



DANIEL

FOLLOWING GOD IN A GODLESS WORLD

A 30-DAY TEEN DEVOTIONAL STUDY OF DANIEL 1-7



We are super excited that you have decided to come along this journey through Daniel with us. Below are some helpful tips on how to read through this devotional.

How To Use This Book

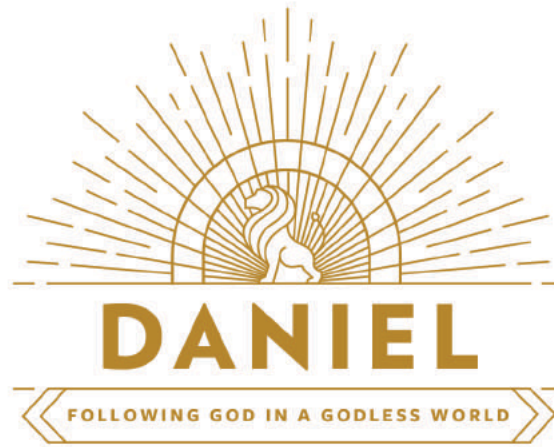
- Commit to a daily time and place. Set aside at least 10 minutes, but more if you can. Be alert, the devil doesn't want you to do this, so make this time a commitment to yourself, in dependence on the Spirit's power.
- Come with expectation and openness. Pray before reading: 'Open my eyes so I can see the wonderful things in your word' (Psalm 119:18).
- Take your time. If it's too much to take in, do a 'day' over 2 or 3 days.
- Pray about what you wrote down. God has spoken to you through his Word, now speak to him in response. He doesn't only want to speak to you. He wants to hear from you.
- Maybe you want to journal through this in a notebook and write down your reflections or things that stuck out to you each day.

Make it a Community Experience

- WhatsApp what you wrote down to others. For accountability, support and richness. You can even make a WhatsApp group with one or more people who are also journeying through this devotion.
- Alternatively work through this as a small group. You could share your daily thoughts on the WhatsApp group or even chat about it when you meet up again.

People in my '30 days in Daniel' WhatsApp Group include:

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Day 1: Relocated to Babylon

Daniel represented his God in a godless world. In the next 35 days let's learn all we can from him, as we go verse by verse through the book of Daniel. Let's draw the inspiration, insights and skills we so desperately need to live for God in our godless world.

Most followers of Jesus today find themselves in a world where being a Christian is difficult. But this is nothing to fear. It is our destiny and purpose to represent our Saviour in contexts and situations where he is neither known nor honored. Like Daniel, we must and can accept our assignment, and learn to prosper in a godless age.

*¹In the third year of the reign of King Jehoiakim of Judah, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came to Jerusalem and laid siege to it. ²The Lord handed King Jehoiakim of Judah over to him, along with some of the vessels from the house of God. Nebuchadnezzar carried them to the land of Babylon, to the house of his god, and put the vessels in the treasury of his god. **[Daniel 1:1-2]***

Daniel's story starts with agony. As a teenager, his city was ransacked by the world's superpower, Babylon. He was dragged from his Jerusalem home to the palace of his captor.

The capture of the Israelites was the end of a domino-like series of disobediences in God's people. The Lord had threatened his people Israel with exile if they did not obey the terms of the covenant established at Mount Sinai (Lev. 26:33, 39). For centuries God had warned the Israelites through the prophets that if they were disobedient to him, and worshipped false gods, that they would be destroyed by invading nations. These warnings were not listened to.

Isaiah the prophet had prophesied that the day would come when a new empire, Babylon would attack Jerusalem and take them into exile. Yet still they continued to rebel.

Eventually, God's ax fell. Babylon attacked Jerusalem, crippling but not destroying them. They plundered God's holy temple, stealing the valuable golden utensils and put them in the Babylonian temple as an offering to their false-god. 18 years later, the final stage of judgment happened when the entire nation of Jerusalem was taken into captivity.

All this time God was in control! The key phrase in these verses is **'The Lord handed King Jehoiakim of Judah over to him'**. God was in charge of the chaos and not the author of this



evil. He allowed one dictator to harm his own people, and (as we will see) found a way to use this painful scenario for his glory and for the ultimate good of his people.

Let's meet Daniel...

³Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobility, ⁴youths without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace, and to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans. ... ⁶Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah. (Daniel 1:3-4 & 6)

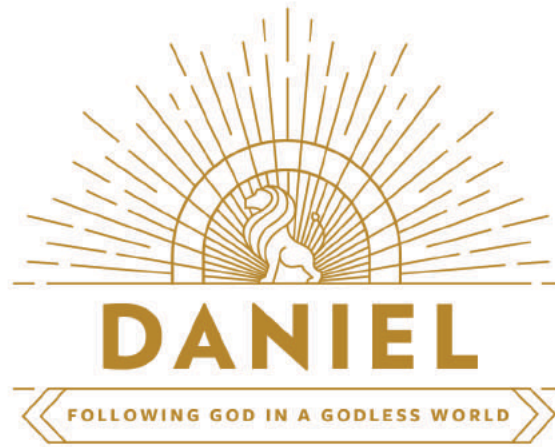
Daniel and his 3 friends had been taken to Babylon. They were selected as the cream of the crop, top of the class, and outrageously talented, good-looking and athletic. The evil king of Babylon claimed them as his own, enlisting them into a radical brainwashing program that aimed to drive their beliefs out of them.

Their new city, in what is now known as Iraq, was the greatest in the world. The capital city of a sprawling empire. 2500 acres in size and filled with magnificent buildings, the greatest of libraries and hanging gardens. Its celebrities set fashion trends for the world. Its food was unimaginably drool-worthy. Its gates and temples were covered with idols portraying their false-gods.

Daniel was stripped of his home, family, dreams, prospects of marriage and children, had to start his life over again in this strange land and culture. We notice that Daniel, is in a tough place but is still resting in God's control over the circumstances that are beyond his own control, he accepted this relocation of his life as a God-given assignment. Refusing to buy the lie that his faith in God was somehow from the olden days, misplaced, irrelevant and puny, he would seek to bring the kingdom of God into an earthly kingdom.

Reflection

Have you experienced an agonizing relocation of sorts in your life? What can you learn from Daniel? Perhaps you want to write down in your journal some thoughts you have after today's devotion.



Day 2 : Intimidated by the culture

The king of Babylon entered these stolen youth into a brainwashing program. He would try to drive whatever faith they had out of them, by drowning them in a culture and a curriculum that was supposed to be better in every way to anything they had previously known.

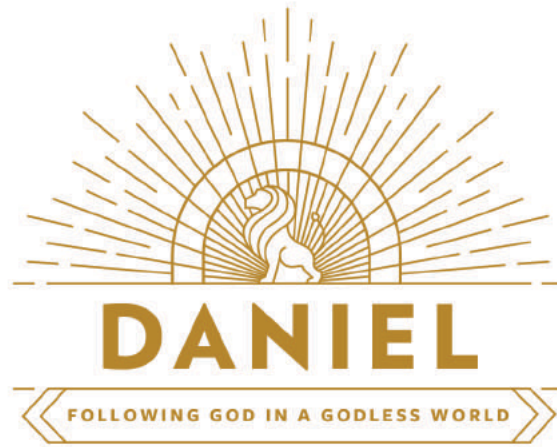
*³The king ordered Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the Israelites from the royal family and from the nobility—⁴young men ... to teach them the Chaldean language and literature. ⁵The king assigned them daily provisions from the royal food and from the wine that he drank. They were to be trained for three years, and at the end of that time they were to attend the king. ⁶Among them, from the Judahites, were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. ⁷The chief eunuch gave them names; he gave the name Belteshazzar to Daniel, Shadrach to Hananiah, Meshach to Mishael, and Abednego to Azariah – **Daniel 1:3-7***

Nebuchadnezzar had a special strategy of bringing Judah, and other smaller nations, under his control. He handpicked the brightest and most promising of the young people of these nations. He chose young people who were upper class, handsome, highly educated and intellectually sharp. He brought them into his palace, and sought to win them over to Babylonian culture, and allegiance to himself as a generous king.

Already separated from loved ones and their home, the king was seeking to take one more thing from them – their confidence in their God. Daniel and his friends had grown up worshipping and serving God. They would probably have known the first five books of the Bible off by heart. In Jerusalem they had been able to worship and obey their God in a culture that largely encouraged their faith. Now they were being put in a culture that did not understand their faith at all.

Let's explore how the king of Babylon tried to win them over, intimidating them with the 'irrelevance' of their own faith and how we can see culture allowing that to happen in our lives still.

1. The knowledge of God is challenged in education. The schools in Babylon gave no trust to Daniel's faith, and even taught things that challenged it. For 3 years, Daniel sat through lectures in the university of Babylon where his beliefs were challenged. Still today our faith can be challenged by what we learn in school.



2. The reality of God is confused by materialism. The king tries to win over Daniel and his friends with cool stuff. Still today, we can be won over by flashing lights and fancy things that we think satisfy our need for fulfillment and comforts.

3. The usefulness of God is pushed into private. Daniel and his friends have their names taken from them, and along with that any public sign of their faith. Daniel means *'God is my judge'*. Hannaniah means *'Loved by the Lord'*. Mishael means *'Who is as God'*. Azariah means, *'The Lord is my help'*. Stripped of names that publicly show their faith in God, their faith is made private. Still today, society says, *'We don't mind what you believe, but don't share it with us.'*

4. Our identity in God is blocked by the way society sees us. These 4 young believers are given new names that point to false gods. One of the greatest parts of the gospel is that we are given an eternal identity as a child of God. Society, as it did then, seeks to redefine us for its own ends. Depending on the local idols of choice, we are pressurized to earn our identities through our performance, possessions, pedigree, popularity or power.

5. Our value is based on the approval of man not God. At the end of 3 years, Daniel and his friends would have a one-on-one oral exam with the king. If he approved of them, their future was set. Still today, Satan seeks to elevate the importance of what people think about us, and ignore what God thinks about us.

Reflection

These forces that try to downplay the importance of God in Daniel's life are still real. Daniel teaches us that we can withstand them. We can live faithful to God even while everything around us urges us to leave our faith behind. What forces are their in your life that are changing the way you view God and your relationship with Him?



Day 3: Choosing your battles

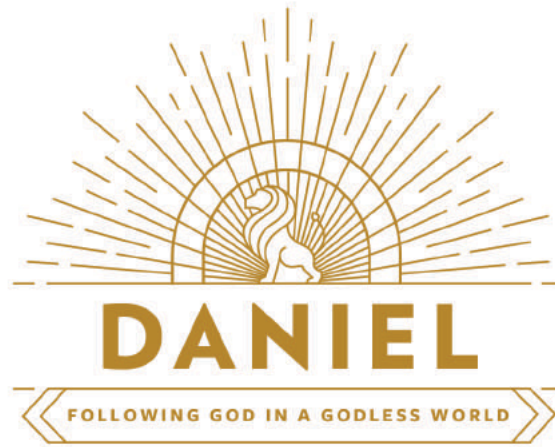
Daniel and his friends had four options in responding to the godless city they found themselves in:

1. **Bomb shelter** – they could have simply denounced the evil of the city they lived in, and hid underground while they waited for God’s judgment to fall.
2. **Mirror** – they could have changed their beliefs and lifestyles to fit in.
3. **Parasite** – they could have simply chosen the parts of the culture that benefited them but make no effort to change that culture.
4. **Salt-and-light** – they could have been faithful to God while still trying to shape the godless city. Let’s read how they chose the 4th option:

*⁸Daniel determined that he would not defile himself with the king’s food or with the wine he drank. So he asked permission from the chief eunuch not to defile himself. ⁹God had granted Daniel kindness and compassion from the chief eunuch, ¹⁰yet he said to Daniel, “I fear my lord the king, who assigned your food and drink. What if he sees your faces looking thinner than the other young men your age? You would endanger my life with the king.” ¹¹So Daniel said to the guard whom the chief eunuch had assigned to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, ¹²“Please test your servants for ten days. Let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. ¹³Then examine our appearance and the appearance of the young men who are eating the king’s food, and deal with your servants based on what you see.” ¹⁴He agreed with them about this and tested them for ten days. - **Daniel 1:8-14***

Though his situation was very unique, Daniel provides an inspiring example that may inspire us in situations when we are tempted to be consumed by an ungodly culture.

1. **Decide to be true to God.** Daniel determined that he would not change himself. He made a prayerful decision to not sin. He understood that though he lived in the world, he would not sin. He supported the king but gave ultimate allegiance to God, the king of kings. Even as we seek to change our surrounding culture we must not be taken in by worldly idols and sins.
2. **Don’t be self-righteous.** Daniel’s decision to not eat the king’s food was not an attempt to prove how righteous he was. He was motivated by love for God. It was a matter of personal conviction in the sight of God. Fitting in and eating the food that God did not approve of would have been less risky but Daniel was more concerned about pleasing God than people.



