**Riverside Vineyard Church Bible Day**

**THE BOOK OF DANIEL**

**Session 1: ORIENTATION**

1. WHY DANIEL?
* One of the best known O.T. books
* A mix of biographical / autobiographical (9:2, 10:2) narrative and bizarre and puzzling prophetic visions and dreams
* What makes the book remarkable (relevant) is its similarities and parallels with our world:
	+ A largely anti-God media and State
	+ A stifling political correctness
	+ Pressure to drive Christian faith from public expression.
* The story of Daniel and his friends is a clarion call not to lose our nerve and to realize there are huge opportunities, not just threats.
1. THE HISTORICAL SETTING
	1. Jerusalem besieged (605 BC) and deportations of people to Babylon began (1:1-2)
	2. A repeating pattern in the Biblical Story:
* Exile: Cast out of the Garden; Captives in Egypt; Exiled to Babylon; Under Roman domination in Jesus day…: A cultural captivity in our day.
	1. Babylon: Biblical history ad Biblical metaphor
		1. History
* Exilic prophets (Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel)
* Super-power of the day
* Jeremiah’s shocking message (letter Jer.29); yield to Babylon and you will live/flourish
	+ 1. Metaphor
* 1 Peter: Babylon a symbol of exile in the world

“To God’s elect, strangers [=exiles] in the world…”

* Revelation: Babylon a symbol of demonic worldliness

“…fallen, fallen is Babylon the Great which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries” Rev.14:8 cf. 16:19, 17:4-6, 18:10

1. THE BOOK’S STRUCTURE
	1. It appears to have a symmetrical structure made up of two parts: (Prof. D.W.Gooding, “The Literary Structure of Daniel and Its Implications”, Tyndale)
		1. CH.1-5

Court scene: administration in Babylon (ch.1)

Two images: dream and image (ch.2&3)

Two kings disciplined: Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar (ch4&5)

* + 1. CH.6-12

Court scene: administration in Medo-Persia (ch.6)

Two visions of animals (ch.7&8)

Two writings explained (9-12)

* 1. Chart of two part structure (adaptation by John Lennox)

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| **PART A** | **PART B** |
| Chapter 1 | Chapter 6 |
| **Babylonian Court.** | **Medo-Persian Court.** |
| Daniel refuses to eat the king’s food. | Daniel refuses to obey the king’s command and refrain from praying to God. |
| He and his friends are vindicated. | He is vindicated. |
|  |  |
| **TWO IMAGES** | **TWO VISIONS OF BEASTS** |
| Chapter 2 | Chapter 7 |
| Nebuchadnezzar’s dream image. | Four beasts. |
| Chapter 3 | Chapter 8 |
| Nebuchadnezzar’s golden image. | Two beasts. |
|  |  |
| **TWO KINGS DISCIPLINED** | **TWO WRITINGS EXPLAINED** |
| Chapter 4 | Chapter 9 |
| The discipline and restoration of Nebuchadnezzar. | The prophecy in the book of Jeremiah about the destruction and restoration of Jerusalem. |
| Chapter 5 | Chapters 10-12 |
| The “writing on the wall” and the destruction of Belshazzar. | The “Writing of Truth” and the eventual destruction of “the king”. |
| The end of Babylonian supremacy. | The end of world history. |

* 1. Note:
		1. The book is written in two languages – a short section in Hebrew, followed by a long section in Aramaic and finally another section in Hebrew.
		2. The first six chapters seem to be in chronological order, but chapters 7&8 (two visions of beasts) go back again to the reign of Belshazzar (ch.5).
		3. Each Part concludes with a major climax: the end of Babylon and the end of world history.
	2. Discussion Question

What does the structure suggest about the overall message of the book? Consider its parallel and repeating style and its mix of historical events and prophetic symbolism.

