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## SESSION ONE

Daniel 2:25-49

### Learner Session Guide



#### Focus Statement

Until the day when God's kingdom will replace all others, God works through human rulers, holding them accountable for their actions. As Lutherans praying, "Your kingdom come," we seek the Spirit's guidance to live as responsible citizens and faithful disciples.



#### Key Verse

The king 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!" **Daniel 2:47**

## Daunting Dream: What Does It Mean?

### Focus Image



*Statue of the Prophet Daniel at Sanctuary of Bom Jesus.  
Photo: Eric Gaba (Wikimedia Commons user: Sting).*

## Gather

### Check-in

Take this time to connect or reconnect with others in your group as together you begin a new study.

### Pray

*Gracious God, we thank you for our baptismal calling to service in Jesus' name. As we begin the study of Daniel, open our hearts and minds to ponder deeply your Word as revealed through the stories we will encounter. Trusting in the Holy Spirit's presence among us, we offer ourselves as your disciples ready to learn and grow and to become ever more equipped for service as citizens of our nation and faithful disciples of the gospel. Amen.*

### Focus Activity

Write down the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word pair "church and state."

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### Notes

## Open Scripture

Read Daniel 2:25-49.

- What strikes you in this snippet of the Daniel 2 story?
- If this country were part of the statue, which metal do you think it would be? Why?
- What do you suppose Daniel means when he refers to the kingdom that will stand forever?

## Join the Conversation

### Literary Context

The book of Daniel begins with six stories, all but one of which recount the adventures of young, bright, pious Jews deported to Babylon in the aftermath of Judah's defeat by Babylon in 587 B.C.E. Forcibly removed from home, the young men are given new names and a Babylonian education to prepare them to serve as loyal advisors to King Nebuchadnezzar. Despite their refusal to defile themselves by eating from the royal rations, the young men flourish and advance in the court (Daniel 1).

1. In Chapter 2, King Nebuchadnezzar's rage at his native advisors' inability to recount and interpret his daunting dream (verses 1-11) sets the stage for Daniel's offer to do so. His divinely revealed interpretation lays out a major theme of the book: all human rulers, including great King Nebuchadnezzar, rule only at God's bidding. One by one all human kingdoms will crumble until finally, in God's own time, they all will give way to God's never-ending kingdom (verses 12-45).

- How would you summarize Daniel's response to having the mystery of Nebuchadnezzar's dream revealed to him (2:19-22)?
- Reread Daniel 2:31-45. Having read the explanation of the dream, what do you see differently now?

2. Hearing the interpretation, Nebuchadnezzar acknowledges the power of Daniel's God (verses 46-49). Take a look at the Focus Image. Imagine that you are Nebuchadnezzar looking at Daniel and pondering his interpretation of your dream. How do you feel?

3. Can you recall others in the Bible who interpreted dreams? What dreams did they interpret?

### Historical Context

Remember the TV series *M\*A\*S\*H*? By setting the show in the Korean War, its creators were able to address hot button issues of a later time—the turbulent years of the Vietnam War. The Holy Spirit inspired the author of Daniel to use a similar practice. The book of Daniel was probably written sometime after Alexander the Great, the leader of the Greek Empire, died in 323 B.C.E. The Babylonian, Median, and Persian superpowers (gold, silver, and bronze statue layers in today's text) were long gone, and the Greek Empire had splintered into contentious factions (iron and clay layers).

During the centuries spanning the rise and fall of these empires, Jews had spread throughout the ancient near eastern world. Living in foreign cultures, these Jews had to straddle two sometimes competing sets of loyalties—their faithfulness to God's covenant with them and their allegiance to their new culture and the government under whose rule they lived. The stories of Daniel 1-6 address tensions related to this balancing act. Although they are set mostly during the time of Babylonian rule (587-547 B.C.E.), the stories actually address hot button balancing act issues of the later times of Persian and Greek rule (547-167 B.C.E.).



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1. Locate Jerusalem and Babylon on the map above. The Jewish people were defeated by the Babylonians and many were forced to leave their homeland and live in exile in Babylon (see 2 Kings 24:1—25:12).
  - How do you imagine the Jewish people felt about being forced to live in exile in Babylon?
2. How do you think setting the Daniel stories in the time of the exile might have affected how the original audience read these stories? Notice, for example, what happens in verse 48. How might Jewish readers have reacted to that part of the story?
3. We too sometimes discover that our faith is in tension with the expectations of our culture. What kinds of tensions between faith and culture have you encountered?

### Lutheran Context

Luther used the language of “two kingdoms” to describe the themes we see in Daniel 2. God has instituted civil government (the left-hand kingdom) to maintain peace and administer justice. This kingdom is secular and does not have sacred functions. Ruling according to God’s bidding, governments are responsible for how they use their power. Those who misuse it will fall.

