

 Daniel



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A *Discover Together*
BIBLE STUDY

Daniel

Discovering the Courage to Stand for Your Faith

Sue Edwards



 **Kregel**
Publications

Daniel: Discovering the Courage to Stand for Your Faith

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Contents

How to Get the Most Out of a Discover Together Bible Study	7
Why Study Daniel?	9
LESSON 1 How to Thrive When You Find Yourself in Exile	11
LESSON 2 Lay Down in God's Hands	19
LESSON 3 A Walk in the Fire	31
LESSON 4 Lessons from a Tree	41
LESSON 5 Deciphering the Writing on the Wall	49
LESSON 6 How to Survive Conflict When Cats Are After You	57
LESSON 7 A God We Can Count On	65
LESSON 8 A Peek into the Unseen Reality	77
LESSON 9 The End; He Wins	85
Works Cited	94
About the Author	96





How to Get the Most Out of a Discover Together Bible Study

Women today need Bible study to keep balanced, focused, and Christ-centered in their busy worlds. The tiered questions in *Daniel: Discovering the Courage to Stand for Your Faith* allow you to choose a depth of study that fits your lifestyle, which may even vary from week to week, depending on your schedule.

Just completing the basic questions will require about one and a half hours per lesson, and will provide a basic overview of the text. For busy women, this level offers in-depth Bible study with a minimum time commitment.

“Digging Deeper” questions are for those who want to, and make time to, probe the text even more deeply. Answering these questions may require outside resources such as an atlas, Bible dictionary, or concordance; you may be asked to look up parallel passages for additional insight; or you may be encouraged to investigate the passage using an interlinear Greek-English text or *Vine’s Expository Dictionary*. This deeper study will challenge you to learn more about the history, culture, and geography related to the Bible, and to grapple with complex theological issues and differing views. Some with teaching gifts and an interest in advanced academics will enjoy exploring the depths of a passage, and might even find themselves creating outlines and charts and writing essays worthy of seminarians!

This inductive Bible study is designed for both individual and group discovery. You will benefit most if you tackle each week’s lesson on your own, and then meet with other women to share insights, struggles, and aha moments. Bible study leaders will find free, downloadable leader’s guides for each study, along with general tips for leading small groups, at www.discovertogetherseries.com.

Through short video clips, Sue Edwards shares personal insights to enrich your Bible study experience. You can watch these as you work through each lesson on your own, or your Bible study leader may want your whole study group to view them when you meet together. For ease of individual viewing, a QR code, which you can simply scan with your smartphone, is



provided in each lesson. Or you can go to www.discovertogetherseries.com and easily navigate until you find the corresponding video title. Woman-to-woman, these clips are meant to bless, encourage, and challenge you in your daily walk.

Choose a realistic level of Bible study that fits your schedule. You may want to finish the basic questions first, and then “dig deeper” as time permits. Take time to savor the questions, and don’t rush through the application. Watch the videos. Read the sidebars for additional insight to enrich the experience. Note the optional passage to memorize and determine if this discipline would be helpful for you. Do not allow yourself to be intimidated by women who have more time or who are gifted differently.

Make your Bible study—whatever level you choose—top priority. Consider spacing your study throughout the week so that you can take time to ponder and meditate on what the Holy Spirit is teaching you. Do not make other appointments during the group Bible study. Ask God to enable you to attend faithfully. Come with an excitement to learn from others and a desire to share yourself and your journey. Give it your best, and God promises to join you on this adventure that can change your life.



Why Study Daniel?

Through the centuries, millions of Christians have read the memoirs of the great Old Testament prophet Daniel and have been blessed in the process. But his words have never been more relevant than they are today. We have much in common with Daniel. No, we weren't kidnapped and taken to a hostile country, never to return home. However, many Christians hardly recognize their now secularized birthplace. We were not taken to a foreign land but, in some ways, our homeland has been taken from us.

Daniel's stories and prophecies inform, encourage, and offer hope as we try to navigate new challenges in a country that has lost its Christian roots. How do we honor God and stay true to our faith in hostile societies? Daniel and his friends show us. That is reason enough to dig into this great Old Testament book, but it's not the only reason.

When chaos and uncertainty shake our security, we need assurance that God is with us, that he cares, and that he exerts ultimate control over the past, present, and future. The book of Daniel declares these truths, providing Christians a firm foundation in sinkhole times. The first half of the book contains six significant events from Daniel's memoirs and the second half includes four visions. The six accounts occurred during Daniel's seventy-year exile while he served his captors as a top government official. These experiences illustrate God's faithfulness during extreme stress and danger. Throughout these hair-raising events, Daniel and his friends honor God and gain pagan favor without compromising their integrity. Lessons we need to learn.

