

Introduction:

Growing up reading the Adventures of Tin Tin, the Adventures of Daniel, amazing stories that we have learnt as kids, often getting mixed up and confused who goes where who said what. Often the lessons of life and faith have been left at a basic level. Daniel however provides us with some powerful stories and practical lessons of spirituality, faith, work ethics and dieting.

Where we are heading over the next month?

We have the series, we have the chapters, and we have an image to work with. The rest is an exciting opportunity for us to open ourselves to God and allow his word and his people to teach and guide us in our lives to a greater relationship with Him.

What is the book of Daniel about?

Daniel is a well-known book that I am sure we have encountered many times but often we separate the stories into separate random collection of stories. However the book of Daniel has far greater themes going on for us to explore and learn from.

Our focus over the next month lies within the first 6 chapters, focusing on chapters 1,3,5,6.

To make it short and sweet the book of Daniel can be divided into two sections:

Chapters 1-6 tell us of the stories of Daniel and his friends

- The exile and Daniel fast of Chapter 1,
- the fiery furnace of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego,
- Belshazzar's writing on the wall and the most famous of all
- Daniel in the lion's den.

Chapters 7-12 recount the four visions which came to Daniel in his older age. This is where we get the apocalyptic theme of the book of Daniel.

However in the midst of these chapters is the amazing encounters King Nebuchadnezzar has with God. And we see how He uses Daniel and His friends as well as his supernatural power to draw Nebuchadnezzar to Himself.

Of course Daniel is not a book in isolation to the bigger picture of God's redemption story of humanity. What makes Daniel a really interesting book is that it is totally integrated into the story of the Old Testament, however its truth is presented from a world standpoint. It's this standpoint that provides us some powerfully life lessons that we can apply to the everyday life we live in. For instance in my reading of the first 6 chapters I found 35 life lessons, and I am sure there is more that we all could find.

The life lessons of Daniel

1. Submitting to authority
2. Sacrificing worldly pleasures
3. Integrity in the workplace
4. Patience in the midst of adversity
5. God-centered praise
6. Why people reject God's encounters and invitations
7. Intellectual conversion is not enough
8. When should Christians stay quiet or stand up
9. A life of no compromise
10. Conforming to neutral religion.
11. Responding to the convictions of the spirit.
12. Showing respect to governing authority without compromise of faith.
13. God's faithfulness and deliverance.

FIRE-TESTED FAITH - Josh Duncan

Series: Daniel - Daniel 3: 1-30

Hawkesbury Valley Baptist Church

4 May 2014 - am/pm services

14. The power of prayer.
15. God wins.
16. The destruction of pride and arrogance.
17. Humility.
18. How to respond to people who seek to harm you.
19. Working with non-Christian leaders.
20. Prayer conquers all.
21. Vegetables and water won't kill you.
22. Boldness of faith speaks powerfully to those around us.
23. People are always watching us.
24. Bad things happen to good people.
25. How do we respond to adversity.
26. God uses our struggles and adversity for his good.
27. Consistency in character is crucial.
28. Integrity has generational value.
29. Lessons for personal faith, and the future hope of the church.
30. The dangers of not dealing with anger.
31. Dealing with pride.
32. Working together through times of crisis.
33. Showing rock solid faith.
34. A resolve to follow God alone no matter what life hits us with.
35. Faith is believing in the impossible

Daniel is set in a time where powerful empires were being established, God's people Israel was in exile, its people scattered lost and under the authority of pagan rulers. We see stories where people's faith and integrity is tested in the fires of trial and persecution. People seeking to cause harm to those of faith.

In short the underlying message of Daniel is that God's people will experience suffering and be threatened with extinction, but that will not be the end of the story because God is the living and all powerful God who will get glory by vindicating his name and saving his children.

Those days are no different now as they were back in Daniel's days. The message for us as followers of Christ in HVBC is how does our faith corporately and individually respond when our faith, character and integrity is put through the fiery furnace of life.

The Image of Gold and the Tempered Faith:

What is the key message I want people to leave with is this. When faced with fire is our faith sure or do we show fear. Daniel Chapter 3 teaches us this lesson through a well known story.

Section 1: Faith and Fear

King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, sixty cubits high and six cubits wide,^[a] and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. ² He then summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, 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, advisers, 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 worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

Setting the Scene:

In order to understand what Nebuchadnezzar is doing here we need to go back to chapters 1 & 2.

- Nebuchadnezzar invades Judah and grows the Babylonian empire.
- Takes some Israelites into his courts to groom and train.
- Their dedication to their faith does not go unnoticed.
- Nebuchadnezzar has a dream in chapter 2.
- God uses his people to interpret.
- Nebuchadnezzar has an encounter with God.
- Nebuchadnezzar has his dream revealed and it shows him as the head of the golden statue, but the empire will not last
- Fear and panic kicks in and so he comes up with an idea to solve his problem
- What does the image represent?
- Conformity, or the universal religion is dangerous.

What do we currently fear right now? - Job security, Finances, Family

Section 2: Not following the crowd

⁸ At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews. ⁹ They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "May the king live forever! 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."

- Who are the accusers? People jealous of our integrity, character and approach to life
- Where are all the other Jews at this time, what are they doing
- In times of testing of faith do we look around and join the others or do we stand strong to the things God has called us to even if there is only 3.
- Shadrach Meshach and Abednego had every reason to join in and deny their faith.
- What will you stand up for that other Christians may not?

Section 3: Pride kicks in, head faith becomes blurry

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?"

- Nebuchadnezzar's plan has come unstuck
- People are opposing him and not conforming to the patterns of this world.
- Suddenly his faith is being truly tested
- Pride kicks in, and the God he knows is being ignored and denied
- Similar to the story of Peter's denial, everything he knew was denied when faith was tested

Section 4: Unshakable, uncompromising faith

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."

- This is the best definition of true Godly faith
- Absolute assurance of God's presence no matter what
- Their hope was grounded in his power to do whatever he had promised to do for them as their God- He is able to deliver us
- They were showing Nebuchadnezzar a faith that he wanted but couldn't attain
- Imagine this as our default position?

Section 5: The last defense of pride, and the miracle survival

¹⁹ Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace 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 advisers, "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 advisers 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.

- Nebuchadnezzar's pride and anger caused death to others
- The miracle of survival signifies that in the fiery persecution that followed their brave act of witness, they came through completely unharmed.
- The presence of the divine figure is in no doubt meant to be taken as the fulfillment of God's promise of companionship with his people when they pass through tribulation.
- This promise is very much still here for us today

Section 6: The moment of repentance

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.

- The faith of Shadrach Meshach and Abednego and God's deliverance and protection of their lives, was the final act of humbling Nebuchadnezzar.

"As he passed through the moment of truth, Nebuchadnezzar passed through a moment of danger. He had suddenly to make the choice of allowing himself to become either humbled or offended by the truth as he faced it. In the end he allowed himself to be humbled, he ceased to resist the truth. He accepted the deadly wound it inflicted on his pride and self-confidence and surrendered. " R. Wallace

- Despite his position of authority, Nebuchadnezzar accepts the practical political implications of his conversion he begins immediately to make amends.
- Today is an opportunity to be real open and honest before God.
- Where does our faith stand, the head or heart?
- Does fear mobilize our faith and cause us to self-protect, or is our faith sure and true and ready for a place of total surrender and reckless abandonment?
- That's between us and God right now.
- Let God speak to you now through this time of response and be open to what he has to say.