



Daniel: Living Faithfully in a Hostile World

### Study 1: Faithfulness in a foreign land

**Launch 5 mins:** What was the last things you had to eat? What does your diet say about you?

*Purpose: introduce the idea that you are what you eat! Which comes through in chapter 1!*

### Pray

**Context: Say:**

The events of the book of Daniel take place after the exile of Jews to Babylon as mirrored in Jeremiah 39 and Isaiah 40. Royals, the upper class, government officials, and craftsmen likely made up the bulk of the ranks of the exiles.

### Observation 7 mins

Map out the key moments in the narrative using the diagram on the reverse side (introduction, conflict, climax, resolution)

### Meaning 30 mins

Read vv1-7 **15mins**

1. What message is Nebuchadnezzar sending by taking Jehoiakim and articles from the temple?  
*Purpose: to see that dethroning a King and defrocking a temple, Nebuchadnezzar has destroyed the Jewish nation. Neb has basically said: 'I'm bigger than you King, and my god is bigger than your God'*

2. How is God presented at this point in the story?  
*Answer: it seems like God has been defeated by foreign powers. His temple is desecrated, and his people are in exile, away from the land of promise and blessing: so, is God with his people now that they are away from the land of promise and blessing?*

3. What seems to be happening to the identity of Daniel and his friends?  
*Purpose: to see that Daniel's identity as one of God's people is being dismantled. He is given a new name: naming something or someone was a sign of ownership.*

Read vv8-16 **5 mins**

4. What is Daniel achieving by rejecting the royal food and wine?  
*Answer: Daniel doesn't want to be defiled v8. By abstaining from the food, he is making a conscious choice not to be Babylonian*

Read vv17-21 **10 mins**

5. Why is Daniel successful in his mission?  
*Purpose: to see that God is with his people, even in their exile. God blesses Daniel with knowledge and understanding v18*



Daniel: Living Faithfully in a Hostile World

6. How is God contrasted at the end compared to the beginning of the story?  
*Purpose: to see that while God might have seemed distant and weak at the beginning, we see that God is present with his people, blessing them, and keeping them even in exile under an oppressive and aggressive foreign power*

Read Luke 4:1-13 **10 mins**

7. How is Daniel an archetype of Jesus?  
*Purpose: to see that Daniel goes through a time of testing, like Jesus does. Neither give in to temptation, Daniel to lesser nor Jesus to greater*
8. How is Jesus greater than Daniel?  
*Purpose: to see that Jesus went through the temptation by satan and did not give in. We see that Jesus is holy and sinless*

**Application 8 mins**

1. What are some ways that Perth shapes our identities?  
*Purpose: unpack how we are shaped to live for ourselves, to go out and get (or take) whatever we desire*
2. What changes would you need to make so that your identity looked less like Perth and more like Jesus?  
*Purpose: apply the reflections of application q1 to ourselves in light of Jesus perfect obedience, which he applies to us in the gospel, despite our sin and stuff ups!*

**Pray**



Daniel: Living Faithfully in a Hostile World

## Study 2: Mystery made known

**Launch 5 mins:** What are some of the worst leadership decisions you've seen?

### Pray

#### Context Say:

Daniel remained faithful to God and his commands despite the temptation to be unfaithful to God. God is still powerful to bless even despite Judah's destruction and the people's exile under Nebuchadnezzar's overlordship. God blesses Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah with position and influence in the King's service.

#### Observation 8 mins

In triplets, spend five minutes storyboarding the passage (have fun with it!): v1-13; v14-23; v24-30; v31-35; v36-45; v46-49

#### Meaning 30 mins

Read vv1-13 **5 mins**

1. How would you describe the relationship between Nebuchadnezzar and his wise men?  
*Purpose: to see that there is no trust between the King and his wise men, hence the test for the wise men to give not just the interpretation of the dream, but the content too*

Read vv14-23 **10 mins**

2. How are Daniel's actions different to Nebuchadnezzar's actions in v1-13?  
*Purpose: see that when Neb lashes out, Daniel is methodical. Neb seeks counsel from his 'wise' men; Daniel prays to God knowing that all power and knowledge is his*
3. What do we learn about what God is like over and against Babylonian spirituality?  
*Purpose: see the weakness (deadness!) of Babylon's gods and the distrust of Neb to his gods vs the greatness of God and the trust Daniel places in him*

