

**FAITH**

IN A

**DIVIDED WORLD**



# INTRODUCTION

The book of Daniel tracks the journey of four young Jewish men during the Babylonian Exile who were snatched from their homeland and placed in a totalitarian society that did not agree with, understand or value their monotheistic beliefs. Forced into the service of pagan kings, Daniel and his companions navigated their way in a setting unfavourable to Judaism while still maintaining the integrity of their faith. Even when the pagan kings and their governments finally announced their support for Yahweh, the challenges did not end.

As social and political landscapes change, the book provides insights and encouragement to believers today. It is not just about the stories of the lion's den or these men's faithfulness. The lessons can be found through three broad themes in the first seven chapters.

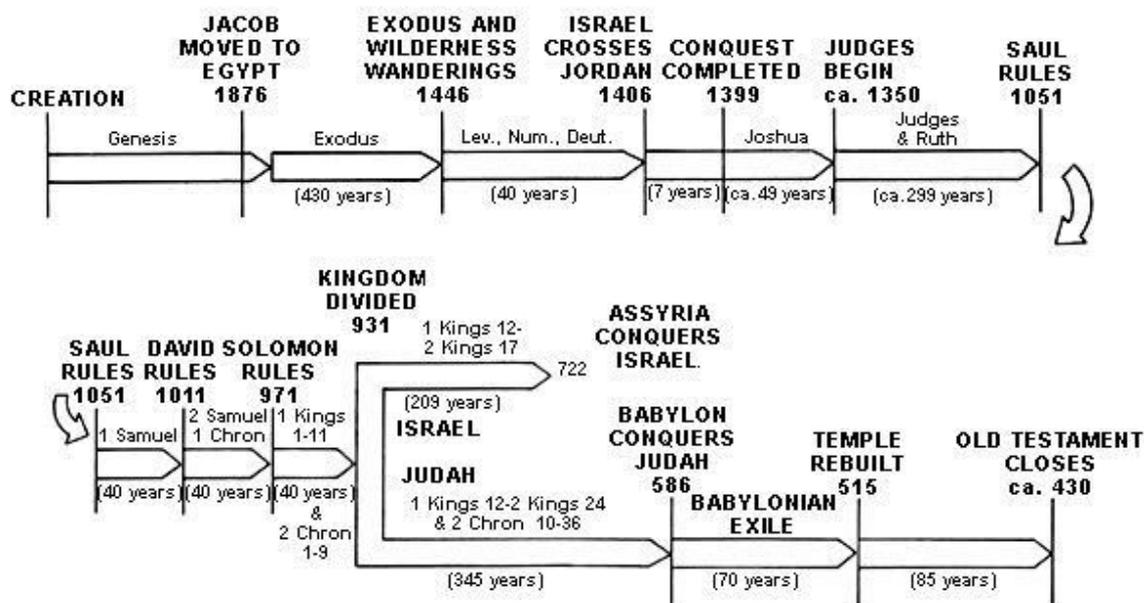
Firstly, the book encourages and challenges us to have integrity in our faith. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are seen as faithful heroes who showed integrity with wisdom in the midst of serious threats against their freedom, societal inclusion, prosperity and their very lives. This should inspire the followers of Christ today.

Secondly, the book shows how God worked tirelessly to humble, challenge and employ pagan kings into genuine faith and service. Although Daniel is the key protagonist, the book is also about the kings God reached out to and the pressure of the exile. We can see God's missional heart when even the most heathen and violent leaders broke down, found humility and put their faith in Him.

Finally, the book teaches us of God's control and direction of human affairs and history; and therefore, who the true King really is. The exile took place over the 70-year period that God specified. God was clearly at work in Daniel's story - shaping destinies, intervening in the lives of kings and ordinary people, and leading history to an incredible moment. A society shaped by the love and ethics of Jesus relieves the pressure of being nomads and exiles in this world. God's presence gives us a true home.

While we could easily look at our world and think “this is the worst it’s ever been”, God promises a brighter future for His followers. The Kingdom of God is a civilisation built by God himself that outlasts any human attempts to do the same. It is the place we hope and long for. Will you stand for this kingdom now, while you wait for it?

