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THE 66-BOOK 8-WEEK GROUP BIBLE STUDY SERIES • BOOK 27 OF 66

דָּנִיֵּאל

DANIEL

An 8-Week Group Bible Study

By Greg and Kayla Gibson

WEEK 1 OF 8 • GENERAL / MIXED GROUP EDITION

Faithful in Babylon — Daniel 1:1–2:49

Scripture Scope: Daniel 1:1–2:49 (ESV) • Session Length: 75–90 Minutes

LEADER GUIDE EDITION

Complete Participant Text + Interleaved Pacing, Hebrew Word Studies, Facilitation Probes & Pitfalls

Daniel — 8-Week Group Bible Study (Leader Guide Edition)

Week 1: Faithful in Babylon (Daniel 1:1–2:49)

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- **The setting:** Daniel opens in the third year of Jehoiakim—commonly dated to Nebuchadnezzar's 605 BC campaign (scholars also note chronological discussions comparing Daniel 1:1 with Jeremiah 25:1 and 46:2)—and closes in the third year of Cyrus king of Persia, about 536 BC. Daniel lived through the whole exile in Babylon and into the Persian era.
- **Connections:** Daniel 1:1–2 matches 2 Kings 24:1 and 2 Chronicles 36:5–7, when temple vessels were carried to Babylon; the same vessels appear at Belshazzar's feast (Daniel 5) and are returned under Cyrus (Ezra 1:7–11). Daniel's contemporaries were Jeremiah, in Jerusalem, and Ezekiel, among the exiles, who likely names Daniel (spelled Danel in Hebrew; some scholars discuss whether Ezekiel also echoes a traditional righteous figure) as a model of righteousness and wisdom (Ezekiel 14:14; 28:3).
- **Two halves:** Chapters 1–6 are court stories, told about Daniel and his friends, showing faithful exiles serving pagan kings while God proves sovereign over empires. Chapters 7–12 are visions, told largely by Daniel himself, revealing God's plan through successive kingdoms to his everlasting kingdom.
- **Two languages:** Daniel is written in Hebrew (1:1–2:4a; chapters 8–12) and Aramaic (2:4b–7:28), the international language of the empire. The Aramaic chapters form a mirror pattern: four kingdoms (2 and 7), faithful Jews delivered (3 and 6), and proud kings judged (4 and 5).
- **The structure:**
  - Faithful in Babylon and the king's dream (1–2).
  - The fiery furnace (3).
  - The humbling of Nebuchadnezzar (4).
  - The writing on the wall (5).
  - The lions' den (6).
  - The four beasts and the Son of Man (7).
  - The ram and the goat, and Daniel's prayer (8–9).
  - The final vision and the resurrection hope (10–12).
- **Why it matters:** Daniel shows how God's people can live faithfully in a culture that does not share their faith, because the Most High rules the kingdoms of men. Human empires rise and fall, but the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, and he gives it to one like a son of man.

How This 8-Week Study Works

Designed for weekly small groups, mini-churches, and community gatherings (75–90 minutes per session) rather than daily homework checklists, this study follows Daniel's 12 chapters in eight weeks. Daniel's six court stories each carry a full week, and its visions are studied carefully without speculation. Each week moves through six repeatable sections:

- **Section X.1 — Opening:** Sets the scene, the Week at a Glance, Head, Heart, and Hands objectives, the Opening Frame, and the Opening Entry Question.
- **Section X.2 — Historical & Literary Context:** Places the week's chapters inside the structure of Daniel and the ancient Near Eastern world.

- **Section X.3 — Movement 1:** The week's first guided passage: Guided Scripture Reading, Anchor Verses, Teaching Narrative, and Group Discussion Questions.
- **Section X.4 — Movement 2:** The week's second guided passage, following the same flow.
- **Section X.5 — Canonical Horizon:** Traces how the passage echoes across Scripture and finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ.
- **Section X.6 — Application, Looking Ahead, and Closing Prayer:** Moves the week's study into everyday life, previews next week, and closes in prayer.

Key anchor verses are printed in each section for quick reference. Longer focal passages are read aloud together from the ESV.

Choosing a Bible Translation: Top 5 Translations Compared

Every English Bible translation falls along a spectrum between two primary approaches: word-for-word translation (formal equivalence, which prioritizes literal accuracy to the original phrasing and sentence structure) and thought-for-thought translation (dynamic equivalence, which prioritizes immediate modern readability by translating idioms and ideas into natural contemporary expressions). Here is how five widely used English translations compare:

