



DANIEL

A 12-WEEK STUDY

Todd Wilson



J. I. Packer

THEOLOGICAL EDITOR

Dane C. Ortlund

SERIES EDITOR

“This series is a tremendous resource for those wanting to study and teach the Bible with an understanding of how the gospel is woven throughout Scripture. Here are gospel-minded pastors and scholars doing gospel business from all the Scriptures. This is a biblical and theological feast preparing God’s people to apply the entire Bible to all of life with heart and mind wholly committed to Christ’s priorities.”

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According to Plan, Gospel and Kingdom, The Gospel in Revelation, and Gospel and Wisdom

“What a gift to earnest, Bible-loving, Bible-searching believers! The organization and structure of the Bible study format presented through the *Knowing the Bible* series is so well conceived. Students of the Word are led to understand the content of passages through perceptive, guided questions, and they are given rich insights and application all along the way in the brief but illuminating sections that conclude each study. What potential growth in depth and breadth of understanding these studies offer! One can only pray that vast numbers of believers will discover more of God and the beauty of his Word through these rich studies.”

BRUCE A. WARE, Professor of Christian Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

KNOWING THE BIBLE

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Genesis	Matthew	Galatians
Exodus	Mark	Philippians
Ruth/Esther	Luke	Colossians/Philemon
Psalms	John	Hebrews
Proverbs	Acts	James
Isaiah	Romans	Revelation
Daniel	1 Corinthians	

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Knowing the Bible: Daniel, A 12-Week Study

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S E R I E S P R E F A C E

KNOWING THE BIBLE, as the series title indicates, was created to help readers know and understand the meaning, the message, and the God of the Bible. Each volume in the series consists of 12 units that progressively take the reader through a clear, concise study of that book of the Bible. In this way, any given volume can fruitfully be used in a 12-week format either in group study, such as in a church-based context, or in individual study. Of course, these 12 studies could be completed in fewer or more than 12 weeks, as convenient, depending on the context in which they are used.

Each study unit gives an overview of the text at hand before digging into it with a series of questions for reflection or discussion. The unit then concludes by highlighting the gospel of grace in each passage (“Gospel Glimpses”), identifying whole-Bible themes that occur in the passage (“Whole-Bible Connections”), and pinpointing Christian doctrines that are affirmed in the passage (“Theological Soundings”).

The final component to each unit is a section for reflecting on personal and practical implications from the passage at hand. The layout provides space for recording responses to the questions proposed, and we think readers need to do this to get the full benefit of the exercise. The series also includes definitions of key words. These definitions are indicated by a note number in the text and are found at the end of each chapter.

Lastly, for help in understanding the Bible in this deeper way, we urge readers to use the ESV Bible and the *ESV Study Bible*, which are available in various print and digital formats, including online editions at www.esvbible.org. The *Knowing the Bible* series is also available online. Additional 12-week studies covering each book of the Bible will be added as they become available.

May the Lord greatly bless your study as you seek to know him through knowing his Word.

J. I. Packer
Lane T. Dennis

WEEK 1: OVERVIEW



Getting Acquainted

The book of Daniel is a favorite for Sunday school teachers and students alike. And for good reason. It has all the makings of a great story—memorable characters, cliff-hanger drama, and science fiction–like visions. It’s like *Harry Potter* meets *Lord of the Rings* with a dash of *Star Wars* thrown in!

Yet therein lies a potential danger. Because the human actors and events are so fascinating, we are tempted when studying this book to fix our gaze on the human plane. But when this happens we can inadvertently lose sight of the fact that this book is ultimately not about Daniel or his three friends, but about God and his victory in the world.

Sure, the book of Daniel tells Daniel’s story—and a fascinating and instructive story it is. But the main purpose of Daniel is to reveal to us who God is—his character, his purposes, his way of working in the world for the good of his people. The main lesson of Daniel, then, is not, as is often assumed (and taught!), *Dare to be a Daniel!* Rather, the main point is this: *Dare to trust in Daniel’s God!*

The story of Daniel is about the story of God and his victory in the world. For God is the sovereign Lord of history, the one who establishes kingdoms and brings them down. From the opening chapter and the story of Daniel’s exile¹ to Babylon, to the closing chapter and its vision of the future, we see how God achieves his victory in the world. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 1581–1585; available online at www.esvbible.org.)