3. Don't impose your values on others. Daniel did not try to get everyone eating food that God approved of. He did not expect unbelievers to live according to God's law. Still today, we must not expect the world to live by Christ's teaching. Without knowing God and the Spirit's power, that's impossible.

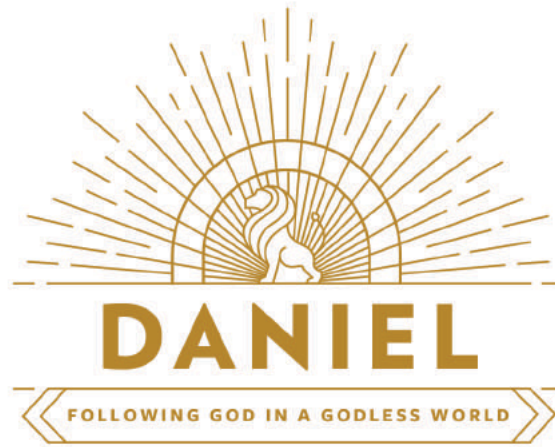
4. Choose your battles. Notice that Daniel did not resist the education he had received, even though it had much that was false and evil in it. This is because he was filtering what he was hearing through his biblically revealed convictions. Notice also that Daniel did not refuse the new name given to him – after all, he knew who he was even if they did not. Instead he chose to resist the culture at one point – the food he was being fed.

As Christians, we don't have God-given restrictions about diet anymore (Acts 10:9-15). But he chose to take his stand on what he ate. We notice that Daniel made his decision based on biblical revelation – as should we. There was no command against taking on another name, or learning what others believe. But dietary requirements were biblically clear (under the law of Moses, which we are no longer under).

Like Daniel, we should learn that not every battle is worth fighting. There's a difference between violating God's commands and putting up with aspects of a godless world. Why did Daniel tolerate some things that he didn't like? Not because he lacked courage, but because he had wisdom.

Reflection

How can you be the salt and light in your school today? Think of one thing that you can do today to share Jesus with your friends, family or teachers and post it on your Whatsapp group to share ideas and encourage each other.



Day 4: Being Salt and Light

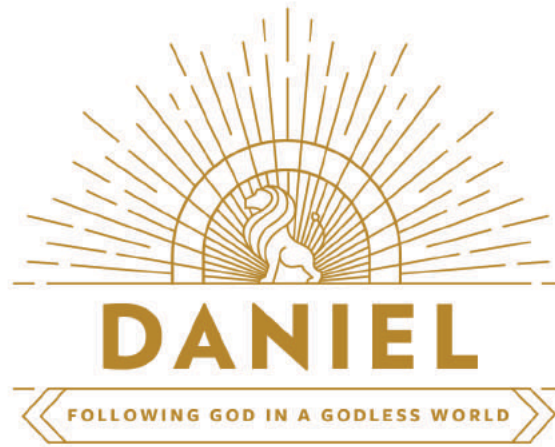
Daniel and his friends ask for special permission to try out a different diet for 10 days. The results are fascinating:

*¹⁵At the end of ten days they looked better and healthier than all the young men who were eating the king's food.¹⁶So the guard continued to remove their food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables. ¹⁷As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. ¹⁸At the end of the time that the king had said to present them, the chief eunuch presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁹The king interviewed them, and among all of them, no one was found equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. So they began to attend the king. ²⁰In every matter of wisdom and understanding that the king consulted them about, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and mediums in his entire kingdom. ²¹Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus. – **Daniel 1:15-20***

We continue to learn from Daniel how to be salt-and-light in society – being true to a different set of values than the culture, yet still participating in the culture in an effort to influence it. So far we have learnt: 1. Resolve to be true to God. 2. Don't be self-righteous. 3. Don't impose your values on others. 4. Choose your battles. Now today we learn more...

5. Be politely respectful with authorities. Once Daniel decided that he would not eat the king's food, there are many ways he could have gone about asserting this decision. He could have gone on hunger strike, for example. Or he could have tossed the tables of food over in a valiant show of courage. But Daniel chose instead the most respectful and polite way of going about his convictions. He wisely and courteously asked permission to not eat the food, and gave the reason: he did not want to defile himself. In other words, he was saying, it was a compromise of personal conviction. Then, he negotiated an opportunity to show the superiority of his convictions – he suggested that after 10 days they would be in superior health (and would therefore offer superior service to the king). The intriguing, respectful and realistic manner with which Daniel went about this conversation led the master to oblige his request.

Daniel teaches us how to relate to our superiors. If we Christians are ready to obey God but not ready to respect our earthly authorities, we shoot ourselves in the foot. Put yourselves in the shoes of leaders for a moment: if you are leading others, and one of them is rudely demanding, obnoxious or disrespectful towards you, how will you respond? Probably by blocking



your ears to what they have to say, demoting them or something worse. As Jesus said, 'Be as innocent as doves, but as wise as snakes.'

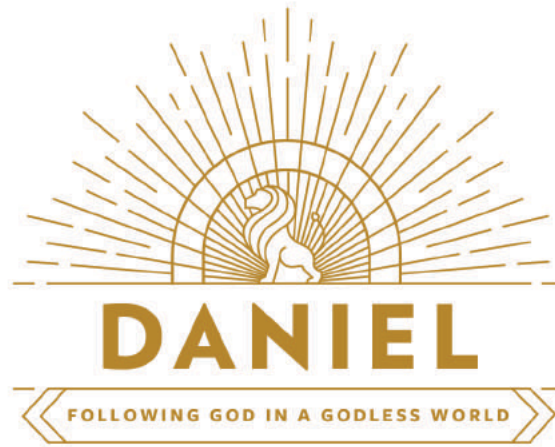
6. Develop yourself intellectually. Daniel and his friends were already naturally talented and bright. But they applied themselves diligently in their studies for those 3 years in the best Babylonian university. They did the hard work of learning all they could, while seeking to test it against their knowledge of God and his ways from the Scriptures. The same kind of self-discipline they applied to their diet, they seemed to apply to their education. Still today we Christians should be known for developing our talents and gifting as much as we can – not for our glory, but for God's.

7. Identify, grow and use the spiritual gifts God has given you. God gave them special knowledge. In particular he gave Daniel the supernatural ability to interpret the meaning of visions and dreams. Babylon was famous for its attempts to know the future. The future telling abilities pursued by the Babylonians were fakes of the real spiritual gifts that God gives, gifts that he granted to Daniel.

8. Trust God to work on your behalf. God, not Daniel, is the true hero of this story. After all it was God who 'had granted Daniel kindness and compassion from the chief eunuch' (v9). Additionally, it was God who gave Daniel the idea about the ten-day test; who caused Daniel and his friends to grow in health; and who gave Daniel and his friends their knowledge and ability to understand visions and dreams. We can also trust God to work on our behalf.

Reflection

Today let's consider how we can be more respectful of the authorities in our life.



Day 5: Faith at School

The story of Daniel's service within Babylon does more than guide us Christians to live out our faith creatively in a world hostile to our faith. It also serves as a guide for us to live out our faith at school, yet remain true to God at the same time. Reflecting on Daniel, chapter 1, what insights can we draw out to help us to do that?

1. Hang out with your non-Christian friends.

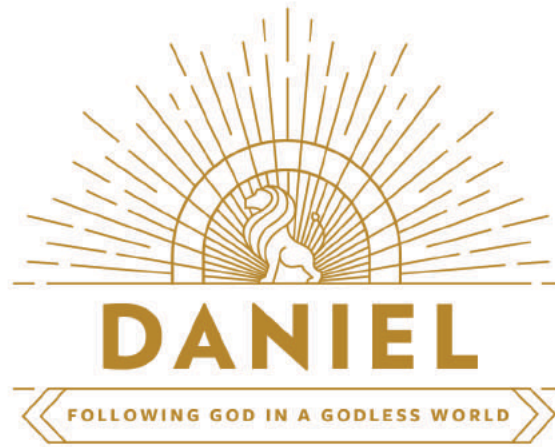
Though many Christians go to "Christian" schools, many of our friends don't know God yet. Daniel teaches us how to work out our faith in our schools where we spend most of our time. Like salt, we are meant to get out of the saltshaker and into the places and people that desperately need to taste the flavours of God's kingdom.

2. School isn't all about you. Many of us go to school to have fun with our friends, play some sport or to get the marks and get it over with. None of these are wrong. But a quick look at Daniel reveals a better reason – he saw school as one way to worship God and serve others. Having this as our motive at school enables us to risk our reputations and share about Jesus in obedience to God – we will notice again in chapters 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 that Daniel and his friends are willing to lose everything in order to please God.

3. Don't overrate your talents. Daniel was brilliant and hardworking but he would be the first to admit that all his talents and diligence came from God, and also that the impact of his life exceeded what he was capable of. Chapter 1 gives us behind-the-scenes snapshots of God's activity: it is God who let Judah fall so that Daniel is relocated to his assignment in the first place (v2). It is God who granted him favour and compassion with his boss (v9). God is the one who gave Daniel knowledge and skill (v7). God is the one who makes him 'ten times better' than his unbelieving peers (v20). Even if we certainly have a part to play in our success, we must be careful not to claim the credit ourselves.

4. Don't change your principles. Given enough time, every school will test our convictions at some point. Whether it is lying to others, under-age drinking, pornography or even sex before marriage, at some point we must take a stand. It isn't always easy but we need to stick to our convictions no matter what everyone else is doing around us.

5. 'As far as it is possible for you, live at peace with everyone' (Rom 12:18). Daniel treated the people he was around well. He built friendships with his superiors. He looked out for their well-being – for example when the master admitted that not sticking to the prescribed

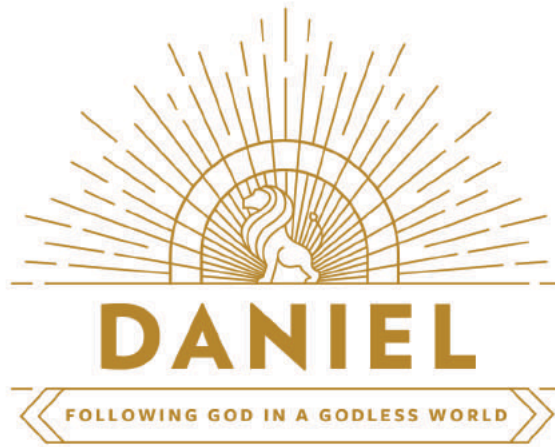


diet it could sabotage his own job and life (v10), Daniel offered a safeguard against that possible end (v11-13). It is not surprising then that the master in charge of him was so ready to show him kindness and compassion (v9).

6. Daniel prayed for those around him. Daniel put Jeremiah's advice to test and proved it helpful: "This is what the God of Israel says to all the exiles I deported from Jerusalem to Babylon: "Build houses and live in them. Plant gardens and eat their produce. Pursue the well-being^{of} of the city I have deported you to. Pray to the Lord on its behalf, for when it thrives, you will thrive." (Jer 29:4-7) Similarly, we invest our lives in school, our relationships and our friendships not for what we can get out of them, but for what we can add to them.

Reflection

Write down the names of 3 of your friends who don't yet believe in God and pray that God would reveal himself to them. Maybe you also want to invite them to church on Sunday. Continue to pray for them every day as you continue through this journey.



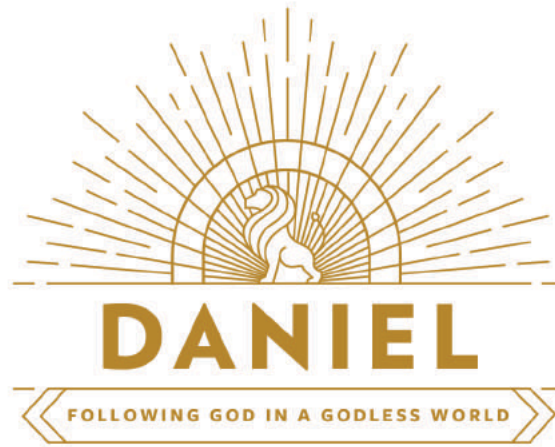
Day 6: Power is overrated

Two years into Daniel's new life in Babylon, something remarkable happened: The king had a dream so troubling that he could not sleep. He was so determined to find the meaning of the dream; he was willing to execute each and every 'wise man' that had graduated from his elite training program. Daniel and his friends, included in these elite, had less than a day to live. Let's read the story to find out what exactly happened...

