

FAITHFULNESS  
IN A FAR PLACE

# DANIEL



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# Introducing the Book of Daniel

In these studies we want to encourage you to ask, 'so what?'. Don't just ask what happened. Ask so what does this mean for us? In Daniel we see the people of God living as captives in a far away place. Yet they are able to live and thrive (though often through suffering) even under the rule of a fiercely pagan nation. So what? Don't Christians today experience something of the same?

## Who was Daniel?

Daniel was either a member of Israel's elite or nobility. We know this because of the order from King Nebuchadnezzar (1:3-4), that such men be brought to Babylon to receive training to serve in the his palace. He was also handsome and without defect (1:4). In Babylon, Daniel's name was changed to Belteshazzar (1:7).

## When is the book set?

From Daniel 1:1-2 we learn that Daniel lived in Judah during the time of King Jehoiakim. King Jehoiakim was a son of the good king Josiah. Though Jehoiakim was older than his brother Jehoahaz, Jehoahaz became king when Josiah died. His reign, however, lasted only three months (2 Kings 23:31). Jehoiakim, reigned for eleven years. It is in the third year of King Jehoiakim of Judah that Daniel begins.

### ***Kings of Judah before the exile to Babylon***

Josiah (good) (2 Kings 22-23) → Jehoahaz (bad) (2 Kings 23) → Jehoiakim (bad) (2 Kings 24)

Unlike Josiah, who fervently set out to follow the Book of the Law (2 Kings 23:25), Jehoiakim did what was wrong in the eyes of the Lord (2 Kings 23:37).

The events of Daniel begin in the third year of Jehoiakim (Daniel 1:1), around 606 BC. The last time reference in the book is to the third year of Cyrus, King of Persia (Daniel 10:1), around 536 BC. This means, if Daniel was in his late teens when he was taken to Babylon, we're following his life until he's almost in his 90s!

## ***Why was Judah carried into exile in Babylon?***

The prophet Jeremiah makes clear that it is because of sin that they are being invaded. Jeremiah reminds them that God sent prophets to warn them to turn away from sin, and did so time and again. Because they refused to give up their evil ways, God used a foreign army to destroy them (see Jeremiah 25:1-14; see also 2 Kings 24:1-4).

## ***In what ways is Daniel's world like our world today?***

In Daniel's time any visible evidence of God's power had been lost. To the Babylonians Israel's God was a joke. Israel was a laughingstock, mocked and overtaken by a people who served different gods. You could imagine Babylon's king and people mockingly say to Israel: 'Where is that so called 'God' of yours now!'. In other words, it was quite a lot like our world. Today, Christians in most Western nations are seen as out of touch, if not outright dangerous, to a society that says there is no authority higher than my own self will. As Christians are sometimes mocked, 'You pray to your imaginary friend'. Daniel and his friends are forced to learn to live in this world completely different to what they had previously experienced. And we can learn much from their experience and decisions today.

## *How is Daniel 'put together'?*

As you read Daniel, it feels like a 'book of two halves'. Daniel 1-6 contains historical stories, which, although they occur in a world quite unlike our own, the basic plot is fairly easy to follow. Daniel 7-12, however, is quite strange, containing a series of four astounding visions.

However, there's another 'structure' in Daniel that is not as obvious to see in our English Bibles. Unlike almost the rest of the Old Testament, Daniel 2:4-7:28 are not written in the Hebrew language but in Aramaic (most Bibles will note this with a footnote at Daniel 2:4). Although this is a puzzling feature of the book, one thing it reveals is another structure within the book. Chapters 2-7 contain 3 pairs of events: chapters 2 and 7, chapters 3 and 6, and chapters 4 and 5 retell events (or visions/dreams) which mirror each other. For this reason, in these studies we're going to consider some of these chapters together (we'll separate out chapters 2 and 7 because chapter 7 is such a significant chapter in Daniel and for the whole Bible).

### ***The Structure of Daniel 2-7***

Chapter 2: A dream of the **dominion** of the rock that becomes a mountain.

Chapter 3: God's **salvation** of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego

Chapter 4: God **humbles** King Nebuchadnezzar

Chapter 5: God **humbles** King Belshazzar

Chapter 6: God's **salvation** of Daniel

Chapter 7: A vision of the **dominion** of the Son of Man

We trust God will grow your joy and faith as we study Daniel together.

## ***Credits***

These studies have been developed with assistance from material from Maroochydore and Aura Presbyterian Churches and St Luke's Anglican Church, Miranda.