Placing It in the Larger Story

The book of Daniel, named after and written by Daniel in the sixth century BC,² records the events of Daniel's life and the visions he saw from the time of his exile in 605 (1:5) until the third year of King Cyrus in 536 (10:1). Sweeping in scope, the book deals with the rise and fall of various world empires. But these historical events are seen through the lens of God's sovereign control of things, and thus serve a pastoral purpose to encourage the Jewish people during a critical time in their history. The Jews were in exile, suffering at the hand of pagan rulers who cared little for God or his people. They had every reason, then, to wonder whether God was in control, and whether he would deal with the situation—for his own glory and the good of his covenant people.

Key Verse

“I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed” (7:13–14).

Date and Historical Background

While some place the writing of Daniel in the second century BC, there is good reason to believe that Daniel himself is the author of this book and that it was composed in the sixth century BC. This was a tumultuous time in the ancient Near East and a crucial moment in the life of God's people. Daniel opens against the backdrop of the rise of the Babylonian empire, which had recently toppled the Assyrian empire. The book closes some 70 years later with the overthrow of Babylon by the Persian empire under Cyrus. It was the strategy of the Babylonians to bring to Babylon the “cream of the crop” of the peoples they conquered; the Persians reversed this process by returning the exiles to their homeland. The events of Daniel take place between these two major world-changing events: the rise of Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar and the displacement of Babylon by the Persians under Cyrus roughly 70 years later.

Outline

- I. Daniel and the Three Friends at the Babylonian Court (1:1–6:28)
 - A. Prologue (1:1–21)
 1. Daniel and his friends taken into exile (1:1–7)

2. Daniel and his friends remain undefiled (1:8–16)
3. Daniel and his friends promoted and preserved (1:17–21)
- B. Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a great statue (2:1–49)
 1. The dream and Nebuchadnezzar's threat (2:1–13)
 2. Daniel's response and prayer (2:14–24)
 3. Daniel interprets the dream (2:25–45)
 4. Nebuchadnezzar promotes Daniel (2:46–49)
- C. Nebuchadnezzar builds a great statue (3:1–30)
 1. The nations worship Nebuchadnezzar's statue (3:1–7)
 2. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego preserved in the fiery furnace (3:8–29)
 3. Nebuchadnezzar promotes Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (3:30)
- D. Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a toppled tree (4:1–37)
 1. Nebuchadnezzar's dream and its interpretation (4:1–27)
 2. Nebuchadnezzar's humbling (4:28–33)
 3. Nebuchadnezzar's exaltation (4:34–37)
- E. Belshazzar's feast (5:1–31)
 1. An idolatrous feast (5:1–4)
 2. An unreadable message (5:5–9)
 3. A forgotten interpreter (5:10–12)
 4. A message of judgment (5:13–31)
- F. The lions' den (6:1–28)
 1. Daniel promoted (6:1–3)
 2. The administrators plot to remove Daniel (6:4–15)
 3. Daniel preserved in the lions' den (6:16–24)
 4. Darius acknowledges the power of Daniel's God (6:25–27)
 5. Daniel preserved until the end of the exile (6:28)
- II. The Visions of Daniel (7:1–12:13)
 - A. The vision of four great beasts and the heavenly court (7:1–28)
 1. The four great beasts (7:1–8)
 2. The Ancient of Days judges the beast (7:9–12)
 3. The coming of the Son of Man (7:13–14)
 4. The interpretation of the vision (7:15–27)
 5. Daniel's response (7:28)
 - B. The vision of the ram, the goat, and the little horn (8:1–27)
 1. The vision of the ram and the goat (8:1–14)
 2. The interpretation of the vision (8:15–26)
 3. Daniel's response (8:27)
 - C. Daniel's prayer and its answer (9:1–27)
 1. Daniel's prayer concerning the 70 years (9:1–19)
 2. Gabriel's answer: 70 sevens before the promised redemption (9:20–27)
 - D. Daniel's vision of the final conflict (10:1–12:13)
 1. A heavenly messenger brings news of heavenly conflict (10:1–11:1)
 2. A detailed vision of future earthly conflicts among nations (11:2–45)
 3. The promise of resurrection to glory or shame (12:1–4)
 4. How long until the end? (12:5–13)

WEEK 1: OVERVIEW

As You Get Started

What is your current understanding of how Daniel helps us to grasp the whole storyline of the Bible? Do you have an idea of how aspects of Daniel’s message are fulfilled in the New Testament?

