

SMALL GROUP BIBLE STUDY

July 2016

THEME: The God of Daniel (Part 1)

Series Introduction

While fear drives one into desperation, hopelessness leads to despair. Together, fear and hopelessness are powerful forces that stumble faith in God when extreme trials threaten our lives. Does God really exist? How does God show his love and faithfulness in our plight? How can God's people persevere when evil prevail? Why does God at times allow evil to "win" in the here and now, and suffer his people?

Although it will take some efforts and imaginations to read through this Book with its mysterious symbol-laden visions, the stories of Daniel and friends in the lions' den and in the fiery furnace are familiar Sunday school favourites. Many may wonder – were they merely fearless or uncompromisingly faithful?

More importantly, beyond the fear and suspense of those stories, the Book proclaims that God is alive. He is always watching over his people. Evil will not have the last say. And God's people are called to trust him, obey his commandments, and persevere in faith even if it should cost them dearly. Ultimately, our trust is in God who has defeated the power of the Evil One on the cross (Colossians 1:13-15) and will usher in his final victory in the second coming of Christ (Revelation 19:11-21).

We live in a world and in a society where the faith and values of Christians are increasingly oppressed and suppressed. Will we stay true the Christ and the Gospel? Do we dare to live by faith, knowing that it will open us to all kinds of threats?

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3 July

God's Wisdom Wins

Daniel 1

Introduction

With every changing socio-political landscape, ensuring personal and corporate survival are essential concerns of many. The same would be for the sons of Israel as the nation came under the Babylonian rule in 622BC. Immediately, the clash of religious beliefs and practices were apparent. Of particular concern for Daniel and his friends was the food law – “To eat or not to eat?” More fundamentally, the key to decision-making is not worldly wisdom, but a commitment to divine wisdom (v8). God honours those who honour him (vv9&17). Daniel and friends became God's instruments in the pagan court to influence its public policies (v20) and eventually for the redemption of God's people (v21). God's wisdom wins!

For Study and Discussion

1. God is the True Ruler (1:1-7)

- a. What happened to Judah in the third year of King Jehoiakim's reign? What assets (both people and properties) did Judah lose? How do you think the people of Judah would have felt about their situation?
- b. Read verse 2 carefully. What truth does it offer to their situation? How significant is this truth? Who is truly the ruler in control?
- c. Daniel and his friends were selected to be educated and prepared to serve the pagan Babylonian king. What challenges did Daniel and his friends have to face? What does the Bible teach concerning honouring God and submission to authority? See Romans 13:1 and Luke 4:8.

2. God is the True Helper (1:8-16)

- a. What was Daniel and his friends required to do as part of their preparation to serve the Babylonian king? Why were they not willing to do so?
- b. Daniel negotiated with the chief of the eunuchs for an alternative diet. At what cost and risk did the chief eunuch agreed to Daniel's request? Would anyone sensibly accede to such a request?
- c. Why then was the chief eunuch willing to help Daniel and his friends? Was it by chance that Daniel's “experiment” produced good outcome? Who is truly their helper? (v9)

- d. What are some things that we are most likely to be tempted to compromise our faith today? How might we resist the temptation to compromise on our faith? Consider Matthew 10:28 and Acts 5:29.

3. God is the True Wisdom (1:17-21)

- a. Not only was their dietary “experiment” a success, they were highly regarded by the king. Why?
- b. Was it a matter of their “vegan” diet that they were so full of knowledge, skill and wisdom that benefitted the king? Who is truly the giver of wisdom? (v17)
- c. What is the significance of verse 21 in telling that Daniel served in the Babylonian court until the first year of King Cyrus of Persia (538BC)? That is a long time and Daniel would have been a very old man by then. Consider the effects on God’s people should there be an absence of godly wisdom in the Babylonian court.

Discipleship Pointers

God is sovereign over all earthly authorities that rule over his people. God preserves his faithful followers and even help us to thrive in the face of adversities.

