

Conversations

Bible Study Resource

Daniel

living faithfully
in a foreign land

THE INTRO

Daniel 1:1 begins by placing the events that are to follow within a particular point in Israel's history.

When Israel was preparing to enter the promised land, God made clear that their occupation of the land was conditional upon their obedience (Deuteronomy 4), with the promise that if they did not obey God, they would not remain in the land.

The nation of Israel divided into two kingdoms (Israel, the northern kingdom and Judah, the southern kingdom) under Solomon's unwise son, Rehoboam (1 Kings 12). Israel quickly descended into idolatry, turning away from the Lord. The Assyrians took over Israel in 722BC and the people went into exile. Despite witnessing this, Judah did not repent. 2 Kings 24 tells how Nebuchadnezzar, a central character in the book of Daniel, invades Judah and rules over the land. It is during this time that Daniel and his friends are taken into exile in Babylon. Successive kings put in place by Nebuchadnezzar rebel against him, leading first to Nebuchadnezzar removing all the treasures from the temple in Jerusalem to Babylon and taking more of the people into exile and leaving only the poorest in the land (2 Kings 24:13-14) before finally returning to destroy Jerusalem, setting fire to the temple, the royal palace and all the houses of Jerusalem, and breaking down the walls of the city (2 Kings 25:9-10).

Daniel and his friends therefore live at a time when God's people are oppressed by a foreign power. The challenge for Daniel and his friends is to remain faithful to God in a foreign land, while they experience the oppression and opposition of an empire that at times is directly opposed to God.

The book of Daniel has been a source and comfort for God's people throughout the generations, particularly when they have experienced a sense of "exile": that they are living in a land where the powers that be are oppressing them and at times directly opposing God.

Daniel and his friends provide us with models as to how to live for God in such a context, and challenge us to stand for God, despite the risk.

OUTLINE OF STUDIES

There are six individual studies in this series.

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| Daniel 1 | Making a Stand for God |
| Daniel 2 | Dangerous Dreams |
| Daniel 3 | The Risks and Rewards of Not Bowing to Idols |
| Daniel 4 | Who Rules the World? |
| Daniel 5 | Speaking Truth to Power |
| Daniel 6 | Choosing God and a Den of Lions |

THE METHOD

Each of the individual studies uses the *Conversations* style.

Conversations is a method of Bible study developed by the Scottish Bible Society and the Contextual Bible Study Group. Conversations seeks to encourage people to actively engage with the Bible and apply it to life. The questions are designed to stimulate conversation within groups where people may have varying backgrounds and knowledge of the Bible.

You will notice a similar pattern of questions used throughout the studies. All of the questions are ‘open’ questions which don’t presume an answer but instead invite people to reflect personally on the text. The first question is always, “What jumps off the page at you?” – an opportunity for people to begin to share their thoughts on a passage. Then there are ‘listing’ questions that encourage a closer reading of the text, ‘theological’ questions that seek to understand the meaning, and finally ‘contextual’ questions that begin to apply the text to life. We hope you find this a refreshing and stimulating way to study the Bible.

More Bible study resources that utilise the Conversations method can be found on the Scottish Bible Society website: scottishbiblesociety.org/equip

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READ

Daniel 1:1-21

¹ In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. ² And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure-house of his god.

³ Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring into the king's service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility – ⁴ young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. ⁵ The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service.

⁶ Among those who were chosen were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. ⁷ The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Beltshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego.

⁸ But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself in this way. ⁹ Now God had caused the official to show favour and compassion to Daniel, ¹⁰ but the official told Daniel, 'I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men of your age? The king would then have my head because of you.'

¹¹ Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, ¹² 'Please test your servants for ten days: give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. ¹³ Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see.' ¹⁴ So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days.

¹⁵ At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. ¹⁶ So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.

¹⁷ To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.

¹⁸ At the end of the time set by the king to bring them into his service, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁹ The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's service. ²⁰ In

every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanterers in his whole kingdom.

²¹ And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus.

