

# DANIEL Bible Reading Schedule

## 2 Weeks

### WEEK 1

You might think you know Daniel's story fairly well but I know from experience that this book tends to come alive in fresh ways each time I read it. Plus, the last 6 chapters are not as well known. Daniel was a young man when he was shipped to Babylon. Jerusalem, the holy city, lay in ruins, and Judah, where Daniel grew up, was in disarray. Through Daniel's experiences as a captive and as a government official, and through special messages, God revealed his power and his plan for history to Daniel. I am confident that these next two weeks will enrich your life and give you increased faith in whatever you are facing.

#### DAY 1 – Daniel 1

Verse 21 reveals that Daniel was in exile for 66 years as we learn that he arrived in Babylon in 605 BC (the third year of King Jehoiakim's reign in Judah, verse 1) and lived until the first year of King Cyrus in 539 BC. The young men of Judah were hand-picked (V4) and placed in a rigorous training program for King Nebuchadnezzar. Right from the get-go, Daniel portrays incredible courage to ask about a special menu for himself and his friends. But just as quickly, he has found favor with the chief of staff. Daniel asked for a diet that would honor God and also display God's blessing on the young men from Judah. This strong reliance on God by Daniel and his friends is a significant theme throughout the book. The credit at each juncture in their journey is clearly given to God: "God gave these four young men an unusual aptitude for understanding every aspect of literature and wisdom." (V17) Verse 19 references an oral interview that surely had to feel a bit intimidating. No one impressed the King more than the four Hebrew young men. "The king found them (Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) ten times more capable than any of the magicians and enchanters of his entire kingdom." (V20) What I like about that is the continuous involvement and favor of God on these men who were exiled in a foreign land, isolated from home and family. What do you think about Daniel's diet? Some have suggested that such a diet was healthier and could be a model for us even today. Rick Warren, author of "The Purpose Driven Life," launched an approach to food and diet with the name, "The Daniel Plan." I think you will agree that it has been proven that more vegetables and natural foods are healthier for us. Nonetheless, God made it a success for Daniel as well as giving us something to think about in regard to our own eating habits. How do you respond to this beginning chapter? What stands out to you?

#### DAY 2 – Daniel 2

The interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream fills over half of this chapter but the posture of Daniel is the most impressive to me. I see humility and confidence mixed together in a divine way. Verses 17 to 23 are the most applicable for me as he displays complete dependence on God. Plus, he asks his friends to pray with him. Daniel realized that God did not have to answer his prayer but God was gracious and showed him everything he needed to know. The specifics and how they match the very dream of

Nebuchadnezzar's dream is miraculous, for sure! I like that Daniel praises God for the answer and then honors God before Nebuchadnezzar the whole time. Verse 30 portrays Daniel's humility but incredible courage. "It is not because I am wiser than anyone else... but because God..." The enormity of this dream is also amazing. It reveals God's activity in the world for hundreds of years. Most scholars suggest this connection: Gold with Babylon; Silver with Media-Persia; Bronze with Greece; and Iron with Rome. It is also fascinating that Daniel elaborates on this vision in chapter 7 which we will read next week. Verse 44 points to the Messiah, in my thinking. Jesus proclaimed that the kingdom of God had arrived in him. "During the reigns of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed or conquered. It will crush all these kingdoms into nothingness, and it will stand forever." (V44) In this case, God's kingdom grows from humble beginnings to ultimate, united glory as a single kingdom that fills the whole earth forever. The rock that breaks and crushes these other kingdoms must be Christ. He is the mystery of the ages, the one in whom God plans to unite all things in his glorious kingdom. Isn't it fascinating and marvelous that our God revealed such far-reaching events through Daniel who lived in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC?! How did this chapter impress you? Why?