- Nothing that happens to the people of God past, present and future is outside of God’s providential will, whether circumstantially good or bad in our views. God remains in control to do good for his people.
- It is God’s favour upon his people that enables us to thrive even in the most difficult and impossible situations. Obedience to God’s revealed will and walking in his way take faith in God’s goodness and faithfulness (Romans 8:28). Seek always to please and honour God, not the favour and approval of man.
- Heavenly wisdom is God’s endowment upon his people. It comes through obedience to God’s will and way. And often God positions wise and obedient believers to do good for his kingdom and purposes in homes, work places, and in the society.

Family/Group Moments

- What are some of the pressures we face daily that challenge our faith convictions and practices? Talk to one another about some of these pressures?
- What heavenly wisdom do we need to respond to those pressures? Share with one another how you have been able to weather those pressures.
- Pray for one another to have the courage to seek God’s favour and honour him when the odds are against us as Christian people.

10 July

God's Wisdom Reveals

Daniel 2

Introduction

Discretion and discernment are not to be presumed with age. The difference between a clever fool and a wise fellow is the absence and the presence of relationship with God respectively. Daniel was quick to acknowledge God as all-wise and all-knowing, i.e. omniscience (v28). Furthermore, the knowledge and wisdom of God is true and trustworthy (v45). The confession of King Nebuchadnezzar regarding Israel's God (v47) was unprecedented since the Pharaoh (Exodus 10:16-17). Do you need wisdom? James 1:5 exhorts us to ask God who dispenses wisdom generously. Above all, Jesus is the wisdom of God revealed (1 Corinthians 1:24). When we live according to heavenly wisdom, God is glorified and Christ is exalted.

For Study and Discussion

The king's dreams (or is it nightmares) that requires "instant gratification". The king insists on having it interpreted without wanting to tell anyone what the dreams are about – what an unreasonable request! But he did root out all the "fakes" wise-men, and found Daniel.

1. The King's Dreams (2:1-16)

- a. How would you reconcile the use of plural "dreams" in verses 1 when Daniel only interpreted one dream?
- b. What threats and rewards did the king give to the "wise" men, if they could or could not interpret his dream? (vv5, 6)
- c. Unreasonable request (vv10, 11) – How are the wise men's words an immediate condemnation of their (in)-abilities and limitations?
- d. Judgement on Daniel and his friends (vv12-16). Daniel obviously did not hear of the death sentence.
 - i. How did Daniel and friends become implicated in this saga?
 - ii. What was his reaction upon finding out that he and friends could be executed?
 - iii. Why do you think Daniel was given more time when the king had earlier on accused the wise men of wanting more time (v8)?

2. Daniel's Testimony (2:17-30)

- a. What did Daniel do immediately after his audience with the king? (vv17-18)

- b. How did the vision come to Daniel? (v19)
- c. What attributes of God did Daniel praise? (vv20b-23)
- d. There was an urgency to stop the senseless killing of the wise men. How did Daniel point out that the interpretation of the king's dreams was from God? (vv24-30)

3. The King's Dreams Interpreted (2:31-45).

From historical hindsight, we know that after the Babylonians (Head of gold), came the Medo-Persians (arms of silver), then the Greeks (belly and thigh of bronze), followed finally by the Romans (legs of iron). The climatic part of the interpretation suggests the ending God has destined.

- a. What is the message of the dreams (v44)?
- b. What will smash these human kingdoms (v34)? Who is this alluding to? (1 Corinthians 10:4)

4. Daniel's Promotion (2:46-49)

- a. What were the king's response and its significance upon hearing Daniel's interpretation?
- b. What happened to Daniel and his friends? How significant is this to the providential protection of God's people under the Babylonians?

Discipleship Pointers

God's Kingdom is everlasting with Christ ruling eternally as the King over it.

- Having confidence in God's kingly and eternal rule, what are our reactions when we hear bad news (such as when Daniel was to be executed)? Do we handle it with calm and collection, or do we behave differently? Who is our center in moments of trials?
- How are we influencing the world in our positions and roles? (vv48, 49)? Reflect our Christian calling and roles in society. What should we do for God's glory?