¹ In the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams that troubled him, and sleep deserted him. ² So the king gave orders to summon the magicians, mediums, sorcerers, and Chaldeans to tell the king his dreams. When they came and stood before the king, ³ he said to them, "I have had a dream and am anxious to understand it." ⁴ The Chaldeans spoke to the king: "May the king live forever. Tell your servants the dream, and we will give the interpretation." ⁵ The king replied to the Chaldeans, "My word is final: If you don't tell me the dream and its interpretation, you will be torn limb from limb, and your houses will be made a garbage dump. ⁶ But if you make the dream and its interpretation known to me, you'll receive gifts, a reward, and great honor from me. So make the dream and its interpretation known to me." ⁷ They answered a second time, "May the king tell the dream to his servants, and we will make known the interpretation." ⁸ The king replied, "I know for certain you are trying to gain some time, because you see that my word is final. ⁹ If you don't tell me the dream, there is one decree for you. You have conspired to tell me something false or fraudulent until the situation changes. So tell me the dream and I will know you can give me its interpretation." ¹⁰ The Chaldeans answered the king, "No one on earth can make known what the king requests. Consequently, no king, however great and powerful, has ever asked anything like this of any magician, medium, or Chaldean. ¹¹ What the king is asking is so difficult that no one can make it known to him except the gods, whose dwelling is not with mortals." ¹² Because of this, the king became violently angry and gave orders to destroy all the wise men of Babylon. - Daniel 2:1-12

Tomorrow we will learn some things from what God does in these verses, as well as how Daniel responds, but today let's reflect on what we learn from how the king responds:

1. Having power is overrated. The king is the most powerful man in the world. In the ancient kingdoms, humans were divided into two main groups: there was the king, and then there was everyone else who were his slaves and servants. Look at evidences of his power in these verses: 'the king gave orders to summon' (v2) – he does not make suggestions, rather he gives orders,



and he does not just invite people into his presence, he summons them. Twice he states the obvious: 'my word is final' (v5,8). There is even a hint of him having godlike status: 'may the king live forever' (v4). Yet despite all this power, just one dream that highlights to him the uncertainty of the future is able to strip him of his sleep (v2).

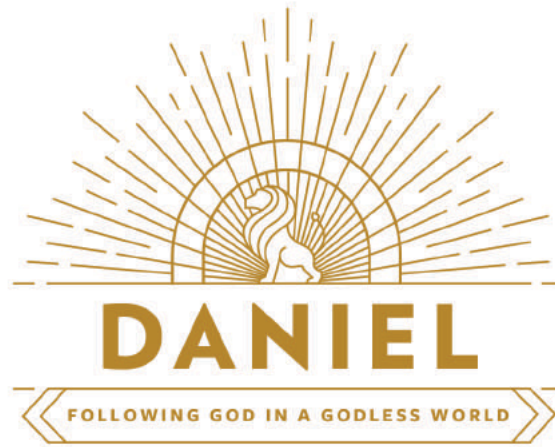
Money and power give us many privileges, and can solve many problems, but there are some things that it cannot give – like peace of mind, rest of heart and a good night's sleep. Though none of us know what the future holds, there is a comfort that comes to us when we know the One who holds the future – a comfort the unbelieving king does not know.

2. Power corrupts. The evil king is ready to let his inner turmoil boil over into murderous wrath. It is understandable and acceptable that he did not want to reveal the dream itself to his wise men and magicians – they could then make up an interpretation. If they really had the supernatural power to interpret a dream, then surely they would have the power to know the dream in the first place. What was not understandable or acceptable however was his willingness to kill: 'The king became violently angry and gave orders to destroy all the wise men of Babylon' (v12).

Throughout history people in power have tended to exploit and do violent things against their own people. It is not that powerful people are especially evil, only that humans, left to our own devices, have seeds of corruption that tend to grow when given the chance – such as being given power over others.

Reflection

In your own life, or in others, how have you seen power corrupt people and leave them empty? Spend some time in prayer for the leaders (for e.g. teachers, sport captains etc.) in your life asking God to help them (or you) to become better leaders



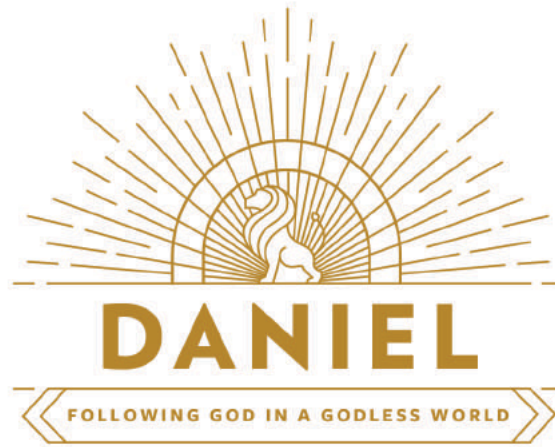
Day 7: Responding Well to a Crisis

The king issued a decree that all the wise men in his city be executed, because they had failed to tell him what he had dreamed and what it meant. Daniel and his friends had hours left to live. What did they do?

¹³ The decree was issued that the wise men were to be executed, and they searched for Daniel and his friends, to execute them. ¹⁴ Then Daniel responded with tact and discretion to Arioch, the captain of the king's guard, who had gone out to execute the wise men of Babylon. ¹⁵ He asked Arioch, the king's officer, "Why is the decree from the king so harsh?" Then Arioch explained the situation to Daniel. ¹⁶ So Daniel went and asked the king to give him some time, so that he could give the king the interpretation. ¹⁷ Then Daniel went to his house and told his friends Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah about the matter, ¹⁸ urging them to ask the God of the heavens for mercy concerning this mystery, so Daniel and his friends would not be destroyed with the rest of Babylon's wise men. ¹⁹ The mystery was then revealed to Daniel in a vision at night, and Daniel praised the God of the heavens. – Daniel 2 :13-19

What do we learn about God?

- 1. God is able to put thoughts into the minds of people who do not know him.** Later in the story, Daniel will say to the king, 'Your Majesty, while you were in your bed, thoughts came to your mind about what will happen in the future. The revealer of mysteries has let you know what will happen' (v29). This king did not know, follow, worship or obey God, but still God was able to drop thoughts into his mind.
- 2. God creates difficulties that show how helpless we are without God.** The wise men of Babylon are tested. Despite all their learning, abilities and magic, and the gods they worship, they were unable to do what the king demands of them. People still tend to have an exaggerated sense of their control, abilities and resources. These earthly securities cause us to rest in our own powers rather than reach out to a God for whom nothing is impossible. God likes to crash through this illusory security by bringing about situations that exceed our wisdom and power.
- 3. God creates opportunities for his people to excel by relying on Him.** On first reading, we are horrified that Daniel and his friends are also about to be executed (v13). Then as we read on we realize that God is putting Daniel and his friends between a rock and a hard place precisely because he wants them to stand out. He plans on demonstrating his power to them and through them in that place.



What does Daniel teach us about responding to a crisis situation?

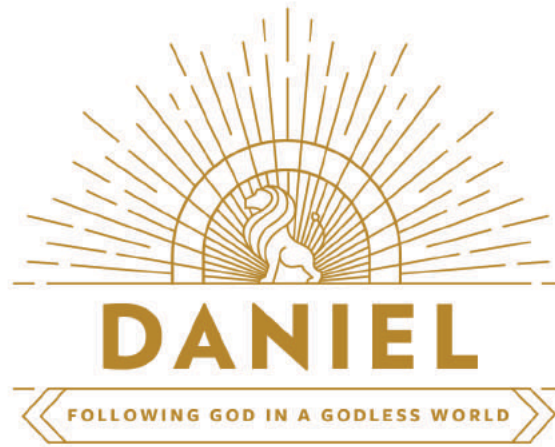
- 1. Remain calm in crisis.** We're told that Daniel 'responded' to the alarming news of his imminent execution. Too many of us do not respond, we react. Adrenaline kicks in, and we panic. Daniel keeps his head while all those about him were losing their chill.
- 2. Collect as much information as you can.** Daniel finds out from his soon-to-be executioner what exactly is going on (v15). Until he understands exactly the nature and causes of the crisis, he knows he is not ready to respond wisely.
- 3. Get help.** Instead of dealing with the situation alone, he gets help: first, 'with tact and discretion' (v14) he asks for information from Arioch, then he respectfully approaches the king and asks for a little bit of time (v16), and finally he calls on his friends (v17).
- 4. Find some good friends.** Daniel finds more than friendship in 'his friends Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah' (v17) – he finds friends who love Jesus. Together they seek God. They stand with each other in the trial, drawing on God's grace, and sharing that grace with each other. We cannot control what trials will come our way, but we do have some control over who will be there for us when those trials come. Daniel has long been invested in this spiritual community, and now that the heat is on, he knows exactly who to turn to for help.
- 5. Pray.** The four friends urgently pray to God about their survival. They "ask the God of the heavens for mercy concerning this mystery" (v18). He grants them an answer, revealing the mystery of the king's dream to Daniel (v19), whose petitions give way to rejoicing.

Reflection

In your most recent crisis situation, how could you have faced it in a more Daniel-like way? Spend some time in prayer asking God to help you to rely on him to be your strength today.

Listen to this YouTube song as you prepare for your day:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wfhpv39c-pM>



Day 8: The Gift of Knowledge

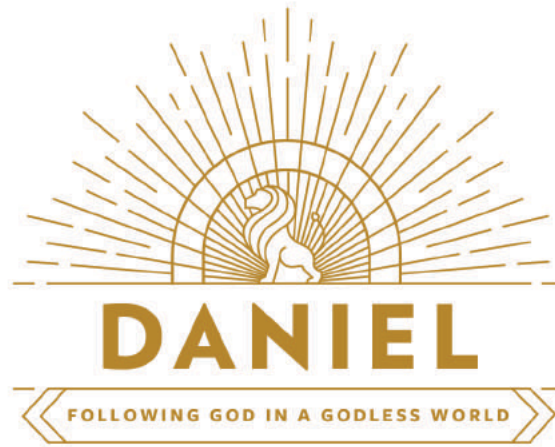
God answered the prayers of Daniel by revealing to him the king's dream. Now certain that he will live and not be killed, Daniel praises God...

Daniel praised the God of the heavens²⁰ and declared: May the name of God be praised forever and ever, for wisdom and power belong to him. ²¹ He changes the times and seasons; he removes kings and establishes kings. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding. ²² He reveals the deep and hidden things; he knows what is in the darkness, and light dwells with him. ²³ I offer thanks and praise to you, God of my fathers, because you have given me wisdom and power. And now you have let me know what we asked of you, for you have let us know the king's mystery. ²⁴ Therefore Daniel went to Arioch, whom the king had assigned to destroy the wise men of Babylon. He came and said to him, "Don't destroy the wise men of Babylon! Bring me before the king, and I will give him the interpretation." ²⁵ Then Arioch quickly brought Daniel before the king and said to him, "I have found a man among the Judean exiles who can let the king know the interpretation." ²⁶ The king said in reply to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, "Are you able to tell me the dream I had and its interpretation?" ²⁷ Daniel answered the king: "No wise man, medium, magician, or diviner is able to make known to the king the mystery he asked about. ²⁸ But there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has let King Nebuchadnezzar know what will happen in the last days. Your dream and the visions that came into your mind as you lay in bed were these: ²⁹ Your Majesty, while you were in your bed, thoughts came to your mind about what will happen in the future. The revealer of mysteries has let you know what will happen. ³⁰ As for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because I have more wisdom than anyone living, but in order that the interpretation might be made known to the king, and that you may understand the thoughts of your mind. – Daniel 2:20-30

God knows everything. God cannot be truly in control if he does not know everything. The bible says 'He knows what is in the darkness, and light dwells with him (v22). There is no dark place, no deep shadow, where God is not. He knows everything about us – every thought in our head, every motive in our heart, every hair on our head.

God reveals some of his thoughts. As amazing as God knowing everything is, he goes one step further: he chooses to reveal some of his knowledge to his people.

The bible says He 'gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding' (v21-22). Nebuchadnezzar asked the impossible. He wanted people to tell him what dream he had,



something that is humanly impossible to do. We may look at a person's face, but we cannot know their thoughts.

Their thoughts are beyond reach, unless of course they tell us their thoughts. But that's exactly what God does in this story. First, he tells Nebuchadnezzar his thoughts in a dream, and then he tells Daniel those same thoughts, this time with an interpretation.

When God reveals his thoughts to us, we must not become proud. Ultimately wisdom belongs to God (v20), but he sometimes graciously chooses to share it with people. As we read the Bible, and ponder the life, teachings and ministry of Jesus, and as the Spirit grants us insight into these things, we are given special revelation from God himself. This should not make us proud. Rather, like Daniel did, we should humbly boast in the goodness and wisdom of God.

God reveals some of his knowledge through gifts of the Spirit. Daniel had an unusual God-given gift of God speaking to him in dreams and visions, but we see here that he could not simply 'switch it on' anytime he liked. He had to ask God for this specific knowledge. God gives us the gift, but it is as we seek him that he chooses when and how he will use us. It is right to recognize a spiritually gifted person, but we must remember that the gift belongs to God.

Reflection

We learnt today that God gives us knowledge and insight. Why not write down in your journal 3 things you are trusting God to reveal about the bible to you. Pray and ask God to give you wisdom and understanding about these things.



Day 9: Kingdoms Fall

Daniel stopped his own execution by telling the king his extraordinary dream...

