

# Cottonwood Creek Church

DANIEL

SESSION ONE: FAITH IN HARD TIMES

DANIEL 1:1-21

9.8.24

## MAIN POINT

Daniel and his friends demonstrated faith and faithfulness, even when their culture rejected the one true God.

## INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**If you could change one thing about American culture, what would it be and why?**

**In your opinion, what social issue do you feel is being pushed in the American culture to accept that is unbiblical?**

**Can you think of a time or a season in your life when you struggled to be faithful? How was your faith tested? How were you pressured to acquiesce to culture or the people around you?**

**How did you respond? How do you typically respond in times like this?**

The Book of Daniel gives us a look into what it is like to be faithful in a decaying world. We see many different kings in this story of Daniel, but one familiar name is Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar was an arrogant man. He believed that he was greater than God. Nebuchadnezzar was the king of Babylon at this time. History tells us that he attacked the southern kingdom of Judah three times, beginning in 605 BC. Some theologians believe that it was in the beginning of these invasions that Daniel and his friends were taken to Babylon to be trained, around 606 BC. Most likely Daniel was anywhere from 13-16 years old. Like Daniel and his friends, the world will try to hold us captive by claiming us, renaming us, and taming us.

## UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

READ DANIEL 1:1-7.

**Why would Nebuchadnezzar want to assimilate the young people into Babylonian culture? What was he seeking to eliminate?**

**Why change their names? How was the process described in these verses connected to their identity?**

**In what ways can we draw parallels between Daniel's situation and the pressures we face today in our culture?**

Daniel, along with others viewed as promising young people, were taken to Babylon as Israel was defeated and then exiled from their land. The Lord had long warned His people that if they failed to remain faithful to His covenant, this very thing would take place (Lev. 26:33; 39; 2 Kgs. 20; Isa. 39). For generations, God's people walked in disobedience, and now they were feeling the effects of God being true to His word.

READ DANIEL 1:8-16.

**What tension do you think Daniel and his friends felt in their new position?**

**Why would Daniel and the others refuse the king's food? How do we see God's sovereignty and faithfulness at work in this passage?**

**What lessons can we learn from Daniel about standing firm in our convictions, even when it may lead to conflict?**

**How can we effectively communicate our beliefs in a way that is respectful and persuasive?**

We don't know all the reasons why Daniel and his friends refused the meat and wine. Perhaps it had been offered to idols or they feared it to be unclean by Jewish standards. Regardless, Daniel was convicted that it would defile him either spiritually or physically to partake of this food. So, he asked to eat only vegetables and water. If after ten days, he and his friends were in worse condition than those eating the meat and wine, they would do as the chief to the eunuchs said. After this period, not only were Daniel and his friends not in worse condition than the others, they were actually in better condition.

READ DANIEL 1:17-21.

**How did God demonstrate His provision and favor toward Daniel and his friends in these verses?**

**What role does prayer and community support play in standing firm in our faith?**

**How does this encourage you to be faithful to God in the midst of pressure to do otherwise?**

Not only did God protect the young men physically, but He grew them in wisdom and in skill so they might be promoted by the king. He even gave Daniel an understanding of dreams and visions (1:17). This is one of many reminders in the life of Daniel that God's hand was upon His people, even in the midst of their oppression. Even while King Nebuchadnezzar sought to tame the young Hebrews, God strengthened them in body and spirit.

## APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**How does our culture seek to inform our identity? How can we make sure our identity is secure in Christ, even when our faith is tested?**

**What are some areas in your life where you feel pressure to conform to societal norms that contradict your faith?**

**With the next generation coming up, what can you do/have you done to help them address cultural pressure? (i.e. media consumption, lifestyle, etc...)**

**How have you struggled to be faithful when tested in the past? How does Daniel's obedience inspire you to be faithful, even in ways that might seem insignificant (like the food he ate)?**

**How can living faithfully before God in small ways provide big opportunities to share the gospel with others?**

## PRAYER

Take some time in prayer to repent of ways that you have given into the culture around you because it was the easier choice. Ask Him to strengthen your faith and faithfulness, even when this means rejection or opposition from the world.

## COMMENTARY

### DANIEL 1:1-21

1:1. Although Daniel recorded these events as taking place in the third year of . . . Jehoiakim, Jeremiah wrote that it was in the fourth year (Jr 25:1,9; 46:1). Daniel probably used the Babylonian system which did not count a king's year of accession, while Jeremiah used the Israelite system of counting, which did include the accession year. The events took place during the accession year of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, probably when he was still co-regent with his father and just after the battle of Carchemish (605 BC).

1:2. Although Nebuchadnezzar viewed his defeat of Judah as a victory for his gods, Daniel's perspective was that it was the LORD who handed Jehoiakim over to the Babylonians. The historian Berosus mentioned these events when he wrote that Nebuchadnezzar conquered Hattiland (referring to Syro-Palestine). At that time, Nebuchadnezzar took vessels from the house of God, in fulfillment of Isaiah's prediction when Hezekiah showed them to the Babylonian king a century beforehand (Is 39:2,6).

1:3. His chief eunuch could also be translated his chief official, since the meaning of Hebrew saris varies (see the word's use in Gn 39:1; 2Kg 20:18; Est 2:3; Is 56:3).

1:4. The Hebrew word for young men here literally means children or boys and probably refers to teenagers, a good estimate being around age fifteen. Chaldean language and literature refers to an ancient university-style education in Sumerian, Akkadian, and Aramaic.

1:5. Persian literature shows that three years was the customary time allotted for such training.