Family/Group Moments

- In times of trials and troubles, it is always good to have spiritual support (consider verses 17 and 18). When Daniel came out from his audience with the king, he went to these friends and asked them to jointly seek God for mercy. What are our first reactions in times of trials and tribulations? Who are our supporters and prayer partners?

17 July

Worship God Alone

Daniel 3

Introduction

When God's glory does not matter, it is easy to compromise on divine truth. But if God's glory matters, how willing are we to suffer and stand our ground for the integrity of divine truth. In the face of a death threat for refusing to worship the golden image made by Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel and friends' response in verses 17&18 may be seen as either fearless or foolish. But the king's reaction to their miraculous surviving of the furnace fire was even more mind-blowing (vv28-29)! God's glory matters. Worship God alone, even if that should cost our lives! Jesus did for our sakes (Philippians 2:8). Will we do so for his sake?

For Study and Discussion

1. Nebuchadnezzar's Image of Gold (3:1-7)

- a. Considering that Nebuchadnezzar had just honoured Daniel and acknowledged Daniel's God at the end of chapter 2, the whole scene change at the start of Daniel 3 (with Nebuchadnezzar building an image of gold, i.e. made up of solid gold) is quite striking. What do you think the image might have represented? What was Nebuchadnezzar "trying to prove"? (Quickly review Daniel 2:31-45)
- b. Count how many times the words "set up" or "set it up" are used in the whole chapter. What does this highlight about idolatry? See also Psalm 115 and Romans 1:18-23.
- c. We may say that we do not have physical "idols" which we literally bow to and worship. But we know that idolatry comes in many forms. Discuss about some of the "stuff" in our lives that we "set up" to celebrate our glory. How do we guard against this?

2. The Jews' Dilemma (3:8-15)

- a. What three-fold accusation was made against Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (v12)? Why did it cause Nebuchadnezzar to be so "furious with rage" (v13)?
- b. The three Jews obviously faced a dilemma here. How was this dilemma different from the one they had faced in chapter 1? How did that dilemma and its resolution help the three Jews here in Daniel 3?

3. Responding to Nebuchadnezzar (3:16-23)

- a. Discuss how the response of the three Jews in vv17-18 reflects their faith. What are they absolutely clear and sure about?

- b. It is easy for us to just concentrate on the courage and fearlessness of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego here. Let's look at their response from another angle – what do we learn about God and his character?

4. God's Deliverance (3:24-30)

- a. Who do you think is the fourth man in the furnace whom Nebuchadnezzar saw? (v25) What does this teach us about God and the way he saves?
- b. After the three men came out of the furnace, totally untouched by the fiery fire, what did Nebuchadnezzar say? To what extent has Nebuchadnezzar's knowledge of God grown? Consider what he said about God from 2:46-47 to 3:15b to 3:28-30.
- c. Share about a situation in which you had to decide whether to compromise (your faith) or not. How can you apply this passage to that situation?

Discipleship Pointers

God alone can defend his own glory and his own people before the world that is set up against him and his people. Obey and honour God at all costs.

- The first and the second commandments – *“You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven or above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them”* – are and will always be relevant to us. Consider how we may subtly break the commandments, and guard against that.
- When we suffer as a result of our faith, we do well to remember that God is always with us in and through the suffering (1 Peter 4:12-16).
- Our response to God and to life in general can serve as a testimony to others and help them in their relationship with God (whether it is to start a relationship with God or to grow an existing relationship with God). Let us be steadfast in our witness knowing that God can best use us when we are most confident in him.

Family/Group Moments

- Read Psalm 46 together. Worship God together by reflecting on the Psalm, verse by verse.
- Share with one about another a time when you had to choose to obey God and his word, and as a result, suffer for doing so. What did God teach you through the experience?

23 July

God Alone is King!