- **ESV (English Standard Version) — Word-for-Word**
  - Pros: Follows the wording and sentence structure of the original Hebrew and Greek closely while using modern English; well suited to close study.
  - Cons: Because it tracks the original sentence structure, some phrasing can feel more formal than everyday speech.
- **NIV (New International Version) — Balanced (Between Word-for-Word and Thought-for-Thought)**
  - Pros: Widely read; balances accuracy to the original languages with natural, everyday readability.
  - Cons: Because some idioms are rendered as modern expressions, a few literal wordplays or technical terms can be less visible.
- **NLT (New Living Translation) — Thought-for-Thought**
  - Pros: Warm and conversational; reads smoothly aloud and helps readers follow the big picture of long passages.
  - Cons: Because it prioritizes meaning over literal phrasing, it can be harder to use for close word study.
- **CSB (Christian Standard Bible) — Optimal Equivalence (Balanced)**
  - Pros: Stays close to the original words where possible while smoothing awkward phrasing into natural modern English.
  - Cons: Because it is a newer translation, some well-known verses may sound different from the wording many readers remember.
- **KJV / NKJV (King James Version & New King James Version) — Traditional Word-for-Word**
  - Pros: Historic cadence that shaped English literature and church history; the NKJV updates archaic pronouns ("thee/thou") while keeping the classic rhythm.
  - Cons: Often reads like older English poetry, with complex sentences and archaic or formal vocabulary that can be harder for modern readers to follow.

This study quotes the ESV.

Greg & Kayla's Recommended Study Bibles

Having a trusted study Bible on hand is one of the best ways to go deeper as you read through Daniel:

- **Greg's Favorite Study Bible:** The MacArthur Study Bible (ESV), which contains extensive explanatory notes beneath almost every verse, ideal for detailed study.
- **Kayla's Favorite Study Bible:** The ESV Study Bible, containing over 20,000 study notes, articles, and explanations.

The 8-Week Daniel Study at a Glance

Week	Title & Passage	Movement 1 / Movement 2	Canonical Horizon
1	**Faithful in Babylon** (1:1–2:49)	Daniel's Resolve in the King's Court (1:1–21) / The Dream of the Statue and the Kingdom That Will Stand Forever (2:1–49)	Christ the stone whose kingdom fills the earth
2	**Even If He Does Not** (3:1–30)	The Golden Image and the Refusal (3:1–18) / The Fourth Man in the Fire (3:19–30)	The Son who walks with his people in the fire
3	**The Most High Rules** (4:1–37)	The Dream of the Great Tree (4:1–27) / Nebuchadnezzar Humbled and Restored (4:28–37)	The Most High who humbles the proud and exalts the humble
4	**Weighed and Found Wanting** (5:1–31)	Belshazzar's Feast and the Writing on the Wall (5:1–12) / Daniel's Interpretation and the Fall of Babylon (5:13–31)	The Judge before whom every life is weighed
5	**The God Who Shuts the Lions' Mouths** (6:1–28)	The Plot Against Daniel's Prayers (6:1–15) / Delivered from the Lions (6:16–28)	The Righteous One sealed in a tomb and raised
6	**One Like a Son of Man** (7:1–28)	The Four Beasts (7:1–8) / The Ancient of Days and the Everlasting Kingdom (7:9–28)	Jesus the Son of Man and his everlasting kingdom
7	**How Long, O Lord?** (8:1–9:27)	The Ram and the Goat (8:1–27) / Daniel's Prayer and the Seventy Weeks (9:1–27)	The confession of sin and the Anointed One cut off
8	**The Wise Shall Shine** (10:1–12:13)	The Heavenly Messenger and the Unseen Conflict (10:1–11:1) / Kings of North and South, and the Resurrection Hope (11:2–12:13)	Resurrection to everlasting life

How to Use This Leader Guide Edition

This **Leader Guide Edition** is built on a synchronized two-edition architecture so you never have to juggle two separate books during your small group or mini-church gathering:

1. 100% Word-for-Word Participant Text Included: Every section, Scripture reading prompt, verbatim ESV anchor verse callout, teaching narrative, table, and discussion or reflection prompt appears here **word-for-word identical** to what your group members see in their Participant Study Edition. Section numbers and question labels match exactly, so leaders and participants can stay on the same page.

2. Interleaved `[LEADER GUIDE OVERLAY]` Blocks: Immediately following each section, you will find a dedicated leader block containing:

- **Pacing & Time Targets** calibrated for a 75–90 minute session. Pacing targets appear in every Leader section header. If time runs short, shorten the Teaching Narratives rather than the discussion.
- **Hebrew Word Study & Ancient Near Eastern Research Quick-References** so you can explain terms naturally without lecturing, when they add something useful.
- **Question-by-Question Facilitation Probes** listed in question order, designed to move conversation past polite answers into honest reflection.
- **Pitfalls to Steer Around** so you can gently redirect common rabbit trails back to the biblical text.
- **Additional Research Notes** appear when they add something useful.

