

3. Is there a lesson for us here? When do we find ourselves 'fighting back' instead of committing a threatening situation into God's hands? Was there a 'middle course' Daniel could have taken, such as praying secretly - and if so, why didn't he take it?

Read Daniel 6:11-16

4. What do we learn about King Darius in these verses?

Read Daniel 6:17-24

5. In vv.21-23 we have a miracle and the King witnessed it - Daniel had survived an un-survivable fate. But put yourself in the King's shoes: what would this have conveyed to him about Daniel?
6. The King's actions in v.24 seem unnecessarily harsh by the standards of today. But what part does it play in the overall story of Daniel being thrown into the lions' den and surviving?

Read Daniel 25-28

7. How would you summarise what King Darius learnt from this whole episode?
8. Contrast Daniel's experience as a young man, still in his mid-to-late teens, in 2:24-49 and his experiences in this chapter some 50 or so years later. What has contributed to his maintaining his integrity?

Anglican Parish of St Peter's, Wanneroo

BIBLE STUDY NOTES - DANIEL

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2020

Some introductory comments about Daniel

When we read Daniel, it is almost as if we are reading two books. One is an account of the life story of Daniel (admittedly, an unusual and adventuresome life story); the other is an account of strange dreams and visions that Daniel experienced.

The first 6 chapters of Daniel describe how Daniel and his three companions, after the Babylonians laid waste to the city of Jerusalem in the 6th century BC, were taken as young men from Jerusalem into captivity in Babylon. The second half of the book, chapters 7 – 12, describe some of the dreams or visions of Daniel. These visions concern a future judgement and retribution, emphasising God's sovereign control over history and 'his ultimate victory over forces which may seem to have gained the upper hand for the time being'. These chapters are a style of writing described as 'apocalyptic'. The book of Revelation is another example of an apocalyptic writing in Scripture.

The visions in the second part of Daniel have been used by some people as the basis for predicting the immediate future – in modern times links have been made, for example, to Nazi Germany or to the Soviet Union, or to the rise of China in the present day. These prophecies can be seen as having been fulfilled in the rise and fall of nations in the centuries following Daniel, and in Christ. When we today read these dreams and visions, they serve as a powerful reminder of a *principle* – that God *is* sovereign, and the nations of the world *will* be called to account: God's purposes will *not* be thwarted. We need to remember, however, that these scriptures are *not* given to us as 'clues' so that we can work out the details of 'how' and 'when' this will happen. Alister McGrath¹ has written of these chapters¹:

¹ McGrath, A. (2005). *The NIV Bible Companion*. London: Hodder and Stoughton. p.200

A series of visions received by Daniel is set out at some length. In reflecting on these images, we must be careful not to misinterpret them, or to apply them without thought to other periods in history, such as our own. The prophecies here recorded were given to Daniel, with his own situation in mind. They cannot be treated as a detailed prediction of every major event of world history up until the present day. Rather, they are to be seen as allowing Daniel a vision of the future of the empire which has taken him captive, so that he may face the present in the knowledge of what God has prepared for him and his people.

We too should therefore read them as reassurance about God's sovereignty, and thus a comfort for us in difficult times, not as the basis for engaging in 'apocalyptic guessing games' about the end times. Remember that Jesus spoke to his disciples of days when:

*"the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light;
the stars will fall from the sky,
and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.'
"At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds
with great power and glory. (Mark 13:24-26)*

But – Jesus then went on to qualify those words with a warning: *"But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. (Mark 13:32).*

So, what can we learn from the book of Daniel? As stated above, it is an account of Daniel's faithfulness to God in a time of trial, and of God's faithful response to Daniel. Above all, Daniel points to the fulfillment of God's plans for his creation and for the nations of the world in the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus.

Who wrote the book of Daniel, and when?

The traditional and conservative view is that Daniel is exactly what it appears to be: an autobiographical account by Daniel of his life experiences - a 'memoir' written (or, at least, completed) by Daniel towards the end of his long life; perhaps it was what we might now call a diary or journal. Some scholars have argued that the book was

Week 6: Daniel chapter 6

In the face of opposition and deceit, Daniel remains faithful and obedient to God

Study date: Week beginning 16th November
Sermon: 22nd November - 'Ah! The lions' den!
Daniel remains obedient to God.'