Daniel 4

Introduction

Kingdoms rose and kingdoms fell; great kings dotted human history; none however would ever have a lasting kingdom after their death. But the Kingdom of God reigns and rules forever (Psalm 146:10) and Jesus is the everlasting King (Revelation 11:5). This was Daniel's message to king Nebuchadnezzar as he appealed for his repentance (vv26&27). God alone is King. No one ever wins God. In the end, Nebuchadnezzar ate the humble pie in confession and worship of God as God (vv34&35). The apostle John saw in his vision the same mighty God who reigns and is worshipped (Revelation 4). God alone is King! Let him rule and reign in our lives and in our world.

For Study and Discussion

King Nebuchadnezzar gave an account of his personal encounter with God. Despite being a pagan, God used him to humble the Israelites; chose him to acknowledge and declare that He, YAHWEH, alone is the One and Only True God. From his account, we can see that God's sovereignty is over whoever He chooses to exalt and humble. Let us be mindful to study this passage prayerfully and humbly, seeking God's mercy and grace always; knowing that He watches over what we do, and shall call us to account for our deeds, detesting our pride.

1. The Dream Received (4:4-18)

- a. In verse 2, king Nebuchadnezzar considered it a pleasure to share encounter with God to all his people. How ready are you to share your personal testimony with non-believers? How much do you believe God is real in your life?

- b. Nebuchadnezzar was experiencing peace, prosperity and security in his kingdom. Yet God chose to drop him a divine warning of his impending crisis. Similarly, consider the Parable of the Rich Farmer (Luke 12:16-21), what does God warn us about building false security (1 Thessalonians 5:3)? What securities are you building your life on? Are they magnifying your human capability and glory? Are they consistent with your belief in God?

- c. What attribute(s) of God is seen in forewarning Nebuchadnezzar of his impending life crisis? How much did he take heed? Are there also some forewarnings that God is revealing to us? How much do we take heed?

2. The Dream Revealed (4:19-27)

- a. Why is it that Daniel was able to interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream, while others could not (v9; cf. 2:27, 28)? How did Daniel discharge his duty in interpreting the dream to Nebuchadnezzar? What Christian ethics and values can we learn from this servant of God?

- b. What advice did Daniel offer to Nebuchadnezzar (v27)? What possible sins could be alluded from this verse (also, vv30, 37)?
- c. What does it mean to ‘doing what is right’ (v27)? Compare this with:
- i. Deuteronomy 6:25
 - ii. Psalm 15
 - iii. Ephesians 4:22-24
 - iv. Philippians 1:9-11
 - v. 1 Timothy 6:17-19
- e. What does it mean to “being kind to the oppressed”? Are we in any position that allows you to oppress others? Or, are we oppressing the others just because our expectations / agendas are not met? Why?

3. The Dream Realised (4:28-37)

- a. What was Nebuchadnezzar saying in verse 30? Isn’t what he said true (Jeremiah 27:5-8)? Could we be proud of our achievements? What is so wrong about it?
- b. What is Nebuchadnezzar’s opinion and understanding of God (v34, 35, 37)? What is yours?
- c. What does the Bible say about ‘pride’?
- i. The root of pride. Consider Psalm 10:2, 4.
 - ii. The danger of pride. Consider 2 Chronicles 26:16-17.
 - iii. Attitudes and consequences of pride. Consider Proverbs:
 - 8:13
 - 11:2
 - 29:23
 - 16:18
- d. Nebuchadnezzar ended his kingship, making God known and worshipping Him. Would you do likewise today, for we know not when our last day is? Nebuchadnezzar knew what to tell his people. What about us?

Discipleship Pointers

Consider the original sin of man is pride (Gen 3:4-5); the downfall of Satan is pride too (Eze 28:11-19; Isa 14:13-14). Pride is one of the central themes in the Bible, as well as in our human race. Often, how we comment and judge others reflect much of our inner pride. We must be careful to be meek like Jesus, lest judgement befalls us.