3. Leader Flags: Numbered in reading order, they mark passages that need pastoral care or tend to raise hard questions. Daniel includes threats of execution, a furnace, a king's mental breakdown, a lions' den in which the accusers and their families die (6:24), and visions of persecution. These scenes are retold briefly and are never printed as anchors. Some members have lived under hostile governments, faced pressure for their faith, or live with mental illness. Daniel's visions also invite speculation; discourage date-setting and tying visions to current events, and present the main interpretive views fairly. If someone discloses abuse, exploitation, trafficking, coercion, or immediate danger, listen without interrogation, take the disclosure seriously, help the person reach safety, and follow applicable law and your organization's safeguarding and reporting procedures. If someone expresses current thoughts of suicide or self-harm, ask directly whether there is immediate danger, intent, a plan, or access to means. Do not leave the person alone when imminent risk is present. In the United States, call or text 988 (the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline), and call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department for immediate danger. Outside the United States, use the appropriate local crisis or emergency service. Inform the appropriate pastor or safeguarding leader while prioritizing immediate safety.

4. Dating: Conservative scholarship, reflected in both recommended study Bibles, holds that Daniel wrote in the sixth century BC; many critical scholars date the visions to the second century BC. Mention the debate briefly and neutrally if it arises.

5. Reading aloud: Assign readers ahead of time for the Guided Scripture Reading. Printed anchor verses are for quick reference; read the longer focal passages from an open ESV. Passages marked "in brief" are summarized or retold by the leader rather than read.

6. Facilitating well: Ask the printed question, wait, and let silence work. Use the probes to deepen, not to lecture. Aim for every voice to be heard at least once each session.

Week 1 Session Pacing at a Glance (75–90 Minutes)

Section	Focus	Time Target
Section 1.1	Opening: Faithful in Babylon (Daniel 1:1–2:49) (1.1 Q1)	**10 mins**
Section 1.2	Historical & Literary Context: Exiles in the King's Court (1.2 Q1–Q3)	**12 mins**
Section 1.3	Movement 1: Daniel's Resolve in the King's Court (Daniel 1:1–21) (1.3 Q1–Q5)	**22 mins**
Section 1.4	Movement 2: The Dream of the Statue and the Kingdom That Will Stand Forever (Daniel 2:1–49) (1.4 Q1–Q5)	**20 mins**
Section 1.5	Canonical Horizon: Christ the Stone Whose Kingdom Fills the Earth (1.5 Q1–Q3)	**12 mins**
Section 1.6	Application, Looking Ahead, and Closing Prayer (1.6 Q1–Q3)	**9 mins**
Total	**Full Week 1 Group Session**	**75–90 mins**

WEEK 1 OF 8

WEEK 1 SESSION GUIDE · DANIEL 1:1–2:49

Week 1: Faithful in Babylon

Scripture Scope: Daniel 1:1–2:49 (ESV) • Focal Passages: Daniel 1:1–21; 2:14–23; 2:27–35; 2:44–49 • Session Length: 75–90 Minutes

Section 1.1

Opening: Faithful in Babylon (Daniel 1:1–2:49)

Passage Daniel 1:1–2:49

Opening

Jerusalem has been besieged, and the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar has carried off temple treasures and the brightest young men of Judah's nobility. Among them are four young men—often thought to be teenagers or young adults, though Scripture does not specify their exact age: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. In Babylon they are given new names honoring Babylonian gods, enrolled in a three-year training program in the language and literature of the empire, and assigned food from the king's own table. Daniel accepts the training and the names, but he resolves not to defile himself with the king's food, and he asks permission, respectfully, for a ten-day test. God gives him favor, and the four flourish.

Then the king has a dream that terrifies him and demands that his wise men tell him both the dream and its meaning, or die. They cannot. Daniel asks for time, gathers his friends to pray, and God reveals the mystery in the night. Before the king, Daniel insists that no human wisdom could do this: there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. The dream is of a great statue shattered by a stone cut by no human hand, a stone that becomes a mountain filling the whole earth: a kingdom that God himself will set up, which shall never be destroyed.

Week 1 At a Glance

Scripture Scope	Daniel 1:1–2:49 (Jerusalem besieged, young nobles taken to Babylon, new names and royal training, Daniel's resolve and the ten-day test, God-given wisdom, the king's dream and impossible demand, Daniel's prayer and praise, the statue of four metals, the stone that becomes a mountain, and the king's confession)
Focal Passages	Daniel 1:1–21; 2:14–23; 2:27–35; 2:44–49
Literary & Structural Anchor	"The Lord gave" (1:2) and "God gave" (1:9, 17) show God at work behind every event, even exile. Daniel serves in Babylon yet draws a line at defilement. The pattern of prayer, revelation, and praise (2:17–23) shows where wisdom comes from. The Aramaic section of the book begins at 2:4b. The central theme appears: human kingdoms rise and fall, but God's kingdom stands forever.
Big Idea	God's people can live faithfully in a foreign culture because the God of heaven rules its kings and will establish a kingdom that never ends.

Week 1 Learning Objectives (Head, Heart, Hands)

HEAD	**Know the Ruling God:** Learn the setting of Daniel, the meaning of his resolve, and the message of the king's dream.
HEART	**Trust the Everlasting Kingdom:** See that Jesus is the stone whose kingdom will fill the earth.
HANDS	**Serve Faithfully:** Take one step to serve well where God has placed you while keeping your heart undivided.

