



Personal Bible Study Program 2006

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

Colossians 3:16

This year on Sundays, we will be studying sections of the books of John and Daniel as well as the whole of Colossians. In between these books there will be talks leading up to and including the mission as well as talks on 'Why God became a man', at the end of the year.

To help you get the most out of bible talks on Sunday we have designed a daily bible reading program that will help you to read and apply each bible passage during the week before the bible talk. This can be a supplement to your existing bible reading program if you already have one.

We hope that you will make the most of this Bible reading program by setting aside the time to "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly".

How to use the readings:

- Print the studies out double-sided and staple the pages as a booklet
- Set aside time
- Pray for understanding
- Read the passage
- Answer the questions
- Meditate on what you learn
- Apply what you learn
- Pray in response

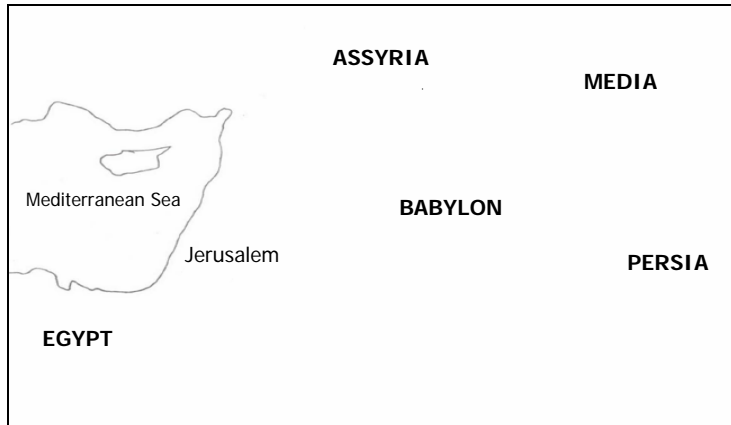
This Bible reading guide is available for download from the 'Resources' page at www.bpc.org.au

Please note that we are open to feedback on how to improve this resource. Please email your comments to office@bpc.org.au

Introduction to Daniel

A time of Empires

The events of Daniel take place in the 6th century BC. At this time, Israel was a small player surrounded by superpowers (Egypt, Assyria, Babylon and Persia).



The ten tribes of the Northern kingdom of Israel had already been exiled to Assyria. Babylon, the emerging superpower rises to defeat the Assyrian empire. Babylon's attention then turns to Egypt and eventually the Southern Kingdom of Judah. The unthinkable happens and Jerusalem is eventually destroyed (see 2 Kings 24&25). These events were long prophesied as judgement against Israel for its disobedience to God (Hab 1:2-15; Deut 28:45-52).

The key events of the era of the book of Daniel are as follows:

- 612 BC Babylon defeats Assyria (under Nebuchadnezzar)
- 605 BC Babylon defeats Egypt
- 605 BC Daniel is carried off to Babylon to serve in the royal courts
- 587 BC Jerusalem is destroyed by the Babylonians and Judah exiled
- 539 BC Medes and Persians defeat Babylon (under Cyrus)

Although the events of Daniel take place during the empires of the Babylon and the Medo-Persians, the dreams and visions encompass the empires of Greece and Rome which were to follow. But ultimately, the book of Daniel is concerned with how the Kingdom of God is the one that will ultimately triumph over all these worldly empires and reign forever.

Faithfulness under Pressure

Although the book of Daniel involves the coming and going of great empires, Daniel is more concerned with the sovereign rule of God and how faithful servants of God can live and flourish under oppressive regimes and kingdoms that oppose God. Daniel and his friends challenge us to live under God's rule at all times, no matter what the cost, recognizing that salvation and vindication come from God alone. The one who rules over all kings and kingdoms.

The book of Daniel addresses important questions for God's people in all times and places:

- Is it possible to make a stand for God in the face of hostile opposition?
- What does it mean to compromise our faith in God?
- How should Christians deal with the pressure to worship false idols?
- Will God allow his enemies to thrive against his rule forever?
- What will God do for the righteous who trust in him despite overwhelming circumstances of suffering and evil?