³¹ "Your Majesty, as you were watching, suddenly a colossal statue appeared. That statue, tall and dazzling, was standing in front of you, and its appearance was terrifying. ³² The head of the statue was pure gold, its chest and arms were silver, its stomach and thighs were bronze, ³³ its legs were iron, and its feet were partly iron and partly fired clay. ³⁴ As you were watching, a stone broke off without a hand touching it, struck the statue on its feet of iron and fired clay, and crushed them. ³⁵ Then the iron, the fired clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were shattered and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors. The wind carried them away, and not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the statue became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. ³⁶ "This was the dream; now we will tell the king its interpretation. ³⁷ Your Majesty, you are king of kings. The God of the heavens has given you sovereignty, power, strength, and glory. ³⁸ Wherever people live—or wild animals, or birds of the sky—he has handed them over to you and made you ruler over them all. You are the head of gold. ³⁹ "After you, there will arise another kingdom, inferior to yours, and then another, a third kingdom, of bronze, which will rule the whole earth. ⁴⁰ A fourth kingdom will be as strong as iron; for iron crushes and shatters everything, and like iron that smashes, it will crush and smash all the others. ⁴¹ You saw the feet and toes, partly of a potter's fired clay and partly of iron—it will be a divided kingdom, though some of the strength of iron will be in it. You saw the iron mixed with clay, ⁴² and that the toes of the feet were partly iron and partly fired clay—part of the kingdom will be strong, and part will be brittle. ⁴³ You saw the iron mixed with clay—the peoples will mix with one another but will not hold together, just as iron does not mix with fired clay. – Daniel 2:31-43

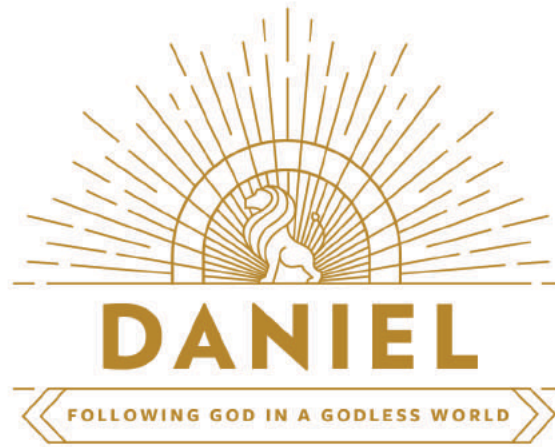
Daniel sees the statue made of four parts. Each part represents a successive world superpower, all of which rule over Jerusalem:

The head is made of gold. That's identified here in (v37-38) as the kingdom of Babylon under King Nebuchadnezzar.

The chest and arms are made of silver. That's the second succeeding kingdom.

The belly and thighs are made of bronze – symbolizing the third one.

Then iron legs refer to the fourth kingdom.



Earthly kingdoms rise and then fall. Remember that Nebuchadnezzar is only 2 years into his rising reign, yet God is already saying to him, 'Babylon is a magnificently great world superpower. You may feel like it will last. But it will not. Its days are number. The countdown has begun. There is coming a day when this kingdom will collapse and be succeeded by another, which in turn will fall and be eclipsed by yet another, and on and on.'

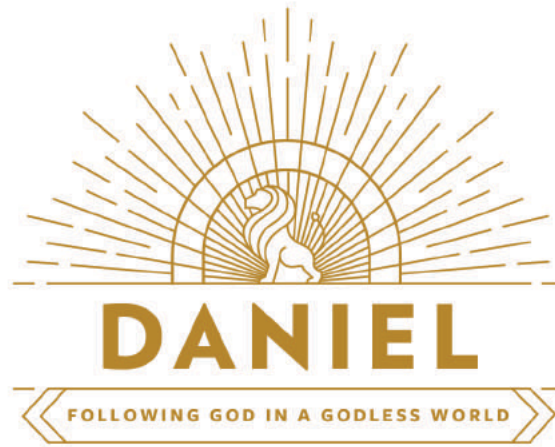
Do not be intimidated by the kingdoms. Daniel's faith in God as his high king was against all culture. So dominant was the throne in Babylon that it eliminated the possibility in people's minds that there was a higher throne in heaven.

Faith in God is still against culture. One reason is that there are organizations of people that are so great, that God could seem less real. Whether it is the latest technology, celebrities or popular beliefs these things seem to rule the landscape of our day. We cannot imagine a time when they will not be dominant in society and our lives.

But God does not share our lack of creativity. God has witnessed kingdoms rising and then falling. No kingdom has stood for very long in the history of the world. From his eternal lookout, they are milliseconds in His Story.

Reflection

What things are large in your life right now that won't matter in a few years time? How does today's reading change your perspective on those things? Ask God to show you His greatness and sovereignty over these issues.



Day 10: The scope of human history

Let's read about the meaning of the king's dream that Daniel interpreted. Although this dream unfolded in someone's head a long time ago near modern day Baghdad, but it was a dream packed with implications for the whole world.

Though written, an extremely long time ago, the book of Daniel tells of future kingdoms (Daniel explains that the four parts of the statue represent four empires) and exactly how many kingdoms before God sent Jesus to the world.

- First, the head of gold. That's Babylon, a kingdom that lasted 66 years.
- Second, the chest and arms of silver. We now know that this is the Medo-Persian empire, with King Cyrus as it's first king – an empire that ruled for 208 years.
- Third, the belly and thighs of bronze. We now know this is the Grecian empire, under Alexander the Great which ruled for 185 years
- Fourth, the legs of iron, which we now know to be the Roman empire, which reigned unrivalled for about 500 years.

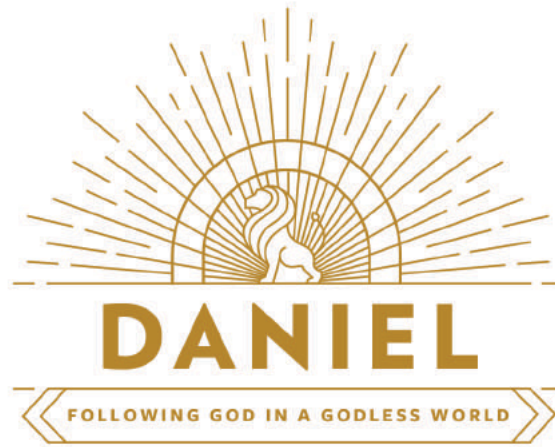
Here we have a crazy example of 6th century predictions coming to pass in the next 5 centuries! When we read about the statue in the king's dream, something surprising happens...

⁴⁴ "In the days of those kings, the God of the heavens will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, and this kingdom will not be left to another people. It will crush all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, but will itself endure forever. ⁴⁵ You saw a stone break off from the mountain without a hand touching it, and it crushed the iron, bronze, fired clay, silver, and gold. The great God has told the king what will happen in the future. The dream is certain, and its interpretation reliable." -Daniel 2:44

The stone and the hope of human history.

What does the stone represent?

In Daniel's vision, a rock or stone from heaven crashes into the statue. Daniel does not tell us exactly what this rock represents but, we know from the New Testament that it refers to the coming of Jesus! in [Luke 20:18](#), Jesus identifies himself with it, referring to himself, he speaks of everyone on whom this rock falls will be crushed to pieces.



When does the Messiah come?

In the dream, the rock strikes the legs of iron. In other words, he comes three kingdoms after the first Babylonian one – that’s during the Roman empire. Amazingly, this is exactly when Jesus came!

Was there a reason Jesus came when he came?

DEFINITELY YES! Galatians 4:4 says, *‘When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son.’*, God created the perfect historical conditions for the arrival of Jesus, and the spread of the message of Jesus. Just think, at just the time Jesus came...

- Synagogues were in the major cities of the world! The Babylonians had moved most of the Jews from their homes, letting them live as Jews all over the world. By the time Jesus came were synagogues everywhere. When early church leaders like the apostle Paul went to any city in the world, they were able to preach first in a synagogue!

- There was one language! Alexander the Great united the world with the Greek language. With one world language, the gospel spread quickly across the nations.

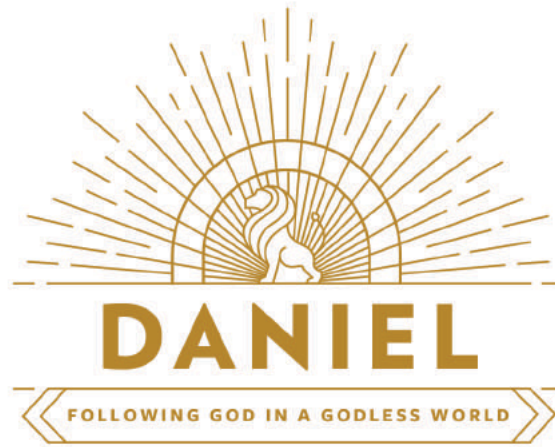
- There was order. The Romans created the “Pax Romana” (The Peace of Rome), making it safe for the first time in history for civilians to travel all over the empire. And, the Romans built roads all across the empire, making it possible for the gospel to spread like wildfire across the empire.

In other words, rare as they were in human history, the conditions were just right for the explosive spread of the gospel. God orchestrated the circumstances and perfectly timed the sending of his Son Jesus.

Reflection

God planned Jesus’ arrival on earth perfectly – let’s think today about where God has placed you and how you can share the Gospel with people who you have in your life. Maybe you want to refer back to the names you wrote down and pray that god would give you a moment to share the gospel with them. If you are uncertain about what to share you can watch this 2 minute video to help you:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V7mURm-8cOI>



Day 11: The hope of human history

We're still just scraping the surface of the king's dream. Today let's take a closer look at those verses in Daniel 2 about the stone, the hope of human history...

³⁴ As you were watching, a stone broke off without a hand touching it, struck the statue on its feet of iron and fired clay, and crushed them. ³⁵ Then the iron, the fired clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were shattered and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors. The wind carried them away, and not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the statue became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. – Daniel 2:34-35

⁴⁴ "In the days of those kings, the God of the heavens will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, and this kingdom will not be left to another people. It will crush all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, but will itself endure forever. ⁴⁵ You saw a stone break off from the mountain without a hand touching it, and it crushed the iron, bronze, fired clay, silver, and gold. – Daniel 2:44-45

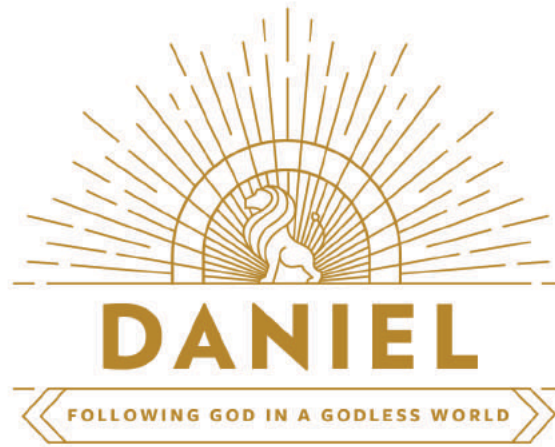
Jesus is heaven's stone. Who is this stone in Daniel 2:34? It is Jesus Christ himself. The bible clearly shows us this.

- The psalmist wrote, 'The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone' (Psalm 118:22).
- The prophet Isaiah said, 'He will be as a sanctuary, but a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense to both the houses of Israel' (Isaiah 8:14).

To Israel, Jesus was a 'stone of stumbling.' Israel was looking for a political leader/king to free them from Roman rule. but Jesus came the first time as a suffering Servant. He entered Jerusalem on a donkey not a stallion. His crown was made of thorns, and his c happened on a cross! Just as the prophecies had said, the Jewish builders rejected the cornerstone of God's plan for salvation.

Jesus is the king of a kingdom! Daniel says that the rock refers to 'the kingdom that God will set up. It's not surprising then that Jesus' main message was: 'The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the good news' (Mark 1:14-15).

What do we learn about His kingdom from Daniel 2?



Christ's kingdom is a kingdom of God not man. The statue is made by people but, this rock is made by the hands of God. The rock cut from the mountain is Christ's kingdom, which is God's kingdom. Said in another way, God the Father rules through his Son. To embrace the Son as king is to embrace the Father as king.

Christ's kingdom is a growing kingdom. The rock 'became a great mountain and filled the whole earth'. Simply, the rock grows and grows. Christ's kingdom started over 2000 years ago in a small part of the earth is growing all the time! More and more people from more and more towns and cities and nations are experiencing more and more of the kingdom. The New Testament ends with just over 30 mentioned churches in existence – there are now 38 million of them. That's CRAZY!

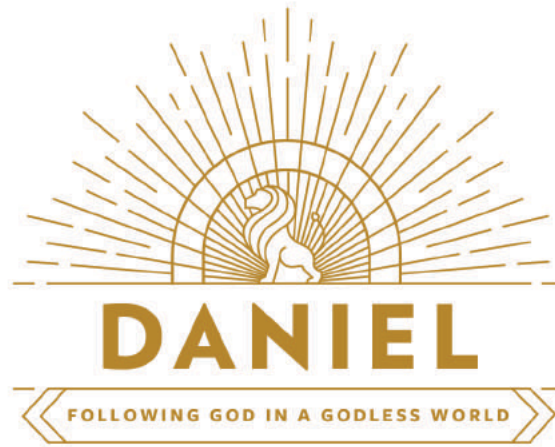
Christ's kingdom threatens every other kingdom. In the vision the rock smashes the statue. This shows how Christ's kingdom is different to every kingdom of man. There is no human system that is entirely compatible with Christ's kingdom. Every human-made culture, every system of thought, every political power - no matter how good it is – is at odds with Christ and his rule on some points.