Opening Frame: Faithful in Babylon

Ezekiel spoke to exiles in a settlement by a canal in Babylon and likely named Daniel as a model of righteousness. Now the series moves from that settlement into the king's palace, where Daniel served for nearly seventy years. The book has two halves: stories of faithful exiles at court (chapters 1–6) and visions of the kingdoms of history (chapters 7–12). It is also written in two languages, Hebrew and Aramaic, the international language of the empire. Many believe Daniel wrote in the sixth century BC; many other scholars date the visions to the second century BC. We will focus on the book's message. This is an 8–week study. The question for this week: how can God's people live faithfully in a culture that is not their own? Before we read together, take a moment to share with the group:

Opening Entry Question (Icebreaker)

1.1 Q1 (Opening Entry Question): Describe a time you felt like an outsider, such as at a new school, job, or country. What helped you find your footing?

◆ LEADER GUIDE OVERLAY — SECTION 1.1 · SECTION PACING TARGET: 10 MINUTES

- **Pacing & Time Target:** 10 minutes. Opening and At a Glance, 3 minutes; Head, Heart, Hands, 2 minutes; Opening Frame, 2 minutes; Opening Entry Question, 3 minutes.
- **Facilitation Cues & Follow-Up Probes:**
  - Briefly walk through the front matter before 1.1, especially the two halves of the book and the eight-week table. Some members may be immigrants, refugees, or adoptees; receive their stories warmly.
  - Follow-up probe for **1.1 Q1**: Where were you an outsider? What was hardest? What or who helped?
- **Pitfalls to Steer Around:** Do not turn the icebreaker into a discussion of current immigration policy.
- **Additional Research Notes:** Daniel follows Ezekiel in this series and comes before Hosea. Isaiah 39:6–7 had foretold that descendants of King Hezekiah would serve in the palace of the king of Babylon.

Section 1.2

Historical & Literary Context: Exiles in the King's Court (Daniel 1:1–2:49)

Passage Daniel 1:1–2:49

Entering the World of Exiles in the King's Court

1. Historical Background

Around 605 BC, Nebuchadnezzar defeated Egypt at Carchemish and moved against Jerusalem; King Jehoiakim became his vassal, and temple vessels were taken to Babylon (2 Kings 24:1–2; 2 Chronicles 36:5–7; scholars note minor chronological questions in comparing Daniel 1:1 with Jeremiah 25:1 and 46:2). Daniel was likely taken in this first wave, about eight years before Ezekiel.

2. Cultural Setting

Conquering kings took young nobles as hostages and trained them as future officials. Babylonian education in language, literature, astronomy, and omens took years, so the three-year program (1:5) fits. The new names (Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) appear to incorporate Babylonian royal or divine elements (such as Bel, Aku, or Nabu, though exact etymologies are debated), replacing Hebrew names that honored the LORD. Babylonian experts consulted dream manuals, so the king's demand to be told the dream itself exposed them.

3. Literary Structure of Daniel 1:1–2:49

- **The Lord gave** (1:1–2)
- **Training for the king** (1:3–7)
- **Daniel's resolve and the test** (1:8–16)
- **God-given wisdom** (1:17–21)
- **The troubling dream and the impossible demand** (2:1–13)
- **Daniel prays and praises** (2:14–23)
- **No human wisdom** (2:24–30)
- **The dream and its meaning** (2:31–45)
- **The king's response** (2:46–49)

4. Key Themes

God's hand behind events; faithful but serving; human wisdom versus God's wisdom; prayer, revelation, and praise; mystery; the kingdoms of men and the kingdom of God.

5. Theological Considerations

Daniel accepts much of Babylon (its training, its names, its service) but not everything. The text does not say exactly why the king's food would defile; the point is a heart set on faithfulness to God in a pressured setting.

6. Relevant Scholarly Insights

The book switches from Hebrew to Aramaic at 2:4b, when the wise men address the king, and stays in Aramaic through chapter 7. Aramaic was the international language of the empire (compare Ezra 4:8–6:18), signaling that what follows concerns the nations.

Group Discussion Questions (Section 1.2)

1.2 Q1: Daniel's Hebrew name honored the LORD, and his new name honored a Babylonian god. What does it feel like when a culture tries to reshape who you are?

1.2 Q2: Daniel accepted Babylonian training and service but drew a line at the king's food. How do Christians today decide where to participate in culture and where to say no?

1.2 Q3: Joseph also served a foreign king and interpreted his dreams (Genesis 41). What do Joseph and Daniel have in common?