QUESTIONS

- 1 What jumps off the page at you? **3s/FB**
- 2 Who are the various characters in the passage and what do we learn about them?
FGP
- 3 What does God do in the story? **3s/FB**
- 4 What risks do Daniel and his friends take by making a stand for God?
GPS or FGP
- 5 How does this story help us as we live out our faith in our context? **3s/FB**
- 6 What do we learn from this story about the benefit of living as part of a community of faith? **GPS or FGP**

Study Key

3s/FB - Groups of 3 with feedback to whole group

FGP - Full Group

GPS - Larger groups of 6 (if desired)

READ

Daniel 2:1-49

¹ In the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his mind was troubled and he could not sleep. ² So the king summoned the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers to tell him what he had dreamed. When they came in and stood before the king, ³ he said to them, 'I have had a dream that troubles me and I want to know what it means.'

⁴ Then the astrologers answered the king, 'May the king live for ever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will interpret it.'

⁵ The king replied to the astrologers, 'This is what I have firmly decided: if you do not tell me what my dream was and interpret it, I will have you cut into pieces and your houses turned into piles of rubble. ⁶ But if you tell me the dream and explain it, you will receive from me gifts and rewards and great honour. So tell me the dream and interpret it for me.'

⁷ Once more they replied, 'Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will interpret it.'

⁸ Then the king answered, 'I am certain that you are trying to gain time, because you realise that this is what I have firmly decided: ⁹ if you do not tell me the dream, there is only one penalty for you. You have conspired to tell me misleading and wicked things, hoping the situation will change. So then, tell me the dream, and I will know that you can interpret it for me.'

¹⁰ The astrologers answered the king, 'There is no one on earth who can do what the king asks! No king, however great and mighty, has ever asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or astrologer. ¹¹ What the king asks is too difficult. No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among humans.'

¹² This made the king so angry and furious that he ordered the execution of all the wise men of Babylon. ¹³ So the decree was issued to put the wise men to death, and men were sent to look for Daniel and his friends to put them to death.

¹⁴ When Arioch, the commander of the king's guard, had gone out to put to death the wise men of Babylon, Daniel spoke to him with wisdom and tact. ¹⁵ He asked the king's officer, 'Why did the king issue such a harsh decree?' Arioch then explained the matter to Daniel.

¹⁶ At this, Daniel went in to the king and asked for time, so that he might interpret the dream for him.

¹⁷ Then Daniel returned to his house and explained the matter to his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. ¹⁸ He urged them to plead for mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that he and his friends might not be executed with the rest

of the wise men of Babylon. ¹⁹ During the night the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision. Then Daniel praised the God of heaven ²⁰ and said:

‘Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever;

wisdom and power are his.

²¹ He changes times and seasons;

he deposes kings and raises up others.

He gives wisdom to the wise

and knowledge to the discerning.

²² He reveals deep and hidden things;

he knows what lies in darkness,

and light dwells with him.

²³ I thank and praise you, God of my ancestors:

you have given me wisdom and power,

you have made known to me what we asked of you,

you have made known to us the dream of the king.’

²⁴ Then Daniel went to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to execute the wise men of Babylon, and said to him, ‘Do not execute the wise men of Babylon. Take me to the king, and I will interpret his dream for him.’

²⁵ Arioch took Daniel to the king at once and said, ‘I have found a man among the exiles from Judah who can tell the king what his dream means.’

²⁶ The king asked Daniel (also called Belteshazzar), ‘Are you able to tell me what I saw in my dream and interpret it?’

²⁷ Daniel replied, ‘No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about, ²⁸ but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come. Your dream and the visions that passed through your mind as you were lying in bed are these:

²⁹ ‘As Your Majesty was lying there, your mind turned to things to come, and the revealer of mysteries showed you what is going to happen. ³⁰ As for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because I have greater wisdom than anyone else alive, but so that Your

Majesty may know the interpretation and that you may understand what went through your mind.

³¹ ‘Your Majesty looked, and there before you stood a large statue – an enormous, dazzling statue, awesome in appearance. ³² The head of the statue was made of pure gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, ³³ its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay. ³⁴ While you were watching, a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them. ³⁵ Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were all broken to pieces and became like chaff on a threshing-floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth.

³⁶ ‘This was the dream, and now we will interpret it to the king. ³⁷ Your Majesty, you are the king of kings. The God of heaven has given you dominion and power and might and glory; ³⁸ in your hands he has placed all mankind and the beasts of the field and the birds in the sky. Wherever they live, he has made you ruler over them all. You are that head of gold.