1:6-7. Daniel and his friends, whose original names honored the God of Israel, were given other names intended to honor the false gods of Babylon. Daniel (God is My Judge) became Belteshazzar (Bel Protect Him); Hananiah (God Has Been Gracious) became Shadrach (The Command of Akku); Mishael (Who Is What God Is?) became Meshach (Who Is What Aku Is?); Azariah (The Lord Has Helped) became Abednego (€-Servant of Nebo).

1:8. The word determined means literally a set upon his heart, a referring to inner resolve. Daniel decided that he would not defile himself with a diet that included non-kosher meat such as horseflesh and pork, or drink wine that had been offered to Babylonian gods.

1:9-14. Only God's Spirit could have convinced the official to disobey the king even for ten days.

1:15-16. The fact that Daniel and his friends looked better and healthier is not a biblical endorsement of vegetarianism (Gn 9:3). Rather, God in his providence made them healthy and strong.

1:17-19. The ability of Daniel and his friends to excel intellectually was clearly given by God.

1:20. Throughout the Book of Daniel, there are six different expressions for the king's counselors. The first two, used here, are magicians and mediums. The word for magicians comes from a root that means an engraver. It refers to those who engraved Babylonian religious activities and astrological movements of the stars on clay tablets. The word mediums means conjurers. It refers to those who used spells and incantations to communicate with the spirit world.

1:21. Daniel saw the end of the exile, living until the first year of King Cyrus (539 BC) and even beyond that time (see 10:1, where a third year dates to 536).<sup>1</sup>

# Cottonwood Creek Church

DANIEL

SESSION TWO: DEPENDENT FAITH

DANIEL 2:1-23

9.15.24

## MAIN POINT

We must rely on God in the midst of the many pressure points in life.

## INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**Describe a time when you experienced increased pressure or anxiety.**

**What were the circumstances surrounding that experience, and how did everything work out?**

Today's text reminds us that we can rely on God when life presses in on us. God is sovereign, near, and watches out for us. In Daniel 2, God orchestrated everything that happened: He is the One who gave the king the dream, and He is the One who revealed it to Daniel. God gives us wisdom when we lack understanding and ability, just as He did for Daniel. And God is worthy of our adoration, so we can praise Him, even when we are in the midst of the pressures of life.

## UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

READ DANIEL 2:1-13.

**Why do you think the king reacted so harshly about his dream?**

**What would you have done if you were Daniel and his friends?**

In the first few years of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, he was likely stressed and anxious, as any king would be. He had dreams, his spirit was troubled, and he didn't sleep well (v. 1). This is no surprise, because even though he held the power and prestige of ruling the great kingdom of Babylon, no ruler was invincible, and any shift in power brought potential threats. In the ancient world, dreams were especially meaningful for a ruler and his nation. He employed a number of different people to help interpret them. The only problem was, the king demanded that they not only interpret his dream, but first describe the dream itself. An impossible task! In fact, God would prove the words of the Chaldeans true that skill would have to come from a God who was not of flesh (v. 11).

READ DANIEL 2:14-19.

**What do we learn from Daniel's response of bold faith? How might that translate to our lives when we feel threatened or overcome?**

**What does Daniel's response say about his view of God? What role did his companions play?**

**How does Daniel's reliance on prayer and seeking God's wisdom serve as a model for us today?**

**What keeps us from asking for God's wisdom first? What are some of the reasons we rely on our own wisdom instead?**

Having heard about the impending threat, Daniel went to make an appointment to see the king. Even though his life was in danger, he went in faith. The captain of the king's guard had already been sent out to kill the wise men, and Daniel knew his life could be over at any moment. Yet before God revealed anything, Daniel asked for an audience with the king. Daniel's response might seem crazy or radical to us. How could Daniel know God would give him the understanding he needed to know and interpret the dream? He didn't, but he had faith that God was in control of everything that was happening, even when it felt hopeless.

READ DANIEL 2:20-23.

**What was Daniel's response to God giving him the vision of the king's dream?**

**What specific things did Daniel say about God in his song of praise?**

**What is the takeaway for us from Daniel's words in these verses?**

Having received clarity about the king's dream, Daniel's immediate response was praise and adoration. He blessed God for providing what he could not provide for himself. He praised God for being in control, even when they couldn't see it.

## APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**How do we typically respond when God reveals something difficult to us? What can we learn from Daniel's attitude?**

**What is your initial reaction when life starts pressing in on you?**

**What is one thing you have learned to be true about God from a past experience when your faith was tested?**

**Where are you most tempted to rely on your own wisdom? Where do you need to ask for wisdom from God today?**

## PRAYER

Take some time in prayer to ask God for the wisdom that you try to provide on your own. Humble yourself before God, who is sovereign over all, and trust Him to be true to His character, even when you can't see it.

## COMMENTARY

### DANIEL 2:1-23

2:1 Nebuchadnezzar's dreams took place in the second year of his reign, which might appear to conflict with the claim that Daniel's three-year training program (1:5) began in Nebuchadnezzar's first year (1:1). However, by Babylonian reckoning Daniel's second year of training occurred during what was considered the first year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign (604-603 BC; see note at 1:1 about reckoning time). Therefore, the king sought interpretation of his dreams in 602 BC, shortly after Daniel had completed his three-year education.

2:2-3 On magicians and mediums, see note at 1:20. The Hebrew word for sorcerers comes from an Akkadian word that can also mean witchcraft. Chaldeans is both a general ethnic term for the Babylonian people and, as used here, a specific term for priests who served as astrologers, soothsayers, and wise men in the king's government.