The book of Daniel is about hoping in a sovereign God who reigns over history. Daniel shows us what it means to live with courage, faith and integrity despite ever-present hostility.

Enjoy the book of Daniel as you appreciate the awesome sovereign God – the Ancient of Days whose kingdom will never be destroyed.

Apocalyptic writing

The second half of Daniel, chapters 7-12 is a style of writing known as 'apocalyptic' (meaning revelation). It can be a little bit baffling with images of beasts, use of dreams, visions and numbers. One of the reasons why it's hard to understand is because we don't have a modern equivalent style.

Some hints to help with reading apocalyptic writing:

- Apocalyptic writing was often written during great persecution of God's people so it is often concerned with God's final judgement, salvation and triumph over evil. Apocalyptic writing is therefore concerned with history building to a climax when God acts in a final and conclusive way.
- Apocalyptic writing is often conveyed by dreams and visions which involve imagery with hidden and symbolic meaning that needs to be revealed. For example, "horns" represent might. Another example is the rule of the *beastly* empires is contrasted to the rule of the heavenly *son of man*.
- Numbers are also used to convey general, symbolic meaning rather than being there to make speculative predictions about specific times, people and events.
- When there is an interpretation for a vision provided, this should control our interpretation rather than finding detailed and speculative interpretations.

Daniel 1

for bible talk on 23 Apr



Day 1 Read the whole chapter, then look at verses 1 & 2 today.

1. What else do we know about Jehoiakim, King of Judah? Read 2 Kings 24:1-6. To get an idea of the kind of practices that Jehoiakim encouraged, read an extract of the prophet Habakkuk, who prophesied during that time. (Hab.1:1-11)
2. If God punished the sins of the Israelites by bringing the Babylonians against them; is it possible that God might act in the same way today against wicked societies today?
3. To whom do you think that God has given the task of speaking out against the evils of our society?

Day 2 (1:3-7 The Royal Boys)

1. In the communist revolutions of the 20th century, young men of 'noble' birth were the first to be put to death. What do you think was Nebuchadnezzar's purpose in 're-educating' these young men, rather than simply killing them?
2. Have you had the experience of being made to leave home to go to school or University, living amongst people of very different values? How did it change your Christian commitment?
3. How do you think Daniel and his friends felt at the prospect of three years in a 'pagan' university learning the literature of a pagan culture? Does it give you any insight into the dilemmas faced by international students?

Day 3 (1:8-16 To Eat or Not To Eat?)

1. Do you understand what Daniel meant by 'defiling himself with the royal food'? (see Lev.17:12)
2. Some Christians say that Daniel's vegetarian diet was a biblical prescription for good health. What do you think was the reason that they restricted their diet so severely? What is the danger for Christians in combining diet and religious belief? (see Colossians 2:16-23)
3. Do you think that there are any substances that Christians should abstain from out of religious conviction? State your biblical basis for doing so.

Day 4 (1:17 Literature, Dreams & Visions)

1. Daniel's university experience was one of "literature & learning, dreams and visions. Was/is that your experience of university?
2. What has/can your education done/do to equip you to serve God? Is that part of your desire? Is it too late to achieve that end?
3. Even in the process of studying the pagan philosophies and religions of their captors: "...God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning." What does this teach us about the process of learning for the believer?

Day 5 (1:18-21 Bachelor of Babylonian (Hons))

1. Daniel, and his friends had no choice about their study material or subjects, much of which would have involved the heathen religions of their captors, yet they excelled. Why would they want to excel?
2. Note the introduction of the word "wisdom" (vs. 20) How does wisdom differ from knowledge? (Ps 111:10; Prov.9:10; 24:3&14) How does the Christian gain wisdom?
3. Christian psychologists, sociologists and criminologists need to study the gruesome details of human deviant (wicked?) behaviour. How does the story of Daniel's education help them to "excel", in spite of the subject matter?

