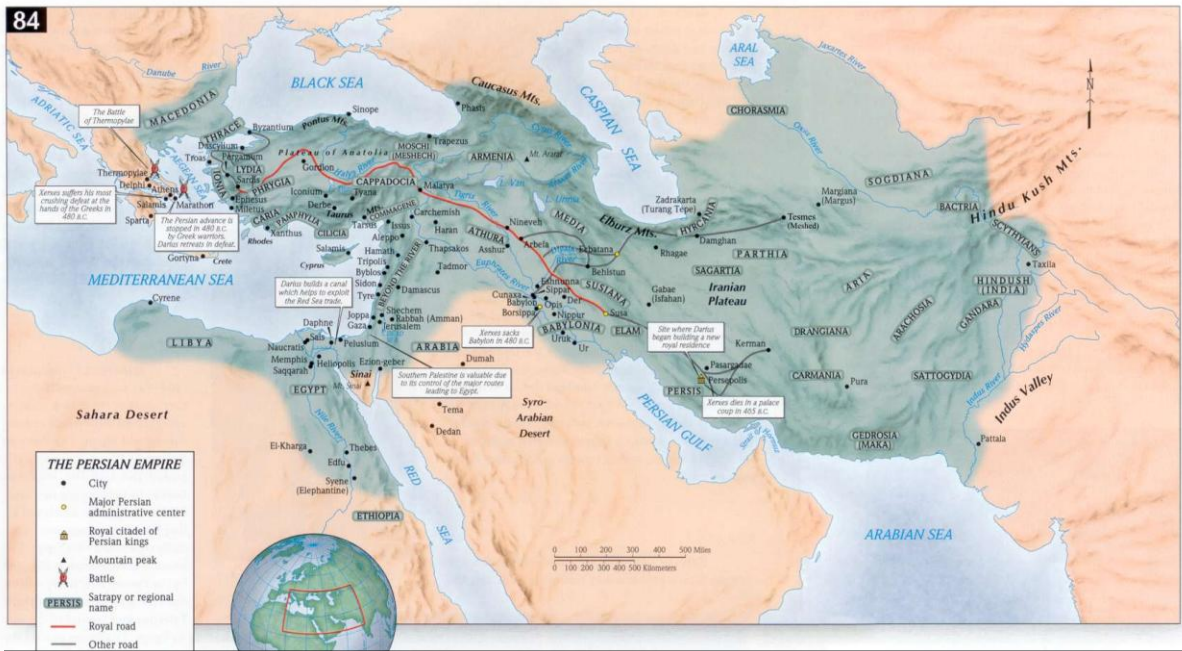
Some people throw up their hands and say this is all too hard! Others get overly obsessed in the detail and come up with all sorts of predictions that they claim are just about to happen. We need to relax a bit. God really is speaking to us and he really is good at communicating. If something is vague, he meant it too be vague. Our main task is to work out the big picture of what God is telling us which, with some patient reading, we are able to do.

Ultimately, this book is about God. It shows God's amazing power; that he is still in control of all nations despite their evil attempts at autonomy and power; and how he will have the final victory in Christ. It still speaks to us today as exiles in a strange land waiting to go to our heavenly home. God is still in control. Big powerful evil nations will not escape judgement. God has already won the final victory in Christ. In all the excitement, fear and head scratching of this book, remember the ultimate message – God wins!

Maps



The Babylonian Empire. King Nebuchadnezzar (reigned 605-562BC) and his dad destroyed the Assyrian empire and became the dominant power in the region. The area covers modern Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Israel. Notice how ancient Israel and Judah have been completely swallowed up.



The Medo-Persian Empire. Cyrus the Persian conquered the Medes and in 539 he went on to take the Babylonian empire. As you can see, their empire got really big and really powerful. They never managed to get the Greeks though. These guys are referred to in Daniel 2, 6, 7 and 8.



Alexander The Great (reigned 333-321BC). Exactly like God says in Daniel 8, Alexander (a Macedonian/Greek) charged into the Persian empire and took it over in ten years. He then died very suddenly in Babylon and his empire was divided among his generals.

