

Daniel Bible Study

Winter 2021

Daunting Dream: What Does it Mean?

Daniel 2:25-49

What do we know and think about the book of Daniel?

What comes to mind when you hear the two words “church and state” together?

Have you had any strange dreams that you would like to share?

- What stands out about this section of the text?
- In general terms ancient Babylon is modern Iraq and ancient Persia is modern Iran
 - Generally the four metals represent the successive superpowers of the ancient world:
 - Babylon, Media, Persia, Greece
 - If our country were part of the statue which metal do you think it would be?
- What does Daniel mean when he refers to the kingdom that will stand forever?

The Book in Context

- Stories about the Jews who were deported to Babylon after Judah’s defeat in 587 BC
- All kingdoms will crumble until God’s kingdom arrives.
 - How does Daniel respond to Nebuchadnezzar’s dreams in 2:19-22?
 - 2:31-45. Does it sound different now?
- What other Bible characters have interpreted dreams? What is similar and what is different?

History

- Sometimes stories are set in a different time period in order to address some controversial things in the current time period. (The TV show M*A*S*H for example).
 - Daniel may have been written following the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC during a time when the Greek empire was crumbling. Any reactions?
- How do you suppose the Jews felt about being exiled to a foreign land?
- If this had been written in the 4th century BC how do you think the readers would have responded originally? How about to 2:48?
- Often times our faith is in tension with our culture. The Jews had to live loyal to their new homeland but also loyal to their faith. What similar tensions do we experience today?

Two Kingdoms

- Luther often times spoke of the idea of “two kingdoms”. The civil government was the “left-hand kingdom” and the kingdom of God the “right-hand kingdom.”
 - With this in mind would there be any conflict working under someone like Nebuchadnezzar and being a person of faith?
 - Is it helpful to think of both kingdoms being under God’s rule?
- Luther’s explanation to the second petition of the Lord’s Prayer: *Your kingdom come. What does this mean? It means that God’s kingdom comes on its own without our prayer, but we ask in this prayer that it may also come to us. How does this come about? Whenever our heavenly Father gives us his Holy*

Spirit, so that through the Holy Spirit's grace we believe God's holy word and live godly lives here in time and hereafter in eternity.

- How do these words compare to Daniel 2:36-45?
- How do you think Luther would respond to politicians who refer to the USA as a “Christian Nation”?

In Song

- The hymn “O Beautiful for Spacious Skies”
 - This hymn can be sung as praise of God for making this country God's special agent on earth or as a prayer that God equip all citizens to elect leaders who will work for peace and justice in the world.
 - Which are you most comfortable with?
 - How does this fit with Daniel 2?
- The hymn “This is My Song”
 - How does this hymn bring out the themes of Daniel 2, the two kingdoms, and the petition “Your kingdom come?”

Feet in the Fire: Taking the Heat for Our Faith

Daniel 3

- Read chapter 3 with focus on verses 13-18
 - When you read this, what do you see?
 - Imagine that you are one of the three men. How do you feel?
 - What kind of situations does this story bring to mind?
- In 2:47 the king affirmed Daniel's God. Now something has changed. Everyone is supposed to worship the statue.
 - How do the three friends respond?
 - Note that they are administrators in the government even though they are Jews.
 - What is the king's response?
- The king issues an ultimatum. They choose the "or else" option.
 - What exactly are they saying about their faith in God in 3:16-18?
 - How does the king respond when the three survive the fire?
 - How is this similar to his response in chapter 2?
- The use of the word or phrase "bond" or "binding" sounds familiar. Where else in the Bible do we hear this?
 - What happens to the bound people in these stories?
 - How do you think the Jews reading Daniel, who knew the other story by heart, responded to these words?
- The stories in Daniel take place in an area of the Middle East where Jews had settled after being forced to leave Israel. Places like Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, and Palestine.
 - How has this area changed and how has it stayed the same?
- As the years go by, why didn't the Jews move back to Judah?
- This story illustrates the tension experienced by Jews who have left their homeland and settled elsewhere. They need to assimilate to the new culture yet remain faithful to God. They were challenged to say "no" to the demands for allegiance to the culture.
 - In what ways are we challenged in this regard?
 - When do we have to stand up and say "no" when faithful allegiance is expected or demanded?
- When we pray "Thy will be done" we ask God to be with us in difficult situations.
 - Are we rewarded for our loyalty and faithfulness? How so?
 - What kind of sacrifice are we willing to make as a faithful follower of Jesus?
- Luther's explanation to the Third Petition of the Lord's Prayer:
 - *Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.* What does this mean? *The good and gracious will of God is surely done without our prayer, but we ask in this prayer that I may be done also among us.* When does this happen? *God's will is done when he hinders and defeats every evil scheme and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful self, which would prevent us from keeping his name holy and would oppose the coming of his kingdom. And his will is done when he strengthens our faith and keeps us firm in his Word as long as we live. This is his gracious and good will.*
 - In light of Daniel 3 what do these words say to you?
- The fiery furnace and the risks of discipleship.
 - Isaiah 43:1-2
 - The hymn "How Firm a Foundation"
 - What idea or theme speaks to you in your life of discipleship?

Reading the Signs: Writing on the Wall and in Our Hearts
Daniel 5

Have you ever heard the expression “*The handwriting is on the wall*”? What does it mean?

What images stand out as we read this text? If this story were being made into a movie, what kind of a movie would it be? Drama? Comedy? Horror? Action? Etc.

Belshazzar desecrates the sacred vessels from Jerusalem.

