



PATHWAY BIBLE GUIDES

DANIEL

Seeing Things God's Way





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BY BRYSON SMITH



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Seeing Things God's Way
Pathway Bible Guides: Daniel
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BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Sometimes things are not what they seem. *Sometimes* things that seem important turn out to be unimportant. *Sometimes* things that seem permanent turn out to be temporary. *Sometimes* things that seem valuable turn out to be worthless.

That's why Daniel is such an important book. It powerfully reminds us to *always* see things God's way. At the heart of the story is a young man named Daniel, far from home, forced to study the learning and wisdom of the empire that had gutted his own, destroying the temple of his God and killing many of his countrymen.

Behind this story lies a greater reality. The powerful kingdom of the Babylonians will not last, and even the powerful kingdom that replaces it will be torn down to be replaced by more temporary dynasties. One king, however, rules over all. The Lord of Israel uses the story of Daniel to point towards an eternal kingdom that reveals the power of his Son Jesus.

Any Christian who picks up the book of Daniel will find much to sympathize with. Political power and social pressure will push us around, and challenge our faith, in ways that we don't expect. Where are we going to find encouragement? In Daniel's God—the same God that rules over the kings of the ancient world is the God who rules today through the king he's appointed—Jesus Christ.

To get the most out of this Pathway Guide to Daniel, please read the

whole of Daniel at least once before you get started on the studies, and ask God to give you his wisdom to live the message that's in the book.

Bryson Smith

March 2007

1. COURAGE

Daniel 1



Getting started

If the Christian life is hard, what comfort does Jesus give us? Consider Jesus' words: "In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

4. How do you think Daniel may have felt about all the changes being forced upon him?

5. How is Daniel's experience like ours?

Read Daniel 1:8-20.

6. Why do you think Daniel refuses to eat the king's food?

7. Compare what the royal official expects to happen to Daniel (v. 10) with what actually happens (v. 15). What do you think is the lesson of this incident?

8. This chapter describes a time of trouble and trials for God's people. What evidence do you find in the chapter that God is still in control?



To finish

What are some areas of life in which you are tempted to compromise on your obedience to Jesus? In what way is this chapter a good encouragement to us?



Give thanks and pray

Give thanks to God for his promise that nothing can separate us from his love (Rom 8:37-39). Pray that we won't compromise in the areas mentioned in the previous question.

FOR THE LEADER

What are Pathway Bible Guides?

The Pathway Bible Guides aim to provide simple, straightforward Bible study material for:

- Christians who are new to studying the Bible (perhaps because they've been recently converted or because they have joined a Bible study group for the first time);
- Christians who find other studies¹ too much of a stretch.

Accordingly, we've designed the studies to be short, straightforward and easy to use, with a simple vocabulary. At the same time, we've tried to do justice to the passages being studied, and to model good Bible-reading principles. We've tried to be simple without being simplistic; no-nonsense without being no-content.

The questions and answers assume a small group context, but it should be easy to adapt them to suit different situations, such as individual study and one-to-one.

Your role as leader

Because many in your group may not be used to reading and discussing a Bible passage in a group context, a greater level of responsibility will fall to you as the leader of the discussions. There are the usual responsibilities of preparation, prayer and managing group dynamics. In addition, there will be an extra dimension of forming and encouraging good Bible reading habits in people who may not have much of an idea of what those habits look like.

Questions have been kept deliberately brief and simple. For this reason, you may have to fill in some of the gaps that may have been addressed in, say, an Interactive Bible Study. Such 'filling in' may take the form of asking follow-up questions, or using your best judgement to work out when you might need to

1. Such as the Interactive Bible Study (IBS) series also available from Matthias Media.

supply background information. That sort of information, and some suggestions about other questions you could ask, may be found in the following leader's notes. In addition, a *New Bible Dictionary* is always a useful aid to preparation, and simple commentaries such as those in the *Tyndale* or *Bible Speaks Today* series are often helpful. On Daniel, *Kingdoms in Conflict: Reading Daniel Today*² by Andrew Reid is excellent. Consult these resources after you have done your own preparation.