Summary

Daniel was willing to draw a line in conforming to the behaviour of an idolatrous society. Where do you draw the line when it comes to conforming to the society around you? (See Rom 12:1-2)

Daniel 2

for bible talk on 30 Apr



Set aside time to read the whole chapter before looking at the individual studies.

Day 1 (2:1-13)

1. What sort of king is Nebuchadnezzar? Does it surprise you that God has dealings with those who aren't His people?
2. Why might Nebuchadnezzar have insisted on being told the dream as well as the interpretation by those who claimed to be able to interpret dreams?
3. Many people, including Christians, have a renewed interest in dreams. What does the passage teach us about what is required to have a sure interpretation of a dream?

Day 2 (2:14-23)

1. What was Daniel's response to being threatened with death? What can we learn about how we should respond to threatening situations?
2. What can we learn of the God Daniel trusted in? How would sharing that same big view of God change your prayer life (in relation to what, when and why)?

Day 3 (2:24-35; and 46-49)

Daniel worked in what could be called a large, godless institution.

1. What was the outcome of His persevering in being faithful to God in that context for:
 - (a) those he worked with (v.24)
 - (b) his employer (vv.28, 45b)
 - (c) himself and his fellow believers (vv.48-49)
 - (d) God's reputation (vv.46-47)
2. What can we learn about being salt and light in our community from Daniel's example (Mt. 5:13-16)?
3. What encouragement is there in Daniel's experience to help us persevere in being faithful in hostile or indifferent workplaces?

Day 4 (2:36-49)

The four kingdoms are generally identified as the empires of Babylon, Persia, Greece (that of Alexander and his successors) and Rome.

1. What is the kingdom that will never be destroyed? Who will establish it?
2. Whom does the NT teach us to identify as the rock? (Mt 21:42-44, 28:18, Acts 2:35-36, Heb 12:28, Rev 19:16)
3. What does Jesus teach us about the kingdom of God that tells us the kingdom he establishes is the kingdom spoken of in Daniel? Mk 4:30-32, Mt 13:24-30, 36-43 cf. Dan 12:3, Jn 18:36
4. What encouragement would there have been for a captive people in this interpretation of the vision? In a world where human empires still make their claims upon our lives what encouragement is there for us in this vision?



Set aside time to read the chapter in one sitting.

Day 1 (3:1-7 Ugly idolatry)

Nebuchadnezzar erects an enormous image of himself which all must worship.

1. What are some of the blatant idols that we worship in our society? What are some of the more subtle idols we worship?
2. The worship of Nebuchadnezzar's image is based on fear (3:6, 11, 14). How often is fear a factor in our worship of false idols? (Mt 6:25-34)
3. The Babylonian astrologers and officials readily worship Nebuchadnezzar's image. What are the idols you too readily worship? Ask God for help to worship him alone.

Day 2 (3:8-18 Fear who?)

Nebuchadnezzar is a furious and powerful king (3:13,15,19) with the power to command and kill. Yet Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego openly disobey him.

1. Why does Nebuchadnezzar think they should worship his image (3:15)?
2. What is the reason they have for disobeying Nebuchadnezzar (3:17,18)?
3. Have you been in situations where your employer asks you to do something that conflicts with obeying God? How can you learn from the example of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego? Who should you *really* fear? (see Lk 12:4-6)

Day 3 (3:16-23 Loyalty costs)

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had excellent positions in Nebuchadnezzar's court, whom they served well. They were willing to risk all this and more.

1. How did they show even greater loyalty to God?
2. How can we learn from the example of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego about what loyalty to God involves? (3:16,18)
3. What kind of response should we expect from the world for our loyalty to God (see 2 Tim 3:12, Jas 4:4, Jn 15:18-19)

Day 4 (3:24-30 God saves and vindicates)

A fourth being appears in the fire with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

1. What does the presence of the being tell us about God's response to their loyalty? Will God always stand with his people? (Ps 46, Mt 28:20)
2. How does Nebuchadnezzar's response to God's rescue, vindicate both God and the three young men? (Hint: compare his speech afterwards (3:28-29) with what he said before (3:15))
3. God rescued the three men from the fire. Will God always rescue his people from all situations? How can we learn from the example of Stephen (Acts 7)? What did God do in his situation? (also reflect on Rom 8:31-39 and Heb 11:32-40)