◆ LEADER GUIDE OVERLAY — SECTION 1.2 · SECTION PACING TARGET: 12 MINUTES

- **Pacing & Time Target:** 12 minutes. Context summary, 5 minutes; discussion, 7 minutes (about 2 minutes per question).
- **Facilitation Cues & Follow-Up Probes:**
  - 1.2 Q2 is the key application of the whole first half of Daniel; give it room, but keep it general.
  - Follow-up probe for **1.2 Q1**: What changed with the name? What stayed the same? Where do you feel that pressure?
  - Follow-up probe for **1.2 Q2**: What did Daniel accept? What did he refuse? How do we tell the difference?
  - Follow-up probe for **1.2 Q3**: Where did they serve? To whom did they give credit? What can we learn?
- **Pitfalls to Steer Around:** Do not spend the context time on the dating debate; mention it only if asked.
- **Additional Research Notes:** Jeremiah urged the exiles to "seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile" (Jeremiah 29:7). Psalm 2 and Proverbs 21:1 affirm God's rule over kings.
- **Ancient Near Eastern Research Notes:** Babylonian scholars kept collections of dream omens and their meanings. A king could test his experts by withholding the dream, and Nebuchadnezzar did exactly that. Taking young nobles as hostages ensured a vassal's loyalty and trained future administrators for the empire.

Section 1.3

Movement 1: Daniel's Resolve in the King's Court (Daniel 1:1–21)

Passage **Daniel 1:1–21**

Guided Scripture Reading

Read aloud in this order, with brief connecting summaries between readings:

- **Reader 1: Daniel 1:1–7** (focal passage) — In the third year of Jehoiakim, Nebuchadnezzar besieges Jerusalem, and the Lord gives Jehoiakim and some of the temple vessels into his hand; the king orders the chief of his eunuchs to bring young men of royal and noble families, without blemish and skilled in wisdom, to be taught the literature and language of the Chaldeans for three years and fed from the king's table; Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah are given new names.
- **Reader 2: Daniel 1:8–16** (focal passage) — Daniel resolves not to defile himself with the king's food or wine and asks permission; God gives him favor with the official, who fears the king; Daniel proposes a ten-day test of vegetables and water, and at the end the four look better and healthier than the others.
- **Reader 3: Daniel 1:17–21** (focal passage) — God gives the four learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel understanding in all visions and dreams; when the king tests them, he finds them ten times better than all his magicians; Daniel remains until the first year of King Cyrus.

Anchor Verses (ESV)

> **Daniel 1:8:** 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.
>
> **Daniel 1:17:** 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.

Teaching Narrative: Daniel's Resolve in the King's Court

1. The Lord Gave (Daniel 1:1–2)

Exile is not God's defeat; it happens under his hand.

2. Training for the King (Daniel 1:3–7)

New names, new language, new loyalties expected.

3. Daniel Resolved (Daniel 1:8)

A heart decision, made respectfully.

4. Favor and the Test (Daniel 1:9–16)

God gives favor; Daniel offers a wise and gracious alternative.

5. God Gave Wisdom (Daniel 1:17–20)

Excellence that comes from God.

6. Daniel Remained (Daniel 1:21)

A whole lifetime of faithfulness, outlasting the empire.

Group Discussion Questions (Section 1.3)

1.3 Q1: "The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand" (1:2). How does it change your view of a hard situation to know that God is still in control?

1.3 Q2: "But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself" (1:8). Why do you think Daniel decided in his heart before the pressure came?

1.3 Q3: Daniel did not rebel or make demands; he "asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him" (1:8) and proposed a test. What can we learn from the way Daniel stood firm?

1.3 Q4: "God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom" (1:17). How can believers pursue excellence in their work while remembering that their gifts come from God?

1.3 Q5: "And Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus" (1:21). What does a lifetime of faithfulness look like, and who has modeled it for you?

◆ LEADER GUIDE OVERLAY — SECTION 1.3 · SECTION PACING TARGET: 22 MINUTES

- **Pacing & Time Target:** 22 minutes. Guided Scripture Reading, 6 minutes; Anchor Verses and Teaching Narrative, 5 minutes; discussion, 11 minutes (about 2 minutes per question).
- **Facilitation Cues & Follow-Up Probes:**
  - Have readers take 1:1–7, 1:8–16, and 1:17–21. Point out the three uses of "gave" (1:2, 9, 17).
  - Follow-up probe for **1.3 Q1**: Who gave? What does that mean for Judah? Where do you need that truth?
  - Follow-up probe for **1.3 Q2**: When did Daniel decide? Why then? What lines should we settle ahead of time?
  - Follow-up probe for **1.3 Q3**: How did Daniel ask? What did he offer? How could you stand firm graciously?
  - Follow-up probe for **1.3 Q4**: What did God give? How did they use it? How can your work honor God?
  - Follow-up probe for **1.3 Q5**: How long did Daniel serve? What kept him faithful? Who models that for you?
- **LEADER FLAG 1: Taken from home (1:1–7)**
  - Members who are immigrants, refugees, adopted, or separated from family may relate deeply to these young men. Honor their experience. The phrase "chief eunuch" (1:3) has led some to suggest the youths were made eunuchs; note briefly that the text does not say so clearly and that interpreters differ, and do not speculate.
- **LEADER FLAG 2: Diet and defilement (1:8–16)**
  - Avoid turning the passage into a diet plan, a fasting method, or a rule against particular foods. The text does not specify Daniel's reason; the point is faithfulness to God in a pressured setting and God's favor on that faithfulness.
- **Pitfalls to Steer Around:** Do not make Daniel a model of defiance; he was respectful, creative, and cooperative wherever he could be.
- **Additional Research Notes:** Possible reasons for Daniel's refusal include food offered to idols, foods unclean under the law, or a refusal to depend on the king's table. 1 Peter 2:11–12 calls believers "sojourners and exiles" who live honorably among unbelievers.
- **Hebrew Word Study:**
  - Natan (נָתַן), "gave," in 1:2, 9, 17. Repeated three times in chapter 1. In this movement even exile is under God's hand: he gives the king victory, gives Daniel favor, and gives the four wisdom.
  - Sim 'al libbo (נָשַׂם עַל־לִבּוֹ), "resolved," literally "set upon his heart," in 1:8. In this movement faithfulness begins with a deliberate inner decision before it shows in actions.