The right-hand kingdom, God’s kingdom, encompasses our lives as the baptized people of God. On the day when Jesus returns, this kingdom will come in its fullness. Until that day, it breaks in wherever the gospel is proclaimed in word and deed. As Luther states in his

explanation of the petition “Your kingdom come,” God will do God’s saving work with or without us. We pray to be included in God’s mission as faithful disciples in our time and place.

1. Like Daniel’s community, we are called to live as loyal citizens of the left-hand kingdom and faithful disciples of the right-hand kingdom. When these calls become unbalanced, we must be ready to pay the cost.

- With this in mind, do you think there is any conflict working for or under a ruler like Nebuchadnezzar and being a person of faith? Why or why not?
- Is it helpful for you to think of both kingdoms (secular and sacred) being under God’s rule? Why or why not?

2. Luther’s explanation of the second petition of the Lord’s Prayer reads as follows:

*Your kingdom come.*

What is this? OR What does this mean?

In fact, God’s kingdom comes on its own without our prayer, but we ask in this prayer that it may also come to us.

How does this come about?

Whenever our heavenly Father gives us his Holy Spirit, so that through the Holy Spirit’s grace we believe God’s holy word and live godly lives here in time and hereafter in eternity.

(Luther’s Small Catechism with Evangelical Lutheran Worship Texts.

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- How do Luther’s words echo themes of Daniel 2:36-45?
- How do you think Luther would respond to politicians who refer to our country as a “Christian nation”?

### Devotional Context

1. Pondering our responses to several hymns in the “national songs” section of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (ELW 888–893) or another hymnal is a helpful way to assess where we are and contemplate who we are called to be as citizens who are also Christ’s disciples.

- Read or sing “O Beautiful for Spacious Skies” (ELW 888). This beautiful hymn can be sung as praise of God for making this country God’s special agent on earth or as a prayer that God equip all of our citizens to elect leaders who will work for justice and peace in the world. With which interpretation are you most comfortable? How does Daniel 2 confirm or challenge your deepest convictions?



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- Read or sing “This Is My Song” (ELW 887). Ponder how its language and imagery illustrate themes of Daniel 2, Luther’s two kingdoms, and the petition “Your kingdom come.”

2. How would you define the term “God-given wisdom”? How does this apply to Daniel? How would you say this applies to you?

3. If you had one bit of wisdom to share with a leader of this country, what would it be? If you had one bit of wisdom to share with a key leader of the church, what would it be? How would these bits of wisdom differ, if at all?

### Wrap-up

Be ready to look back over the work the group has done during the session.

### Pray

*Almighty God, we lift up to you all who govern this [nation]/state/city/town \_\_\_\_\_. May those who hold power understand that it is a trust from you to be used, not for personal glory or profit, but for the service of the people. Drive from us cynicism, selfishness, and corruption; grant in your mercy just and honest government; and give us grace to live together in unity and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (ELW, p. 77)*

## Extending the Conversation

### Homework

1. Read the next session’s Bible text: Daniel 3. As you read, pay particular attention to the dialogue between Nebuchadnezzar and the three men (verses 13-18). Reflect on the price the three young men are prepared to pay for their loyalty to their God.
2. As you read or hear the daily news, take time to pray for the nations and peoples featured in each day’s stories.
3. Make a list of major issues confronting our nation this week. Choose a concrete way to respond to one of them as a responsible citizen and faithful disciple.





Notes

### Enrichment

1. If you wish to read through the entire book of Daniel during this unit, read the following sections this week.

Day 1: Daniel 1:1-14

Day 2: Daniel 1:15-21

Day 3: Daniel 2:1-24

Day 4: Daniel 2:25-49

Day 5: Daniel 3

Day 6: Daniel 4:1-18

Day 7: Daniel 4:19-37

2. If you would like to sample and understand more deeply some of the ways the ELCA seeks to equip its members to be responsible citizens and faithful disciples, go online to the ELCA Web site and click on the “Social Issues” tab or go directly to the following site: <http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues.aspx>. Browse through the Social Statements dealing with the economy, the environment, health and health care, peace, and the statement dealing with the interlocking issues of race, ethnicity, and culture. All the Social Statements also are available in print from: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; 8765 W Higgins Rd; Chicago, IL 60631.

3. Listen to radio stations or watch television shows that refer to themselves as “Christian.” Do they use the language of “Christian America”? If so, how?

### For Further Reading

Available from [augsburgfortress.org/store](http://augsburgfortress.org/store):

*Lutheran Study Bible*, “Daniel” introduction and notes (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2009), pp. 1421-1446.