- What was wrong with this kind of a party?
- What is his response to the vision?
 - What do you think 5:6 is referring too?
- What role does the queen play in the story?
- List the qualities that Belshazzar and Daniel possess
 - Which character are you more like?
 - What do you learn about yourself by pondering this?
- Compare and contrast chapters 3 and 5 – Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar.
 - What do you discover?
- Where did Nebuchadnezzar’s power come from? Why did he lose it?
- Compare Genesis 41:42 to Daniel 5:29. What similarities do you notice? What gifts did they share?
- What does being “centered in God” mean to you? What happens when we doubt ourselves?
- 2 Kings 24:10-14 and Daniel 5:1-4
 - How do you think the Jewish readers of Daniel reacted when they read this?
 - What effect do you think the writer was trying to achieve?
- What about the words on the wall.
 - What do they mean?
 - If we don’t know what they mean exactly what do we know about them?
- How do we know that the Bible has authority?
 - What if it is historically inaccurate at times?
 - How comfortable are we with all of this?
- Belshazzar tries to prove his worth through some interesting actions. Daniel seems free to live his life in confidence because he believes that God has declared him worthy.
 - Is this somehow related to an understanding of Law and Gospel?
- We believe we are made right, justified, by grace through faith. We do not need to prove anything to anyone.
 - What happens when we begin to doubt or question this conviction?
- What does it mean to you when you pray *Our Father who art in heaven*?
 - How can we be so certain of all of this?
 - Read Romans 6:1-14

Nightmarish Dream: What Does it Mean?

Daniel 7

What is going on in this chapter?

How is it different from the previous ones?

- Chapters 7-12 are considered *Apocalyptic* like the book of Revelation. This refers to revealing or unveiling something hidden. It uses visions and images as a kind of code.
- This text paints the picture of a two-level universe. The earthly level is filled with beasts and heavenly level is filled with God the judge.
 - What can we figure out if we crack the code?
 - What message did Daniel's community get when they cracked the code?
 - What is most confusing about all of this?
- The dwelling place of God. Compare and contrast
 - Daniel 7:9-10
 - Isaiah 6 (742 BC)
 - Ezekiel 1 (596 BC)
- "Like a human being" – 7:13
 - What does this mean and who is this?
 - Jesus?
 - Michael?
 - Compare Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26; Matthew 16:27; 25:31.
 - What similarities about the call to discipleship do you see in all these references?
- What does God look like?
 - 7:9
- Historians believe that this part of Daniel was written following the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC.
 - Much has transpired since the beginning of this book. Now it is 178 BC and Greek Seleucid family controls Judah. King Antiochus IV Epiphanes issued a decree in 168 BC that prohibited the practice of the Jewish faith. Many Jews hid their faith and conformed to the Greek lifestyle to keep the peace. Others went into the hills and developed a guerrilla force.
 - How might the story of Daniel in the Lion's Den help and encourage these people?
- Apocalyptic language was more common back in the days of the Ancient Near East.
 - Why do think the author would chose to use this style and write in code?
 - Why do we struggle so much with sections like this in the Bible?
 - Are we aware of modern times where code language has been used in a similar way?
- Daniel's community believed that the final judgment would come in 3 ½ years (7:25b). It didn't. Early Christians thought Jesus would return within their lifetimes. He didn't.
 - Was the Biblical timeline incorrect?
 - Which is harder: Living a life of discipleship or deciphering the code in the Bible?
 - Which is more useful?
 - Do we live a life of discipleship as a means to bring about salvation or in response to having received it?
- *Save us from the time of trial*
 - What trial are we anticipating in the future? In the church? In our congregation?

Neck in the Noose: Paying the Ultimate Cost of Faith
Daniel 10:1, 18-21; 11:1-35; 12

What does the phrase “cost of discipleship” mean to you?

- Antiochus IV Epiphanes had previously decreed that the Jews can no longer practice their religion. As he flees Egypt due to the expansion of the Romans he defiles the temple and leaves troops in Jerusalem as he passes through on the way home.
 - Many Jews obeyed the decree and gave up the practice of their faith. Would you have? Could you imagine having to agree to such a thing? Can you understand why some Jews agreed?
 - Some Jews fled to the mountains. Others stayed to protest. What do you think happened to them? Was it worth it?
 - In what ways has the servant model of Isaiah 50:4-11 and 52:13-53:12 shaped our understanding of discipleship?
 - Are you aware of any Jews or Christians who have followed in this servant path as they sought to remain true to their faith community?
 - Compare Isaiah 42:1-9 and 49:1-6
- Judah stood in the crossroads of people and armies as they traveled throughout the ancient near east.
 - Imagine what it would be like to live in such a place?
 - How is this region affected in the current time frame?
 - Through the years many people resisted these foreign forces non-violently.
 - What would cause them to see this as an option?
 - Do people still think like this today?
- What about these battles in heaven? What does all this mean and how does it impact you?
 - Are battles still fought in heaven or just here on earth?
 - Are we still seeing evidence of religious battles in the current era like we did back then?
- *Deliver us from evil*
 - Luther writes: *“We ask in this prayer, as in summary, that our Father in heaven may deliver us from all kinds of evil – affecting body and soul, property or reputation – and at last, when our final hour comes, may grant us a blessed end and take us by grace from this valley of tears to himself in heaven.”*
 - What echoes of Daniel’s community can you hear in this explanation?
 - What stands out the most?
- New Testament servant leadership
 - Philippians 2:5-11
 - Romans 8:31-39
 - Some see their worth as a gift from God; others see it as dependent on taking care of the needs of others. What do you see?
- The end is near
 - What do you think “the book” is in 12:1? (compare with Isaiah 4:3; Exodus 32:32-33; Malachi 3:16-18; and Revelation 22:18-19)
 - Ezekiel 34:1-14
 - 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
 - Matthew 25:31-46
 - 1 Corinthians 15:12-28, 35-57