Christ's kingdom ultimately outlasts and displaces every other kingdom. At the end of time the only kingdom standing will be Christ's. It will be a huge mountain that fills the whole earth. One day it will be said, 'The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of Christ' (Rev 11:15). Christ's kingdom is eternal and here forever, every other one is only temporary. Wonderfully, Jesus has outlasted the very kingdom that crucified him.

What happens after the Roman empire ends? The vision does not go beyond the empire that Jesus came. But even though these kingdoms have fallen, the iron, bronze, silver and gold are all together, broken in pieces. In other words, all kingdoms are made of similar stuff to those earlier kingdoms.

Reflection

Christ's kingdom will eventually replace every other kingdom – how have you seen Jesus' influence and leadership grow in your life?



Day 12: Smiling Face, Frowning Providence

When we reflect on the vision of Daniel 2, we can learn two more things about God:

1. God is in control of everything.

Daniel believed God was in control of the circumstances of his life. This helped him survive major trauma. He seemed to know this about God: 'Behind a frowning providence, He hides a smiling face.'

He did not relate the hard times of life with the character of God.

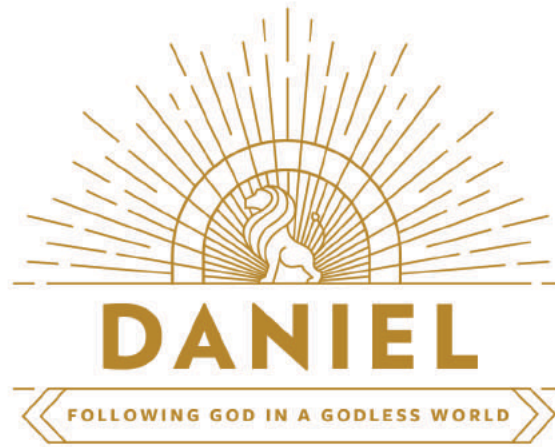
Think how hectic life had been for Daniel. One day he turns 16, enjoying a big supportive family, in a culture that supports his faith. You could see that he had a bright future ahead of him. Then in that same year, he is kidnapped and dragged off to a godless land where he is forced to study forbidden magic arts, renamed after a demon and put to work for the same wicked king who destroyed his home land, and mocked his God – “and later gives the order to execute him and his friends for nothing he had done. “

Daniel 2 reveals a God in control of the history of the world, even the massive changing of kingdoms and the events of our lives, even the toughest ones.

How do we relate the goodness of God with the difficult realities of life? We learn four things from Daniel...

1. We live in a fallen world where God at best tolerates evil and suffering. God allows our evil choices but doesn't make us choose them. God's ultimate power does not mean that we are puppets on his string. Sure, no one can change his plans, but we are still free to make sinful choices that we are responsible for. God puts up with this evil, as he waits for more people to respond to his gospel (2 Peter 3:9). If God were to eliminate evil, we would all be destroyed. So, he chooses to work into a world where much happens that is against Him.

2. God promises to work evil and suffering for higher purposes. He takes the evil choices of God's people and works them into his great big plan. We have the promise that God works all things for good (Rom 8:28). Every move we make that goes against his will and character, He absorbs into his own long-term victory game, turning evil for good. No tough thing that comes our way surprises or overwhelms God – it comes to us through the filter of His wisdom and love.



3. While we wait for a glorious future, we trust that God is with us. Daniel had been ripped from his former life and dumped into a terrible situation. There he experienced God's presence, guidance and help. We can expect the same treatment from God. No matter how much our current assignment or situation seems to frown, we trust in a God who smiles in love for us. He will never leave us nor forsake us.

2. God is able to put his people in positions of influence.

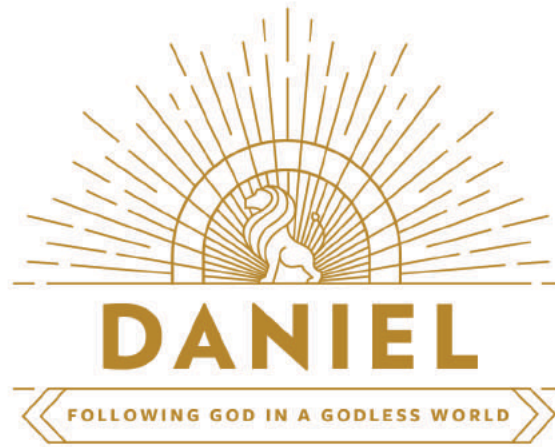
*⁴⁶ Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell facedown, worshiped Daniel, and gave orders to present an offering and incense to him. ⁴⁷ The king said to Daniel, "Your God is indeed God of gods, Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, since you were able to reveal this mystery." ⁴⁸ Then the king promoted Daniel and gave him many generous gifts. He made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon and chief governor over all the wise men of Babylon. ⁴⁹ At Daniel's request, the king appointed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to manage the province of Babylon. But Daniel remained at the king's court. – **Daniel 2:46-49***

Amazingly, God uses this crazy situation to promote Daniel to be 'ruler over the whole entire province' and over 'all the wise men of Babylon' – the lucky survivors who owe their lives to Daniel. Daniel then used his position to promote his three friends.

Nebuchadnezzar saw Daniel's God-given ability to describe and then interpret the dream and admits '*your God is indeed God of gods and Lord of kings*'. But notice that he was not converted... he falls on his face and worships Daniel, but not God! In fact, in the very next story (chapter 3) he commands his empire to 'fall down and worship the golden image' he himself sets up.

Reflection

What experiences have you had with evil or suffering that caused you to doubt or be perplexed by God's being in control? Does Daniel's story help you understand these situations?



Day 13: The Forced Religion

In chapter 3, we come to the third story in the book of Daniel. It occurs many years into Daniel's service of the Babylonian king...

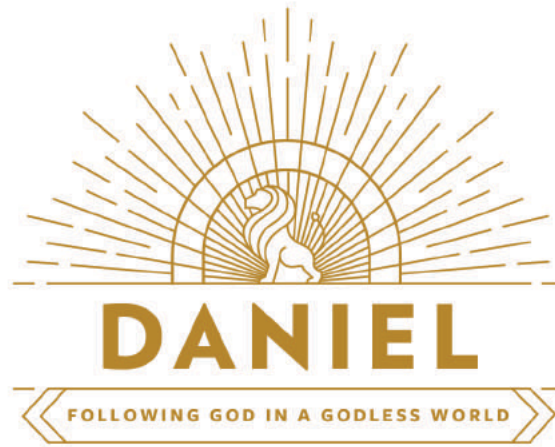
³ King Nebuchadnezzar made a gold statue, ninety feet high and nine feet wide. He set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. ² King Nebuchadnezzar sent word to assemble the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates, and all the rulers of the provinces to attend the dedication of the statue King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. ³ So the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates, and all the rulers of the provinces assembled for the dedication of the statue the king had set up. Then they stood before the statue Nebuchadnezzar had set up. ⁴ A herald loudly proclaimed, "People of every nation and language, you are commanded: ⁵ When you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, drum, and every kind of music, you are to fall facedown and worship the gold statue that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. ⁶ But whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire." ⁷ Therefore, when all the people heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, and every kind of music, people of every nation and language fell down and worshiped the gold statue that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. – Daniel 3:3-7

Nebuchadnezzar built a statue that either represents himself, or the main god that Babylonians worshipped, Marduk. The statue was close on 30 metres high and 3 metres wide.

Then he created an elaborate day of national worship. All the people who represented the Babylonian government were instructed to gather at the statue on the plain on an appointed day. There was to be an elaborate ceremony, including a massive orchestra as well as climatic moment when all are to fall face down in worship of this image. To make the occasion even more important the king issued a threat that if anyone failed to attend and worship, they would be executed.

This is called state-religion.

What is state-religion? State-religion is when the government, chooses one religion and imposes it upon all the people of the land. Perhaps they enforce some special days, pageants and gatherings in the annual calendar where the nation is to honour this religion. Sometimes there



are special places of worship where people gather. In some situations you may have other beliefs in private, but in public the nation is meant to stand united around this common religion.

The problem? There are at least 3:

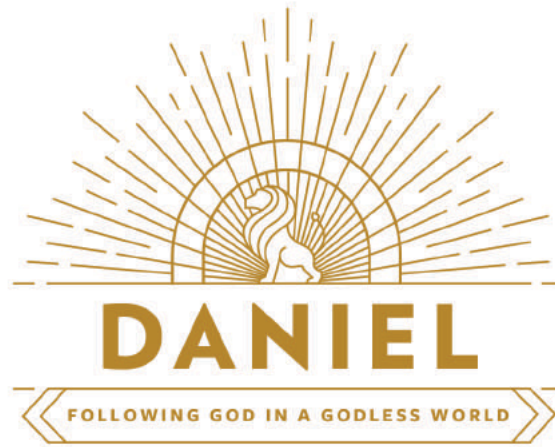
- 1. People are executed.** That's what we see happening in Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar – 'worship this god – or else!' These people are often referred to as martyrs and are killed for their belief in God. This makes sharing their faith nearly impossible!
- 2. Unity is confused with uniformity.** The king, in his quest for unity, thought that everyone must be uniform in their beliefs. But think how Daniel and his friends contributed to the well-being of the Babylonian kingdom, even though they held a small belief system that disagreed with the king's belief system.
- 3. Religion is practiced privately.** Believers do not share their faith with others and keep their beliefs about God to themselves.

The solution?

Separate church and state. Jesus seemed to teach this when he famously said, 'Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.' Instead of combining God's authority and state authority, he showed how both God and government had a legitimate claim upon people, but they were clearly separate.

Reflection

If you were in the position of Daniel and his friends – what would you do? Would you bow down to the statue or would you stand firm in your faith. You could spend some time praying for God to give you strength today in situations where you need to stand firm in your faith.



Day 14: Refusing Idolatry

Let's remember the picture of thousands of people bowing down in worship before a statue. Yesterday we read of how the Babylonians were to gather to *'fall facedown and worship the gold statue' (3:5)*.

This is called idolatry.

At the core of the Jewish faith is the determination to worship God alone and to not worship any false gods (these are the first and second of the Ten Commandments). Worshipping this image of gold was a serious sin. Nebuchadnezzar knew about the God of Israel, but he worshipped idols. He commanded all the people under his rule to do the same. Various cultures still worship idols. Daniel is pressured by his king to worship this idol but in our day, idolatry is less about following the king but more about following the crowd.

These days its less about worshipping an actual statue and more about finding our identity, meaning and hope in something other than God.

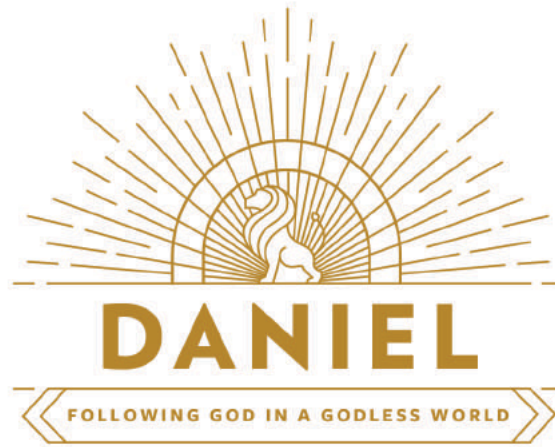
Idol worship is as old as time. People have looked at the forces of nature and have given these forces to invisible false gods. These "gods" are given person like qualities, but they were invisible. Carvings and statues of these gods were built to become idols, physical representations of these gods. It was understood that the idol itself was enveloped in the aura of the god it represented and became a god itself.

The worship of statues still happens around the world but where we find ourselves it isn't very common

But idolatry is as strong as ever! The prophet Ezekiel spoke of *"those who have set up idols in their hearts, embracing things that make them fall into sin" (14:3)*, John Calvin, the Reformer said, 'The heart is an idol factory'.

He referred to the human tendency to elevate parts of creation, making them ultimate, making them the objects of our meaning, identity, worth, joy, salvation, hope and focus.

So the modern 'gods' that so many people worship are the gods of love, pleasure, money and power. People live for these things as though they were God. A person may believe in God but still give their daily devotion to lesser gods, to idols.



Still today, depending on the family or culture we grow up in, we can have specific gods that are thrust upon us, just like idol worship was forced by Nebuchadnezzar upon his people. One family or culture may give primary focus to the god of comfort, another the god of family relationships, another the god of stuff, another the god of educational achievement, another the god of pleasure, another the god of reputation.