2:4-7:28 The narrative switches from Hebrew to Aramaic in v. 4 and continues in Aramaic until 7:28. Chapters 2-7 pertain to God's revelations about the Gentile nations. The structure is chiasmic (ABCCBA).

2:5-9 Some versions translate the phrase my word is final as the dream is forgotten. It is better to translate it as referring to the certainty and finality of the king's demand. Nebuchadnezzar withheld the facts of the dream not because he could not remember them but because he wanted to test his wise men.

2:10-11 This candid confession by the wise men admits that despite all their incantations, magic, and astrology, they were not capable of receiving supernatural revelation.

2:12 Wise men is a general term for all the king's counselors, who gained their knowledge through occult practices.

2:13 Daniel and his friends were subject to execution because they were in the class of wise men; they had not participated in any of the discussions with the king.

2:14-16 That the king would grant a stay of execution under these circumstances is more than remarkable.

2:17-19 The mystery refers to a secret that can only be known by divine revelation.

2:20-23 Daniel's song of praise includes the two key ideas of the chapter: First, God is sovereign over the political affairs of humanity because he removes kings and establishes kings. Second, God alone can give revelation by giving wisdom to the wise

and by revealing the deep . . . hidden things, even the king's mystery that had stumped the wise men.



# Cottonwood Creek Church

DANIEL

SESSION THREE: FAITHFULNESS THROUGH UNCERTAINTY

DANIEL 2:24-49

9.22.24

## MAIN POINT

Even in the midst of uncertainty, Daniel remained faithful to God at every step.

## INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**Can you think of a moment or season when you found yourself in uncertain times? What made those circumstances feel uncertain?**

**How did this affect your faith in the short term? Long term?**

**Looking back, would you have made the same or different decisions during that uncertain time? Why?**

What are we to do in times of uncertainty? First, stay confident. In our text Daniel displayed an unwavering confidence in God. Second, stay humble. Daniel was brought before the king, yet Daniel put his humility on full display. He didn't care who received credit; what mattered to him was obedience to God. He pointed everything back to God and was not concerned with receiving the credit for himself. Third, stay focused. God's kingdom is where we should be focused. Daniel concerned himself with God's kingdom, realizing that His is the only kingdom that will last. Finally, stay faithful. We must not give up in seasons of uncertainty. We must place our faith in the one true king.

## UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

READ DANIEL 2:24-30.

**What stands out about how Daniel approached the king?**

**How did Daniel use the opportunity to testify to the one true God?**

**How did Daniel point to God's character?**

**How can we help others understand God's sovereignty in their own lives, particularly in times of uncertainty?**

Even though God had revealed everything Daniel needed to know, he was likely still unsure entering into the king's court. Would King Nebuchadnezzar accept his interpretation? Would he throw him out if he didn't like what Daniel had to say? Would he have him killed? Certainly, all of those were in the realm of possibility. Everything

about Daniel's situation was uncertain, except his word from God. Daniel knew who was really in control, so he could make bold moves in faith.

READ DANIEL 2:31-45.

**What did King Nebuchadnezzar see in his dream? What did it mean?**

**How did Daniel seek to give the king a right perspective of the future?**

**What parallels can be drawn between the statue in the dream and the values of our contemporary culture?**

Daniel continued by telling the king what he saw in the dream and then what it meant. Before giving the king the details of what his dream meant, Daniel made sure he knew that regardless of the king's status and power, he was only on his throne because God allowed it. Daniel described the great statue the king had seen and described a succession of four kingdoms. Nebuchadnezzar represented the golden head, the kingdom of Babylon. While Babylon would remain powerful under his rule, other kingdoms would eventually dominate in the future. The gold would eventually be replaced with silver and then bronze.

READ DANIEL 2:46-49.

**How did the king respond to Daniel's interpretation?**

**Why do you think he responded this way?**

King Nebuchadnezzar's response was one of complete relief. He had lost sleep over the future of his kingdom, and Daniel told him what the future held. He likely took great solace in the fact that his kingdom was represented by the head of gold. His power and authority were solidified in his mind. Regardless of the king's motivations, his promotion of Daniel (and Daniel's advocating for his friends) would put Daniel in increasingly prominent positions in the court. This would mean more opportunities to have the king's ear and to speak the truth of God in the midst of darkness.

## APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**What feels uncertain in your own life right now? Where are you struggling to be faithful in the process?**

**How does this chapter illustrate the importance of having faith in God's timing and purposes?**

**How does this account of Daniel help to encourage your faith, even if your circumstances look very different? How does his story point you to the gospel and the unwavering nature of our God?**

**How might you share the truth about Jesus with someone based on this account in the life of Daniel?**

## PRAYER

Take some time to thank God for being constant and unwavering, even when circumstances are uncertain. Ask Him for the courage and humility to be faithful in the midst of anything.

## COMMENTARY

### DANIEL 2:24-49

2:24-26. The king was likely surprised to hear further word regarding this matter.

2:27. Daniel asserted that no pagan soothsayer could solve the mystery. Rather, he attributed revelation to God alone. The word translated diviner expresses the idea of cutting or determining, referring to a person who is able to determine another's fate.

2:28. In the last days indicates that the king's dream would find its complete fulfillment only in the end times.

2:29-30. Daniel tactfully stressed that Nebuchadnezzar rather than himself was the recipient of the revelation.