He also describes four indispensable visions that provide keys to prophecies revealed later in the Bible. On a grand scale, these visions paint pictures of God's plan to redeem the world according to God's timetable and sovereign will. They supply the edges of the great puzzle of biblical prophecy. These visions are full of mysterious imagery, making them difficult to interpret, but as we examine them carefully and look for clues in the text, answers emerge that elicit hope in the midst of uncertainty. Portions of the visions have already been fulfilled—the parts that encouraged the Jews as they awaited release from bondage and permission to return home. Other parts of the visions, yet to be fulfilled, serve a similar purpose



Cancer took my father over forty years ago. I have grieved because my husband and children never met him. But three years ago, my husband and I attended a military reunion of sailors who served on a Coast Guard ship in Greece with my father in the '50s. I yearned to connect with anyone who might have known him. The first morning at breakfast I finally found an elderly gentleman who commented, "Yes, I remember your dad. He was a man of great integrity." My heart leapt, as I too recalled the day my dad turned away a bribe of fruits and vegetables left on our doorstep by a Greek vendor who hoped to receive the ship's business. My dad was the supply officer. I'm glad my father cannot see the moral decay that characterizes our nation today. I grieve as I attempt to adjust to the changes around me, but studying Daniel has helped immensely. My prayer is that you will also find comfort and wisdom as you study this man's memoirs. —Sue



for us as we await release from bondage, entangled in godless cultures and pagan bullying.



Introduction to Studying Daniel (9:53 minutes).

Why study Daniel? Because through the dual messages of story and vision, we learn to live, work, thrive, witness, persevere, hope, and bring glory to God in our own pagan exile. Christians today need mentors who have walked these roads and can light the path. Daniel and his friends await.



How to Thrive When You Find Yourself in Exile

LESSON 1

Daniel 1

Today, many of us find ourselves in a similar predicament as Daniel and his friends. In 605 B.C. they were kidnapped from their homes in Judah and exiled to Babylon, a powerful pagan nation that did not respect or honor their faith or devotion to the One True God. Babylon worshipped a pantheon of Mesopotamian mythological gods, and Daniel and other exiled Jews were forced to adapt to this strange, unfamiliar situation.

We have not been kidnapped but, just like Daniel, we find ourselves immersed in a culture that no longer respects or honors the Judeo-Christian ideals that once characterized our nation. In a sense, we are also in exile, and our children must grow up in a thoroughly post-Christian world. As a result, many believers are rightly grieving, disappointed, and confused. But others are reacting inappropriately with outrage, hostility, and panic. Do we think that God owes us a place to live in sync with our Christian values? Few Christians have ever enjoyed that privilege, and more Christians are martyred today than at any other time in history. Understandably, adjusting to this dramatic change is difficult.

Does the Bible teach us how to adapt to exile? Absolutely. The book of Daniel is chock-full of lessons to help us exhibit wisdom, strength, and grace in a culture that distorts our beliefs and ridicules our sacred principles. Guided by the Holy Spirit, Daniel crafted his memoirs to prepare us for such a time as this.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Daniel lived at the beginning of what Jesus called *the times of the Gentiles* (Luke 21:24). God offered Israel the role of leading all the nations of the earth, when he told them as he established their nation, “If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations on earth” (Deuteronomy 28:1), but the Jewish nation continued to vacillate between faithfulness and rebellion. He was patient with them for many years, but finally God withdrew his offer and gave world supremacy to

OPTIONAL

Memorize 1 Peter 2:23

When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

There has never been a Gentile world power which, as a nation, has had for its chief aim the glory of God.

—Irving L. Jensen
(*Ezekiel and Daniel*, 49)



Daniel's Hebrew name meant "God is my judge" but his Babylonian captors gave him a new name, Belteshazzar, meaning "Bel's Prince." Bel (Marduk) was the chief pagan god of the Babylonian pantheon. Imagine your culture forced you to abandon your given name and substituted a name that reflected its values. This personal intrusion hints at tensions ahead in this wonderful story of courage and God's faithfulness.

DIGGING DEEPER

In a Bible atlas, locate the ancient nations of Israel and Babylon. How far were the Jews forced to travel as they walked from their homeland to the pagan nation of their captors?

The word *Lord* in Daniel 1:2 is *Adonai* and not *LORD YHWH*. The former word for God emphasizes God's ownership or control, already a hint at a major theme of the book of Daniel.

DIGGING DEEPER

God called the prophet Jeremiah to warn the Jews concerning the devastating consequences of ignoring his warnings. To learn more, read Jeremiah 25. Consult a Bible dictionary to learn more about Babylon, the country God used to discipline his people. What did you learn in your investigation that will enrich your study?

Gentile nations, beginning with Babylon (which is now Turkey, Iran, and Iraq). Since that time, a succession of Gentile nations have ruled the world. We still live in *the times of the Gentiles*, and that epoch will not end until Jesus returns (Luke 21:24–27).



Read Daniel 1:1–21.

Chapter 1 identifies the beginning and end of Daniel's service to several world leaders during the Jewish exile. His service began in 605 B.C., the third year of Judah's king Jehoiakim, and probably ended around the first year of King Cyrus, 539 B.C.

1. Who was ultimately responsible for Israel's defeat and the exile of its people (Daniel 1:2; Jeremiah 27:6–7)?
2. Why had God orchestrated these events (2 Kings 21:1–6, 12–15)?
3. What kind of king was Jehoiakim (2 Kings 23:35–37)?