³⁹ ‘After you, another kingdom will arise, inferior to yours. Next, a third kingdom, one of bronze, will rule over the whole earth. ⁴⁰ Finally, there will be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron – for iron breaks and smashes everything – and as iron breaks things to pieces, so it will crush and break all the others. ⁴¹ Just as you saw that the feet and toes were partly of baked clay and partly of iron, so this will be a divided kingdom; yet it will have some of the strength of iron in it, even as you saw iron mixed with clay. ⁴² As the toes were partly iron and partly clay, so this kingdom will be partly strong and partly brittle. ⁴³ And just as you saw the iron mixed with baked clay, so the people will be a mixture and will not remain united, any more than iron mixes with clay.

⁴⁴ ‘In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure for ever. ⁴⁵ This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands – a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces.

‘The great God has shown the king what will take place in the future. The dream is true and its interpretation is trustworthy.’

⁴⁶ Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and paid him honour and ordered that an offering and incense be presented to him. ⁴⁷ The king said to Daniel, ‘Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery.’

⁴⁸ Then the king placed Daniel in a high position and lavished many gifts on him. He made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men. ⁴⁹ Moreover, at Daniel's request the king appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego chief ministers over the province of Babylon, while Daniel himself remained at the royal court.

QUESTIONS

- 1 What jumps off the page at you? **3s/FB**
- 2 Who are the various characters in the passage and what do we learn about them? **FGP**
- 3 What does God do in the story? **3s/FB**
- 4 How do Daniel and his friends respond to the danger? **GPS or FGP**
- 5 How does this story help us as we live out our faith in our context? **3s/FB**
- 6 What do we learn from this story about God and the way that he deals with rulers, kingdoms, and empires? **GPS or FGP**

Study Key

3s/FB - Groups of 3 with feedback to whole group

FGP - Full Group

GPS - Larger groups of 6 (if desired)

READ

Daniel 3:1-30

¹ King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, sixty cubits high and six cubits wide, and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. ² He then summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, advisors, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials to come to the dedication of the image he had set up. ³ So the satraps, prefects, governors, advisors, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up, and they stood before it.

⁴ Then the herald loudly proclaimed, ‘Nations and peoples of every language, this is what you are commanded to do: ⁵ as soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. ⁶ Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace.’

⁷ Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the nations and peoples of every language fell down and worshipped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

⁸ At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews. ⁹ They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, ‘May the king live for ever! ¹⁰ Your Majesty has issued a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, ¹¹ and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace. ¹² But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon – Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego – who pay no attention to you, Your Majesty. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up.’

¹³ Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, ¹⁴ and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, ‘Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? ¹⁵ Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?’

¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, ‘King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. ¹⁷ If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty’s hand. ¹⁸ But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will

not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.’

¹⁹ Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude towards them changed. He ordered the furnace to be heated seven times hotter than usual ²⁰ and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. ²¹ So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. ²² The king’s command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, ²³ and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.

²⁴ Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisors, ‘Weren’t there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?’

They replied, ‘Certainly, Your Majesty.’

²⁵ He said, ‘Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.’

²⁶ Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, ‘Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!’

So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, ²⁷ and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisors crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them.

²⁸ Then Nebuchadnezzar said, ‘Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king’s command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. ²⁹ Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way.’

³⁰ Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

QUESTIONS

- 1 What jumps off the page for you? **3s/FB**
- 2 Who are the various characters in the passage and what do we learn about them?
FGP
- 3 What does Shardach, Meshach and Abednego's speech to Nebuchadnezzar reveal about their faith? **3s/FB**
- 4 What does God do in this story? **GPS or FGP**
- 5 How does this story help us as we live out our faith in our context? **3s/FB**
- 6 What are the idols of our generation to which we are tempted to bow down, and what are the risks and rewards if we stay faithful to God? **GPS or FGP**

Study Key

***3s / FB** - Groups of 3 with feedback to whole group*

***FGP** - Full Group*

***GPS** - Larger groups of 6 (if desired)*

READ

Daniel 4:1-37

¹ King Nebuchadnezzar,

To the nations and peoples of every language, who live in all the earth:

May you prosper greatly!

² It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me.

³ How great are his signs,

how mighty his wonders!

His kingdom is an eternal kingdom;

his dominion endures from generation to generation.