Alexander's generals divided the empire into four (with a few small extras). Daniel 11 talks about the kings of the South – the Ptolemys in Egypt, and the kings of the North – The Seleucids. The Seleucids had the middle section that stretched all the way to India (at its height). They battled over the middle ground which included Israel.



The Roman empire around the time of Jesus' birth.



Jesus' Empire

Daniel 1 – Exiles in a strange land

Getting started

1. Where do you feel most intensely that Christians are different to the world around us?

Daniel begins at a time when The people of Judah were being punished for their rejection of God. Even then, though, God had preserved a remnant of people who were still faithful in following him. Daniel and his friends were such people. They were very suddenly plucked out of their families, homes and homeland. They now had to work out how to live for God as exiles in a foreign country.

Understanding the Passage

Read Daniel 1

2. Write down/discuss your initial questions/thoughts/insights about the passage.
3. In v1-2, who does Nebuchadnezzar think gave him the victory over Judah?
4. Who does the passage say really gave him the victory?
5. In v3-7, what are the required qualifications for the youths from Israel?
6. What are the Babylonians trying to do with/to the youths?
7. In v8-16, Daniel isn't concerned about weight loss. What does verse 8 say his real concern is?

8. Why does Daniel make the stand he does regarding the food? (**Important Note:** Wine is not considered unclean in the Old Testament law, nor is it clear that the King's food necessarily has ceremonially unclean food. Also, Daniel 10:2-3 suggests that Daniel's abstaining from wine at least was not lifelong. Finally, despite some very successful "Christian" books that promote the "Daniel diet", The Bible makes very clear that eating meat does not defile you before God (See Gen 9:1-3). Daniel isn't concerned about health questions; he's concerned about being defiled. Think about what the Babylonians are trying to do to these youths and also who gets the credit for their good development.)

9. According to the text, why is the Eunuch happy to listen to Daniel?

10. In v17-21, why are Daniel and his friends so successful?

Read 1 Peter 2:11-17

11. How were Daniel and his friends successful in doing the things this passage talks about?

Thinking it through

12. What comfort does this passage give for those who are tempted to think God's lost control or has stopped working?

13. In 1 Peter 2:11-17, in what way are we aliens (exiles) and strangers

14. What are the areas that you struggle with that Peter mentions?

Daniel 2 – The Revealer of Mysteries

Getting Started

1. Why are people so offended by the idea that God controls our future?

Being an adviser in the royal court of Babylon was not just about being wise. It also required a working knowledge of how to understand omens, read the stars, tell the future based on the shape of an animal's liver, and interpret dreams. All of these were focussed on working out what the future holds. Knowledge is power and knowledge of the future means a lot of power! In this chapter the most powerful ruler on the earth needs more power than his advisers are able to give him.

Understanding the passage

Read Daniel 2

2. Write down/discuss your initial questions/thoughts/insights about the passage.
3. Why do you think the king breaks from tradition and refuses to tell the advisers (Astrologers, or Chaldeans, depending on your translation) what he actually dreamed?
4. What truth do the advisers tell in v10-12.
5. What steps does Daniel take in v16-18? How is that different to the other advisers?
6. v19-23 are in many ways the central verses for the passage. In your own words, what are the key facts that Daniel says about God?
7. According to these verses does God simply foretell the future or does he control it as well?

8. In v26-30, what are the key differences between what Daniel says and what the other advisers said earlier in the chapter?

A note on dream interpretation: Some people think that the four kingdoms are the Babylonians, the Medes and Persians (2 empires that united into one), the Greeks and the Romans (I think this has stronger grounding). Others say they are the Babylonians, the Medes, the Persians and the Greeks. In the end, it doesn't overly matter. If it mattered, God would have told us! People can get too caught up on what God hasn't told us and miss the importance of what he does actually say.

9. Nebuchadnezzar is very powerful. How did he get that power (v37-38).

10. According to the dream, what else will God do that's even bigger?

11. By v47, what has Nebuchadnezzar discovered about Daniel?

Thinking it through?