Read vv36-49 **15 mins**

4. What do the kingdoms represented by the parts of the statue all have in common?  
*Answer: all these kingdoms are man-made, and will not withstand God's judgement*
5. What does God's promise of a forever kingdom mean:
  - a. For Nebuchadnezzar?  
*Answer: Neb's conquest of Jerusalem is temporary. Neb's kingdom will fall, but God's kingdom endures forever. Even pagan Neb comes under God's sovereignty*



Daniel: Living Faithfully in a Hostile World

- b. For God's people?

*Answer: God will end their exile and bring them back to the promised land. Their life in exile is not helpless. God remains for his people even though he has shunned them from the land of promise for a time*

- c. For Daniel and his friends?

*Answer: Daniel and his friends are elevated to high positions. God blesses them in the land of exile*

Read Revelation 11:15-18 **7 mins**

6. Jesus fulfills God's promise of a forever kingdom from Daniel 2 (the reference to the 24 elders is probably the 12 tribes and the 12 apostles; ie: all of God's people, together). What do you love about Jesus' work in Revelation 11?

*Purpose: to see that the good reign and judgement of the Lord and his Messiah will come. If we know those realities as good, we'll look forward to that time. This question provides a chance for people to reflect on the goodness of Jesus' reign*

**Application 10 mins**

1. How should the reality of Jesus forever kingship and kingdom change our perception of politics today?

*Purpose: to see that even the imperfect rule of 'christian' leaders comes to an end, whereas Jesus' perfect rule never ends*

2. When are you prone to get caught up in the strife, craziness and helplessness of politics?

*Purpose: self-examine when we give into fear rather than trusting Jesus and his good rule*

3. How will the words of Daniel 2 and Revelation 11 change your outlook on politics?

*Purpose: to see that we don't need to get so worried about the 'state of the world.' We can get involved in politics to do good, but politics won't solve our problems: only Jesus' rule does*

**Pray**



Daniel: Living Faithfully in a Hostile World

### Study 3: Friends in the furnace

**Launch 5 mins:** Tell us about a time you were in deathly hot weather.

#### Pray

#### Context Say:

God has shown Nebuchadnezzar his power over the nations and the everlasting kingdom he will establish. God will not abandon his people to exile; he will bring them together in his kingdom of promise.

#### Observation 10 mins

List all the repeated words/phrases with verse references in triplets

#### Meaning 35 mins

Read vv1-7 **10 mins**

1. What characterises the scene?

*Answer: there's either an orchestra or cacophony of different instruments. The author draws attention to the array of instruments twice to show the ridiculous efforts Neb has gone to for a statue. Additionally, all government officials must bow to this statue. There is no in-between option: everyone in government must bow to a representation of Neb's greatness/hubris.*

2. How do Nebuchadnezzar's actions contradict the conclusion he reached in chapter two?

*Purpose: to see the contrast between Neb's hubris in the opening verses of chapter three compared to his seeming humility in 2:47 where he says God is the God of gods and the Lord of Kings. Here, Neb sets himself up over the nations and peoples of every language on pain of death*

Read vv8-18 **15 mins**

3. How would you describe Nebuchadnezzar's character?

*Answer: vengeful, spiteful, and petulant. In many ways Neb's actions are a power play: to show himself and his statue as great and the God of the friends as lesser or non-existent*

4. What reaction would you expect the three friends to have to Nebuchadnezzar's speech?

*Purpose: to unearth our own insecurities when we are confronted by power that is opposed to us*

5. What does the friends' reaction tell us about them?

*Purpose: to see the friend's trust in God and faithfulness to God even in the face of opposition*



Daniel: Living Faithfully in a Hostile World

Read vv19-30 **10 mins**

6. What business do the friends have leaving the furnace unscathed?

*Answer: none! Some of Neb's soldiers are burnt alive. The three friends are in the middle of the furnace, so they too should be dead. Except for the part where a fourth being, like the 'son of the gods' is in the fiery furnace with the three friends...*