Optional

In Australia, we don't face death for our loyalty to God. But many Christians face death on a daily basis because of their loyalty to God, even willing to pay this price. Visit "voice of the martyrs" (www.persecution.com.au) and learn how to pray for our persecuted brothers and sisters. (Heb 13:3)



Day 1

1. Read the chapter. Enough already, it's long but better to read it in one sitting!!

Day 2

1. Who is the main speaker?
2. What were the main components of the dream and how did Daniel interpret it? To do this you might like to go quickly through the text and mark out the repetitions of the Tree, Coming of the divine messenger, Living with the animals, and Restoration.

Day 3

1. What is Nebuchadnezzar's sin? (v.30) Why does God judge it so severely? Think about Herod (Acts 13:20-25; Deut 8:10-20)
2. What are the similarities between these stories?
3. How do you think this applies in modern Australia?

Day 4

1. People are fascinated by the supernatural as long as it doesn't cut across their will and demand moral changes in their lives. How urgent was the king to find an answer to the meaning of his dream?
2. When Daniel interpreted the dream he gives a piece of advice, what is that? (v.27)
3. How does Nebuchadnezzar respond? (vv.28-29)
4. Why is Nebuchadnezzar so slack in responding to the vision?

Day 5

1. Nebuchadnezzar does recover his sanity after what event? (v.34)
2. Why did it take that long do you think?
3. What does he confess now about God in fulfilment of his vision? (vv.17, 34b-35, 37)
4. Notice how his sin of pride led to mental illness of the most extreme kind. How is this form of judgment appropriate for his sin?

NB: Daniel 4 is not talking about all causes of mental illness, but is concerned with highlighting the emptiness of Nebuchadnezzar's proud claims. If this chapter raises any questions about mental illness in relation to God's judgement, please contact Neil.



Background

There is a gap of 23-25 years between chapters 4 & 5. The Kingdom of Babylon is about to fall under the Persian rule. The city was surrounded by armies, so the picture here is truly "fiddling while Rome burned." Babylon fell without a fight, no one had the heart to stand up to the Persians. Nebuchadnezzar is Belshazzar's grandfather or it is possible it is a relationship like descendent or even successor.

Day 1

1. Read the chapter. Again a very long chapter, so just read for the flow of the story. (NB: The name of the king is Belshazzar and Daniel's Babylonian nickname is Belteshazzar. Confusing isn't!)

Day 2

1. What was the sin of Belshazzar? How is his revelry brought to a sudden halt?
2. How does Daniel castigate Belshazzar?
3. What particular sins does he accuse him of? (vv.18-24)
4. Why does God treat him so differently to Nebuchadnezzar?

Day 3

1. The writing on the wall was not difficult to understand in terms of the words themselves. They are weights or coins used throughout Babylon and much of the ancient world.
Mene = Mina Tekel = Shekel Parsin = Half-Mina.
2. What did the terms mean in Daniel's interpretation?
3. How do you think you would stand up to this kind of examination by God?

Day 4

We are meant to see a contrast between Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar. Part of that contrast is the sovereign hand of God.

1. Why doesn't God treat everyone the same? (Hard question)
2. If we are held accountable according to the amount of light we have received, (cf. parables of talents Matt 25:14-30 or servants in the household, Lk 12:41-48) how are you managing the grace and light given to you?



Day 1 (6:1-4 A Man of Integrity)

1. Those who sought to bring Daniel down, recognised that their only hope of success was to use his religious integrity against him. That is, they would trap him by his own devotion to God. In what way does this resemble the experience of Jesus? (Jn 11:43ff)
2. What aspects of your performance speak of your integrity in the midst of the deceitfulness of others? Do those in authority recognise your integrity? Does it matter, and to whom?
3. If greater responsibility and authority is offered to you, what will your response be and what are your motives?