4. How long did the exile last (Jeremiah 25:11)?

5. What price would Babylon pay for her cruelty and enslavement of Israel (Jeremiah 25:12–13)?

6. From Daniel 1:2, what do you learn about Nebuchadnezzar’s attitude toward the God of Israel?

7. What do you learn about the outward appearance and inward qualities of Daniel and his three Hebrew friends from this chapter (1:3–4, 17, 20)?

DIGGING DEEPER

Read Jeremiah 51:33–64 to hear the details of Babylon’s downfall. What did Jeremiah instruct Seraiah to say and do when he visited Babylon with king Zedekiah? In your opinion, why?

DIGGING DEEPER

If you are interested in learning more about the number and nature of temple “articles” carried off by Nebuchadnezzar and what ultimately happened to them, read Ezra 1:1–11. What is the lesson for us?

Daniel’s gift of understanding visions and dreams was appropriate to his need in a land where such was expected of wise men, and the God who was the source of all knowledge would also give discernment to distinguish the true from the false.

—Joyce G. Baldwin
(*Daniel*, 93)

Hananiah means “Jehovah is gracious,” but his Babylonian name *Shadrach* is the name of the Sumerian moon god. *Mishael* in Hebrew literally means “Who is what God is?” implying that the God of the Hebrews was the only true God and above all others. His new name *Meshach* referred to the pagan god *Aku*. *Azariah* means “The Lord helps” and his Babylonian name *Abednego* means “servant of Nebo,” another pagan god. The king’s chief official attempted to wipe out the memory of the God of their fathers, but these boys were brought up in homes where God’s name was exalted, and it would take much more than a name change to purge them of their strong faith.

Daniel may have had several reasons to resist eating the royal food and wine. First, the food was not kosher. God had given the Israelites strict instructions on what they could and could not consume. Some restrictions were based on health concerns and others reflected theological truths that God wanted to impress upon his people through what they ate. Another reason may be that this food had been offered to idols. This was common practice in ancient pagan religions, and eating or drinking that food implied recognition of these deities.

DIGGING DEEPER

To learn more about Old Testament law regarding food sacrificed to idols, see Exodus 34:15 and Hosea 9:3–4. Why do you think God imposed dietary restrictions on his people?

DIGGING DEEPER

Jesus said that he fulfilled the law (Matthew 5:17) and Paul wrote extensively in the New Testament concerning Jesus’ new covenant, which changed the believer’s relationship to the law. Write an essay expressing why dietary restrictions have been lifted since Jesus inaugurated the new covenant. Paul’s letter to the Galatians and his instructions in 1 Corinthians 8 will help you in your inquiry.

8. What did Nebuchadnezzar have planned for the Hebrew teens who seemed especially gifted, smart, and talented (1:4–5)?

9. Daniel submitted to a name change and to learning about the Babylonian language, literature, mythology, and history, but he balked at eating Babylonian food. Any ideas why (see Ezekiel 4:13; Hosea 9:3–4)?

10. What parts of your culture do you feel comfortable adopting? What parts do you believe God would have you resist and why?

11. Describe Daniel’s dilemma (1:8–10). Imagine the conversations between the Hebrew teenagers as they considered what to do. What do you think they talked about and what do you think they did that helped them devise a strategy?

12. What creative alternative does Daniel suggest to their guard (1:11–14)?

13. What do you learn about God’s involvement in 1:9?

14. Consider how Daniel interacted with those in authority over him. What do his actions and attitudes reveal about his character?

15. What resulted from Daniel’s suggestion (1:15–16)?

The most beautiful people we have known are those who have known defeat, known suffering, known struggle, known loss, and have found their way out of the depth. These persons have an appreciation, a sensitivity, and an understanding of life that fills them with compassion, gentleness, and a deep loving concern. Beautiful people do not just happen.

—Elisabeth Kubler-Ross
(*Death*, 93)

16. Like Daniel, we live in a culture whose values, standards, and behaviors are often contrary to our faith. What enables Christians to stand for what is right in a pagan world?
17. Do you know anyone who has faced a situation where they were pressured to do something against their principles? How did they handle it and what resulted?
18. If you found yourself in Daniel's shoes (for example, if your boss asked you to engage in a transaction that is not technically illegal but could lead to other illegal activity, or if a family member wanted you to accompany her to an event that you find extremely offensive), how do you think you would feel? What do you think you would do? What process would you follow to help you determine a wise response?

22. How might studying this situation in Daniel's life help you the next time you are in conflict with the values, standards, and behaviors of the culture around you? Be specific.
23. What kinds of emotions usually accompany a confrontational situation like the one between Daniel and the king's chief official? Have you ever found yourself in a similar situation? If so, what did you do? What resulted?
24. If you are a parent or grandparent, or if you work with young folk in any capacity, what have you learned from this account to help you prepare future exiled generations to honor God?
25. What does this account teach you about God's involvement in the affairs of the world? How might believing this reality affect the way you respond to your exile, interact with the world, and live your daily life?

Must one point out that from ancient times a decline in courage has been considered the beginning of the end?

—Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn,
Harvard Commencement
Address, June 8, 1978
(Swindoll, *Tale*, 120)