# Courage

## *Daniel 1*

### To get started

Share about a time you felt out of place.

### Read Deuteronomy 28:58, 64-67

1. Before we get into Daniel, from Deuteronomy 28:58, 64-67, what does God say will happen if his people don't follow his law? (Keep this in mind as we read Daniel 1).

### Read Daniel 1:1-7

2. What historical events are described at the start of Daniel?
3. How do you think Daniel, and those with him, would have felt about what had occurred? (You might also reflect on God's promises, such as those in Genesis 12, 2 Samuel 7, and 1 Kings 8.)

### Read Daniel 1:8-21

4. Why do you think Daniel and his friends refuse to eat the king's food? (You might want to note Daniel's diet in 10:2-3.)
5. Compare what the Babylonian officials expect to happen (v10) with what eventuates (v15). What do you think is the lesson of this?

6. This chapter describes a time of trouble and upheaval for God's people. Yet, throughout the chapter we're told that God is at work (vv2, 9, 17). How might this have comforted God's people then? How does it give comfort to us now?

## Bring it together

7. What are some areas of life in which Christians are tempted to compromise on our allegiance to Jesus, causing us to forget where our home truly is? How can opening one, seemingly inconsequential, door lead to the acceptance of sin in other areas of our lives? Where are you feeling pressure to compromise at work, at home, within your wider family?

## Close in prayer

Give thanks to God for his promise that nothing can separate us from his love (Rom 8:37-39). Pray that we won't compromise in the areas mentioned during this study.



# Wisdom

## *Daniel 2*

### To get started

Who do you think of as being wise? What makes them wise?

### Read Daniel 2:1-13

1. What effect does this dream have on Nebuchadnezzar?
2. Why do you think he refuses to tell the wise men the content of the dream?

### Read Daniel 2:14-30

3. How does Daniel respond when he hears of the king's threat to kill all the wise men?
4. How does Daniel respond when the 'mystery' of the dream is revealed to him? What does this reveal about God?
5. How were the wise men correct in their response to the king's request (vv10-11)?

### Read Daniel 2:31-45

6. Have a go at sketching Nebuchadnezzar's dream. How does Daniel explain the dream?

Other than the 'head of gold,' Daniel doesn't identify the other kingdoms represented in the statue. There are a few theories as to the identity of these kingdoms but in our time together we won't focus on this.

7. This imposing statue is destroyed by a rock that becomes a mountain (vv44-45). What does Daniel interpret this part of the vision to mean? What kingdom do you think this refers to?

## Read Daniel 2:46-49

8. What does King Nebuchadnezzar learn of God from Daniel's interpretation of his dream?

## Bring it together

9. In this chapter we've heard lots about *wise men* and *wisdom*. What is God telling us about true wisdom?
10. Although we might have many unanswered questions about the dream and its interpretation, Daniel's prayer (vv20-23) shows us how we should respond. If we believe what Daniel says about God, how will this make a difference in how we live and pray?

Close in prayer using Daniel 2:20-23.

# Salvation

## Daniel 3 and 6

### To get started

When have you felt like *the odd one out* as a Christian?

### Read Daniel 3 and 6

As we read, you'll notice some quite similar things in each event. After we've read, fill out the table below and discuss the similarities and differences you notice.

	Daniel 3	Daniel 6
Who is king during these events?		
What does the king command?		
What do you think motivates the king to make this command?		
Which followers of God are focussed on in these events?		
How do the followers of God respond to the king's command?		

	Daniel 3	Daniel 6
What consequences do the followers face?		
How are the followers of God rescued?		
How does each rescue show God is at work saving his people?		
After the rescue, what does the king command regarding the God of Israel?		

1. What do these two events teach us about the kind of opposition followers of God may face?
2. How are the responses of God's people to opposition an encouragement and example to us?

### Read Hebrews 11:32-12:3

3. Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and Daniel are alluded to as demonstrating faith, which is perfected in Christ. How are they to be an encouragement to us?

## Bring it together

4. How might we find ourselves in similar situations to the God's people in Babylon? What practices should be learning now that will strengthen us to respond in faithfulness?
5. The way the followers of God responded to opposition, and God's rescue of them, had an impact. What does this teach us about God and how does this give us confidence to similarly stand firm in the face of opposition?