Section 1.4

Movement 2: The Dream of the Statue and the Kingdom That Will Stand Forever (Daniel 2:1–49)

Passage Daniel 2:1–49

Guided Scripture Reading

Read aloud in this order, with brief connecting summaries between readings:

- **Leader summary of Daniel 2:1–13** — Nebuchadnezzar has a dream that troubles him so that he cannot sleep; he demands that his wise men tell him both the dream and its meaning, threatening terrible punishment if they fail; they answer, now speaking in Aramaic, that no one on earth can do this and only the gods could reveal it; the furious king orders all the wise men of Babylon to be put to death, and the order reaches Daniel and his friends.
- **Reader 1: Daniel 2:14–23** (focal passage) — Daniel speaks with prudence and discretion to Arioch, the captain of the guard, and asks the king for time; he tells his friends to seek mercy from the God of heaven; the mystery is revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night, and he blesses God, who changes times and seasons, removes and sets up kings, and reveals deep and hidden things.
- **Leader summary of Daniel 2:24–30** — Daniel asks Arioch to stop the executions and tells the king that no wise man can reveal this mystery, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries.
- **Reader 2: Daniel 2:31–35** (focal passage) — Daniel describes the dream: a great, frightening statue with a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron, and feet of iron mixed with clay; a stone cut out by no human hand strikes the feet and breaks the whole statue to pieces, and the stone becomes a great mountain that fills the whole earth.
- **Leader summary of Daniel 2:36–43** — Nebuchadnezzar is the head of gold; after him will come other kingdoms, each inferior, the last strong as iron yet divided like iron mixed with clay.
- **Reader 3: Daniel 2:44–49** (focal passage) — In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed; it will break all these kingdoms and stand forever; the king falls on his face, honors Daniel, and confesses that Daniel's God is God of gods and Lord of kings; Daniel and his friends are promoted.

Anchor Verses (ESV)

> **Daniel 2:19:** Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven.
>
> **Daniel 2:20–22:**
>
> Daniel answered and said: “Blessed be the name of God forever and ever,
> to whom belong wisdom and might.
>
> He changes times and seasons;
>
> he removes kings and sets up kings;
>
> he gives wisdom to the wise
>
> and knowledge to those who have understanding;
>
> he reveals deep and hidden things;
>
> he knows what is in the darkness,
>
> and the light dwells with him.
>
> **Daniel 2:44–45:** And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever, just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A

> great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure."
>
> **Daniel 2:47:** The king answered and said to Daniel, "Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery."

Teaching Narrative: The Dream of the Statue and the Kingdom That Will Stand Forever

1. An Impossible Demand (Daniel 2:1–13)

Retold briefly. The limits of human wisdom, and a death sentence.

2. Wisdom, Tact, and Prayer (Daniel 2:14–18)

Daniel's discretion and the prayer meeting.

3. Revelation and Praise (Daniel 2:19–23)

Daniel worships before he acts.

4. A God in Heaven (Daniel 2:24–30)

No credit taken; all glory given.

5. The Statue and the Stone (Daniel 2:31–45)

Kingdoms of men, and the kingdom of God. Interpreters identify the four kingdoms in different ways: many read them as Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome, while others read them as Babylon, Media, Persia, and Greece. On either reading, God's kingdom outlasts them all.

6. The King's Confession (Daniel 2:46–49)

God of gods and Lord of kings.

Group Discussion Questions (Section 1.4)

1.4 Q1: When his life was threatened, Daniel asked for time and called his friends to "seek mercy from the God of heaven" (2:18). What does this teach about facing a crisis?

1.4 Q2: "Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven" (2:19). Why do you think Daniel praised God before rushing to the king?

1.4 Q3: "He removes kings and sets up kings" (2:21). How does this truth affect the way you think about leaders and events in the world today?

1.4 Q4: Daniel told the king, "there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries" (2:28), taking no credit himself. Why is redirecting credit to God so vital for believers—and where are people commonly tempted to claim credit for what God gives? (Personal reflection may remain private.)

1.4 Q5: "The God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed" (2:44). What hope does this give you when human institutions seem shaky?