On the question of background information, these studies are written from the assumption that God's word stands alone. God works through his Holy Spirit and the leaders he has gifted—such as you—to make his meaning clear. Assuming this to be true, the best interpreter and provider of background information for Scripture will not be academic historical research, but Scripture itself. Extra historical information may be useful for the purpose of illustration, but it is unnecessary for understanding and applying what God says to us.

The format of the studies

The discussion questions on each passage follow a simple pattern. There is a question at the beginning of each discussion that is intended to get people talking around the issues raised by the passage, and to give you some idea of how people are thinking. If the group turns out to be confident, motivated and comfortable with each other and the task at hand, you may even decide to skip this question. Alternatively, if the group members are shy or quiet, you may decide to think of related types of questions that you could add in to the study, so as to maintain momentum in a non-threatening way.

After the first question, the remaining questions work through the passage sequentially, alternating between observation, interpretation and application in a way that will become obvious when you do your own preparation. The final question of each discussion, just before the opportunity for prayer, could be used in some groups to encourage (say) one person each week to give a short talk (it could be 1 minute or 5 minutes, depending on the topic and the people). The thinking here is that there's no better way to encourage understanding of a passage than to get people to the point where they can explain it to others. Use your judgement in making best use of this final exercise each week, depending on the people in your group.

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2. Andrew Reid, *Kingdoms in Conflict: Reading Daniel Today*, AIO, Sydney, 1993.

In an average group, it should be possible to work through the study in approximately 45 minutes. But it's important that you work out what your group is capable of, given the time available, and make adjustments accordingly. Work out in advance which questions or sub-points can be omitted if time is short. And have a few supplementary questions or discussion starters up your sleeve if your group is dealing with the material quickly and hungering for more. Each group is different. It's your job as leader to use the printed material as 'Bible Guides', and not as a set of questions that you must rigidly stick to regardless of your circumstances.

Preparation: 60/40/20

Ideally, group members should spend half an hour reading over the passage and pencilling in some answers *before* they come to the group. Not every group member will do this, of course, but encourage them with the idea that the more they prepare for the study, the more they will get out of the discussion.

In terms of your own preparation as leader, we recommend you put aside approximately *two hours*, either all at once or in two one-hour blocks, and that you divide up the time as follows:

- 60 minutes reading the passage and answering the questions yourself as best you can (without looking at the leader's notes or Bible commentaries);
- 40 minutes consulting the leader's notes (plus other resources, like commentaries). Add to your own answers, and jot down supplementary questions or other information that you want to have available as you lead the discussion. Make sure you write everything you need on the study pages—the last thing you want to do is to keep turning to the 'answers' in the back during the group discussion;
- 20 minutes praying about the study and for your group members.

This 60/40/20 pattern will help you to focus on the Bible and what it's saying, rather than simply regurgitating to the group what is in the leader's notes. Remember, these notes are just that—notes to offer some help and guidance. They are not the Bible! As a pattern of preparation, 60/40/20 also helps you to keep praying for yourself and your group, that God would give spiritual growth as his word is sown in your hearts (see Luke 8:4-15; I Cor 3:5-7).

If, for some reason, you have less or more time to spend in preparation, simply apply the 60/40/20 proportions accordingly.

LEADER'S NOTES

1. COURAGE

Daniel 1

► Remember: 60/40/20



Getting started

John 16:33 was spoken by Jesus to his disciples the night before he was crucified. Jesus explained to them that the world hated him, and that it will also hate his followers. The comfort, however, is that Jesus had overcome the world by not giving in to the world. In humble submission to the Father, Jesus was obedient even to death on a cross. In so doing, Jesus has established a kingdom of forgiveness and salvation for his people. It's a kingdom that will last forever.

