

Bible Challenge 2018

Week 32: August 5-11

Outline

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Like several of the other prophets before him, Daniel's prophesies cover the reigns of several Babylonian and Persian kings. He begins his ministry as a young man, taken to Babylon during the reign of Jehoiakim, in the initial surrender of the cities of Judah (8 years prior to the fall of Jerusalem — 2 Samuel 23:36 & Daniel 1:1). If you recall, the prophets had told the people to surrender and they would live. Daniel was amongst those who surrendered. From there, he finds himself under Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Darius, and Cyrus. This means that Daniel would still have been alive when Cyrus sent the people home to Jerusalem to rebuild, though he was likely too old to have made the trip. His life and ministry overlaps with Jeremiah and Ezekiel and he was probably about a generation before Esther.

Typically, we in the Christian church treat Daniel as one of the major prophets. Yet, from a Jewish perspective, the book of Daniel is one of the writings — connected with the book of Esther and teaching one how to live faithfully even if one happened to live in the court of a pagan king. And, apart from the last half of the book, our English Bibles might have included it just before Esther.

Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah

We are introduced to Daniel and his three friends — friends whom we know better by the Babylonian names given to them: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Daniel, though also given a Babylonian name (Belteshazzar), is best known by his Hebrew name. I'm not quite sure how this happened, nevertheless, it has happened. They are called to be prepared for the King's service but rather than to eat from the king's table (where food would have been offered for pagan sacrifice before being given to the king), the men chose to eat vegetables and to drink water. Showing themselves faithful, they gained standing in the eyes of those who presided over them.

Nubuchadnezzar's Dream

As God did with Joseph before him, when it was time to distinguish Daniel, God sent the king a dream that he did not understand and that his wise men could not interpret. The dream is the familiar dream of a statue that is formed from various materials: gold, silver, bronze, iron, and a mixture of clay and iron. These represented the kingdoms that would rise and fall between that time and the coming of the Messiah.

The Fiery Furnace

At this point in the account of Daniel, it was time for Daniel's three friends to be tested in their faith — bow before the idol of Nebuchadnezzar or perish in the hot furnace. It is here that one of the most powerful testimonies of the book is uttered by Daniel's three friends. When faced with a test of idolatry or death, they respond: *"Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."*

Indeed, God did deliver the three men and a fourth man (whom we normally understand as the pre-incarnate Christ) was seen in the midst of the flames with them. And thus we see a foreshadowing of Christ's promise to deliver his own from the flames of Hell.

Nebuchadnezzar's Second Dream

Once again Daniel is called in by Nebuchadnezzar to interpret a dream that has the king vexed. And, once again Daniel gives honor to God for being the revealer of the meaning of dreams — in this case, a dream about the humbling of this king — a reminder that God indeed is a God who rules over all of the nations and peoples of the earth. Nebuchadnezzar regressed into more of an animal state, pursuing his lusts rather than what is well and wise for man. Such is the work of sin in a person's life. No matter how great the man, God is able to humble him.

Belshazzar and the Hand's Writing

In Daniel 5:2, Belshazzar is referred to as the son of Nebuchadnezzar, though this is perhaps not as clear in the Hebrew text as with our English translations. The reason for this is that it was common for one to call their predecessor their father even if there were not a biological connection (c.f. 2 Kings 2:12; 5:13; 6:21). Archaeologists have dated the death of Nebuchadnezzar at 562 B.C. For about 6 years, his wicked sons vied for control (see Jeremiah 52:31; 2 Kings 25:27) but they were overthrown in 556 BC by Nabonidus who put his son, Belshazzar, on the throne.

Clearly, Belshazzar is no wiser than his predecessors and begins using the goblets from the Temple of God for his drinking party. Dishes and utensils that had been made for God's Temple were only to be used for God's purposes, not for profane ones. In judgment, God wrote upon the wall of their room, Mene, Mene, Tekel, Peres — your days are numbered, you have been weighed in the balance and found wanting and so your kingdom will be taken and split. That night Belshazzar would die and Darius the Mede took the kingdom.

Darius and the Lion's Den

Next to the story of the fiery furnace, the account of the Lion's Den is likely the most well-known story of this book. And here, for not being willing to pray to the king, his life is now at stake (much like that of his 3 friends). And, much like his three friends, God sent "His Angel" to preserve him through the night.

Daniel and Five Visions

The account of Daniel shifts gears in chapter 7 and records a series of visions that Daniel has across his ministry in Babylon — in this case, visions taking place across the reigns of Belshazzar, Darius, and Cyrus. Books can be written about the content of these visions and here, for example, you find the title "Son of Man" that Jesus would adopt in his earthly ministry.