Read Daniel 6:1-9

In chapter 5 the impression is given that Daniel has moved away from the influential position he had occupied in Babylon - King Belshazzar didn't seem to know of Daniel (5:10-13). Now, under King Darius, Daniel is again in a responsible position and carrying out his duties in such an impressive way that Darius plans to promote him. That sparks jealousy from other at the royal court, politics takes over, and plans are hatched to thwart the King's plans for Daniel.

1. In vv.1-5, how would you describe: King Darius; Daniel; the administrators and satraps?
2. In vv.6-9 the administrators and satraps devised a plot that would, as we might say today, politically 'wedge' Daniel: whatever course he took would be wrong—he would offend the king or go against his religious beliefs. Are such things unknown in the church, or do we sometimes engage in such manoeuvres?

Read Daniel 6:10

Note Daniel's response this crisis in v.10. From what we know of Daniel, we have to assume that he would have been aware of the political manoeuvring that lay behind the King's decree. But his first response was to pray, not to engage in counter-moves against his opponents.

3. In v.5 a link seems to be implied between the behaviour that was going on with the Temple vessels and the writing on the wall. What would that link be?
4. This is the third time that Daniel has been 'brought into play' after the astrologers and wise men of the royal court have failed (see ch. 2; 4:4-8). Is there significance in this detail, and if so what point is Daniel trying to make as he includes this detail in his account?
5. In vv.13-16, how does Belshazzar appear to view Daniel? What does he think will motivate Daniel to use his gifts to help him?

Read Daniel 5:17-31

6. In v.17 we have an example of integrity in ministry - see, for another example, 2 Kings 5:14-16. Is there a lesson in this for some aspects of contemporary ministry?
7. We have not spent time on chapter 4 but it would be helpful at this point to read 4:24-37. What do 5:18-23 tell us about Nebuchadnezzar and about Belshazzar? What was the essential difference between them?
8. In light of the interpretation of the writing on the wall given in vv.26-28, Belshazzar's response in v.29 seems strange. What sense do you make of it?

written much later (some suggest 400 years later, in the second century BC) and was compiled from various stories about the time the Jewish people spent in captivity in Babylon. Such views seem to create more problems than they solve, however, and do not give a convincing reason for departing from the traditional view.

The most likely occasion for Daniel and his friends to be taken to Babylon as captives was 605BC, when Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem. The final date mentioned in the book is "the third year of Cyrus king of Persia" (Dan. 10:1), which would have been 537 B.C. The story thus covers nearly seventy years of Daniel's life, from his captivity as a young man until he was probably into his 80's.

Our studies in the book of Daniel

Our 6 studies will focus on Daniel chapters 1 - 7. After looking at chapters 1 - 3, we will detour to chapter 7 because this describes a dream that Daniel had around the time of the events of chapters 4 and 5, in the first year of King Belshazzar's reign. We then pick up the story again in chapter 5, which describes King Belshazzar's death.

Time constraints mean that we won't be looking specifically at chapter 5 or at chapters 8-12: time won't allow it. However, do try to find time to read those chapters - and, if possible, the whole book of Daniel before the first study.

How we can benefit from studying Daniel

In Daniel ch. 1- 6 we see the life and character of Daniel as a servant of God: he gives us an example of what it means to trust and to obey God in difficult and threatening circumstances. In Daniel ch. 7-12 we see Daniel as a 'spokesperson for God': in a series of dreams and visions given to Daniel, God shows the future that he intends for the gentile nations and his plan for the future survival of the nation of Judah - however improbable such a future for Judah might have seemed to those living in captivity in Babylon at that time. In our own age we are entering a time when the future often seems less certain and rather more threatening than it has for some time, thus standing firm in our faith and in God's promises becomes ever more important. Daniel can be an encouragement for us as we seek to do this.