2:31-45. Daniel interpreted the parts of the colossal statue to represent four empires in historical succession. The head represented the kingdom of Babylon (605-539 BC). The chest and arms symbolized the Medo-Persian Empire (539-331 BC). The stomach and thighs stood for the Greek Empire (331-146 BC). The legs referred to the Roman Empire (146 BC - AD 1476 in the West and AD 1453 in the East). The feet were mixed of iron and clay and represented a future continuation or revival of Rome. The material of each section of the statue decreased in value but increased in strength (except for the feet; see vv. 42-43). The decreased value may symbolize the moral decline of each succeeding kingdom. The increased strength refers to the harsher domination each successive kingdom would impose on its subjects. Daniel also described a stone that would shatter the final kingdom and grow into a mountain that filled the whole earth. This stone is the kingdom of God.

Primarily because they disbelieve in the possibility of predictive prophecy, critical scholars assume that Daniel was written in 165 BC and therefore is looking backward rather than forward at the rise of earthly kingdoms such as the Roman Empire. They divide the four kingdoms into Babylon, Media, Persia, and Greece. On the other hand, most interpreters who accept the reality of predictive prophecy in Scripture believe Daniel was written in the late sixth century and view the fourth kingdom as Rome. They hold different opinions about the meaning of the stone, however. Some view it as a

spiritual kingdom, embodied in the church, which gradually conquered the Roman Empire. Others more accurately view it as a future kingdom, when Messiah Jesus will return and establish his physical rule that will govern the whole earth and never be destroyed.

2:37. In Ezk 26:7 God himself calls Nebuchadnezzar king of kings. But Daniel makes clear that his position is a gift of God. King Artaxerxes claims the title for himself in Ezr 7:12. But the title belongs truly only to Jesus Christ (1 Tm 6:15; Rv 17:14; 19:16).

2:46-47. King Nebuchadnezzar responded to Daniel's remarkable revelation by recognizing the God of Israel as part of the pantheon of gods, though he did not recognize the God of Israel as the one and only true God.

# Cottonwood Creek Church

DANIEL

SESSION FOUR: FAITHFUL WHEN PRESSED

DANIEL 3:1-30

9.29.24

## MAIN POINT

We must stand firm in our faith, even when we feel the pressure to fall to the standards of the culture around us.

## INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**Who comes to mind when you think about demonstrating courageous faith? Someone in history? Someone in your own life?**

**What about this person demonstrated faith through difficulty?**

Giving up is easy. We all know it's easier to quit than it is to fight. This applies to our marriages, health, jobs, faith walks, and more. What do you think causes us to give up? Peer pressure can force us to do things we normally would not do. Daniel's companions faced the pressure to give up and worship false gods. Yet, we see in them an example of faithfulness in the face of pressure even if it meant death. They understood that even if God didn't deliver them, He was still worthy of their trust and worship.

## UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

READ DANIEL 3:1-7.

**What was Nebuchadnezzar's purpose in setting up the statue? Why would he require people to worship it at all costs? Why do you think the people obeyed?**

**What statues has our society created that you feel we worship?**

**When have you felt pressure to conform to cultural standards that went against God's will?**

As a bold statement of his own power and authority, Nebuchadnezzar had a giant golden statue about 90 feet tall built in Babylon. It was an image declaring the power and superiority of Babylon, and he demanded that all the leaders come and worship it. Nebuchadnezzar knew that if he could get the leaders of Babylon to worship the idol, then the people would follow suit.

READ DANIEL 3:8-18.

**How did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego respond to the king's threat?**

**How were they able to stand against the king as they did? Do you think standing against the king as a group rather than as individuals was easier?**

**How should the response of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego challenge us to stand in the face of peer pressure? How did their faith inform their action?**

**Why is it important that we put emphasis on the object of the three men's faith and not their personal strength to exhibit faith?**

**What is the significance of their statement, "Even if He does not..."? How can this encourage us in our own trials?**

Some of the others who were in the king's employ informed him about Daniel's friends. The English translation states they maliciously accused the Jews of not obeying the king's orders. Perhaps they were jealous of the status the Jews had been given in the king's court. Regardless of their reasoning, they wanted to see them punished. However, the three men were given a second chance. Brought before the king, they were given an opportunity to change their minds and follow the king's command, but they would not be shaken or threatened into disobedience before their God.

READ DANIEL 3:19-30.

**Why do you think the king responded even more harshly than he initially threatened?**

**How did God provide in a seemingly impossible circumstance?**

**How did the king respond to seeing the men emerge from the fire untouched?**

**How does God's presence with them in the furnace demonstrate His faithfulness in our own trials?**

The king had undoubtedly been threatened by the men's refusal to worship. His authority was questioned, and his response was clearly an overreaction. Even though everyone else had followed his orders, he would make an example of the three who refused. Once the men were thrown in the furnace, the king looked in, fully expecting to see them quickly burned up in the flames. Yet, he not only saw them alive and unbound, but also saw a fourth person in there with them, one that looked like a son of the gods.

## APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**Where do you struggle to be faithful in the face of peer pressure?  
How might the Lord be challenging you to be bold in your faith in  
this area, even though it may lead to personal loss or discomfort?**

**In what ways does this chapter challenge us to examine our own  
idols and areas of compromise in our lives?**

**How can we support one another in our church community when  
facing persecution for our beliefs?**

**How might you share the gospel or invite someone to church this  
week using this account from Daniel?**

## PRAYER

Take some time in prayer to ask God for the courage and faith to trust Him completely, even when you face strong opposition and peer pressure.