### An Overview of Old Testament History



### An Overview of Daniel's involvement

BABYLONIAN EMPIRE			MEDO-PERSIAN EMPIRE		
Nabopolassar	Nebuchadnezzar	Belshazzar	Cyrus & Darius the Mede	Darius I	Xerxes Queen Esther
605	562	555 539			
<b>DANIEL</b>					
605		536			
Jeremiah			Zerubbabel: rebuild of Jerusalem Temple		
627	574				
<b>Ezekiel</b>					
593 559					
605 Daniel deported	586 Jerusalem destroyed	536 Temple started	516 Temple finished		



## DO YOU FIT IN?

### Context

A national tragedy struck Israel when Jerusalem was besieged. Nebuchadnezzar (king of Babylon) pillaged “the perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole world” (Psalm 48: 2). The temple that David and Solomon had built as Yahweh’s house was destroyed. Its treasures were taken away. God, however, was actually involved in the Babylonians’ triumph (verse 17).

For many Judeans and Jews, it seemed as though the God of Jerusalem had been defeated by the gods of Babylon. Some lost hope and faith. Among the young men exiled, four chose to keep their faith, trust in God’s favour and strive for holiness.

- 1) Why did God allow His holy city (1 Kings 9: 1-9) to be taken by the pagan nation (Jeremiah 4: 16-17)?
  
- 2) Why did Nebuchadnezzar take the young men, rename them and teach them the ways of Babylon?

### Observation

- 3) How did the king’s servants treat Daniel?
  
- 4) How was Daniel wise and faithful in his encounter with the servants (verses 8-16)?

## Meaning

- 5) Although Jewish dietary restriction is very specific, it is not vegetarian. Why did Daniel choose a vegetarian diet over the king's choice food? Discuss these answers.
- a) To avoid ceremonially unclean food (Deuteronomy 14: 3-20) that might have been offered to Babylonian idols
  - b) To retain his identity as a Jewish exile and avoid assimilation into Babylonian culture
  - c) To remind himself through a form of fasting that it was a testing time for the Jews
  - d) To keep God's covenant and avoid being indebted to Nebuchadnezzar (11: 26)
- 6) After 10 days, the four young men actually looked better than those who ate the king's food. Was the vegetarian diet superior? What else could this signify (verse 17)?

## Application

The relationship between faith and culture is often questioned in the Bible. According to 1 Corinthians 8-10, discipleship involves being wary of idolatry and anything that resembles idolatry. This includes valuing any person over God. Most importantly, however, it is about edifying our neighbours. If they do not share the freedom we have, we should not insist on exercising it in a misleading way (Romans 14).

- 7) We might have been in environments that are hostile to our Christian faith. What can we learn from Daniel to retain our identity in Christ within our areas of influence?
- 8) How can things and people make us replace God and indebted to them? How should we respond?

## NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DREAM - ONLY GOD KNOWS

### Context

The average person has three to five dreams per night, but most are immediately forgotten. Some believe that dreams reveal hidden desires and emotions, while others think dreams are a product of random brain activity from recent experiences.

- 1) What was the last dream you can remember?

In ancient days, however, dreams were not considered a mere experience while sleeping.

*"For the ancient Near East it can be stated that dream experiences were recorded on three clearly differentiated planes: (1) dreams as revelations of the deity which may or may not require interpretation; (2) dreams which reflect, symptomatically, the state of mind, the spiritual and bodily 'health' of the dreamer, which are only mentioned but never recorded; and (3) mantic dreams in which forthcoming events are prognosticated."*

(Leo Oppenheim - "The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient New East" Journal)

### Observation

- 2) What are the key differences between the events in Daniel 2 and Genesis 41: 8-24?

- 3) What did Daniel's response (verses 16-18) say about his faith and character?

## **Meaning**

- 4) Why did God reveal Nebuchadnezzar's dream to Daniel (verses 18, 27-28 and 30)?
  
- 5) How did Daniel's praise for God's revelation (verses 20-23) reflect his understanding of God's character and power?

## **Application**

- 6) What ways can God use to impart wisdom in our lives (Colossians 3: 16; Proverbs 15: 33)?
  
- 7) Daniel responded to the threat of death by gathering his friends and seeking God's mercy (verse 18). Describe a time when you face tough circumstances with faith.

## **DANIEL INTERPRETS DREAM - THE RULER OF HISTORY**

### **Context**

The Bible records 21 dreams, including 15 in the Old Testament. The six dreams in the New Testament relate to either the birth or the death of Christ.

- 1) God uses dreams as a method of communication to impart wisdom or deliver important information, but are dreams still relevant today (Acts 2: 17)?

### **Observation**

- 2) How did Daniel start his interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream? What did it signify about Daniel's character and faith (verses 37-38)?

### **Meaning**

Daniel interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream in reference to four kingdoms:

- the Babylon Empire - represented by the head of gold (verse 38)
- an inferior (silver) kingdom - possibly the Persian Empire (verse 39)
- a kingdom of bronze - possibly the Greek Empire (verse 39)
- a kingdom of iron - possibly the Roman Empire (verse 40)

- 3) What is the kingdom that will stand forever and break all the other kingdoms into pieces (verse 44; Colossians 1: 13-14; Matthew 3:2)?
  