What is your current understanding of what Daniel contributes to Christian theology? How does his book clarify our understanding of God, Jesus Christ, sin, salvation, the end times,³ or any other doctrine?

What aspects of the visions of Daniel have confused you? Are there any specific questions that you hope to have answered through this study?

As You Finish This Unit . . .

Take a few minutes to ask God to bless you with increased understanding and a transformed heart and life as you begin this study of Daniel.

Definitions

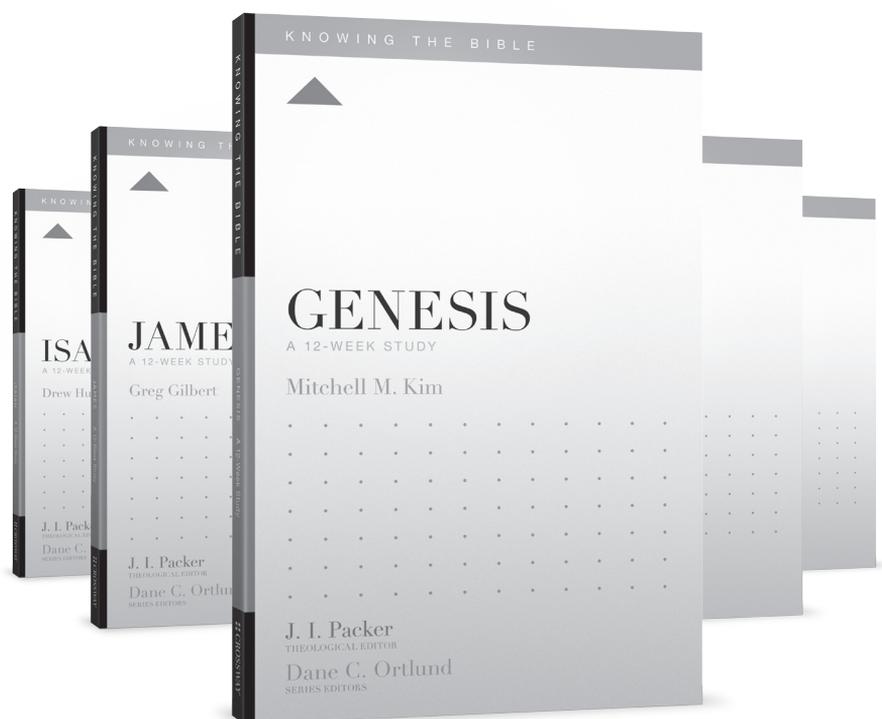
¹ **Exile** – Several relocations of large groups of Israelites/Jews have occurred throughout history, but “the exile” typically refers to the Babylonian exile, that is, Nebuchadnezzar’s relocation of residents of the southern kingdom of Judah to Babylon in 586 BC. (Residents of the northern kingdom of Israel had been resettled by Assyria in 722 BC.) After Babylon came under Persian rule, several waves of Jewish exiles returned and repopulated Judah.

² **BC** – Abbreviation for “before Christ” in calendars. It immediately precedes the era designated AD (*Anno Domini*, meaning “in the year of our Lord”) and, counting backwards, refers to the number of years before Jesus Christ was born.

³ **End times** – The time associated with events prophesied in Scripture to occur at the end of the world and the second coming of Christ—also known as “the last days.” Because the early church expected the return of Christ at any time, the end times can refer to any point in the period from Pentecost until Christ returns.

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THE BOOK OF DANIEL has all the makings of a great story: memorable characters, cliff-hanging moments, and incredible visions. Yet we miss the point if we pay more attention to Daniel's story than to Daniel's God.

In this helpful study, readers will see how this fascinating biblical book ultimately points to the sovereign Lord of history, who rules over all earthly kingdoms and whose plans cannot be thwarted.

ABOUT THE *KNOWING THE BIBLE* SERIES

Over the course of 12 weeks, these studies explore books of the Bible and:

- Ask thoughtful questions to spur discussion
- Show how each passage unveils the gospel
- Tie the text in with the whole story of Scripture
- Illuminate the doctrines taught in each passage
- Invite you to discover practical implications
- Help you better understand and apply God's Word

“Knowing the Bible brings together a gifted team of Bible teachers to produce a high-quality series of study guides.”

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GRAEME L. GOLDSWORTHY,
author, *According to Plan*

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BIBLE STUDY