### DAY 3 – Daniel 3

Why beat around the bush? One of the most powerful Scripture verses in the entire Bible is found in this chapter. Let's see if you agree: Bow down or burn up is the command of Nebuchadnezzar. "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, Your Majesty. But even if he doesn't, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up." (VV16-18) This is one of the most dynamic professions of faith in all of the Bible and has inspired many believers as they faced execution and death for their faith in the Lord. The martyrs will be honored forever in heaven. How do you respond to such a trusting and courageous faith? Try to put yourself in their shoes. It will make the story become more real and especially impactful, I think. Now Nebuchadnezzar is a very prideful King and it actually surprises me that he let these guys go after the test in the furnace. But, despite his arrogance, N. believed in a spiritual world and surely didn't want to upset one of the most powerful gods, the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (V28). What do you think of the fourth man in the furnace? It means "like a son of the gods." Many scholars think the phrase refers to an angel of God but others have called it a "Christophany;" which is a physical appearance of Christ before his incarnation. Of course, I want to elevate the deity of Christ and affirm his eternal presence from the beginning, so why wouldn't it be Jesus? In fact, God's promises to be with us come alive in this event. Through the trials and uncertainties of life, we can be sure that the Lord is near. Jesus said it plainly, "And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:20, the last sentence in Matthew's Gospel) How has this story blessed you? What are you taking from it?

### DAY 4 – Daniel 4

This chapter represents the most detailed and interesting description of Nebuchadnezzar in the book. God uses Daniel to teach Nebuchadnezzar about himself. He will be humbled by God which will bring him to his knees, literally. Some hope that Nebuchadnezzar placed his personal faith in God but I don't sense true worship and belief in our God as the Only God. Nebuchadnezzar probably did not turn away

from his many gods even if he was impressed by Daniel's God. The principle of God opposing the proud and giving grace to the humble is on full display in this chapter. After interpreting the dream, Daniel courageously admonishes the King: "King Nebuchadnezzar, please accept my advice. Stop sinning and do what is right. Break from your wicked past and be merciful to the poor. Perhaps then you will continue to prosper." (V27) In other words, "repent!" I am drawn to this verse since Daniel is truly a prophet in this way. He speaks God's word boldly and specifically to the King. Prophecy is too often thought of as a prediction which Daniel did when he interpreted the dream. But the most compelling words are Daniel's confrontation about the King's posture and behavior. I Corinthians 12 -14 highlighted the importance of prophecy in the church. Gifted, mature believers speaking into the lives of others in a "tough love" sort of way has the most benefit so we should eagerly desire this gift. "Let love be your highest goal! But you should also desire the special abilities the Spirit gives—especially the ability to prophesy." (1 COR 14:1) Listen to verse 3, "But one who prophesies strengthens others, encourages them, and comforts them." Daniel was acting in a courageous way toward this mighty King but he also was motivated by love. He is actually demonstrating love when he confronts Nebuchadnezzar. That is what I take away from this chapter. What do you learn from Nebuchadnezzar's approach to life; to God? What do you learn from Daniel's example?

#### DAY 5 – Daniel 5

This is quite an abrupt episode in Daniel's life with a new King. Because of the specifics mentioned in verse 30, we know that the year of chapter 5 takes place is 539 BC. Nebuchadnezzar has been dead for 23 years with his successor ruling with increased violence and debauchery. We see the corruption and disregard for God's holy vessels. God's judgment came with lightning swiftness as the next kingdom under Darius took over. We know from history that Belshazzar, the king mentioned in this chapter, was actually the son of Nabonidus who succeeded Nebuchadnezzar as king in 562BC. We are not sure from historical records if Nabonidus was the son of Nebuchadnezzar but we do know that Nebuchadnezzar was regarded highly because he led Babylon to be the world's greatest like no other. But Nebuchadnezzar's acknowledgment of the Most High God had long been forgotten. It was commonplace for excessive drinking, entertainment, and all-night escapades in the palace of the king. This was one such event that especially offended our Holy God, Yahweh. Daniel had seemingly slipped from notoriety and leadership with the new regime. But his accomplishments and character were not forgotten by everyone as we see in verses 11 & 12. Again, I am impressed with Daniel's courage and his prophetic gift. He makes a connection with the choices of Nebuchadnezzar and why he succeeded. This was basically a confrontation on how the present King was living. This day would end up being his last day on earth (V30). I have thought of the message written on the wall by God as still incredibly relevant in a day when many leaders arrogantly live and rule as oppressive dictators in too many nations in our world. Your days are numbered and you don't measure up and your leadership will be dismantled. I actually pray that happens for Putin. Human rulers often think they are above their accountability to God. But our Lord is Sovereign and he will bring justice in his timing and in his way. The Bible says people who ignore God and live with human pride are under God's wrath and will experience his judgment one day if they choose not to repent. This is a story that confirms God's oversight in the affairs of human leaders. What do you take away from this interesting and illuminating story?

