



Serving THE King

Exploring the Book of Daniel

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Think who are the world 'superpowers' of our day? The United States of America and China appear to be the current candidates for the title. And such nations aren't called 'superpowers' for nothing – they wield enormous global power – militarily, and of course financially.

Now cast your mind to another place and time, the Middle East in 605BC, and the superpower back then is Babylon. This empire arose with tremendous speed and all nations fell before it. When people saw the superpower of Babylon, they must have thought its power – unimaginable, its rule – unshakable, its influence – unstoppable.

But enter a Jewish man by the name of Daniel. Daniel has had a close-up view of the power of Babylon. He's held captive. His own land has been laid to waste and he's now a servant to the kings of Babylon. But what we'll see is that Daniel has a unique perspective. Even though Daniel gets to know these kings of Babylon, Daniel knows that it's God who is THE great and powerful king.

As we explore the book of Daniel together, we'll discover the excitement and drama of the story. Daniel is certainly a man of uncompromising faith and you can't help but be inspired. But mostly, the story is about God – how He is completely in control, and how He will establish His kingdom with His own King (can you think who this might be?!!) who will sit on the throne and rule forever.

Exploring the Book of Daniel

The book of Daniel covers 12 chapters but we're going to cover the book in just 6 weeks. This means that we will take a summary approach to how we explore the book together. But covering the book in this way has its advantages. When you look at the themes going through the book, there are clear linkages between certain chapters, and it's these chapters which we group together in our studies.

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As we go along we'll discover that Daniel is a very unique book. Not only is it the story of Daniel which is chapters 1-6, it also contains a genre which has become known as 'apocalyptic', which is chapters 7-12. These chapters contain the strange visions that God gave to Daniel. When we get to these chapters, it's important to keep remembering – that what's most important is to have the 'big picture' in view rather than worrying about every single detail.

One thing that's very interesting about the book of Daniel is that it's one of two Old Testament books (the other being Ezra) that was written in two languages. The opening and closing chapters were written in Hebrew (1:1-2:4a; 8-12) the distinct language of Israel. The middle section was written in Aramaic (2:4b-7:28) the language that was more broadly spoken across the middle eastern region at that time. A question worth pondering is, why was it written in this way?

Enjoy the intriguing and exciting book of Daniel!



Study 1— Is God Dead?

Daniel 1

Daniel and the story of Israel

One of the most important things to do when we come to a book like Daniel is to see how it fits into the overall story. It's important to understand Daniel in the context of the history of Israel.

Here's a game we can play together to help us work this out.

Here's how it works:

1. One member of the group cuts the cards (see over the page) and shuffles them.
2. Then they take the top card and place it on the table/floor in front of everyone.
3. Then they pass all the cards to the person on their left who takes the top card and places it before or after the first card – in chronological order.
4. The bundle of cards continues to be passed around the group with each person having a go at putting the top piece in chronological order on the floor/table.

Here are the 'rules':

1. Everyone's allowed to help (it's meant to be fun, not a test!)
2. When the cards have all been placed in an order that the group is happy with, then you can open your bibles to see how you went.
3. Afterwards, make sure you discuss where Daniel fits into the 'time-line'.

To discuss after the card exercise:

Read 2 Kings 25:1-21 and Daniel 1:1-2

In your own words, describe the events these passages tell us about.

Given the great promises given by God and how great Israel once looked, what might those who survived the Babylonian onslaught (like Daniel) have been thinking about Israel?

Given that all those precious temple items had been carried off to the temple of the Babylonian god – what might they have been thinking about God?

<p>Assyria attacks The northern tribes of Israel are destroyed.</p>	<p>David Becomes King From shepherd boy to sovereign king.</p>
<p>Creation</p>	<p>The Tower of Babel is destroyed by God.</p>
<p>King Solomon The kingdom of Israel is at its largest – successful and safe. King Solomon builds the temple for God.</p>	<p>Warning! Before Israel enters the promised land, God warns the people they must keep His law, otherwise they'll be overrun by other nations and thrown out of the land.</p>
<p>The Exodus God rescues Israel from Egypt. The time of Moses.</p>	<p>Daniel An exiled Israelite in Babylon.</p>
<p>Babylon attacks Jerusalem is destroyed. Many Israelites are deported.</p>	<p>Abraham God gives 3 promises to Abraham- land, many descendants & blessing.</p>
<p>Israel Divides The once great kingdom divides into Israel (north) and Judah (the south).</p>	<p>Persian King Cyrus tells the Jews they can go back to their land to rebuild their city and temple. The time of Ezra.</p>
<p>Noah & the Flood</p>	<p>The 10 Commandments given to Israel.</p>