These words of Jesus are introduced here at the very start of this study series because in many ways, Jesus' words capture the main lesson of the book of Daniel. Daniel takes us into an Old Testament time when God's people are facing opposition and pressure to compromise. The book provides the reassurance that allegiance to God will ultimately lead to salvation, because human kingdoms will perish. Irrespective of how important and powerful they may seem now, human empires will eventually fade. But the kingdom of God is everlasting. In this way, Daniel points forward to Jesus Christ—the one who overcame the world and through whom God establishes his kingdom.

Studying the passage

The opening couple of verses of Daniel sound very matter of fact, but behind them lies an unbelievable amount of anxiety, pain and soul searching. The verses describe what is often referred to as 'the Exile'. The Exile occurred about 600 years before Jesus and it resulted from the mighty Babylonian Empire conquering Israel. Babylon swarmed like locusts across the border. Israel's beloved capital city of Jerusalem was destroyed and the precious Temple of

Yahweh¹ reduced to ruins. The Babylonians took Israel's king captive and they carried back to Babylon large numbers of Israelites as prisoners of war (question 1). And there by the waters of Babylon, as captives in a foreign land, the Israelites wept. They wept out of anguish, they wept out of loss and they wept out of confusion (question 2). What had happened? Had Yahweh given up on Israel? Or had the gods of Babylon been too powerful for Yahweh? Either prospect was terrible!

For Israelites like Daniel, the events of the Exile also brought with them a very personal crisis. For starters, they had been torn away from their own homes and families and were now being forced to learn a foreign culture and language. With all this came the challenge of how to live as an Israelite in a foreign land. What do you do when you're now living in a pagan nation instead of an Israelite community? How do you stay true to your identity as an Israelite? Where do you draw the line on particular issues (questions 3-4)? It is here that strong parallels exist between Daniel and the New Testament Christian. Both face the challenge of staying loyal to God in a world which pressures them not to (question 5).

For Daniel this challenge culminates over the issue of eating the king's food. It's interesting to consider why Daniel draws the line on this issue. The text does not fully explain Daniel's actions, but one likely suggestion is that in the ancient near east, sharing a meal with someone was often a sign of dependence and loyalty to them. It was an act that would obligate you towards them. This is what Daniel rejects. Daniel's dependence, loyalty and obligations are with Yahweh the God of Israel, and so he refuses to eat (question 6).

The clear expectation is that Daniel's health will suffer by not eating the king's food. Miraculously, the reverse happens (question 7). The lesson here is that even in tough times, the true man of God stays loyal to God, for, even when trouble and trials occur, God is still sovereign and still in control. This can be seen at numerous points in the chapter. Three times throughout the chapter (vv. 2, 8-9, 17) we are expressly told that God is orchestrating and controlling the events of the chapter. Despite the turmoil of the Exile, God is not absent.

1. 'Yahweh'—or as the Hebrew of the Old Testament spells it, 'YHWH'—is God's personal name, revealed to Moses in Exodus 3:13-15. It means "I am who I am" or "I will be who I will be". In most English Bibles, if 'Yahweh' is used in the Hebrew, the English translation 'LORD' is placed in capital letters. Most Jews were careful not to use this name lest they accidentally took God's name in vain. But notice the boldness with which Daniel uses it in Daniel 9!

Indeed, this lesson reaches its climactic point at the very end of the chapter (v. 21): “And Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus”. King Cyrus was the Persian king who defeated the Babylonians, and so verse 21 carries with it a great encouragement. Daniel, the one who looked like he might get into serious trouble, survived! Meanwhile, Babylon disintegrated around him. The follower of God survived, and the kingdom of Babylon did not (question 8).



To finish

The finishing question is designed to help people reflect on the encouragement of this chapter. It’s a chapter that calls on us to have courage and to stand firm in our loyalty to Jesus and his kingdom. No matter how difficult it might be to do that, there will come a time when we will be seen to have done the right thing, for God’s kingdom alone will last. In this respect, the finishing question takes us back to Jesus’ words from the ‘Getting started’ question.



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- people who are new to studying the Bible;
- groups with limited time for study.

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