Day 2 (6:5-11 A Plot is hatched)

1. Daniel is about to suffer at the hands of jealous rivals. How does he react? Have you had this experience? What encouragement can you gain from Daniel's example?
2. Daniel could have closed windows of his upstairs 'prayer room', but he deliberately prayed in full view of the public. Was this 'provocation', or 'witness'?
3. Do you find yourself being jealous of any gifted or successful persons at work or at church? How can you deal with this?

Day 3 (6:12-18 A Long Night With The Lions)

1. The Lord Jesus was, like Daniel, unjustly accused and sentenced to death. Make a list of the similarities and differences between the two. What does this tell you about the basis of religious integrity?
2. What was the King's attitude to Daniel? Given that the Babylonians believed that the King was a semi-divine being, what possible conflict of interest was there if Daniel survived the night? Do you think that Daniel believed that he would survive?

Day 4 (6:19-24 The Living God)

1. In reply to Darius' question 'Daniel, servant of the *living* God ...etc', Daniel replies "O king *live* forever!" How are these two statements related?
2. Can we conclude from this story that the righteous will always escape from the murderous plans of the wicked if they have Daniel's faith? Have you experienced God's deliverance from danger or persecution?
3. Do you see any evidence in this chapter, of growth in Darius' faith in "the living God"?

Day 5 (6:25-28 The Salvation Of The Medes & Persians)

1. What does Jesus have to say about how to deal with a Christian brother or sister who has wronged us? (see Matt 18:15ff)
2. What do Darius' words in verses 26-27 reveal about God's greater purpose in allowing the Israelites to be brought in captivity to Babylon?
3. What does Daniel outlasting Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar tell us (6:28 cf. 1:21)
4. Do you think that the words of Darius are evidence of his 'conversion'?



Chapters 7-12 of Daniel consist of apocalyptic writing (see introduction).
Find time to read the passage in one sitting.

Day 1 (7:1-8 A troubling vision)

1. If you like, try drawing the four beasts in the vision that Daniel saw. Then try drawing the part of the vision that involves the Ancient of Days and the son of man. How would you feel if you were Daniel seeing this vision (cf. 7:15, 28)?
2. Contrast the rule of the beasts with that of the Ancient of Days.

Day 2 (7:15-28 A troubling interpretation)

1. What do the beasts represent? How does the fourth beast compare to the others?
2. What do you think is the significance of the four kingdoms being represented as beastly rulers compared with the rule of "one like a son of man"?
3. The fourth beast viciously fights and defeats the "saints of the most high". Can you see in history, examples of regimes where Christians are severely persecuted? What are we to think when we see Christians being persecuted so severely by earthly rulers?

Day 3 (7:11,18,22,25-27 Hope amidst the strife)

1. As troubling as the vision is, there is hope. What hope is there for the persecuted saints of the Most High?
2. Remember that Daniel and his people are exiled and captive. How would they have felt during this time (read Ps 137 to get a feel)? How would they draw comfort and hope from Daniel 7?
3. When you feel overwhelmed by the seemingly unending opposition to God and his people in the world, how might this chapter encourage you?

Day 4 (7:9-14 The Ancient of Days and the Son of Man)

1. The "horn" wages war against the saints and defeats them (7:21). But how does the horn compare to the Ancient of Days (7:11)?
2. What is the impression of God that you get from the imagery of 7:9-11?
3. What is the impression of the Son of Man in 7:13-14?
4. In the gospels, Jesus often uses the term "Son of Man" to refer to himself (eg. Mk 10:45; 13:26) Why do you think he does this?
5. How does Jesus add to the message of Daniel 7 (see Php 2:5-11)?

Day 5 (Acts 7:54-60)

1. Before he is stoned to death, what does Stephen see?
2. How is Stephen victorious even in death?
3. How is this an encouragement for us to stand for Jesus as Stephen did?
4. Note in Daniel 9, Daniel sets us an example of praying about what God has promised he *will* do. Spend time praying that the kingdom of the Most High *will* come in all its fullness.