#### DAY 6 – Daniel 6

Welcome to the most well-known story of Daniel. I have heard of this event since I was five years old. This is actually a story about justice. Those who connived to bring Daniel down were the ones brought down, of course. The other clear lesson comes from Daniel and his choice to always honor the Lord as his top priority. Daniel must have been patient with the Lord because it does seem that he was ignored after Nebuchadnezzar died. If he was demoted after 562 BC, that means he remained faithful to God in spite of going unnoticed. However, when Darius the King elevated him again, he “proved himself more capable than all the other administrators and high officers.” (V3) Daniel must have been around 80-85 years old. Daniel lived an exemplary life throughout his journey in a foreign land as he represented faith in the Living God every step of the way. How are you responding to this familiar story this time? I am thinking about the religion of the Medes & Persians. They were a polytheistic people with many gods. God showed himself unique and powerful through our hero, Daniel. The decree of Darius opened the way for people to think differently about God than they would have been taught since childhood. Quite frankly, this is similar to my prayers for the Muslim world. How will people, especially children, be open to a new way found in Jesus Christ? Well, I read about it all the time in testimonies of Muslim people coming to Christ because their ideas about God shifted through someone’s example, through a satellite TV program, through a vision or dream... Our God has made his gracious plan visible to us and I pray he will make it visible to them. May God continue to use every means possible to reach the Muslim people who are in bondage to sin and a strenuous religious system. Won’t you pray with me?! Many people around the world believe verses 26 & 27, “For he is the living God, and he will endure forever. His kingdom will never be destroyed, and his rule will never end. He rescues and saves his people...” AND He can save everyone who will call on his name. Amen!

## WEEK 2

These next six chapters are not nearly as familiar to us. In fact, I bet this might be the first time many of you have even read this part of Daniel. But Daniel's prophecy is often quoted in the New Testament. Jesus affirmed Daniel's future predictions when he quotes Daniel 9:27; 11:31; & 12:11 in Matthew 24 which is a profound chapter about the events leading up to Christ's return. I will refer to people smarter than myself when interpreting the words of Daniel. There are actually some very interesting and especially inspiring words and verses in these chapters.

### DAY 7 – Daniel 7

The two visionary highlights for me are connected to the "little horn" (7:8, 11, 20-21, 24-26) and the words "someone like a son of man." (V13) It seems obvious that these two characters prophesied by Daniel are in opposition to each other. Most interpret each to represent a person with significant power. The image of the "little horn" is characteristic of apocalyptic literature. The little horn captures Daniel's attention because of its "boastful speech" and its violent actions against other kings, God's people, and the Most High. Some interpreters believe that no single man will fulfill this vision, but that the vision represents the evil forces at work in the world. Others hold that the Antichrist has already come. The little horn and the idea of the Antichrist do have an ultimate fulfillment, but that is better revealed in the NT (2 Thessalonians 2:5-12; Rev. 13:1, 5; 16:13-14; 19:20-21; 20:10). God's people can take comfort in knowing that this final onslaught and manifestation of evil will be short-lived (Revelation 12:12) and the works of this hellish kingdom will be demolished (7:11-12). This brings us to the Son of Man installed by the Ancient One (Verses 13-14) who will rule by God's divine approval and power, and his reign will prevail forever. The phrase "coming with the clouds of heaven" indicates his heavenly origins and his triumphal entry to conquer all that is evil and contrary to God. Jesus essentially uses these exact words for himself in Matthew 24:30, "And they (the whole earth) will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." We believe that this means a descent of the Son of Man (Jesus) from God's presence to reside on earth as Judge and Deliverer. This connection makes Daniel's prophecy in this chapter especially important and consistent with the other writers who tell us about the Second Coming of Christ. How does Daniel's vision conclude in this chapter? What are you appreciating about these intense but hopeful words of ultimate victory?