- 4) Daniel's interpretation reflected the next 600 years of history. Why did God give this dream to a pagan king and send Daniel to interpret it?
  
- 5) Did Nebuchadnezzar believe in God (verses 46-47)?

### **Application**

- 6) How can this prophecy build our confidence in the Bible and God's sovereignty over history?

Nebuchadnezzar appointed Daniel as the ruler of the whole province of Babylon. Daniel's primary motivation, however, was not to serve Nebuchadnezzar or to seek success.

- 7) How do we serve God wholeheartedly like Daniel (Matthew 6: 24)?

## **FACING FIERY TRIALS**

### **Context**

- 1) In Daniel's interpretation (2: 38), the golden head of the image represented the Babylon Empire. Why did Nebuchadnezzar then build an image entirely of gold?
- 2) Why did Nebuchadnezzar force his people to worship the image, even after witnessing Yahweh's power through Daniel (2: 46)?

### **Observation**

Although Babylonian kings were known to be cruel and tyrannical (2 Kings 25: 6-7), Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego did not yield to Nebuchadnezzar's power.

- 3) What did these three men show about their faith and understanding of Yahweh through their response to Nebuchadnezzar's interrogation (verses 16-18)?

### **Meaning**

Some may say that God will always rescue us if we have faith, just as He rescued these three men from the blazing furnace. However, the Bible also records occasions where God did not rescue those who were persecuted.

- 4) Why did God rescue Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego?
  
- 5) Would God still have been glorified if the three men had not been rescued?
  
- 6) Why did God show the fourth being in addition to rescuing the three men (verse 24)?

### **Application**

Honouring God should not be conditional. Even when He allows difficulty and adversity, we should not rely on our own understanding or other gods. Our hope and faith should be in Christ's resurrection and triumphant return.

- 7) A 'blazing furnace' can either weaken or strengthen our faith. What situations might put our faith under pressure?
  
- 8) How can we stand firm when God does not immediately rescue us from dire circumstances (1 Peter 1: 3-9)?

## **BAD NEWS BEFORE GOOD NEWS**

### **Context**

After multiple moments of divine intervention, Nebuchadnezzar had to re-examine who the real source of his power, success and prosperity was. He legalised Jewish religion in Babylon and imposed cruel punishments for disrespecting Yahweh.

- 1) What held him back from making Yahweh his personal God in his journey to true faith?

### **Observation**

- 2) How was Nebuchadnezzar's belief system (verse 9)?
- 3) The metaphor of a strong tree representing a prosperous kingdom is common in the Old Testament. It is also applied to the Kingdom of God (Ezekiel 17: 22-23; Matthew 13: 31-32). How does its language and imagery signify God's vision for the proper use of power and authority?

### **Meaning**

- 4) There was hope for Nebuchadnezzar (verse 26). Why would God seek to restore him?

5) What did Daniel's instructions indicate about God's character (verse 27)?

### **Application**

6) Although Nebuchadnezzar was confronted with the reality of the true God multiple times, he persisted in his ways. How can we avoid the same stubbornness?

7) Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Daniel's homeland and people. Daniel, however, showed compassion (verses 19 and 27) and interceded for Nebuchadnezzar's salvation. How can we show the same compassion to those who mistreat us?

## **FACING REALITY**

### **Context**

One year after receiving the terrible vision of his demise, Nebuchadnezzar appeared unphased - still in love with his self-perceived greatness. However, eventually he was not able to thwart God's intervention as the word of God would always be true. Though humiliating, the destruction of Nebuchadnezzar's pride was God's act of divine mercy and love.

- 1) How was the state of Nebuchadnezzar's heart (3: 28-29, 4: 30)?

### **Observation**

- 2) Why was Nebuchadnezzar unable to see Yahweh as the source of his power and prosperity?
- 3) How was Nebuchadnezzar actually better off after his humiliating experience?

### **Meaning**

- 4) Why did God bless a pagan king with more greatness (verse 36)?

## **Application**

- 5) How can we develop the right attitude in recognising God as the source of our successes, while still feeling free to work hard at our endeavours?
  
- 6) Read Hebrews 3: 15 and pray that God will help each of us to listen to Him.

## THE WRITING'S ON THE WALL

### Context

After Nebuchadnezzar passed away, his son Evil-merodach became king. He released Jehoiachin of Judah (the exiled Jewish king) from prison and allowing Jehoiachin to dine with him (Jeremiah 52: 31-34).