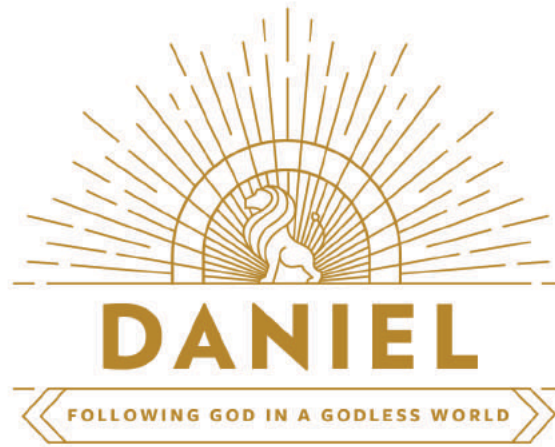
We must learn to see what “gods” have been forced upon us by our specific family or culture, and refuse to treat them as ultimate. Our primary meaning, identity, worth, joy, salvation, hope and focus should be found in the True and Living God, who alone is worthy of our worship. All of these idols attract God’s judgment, and they don’t satisfy us, they actually hurt us when we can’t have them or when we lose them, they fill us with anxiety when we have them but when we realize we might lose them they exhaust us in our efforts to get and keep them.

It is much better to find our identity in God who blesses us as we trust him, who can fill our souls with lasting joy, who cannot be lost anymore than he can lose his grip on us, who replaces despair with hope and anxiety with joy, who renews and refreshes us rather than driving us, who is ready to forgive us when we fail him.

As CS Lewis says, ‘A car is made to run on petrol, and it would not run properly on anything else. Now God designed the human machine to run on himself. He himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn, or the food our spirits were designed to feed on. There is no other. That is why it is just no good asking God to make us happy in our own way without bothering about knowing Him. God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing.’

Reflection

Which idols have been most effective in distracting you from your relationship with God? In what ways have they let you down?



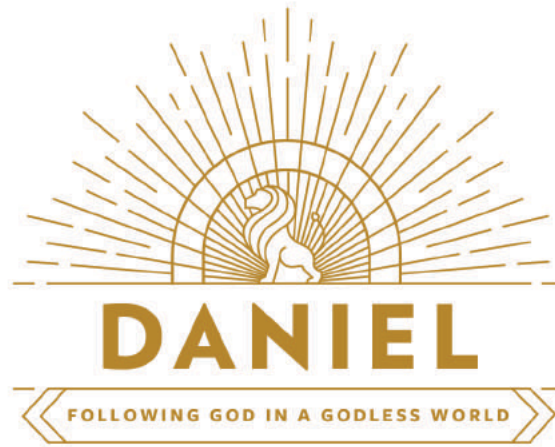
Day 15: Fortified obedience

The decisions we make every week are shaped either by spiritual convictions or outward pressure. But in today's reading Daniel's friends teach us that there are two things that support our efforts to live true to our inner compass: the support of community, and the courage to stand with God no matter what. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego obey God rather than the king. How did they do it?

*⁸Some Chaldeans took this occasion to come forward and maliciously accuse the Jews. ⁹They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "May the king live forever. ¹⁰You as king have issued a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, drum, and every kind of music must fall down and worship the gold statue. ¹¹Whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire. ¹²There are some Jews you have appointed to manage the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men have ignored you, the king; they do not serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up." ¹³Then in a furious rage Nebuchadnezzar gave orders to bring in Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king. ¹⁴Nebuchadnezzar asked them, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, is it true that you don't serve my gods or worship the gold statue I have set up? ¹⁵Now if you're ready, when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, drum, and every kind of music, fall down and worship the statue I made. But if you don't worship it, you will immediately be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire—and who is the god who can rescue you from my power?" ¹⁶Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied to the king, "Nebuchadnezzar, we don't need to give you an answer to this question. ¹⁷If the God we serve exists, then he can rescue us from the furnace of blazing fire, and he can rescue us from the power of you, the king. ¹⁸But even if he does not rescue us, we want you as king to know that we will not serve your gods or worship the gold statue you set up." - **Daniel 3:8-18***

1. Spiritual friends help us obey.

A strong theme in the book of Daniel is the relationship between Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Theirs was a friendship held together by a shared faith in the same God. There were other young men from Israel, but they didn't share the same level of devotion to God as these four men (see 1:6). It seems that their common love for God was the strength for these friendships.



I don't think the four men would have had the courage to stand against the luxuriance of Babylon and the prospect of eating foods they shouldn't ,or if they would have been able to face the thought of execution if they did not have each other.

Still today, every Christian desperately needs to find some friends who share their love for God. These friends are a source of strength and courage when temptation to give up comes our way. Hebrews 3:13 reminds us to 'Encourage one another daily, as long as it is called "Today," so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.'

2. The courage to obey God no matter what fortifies our obedience.

Obedience releases spiritual joy into our lives. Jesus said, 'Blessed are those who hear the word of God and do it.' But there are times where obeying God can come at great cost.

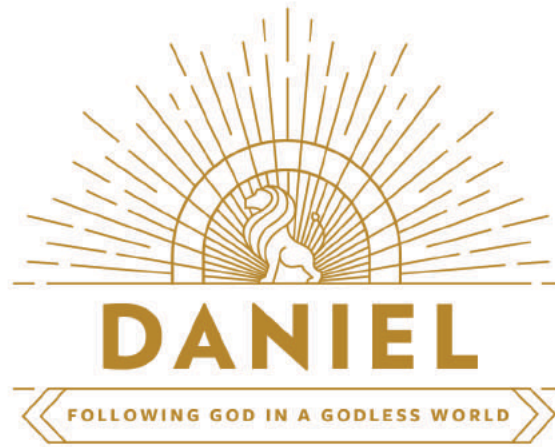
Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had to choose between obeying the king and God. If they obeyed the king, they would live. If they obeyed God, they would die. How easy would it have been to justify this disobedience to God with the justification that "in the future we could do more for God if we were alive than if we were dead." What would they do? Apparently the second of the Ten Commandments rang in their inner ear: 'You shall not bow down to worship an idol for I am a jealous God'.

They decided to not attend the worship event, in direct disobedience to the king. All would have gone well, except that some of the 'Chaldean' wise men were so jealous of the promotion of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and they told the king about their disobedience. Nebuchadnezzar was furious when he found out and interrogated them to see if it was true, threatening them with death in a fiery furnace!

Their courageous answer is historic: '*We want you as king to know that we will not serve your gods or worship the gold statue you set up*' (v18). Long before this particular situation these men had decided to obey God no matter what.

Reflection

Who are the spiritual friends you need to be obedient to God?



Day 16: The Fourth Man

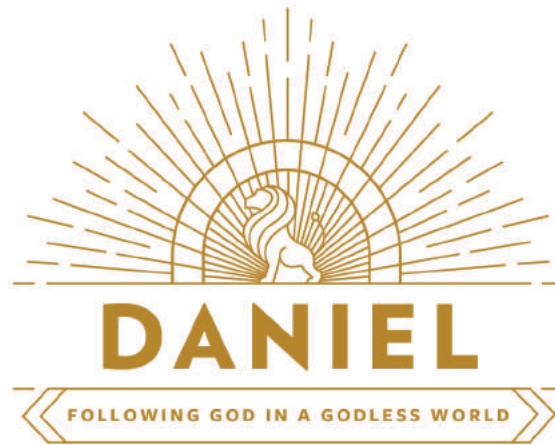
How did the mad king would respond to the open disobedience in Daniel's friends? Let's see...

19 Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with rage, and the expression on his face changed toward Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He gave orders to heat the furnace seven times more than was customary,²⁰ and he commanded some of the best soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and throw them into the furnace of blazing fire.²¹ So these men, in their trousers, robes, head coverings, and other clothes, were tied up and thrown into the furnace of blazing fire.²² Since the king's command was so urgent and the furnace extremely hot, the raging flames killed those men who carried Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego up.²³ And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego fell, bound, into the furnace of blazing fire.²⁴ Then King Nebuchadnezzar jumped up in alarm. He said to his advisers, "Didn't we throw three men, bound, into the fire?"
"Yes, of course, Your Majesty," they replied to the king.
25 He exclaimed, "Look! I see four men, not tied, walking around in the fire unharmed; and the fourth looks like a son of the gods." -Daniel 3:19-25

God promises to be with us in crazy difficult times. The men had decided to obey God and to disobey the king, and that meant they would be thrown into the fiery furnace. They had told the king that God was able to rescue them from the furnace (v17), but that even if he did not, they would still obey Him (v18).

The punishment was terrifying! The king's anger had become superheated. When he first called the men in, he was already in a mad rage (v13), but after they defied him, we're told that he was 'filled with more rage, and the expression of his face was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego' (v19). His superheated anger led him to command that the furnace also be superheated (v19), to such a heat that even the soldiers who threw these three men into the flame were killed.

What happened next stands as one of the most encouraging pictures of God being with us in the fiery trials of life. God spared them. He removed the ropes that bound them, helping them to their feet so they could walk in the midst of the fire. He insulated them! Stunningly, when the king took a closer look, he noticed that they were alive and that there was with them a fourth man! The angel's presence was the God's way of saying, 'When you are in the most difficult times, there I am with you!'



²⁶ Nebuchadnezzar then approached the door of the furnace of blazing fire and called: "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, you servants of the Most High God—come out!" So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out of the fire. ²⁷ When the satraps, prefects, governors, and the king's advisers gathered around, they saw that the fire had no effect on the bodies of these men: not a hair of their heads was singed, their robes were unaffected, and there was no smell of fire on them. ²⁸ Nebuchadnezzar exclaimed, "Praise to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego! He sent his angel and rescued his servants who trusted in him. They violated the king's command and risked their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. ²⁹ Therefore I issue a decree that anyone of any people, nation, or language who says anything offensive against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego will be torn limb from limb and his house made a garbage dump. For there is no other god who is able to deliver like this." ³⁰ Then the king rewarded Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon. -Daniel 3:26-30

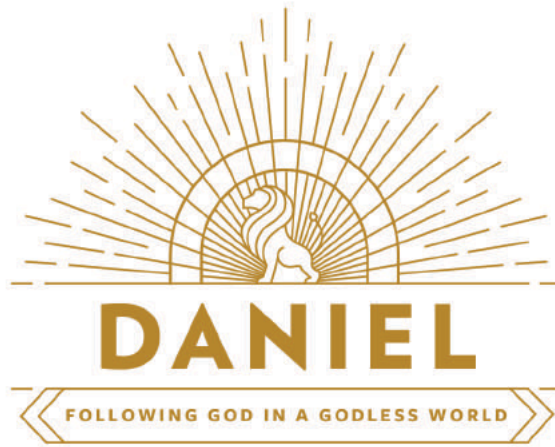
God promises to reward our determination to not compromise.

The astonished king recognized that the God of these three men was 'the Most High God'. Though he had just minutes before punished them for disobeying him, he highly honoured them for doing so. He did it by making their religion one of the acceptable religions in Babylon (and not to be persecuted at the risk of death) (v29) and promoting them even more highly in his kingdom!

When we stand with God, he stands with us. When we honour him, he tends to honour us. This honour may only come on Judgment Day when he publicly declares to the whole universe that he is pleased with us. Or it may come in this life already – where God honours us in the sight of people. Either way, our reward is to have God say to us, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant!'

Reflection

Have you experienced God being with you in fiery trials? If so, when? Listen to this worship song (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zmNc0L7Ac5c>) as an encouragement today.



Day 17: The King's Open Letter

Today we read an abridged version of Daniel 4. We will read of the king's second dream and how Daniel interprets it, then of the king's humiliation and final restoration.

As you read it look for sentences and ideas that stick out to you. Think about the meaning of this passage today. Tomorrow we will look at 4 powerful things that come from it. Maybe today you want to take your bible out and highlight in it.

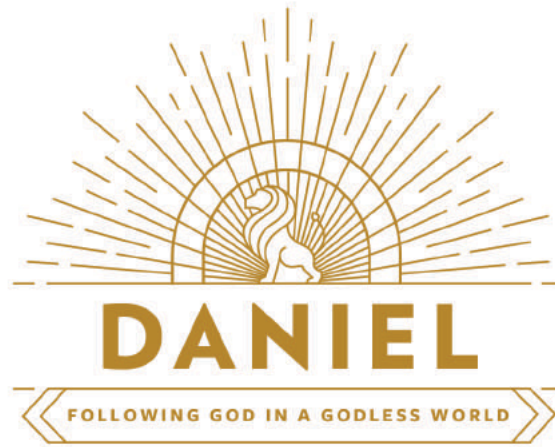
¹ King Nebuchadnezzar to all peoples, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth: ² It has seemed good to me to show the signs and wonders that the Most High God has done for me. ³ How great are his wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom.

Nebuchadnezzar's Second Dream

⁴ I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at ease in my house and prospering in my palace. ⁵ I saw a dream that made me afraid. ⁶ So I made a decree that all the wise men of Babylon should be brought before me, that they might make known to me the interpretation of the dream. ⁷ Then the magicians, the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the astrologers came in, and I told them the dream, but they could not make known to me its interpretation. ⁸ At last Daniel came in before me—he who was named Belteshazzar after the name of my god, and in whom is the spirit of the holy gods — and I told him the dream: ⁹ "Because I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you... tell me the visions of my dream and their interpretation. ¹⁰ I saw, and behold, a tree in the midst of the earth, and its height was great. ¹¹ The tree grew and became strong, and its top reached to heaven, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth. ¹² Its leaves were beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, and the birds of the heavens lived in its branches, and all flesh was fed from it.