### DAY 8 – Daniel 8

I am sure you agree with me that this chapter sounds very much like the Book of Revelation. Daniel did not understand the vision until it was explained to him and then again it still seems vague. But I noticed that this isn't supposed to take place for some time: "But none of these things will happen for a long time, so keep this vision a secret." (V26) For whatever reason, God withholds his judgment for their rebellion. "The army of heaven was restrained from responding to this rebellion. So, the daily sacrifice was halted, and truth was overthrown." Sometimes injustice seems to prevail but God is actually restraining himself until the proper time. So often we are called to wait on the Lord. From our finite point of view, justice is taking too long. The Psalmist David cried out, "How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me... how long will my enemy triumph over me?" (Psalm 13:1-2) Even though Daniel's words seem to predict something far away in history, the connection to

Media & Persia as the two-horned ram and Greece being the one-horned goat fits the outcome as Greece overthrows Media-Persia in 331BC. Then, after Alexander's (the Great) death in 323 BC, his kingdom was divided into four major kingdoms ruled by generals. Daniel would need to keep this prophecy secret or King Belshazzar would smell an insurrection or even treason, which would endanger Daniel and disrupt God's plan. But overall, this is a hard chapter to understand and apply to our lives. But I am drawn to the important principle of waiting on God as Psalm 27:13 – 14 indicates, "I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord." Waiting patiently points to hope and hope in the Lord never disappoints. What areas of your life are you in a waiting mode? How can you embrace these with hope?

#### DAY 9 – Daniel 9

I am fascinated with this chapter as Daniel prays and then closes the chapter with some of the most quoted words he shares. Jesus includes some of these statements from verses 24 thru 27 in his teaching about his second coming. First of all, we notice the prayer in response to the coming prophecy about the destruction of Jerusalem given by the prophet Jeremiah. Daniel's heartfelt prayer is another example of how God's people are invited to pray and what to pray. As with almost every prayer in the Bible, Daniel acknowledges the greatness of God first. He is also quick to admit guilt which if hidden would impede his prayers. Daniel is full of repentance and confession. He also refers to what God did for the Israelites in Egypt. Daniel pleads to God for forgiveness and rescue. It is especially inspiring to me that history tells us how quickly the Lord moved on behalf of his people consistent with Daniel's prayer. Daniel prayed this prayer in 539 BC. Shortly thereafter (in 538 BC) King Cyrus gave his decree allowing the Jewish people to return to Judea. The new Temple in Jerusalem was completed in 515 BC under Ezra's leadership. Our God delights in our prayers and is faithful to answer according to his will. But the most critiqued paragraph in this chapter is found in verses 24 to 27. Some scholars suggest that these words are a continuation of history at that time but others point forward to Christ and his death. I could not begin to do justice to the extensive interpretation that has been written on these verses. Most Study Bibles share several paragraphs to even multiple pages. 483 years is supposed to represent the time from Daniel to Jesus and his sacrificial death. If we begin counting as Nehemiah rebuilds the city (445BC) to the death of Christ in 33AD, we can think of that stretch of time as the 69 sets of 7 years with one set still pending. But the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD fits the terminology of the last set of seven. My point is the wording is not precise and the interpretations are varied. The seven-year tribulation has its greatest clarity in these verses which is basically how evangelicals view the end times and the Great Tribulation. But you can easily see that other interpretations might arise, even though I believe in a seven-year tribulation, other valid conclusions should not be dogmatically thrown out. The facts are we only know in part and this aspect of our faith in Christ must not be essential or the Lord would have made it much clearer. What do you notice in Daniel's prayer that might enhance your prayers?