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Thanks to Richard Germain (See Daniel 6)

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OH WOULDN'T YOU JUST KNOW IT ... AS  
SOON AS WE START OUR FAST THEY THROW  
US THIS TASTY LOOKING GUY

# Humility

## *Daniel 4 and 5*

### To get started

As the saying goes, *pride goes before a fall*. Do you agree with this saying? Can you think of examples of this happening?

### Read Daniel 4

1. Look back to the end of chapter 3 (especially Daniel 3:28) and recall Daniel's interpretation of King Nebuchadnezzar's dream in chapter 2. In the light of these things, what's disappointing about Nebuchadnezzar's pride in verses 4, and 29-30?
2. How is Nebuchadnezzar humbled by God?
3. What does Nebuchadnezzar come to realise about the Most High God (4:1-3, 34-37)?

### Read Daniel 5

4. How is King Belshazzar's pride worse than his father's? (Note verses 2-4, 14, 22-23.)
5. How is Belshazzar humbled by God?
6. How is Belshazzar's response to God's message the same/different from his father's?

## Bring it together

7. What is the danger of pride? How are we tempted to be proud?
8. How would these two chapters have been a comfort for God's people in the time of/after Daniel? How are they are comfort for us?
9. How would these two chapters have been a challenge for God's people? How are they are challenge for us? (Read Hebrews 12:7. How might what God did for Nebuchadnezzar be a kind of discipline?)

## A question to ponder

10. We've suggested that Daniel 4 & 5 are the *central focus* of the first part of this book (Daniel 1-7). From what we've read and discussed so far in Daniel, what do you think is the main point or teaching of Daniel?

# Dominion

## Daniel 7

### To get started

What do you think the most important event was in the last week (a) in the news, (b) in your own life?

### Read Daniel 7:1

1. How is this chapter different from everything that's come before it? How is it similar to other things we've read in Daniel?

### Read Daniel 7:2-14

2. Have a go at drawing each of the four beasts which emerge from the raging, chaotic sea

<i>Beast 1</i>	<i>Beast 2</i>
<i>Beast 3</i>	<i>Beast 4</i>

3. What happens in each of the three scenes:

1. Verses 2-8

2. Verses 9-12

### 3. Verses 13-14

## Read Daniel 7:15-28

Although this vision alarms Daniel, an angelic guide is there to explain the vision to him.

4. What is Daniel told each of the four beasts represents?

There are many opinions as to how these beasts relate to historical events. We won't focus on identifying them, but instead, like the vision, focus on the Son of Man.

5. Who, ultimately, has control over the beasts (note vv12, 14, 26)?

6. Only one figure has the right to approach the Ancient of Days. Who is it and what is given to this figure?

7. How do you think this vision would have been a comfort to Daniel and to God's people in the time of Daniel and afterwards?

8. Look back to Daniel 2. What similarities and differences are there between Daniel's vision and Nebuchadnezzar's dream?

## Bring it together

9. Read Matthew 26:64-66. At his trial, Jesus identifies himself with the Son of Man of Daniel 7. How do the religious leaders react? How does Jesus fulfil this vision?

10. In what ways does this world tempt us to underestimate the importance of Jesus?

11. Thinking about Daniel 7, what do you think God would say is the most significant things that have occurred in the last week?

### **A question to ponder**

12. In Daniel 7, kings and governments are shown to be beastly (see Daniel 7:17). In Romans 13:1-5, however, we're taught that governing authorities are established by God. How do we hold together both of these biblical truths? What mistakes are made when we forget one and emphasise the other?



# Desolation

## *Daniel 8*

### To get started

Who do you think would win in a fight between a shark and a crocodile? What about between a ram and a goat?

### Read Daniel 8:1-14

1. How is the ram described in Daniel's vision? What are its defining characteristics?
2. How is the goat described in Daniel's vision? What are its defining characteristics?
3. How does this vision cause you to feel? How do you think it may have made Daniel feel?

This vision has probably left us feeling confused. Fortunately, just as in chapter 7, an angelic guide is available to interpret this vision for Daniel and us.

### Read Daniel 8:15-27

4. Who are the horns of the ram identified as?
5. Who is the goat, and its horns, identified as?

*A little bit of history:* Under the leadership of Alexander the Great (356-323 BC) (v21), the Greek empire conquered vast regions of the Middle East. After Alexander's death at age 32, the empire was divided between four of his generals (v22).

6. The vision has a focus on the goat's final horn (verses 9-12, 23-25). Why do you think this horn is given so much attention?
  