12. When does God establish this final kingdom (see Luke 1:30-33; Matthew 28:18)?

13. Why is it comforting to know that God controls our future?

14. What does this passage have to say to the many people who like to read their star signs or have their fortune told.

15. As we saw last week, we, like Daniel, are exiles waiting to go home. How does this passage help us Christian exiles who are surrounded by communities, governments and corporations that are fundamentally opposed to God?

Translation Note: The book of Daniel begins in Hebrew, the language of the Israelites. From chapter 2 verse 4 to the end of chapter 7 it is in Aramaic, the international language employed by the Babylonian empire that people from lots of different tribes and conquered nations could use. These chapters send their message to the world, just as Nebuchadnezzar's dream is given to the (apparent) king of the world. The message is – God is in charge of everyone, everywhere!

Daniel 3 – No other god is able to deliver like this!

Getting Started

1. When are you most tempted to keep quiet about your faith in God? Why do you think that is?

So far, it hasn't cost Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego much to stick firmly with following God apart from a couple of years of really delicious meals. In fact, they're faithfulness has been rewarded with honour and prestige. They've even managed to save possibly hundreds of lives. You would think that following the events of chapter 2 the royal advisers/astrologers would be eternally grateful. In reality though, they're really not happy that these Jews are being promoted much faster than everyone else. The people who've just been saved very quickly turn into political rivals and Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are about to get seriously tested.

Understanding the passage

Read Daniel 3

2. Write down/discuss your initial questions/thoughts/insights about the passage.
3. In v1-7, what do you think Nebuchadnezzar is trying to do with this exercise? What are the consequences of disobeying?
4. What is the essence of the charge against the three friends (v12)?
5. In the second half of verse 15, what is Nebuchadnezzar assuming?
6. In v16-18 what are the basic assumptions of the three friends? What are they careful not to say?

7. What are the consequences for the soldiers' loyalty to the idol worshipping, arrogant king?

Note about 4th person: Don't get caught up in trying to work out exactly who the fourth person is with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the furnace. Some people think it's God, some think it's an angel sent from God. Both are valid. Nebuchadnezzar mentions both options, but he's hardly the world's greatest theologian. The fact is, God doesn't tell us, and we should be very careful to not try to fill in the blanks. Be content to let God know more than you! The point is, whoever is actually in the furnace, God saves them – either by his own physical presence or through sending an angel.

8. What is significant about how Nebuchadnezzar addresses the friends in verse 26?
9. In v28-29 what impresses Nebuchadnezzar about the three friends. More significantly, what impresses him about God?

Thinking it through

10. What does this passage tell us about God that should help us take a stand for him?
11. Would the stance of the three friends be any less worthwhile if God hadn't saved them from the fire? See Mark 8:34-38
12. Read Romans 8:31-39. On what basis can we be even more confident than the three friends that God is worth dying for?

Daniel 4 – Humbling the Proud

Getting Started

1. What's so impressive about a "self-made man or woman"?

Nebuchadnezzar was the king of the golden age of the Babylonian empire. His dad, Nabopolassar, had begun the work of throwing off the shackles and ultimately destroying the Assyrian empire. Nebuchadnezzar had completed the work and expanded the Babylon empire, making it secure. He also set out to rebuild Babylon itself which had been devastated over years of sieges and uprisings. He created astounding edifices, rebuilt temples, constructed a bridge over the Euphrates river and spared no expense on his royal palace. He built city walls so big it was said that there was room on the top for a four horse chariot to turn around. He was the ultimate self made man... Or so he thought.

Understanding the Passage

Read Daniel 4

2. Write down/discuss your initial questions/thoughts/insights about the passage.
3. In v2-3, what would you say in your own words that Nebuchadnezzar has learnt?
4. From v8, What has Nebuchadnezzar kind of learnt about Daniel and kind of not?
5. In the vision (v10-16), what is significant about the tree? In your own words what happens to the tree?
6. What is the purpose of all this happening (v17)?

