

Lightwave Study Series on Daniel

For small groups



lightwave

Background to the Book of Daniel: Chapters 1-7 of the book of Daniel contain the stories of a group of young Jewish men who taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon in the 6th century BC. (The 3rd year of Jehoiakim's reign mentioned in verse 1 was around 605 BC)

God had promised that Israel would have a land of her own. He had promised that they would have descendents and therefore a future. And he had promised that he would be their God and they would be his people – a special relationship (Genesis 17.8) But God himself had allowed the people of Israel to be taken into exile. It must have been devastating for them. Although Jeremiah the prophet had warned them that there would be a foreign invasion unless they turned from their wicked ways (Jeremiah 25.4-11), nobody had believed him until it actually happened. Now they questioned the very foundations of their faith: Had God lost his power? Did his promises mean nothing? Were the Babylonian God's stronger after all.

Daniel and his friends were to be given an extensive programme of education and orientation, preparing them for top level jobs in the Babylonian civil service. They accepted many parts of this programme, even being given foreign names (See ch4.v8) – but rejected the King's food. This is probably because the meat which had not been prepared according to Jewish law and had been used in religious rituals for other gods.

Daniel's experience of living in a culture unsympathetic to his values and beliefs can be an inspiration and guide for Christians living in secular relativistic cultures like ours.

WEEK 1: Faith, Commitment and Compromise

Aim: To consider what it is like to live and worship in exile and to compare that experience to our own lives.

Welcome

Discuss "If you were forced to live in a non European country with very different customs from ours, what do you think you would miss about Britain?"

Word

Read Daniel 1

1. What do you think would be the significance of some articles from the Israelite temple being taken and put in the temple of Nebuchadnezzar's god? (v.2)
2. What changed for Daniel and his friends when they went to live in Babylon? What did they lose through the experience? Daniel and his friends must have longed to be back in Jerusalem. What kind of world do you long for? How would our governments, courts, communities, schools, public festivals and other areas be different if God were honoured publicly?
3. Why do you think Daniel accepted the programme of education and a new name but rejected the King's food? Living in a culture where the majority are not seeking to serve God means that we often have to decide whether to compromise or stand up and be counted. Share any past or present dilemmas that you face as a Christian at

work or in the community.

4. Daniel did not just say “no” to the King’s food, he responded creatively to a difficult situation. Looking at verses 8-16, how was Daniel’s diplomatic response better than a blunt refusal?
5. Although, Daniel was doing a job he didn’t want to do in a place he didn’t want to be, he took advantage of the opportunities he had. Lockdown and Covid 19 has been a situation “not of our own choosing”? What opportunities have you had / do you have through it that you would not have had otherwise.

Worship

The book of Daniel has a bleak start and yet God is still with the Israelites even when they are far away. Allow some space for people to think of people who need prayer and feel God is far from them. Share briefly their needs – not forgetting yourselves – we all go through times when we feel “far from God” Play some instrumental music. Read Psalm 13 over the music a verse at a time, using the structure of the psalm being honest about what is happening to them and how they feel about it, choosing to trust in God’s goodness. After each verse give space for people to add their prayers verbally or in silence.

Witness

Continue to pray and plan for a social outreach event or an Alpha course or whatever your group is currently seeking to do to reach out.

Let someone read out “During the Week” and make sure everyone understands what to do.

DURING THE WEEK – The psalmist asked, “How can we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?” Psalm 137.4 As we study Daniel, we’ll be finding the answer to that question not only for him but for us in our secular culture. This week, look out for some songs that sum up for you what the culture around you values. Bring them to next week’s session. A pop example could be “I want more part one” by Faithless from their album No Roots (Arista) – but there are examples in all genres of music.

Look out for people talking about the future in conversations, on the news, in newspapers and on TV. What are they expecting to happen? Is it positive or negative? Who is regarded as having the authority to speak about the future. What part does God play in society’s contemplation of the future?

Read Daniel 1-7 to get an overview of the passages that we’ll be studying in the sermons and cells in the next couple of months. It won’t take long and there are some great stories in there. Make a note of any burning questions.

Next week’s worship leader may need to bring: Copies of the day’s newspapers, a large sheet of card, gold and silver paint and brushes, background music