God had shown Nebuchadnezzar His power twice. Despite being impressed by God's power, he did not give it much attention. He probably thought that God was not sovereign over non-Hebrews. Arrogant people tend to think this way: religion works well for you or some people need God, but not for me. Some Christians also think that they only need God mainly to secure their salvation, but in reality, they are just too busy with their lives to spend time praying or developing any personal relationship with Him.

Nebuchadnezzar certainly thought that he was too important and great to need God. God gave him another 12 months before fulfilling His judgement on him. He was too swell-headed to consider his achievements without God's doings. Just when he was too full of himself, God stuck him insane. His throne was empty for "seven period", before God restored him.

How often we need God to humble us before we take Him seriously. Despite the disaster, apparently, Nebuchadnezzar was thankful to God for the crisis that graciously saved him. (Adapted from Lawrence, R. (1990). "The Daily Devotional Commentary". Kingsway Publications. SP Publications.)

Family/Group Moments

- Do we need to be humbled before taking God seriously?
- Would you not give thanks to God for your life crisis that to draw you to Him?

29 May

God is the Lord of Heaven

Daniel 5

Introduction

The pride and sin of every generation should serve as a warning and deterrence to the next. King Nebuchadnezzar rose and fell by the hands of God, and was restored subsequently. His Son King Belshazzar failed to learn from his father's story. His desecration of the loots from the Jerusalem Temple for his personal merry-making and drinking infuriated God. His immediate death signals the severity of sinning against the holy God, the Lord of Heaven. Be warned! Beware!

For Study and Discussion

1. Desecrated the House of God (5:1-9)

- a. What did King Belshazzar do in the heat of his merry-making? What exactly was so offensive about his action, together with their act of worship (v4)?

- b. When the king saw mysterious human fingers writing on the wall, he was overwhelmed with paralysing fear. He cried out for the wise men and sought an interpretation of the wall-writing. What can you say about King Belshazzar from his reaction? How different was he from his father King Nebuchadnezzar?

- c. When none of his wise men could offer any interpretation to the king, he was even more bewildered with fear. Notice that the lords with him were perplexed by his reaction. What do you think were the impressions they had of their supposedly mighty king?

2. Confronted by the Servant of God (5:10-23)

- a. His queen was apparently sober-minded, not being drunk with wine, nor was involved in the merry-making. What credit did she render Daniel in recommending his service to the king? (vv10-12)

- b. What was the king prepared to offer Daniel should he successfully interprets the wall-writing? Was Daniel enticed by the king's offer at all? What does Daniel's response to the king show about his character and commitment to God? (vv13-17)

- c. What was Daniel's purpose in recounting to Belshazzar the rise and fall of his father Nebuchadnezzar? (vv18-21)

- d. What was ultimately Belshazzar's offence against God (vv22-23)?

3. Judged by the Lord of Heaven (5:24-30)

“Mene, Mene, Tekel, and Parsin” means “God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end; you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting; your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.” (vv25-28)

The message of the wall-writing is exceedingly clear. King Belshazzar was left without a doubt what would imminently happen to him and his kingdom. Daniel as rewarded as promised. Belshazzar was killed that very night and his kingdom was handed over to Darius the Mede.

- a. What do all these show us about the heart, and mind, and might of God in dealing with those who desecrate his glory and holiness (represented in Belshazzar’s attitude towards the Temple vessels)?

- b. How should the swiftness of God’s judgement be a warning to us?

Discipleship Pointers

The Lord of heaven is high and holy. He will jealously defend his glory from lowly desecration.

- The holiness of God is his glory. When we sin against God, we are belittling his holiness and scorning his glory. The consequence of sin is the wrath of God.
- The wrath of God is severe, sure, and swift. Any delay is only God’s patience with us that we may repent and return to him.
- Let us learn from the sin and consequence of others, so that we do not desecrate God’s glory and incur God’s punishment.

Family/Group Moments

- What can we learn from church history and the life of others that we might not sin against the holy God?
- When we have sinned against God and a warning has been given, what is the most God-fearing response that we should render?
- Pray for one another to have a heart of humility and fear of the Lord of Heaven.

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