Note about 7 periods of time: How long is 7 times? Short answer – we don't know. More important answer – it doesn't matter. Lots of people will say that it means seven years. But what in the passage says that? Why not 7 months or weeks or days? The importance lies in the symbolism of 7. Throughout the Bible seven represents completeness; e.g. God rested on the 7th day when the work of creation was complete. In other words, Nebuchadnezzar

will lose his mind for exactly the right amount of time to make him acknowledge God as the ruler of the kingdom of men.

7. In v20-22, how does Nebuchadnezzar represent the tree.

8. In v25 what does Nebuchadnezzar need to learn?

9. In v28-32, what's wrong with what Nebuchadnezzar says?

10. From v34-47, how would you put what Nebuchadnezzar has learnt in your own words?

Thinking it Through

11. What does this passage have to say to those of us who grumble about election results?
Who should we speak to if we have a problem with a government?

12. What does this passage have to say to those of us who have achieved a lot or built a lot of prosperity.

13. What does this passage have to say to governments and world leaders who oppose God's plans?

Daniel 5 – Mene Mene Tekel Parsin

Getting Started

1. The final judgement day has been a long time coming. What effect does this have when non-Christians hear Christians talking about that day?

In Daniel 5 the book of Daniel jumps over a whole bunch of history. Daniel first arrived in Babylon as a teenager in the year 605BC. Daniel 5 happened in October, 539 BC – 66 years later. Daniel is now in his late 70s or even early 80s. Nebuchadnezzar died back in 562 BC after reigning for 43 years. He was succeeded by a bunch of relatively short termers. By 539 Nabonidus is on the throne but not in Babylon. His Son, Belshazzar, is calling the shots back in the capital city and shares the title of king (See historical note below). As kings have come and gone Daniel has been pushed to the sidelines. His God, though, is still very much in control.

Understanding the Passage

Read Daniel 5

2. Write down/discuss your initial questions/thoughts/insights about the passage.
3. How do the events of v1-4 make the God of Judah look?
4. What mistake of the young Nebuchadnezzar is Belshazzar repeating (See Daniel 1:1-3)?
5. What does the queen rebuke Belshazzar for? What has he failed to know? (She is possibly Nebuchadnezzar's wife who lived to be 104.)
6. Compare Belshazzar's words to Daniel in 5:13-16 with Nebuchadnezzar's in his later life (4:9, 18). How is the tone different?
7. Put v17-21 in your own words. What point is Daniel trying to make?

8. In v22-23, what has Belshazzar done wrong? Why does he not get the insanity opportunity that Nebuchadnezzar received?

9. In v26, what is God's judgement? How does this explain Daniel's opening statement in v17?

10. How does Belshazzar's response show he hasn't really understood at all?

Thinking it Through:

11. What did Belshazzar deliberately forget that led to his downfall?

12. Our society also deliberately forgets (See 2 Peter 3:3-13). How does this give urgency to evangelism? How should we Christians live in light of this?

Historical note: For many years historians laughed at the Book of Daniel because there was no evidence (other than Daniel!!!) that there was ever a king called Belshazzar. As has happened so often in modern times, new evidence has been uncovered to show the Bible got it right all along. Belshazzar was the son of Nabonidus. Because of a tiff with the powerful priests Nabonidus left Babylon and made Belshazzar his co-regent, or co-king. (That explains why Belshazzar can only offer to make Daniel 3rd highest ruler in the kingdom in v16). Turns out the Bible was telling the truth all along!

Babylon straddled the Euphrates river. The Persian army managed to divert enough of the river so that they could wade in it past the Babylonian defences. They snuck in at night with the whole city was partying - an extension of the party that was happening at the palace. The troops made a bee line for the palace, cut down the guards, burst in on Belshazzar's party and cut down him and his entire retinue. Thankfully, Daniel must have left the room by then. Babylon was never a world power again. It's now a pile of rubble and archaeological artefacts.

Biblical note: It's interesting that both the beginning and end of Babylon are marked by direct arrogant sin against God and God confusing language (See Genesis 11:1-9).

Daniel 6 – The God who Rescues

Getting Started

1. In a crisis, what do people look to to save them?

Daniel has outlived a number of kings and now he's outlived a whole Empire. Once again, Daniel rises to the top and, once again, success breeds jealousy. In Daniel's many long years of being faithful to God though (remember, he's somewhere around 80 years old) his God has always been faithful to Daniel.