## COMMENTARY

### DANIEL 3:1-30

3:1. The events of Dn 3 probably took place shortly after Daniel explained the king's dream (cp. Dn 2), although some estimate that it could have been ten or even twenty years later. Babylonian records indicate that there was a revolt against Nebuchadnezzar during the tenth year of his reign, so this may have led to the king's desire for the loyalty test described here. The gold statue was not likely solid gold but was instead overlaid with it. Nebuchadnezzar probably decked the entire thing in gold to negate the message conveyed by the statue of his dream, wherein only the head was gold and signaled that the Babylonian Empire would only be temporary. The location of the plain of Dura has not been conclusively identified. Daniel was not involved in the events here since he remained in the capital city at the king's court (2:49) while other officials including his three friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were called to Dura to show their loyalty. Had Daniel been there he too would have refused to bow to the image.

3:2-3. The exact meaning of these seven positions is unclear other than that they are listed in descending order of rank.

3:4-5. Three of the instruments mentioned either . . . harp, and drum are the only Greek loan words in Daniel. The presence of Greek words does not require that Daniel was written later in the Greek period. Even Assyrian inscriptions that predate the Babylonian period refer to Greek instruments and musicians (Archer, Daniel). Although some conjecture that the gold statue was of Nebuchadnezzar himself, this is unlikely because the Babylonians did not believe their king was divine. More likely, the image was of a Babylonian god, perhaps Nebuchadnezzar's patron Nabu or the chief Babylonian god Marduk. Nebuchadnezzar made this demand as some form of loyalty oath to him personally.

3:6. Incineration in a furnace of blazing fire as punishment that Nebuchadnezzar had also used on two Judean false prophets, Zedekiah and Ahab (Jr 29:22) was a normal

Babylonian penalty as seen in the Code of Hammurabi, Sections 25, 110, and 157. Perhaps this furnace was built to smelt the gold for the image Nebuchadnezzar had made.

3:7. All the people obviously did not include Daniel (who may have been exempt) and his three friends.

3:8. Chaldeans is both a general ethnic term for the Babylonian people and, as used here, a specific term for priests who served as astrologers, soothsayers, and wise men in the king's government. Their motive in denouncing the three faithful Jewish men was not devotion to the king's demand but rather a hatred for the Jewish people. Hatred of the Jewish people is often on display in the Bible, as with Haman (Est 3:5-6). It reflects a hatred of the God of Israel and is expressed through oppression and attempted genocide of his people (Ps 83:2-5).

3:9-16. The high point of these verses is the king's question, Who is the god who can rescue you from my power? God himself would provide the answer.

3:17-18. The king offered Daniel's friends a second chance to worship the idol, but they persistently refused. The Aramaic imperfect verb *yeseziv* (he can rescue) in this context indicates possibility and not certainty. They were saying that God might deliver them or he might choose not to do so. Their faith in God did not rest on the belief that he would perform a miracle, but that their sovereign God could be trusted. They asserted that if God chose not to deliver them from this punishment but instead allowed them to become martyrs for him, they would still refuse to serve the king's gods or worship the gold statue. This is one of the strongest examples of steadfast faith in the Bible.

3:19. The enraged king (see also 2:12; 3:13) gave orders to heat the furnace seven times more than was customary, an idiom for as hot as possible.

3:20-22. If the fire would burn up those who carried the three men, how much more likely would it burn up the men themselves?

3:23. The furnace was built on a small hill or mound with openings at the top and side. So the three men fell . . . into the furnace from the top, and the king was able to see four men in the furnace (v. 25) as he looked in through the side opening.

3:24-25. The king saw in the furnace a fourth figure who looked like a son of the gods. This may have been an angel or even a preincarnate appearance of God the Son.

3:26-27. When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out of the furnace, Nebuchadnezzar and all his government officials saw that the fire had no effect on the bodies of these men. Not only did the fire fail to burn their hair and clothing, but they did not even have the smell of fire on them. Hebrews 11:34 cites this miracle of faith, referring to those who quenched the raging of fire.



3:28-30. After Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were spared, Nebuchadnezzar saw that the God of Israel was greater than all other gods. Even so, he remained a worshiper of many gods, falling short of full devotion of the one and only true God.<sup>2</sup>

# Cottonwood Creek Church

DANIEL

SESSION FIVE: FAITHFUL HUMILITY

DANIEL 4:1-37

10.6.24

## MAIN POINT

God is constantly seeking to humble our hearts and draw us to look up at Him, instead of out at our own accomplishments.

## INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**What was a humbling experience you have had in your life, whether profound and impacting or just funny?**

**How did this experience shape you for the future?**

**Has that experience caused you to warn others when they are in a similar situation?**

In our text today, God humbled the heart of Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel pleaded for Nebuchadnezzar to repent and thankfully, he realized the weakness he possessed before an almighty God and did so. This is the most humbling thing that we can do. We must continually recognize who we are before our almighty God. In the face of pride, the call of God is to repent and humble ourselves. We do this by looking up instead of out.

## UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

READ DANIEL 4:1-27.

**How do you see the king's pride at work even before the dream is described?**

**What led to King Nebuchadnezzar's pride, and how does this relate to our own lives today?**

**Why was the king so afraid of the vision he saw? What did Nebuchadnezzar see?**

**Why might Daniel have been worried about interpreting the dream? What would the dream mean for Nebuchadnezzar?**

**How does Daniel's warning to Nebuchadnezzar highlight the importance of heeding wise counsel? In what ways does God**

## **demonstrate His mercy towards Nebuchadnezzar before his downfall?**

Based on what Nebuchadnezzar experienced (which he would go on to describe), he sent a word of warning to the people of Babylon and beyond. Perhaps this was an open letter of sorts, warning the people to heed the God of Israel who had demonstrated great signs and wonders.