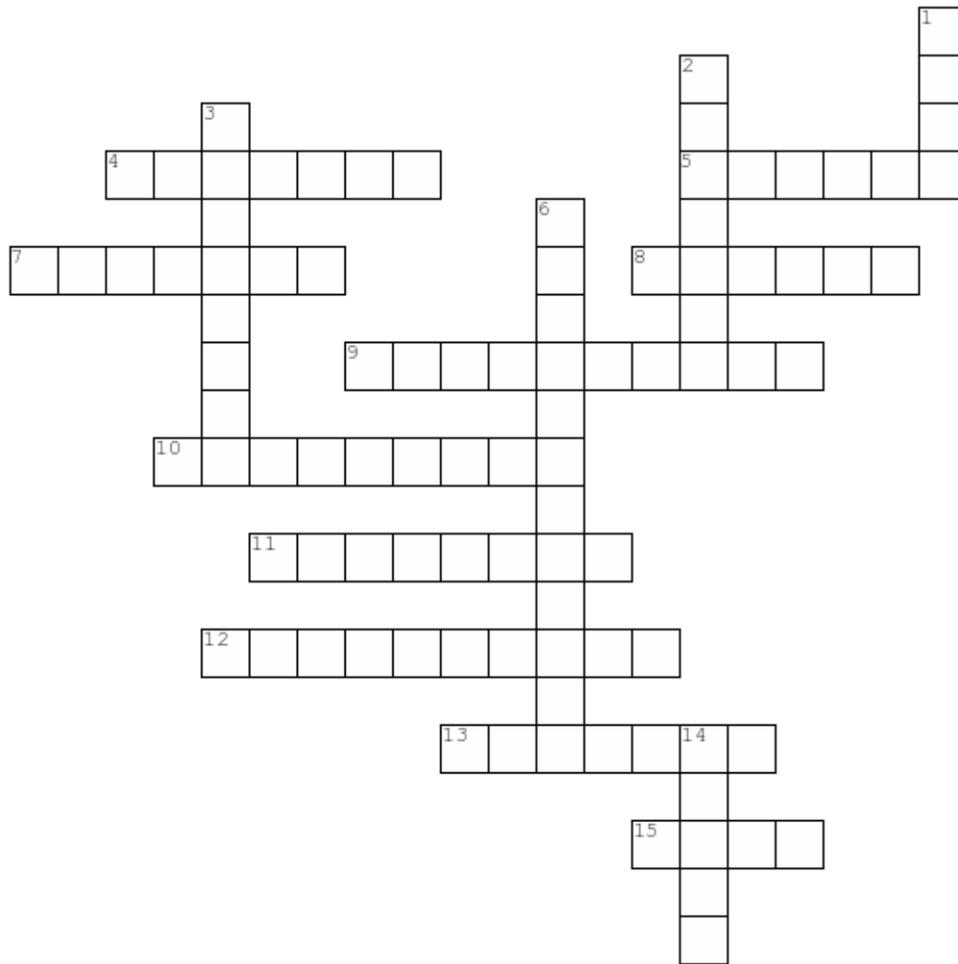
Probably one of the most hotly debated topics has to do with the Question of the 70 Weeks. There are some who have historically held that these seventy weeks are a literal forecasting of the birth of the Messiah and the Messiah's death (69 weeks to the birth and the 70th week for the death — though some suggest that the 70th week refers to anything from the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD, the fall of the Roman Empire in 500 AD, or to the second coming).

The problem with the 70-week addition should be obvious. First of all, if it was universally understood to be predictive of the Messiah, the Jews would have been actively looking and they were not. Second, you do have to do some monkey-business with the math as to when the weeks start to make the math work. Third, it is built on the premise that in "prophetic terms" a week equates to seven years (a day a year), which is not taught in scripture. Further, the 1,290 days and the 1,335 days of Daniel are not taken in the same way as the 490 days of the 70 weeks. Finally, in some contexts, the length of the week is seen to vary to make the math work.

A better way of approaching the 70 weeks is to remember that the language is prophetic and prophetic language is figurative. These are most certainly long periods of time, but they are finite periods of time connected to a promise to send a redeemer at a given and appointed time. Prophecy can be interesting to read and study, but if one is not careful, one can be led into some pretty wild speculation and interpretations that are anything but sober-minded.

Week 32: Daniel

Complete the crossword below



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Across

4. This was Abednego's Hebrew name.
5. God did this to the final vision of Daniel until the time of the end (note that Jesus is seen opening these in Revelation 5ff)
7. This 'Chief Prince' assisted the messenger of God who was tied up with the Persians.
8. This king would be talked into casting Daniel into a lion's den for the night.
9. Daniel and his three friends ate only this during the preparation period.
10. Darius the Mede was the son of this king from the book of Esther (hint: Xerxes is another name for this guy)
11. This language from Daniel 7:13 that Jesus commonly applied to himself.
12. This king made a feast and used vessels from the Hebrew Temple.
13. If you did not bow to Nebuchadnezzar's image, you would be destroyed in here.
15. In Nebuchadnezzar's second dream, this represents the king.

Down

1. This wrote: Mene, Mene, Tekel, Parsin on the wall as a warning.
2. This was Meshach's Hebrew name.
3. This was Shadrach's Hebrew name.
6. This was the name given to Daniel by Nebuchadnezzar.
14. Daniel worked as an advisor in the palace until the first year of this 'redeemer' king.