7. How does Daniel feel about the interpretation of the vision (verse 27)? Why do you think this is?
  
8. Recall the message of Daniel 7 (read Daniel 7:26-27 if you need a refresher). How do these two visions fit together? Why would it be important for God's people to remember Daniel 7 in the midst of Daniel 8 being fulfilled?

### **Bring it together**

9. Although this vision is about particular historical events, what does this vision and its interpretation teach us about God?
  
10. How would this vision have given comfort to God's people during the rise and fall of the Greek empire? How does it give comfort to us, as various 'rams' and 'goats' charge and strike?

# Forgiveness

## *Daniel 9*

### To get started

What kind of things prompt you to pray?

### Read Daniel 9:1-3 and Jeremiah 25:1-14; 29:10

1. Through Jeremiah, what does God promise to do for his people and when does God promise to do it?
2. The first year of Darius' reign, dates this chapter between 65 and 70 years after the start of the exile. In the light of Jeremiah 25, how might Daniel (and other faithful people) be feeling at this time? What does Daniel do in response?

### Read Daniel 9:4-19

3. What does Daniel confess to God about his own people?
4. What does Daniel say about God?
5. What does Daniel ask God to do? What is his basis for asking this?

### Read Daniel 9:20-27

6. How is God's eagerness to answer Daniel's prayer shown? What encouragement does this give?

Identifying the 70 weeks of Daniel 9 has led many people to develop elaborate timelines and many others to give up understanding this passage in despair! (One Old Testament scholar has described attempts at understanding the 70 weeks throughout history as the ‘dismal swamp’ of Old Testament studies!)<sup>1</sup> We won’t get distracted by attempting to identify the timeline, rather we’ll focus on the main-point: that God has a plan for history.

7. From reading Jeremiah 25 and Daniel’s prayer, what do you think people hoped would occur at the end of the 70 years of exile? How does Gabriel’s message both meet and modify these expectations?

## Bring it together

8. In what way(s) is Daniel’s prayer a model for Christians today? In what way(s) is it not an appropriate prayer? Why and why not?
9. Regardless of the timeline, how does God’s promise to ‘atone for wickedness’ and bring ‘everlasting righteousness’ find fulfilment in Jesus? (You might like to read Romans 3:21-26; 4:22-25; 2 Corinthians 1:20; 1 John 2:1-2; 4:10.)

Close in prayer based on Daniel 9:4-19

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<sup>1</sup> Montgomery, *Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, quoted by George Athas, *In Search of the 70 ‘weeks’ of Daniel 9*.

# Hope

## *Daniel 10-12*

### To get started

When do you find it hard to remain convinced that God is in control?

### Read Daniel 10:1-11:1

In the first year of his reign, Cyrus allowed the exiles from Judah to return and rebuild their homes and the temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 1).

Daniel 10-12 recount a vision given to Daniel in Babylon 2 years after that proclamation.

1. According to 10:1 and 14, what is the vision about?
2. How does Daniel feel about the vision and the messenger/angelic guide?
3. How does the messenger describe Daniel in verse 12? What have we seen Daniel portraying this character throughout the book?

### Read Daniel 11:2-45

Read the passage fairly quickly, not getting too tied up in the details. This chapter gives a visionary account of the power struggle within the Greek empire following the death of Alexander the Great. Although it's difficult to determine precisely what's being referred to at various points, it does follow the outline of what happened.

4. What impressions/feelings/emotions did you feel as we read this chapter?
5. Briefly note some things about:
  1. The King of the North
  2. The King of the South

### 3. The contemptible person

6. Throughout the vision we read about an *appointed time*. How is this phrase a source of comfort?

## Read Daniel 12

Again, it's difficult to determine the precise events or times to which this chapter refers. Some think it is a description of the time of Jewish persecution under the Seleucid (Greek) King Antiochus IV Epiphanes in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC. Others think the vision jumps forward to an event prior to the return of Jesus. We don't need to settle this question to understand the main message of the vision.

7. In a world of beastly powers and persecution, what certain hope is given to God's people in verses 2-3?
8. What will happen to those who are not God's people?

## Bring it together

Whatever the 'time, times, and half a time' refer to, Daniel will have to wait. He's told to 'go on his way,' to wait patiently, living for God and trusting him, as he awaits the fulfilment. Christians also called to wait patiently, living for God and trusting him, as we await Jesus' return.

9. Read Romans 13:11-14. How are we called to live as we await our salvation?

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