To finish, a quote from a commentary on the book of Daniel:

The spiritual decline of the days in which Daniel lived are well indexed in the plaintive words of Psalm 137, verses 1- 4:

*By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept
when we remembered Zion.*

*There on the poplars we hung our harps,
for there our captors asked us for songs,
our tormentors demanded songs of joy;
they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"*

*How can we sing the songs of the LORD
while in a foreign land?*

That is the great question. How can the Christian, whose citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20), sing the Lord's song as an exile here (1 Pet. 1:1)? The principles that governed Daniel's life—grace, faith, Scripture, prayer, fellowship, obedience, hope—provide the answer. The narratives of the book put flesh and blood on them for us. The heart of the book's message is, of course, the good news of the kingdom of God. Nations and empires, thrones and dominions will rise and fall, but the city of God will endure. His kingdom will last forever, and the gates of hell shall not withstand it.²

Written 30 years ago, those words are still very relevant today.

[Note: In Daniel 2:4b we encounter an unusual feature of the book of Daniel: the NRSV translation reads: *The Chaldean answered the King (in Aramaic)* . . . The words in brackets are in the original text, and mark a change to the Aramaic language from 2:4 until to the end of chapter 7, when the text reverts to Hebrew. Why? We don't know! But one suggestion³ (and it is only a suggestion) is that the part written in Aramaic (an 'international' language) concern the future of 'the world empires' of that time and was to be read by everyone, whilst Hebrew was used for the visions of chapters 8 - 12, which set out God's plan for the world empires: 'this is what will happen' (in Aramaic), and 'this is God's purpose, the theology, behind it' (in Hebrew).]

² Ferguson, S. B. (1988). *Daniel: The Preacher's Commentary Series*. Nashville, Word. p.19

³ Young, E. J. (1978). *A Commentary on Daniel*. London: Banner of Truth Trust. p.22.

Week 5: Daniel, chapter 5

Time passes, and a new King, Belshazzar, is judged and found wanting

Study date: Week beginning 9th November

Sermon: 15th November - 'The writing on the wall'

Belshazzar succeeds Nebuchadnezzar, although there were probably other kings in between: in fact, Belshazzar was probably not the King, but a local regent, acting as King in Babylon - in vv. 7, 16 and 29 he offers the *third* most senior position as reward for interpreting the writing on the wall, not the *second* position, because as regent he himself held the second position after the (absent) King. The events of this chapter probably took place in 539BC, by which time Daniel was quite elderly.

Belshazzar was not an attractive figure. An important context for this chapter is given at the end in vv.30-31. Whilst Belshazzar was 'wining and dining' with extraordinary extravagance (vv.1-4), the city of Babylon was actually under siege by Darius the Mede! In such circumstances, Belshazzar's behaviour was extraordinarily arrogant, and certainly not showing responsible leadership!

Read Daniel 5:1-16

1. Ancient writers tell us that Babylon thought itself impregnable as a city, and had great stores of food and reliable resources of water to withstand a siege. In light of this, why do you think Belshazzar held the feast described in vv.1-4?
2. The description of the feast and of Belshazzar's behaviour suggests that he had already had too much to drink when he called for the goblets from the Jerusalem Temple to be used to drink more wine. Why do you think he did this?

2. What references to the visual can you find in Daniel's dream (vv.2-14)? Why do you think there is such an emphasis on the visual?
3. In vv.7-8, Daniel saw the fourth beast, described as 'terrifying and frightening and very powerful' (v.7). Do you see this fourth beast as different to the other three?
4. Vv.9-10 describe Daniel's vision of 'the Ancient of Days'. If we assume that the Ancient of Days is God, what do these verses tell us about God?
5. In v.14 Daniel sees 'one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven'. This phrase, Son of Man, is one Jesus uses to describe himself (for example: Mt. 8:20; Mt. 12:8, 32, 40; Mk. 2:10; Mk. 8:31). In Daniel's dream, what appears to result from his coming?

Read Daniel 7:15-28

6. In v.16 Daniel asks about 'the meaning of all this'. If you had been in Daniel's position, what questions would you have asked?
7. After the four kingdoms arise, "the saints of the most high will receive the kingdom" (vv.17-18). How will the way they receive the kingdom differ from the way the four beasts acquire it? What is the significance of this difference?
8. Twice (vv.22 & 26) the heavenly interpreter states that the last king will be tried and condemned by God. Why do you think God goes to the effort of setting up court to judge someone so obviously sinful? What does this tell us about God?
9. Vv. 13, 14, & 27 have been described as 'a vision of heaven'. If this is so, what do you find attractive about this vision of heaven?