**Session 2: LIVING LIFE IN A FOREIGN LAND**

**- The Life of a Disciple**

1. THE BIBLE’S STORYLINE
	1. A tale of two cities – Jerusalem and Babylon. It is a clash of two world views.
		1. Babylon’s philosophy,

“Come…let us make a name for ourselves.” Gen.11:4;

* + 1. Jerusalem’s world view could not be more different,

“I will bless you and make your name great… and all the families of the earth will be blessed.” Gen 12:1-3.

* 1. The issue is not so much what city we live in but what city we live for.
		1. Discipleship involves an awkward duality of citizenship.
		2. It involves the Kingdom tension of living between Jesus’ first and second comings.
1. THE OUTSTANDING EXILES
	1. Into the Fiery Furnace
		1. First glimpses of Babylon
* Spectacular; completely different category/scale
* Huge Ziggurat
* A city of idols
	+ 1. Strangers in a strange land
* new language and customs
* new political system and laws
* new education system and beliefs
	+ 1. Distorted values e.g. golden vessels (1:2)
* Gold: expressing supreme value
* A reminder of the moral and spiritual catastrophe.
* Using the vessels at King Belshazzar’s feast (5:2-4).
	+ 1. Seeing culture’s missional opportunities
* Learning the lessons of living in “exile” – separation, accommodation or engagement?
	1. Private Devotion and Public Witness
		1. Lived life for God and his Kingdom
* Loyalty to God came first 3:17-18
* Spiritual gifts, disciplines and commitments feature strongly 1:8,17, 4:9, 6:10
* Not deluded by culture’s idea of progress
* Unyielding to the pressure to give up God’s values: laws/decrees 3:4-6, worship 3:16-18, false accusations 6:5,24
	+ 1. Benefited the city/culture
* “Seek the peace and prosperity of the city…Pray to the Lord for it…” Jer.29:7
* The principle of service and blessing to all. See 1 Pet.2:13-17
* Study, training, excellence, high office 1:48-49, 6:3
* Spoke courageously, did exploits but took bold action, resisting when necessary, 11:32
* Demonstrated and reflected the God he knew 6:3-4
1. WHICH BATTLES TO FIGHT?
	1. Deciding When and Over What to Take a Stand
		1. Discussion Question – Where do we plant our flag?

Daniel and his friends chose to accept their imposed new names (1:6-7) but to take a stand on their food laws (1:8f.). What were the factors in their decisions and how might this guide us?

* Assigned new names:
* Inner v. outer: Babylon could change their names but not their identities – what’s in a name?
* Resolved not to defile themselves with food (v.8)
* In essence…a refusal to participate in an idolatrous worldview. Cf. when the State becomes god ch.3,6.
	1. The Manner in which we Take a Stand

The means of protest over food 1:8-17

* + 1. Respectful openness v.8
		2. An existing, favourable track record v.9
		3. Listened to and appreciated the consequences for the other party v.10
		4. Confident persistence v.11
		5. Came with a solution v. problem v.12-14
		6. Our lives are tested v.15-17 cf. ch.3,6
	1. For Reflection
		1. This time is not of our choosing, but it is our time and place …our opportunity
		2. Consider how to strengthen and develop in our church community:
* appreciative attitudes towards our city
* actions that benefit our city
* attractive, countercultural lives
* commitment to neighbourhood justice
* proclamation that both attracts and challenge
* encouragement of artistry and creativity

**Session 3: PROPHETIC REVELATION**

**- A Kingdom of Dreams and Visions**

1. GUIDELINES FOR INTERPRETATION OF BIBLICAL PROPHECY
	1. Relevant to its context.
	2. Some prophecies do have a Messianic and/or eschatological dimension.
	3. There is often a reiteration /retelling /reminder of God’s original message.
	4. Look out for the “main and plain” repeating message from God.
	5. Our role is to interpret rather than decode prophecy.
	6. The unity of scripture enables a particular text to be better understood in the light of the whole Biblical story.
	7. The supreme focus of the Bible is the Gospel, and the Gospel is about Jesus – He is the ultimate reason, and the end of all prophecy (Rev.19:10).
2. THE STATUE AND THE STONE. CH.2
	1. Nebuchadnezzar’s statue dream v.31-35
		1. No man could fathom the mystery v.27
		2. But God reveals mysteries! v.28
	2. The interpretation v.36-45
		1. A succession of metals/kingdoms
* civilizations rise and fall
	+ 1. Head of gold – Babylon (605-539 B.C.)

