

THE BIG READ (46)

Jesus in Daniel

A. Introduction

1. Every book of the Bible has one dominating theme – Jesus is the Christ.

“Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, ‘This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.’”
(Luke 24:45-47)

Jesus is the Christ who will suffer and die.

Jesus is the Christ who will rise from the dead on the third day.

Jesus is the Christ who will forgive the sins of all who repent.

Jesus is the Christ who will be preached to the nations.

2. The Old Testament that Jesus read contained the same 39 books as our English Bibles but was arranged in a different order.

It had three sections – the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings.

“Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.” (Luke 24:44)

The final section of the Old Testament is the Writings.

Whereas the Prophets looked back to what happened to Israel and why it happened in order to call the nation to repent and return to God, the Writings looked forward to the hope that was coming to those who repent, through a King like David, and showed those who did, how to live faithfully in all of life’s circumstances as they waited for His arrival.

This means that though the books found in the Writings sections were written at different points in Israel’s history, it was after the Babylonian exile was over, that they were collected together to give the remnant hope and guidance as they waited.

3. The next book in the Writings is Daniel.

Daniel is the first of four narrative books set during and after the exile, the event which was the setting for the book of Lamentations.

Daniel is one of the simplest and most complex books in the Bible.

The first half of the book contains some of the most popular Sunday School stories. The second half provides material that can be debated for hours by Bible scholars.

B. Getting Started with Daniel

1. Who wrote Daniel?

Daniel was written by Daniel, a young man who was taken captive to Babylon during the first wave of the exile in 605BC.

This is where the book begins, with the account of how Daniel and three of his friends were trained in all things Babylonian for 3 years to convert them from their old Jewish way of life to this new Babylonian way of life.

The book ends about 70 years later, around 535BC, by which time Daniel would have been an old man, in his eighties.

Chapters 4 & 5: God rules.

3. The first truth about God we encounter in the book of Daniel is that He rules.

Daniel introduces the God who rules by informing us that the reason for Nebuchadnezzar's triumph was because God gave him the victory.

"In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. 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." (Daniel 1:1-2)

In Daniel 4 and 5, this truth is made more explicit as two proud Babylonian kings are humbled by God. The reader of these two stories is left in no doubt about who is in control.

"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. 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?" (Daniel 4:34-35)

"...until he acknowledged that the Most High God is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and sets over them anyone he wishes. But you his son, O Belshazzar, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this. Instead, you have set yourself up against the Lord of heaven..." That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain." (Daniel 5:21-23, 30)

4. The second truth about God we encounter in the book of Daniel is that He rescues.

Daniel introduces the God who rescues by recounting a time, soon after his arrival in Babylon, where God gave him favour with the king's official and then ensured that he and his friends looked healthier than the young men who ate the royal food.

"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. Now God had caused the official to show favour and sympathy to Daniel." (Daniel 1:8-9)

In Daniel 3 and 6, this truth is made more explicit as first Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are rescued from the fiery furnace, and then Daniel is rescued from the den of lions.

"So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, 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." (Daniel 3:26-27)

"Daniel answered, "O king, live for ever! 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, O king." 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." (Daniel 6:21-23)

5. The third truth about God we encounter in the book of Daniel is that He reveals.

Daniel introduces the God who reveals by giving God the credit for the knowledge and understanding he and his friends had while training in Babylon.

"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... In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom." (Daniel 1:17, 20)

In Daniel 2 and 7, this truth is made more explicit as Daniel is able to interpret the visions both he and Nebuchadnezzar receive about how history is heading towards the arrival of the Christ ('the rock cut out of the mountain' 'the one like a son of man') and the establishment of His everlasting kingdom.

"I thank and praise you, O God of my fathers: 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."
(Daniel 2:23)

"I, Daniel, was troubled in spirit, and the visions that passed through my mind disturbed me. I approached one of those standing there and asked him the true meaning of all this. So he told me and gave me the interpretation of these things." (Daniel 7:15-16)

6. These three truths about God, that He rules, rescues, and reveals, all appear again in the visions found in chapters 8 to 12.

In the visions, God reveals where history is heading.

In the visions, God shows that He rules, that He is in control of everything that happens.

In the visions, God assures His people that He will rescue them. They will suffer but will ultimately be safe.

D. Jesus in Daniel

1. Jesus is the God who reveals.

He reveals to us where history is heading.

"Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt." (Daniel 12:2)

2. Jesus is the God who rescues.

He is the fourth man who identifies with His people in the fiery furnace.

"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, O king." 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." (Daniel 3:24-25)

He is the Anointed One who is cut off for His people.

"After the sixty-two 'sevens', the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing." (Daniel 9:26)

3. Jesus is the God who rules.

He is the rock cut out of the mountain who will smash the kingdoms of the world.

"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. This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands." (Daniel 2:44-45)

He is the one like a son of man who has been given an everlasting kingdom.

"In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations, and men of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed." (Daniel 7:13-14)