READ DANIEL 4:28-33.

A whole year went by before the vision came to pass. Nebuchadnezzar knew what the dream meant. He knew what was coming if he didn't change his ways. He had been warned clearly. Yet he still looked at his kingdom and took credit for all of the prosperity. He even admitted he was doing it all for his own glory!

**How was Nebuchadnezzar's pride confirmed in this passage?**

**What can we learn from the events in this passage? What should we take away about heeding God's instruction and warning?**

**It's easy to pass judgment on Nebuchadnezzar for succumbing to his pride when Daniel warned him about that very thing a year earlier. But how do we see that same tendency in our own lives today? And what can we do to help guard against short-term spiritual memory lapse?**

So he was driven into the wilderness, just as Daniel had warned him. He ate grass, his hair and nails grew long, and he lived as an animal would. We don't know how long the seven periods of time were precisely, only that it was the right amount of time for him to be humbled.

READ DANIEL 4:34-37.

**Did this mean Nebuchadnezzar was truly changed, that he had truly surrendered to Israel's God?**

**Why is it important that we seek lasting change through repentance and not only momentary change?**

**How can we apply the principle of recognizing our dependence on God in our daily lives?**

At the end of that period of time, God's judgment was complete. Having clarity of thought once again, King Nebuchadnezzar turned to the Most High God in praise. He recognized that God alone lives forever. He alone sets up and brings down kingdoms. He establishes kings and humbles them alike.

## APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**Where does pride creep into your life and heart the most? What are the unsuspecting ways the pride comes to the surface?**

**How has the Lord humbled you in these areas? How have those experiences deepened your faith and fueled your worship?**

**Where are you currently taking pride in your own kingdom? Your work? Your family? Your social standing? What needs to change?**

## PRAYER

Ask the Lord to search your heart and reveal the points of pride within you. Confess and repent before the Lord. Ask Him to reorient your heart toward Him instead of focusing on what you can accomplish on your own.

## COMMENTARY

### DANIEL 4:1-37

4:1-3. These verses come at the end of chap. 3 in Aramaic rather than at the beginning of chap. 4. As an introduction to chap. 4, the miracles and wonders include the dream in chap. 4 and its aftermath.

4:4-36. The text does not indicate when King Nebuchadnezzar had his dream, nor does it matter for the interpretation of the passage, but it was likely some ten years before the end of his forty-three-year reign. Then God in his grace allowed him one year to repent followed by seven years of madness. Once he came to his senses, Nebuchadnezzar lived another two or three years before dying in 562 BC. No doubt, the king did indeed write the letter. But it was Daniel, as author of the book, who most likely wrote the section that speaks of the king in the third person (vv. 28-33) and records his time of mental illness. The chapter is structured in three sections: (1) a prologue in which the king praises the true God (vv. 1-3); (2) a narrative body (vv. 4-34a) that recounts the king's dream, Daniel's interpretation, the king's illness and repentance; and (3) a concluding epilogue in which the king declares the sovereignty of the true God (vv. 34b-37). The story covers a period of eight years, beginning with the dream, the year afterwards, and then the king's seven-year period of mental illness.

4:7. Nebuchadnezzar called the four classes of wise men to interpret his dream. Unlike the dream of Dn 2, the king told them the dream. But similarly, they could not make its interpretation known to him.

4:8. The king recognized that a spirit of the holy gods was in Daniel. The CSB translation reflects the fact that Nebuchadnezzar persisted in believing in a plurality of gods. But since he had recently been chastened (3:24-30) and knew that God alone could reveal what was hidden (2:47), it is possibly correct to translate the phrase alternatively as a

spirit of the Holy God is in him. Beginning in this verse and throughout the chapter, Daniel is most frequently called by his Babylonian name Belteshazzar, seemingly because this section is written from the perspective of the Babylonian king, not a Hebrew exile.

4:10-12. The king's dream was of a tree whose top reached to the sky. A similar expression was used in Gn 11:4 for the tower of the city of Babylon, the top of which was to reach the sky. The tree provided food and shelter for all the creatures of the earth.

4:13. The watcher, a holy one, was an angel.

4:14-17. The fact that the stump with its roots would remain in the ground indicated the continuation of life. The band of iron and bronze pointed to the protection of the stump. The tree plainly represents a man (the king) because the angel declared that his mind would be changed from that of a human to an animal for seven periods of time or for seven years.

4:19. As a loyal servant of the king, Daniel was alarmed about the dreadful discipline that would befall the king.

4:22-25. The tree represented King Nebuchadnezzar, who would be struck with a mental illness that would cause him to live outdoors with the wild animals (or animals of the field) for seven years until he repented of his pride and acknowledged that the Most High is ruler over human kingdoms.

4:26. This is the only place in the OT where Heaven is used as a euphemism for God.

4:27. Daniel advised the king to repent (doing what is right) with the hope that this might prevent God's discipline.

4:29-30. Nebuchadnezzar had no less than three palaces in the city of Babylon. He was walking on the roof of one of them when he was overcome with the glory of the city and was consumed with pride. In his exclamation Is this not Babylon the Great that I (lit I, myself) have built . . . by my vast power and for my majestic glory?, Nebuchadnezzar proclaimed himself the source of majesty. He failed to give God the credit and glory as the ultimate giver of all good gifts. Many years later, the apostle Paul scolded the Corinthians for their pride by asking, What do you have that you didn't receive? If, in fact, you did receive it, why do you boast as if you hadn't received it? (1Co 4:7).