#### DAY 10 – Daniel 10

This is Daniel's encounter with Michael, the spirit prince of Israel. Daniel is visited by an angelic man who is beautifully adorned with precious gems and a glowing persona. We might immediately think of a Christophany but his power is limited in verse 13 and could not overcome the spirit prince of Persia. This points to our understanding of this man as an angelic attendant from God whose assignment is to visit

Daniel. I especially notice the affirmation given to Daniel from the angel, "Daniel, you are precious to God..." (V11 & V19) It is not surprising that Daniel is strengthened. Michael is standing with him and the angel attendant is revealed to him as he helps revive Daniel. Often times the presence of God is said to rejuvenate God's people. I have experienced that myself many times. Besides the encounter and the renewal Daniel experienced, we read about the invisible world active all around us in this chapter. Daniel's world, and ours, is populated by more than meets the eye. Daniel is shown the great events of history enacted against a backdrop of a real spiritual world where spiritual beings support or hinder God's people, and where the conflicts of the ages are also carried out. Behind all of this, the Ancient of Days sovereignly guides all things and sits in judgment upon the process of life and its conclusion. Remember though the world is not ultimately governed by angels and spirit princes, but by the Ancient of Days, who hears the prayers of his people. This chapter stirs my heart to again remember what the Apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians in chapter 6: "We are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against the evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly realms." (V12) Stand firm and pray... How might you be sensing the spiritual battle around you? How might you respond with confidence?

#### DAY 11 – Daniel 11 & 12

You may read these two chapters separately but I think they go together. We are wrapping up our time in Daniel with this conclusion that gives us a grand sweep of history. Very fascinating, in my thinking. Of course, I am most drawn to chapter 12 because this announces the final resurrection and the triumph of God's people. The shift to future events for us, as we live in the twenty-first century, begins in verse 40. Before that, we read about several kings as nation rises up against nation. From the very beginning of this prophecy in chapter 11, Daniel is giving predictive events that will unfold just like he announced. Three Persian Kings, Cyrus, Gaumata, and Darius are no match for Xerxes, the fourth king of Persia until the Grecian mighty King dismantles the Persian empire. This is none other than Alexander the Great who in 13 years conquered much of the known world. He dominated India to the east all the way to Egypt in the south. For forty verses, Daniel gives a visionary account of what will take place as Greece rules the world. From verses 28 to 35, Antiochus IV plundered Jerusalem and the Temple beginning in 170BC with the devilish purpose of squelching the religion of the Jewish people. He set up a statue of the Greek god Zeus in the Temple and harassed and killed whoever refused to forsake the covenant. But God's people survived in time for the arrival of the Messiah. Beginning in verse 40, Daniel is seemingly pointing to the end of the age. It does not appear that these countries and situations, mentioned in verses 40 to 45, have taken place even to this point in history. Chapters 12:1 to 3 & 13 clearly teach that the dead will be resurrected. The names that will rise and be with the Lord forever have their names written in the book (V2). Daniel has been accurate throughout these 6 chapters of prophecy. We can be assured that he is just as accurate with his prediction of resurrection life forever in eternity. This message from chapter 12 of Daniel is an especially hopeful way to conclude these profound prophecies that reflect the incredible nature of a godly man. How do Daniel's prophecies inspire you? Are you as assured of resurrected life as Daniel was? How does the life of Daniel speak to you still today?