

# Bible Study 1 : Daniel 1

From the UCCF U.K.

## Background

By 609 BC Assyria had ruled the Mid-East for 150 Years. The empire was now crumbling. Babylon, under King Nebuchadnezzar, was increasing in strength and the Egyptians also wanted a 'piece of the action'. The Assyrians and the Egyptians were to join forces in an attempt to halt the progress of the Babylonians. Judah (the Southern Kingdom of Israel) tried to stop Egypt but was defeated. In 605 BC Babylonia became the dominant player by defeating Egypt. This was the start of a new era. Nebuchadnezzar took captives from Jerusalem (including Daniel), probably as hostages to ensure good behaviour. (For more background see 2 Kings 23:26 to the end of the book)

Read through Chapter 1.

- From verse 2, why had Israel been delivered into the hands of the Babylonians? Why had God allowed this? (See Deut.28)
- How would you split the rest of the chapter into more bite-sized chunks for ease of understanding and analysis?
  - There is no right or wrong answer to this question but maybe the following headings would help:
    - vv. 3-7: 'Neb's scheme'
    - vv. 8-16: 'Dan's objections'
    - v. 17-end: 'Graduation'

### 'Nebuchadnezzar's scheme' (3-7):

- What are Nebuchadnezzar's objectives & tactics for his scheming?
- What were the four demands made upon Daniel and friends and what issues would they have had to wrestle with?

### 'Dan's objections' (8-16):

- Why do you think (v8) Daniel wouldn't eat the Royal Food? How could this overall principle apply to us today?

**Summary:** Daniel was very firmly within Nebuchadnezzar's system. He didn't opt out or hide away, yet still maintained and preserved his distinctiveness. He drew a proverbial line, which he wasn't willing to cross. He was willing to be educated by a pagan society, he was willing to work for them and even change his name but eating the royal food was one step too far for him – he wasn't willing to let this act erode his distinctiveness. He was always thoughtful and loyal to YAHWEH in everything he did.

### 'Graduation' (vv. 17-21)

- Why do you think in verses 15, 17 & 19 that God makes them prosper? From Scripture, is the outworking for God's people always the same? (e.g. 2Tim 3v12, Jn. 15v20)
- How do we see God's sovereignty at work within this chapter? (v2,9,15&17).

## Summary

In this chapter we see the scene being set for the whole book. Daniel and his friends are taken captive by the Babylonian Empire and forced into the system to be educated for three years and eventually employed by king Nebuchadnezzar. The boys though maintain their distinctiveness by drawing the line at what they will and won't do. There are certain lines that they just will not cross. They're OK with being educated, named and employed by King Nebuchadnezzar, but are not willing to eat the royal food. Here they draw the line. God protects and sustains and builds them and they prosper, but only for His glory and so his purposes are fulfilled. What makes you distinctive as a Christian? Where do you draw the line?

Notice that in verse 21 Daniel remained there until the first year of king Cyrus. That means he was still living when the exiles return to Judah from Babylonian captivity.

# Bible Study 2 : Daniel 2

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The second chapter of Daniel switches languages from Hebrew to Aramaic in verse 4. The next 6 chapters (up to ch.7) continue in Aramaic and then it reverts back to Hebrew for the closing chapters. The reason for this isn't absolutely clear although it is interesting to notice that these 6 chapters fall into three sets of pairs. Chapters 2 and 7 (Dreams of four Kingdoms), Chapters 3 and 6 (Fiery furnace and lions Den), and chapters 4 and 5 (The Lord gives and takes away royal authority). The book of Daniel for this reason has been described as being like a spiral staircase, it keeps bringing you back to the same point but each time you are slightly further up and have a better vantage point, you see slightly more each time you go around. We might expect chapter 1 to serve as an introduction to what we see in these six chapters and so we will do well to watch carefully for themes that we saw in chapter 1 reoccurring throughout these studies. What themes did you notice last week that you could expect to see reappearing in Chapters 2 – 7?

Read Chapter 2.

- How would you chew up the passage for ease of digestion?

## **Neb's death sentence on the wise men**

Neb is obviously pretty churned up by his dream, so much so that he can't sleep. So he calls in all the magicians, sorcerers and astrologers.

- What exactly does Neb ask them to do and why? How do they respond? Why do you think Neb got so angry?
- Compare the response Daniel makes to that of the wise men. What did Dan do? Look at Daniel's prayer in verses 20-23. What do you notice about it? What can it teach us?