Week 1: Daniel, chapter 1 God honours faithfulness

*Study date: Week beginning 12th October
Sermon: 18th October - 'A world turned upside down'*

The story starts with Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon attacking Jerusalem and selecting a number of its citizens to take back to live and work in captivity in Babylon. A challenge for us, if we want to really understand the story of Daniel, is to put ourselves into the shoes of Daniel and his companions as we look at some of the challenges they faced, and at their courage in taking the stand that they did about being faithful to God.

The situation of Daniel and his companions was not, and is not, unique. We can think of countless people today who find themselves in a strange country as a refugee, cut off from family and not familiar with the world they suddenly find themselves in. Even some of the stories of hardship during the Covid19 Pandemic have echoes of this as people talk about being stranded overseas with no money and unable to return home. At a different level, many of us will have experienced something similar as we moved into adulthood - however supportive our family, there came a point in life when we were 'on our own' - starting our first job, leaving the relatively safe environment of school for a large University where we are one anonymous student amongst thousands, taking the plunge of travelling overseas, and so on.

1. Do you have any experiences of being alone in a strange situation that you could share?

Read Daniel 1:1-21

2. From the perspective of the King of Babylon, Daniel and the others taken from Jerusalem to Babylon were being given a good career opportunity (vv.3-5). But they would only have been in their mid-teens, and were taken to a totally different culture some 800km away - no phones, photographs or Australia Post! How might they have experienced what happened to them?

3. Why do you think the chief official gave Daniel and his companions new names? (v.7)

4. In what way would 'food and wine from the king's table' have defiled Daniel, and why do you think he took a stand over this particular issue? (vv.5,8). What issues can present a similar dilemma for a Christian in our culture today, and what can we learn from Daniel about how to respond?

5. How do you think the experiences of Daniel and his companions during their three years of training (vv.8-16) prepared them for their later role in the king's service? (vv.18-21)

6. How would you describe Daniel from the picture painted of him in this first chapter of his story?

7. Consider Acts 4:13-22. What similarities do you see between the Peter and John and Daniel in terms of the way they behaved in a difficult and potentially dangerous situation?

8. Think about Joseph (Genesis ch. 39-41), David (1 Samuel 17), and Esther (Esther 4). What similarities can you see to the story of Daniel?

Week 4: Daniel chapter 7

Daniel is 'troubled and disturbed' by a vision in which he sees '... one like a son of man'.

Study date: Week beginning 2nd November

Sermon: 8th November - 'Daniel disturbed: God's plan for history'

Chapter 7 in Daniel begins second part of the book, with its focus on the dreams and visions of Daniel. The dream in chapter 7, however, occurred in the first year after Belshazzar succeeded Nebuchadnezzar as King in Babylon, and thus refers to a time between the events of chapters 4 and 5. It is an important chapter in Daniel, and it is appropriate to look at it at this point in our series of studies.

Ferguson provides a helpful perspective for us:

If the Lord had simply wanted Daniel to know the facts of history ahead of time, why did He give him such a complex, curious, multicoloured, sense-appealing revelation? To ask the question is to answer it. God not only revealed facts about history in advance; He revealed Himself to Daniel, impressing on him something of His own awesome and glorious purposes. Miss this and we miss almost everything. We have already hinted that, like Revelation, Daniel is essentially a book of pictures, appealing to our senses. We are meant to see, hear, and smell the strange beasts that appear throughout this chapter. We are meant to be overwhelmed as Daniel was by the revelation of the Ancient of Days and the coming of the Son of Man. We do well to remember the wise words that G. K. Chesterton wrote in a child's picture book:

*Stand up, and keep your childishness,
Read all the pedant's creeds and strictures
But don't believe in anything
That can't be told in coloured pictures!⁵*

Read Daniel 7:1-14

1. In a number of prophecies the sea represents the nations of world. If that is the case here, what do you make of the symbolism of four beasts rising from the sea?