4:31. Having delayed the execution of his sentence against Nebuchadnezzar for a year (v. 28), God disciplined him the instant he became fully consumed with his pride, even while the words were still in the king's mouth.

4:33. Nebuchadnezzar may have suffered from boanthropy, a rare mental illness in which people believe they are actually cattle. One modern case of boanthropy resulted in the patient growing long matted hair and thickened fingernails, much like Nebuchadnezzar, whose hair grew like eagles feathers and his nails like bird claws. Critics contend that secular history has no record of Nebuchadnezzar's mental illness.

However, it is questionable as to whether an ancient Near Eastern despot would mention his bout with insanity in official court records which were typically devoted to highlighting his accomplishments. Silence about an embarrassing episode is understandable. Moreover, the church historian Eusebius cited Abydenus, a third-century BC Greek historian who referred to a time when Nebuchadnezzar was possessed by a god. Also, the third-century BC historian Berosus possibly referred to these events when he spoke of an illness that befell Nebuchadnezzar just before his death.

4:34. Boanthropy does not render its victims entirely unable to reason or understand what has happened to them, so it was possible for the king to realize that his own pride had caused his insanity. Realizing the cause of his state, Nebuchadnezzar repented of his pride and acknowledged the Most High God. His sanity returned to him instantly, a signal that God had lifted his sentence.

4:34-36. As an epilogue to the narrative, Nebuchadnezzar glorified God, using words that describe his realization that God's dominion is an everlasting dominion and also aptly summarize the theme of the book of Daniel.

4:37. The last sentence of the chapter summarizes the message of the story that God is able to humble those who walk in pride. Some disbelieve that the pagan King Nebuchadnezzar actually came to a saving knowledge of the true God, but possibly he did.

# Cottonwood Creek Church

DANIEL

SESSION SIX: THE NEED FOR FAITHFUL REPENTANCE

DANIEL 5:1-31

10.13.24

## MAIN POINT

Because God takes sin seriously, the proud will be humbled, and the unrepentant will be judged.

## INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**We often have to learn lessons the hard way. Can you think of a time when someone warned you about a dangerous choice you were considering, but you did it anyway? What was the outcome?**

**How have moments like that shaped you for the future? How has God grown you through instances like that?**

In Daniel 5, the last ruler of Babylon came face to face with the hand of God. Though he took great pride in his power and prestige, through Daniel's obedience, Belshazzar would be humbled before the Most High God, and his earthly kingdom would come to an end.

## UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

READ DANIEL 5:1-4.

**What differences do you notice between Belshazzar and Nebuchadnezzar (look back at Daniel 4)? Though neither were godly rulers, how did their character and actions differ?**

**Belshazzar led the people to worship false gods and material things instead of God the creation rather than the Creator. How do you see this happening all around us today? Where might the church be in danger of this?**

In Daniel 5, Belshazzar was the ruler of Babylon, but he would be the last monarch before the Persians took over (5:30). He was likely co-ruling with his father, Nabonidus. The king hosted a lavish banquet for a thousand of his lords, which was common in Babylon. At some point, the king demanded the vessels from the temple be brought to him. These were the vessels of gold and silver from the temple in Jerusalem, which meant they would have been devoted to Israel's God. Even for a proud pagan, this action

was bold. Even one who didn't believe in Israel's God likely would have been superstitious about using a sacred item for such a common use. Nevertheless, he took them as he pleased, drank from them, and praised the gods of gold and silver.

READ DANIEL 5:5-12.

**How did the king's offer of money and status reflect the culture's values? What reflects the values of our culture today?**

**How did Belshazzar shift from the beginning of this passage (5:1-4)? When was a time fear or desperation led you to seek the truth about God?**

**Daniel's reputation reflected his character. How does our character influence our reputation? How does our reputation inform our influence?**

While Belshazzar and his guests were enjoying themselves, a mysterious hand appeared and began writing on the wall in his palace. It was in plain sight, opposite the lampstand so it could be seen clearly.

READ DANIEL 5:13-31.

**Why do you think Daniel recounted his experience with Nebuchadnezzar? Why would it be significant for Belshazzar to know about this (5:22)?**

**How does Daniel's boldness in interpreting the writing on the wall inspire us to speak the truth in difficult situations?**

**Compare Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar's responses to God's judgment (see Dan. 4:34-37).**

**What was the meaning of the writing on the wall? How was this fulfilled at the end of chapter 5?**

Once Daniel was brought to the king, Belshazzar recognized and praised him for his reputation. He promised him many gifts and great status if he proved up to the task. But Daniel wasn't interested in the king's material incentives. He didn't need lavish things. He was only interested in communicating the truth of the Most High God.

## APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**Looking at both Nebuchadnezzar's and Belshazzar's lives and responses to God, what are some of the observations you make? Are there any tendencies you share with them? What might you need to change in response to these two examples?**



**How can you learn from others who have gone before you? How can you position yourself in humility so as not to have to learn lessons of disobedience the hard way?**

**What are changes you can make in an effort to take sin as seriously as God does? How might this allow you to share the gospel with others?**

**How can we encourage others to take God's warnings seriously in their own lives?**

**In what ways does this chapter call us to be more vigilant in our faith and witness, especially in a hostile culture?**

## PRAYER

Take some time to repent of the ways you have walked in pride and sin despite knowing the truth of God and His word. Ask the Lord to bring others into your life who you can learn from and who can help guide you toward obedience and humility.