## **The dream**

Neb's dream speaks of the future, it tells of what is to come, for this reason people have spent countless hours trying to figure out exactly when these things took place and which kingdoms are signified here. There have been many different interpretations of this vision, one of these that has been widely accepted by Evangelicals, and the one that we find most helpful, is this; The Gold head is Babylon, the Silver chest is the Medo-Persian Empire that followed, then the bronze is Greek and the Iron/Clay is Rome. So the setting up of the kingdom occurs during the Roman empire, i.e. at the coming of Christ.

- What do you notice about Dan's approach to the King?
- What is Dan's interpretation of the dream?
- What is the point of the dream?
- What was Neb's response to Daniel? (Who got the praise?)

## **Summary**

- What does this passage teach us about God?
- What can we learn from Daniel in this passage? How will those lessons affect the way that I see the world? How will they affect the way I live my life? How does this passage affect my view of prayer?

We mentioned earlier that people have spent much time worrying over exactly which empires are signified in Nebuchadnezzar's dream and got themselves into a lather over the interpretation of passages like this one which speak of things to come. It is worth asking ourselves what God's purpose was in revealing these things to Neb in the first place. The reason God gave Dan the ability to interpret the dream was that Neb could understand after all (v. 30). Neb wasn't going to be there in the future; he wasn't going to be around to see it all come true, so why did God tell him? Surely to teach him the lesson that God is in control and that he is building his own Kingdom, which vastly surpasses all earthly kingdoms. We must be careful when we think about passages like these not to get so caught up in the details and trying to figure out what the future holds, even though Jesus will return like a thief in the night and no one can know the hour of his coming, that we miss what God is actually saying in his Word.

The central thrust here is that God is in control and his Kingdom will outlast and outshine all earthly kingdoms. It is exciting to see the things that God has said come to pass in human history, but again we see that most in Jesus Christ and in his death and resurrection.

# Bible Study 3 : Daniel 3

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To recap on last week:

- What was the message of Neb's dream?
- How did Neb respond to that message?
- What might we expect to see following on from that?

▪ Before we divide up the pie this week, look at the passage and see if you can find the pivotal verse or verses in the story. What are the main verses?

When you've done that split the passage into chewable chunks.

## vv 1-7

- What's going on here?
- How do we understand it in the light of chapter 2?
- What is the point of this statue?
- Considering what we learnt last week, why is that so important?

## vv 8-14

- What was the significance of their refusal to bow down to the statue - to the friends? - to Neb?

## vv 15-18

- Compare Neb's understanding of God with that of the three friends.
- Why is it so important to hold verses 17 and 18 together?
- Look up Hebrews chapter 11. Is there a part that corresponds to verse 17 and a part that corresponds to verse 18?
- What do the two groups have in common?

## vv 19-30

- Neb is annoyed! Why is there this emphasis on hotter and stronger?
- What is the significance of this other person?
- What does Neb acknowledge about God?
- Why has he missed the point?

## Summary

- What do we learn about faithfulness from this passage?
- What is success?
- Has your faith in God led you to have to make any difficult or unpopular decisions?

# Bible Study 4 : Daniel 4

From the UCCF U.K.

Before opening your bibles, summarise what we've seen happening, characteristics of the main players and the lessons that have been learned in the first three chapters of the book of Daniel...

We've been able to ascertain a fair amount about the character of empire-building-Nebuchadnezzar from his dealings with Daniel. At the end of each of the preceding chapters though we've seen Nebuchadnezzar confessing an aspect of God's greatness. At the end of chapter 2 for example he confesses God as the 'revealer of mysteries' (2:26) and at the end of Chapter 3 as 'a saviour' (3:28). He hasn't though, submitted to his Lordship...

## The trouble with Neb

Read through Chapter 4.

- Can you split the text into more munchable morsels?

## vv 1-8 the tree dream

- Does anything from this section remind us of stuff we've already seen about Neb and God in chapters 1-3?

## vv 19-27 Dan to the rescue

- Would the interpretation of the dream have been an easy message to convey to Neb? What does Dan's reaction to the dream display about his character?
- What was the point of the dream? (n.b. v. 27)

## vv 28-37 Neb was warned

- In light of the previous verses, why are verses 28-30 so completely outrageous? What does this re-emphasise to us about Neb?
- What Neb actually is claiming is also untrue as he hasn't laid a single brick in the building of the city. See Habakkuk 2:6, 9&12 regarding the building of Babylon.
- Do you think verses 31-33 were unfair of God?
- What restored Nebuchadnezzar? What did he learn from this experience about... a) God. b) Himself. c) Justice.
- How should we respond to this study? Are we ever like Nebuchadnezzar in his pride and self-sufficiency?