7. What change do we observe in Nebuchadnezzar?

*Purpose: to see how Neb's hubris has given way to praise for God. It's hard to tell if his response is full-throated repentance, but there is a change on his part*

Read Luke 22:39-44 **10 mins**

8. How does Jesus fulfill what the friends do in greater measure?

*Purpose: to see that Jesus' was willing to trust God and submit to God's will even to death for our sake: Jesus took the cup of God's wrath which we deserved for our sin, himself, so that we could escape judgement and receive life forever*

**Application 10 mins**

1. What are some circumstances that you've struggled to trust God in?

*Method: use this question pastorally. Ultimately this question is trying to lay the groundwork for applying the passage/s personally*

2. How does the story of the three friends and Luke 22 strengthen our resolve to trust God in struggle?

*Purpose: so that we trust Jesus regardless, knowing that he has gone before us and has set a day when we will be delivered from trouble*

**Pray**



Daniel: Living Faithfully in a Hostile World

#### Study 4: God over the great

**Launch 5 mins:** How do you think you'd go with lots of political power?

#### Pray

#### Context Say:

The three friends were saved by God from the furnace. Nebuchadnezzar realises that the three friends are servants of the most High God, who is to be praised.

#### Observation 10 mins

In pairs, create a timeline of the main events including Nebuchadnezzar's realisations.

#### Meaning 30 mins

Read vv1-18 **10 mins**

1. When does vv1-3 and vv4-18 occur in relation to the vision?  
*Answer: vv1-3 is after the vision. What follows from v4 is a recounting of what happened to Neb for all the peoples to hear. Vv4-18 occur before/during the vision*
2. What does Nebuchadnezzar get right about God compared to previous chapters?  
*Purpose: see how Neb recognises God as most high v2; knows God's greatness and kingdom v3; finally goes to Daniel v8, which indicates that he has some level of trust in God; Neb recognises the 'spirit of the holy gods' is in Daniel v18*

Read vv19-27 **10 mins**

2. What is Nebuchadnezzar missing in his contentment and prosperity?  
*Purpose: to see that Neb is secure in his own power and wealth. He has not submitted to God, who is sovereign over all v25. Neb needs to renounce his sins v27*

Read vv28-37 **10 mins**

3. How is Nebuchadnezzar's outlook on life changed through this experience?  
*Purpose: to see that Neb recognises that God is over all kingdoms, and has all power v34-5, unlike v30, when Neb expresses over-confidence in his status*
4. What does the narrative suggest about Nebuchadnezzar's relationship with God after this experience?  
*Purpose: to understand that at the very least, Neb recognises God for who he is: the God above all Kings, including himself. Neb may have repented and turned to God, but the text doesn't clearly say that*

Read Luke 18:18-30 **10 mins**

5. How do we miss in our contentment and prosperity?  
*Purpose: uncover our mixed relationship with money*



Daniel: Living Faithfully in a Hostile World

6. What is the antidote to serving money then?  
*Purpose: for us to die to wealth and live for God!*

**Application 10 mins**

1. In triplets, discuss:
  - a. How is your contentment?
  - b. What is your relationship with prosperity?
2. How will we encourage one another to realign our hearts away from prosperity and toward God?

**Pray:** in triplets based on your discussion in application questions one and two





Daniel: Living Faithfully in a Hostile World

## Study 5: God destroys despots

**Launch 5 mins:** What's the most hubristic (and funny) comment you've heard at work or the sports field?

### Pray

#### Context Say:

God chastens Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar comes to realise that God is the Most High, the King of heaven, whose dominion is eternal and over all, including Nebuchadnezzar.

#### Observation 5 mins

In pairs, highlight the characters names and their key responses to the writing on the wall.