## COMMENTARY

### DANIEL 5:1-31

5:1. The developments in Dan. 5 occurred about twenty-three years after the events in the previous chapter. Nebuchadnezzar had died in 562 BC, shortly after his time of madness and subsequent repentance. After his death, a series of intrigues and assassinations resulted in several obscure kings ruling Babylon until Nabonidus took the throne (556-539 BC). Beginning in 1914, thirty-seven separate archival texts have been discovered documenting the existence of Belshazzar as crown prince. King Belshazzar held a great feast for a thousand of his nobles, probably to bolster morale after Nabonidus had experienced a crushing defeat at the hands of the Persians. The Greek historians Herodotus and Xenophon confirm that Babylon fell while a great feast was in progress (v. 30). Excavations have uncovered a throne room that could accommodate one thousand nobles.

5:2-4. By drinking libations to Babylonian gods with the vessels . . . taken from the temple devoted to the true God of Israel, Belshazzar was acting in an unusually aggressive and blasphemous way. Nebuchadnezzar is called Belshazzar's predecessor (lit his father). Most likely, Belshazzar's father, Nabonidus, married Nebuchadnezzar's daughter to establish his own claim to the throne of Babylon, making Nebuchadnezzar the grandfather of Belshazzar. The Aramaic word for father is flexible, capable of referring to a grandfather, ancestor, or even a predecessor to a king without any lineal tie.

5:5. The appearance of a man's hand beginning to write was not a vision seen by Belshazzar alone, but a miracle seen by everyone present. Afterward, the wise men called to interpret could still see the words written on the plaster wall. According to the archaeologist who excavated it, the throne room (see v. 1) had walls covered with white gypsum or plaster.

5:6. This account of the king's response to the writing was apparently reported to Daniel by those who were there.

5:7. The king shouted for his wise men to come and offered great honor to anyone who could interpret the words on the wall. He even offered to give the successful wise man the third highest position in the kingdom after Nabonidus and Belshazzar.

5:8. None of the wise men of Babylon were able to interpret the inscription on the wall, showing the futility of their pagan religion. Only Daniel, prophet of the one true God, could discern its meaning (1:17).

5:9. That the message was incomprehensible terrified the king even more.

5:10. The queen who came to the banquet hall was the queen mother, not the wife of King Belshazzar since all his wives were already present (cp. v. 3).

5:11-12. Daniel was approximately eighty years old at this point and was either retired or forgotten. The queen mother, being the daughter of Nebuchadnezzar, remembered Daniel's extraordinary spirit and ability to interpret dreams during her father's reign.

5:13-29. When Daniel was brought before the king, he did not demonstrate the same level of respect that he had consistently shown Nebuchadnezzar. Instead, he rebuked Belshazzar for his brazen attitude and failure to learn from Nebuchadnezzar.

5:16-17. Daniel refused to accept any reward for interpreting the inscription not because he was rude or arrogant but because he was indignant at the king's disregard for Nebuchadnezzar's experiences with God and the blasphemous use of the temple vessels.

5:18-24. Writers of historical narrative frequently communicate the essential message of a text through dialogue. In this case, Daniel's words served as a rebuke of Belshazzar for his failure to learn from the experience of Nebuchadnezzar (as described in Dan. 4). Daniel reprimanded Belshazzar because he had not humbled his heart, even though he knew what had happened to Nebuchadnezzar. According to ancient Babylonian texts, Belshazzar had served in the government of King Neriglissar in 560 BC. This indicates that he had been old enough to be aware of the events at the end of Nebuchadnezzar's life. Instead of learning to submit to the Almighty, he exalted himself against God by using the temple vessels to blaspheme God. The specific sins Daniel cited were pride, blasphemy, idolatry, and failure to glorify the true God. For this reason, the writing was inscribed on the wall as a message of judgment and doom.

5:25-27. The three Aramaic words on the wall were MENE (numbered), TEKEL (weighed), and PARSIN (divided).

5:28. Although the third word was written in the plural form (parsin), Daniel explained its meaning by using the singular form (Peres). The prediction that Belshazzar's kingdom has been divided does not indicate that the Babylonian Empire would be divided equally by two kingdoms (Medes and Persians) but rather that Babylon would be destroyed or dissolved and taken over by the Medo-Persian Empire. The third word

on the wall (PARSIN) has the same letters as the Aramaic word for Persian. It was a play on words, indicating that the kingdom would fall to the Persian army.

5:29. It seems that the king did not take the message seriously.

5:30. Having lost a brief skirmish outside the walls of Babylon, Belshazzar retreated to the city and made light of the coming Persian siege. The Babylonians had twenty years of provisions, and the city was a seemingly impregnable fortress. Nevertheless, Darius diverted the waters of the Euphrates River so his forces could enter through the channel, passing below the water gates. He took the city that very night without a battle and killed Belshazzar, who was engaged in a drunken feast. The kingdom of Babylon fell just as foretold by Daniel (2:39). The colossus head of gold (Babylon) had fallen. It was replaced by the chest and arms of silver, representing Medo-Persia (see 2:40).

5:31. The identity of Darius the Mede, who received the kingdom at the age of sixty-two, is uncertain. Some believe he was Gubaru, the governor of Babylon, called Darius, an honorific title meaning royal one. Others maintain that Darius the Mede was an alternate title for the Persian emperor, Cyrus the Great, also viewing the word Darius as a royal title.