¹³ "[Then] a watcher, a holy one, came down from heaven. ¹⁴ He proclaimed aloud and said thus: 'Chop down the tree and lop off its branches, strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the beasts flee from under it and the birds from its branches. ¹⁵ But leave the stump of its roots in the earth, bound with a band of iron and bronze, amid the tender grass of the field. Let him be wet with the dew of heaven. Let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth. ¹⁶ Let his mind be changed from a man's, and let a beast's mind be given to him; and let seven periods of time pass over him...

¹⁹ Then Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, was dismayed for a while, and his thoughts alarmed him. Belteshazzar answered and said, "My lord, may the dream be for those who hate you and its interpretation for your enemies!" ²⁰ The tree you saw, which grew and became

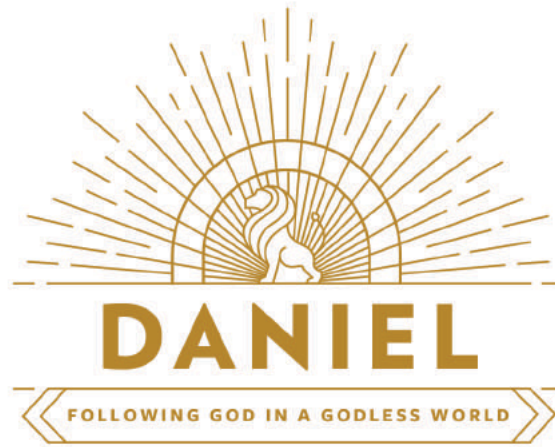


strong —²² it is you, O king, who have grown and become strong. Your greatness has grown and reaches to heaven, and your dominion to the ends of the earth.²³ And because the king saw a watcher, a holy one, coming down from heaven and saying, 'Chop down the tree and destroy it, but leave the stump of its roots in the earth'²⁴ this is the interpretation, O king: It is a decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king,²⁵ that you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. You shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and you shall be wet with the dew of heaven, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, till you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.²⁶ And as it was commanded to leave the stump of the roots of the tree, your kingdom shall be confirmed for you from the time that you know that Heaven rules.²⁷ Therefore, O king, break off your sins by practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity."

²⁸ All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar.²⁹ At the end of twelve months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace³⁰ and the king said, "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?"³¹ While the words were still in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, "O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you.³² Immediately the word was fulfilled against Nebuchadnezzar. He was driven from among men and ate grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair grew as long as eagles' feathers, and his nails were like birds' claws.

³⁴ At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever, for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation;³⁵ all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, "What have you done?"

³⁶ At the same time my reason returned to me, and for the glory of my kingdom, my majesty and splendor returned to me. My counselors and my lords sought me, and I was established in my kingdom, and still more greatness was added to me.³⁷ Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble.



Day 18: Humbled and Exalted

A quick recap of what we read yesterday in Daniel 4: It consists of King Nebuchadnezzar's open letter and testimony to his empire, telling how 'the Most High God' (v2) performed signs and wonders on his behalf. It starts with the conclusion – his permanent realization of the greatness and unending rule of God (v3).

He then tells the events that led him to this insight. It all started with the king having a terrifying dream of a tall tree being cut down but not fully destroyed. The tree stump then mutated into a person who had lost their mind, being reduced to the intelligence and diet of a beast (v4-17).

Daniel interpreted it for him: the cut-down tree and the man-come-animal refers to the king himself, whom God will humble (v18-26) unless he repents (v27).

The king evidently did not repent – within a year this warning came to pass (v28). At the height of his pride, the king's intelligence and behaviour was reduced to that of an ox for a period of time (v29-33). After a long time, God restored him to sanity and rule (v34-36), giving him this testimony: 'All God's works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble. (v37).

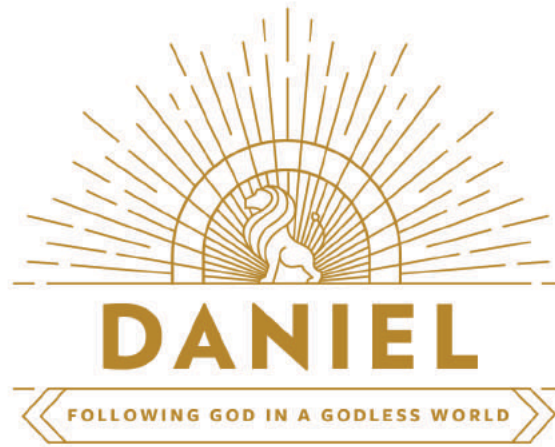
So what do we learn from this sensational chapter?

1. It's possible to be impressed by God, yet not be converted.

Before these events, the king had not converted, despite knowing that God is real and that he can speak (2:47). This despot had lived for himself, demanding worship (3:1-4). He had no love for God, and certainly not for God's people (3:19-23). Though he had been astonished by the miraculous rescue of Daniel's friends in the furnace (3:24-28), yet he still remained unrepentant and complacent. Drunk on his own power and importance, he seemed to see God as his equal.

Still today, people might be Christians in namesake, acknowledging Jesus' greatness and reality, yet not genuinely trusting in and surrendering to him. This happens when our own sense of self-importance or self-satisfaction shrinks our view of Jesus, in the same way streetlights can dim our view of the stars above them.

After these events, the king had been converted. He had repented. He had a radical change of mind and heart. He had seen reality in a whole new way. No longer would he merely flatter God and Daniel, God's servant. Now he was brought to his knees before 'the Most High who rules the



kingdom of men' (v33) and whose 'works are right and ways are just' (v37). No longer a persecutor of the faith, he points others to it.

2. Even people with great power, wealth or fame can be saved.

Nebuchadnezzar was the world's only megawatt super-celebrity as well as the world's most powerful person. He personally owned a large portion of the planet's real estate. And yet God was able to bring him to repentance. 'With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible' (Matt 19:26).

Hard as it is for us to imagine how he can, God has his ways and means of penetrating through the defenses of those who think they have need of nothing. This is as true today as it was then. We can ask God to save people with great fame and wealth.

3. God uses people to reach people.

Daniel was one of the means God used to reach the king. We learn from Daniel how God may also use us to reach people far from God:

Like Daniel, we can earn the respect and trust of people. Since Daniel previously helped him interpret a dream, he had remained faithful to him. He had shown the king respect on even those occasions when truly he deserved none (2:16).

Like Daniel, we should genuinely love people. Daniel had learnt to love the man who had brought most pain in his life. Strikingly, he did not delight in the king's imminent downfall. The first to understand the meaning of the dream, he was 'dismayed for a while' (v19), distraught that the king would suffer so.

Like Daniel, we should have the courage to tell people whom we love the truth. Daniel knew that the king would not like the bad news he had to bring. Yet he shared it. Though the gospel message is good news, it also alerts people to the reality of their desperate need for salvation – the emptiness of life without Christ and the prospect of a Christ-less eternity.

Reflection

Who are the people far from God that you are reaching out to? What can you learn from Daniel as you do? Continue to pray for those friends or family members whose names you wrote down.



Day 19: Handwriting on the Wall

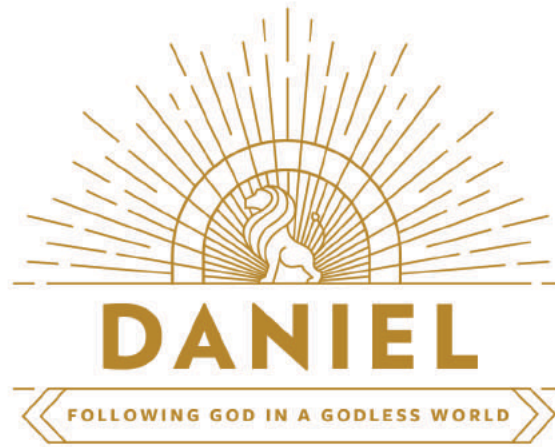
The first 4 chapters of Daniel cover his service under Nebuchadnezzar. In chapter 1 and 2 Daniel is a teen. In this chapter he is in his early 80's and now serves an arrogant successor. Let's read the chapter in full today. Look for sentences and ideas that stick out to you. Over the next 2 days we will unpack what we read today.

¹King Belshazzar held a great feast for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine in their presence. ²Under the influence of the wine, Belshazzar gave orders to bring in the gold and silver vessels that his predecessor Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, wives, and concubines could drink from them. ³So they brought in the gold vessels that had been taken from the temple, the house of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his nobles, wives, and concubines drank from them. ⁴They drank the wine and praised their gods made of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone.

⁵At that moment the fingers of a man's hand appeared and began writing on the plaster of the king's palace wall next to the lampstand. As the king watched the hand that was writing, ⁶his face turned pale, and his thoughts so terrified him that he soiled himself and his knees knocked together. ⁷The king shouted to bring in the mediums, Chaldeans, and diviners. He said to these wise men of Babylon, "Whoever reads this inscription and gives me its interpretation will be clothed in purple, have a gold chain around his neck, and have the third highest position in the kingdom." ⁸So all the king's wise men came in, but none could read the inscription or make its interpretation known to him. ⁹Then King Belshazzar became even more terrified, his face turned pale, and his nobles were bewildered.

¹⁰Because of the outcry of the king and his nobles, the queen came to the banquet hall. "May the king live forever," she said. "Don't let your thoughts terrify you or your face be pale. ¹¹There is a man in your kingdom who has a spirit of the holy gods in him. In the days of your predecessor he was found to have insight, intelligence, and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods. Your predecessor, King Nebuchadnezzar, appointed him chief of the magicians, mediums, Chaldeans, and diviners. Your own predecessor, the king, ¹²did this because Daniel, the one the king named Beltshazzar, was found to have an extraordinary spirit, knowledge and intelligence, and the ability to interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve problems. Therefore, summon Daniel, and he will give the interpretation."

¹³Then Daniel was brought before the king. The king said to him, "Are you Daniel, one of the Judean exiles that my predecessor the king brought from Judah?" ¹⁴I've heard that you have a



spirit of the gods in you, and that insight, intelligence, and extraordinary wisdom are found in you. ¹⁵ Now the wise men and mediums were brought before me to read this inscription and make its interpretation known to me, but they could not give its interpretation. ¹⁶ However, I have heard about you that you can give interpretations and solve problems. Therefore, if you can read this inscription and give me its interpretation, you will be clothed in purple, have a gold chain around your neck, and have the third highest position in the kingdom.”

¹⁷ Then Daniel answered the king, “You may keep your gifts and give your rewards to someone else; however, I will read the inscription for the king and make the interpretation known to him. ¹⁸ Your Majesty, the Most High God gave sovereignty, greatness, glory, and majesty to your predecessor Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁹ Because of the greatness he gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages were terrified and fearful of him. He killed anyone he wanted and kept alive anyone he wanted; he exalted anyone he wanted and humbled anyone he wanted. ²⁰ But when his heart was exalted and his spirit became arrogant, he was deposed from his royal throne and his glory was taken from him. ²¹ He was driven away from people, his mind was like an animal’s, he lived with the wild donkeys, he was fed grass like cattle, and his body was drenched with dew from the sky until he acknowledged that the Most High God is ruler over human kingdoms and sets anyone he wants over them.

²² “But you his successor, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, even though you knew all this. ²³ Instead, you have exalted yourself against the Lord of the heavens. The vessels from his house were brought to you, and as you and your nobles, wives, and concubines drank wine from them, you praised the gods made of silver and gold, bronze, iron, wood, and stone, which do not see or hear or understand. But you have not glorified the God who holds your life-breath in his hand and who controls the whole course of your life. ²⁴ Therefore, he sent the hand, and this writing was inscribed.

²⁵ “This is the writing that was inscribed: Mene, Mene, Tekel, and Parsin. ²⁶ This is the interpretation of the message:

‘Mene’ means that God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end.

²⁷ ‘Tekel’ means that you have been weighed on the balance and found deficient.

²⁸ ‘Peres’ means that your kingdom has been divided and given to the Medes and Persians.”

²⁹ Then Belshazzar gave an order, and they clothed Daniel in purple, placed a gold chain around his neck, and issued a proclamation concerning him that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.