◆ LEADER GUIDE OVERLAY — SECTION 1.4 · SECTION PACING TARGET: 20 MINUTES

- **Pacing & Time Target:** 20 minutes. Guided Scripture Reading with brief retellings, 6 minutes; Anchor Verses and Teaching Narrative, 4 minutes; discussion, 10 minutes (about 2 minutes per question).
- **Facilitation Cues & Follow-Up Probes:**
  - Retell 2:1–13 yourself, without reading the king's threats aloud. Have readers take 2:14–23, 2:31–35, and 2:44–49. Mention that the Aramaic section of the book begins at 2:4b.
  - Follow-up probe for **1.4 Q1**: What did Daniel do first? Whom did he involve? How do you face crises?
  - Follow-up probe for **1.4 Q2**: What came before action? Why praise first? What would that look like for you?
  - Follow-up probe for **1.4 Q3**: Who sets up kings? How does that comfort? How does it humble?
  - Follow-up probe for 1.4 Q4: To whom did Daniel point in 2:28? How does humility protect a believer from pride? (Permit silent reflection.)
  - Follow-up probe for **1.4 Q5**: What kingdom lasts? What feels shaky now? How does God's kingdom steady you?
- **LEADER FLAG 3: Threat of death for the wise men (2:5, 12–13)**
  - Retell only; do not read the king's threats aloud. Members who have lived under oppressive regimes or violent authority may be affected. Acknowledge the danger in a sentence and focus on Daniel's prayerful response and God's deliverance.
- **LEADER FLAG 4: The statue and the kingdoms (2:31–45)**
  - Members may hold strong prophetic views. The four kingdoms are commonly identified as Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome; some scholars propose Babylon, Media, Persia, and Greece. Present the main views briefly, avoid date-setting, and do not identify any kingdom with a modern nation. Keep the focus on God's everlasting kingdom.
- **Pitfalls to Steer Around:** Do not let the identification of the metals take over the session; the climax is the stone and the kingdom that never ends.
- **Additional Research Notes:** Genesis 41 shows Joseph giving God the credit for interpreting Pharaoh's dream. The temple vessels taken in 1:2 reappear at Belshazzar's feast (5:2–4) and are returned under Cyrus (Ezra 1:7–11).

- **Hebrew and Aramaic Word Study:**
  - Raz (רָז), "mystery" (Aramaic), in 2:18, 19, 27–30, 47. A secret only God can reveal. In this movement what the experts cannot know, God makes known, and the word anticipates the New Testament "mystery" revealed in Christ.
  - 'Elah shemayya (אֱלָהּ שְׁמַיָּא), "the God of heaven" (Aramaic), in 2:18, 19, 37, 44. A title used in the exile and Persian period (Ezra 1:2; Nehemiah 1:4). In this movement Israel's God is shown to rule all heaven and earth, not one land.
  - Malkhu (מַלְכוּ), "kingdom" (Aramaic), in 2:37–44, about ten times. The key word of the dream. In this movement human kingdoms pass one after another, but God's kingdom will never be destroyed.
  - 'Even (אֶבֶן), "stone" (Aramaic), in 2:34, 35, 45. Cut out "by no human hand." In this movement God's kingdom comes by his power, not human effort, and grows to fill the earth.

Section 1.5

Canonical Horizon: Christ the Stone Whose Kingdom Fills the Earth

Passage **Daniel 2:44–45**

Tracing the Thread Across Scripture

The stone cut out by no human hand, whose kingdom fills the earth, points to Jesus, the cornerstone (1 Peter 2:6–7), who preached that the kingdom of God is at hand and whose kingdom will never end (Luke 1:33). Turn to each passage as the connections are traced.

1. The Kingdom at Hand (Mark 1:15)

Jesus began his ministry announcing that the kingdom of God was at hand.

2. The Stone (Matthew 21:42–44; Luke 20:17–18)

Jesus called himself the stone the builders rejected, the stone that crushes those on whom it falls, echoing the stone of Daniel 2.

3. Small Beginnings (Matthew 13:31–32)

The kingdom begins like a mustard seed and grows to fill the world, as the stone became a mountain.

4. The Kingdom of Our Lord (Revelation 11:15)

At the end, the kingdom of the world becomes the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he reigns forever.

5. The Mystery Revealed (Romans 16:25–26; Colossians 1:26–27; 1 Corinthians 1:24)

The mystery hidden for ages is revealed in Christ, who is the wisdom of God.

6. Exiles Who Do Good (1 Peter 2:11–12)

Believers live as sojourners and exiles who keep their conduct honorable among unbelievers.

Anchor Verse (ESV)

> **Daniel 2:44–45:** And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever, just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure."

Group Discussion Questions (Section 1.5)

1.5 Q1: Jesus said, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone" (Matthew 21:42). How does Jesus fulfill the stone in Nebuchadnezzar's dream?

1.5 Q2: In Revelation, loud voices declare, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever" (Revelation 11:15). How does this promise shape the way you live now?