⁴ I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at home in my palace, contented and prosperous. ⁵ I had a dream that made me afraid. As I was lying in bed, the images and visions that passed through my mind terrified me. ⁶ So I commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be brought before me to interpret the dream for me. ⁷ When the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners came, I told them the dream, but they could not interpret it for me. ⁸ Finally, Daniel came into my presence and I told him the dream. (He is called Belteshazzar, after the name of my god, and the spirit of the holy gods is in him.)

⁹ I said, 'Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you, and no mystery is too difficult for you. Here is my dream; interpret it for me. ¹⁰ These are the visions I saw while lying in bed: I looked, and there before me stood a tree in the middle of the land. Its height was enormous. ¹¹ The tree grew large and strong and its top touched the sky; it was visible to the ends of the earth. ¹² Its leaves were beautiful, its fruit abundant, and on it was food for all. Under it the wild animals found shelter, and the birds lived in its branches; from it every creature was fed.

¹³ 'In the visions I saw while lying in bed, I looked, and there before me was a holy one, a messenger, coming down from heaven. ¹⁴ He called in a loud voice: "Cut down the tree and trim off its branches; strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the animals flee from under it and the birds from its branches. ¹⁵ But let the stump and its roots, bound with iron and bronze, remain in the ground, in the grass of the field.

"Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him live with the animals among the plants of the earth. ¹⁶ Let his mind be changed from that of a man and let him be given the mind of an animal, till seven times pass by for him.

¹⁷ “The decision is announced by messengers, the holy ones declare the verdict, so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of people.”

¹⁸ ‘This is the dream that I, King Nebuchadnezzar, had. Now, Belteshazzar, tell me what it means, for none of the wise men in my kingdom can interpret it for me. But you can, because the spirit of the holy gods is in you.’

¹⁹ Then Daniel (also called Belteshazzar) was greatly perplexed for a time, and his thoughts terrified him. So the king said, ‘Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its meaning alarm you.’

Belteshazzar answered, ‘My lord, if only the dream applied to your enemies and its meaning to your adversaries!’ ²⁰ The tree you saw, which grew large and strong, with its top touching the sky, visible to the whole earth, ²¹ with beautiful leaves and abundant fruit, providing food for all, giving shelter to the wild animals, and having nesting places in its branches for the birds – ²² Your Majesty, you are that tree! You have become great and strong; your greatness has grown until it reaches the sky, and your dominion extends to distant parts of the earth.

²³ ‘Your Majesty saw a holy one, a messenger, coming down from heaven and saying, “Cut down the tree and destroy it, but leave the stump, bound with iron and bronze, in the grass of the field, while its roots remain in the ground. Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven; let him live with the wild animals, until seven times pass by for him.”

²⁴ ‘This is the interpretation, Your Majesty, and this is the decree the Most High has issued against my lord the king: ²⁵ you will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox and be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes. ²⁶ The command to leave the stump of the tree with its roots means that your kingdom will be restored to you when you acknowledge that Heaven rules. ²⁷ Therefore, Your Majesty, be pleased to accept my advice: renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue.’

²⁸ All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar. ²⁹ Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, ³⁰ he said, ‘Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?’

³¹ Even as the words were on his lips, a voice came from heaven, ‘This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: your royal authority has been taken from you. ³² You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like

the ox. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes.’

³³ Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like the ox. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird.

³⁴ At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes towards heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honoured and glorified him who lives for ever.

His dominion is an eternal dominion;

his kingdom endures from generation to generation.

³⁵ All the peoples of the earth

are regarded as nothing.

He does as he pleases

with the powers of heaven

and the peoples of the earth.

No one can hold back his hand

or say to him: ‘What have you done?’

³⁶ At the same time that my sanity was restored, my honour and splendour were returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisors and nobles sought me out, and I was restored to my throne and became even greater than before.³⁷ Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.

QUESTIONS

- 1 What jumps off the page at you? **3s/FB**
- 2 Who are the various characters in the passage and what do we learn about them?
FGP
- 3 What does God do in the story? **3s/FB**
- 4 How does Nebuchadnezzar react to God? **GPS or FGP**
- 5 What challenges does this story have for those who hold power? **3s/FB**
- 6 What encouragements are there for us as our lives are impacted by those in power?
GPS or FGP

Study Key

3s/FB - Groups of 3 with feedback to whole group

FGP - Full Group

GPS - Larger groups of 6 (if desired)

READ DANIEL 5:1-30

¹ King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine with them. ² While Belshazzar was drinking his wine, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them. ³ So they brought in the gold goblets that had been taken from the temple of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them. ⁴ As they drank the wine, they praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone.