⁵ Ferguson, S. B. (1988). *Daniel: The Preacher's Commentary Series*. Nashville, Word. p.128

4. In v.19 'Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed'. How do you think he heard their statement in vv.16-18, and why would it have made him so angry?
5. What was the source of the three men's courage when threatened by the King?
6. A question for speculation: why was Daniel not involved? Why did these stirring up trouble only target Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego?
7. What was the significance of the three men being thrown into the furnace "wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes" (v.21)?
8. Who do you think the fourth man who 'looks like a son of the gods' was, and why was he there in the furnace? (v.25)
9. What are we to make of Nebuchadnezzar's words in vv.28-29? How do they compare with his words recorded in 2:47?
10. From this chapter, what do we learn about the risks and the rewards of faithful obedience to God?

Week 2: Daniel, chapter 2

King Nebuchadnezzar's insecurity puts Daniel to the test, but God is faithful

Study date: Week beginning 19th October
Sermon: 25th October - 'Trust put to the test'

"Daniel chapter 2 is one of the most amazing predictive chapters in the Bible. It was written around 600 years BC, yet it accurately described the future rise and fall of four great empires! Some of Daniel 2 may seem like so much ancient history to us, but it was all future to Daniel. He peered through future centuries with God's eyes."⁴

The events of this chapter probably occurred in the second year of Daniel's 'training' in Babylon.

Read Daniel 2:1-30

1. What picture of Nebuchadnezzar do you get from this chapter - what sort of a man was he, and what sort of a King?
2. The King's request to his 'wise men' seems most unfair - how could they interpret the King's dream if he wouldn't tell them what it was! The penalty referred to was meant literally - 'cut into pieces' - so they faced a terrible situation. Why did the King make this seemingly unreasonable request? (vv. 2-11)
3. Daniel and his companions were not involved in the initial request from the King for an interpretation of his dream - but they were to share the penalty for the astrologers' failure (v. 13). How would you describe Daniel's response? (vv. 14-18)

⁴ Connelly, D. (2015). *Daniel: Spiritual Living in a Secular World*. London: SU (a number of the questions in these studies are adapted from Connelly's studies in Daniel).

4. Daniel is given the answer by God in a dream, and his response is to praise God (vv. 19b-23). What does he focus on in his praise, and is this what we would expect from such a young man as Daniel? Is there a lesson for us in this? When God answers our prayers, do we praise God spontaneously ?

5. In vv. 24 & 28 Daniel takes two important steps. What are they and what do they tell us about Daniel?

6. How would you summarise Daniel's statement to the King in v.30? Is Daniel demonstrating something here that is sometimes lacking in our contemporary ministries?

Read Daniel 2:31-49

7. What is your reaction to the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar as Daniel describes it (vv.31-35)?

8. In vv.36-45, King Nebuchadnezzar is given an interpretation of his dream. How would you summarise the message that the King heard in this interpretation from Daniel?

9. This chapter describes the young man Daniel facing the first of what will be a number of life-and-death crises as he lives as an exile in Babylon. What did Daniel bring to this crisis in terms of spiritual maturity?

Week 3: Daniel chapter 3

Obedience to God can have consequences, but God's faithfulness can be trusted

Study date: Week beginning 26th October
Sermon: 1st November - 'The Cost of Obedience'

Read chapter 3:1-30

1. How do King Nebuchadnezzar's actions in vv.1-7 fit with what we read about his reaction to the interpretation of his dream in 2:46-49?

2. The statue was about 30mt tall and 3mt wide. What do you imagine was Nebuchadnezzar's motive in building his 'image of gold' and wanting people to worship it? What links do you see with his dream recorded in 2:31-45?

Daniel and his companions faced death if they refused to worship a false God. The story of the fiery furnace is so well-known that we treat it as just that - a story. For many Christians today, however, it is all too real - not a fiery furnace, but some other form of the death penalty for refusing to compromise their loyalty to Jesus. We can all experience a little of that cost if we take a stand for our faith - the business executive who refuses to join colleagues at a questionable night club, the student who disagrees with an anti-Christian statement in a University tutorial, or being the focus of jokes at work for your faith.

3. What do you think might have been behind the actions of those who reported Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to the King?