1.5 Q3: Peter urges believers "as sojourners and exiles" to "keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable" (1 Peter 2:11–12). In what ways do Christians today share Daniel's calling to live honorably inside a culture that does not share their faith? (Personal application may remain private.)

◆ LEADER GUIDE OVERLAY — SECTION 1.5 · SECTION PACING TARGET: 12 MINUTES

- **Pacing & Time Target:** 12 minutes. Canonical Horizon teaching, 5 minutes; discussion, 7 minutes.
- **Facilitation Cues & Follow-Up Probes:**
  - Assign participants to look up Mark 1:15; Matthew 21:42–44; Matthew 13:31–32; Revelation 11:15; and 1 Peter 2:11–12 ahead of time.
  - Follow-up probe for **1.5 Q1**: What did the stone do? How is Jesus that stone? What does his kingdom look like now?
  - Follow-up probe for **1.5 Q2**: Whose kingdom wins? How long does it last? What difference does that make this week?
  - Follow-up probe for 1.5 Q3: What does honorable, non-compromised conduct look like in everyday life according to 1 Peter 2:12? (Permit a pass.)
- **Pitfalls to Steer Around:** Do not use the stone imagery to predict the timing of Christ's return.
- **Additional Research Notes:** Paul calls Christ "the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:24). Colossians 1:27 names the mystery: "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

Personal & Group Application (Head, Heart, Hands)

HEAD	God was in control even in exile; he gave Daniel favor and wisdom, revealed the king's dream, and showed that human kingdoms will give way to a kingdom that shall never be destroyed.
HEART	Jesus is the stone and the wisdom of God, whose kingdom began small and will fill the earth.
HANDS	Faith settles its convictions ahead of time, stands firm graciously, prays with others in a crisis, and gives God the credit.

Section 1.6

Application, Looking Ahead, and Closing Prayer

Application

Take a few minutes to move this week's study into everyday life. Discuss these three questions together and write down what you want to remember:

1.6 Q1: Following Daniel's example in 1:8, why does setting biblical convictions in one's heart beforehand matter when sudden pressure arrives—and what conviction might a believer quietly strengthen this week? (Personal reflection may remain private.)

1.6 Q2: Who are the friends you could call to pray with you when you face a crisis, and how could you strengthen those friendships?

1.6 Q3: How did Daniel's competence and integrity in royal service point others to the God of heaven—and how might believers serve faithfully in their own workplaces, schools, or neighborhoods? (Personal plans may remain private.)

Looking Ahead to Next Week

Recap: In Week 1, we met Daniel and his friends in Babylon, saw Daniel's resolve and God's gift of wisdom, and heard the king's dream of a stone whose kingdom will never be destroyed.

Transition: Next week Nebuchadnezzar builds a golden image, and three of Daniel's friends refuse to bow, even if God does not rescue them.

Week 2 Overview — Even If He Does Not (Daniel 3:1–30): Movement 1, The Golden Image and the Refusal (3:1–18), covers the command to worship the image and the three friends' answer. Movement 2, The Fourth Man in the Fire (3:19–30), covers the furnace, the fourth figure walking in the fire, and the king's praise. The Canonical Horizon traces the Son who walks with his people in the fire.

Focal Readings to Preview

- Daniel 3:1
- Daniel 3:8–18
- Daniel 3:24–28

My One Concrete Step for the Week Ahead

Write down or name aloud the specific rhythm, boundary, or conversation you want to practice before next week's gathering:

Closing Prayer

Close your time together by inviting each person to share a one-sentence takeaway or prayer request, then pray together along these lines:

Closing Group Prayer

God of heaven, you remove kings and set up kings. Thank you that you are in control, even in exile. We pray for those who feel like outsiders or far from home. Give us resolve and graciousness under pressure. Thank you for friends who pray with us. Thank you for Jesus, the stone whose kingdom will fill the earth. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

◆ LEADER GUIDE OVERLAY — SECTION 1.6 · SECTION PACING TARGET: 9 MINUTES

- **Pacing & Time Target:** 9 minutes. Application and questions, 5 minutes; Looking Ahead and Focal Readings, 2 minutes; Concrete Step and Closing Prayer, 2 minutes.
- **Facilitation Cues & Follow-Up Probes:**
  - Encourage members to read the focal readings before Week 2. Consider pairing members as prayer partners for the study, following Daniel's example in 2:17–18.
  - Follow-up probe for 1.6 Q1: How did Daniel's quiet resolve in 1:8 differ from harshness or pride? (Do not require sharing personal struggles.)
  - Follow-up probe for **1.6 Q2**: Who are your praying friends? How could you invest in them? Who might need you?
  - Follow-up probe for 1.6 Q3: How can excellence and humility work together in daily service? (Permit silent reflection.)
- **Pitfalls to Steer Around:** Do not frame 1.6 Q1 as finding things to refuse; Daniel's resolve was rooted in love for God, not in a desire to be different.
- **Additional Research Notes:** Next week Daniel himself is absent; the focus is on Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, whose answer, "But if not" (3:18), is one of the great confessions of faith in Scripture.