#### Meaning 25 mins

Read vv1-4 **10 mins**

- How is Belshazzar different to his father Nebuchadnezzar?  
*Answer: Belshazzar does not honour God like his father. Bel uses the gold and silver goblets from the temple vv2-4, which repeats the scenes of conquest from chapter 1, in miniature*
- Who is Belshazzar setting himself against by his actions?  
*Purpose: to see that by using the goblets, he is setting himself against God. Bel dishonours God*

Read vv5-16 **10 mins**

- What emotions does Belshazzar seem to be expressing?  
*Purpose: fear and fright v5, 9; desperation v7, 16*
- What are the ironies that follow in this scene?  
*Answer: his queen has to tell him to seek Daniel (in the ancient world, this shows the man as weak, and lacking leadership skills) v10, and she knew about Daniel's deeds for Neb v11, whereas Bel doesn't seem to recall that given he went to his own astrologers etc first and not Daniel; Bel seeks Daniel v13, who serves the God he dishonoured in v2*

Read vv17-31 **5 mins**

- How has Belshazzar's character led to his judgement?  
*Answer: Bel has not learned from his Father v18-21; instead, Bel has acted ignorantly and arrogantly, and seems to have acted from his own judgement. Bel was not humble v22, and set himself against God v23*

Read Revelation 19:11-21 **10 mins**

- How is Jesus presented here?  
*Answer: he is a rider with many crowns v12, and judges and wages war v11. He strikes the nations v14 – Jesus is fearsome rather than meek, and mild!*



Daniel: Living Faithfully in a Hostile World

7. What are the implications of Jesus absolute power and judgement on the last day:
  - a. For Kings and rulers?  
*Purpose: to see that their rule and power is destroyed v12, 15, 18, 21*
  - b. For us, his people?  
*Answer: we'll be free, and participate in and benefit from Jesus' victory v17-18*

**Application 10 mins**

1. How do you usually react to corrupt leaders?
2. Leaders in our own lives and times set themselves against Jesus. How does Revelation 19:
  - a. reframe our perception of corrupt leadership?
  - b. and give us hope?

**Pray**



Daniel: Living Faithfully in a Hostile World

## Study 6: Daniel in the dock

**Launch 5 mins:** What do you want to do when you hear about a Christian being marginalised for their trust in Jesus?

### Pray

#### Context Say:

Belshazzar's hubris and ignorance are judged by God through Darius the Mede. Darius destroys Babylon, kills Belshazzar, and absorbs the Babylonian Empire into his kingdom.

#### Observation 5 mins

Individually, highlight all the speeches for the primary characters.

#### Meaning 20 mins

##### vv1-9 5 mins

1. What are the outcomes of Darius' conquest for Daniel?

*Answer: initially, life looks better for Daniel. Daniel is appointed an administrator v2, in a bigger kingdom. He is almost appointed Prime Minister v3. But Daniel is under threat from other administrators in Darius' kingdom vv5-9*

##### vv10-18 10 mins

2. What's surprising about Daniel's reaction to the decree?

*Purpose: to see that Daniel doesn't cower. Instead, Daniel prays toward Jerusalem, to God, with the window open v10 (others might see him praying! v11)*

3. What is your read of the situation for:
  - a. The leaders?

*Answer: they seem to have triumphed v13, 15*

- b. Darius?

*Answer: Darius will lose his greatest administrator, he is greatly distressed, and makes every effort to save Daniel v14. He is helpless to save Daniel, hence his last minute cry to Daniel's God v16 (which indicates that he has recognised something of the greatness of God by watching Daniel, who served the true God and not Darius' gods)*

##### vv19-28 5 mins

4. Why is God at work for Daniel's good even in persecution?

*Purpose: Because Daniel was found innocent in God's sight v21. God shows himself to be the living God v26, who rescues and saves v27: above all other (specifically, Persian) gods*



Daniel: Living Faithfully in a Hostile World

Read Acts 4:23-29 **10 mins**

5. Leadership in all spheres of life conspire against God and his people. How do Peter and John understand their persecution?

*Purpose: to see that we do not suffer persecution alone, but Jesus stands with us in persecution v26-27. Peter and John understand that Jesus' gospel work will not stop because of persecution v29-30*

6. Why is Peter and John's desire for the message to go forward surprising?

*Answer: you'd expect them to cower under the pressure!*

7. How does this passage encourage us to keep going in persecution?

*Response to help us look to Jesus, who has gone before us, and walks with us even now*

**Application 15 mins**

1. When have you got blowback for being Christian?
2. What is top of your mind when you've been on the end of blowback or see Christians persecuted?
3. How will Daniel 6 and Acts 4 shape your approach to conspiracy against God and his people (which includes you!) while you live on this side of the last day?

**Pray**