⁵ Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall, near the lampstand in the royal palace. The king watched the hand as it wrote. ⁶ His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his legs became weak and his knees were knocking.

⁷ The king summoned the enchanters, astrologers and diviners. Then he said to these wise men of Babylon, 'Whoever reads this writing and tells me what it means will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed round his neck, and he will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom.'

⁸ Then all the king's wise men came in, but they could not read the writing or tell the king what it meant. ⁹ So King Belshazzar became even more terrified and his face grew more pale. His nobles were baffled.

¹⁰ The queen, hearing the voices of the king and his nobles, came into the banquet hall. 'May the king live for ever!' she said. 'Don't be alarmed! Don't look so pale!' ¹¹ There is a man in your kingdom who has the spirit of the holy gods in him. In the time of your father he was found to have insight and intelligence and wisdom like that of the gods. Your father, King Nebuchadnezzar, appointed him chief of the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners. ¹² He did this because Daniel, whom the king called Belteshazzar, was found to have a keen mind and knowledge and understanding, and also the ability to interpret dreams, explain riddles and solve difficult problems. Call for Daniel, and he will tell you what the writing means.'

¹³ So Daniel was brought before the king, and the king said to him, 'Are you Daniel, one of the exiles my father the king brought from Judah?' ¹⁴ I have heard that the spirit of the gods is in you and that you have insight, intelligence and outstanding wisdom. ¹⁵ The wise men and enchanters were brought before me to read this writing and tell me what it means, but they could not explain it. ¹⁶ Now I have heard that you are able to give interpretations and to solve difficult problems. If you can read this writing and tell me what it means, you will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed round your neck,

and you will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom.’

¹⁷ Then Daniel answered the king, ‘You may keep your gifts for yourself and give your rewards to someone else. Nevertheless, I will read the writing for the king and tell him what it means.

¹⁸ ‘Your Majesty, the Most High God gave your father Nebuchadnezzar sovereignty and greatness and glory and splendour. ¹⁹ Because of the high position he gave him, all the nations and peoples of every language dreaded and feared him. Those the king wanted to put to death, he put to death; those he wanted to spare, he spared; those he wanted to promote, he promoted; and those he wanted to humble, he humbled. ²⁰ But when his heart became arrogant and hardened with pride, he was deposed from his royal throne and stripped of his glory. ²¹ He was driven away from people and given the mind of an animal; he lived with the wild donkeys and ate grass like the ox; and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven, until he acknowledged that the Most High God is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and sets over them anyone he wishes.

²² ‘But you, Belshazzar, his son, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this.

²³ Instead, you have set yourself up against the Lord of heaven. You had the goblets from his temple brought to you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines drank wine from them. You praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or understand. But you did not honour the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways. ²⁴ Therefore he sent the hand that wrote the inscription.

²⁵ ‘This is the inscription that was written:

MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN

²⁶ ‘Here is what these words mean:

Mene: God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end.

²⁷ Tekel: You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting.

²⁸ Peres: Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.’

²⁹ Then at Belshazzar’s command, Daniel was clothed in purple, a gold chain was placed round his neck, and he was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom.

³⁰ That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain, ³¹ and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom, at the age of sixty-two.

QUESTIONS

- 1 What jumps off the page at you? **3s/FB**
- 2 Who are the various characters in the passage and what do we learn about them?
FGP
- 3 What does God do in the story? **3s/FB**
- 4 How would you summarise the main points of Daniel's speech? **GPS or FGP**
- 5 What challenges does this story have for those in power who oppose God? **3s/FB**
- 6 What encouragements are there for us as a community of faith when those in power oppose God? **GPS or FGP**

Study Key

3s/FB - Groups of 3 with feedback to whole group

FGP - Full Group

GPS - Larger groups of 6 (if desired)

READ Daniel 6:1-28

¹ It pleased Darius to appoint 120 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom, ² with three chief ministers over them, one of whom was Daniel. The satraps were made accountable to them so that the king might not suffer loss. ³ Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the chief ministers and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. ⁴ At this, the chief ministers and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. ⁵ Finally these men said, ‘We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God.’