Read Daniel 1

Given the situation the remnant of Israel finds itself in, you could not imagine a more sad and pathetic scene. The once proud and glorious Israel has been reduced to a small exiled ethnic group inside the great empire of Babylon. The Israelites are a servant class within this empire. And how humiliating – the pagan Babylonians think they have something to teach the Israelites! But it's not just humiliating for Israel, it seems to be humiliating for God. It looks like the Babylonian gods have won! Jerusalem is plundered by Nebuchadnezzar who strips the temple and uses the ornaments to redecorate his own temple. But....

List the number of times you explicitly read of God at work in this passage.

What does this tell us about God?

This will be an important theme right through the book of Daniel. The kings of Babylon (and other nations) look so powerful, and in comparison, the nation of Israel looks so small and helpless. And it appears that in the cosmic battle of the 'gods', the gods of Babylon have had victory over the God of Israel. But we need to remember, God is still very much at work. The destruction of Israel at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, is actually the punishment that God warned about. It is the Lord who is in control. The frightening and powerful nations are the instruments of God to achieve his purposes.

What do you think Nebuchadnezzar is trying to do by selecting certain men of Israel? v3-5

What very obvious way do the Babylonians use to demonstrate to Daniel and his friends that they have been now incorporated into Babylonia? v6-7

Note: the Hebrew names incorporate part of the Hebrew words used for 'God' and 'Lord'. The new names that are selected for these four men incorporate names of the Babylonian gods. Read 4:8. This is just another way of saying – you now belong to us.

So far Daniel and his friends are fairly obliging – they accept a Babylonian education and a Babylonian name change. But at a certain point they say 'no'. What do they refuse and why?

It's not straightforward why they refuse the food and insist on a vegetarian diet. From 10:3 we know they ate Babylonian food including meat at other times. But in this instance they knew that if they did eat *this* food, they will 'defile' themselves (1v8). Even though they now had Babylonian names and a Babylonian education, they understood that it was drawing the line at this point which will keep themselves pure and set apart for God. A passage like Deuteronomy 28:45-52, tell us that Israel is exiled in Babylon in the first place because they ignored the warnings of God and compromised themselves with the nations around them. It seems Daniel and his friends are determined not to repeat the failure of their ancestors.

How did God affirm Daniel in his actions?

As we have already seen, from the start of the chapter it all looks awful for Israel. The nation has been defeated and more than that, with the transfer of vessels from one temple to another, it looks as if God has been defeated.

But remember – God is actually the one behind this. And by the end of the chapter we see that God is the one to bring victory. It may not be a victory in military terms but by the end of the chapter we do see that God is the one who rescues Daniel, and the Babylonians and their gods are shown to be no match for God and his people. As though to demonstrate this beyond any doubt, the writer concludes the chapter by telling us that Daniel lived there until King Cyrus, the king who eventually defeated the Babylonians.

In what way is Daniel an example for us to follow?

For the history buffs!

The book of Daniel spans the timeframe of several kings. The very first chapter gives us the very first, Nebuchadnezzar and the last, Cyrus. To help you keep it clear in your mind as we progress through the book, here is how the order works:

- 1. King Nebuchadnezzar** (Introduced at 1:1)
Reigned in Babylon 605-562BC.
- 2. King Belshazzar** (Introduced at 5:1)
Reigned in Babylon 552-539BC.
Perhaps the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar
- 3. Darius the Mede** (Introduced at 5:31)
From currently known ancient records, we know very little about him.
Media was an empire in the region The Persian empire was partly made of the Medes.
- 4. King Cyrus** (Introduced at 1:21)
Persian King who invaded and took control of the Babylonian empire.
Reigned from 559-530BC.
From the Old Testament book of Ezra we know that Cyrus allowed the Jews to leave Babylon and return to their homeland.

Pray that God will help you to stand apart when necessary to show that you follow Jesus as your King.

In preparation for next week, please read Daniel 2 & 7.