Understanding the Passage

Read Daniel 6

2. Write down/discuss your initial questions/thoughts/insights about the passage.
3. What's ironic about Daniel's new position given Belshazzar's orders in 5:29?
4. How has devotion to God shaped Daniel's life (v4)?
5. What's the motivation of the Satraps and administrators (v3-4)?
6. Why do you think Darius would agree to such a law as that in v6-9?
7. In verse 10, how would you describe Daniel's reaction to the passing of the new law?
8. Darius has enormous power, but what is he unable to do (v13-15)?
9. Given the law he has just passed, what is ironic about the words of the king in v16?

10. According to v23, why was Daniel saved?

11. What are the consequences for those who go against God and his servant (v24)?

12. Put v26-27 in your own words. How do these words match Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the statue back in chapter 2?

Thinking it Through

13. What have Daniel and Jesus got in common (compare v17 and v21-23 with Matt 27:66; 1 Peter 2:23; and Acts 2:23-24)?

14. How is the God of Daniel 6 seen in Jesus (Compare v26-27 with Matthew 28:18-20; Philippians 16:30-31; and John 3:36)?

15. According to both Darius and Jesus, who needs to hear about the God who saves?

Spend time praying for heaps of countries and people groups, that they would know this God through Jesus.

Historical note: Historians don't really know who Darius the Mede is. Cyrus the Persian was the emperor (see v28). Darius the Mede could actually be Cyrus the Persian (since he was king of the Medes and the Persians) and Darius is just one of his names historians don't know about. Darius could also be another name for the governor/king, Gubaru, who Cyrus set over the province of Babylon.

Some people use this as a reason to discard the historicity of Daniel. The trend of archaeological discovery of the past hundred years, however, has been to provide increasing support for the Biblical history rather than to tear it down. Remember Belshazzar from last week, who for a long time was thought to be fictional until more and more evidence came to light showing that Daniel's portrayal of him matches history. Other Biblical characters who sceptics have had to backtrack on are Kings David and Hezekiah. Just because there is no evidence outside the Bible yet, it doesn't mean the Bible is wrong. In fact, history has shown time and again that historians should take the Bible very seriously.

Daniel 7 – The Son of Man

Getting Started

1. When do nations seem most terrifying?

Read Daniel 7

Daniel 7 steps back in time about 10 years from the previous chapter to the first year of King Belshazzar. As readers we already know that Belshazzar and the whole Babylonian empire is doomed so we are wondering what will happen next. This vision fills us in.

People want to be very specific in interpreting the various people and places of this chapter. We should be cautious. We can definitely say as much as the text, and the rest of the Bible, says. After that we should be tentative. For example, we can tentatively say that the four beasts may be the kingdoms of Babylonia, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. The very fact that they are not named however reminds us of all kingdoms and countries that act like these countries. Those four kingdoms are representative. This is different to chapter 8 where the kingdoms of Persia and Greece are specifically named (and very accurate to history!). With this in mind, let's think carefully about what the passage does say.

Understanding the passage

2. Write down/discuss your initial questions/thoughts/insights about the passage.
3. What do the first three beasts have in common?
4. Beast one is transformed from its beastliness to become like a man. Where else have we seen that in Daniel so far?
5. In v7-8, what is different about the fourth beast?
6. In v9-11, what is the reason that the Ancient of Days (God) has arrived? What does he do with the beast with the boastful horn?
7. In v13-14, what are the key differences between the Son of Man and the beasts?

8. In v17-18, who are the beasts and the Son of Man identified as?

9. In v19-27 what will the arrogant horn do to the saints? What will be his end? What will be the end outcome for the saints?

Time, times and half a time: People LOOOOOVE coming up with specific time periods for this phrase. The most popular one is three and a half years, where time = year. Even then though, times doesn't have to mean two years. It could be hundreds! A better reading would be to say that the kingdom seems to gather pace and power and looks like it will last forever but is then cut short.