⁶ So these chief ministers and satraps went as a group to the king and said: ‘May King Darius live for ever!’ ⁷ The royal ministers, prefects, satraps, advisors and governors have all agreed that the king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or human being during the next thirty days, except to you, Your Majesty, shall be thrown into the lions’ den. ⁸ Now, Your Majesty, issue the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered – in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.’ ⁹ So King Darius put the decree in writing.

¹⁰ Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened towards Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.

¹¹ Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help.

¹² So they went to the king and spoke to him about his royal decree: ‘Did you not publish a decree that during the next thirty days anyone who prays to any god or human being except to you, Your Majesty, would be thrown into the lions’ den?’

The king answered, ‘The decree stands – in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.’

¹³ Then they said to the king, ‘Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, Your Majesty, or to the decree you put in writing. He still prays three times a day.’ ¹⁴ When the king heard this, he was greatly distressed; he was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort until sunset to save him.

¹⁵ Then the men went as a group to King Darius and said to him, ‘Remember, Your Majesty, that according to the law of the Medes and Persians no decree or edict that the king issues can be changed.’

¹⁶ So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions' den. The king said to Daniel, 'May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!'

¹⁷ A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that Daniel's situation might not be changed. ¹⁸ Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being brought to him. And he could not sleep.

¹⁹ At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions' den. ²⁰ When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, 'Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?'

²¹ Daniel answered, 'May the king live for ever! ²² My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, Your Majesty.'

²³ The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.

²⁴ At the king's command, the men who had falsely accused Daniel were brought in and thrown into the lions' den, along with their wives and children. And before they reached the floor of the den, the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones.

²⁵ Then King Darius wrote to all the nations and peoples of every language in all the earth:

'May you prosper greatly!

²⁶ 'I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel.

'For he is the living God

and he endures for ever;

his kingdom will not be destroyed,

his dominion will never end.

²⁷ He rescues and he saves;

he performs signs and wonders

in the heavens and on the earth.

He has rescued Daniel

from the power of the lions.’

²⁸ So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

QUESTIONS

- 1 What jumps off the page at you? **3s/FB**
- 2 Who are the various characters in the passage and what do we learn about them?
FGP
- 3 What does God do in the story? **3s/FB**
- 4 Discuss Daniel’s worship of God and the part it plays in the story. **GPS or FGP**
- 5 What are the challenges and encouragements for us from this story, when we are opposed or persecuted because of our faith? **3s/FB**
- 6 What does this story teach us about putting God first in life? **GPS or FGP**

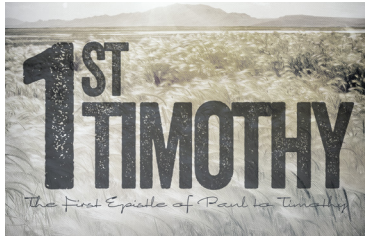
Study Key

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The Word of God is full of living power.
 HEBREWS 4:12 (NLT)



1ST TIMOTHY
 MANUSCRIPT STUDY

In the midst of all of the teaching and exhortation in 1 Timothy, the focus of Paul and Timothy's efforts should not be missed: the work of God in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.



1 SAMUEL
 TALK THE WORD STUDY

The book of Samuel marks the end of the Judges, when "Israel had no king, and everyone did as they saw fit" (Judges 17:6) but through it all we see God drawing His people back to him.



ISAIAH SERVANT SONGS
 LECTIO STUDY

Written during a time of transition - God spoke clearly through Isaiah to remind His people to turn back to Him. God reminds them, and us today, of possible judgement but also of His provision of a wonderful Saviour and Redeemer.



TITUS
 MANUSCRIPT STUDY

Titus is a Pastoral Letter written by Paul to his friend and trusted leader Titus, who had the task of pastoring a church in Crete and appointing its leaders. The book is practical, useful and inspiring for us to consider today.



MATTHEW MIRACLES
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This study covers fourteen passages in Matthew's Gospel in which Jesus displays miraculous power. Through this study, we can enter into the experience of those who encountered Jesus' miracles.



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