## Summary

This chapter is a great example of how God can change people. Even the most proud empire builder can be humbled and turn to God. In this 'GO' week we should take encouragement in the fact that no-one is beyond God's reach. We, like Daniel, need to be faithful and step out simply trusting God.

# *Bible Study 5 : Daniel 5*

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Over the last four chapters we have seen God at work in the life of King Nebuchadnezzar, gradually revealing his true nature to Neb, firstly as "The revealer of mysteries", then as a powerful saviour and then eventually in chapter 4 God shows himself to be The God who is sovereign over the affairs of men, and Neb finally bows the knee.

In Chapter 5 we pick the story up about 25 years after the death of King Neb. There have been a string of less successful rulers since then culminating in Nabonidas who apparently went loopy and lived in the desert for a long time, leaving Belshazzar as a kind of deputy King.

Chapters 4 and 5 seem to form a kind of focus to this Aramaic section as they are the only pair of chapters that occur next to each other.

Read through Chapter 5.

- Are there any verses that you think are particularly focal or important in this chapter?
- How does Belshazzar compare with what we know of Neb?
- What is so outrageous about his actions in verses 1-4?

## **The writing on the wall**

- What is different from Chapter 4 about Daniel's message? The way he delivers it?
- What are the main points of this message?
- Why isn't there a warning and a chance to repent like God gave to Neb? vs 1-3?

## **Summary**

Look up Jeremiah chapter 50:35 ff. and ch.51:11 ff. It turns out that the way the Medes entered the impregnable city of Babylon, during their idol feast, was by drying up the river that flowed freely under the city's well fortified walls and walking straight in.

- With hindsight, what lesson that we have been learning in the book of Daniel is reinforced by this?
- What do we learn from Chapters 4 and 5 about God and his grace? The responsibility of those who ignore the warning of what happened to Neb in Ch.4?

# Bible Study 6 : Daniel 6

From the UCCF U.K.

Daniel has been a faithful servant of the Babylonian court since his appointment in Chapter 1. He has seen Kings come and go, he has watched Babylon itself fall at the hand of King Cyrus the Persian. Throughout that time, he has seen God as Judge, as Saviour and as Prophet, but always as the God who rules over the kingdoms and affairs of mankind.

Now Daniel finds himself in a new empire serving a different King but the same God. The parallels between this chapter and chapter 3 are unmistakable

Read through Chapter 6.

- What is similar between this passage and chapter 3?
- How would you dissect this passage for ease of examination?

## vv 1-9

- Why did the officials hate Dan so much?
- In what different ways did they try to trip Dan up? Why did they settle on the one that they did?
- Do you notice any similarities between what happens in verses 6-9 and other passages of scripture?

## vv 10-18

- What was Dan's response to hearing the news? Why do you think he responded like that? (see Acts 4:19)
- What do you notice about Daniel's praying?
- The phrase "According to the law of the medes and Persians which cannot be repealed" crops up a few times in the passage as a whole, why do you think this is?

## vv 19-28

- Why does Daniel say he was saved?
- What does the fate of the plotters show us?
- What is different about Darius' decree and Neb's in ch.3?

No matter who makes the rules, God rules. That is why he is so willing to face death rather than deny his dependence on the living God. Just like Peter in Acts 4 he knew that it was a better bet to obey God and risk death at human hands than to turn his back on the God who holds his very life in his hands (Dan5:23).

Daniel is so sure that justice will be done that he is recorded only as speaking to God before verse 21. He trusted God so he didn't need to defend himself to human authority, how like Jesus who didn't speak but "entrusted himself to him who judges justly" (1Peter 2:23)

The official's response to Daniel was in no way unique. Right at the dawn of humanity we see Cain kill his brother Abel, because his actions were righteous and Cain's were not (1John3:12).

- Jesus makes it clear that the world will react in this way towards his disciples because it reacted in that way towards him (John14:18). In 1John 3 however John turns this around and asks the searching question of us, do we love each other like Jesus or hate each other like the world? In what ways do you find yourselves prompted to jealousy by each other's godliness?

## Summary

How can we encourage each other to have faith like Daniel's that is so sure of God's rule that it is not afraid of any earthly authority when the two come into conflict?