Son of Man: What an intriguing figure! When we first meet him he is one man. Later on he represents all the saints. He is labelled as like a human (son of man – Daniel and Ezekiel both are called this), but the imagery of him is God imagery, especially coming on the clouds. What does it all mean?

Thinking it Through

10. Jesus called himself the Son of Man. He could just mean that he's a human. Read Mark 14:60-64. What is Jesus claiming about himself?

11. If Jesus is the "saints" (Dan 7:18, 24, 27) how does he fulfil the prophecy about the saints being oppressed but then having the final victory and receiving the kingdom? (See Philippians 2:5-11).

12. The New Testament says that we are "in Christ" and calls us saints. In what way are we the saints of Dan 7 and so, through Christ, also included in the Son of Man imagery? (See Hebrews 12:1-3, 28).

13. God didn't have to tell us everything he does in Daniel 7. Why does he do it? What warnings/encouragements should we take from this chapter?

Homework – The last study will cover the last four chapters of Daniel. Obviously we can't look at every bit in detail, so it would be good to have read the four chapters beforehand.

Daniel 9-12 – War, Pain and Resurrection

Getting Started

1. Given the way the world speaks about and treats Christian why should we have any hope?

If you've read the last four chapters of Daniel your head may be spinning a bit. Some parts of this section are super specific – especially chapter 11 which accurately describes in detail the wars between the Ptolemy's of Egypt (king of the South) and the Seleucids in the area around Syria and Palestine (king of the North). It's so accurate that people like to doubt its authenticity, but we don't have to worry about that, for the whole Bible testifies to God's ability to accurately foretell the future. Daniel himself trusts God's ability, for God had said through Jeremiah that the time between the destruction of Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the temple would be 70 years and on this basis he prays in chapter 9. This passage is still teaching us to trust God!

Understanding the Passage

Read Daniel 9:1-19

2. According to these verses, what has Israel done wrong:

5	
6	
8	
10-11	
13	
16	

3. What does Daniel say about God's character in these verses:

4	
7	
9	
12	

14	
15	
18	

4. What do these verses say about God's word through his prophets:

2	
6	
10	
11-13	

God did send his people back to Judah after 70 years, just like he said he would through Jeremiah. You can read about it in Ezra and Nehemiah. But now God tells Daniel about another seventy, or a more significant seventy. Again, don't read too much into the timing. It's symbolic of the perfect amount of time.

Read 9:20-27

5. In your own words, what will be accomplished by the end of the 70 sevens according to v24?

6. What else is promised during this time (v25-27). (**Note:** Anointed One means a person chosen for a particular task. The Hebrew word for it is Messiah. The Greek word is Christ.)

7. Read Daniel 11:29-35. These verses describe the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes (175-164) who conquered Egypt, only to be kicked out very quickly by the diplomatic bullying of Rome. He pulled back and threw a king sized hissy fit. What does this passage say will happen?

8. Read Daniel 12. Why might Daniel be nervous about the future? What does he have to look forward to?

Think it Through

9. Thinking about what we read in questions 3 and 4, and the prophecies that follow, what grounds does Daniel have to both be nervous and excited about the future.

10. Antiochus Epiphanes set up an “abomination that causes desolation” by dedicating the Jerusalem temple to Zeus and possibly having a pig sacrificed on the altar. Jesus reacquires the phrase in Matthew 24:15 and Mark 13:14, possibly talking about the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 70AD by the Romans. And yet at the same time he has another meaning for it. Read Mark 14:13-27. What similarities do you see with Daniel? What could the ultimate abomination that causes desolation be, especially when it ushers in the time of the gathering of the elect, righteousness, forgiveness of sins and the resurrection age?

11. We can see so much more than Daniel though perhaps not as much as we’d like! Much of the history that Daniel saw in the future we now see in the past. And yet, nations still act like less-than-human beasts, raging against God, his people and each other. The Son of Man has won the victory and received his eternal kingdom, and yet the saints are still persecuted and the final judgement is still to come. The book of Daniel began in chapter one by showing the saints how to live as exiles in a foreign country. Given all we have learned about the character of God, the nature of the world and the plan for the saints, what do you think God is telling us through this book about how to live in this world as the people of God?