Chest/arms of silver – Medo-Persia (539-331 B.C.)

Belly/thighs of bronze – Greece (331-63 B.C.)

Legs/feet of iron and clay – Rome (63 B.C. – Christian Era)

* + 1. “feet of clay”
* the instability of human government
	+ 1. The supernatural stone
* Struck the feet of iron and clay (v.34) and filled the whole earth (v.35)
* “In the times of those kings… God will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed” (v.44)
* Jesus as the stone:
* “As you come to him, a living stone…a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame” 1 Pet. 2:4-8.
* A two-stage coming.
	1. The Repeating Message of Daniel
		1. The writing on the wall ch.5
* “weighed and found wanting” v.22-28
* the end of Babylonian supremacy v.30
	+ 1. The dream of four beasts ch.7
* Lion v.4 (Babylon)
* Bear v.5 (Medo-Persia)
* Leopard v.6 (Greece)
* Terrifying beast v.7-12 (Rome)
* Jesus the Son of Man! v.13-14, 26-27
	+ 1. The vision of two beasts ch.8
* Ram v.3-4 (Medo-Persia v.20)
* Goat v.5f (Greece v.21)
* Daniel … exhausted and appalled! v.27
1. EXILE AND RESTORATION
	1. The final pair of visions:
		1. Return and restoration of Jerusalem ch.9
* Jeremiah’s prophecy (Jer. 25:11-12) exile would last 70 yrs. v.2
* Vision of instruction v.21-27 – Jerusalem would be rebuilt and restored.
	+ 1. The final vision: An end of exile for all who trust God ch.10-12.
* Of and from the Son of Man 10:5-6
* The flow of history – where is it going?
* The “Book of Truth” opened 10:21f
* Repeating pattern – kings invade and exalt themselves and then come to an end 11:2-6, 21, 36-45
	1. A Prototype of the end time
		1. What has happened in history (Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome), will also happen in the end of time.
		2. We have a parallel model of this in the teaching of Jesus in the N.T. (Mk 13), where he uses the fall of Jerusalem (A.D.70) as a model of the end of the known world.
		3. The broad contours of the end are clear:
* Increasing distress and world conflict 12:1a,

“the… power of lawlessness is already at work…the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow…” 2 Thess.2:7-8

* Those whose names are written in the book will be delivered 12:1b cf. Lk.10:17-20.
* Rising from the sleep of death for judgment and its outcomes 12:2 cf. 1 Cor.15:20-24
* How then should we live now?

“Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens and those who lead many to righteousness like the stars for ever and ever.” 12:3

* 1. Discussion Question

Discuss how prophecy has more to do with a call to the meaning and significance of life/history than to a means of calculating when it did or will happen.

“No-one knows about that day or hour…but only the Father. Be on your guard! Be alert!” Mk.13:32

See also Daniel’s prayer Dan.9:4-19. What is the overall prophetic message of the book?

**Session 4: RICH THEOLOGICAL THEMES**

1. GOOD THEOLOGY

“Theology is food for the hungry soul.”

* 1. Inspires – Awe and adoration of God

“When theology spawns great thoughts of man it inevitably leaves only room for small thoughts of God.” J.I.Packer

* 1. Humbles – There are mysteries to our faith that lie beyond the keenest scholarship or most profound spiritual experience.

“This mystery all! The Immortal dies:

 Who can explore his strange designs?” Charles Wesley

* 1. Gospel-centred – God’s good news of rescue and restoration through Jesus.

“All theology must be an exposition of the Gospel” Timothy Keller

* 1. Question for Reflection:

Why do you believe in God? Explain in two or three sentences.

1. GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY.
	1. Seen throughout the Book of Daniel:
		1. A God involved in human history 1:2, 4:17
		2. A God who is outside history/material world 4:34-35 cf. Naturalistic world-view.
* A God who makes himself known e.g. 2:27-28 - Divine revelation
	+ 1. A God who remains in control when “political beasts” seem to be on the rampage and unchecked e.g. 7:15-27.
	1. Pause for Thought and Application
		1. The Christian World-view:
* Babylonian gods were essentially part of the basic material of the universe (the gods emerged out of some sort of primeval soup – Enuma Elish, Babylonian creation epic).
* By contrast, God the Creator is stationed outside the world and brings it into existence. This is of a completely different order, a different category, which holds that God, not matter, is self-existent and eternal.
	+ 1. Revelation and Reason
* How do we know what we know? (Epistemology)
* The Babylonian gods did not communicate with humans – their epistemology was naturalistic (undisturbed by the supernatural ! – same as Enlightenment).
* For Daniel, it was the complete opposite. His God was there and he was not silent (2:19 revelation!)
* Biblical faith is a response to evidence – despite Dawkins’ misunderstanding:

“I think that a case can be made that faith is one of the world’s great evils, comparable to the smallpox virus but harder to eradicate. Faith, being belief that isn’t based on evidence, is the principal vice of any religion.”

* Christianity insists that faith and evidence are inseparable (Jn.20:31, Rom.1:20)
1. HUMANITY’S FATAL FLAW
	1. Nebuchadnezzar’s Testimony ch.4 – A model of human vulnerability.
		1. Vision: A tree cut down. v.10-18
		2. Interpretation: A prophetic warning v.19-27
		3. Fulfilment: The fatal flaw v.28-33
		4. Grace: God’s mercy and restoration v.34-37
	2. Some Theological Explanations
		1. Humanity’s dignity and great potential – Babylon, the wonder of the ancient world v.29-30.
* Humans, alone, are created in the “image of God” Gen.1:26-27 – God’s stewards and representatives on earth
* However, when they exercise that dominion without reference to God they become sub-human (even bestial in their behaviour) v.33.
1. SALVATION
	1. The End of Exile – a powerful motif for salvation.
		1. The near end – For Israel ch.9.
		2. The far end – For the world ch.11-12.
	2. Homecoming
		1. “Home“ is where life flourishes fully.
		2. The story of the human race, however, is one of exile and the longing for home.
		3. The world as it now exists is not our true home; but like the Prodigal, the human race turned its back on God the Father and headed for a far land.
		4. The gospel proclaims how we can come home, through “one like a Son of Man” 7:13-14, 26-27 cf. Mk.13:26, 14:62.
	3. How can we be brought home? How can the creation be healed and restored? How can death and decay be overcome? It happens by:
		1. Jesus leaving his own true home (Phil.2:6-7)
		2. living without a place to lay his head (Mt. 8:20)
		3. and being crucified outside the city gate (a sign of exile and rejection). Heb.13:11-12
		4. He takes our place and experiences our exile (alienation from God). He is cast out so that we can be brought home. Jesus’ death and resurrection is the ultimate deliverance from exile and makes possible our homecoming.
		5. The power of death is broken when Jesus rises from the grave, providing a living foretaste of the new heavens and earth that will be our true home.
		6. He will reconcile “all things” (Col.1:16-20) and remake the world (Rev.21:1-8, 22:1-2).
	4. Conclusion

The book of Daniel:

* + 1. exhorts us to see ourselves as exiles – being both the best citizens we can be and, at the same time, realizing we are pilgrims in a foreign land travelling towards our true home.
		2. insists that we need to be watchful and pay heed, for something very like what has happened before will happen again, except on a greater scale.
		3. assures us that followers of Jesus will “receive the Kingdom and will possess it for ever” (7:18). To the extent that this future is real for you and me… it will change everything about how we live now in the present.