Evil-merodach was eventually overthrown by Nabonidus, who was Belshazzar's father. Although Nabonidus gave up the worship of idols, Belshazzar did the opposite when he was the ruler of Babylon.

### Observation

- 1) Belshazzar did not immediately consult Daniel, which was an indication that Daniel might have lost his status during the succession of kings. Why was it significant that the queen (or the queen's mother) brought Daniel to Belshazzar's attention?
- 2) While it is unclear whether Belshazzar was related to Nebuchadnezzar, the word "father" in this chapter can mean "ancestor" or "predecessor". How was Belshazzar similar and different from Nebuchadnezzar?

### Meaning

- 3) What was significant about drinking from the golden vessels (verses 1-4)?

The writing on the wall referenced measurements of weight - a mina (500-600 grams), a shekel (10 grams) and halves (presumably of a shekel). Some interpret these as kings or kingdoms. However, these words respectively could also mean "to number", "to weigh" and "to divide".

4) How did Daniel (verses 17-23) help Belshazzar to understand God's message through the writing on the wall?

5) Was God's judgement on Belshazzar final (Jonah 3: 4-9; 2 Samuel 12: 10-14)?

### **Application**

6) Daniel was given a difficult task of proclaiming God's judgment against a king in power. How would you seek guidance before speaking God's truth?

7) How do you see God's actions in today's global and political events? How can you show God's concern for leaders and nations (1 Timothy 2: 1-2; Jeremiah 29: 7)?

## STAY CLOSE TO THE MASTER

### Context

God was using Daniel to reach Darius, who had brought in a new kingdom. Daniel prayed three times a day, which was not common (although it is mentioned in Psalm 55: 17). He was familiar with Scriptures and prophecies (Daniel 9: 2), so he would have known Solomon's call to pray towards Jerusalem while in exile (2 Chronicles 6: 38-39) as a means of seeking God's mercy for a return to their land. Daniel also constantly sought God's mercy for people throughout his life (Daniel 9: 1-19). He showed humility by kneeling, rather than standing, in seeking God's help.

### Observation

- 1) What are the similarities between this passage (i.e. the characters and events) and the story around Jesus' death and resurrection?
- 2) How was Darius' character and beliefs based on his actions and words (verses 14-19)?

### Meaning

- 3) Why was Daniel rescued? Does God always rescue innocent and faithful people?

- 4) What were the similarities and differences between Darius and Nebuchadnezzar in their faith journeys?

### **Application**

- 5) Daniel was showing his faith and loyalty to God as a higher power than the king by quietly yet confidently disobeying the king's ordinance. How can we oppose immoral constraints through non-disturbing means with quiet gentleness (1 Peter 3: 13-18)?
- 6) Daniel heeded God's call to remember His promises, even when in exile. God also calls us to look towards our true home in Heaven (Phillippians 3: 20; Hebrews 13: 14). How can we remind ourselves to remain focused?

## THE FUTURE BELONGS TO THE SON

### Context

Similar to Nebuchadnezzar's dream, Daniel's vision was a prophecy of current and future kingdoms. The four beasts are generally interpreted as:

- the Babylon Empire (the lion with eagles' wings)
- the Medo-Persian Empire (the bear with one-side raised)
- the Macedonian or Greece Empire (the leopard with four wings and heads)
- the Roman Empire (the terrifying, dreadful and exceedingly strong beast) with the 10 horns as its kings

### Observation

- 1) The first beast lost its wings and transformed into a human (verse 4). What does this mean (Daniel 4: 28-37)?
- 2) Daniel was very disturbed by the dream (verse 28). However, God did not leave him to despair. Where can we find comfort from hope within this chapter?

### Meaning

- 3) Who was the "son of man" (verses 13-14; Mark 14: 61-62)?

- 4) What expectations did verses 13-14 create for the Jews in Jesus' time (John 6: 15)?  
What about God's intention (Revelation 11: 14-15)?
  
- 5) What was the central message of the dreams and visions in the book of Daniel (7: 27)?

### **Application**

Although our past, present and future might be chaotic and corrupted, God is in control.

- 6) How can we keep our faith and hope in God's promise when the world seems to be walking away from God?
  
- 7) How can the book of Daniel help us understand the purpose of Jesus' death, resurrection and second coming (Ephesians 1: 9-10)?
  
- 8) How do we maintain our citizenship in Christ while physically living in a broken, sinful and ungodly world?

## **THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS SERIES.**

We hope that as you studied God's Word together, you were inspired to live out your faith with integrity, challenged by God's heart to reach the lost and lowly, and encouraged by God's plan to establish His Kingdom with Christ as its King. May God bless and keep you as you live and wait for it.