*³⁰ That very night Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans was killed, ³¹ and Darius the Mede received the kingdom at the age of sixty-two. – **Daniel 5:1-30***



Day 20: The Arrogant King

Who is Belshazzar of chapter 5, yesterday's reading? Decades after Nebuchadnezzar's passing away, he was the eldest son of Nabonidus, the king of Babylon. His father had put him in charge. He was recognized as a king in proxy of his dad (v9)

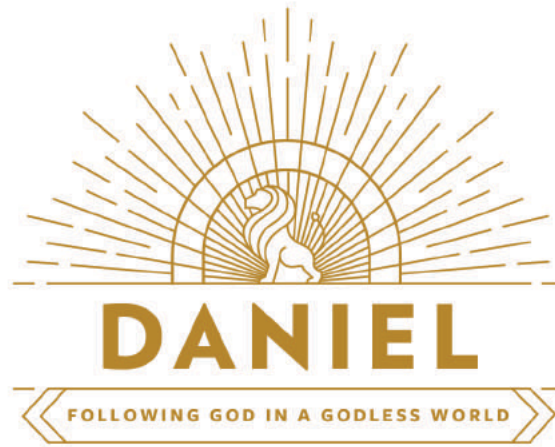
On the eve of his fall, Belshazzar saw a supernatural hand writing a message on the wall while throwing a party. He knew it was some kind of message to him, so offered his wise men a reward if they could tell him its meaning (v7). No one was able to help him at first (v8), which terrified him even more. His mother, the queen, remembered elderly Daniel could help him (v9-12). Daniel was called for and offered wealth and promotion if he could interpret the writing (v13-16). God showed Daniel what the writing on the wall meant (v24-28):

The words were 'Mene, Mene, Tekel, and Parsin'. Because they were Semitic words, only Daniel of Hebrew origins could read them.

1. 'Mene, Mene' was the name of a weight. Tekel was another term also meaning a weight, similar to the Hebrew word 'shekel'. Parsin, also a weight, was half a Mene. How did Daniel draw meaning out of these words? He explained that 'Mene' meant that God had evaluated the life of Belshazzar and had found him valueless, and his days were now coming to an end. The double usage of 'Mene' doubly emphasized this point.
2. Tekel, a much lighter weight than Mene, was God's way of saying that this man was without substance, his attitude to God and life was too light.
3. Parsin carried a double meaning. On the one hand it was a kind of weight, but the consonants 'p-r-s' also mean to divide in two. Two kingdoms, the Medes and the Persians, would combine to take over the Babylonian kingdom.

What had Belshazzar done that God deemed him so wanting and valueless? In essence, he was proud and arrogant. In fact, we find in Belshazzar's actions some common appearances of pride:

1. **Trying to impress elite people is a form of pride.** Belshazzar was throwing a huge party for a 1000 of his 'closest friends' – the elite of his empire (v1). This was not because he cared for them, but because he had lived his life trying to impress him.
2. **Self-gratification is a form of pride.** There were no limits to this party – every appetite was meant to be satiated. Rich food, bottomless cups of wine and the most beautiful women in the land – his many wives and concubines (v2). Despite his best efforts, this drunk king's devotion to



pleasure must not be confused with real happiness. A headlong immersion into sensuality is an attempt to compensate for the emptiness of soul that comes from his lack of spirituality.

3. Not learning from others is a form of pride. Belshazzar's great-great grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar's heart had once been exalted and his spirit arrogant (v20), but then God had humbled him and helped him understand that the Most High God is the one really had the power (v21). Belshazzar knew this story well and still chose to exalt himself against God. Humility enables us to learn from the lessons of others, but pride causes us to think we know better than those who have gone before us.

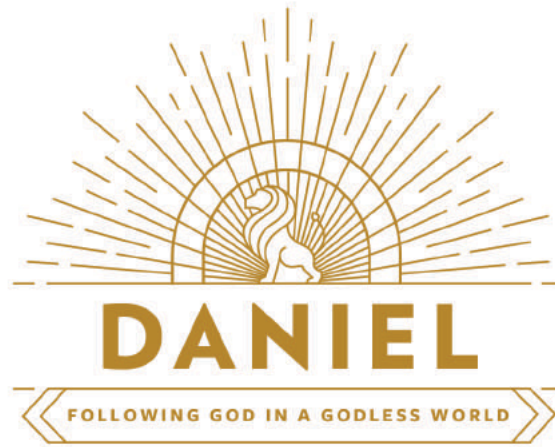
4. Suppressing what we know is a form of pride. God is more merciful to us when we genuinely do not know about him and his ways, but when we do have some knowledge, as Belshazzar had, he holds us accountable for that. Belshazzar took this sin one step further – he purposefully defied what he already knew. He did not just act apart from what he knew about God, he acted against what he knew about God (v23). This is a surefire way to draw God's wrath against one's self: 'For God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness of people who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth' (Rom 1:18).

5. Mocking God is a particularly ugly form of pride. At the height of his party and drunkenness, he ordered that the golden and silver cups, that decades earlier had been taken from the Jerusalem temple, be brought out for the next round of drinks. He then led everyone in a toast to their gods – Marduk, Nabu, Bel, Ishtar – as a way of mocking the God of Israel (v2-4). Daniel honed in on this sin, by chiding him for his failure to honour 'the God who holds your life-breath in his hand and who controls the whole course of your life' (v23).

6. Partying, when we should be praying, is a form of pride. It is likely that Belshazzar knew that the army of Cyrus of Persia was imminently going to attack the city of Babylon. Instead of admitting his vulnerability, repenting of his sins and calling on God for help, he instead opted to project an image of strength, inviting the leaders of his empire to come celebrate the strength of the empire. He may have fooled himself, and others, but would be shown to be the arrogant fool he was – that very night he would be executed by Cyrus (v30).

Reflection

In your own life, which of the 6 signs have you noticed when you become proud?



Day 21: Warning and judgment

We continue to reflect on Daniel 5, and the fall of Belshazzar and the fall of the Babylonian kingdom. Essentially, it's defeat at the hands of king Cyrus is the judgment of God. We learn much about the judgment of God in this terrifying account.

1. God would rather save than judge.

Even as we think about the judgment that comes upon king Belshazzar, let's not forget that decades before, an even more powerful king, his great-great grandfather Nebuchadnezzar, had also been proud and arrogant. In both chapter 4 and 5, these two powerful kings were given a warning by God, had that warning interpreted for them by Daniel, and made a choice in response. In the latter's case, the lack of repentance and humility meant that he forfeited the salvation that could have been his. Yet in his case, God had mercy on him and saved him. The reason: Nebuchadnezzar had humbled himself and repented. As we will see, Belshazzar rejected the offer of salvation, and so received judgment instead. God's preference of salvation over judgment is vividly evident in his sending Jesus to save us too: 'For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him' (John 3:17).

2. Before God judges us, he tends to issue a warning.

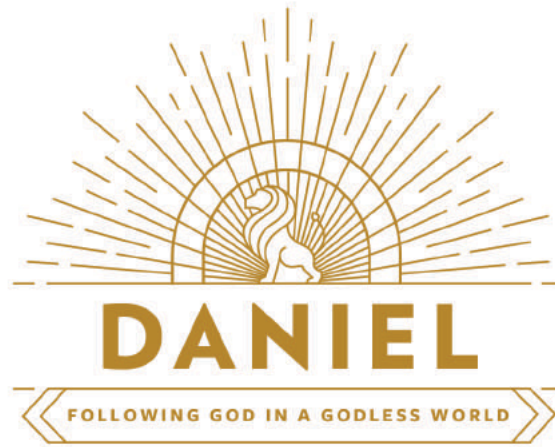
The warning of fingers scrawling words on a wall was nothing short of a miracle, every bit as supernatural as the miracles recorded in the earlier chapters of Daniel – such a supernatural revelation and interpretation of dreams (ch 2) or being preserved in the flames (ch 3). The fingers writing on the wall was not God's attempt to taunt Belshazzar, but were rather a final attempt to snap him out of his arrogant folly and hardness of heart. We should consider all of God's warnings to be acts of his patient kindness towards us.

3. Our conscience may register God's warning.

Even Belshazzar whose heart seemed to be hardened beyond the possibility of repentance, nonetheless showed signs of a guilty conscience. When he saw the writing on the wall, he went pale as a ghost, and his knees went weak. Some deep part of his heart still knew, even though he tried to suppress it, that one day he would give an account to God for his nauseating God-defiance and extreme self-centredness. That said, it is possible to be on a collision course with God's judgment and not to feel any guilt at all for what we have done.

4. God's word in the mouth of his messengers is the clearest kind of warning there is.

God had given Belshazzar an unusual sign, and caused his conscience to quake, but these were not clear enough. To make the matter transparent as possible, God sends Daniel, his messenger



to share with him his message. Still today, God is in the habit of bringing people into our lives who, using Scripture or by sharing a prophetic message, can warn us about the path of destruction we are on.

5. Only humbling ourselves and genuinely repenting can get us out of the danger we are in.

Belshazzar was in the habit of getting whatever he wanted by using his rank or his wealth. He thought that offering Daniel a golden chain around his neck and promoting him to the highest rank under himself (29) might be a way of cutting a deal with Daniel's God. Belshazzar had so lived his life to impress people, he had no sense of the God whose opinion of him ultimately matters. Daniel's cutting dismissal of this gesture ('You may keep your gifts and give your rewards to someone else' (v17)) was a reflection of the offence God took at this sentiment.

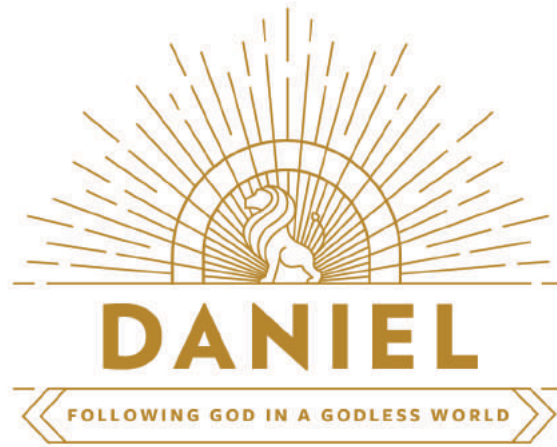
6. When we continue to fail to respond to God's warnings, God's judgment is on its way.

God had mercifully restrained his judgment, issuing warnings instead. But once Belshazzar had definitively and finally rejected these warnings, the volcano head of God's righteous anger began to smoke. There comes a time when God says 'Enough!' This reminds us of the apostle Paul's words about humanity's rejection of his merciful and kind warnings: 'Or do you despise the riches of his kindness, restraint, and patience, not recognizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance? Because of your hardened and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath, when God's righteous judgment is revealed' (Rom 2:4-5). Ultimately, we will experience God's judgment when we see him face to face, but some of his judgment may erupt long before that as we carry on in our wicked ways.

In Belshazzar's case, the judgment arrived within hours. The date was 16 October 539 BC, and history was unfolding. The Median and Persian soldiers of Cyrus had hours before diverted the river Tigris near Babylon. While the party was underway, the soldiers had been marching up the dry riverbed with the goal of breaking into the city. That night Belshazzar was killed, and the Babylonian empire fell. No matter how long judgment takes, if we fail to yield our lives to God and seek his mercy, when that judgment comes it will be swift and unyielding.

Reflection

Are there any possible warning signals or messages in your life that could be God trying to reveal bad choices or dangerous habits that are taking you away from His will for you? If yes, spend time in prayer asking God to help you change those habits and replace them with good habits that will help you follow God's leading in your life.



Day 22: A Trustworthy Person

¹ Darius decided to appoint 120 satraps over the kingdom, stationed throughout the realm, ² and over them three administrators, including Daniel. These satraps would be accountable to them so that the king would not be defrauded. ³ Daniel distinguished himself above the administrators and satraps because he had an extraordinary spirit, so the king planned to set him over the whole realm. ⁴ The administrators and satraps, therefore, kept trying to find a charge against Daniel regarding the kingdom. But they could find no charge or corruption, for he was trustworthy, and no negligence or corruption was found in him. - Daniel 6:1-4

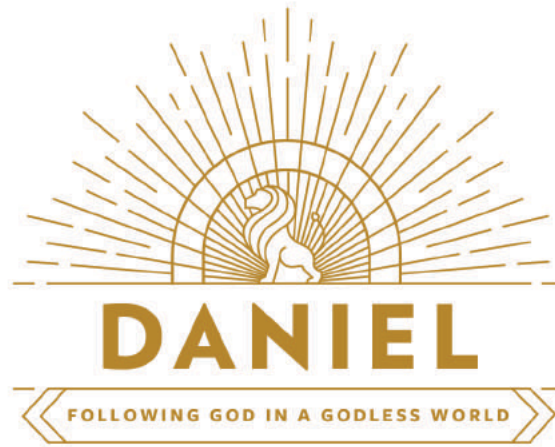
Daniel inspires us to become more trustworthy people. Daniel had served under 3 or 4 kings in the Babylonian empire. At this point in the story, at a ripe old age, he served under the founding king, Darius of the succeeding kingdom, Persia. Most likely, Darius was another name for Cyrus. (Daniel 6:28 should be translated: 'So this Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius, that is, during the reign of Cyrus the Persian.') Darius would reign from 522-486 BC and had the privilege of having an elderly Daniel ready to serve him for the first part of this reign. (We do not know when Daniel passed away.)

As with prior kings, this new king trusted him at first to be one of his top 3 (v2), and because he was so trustworthy there, finally to be his 2nd in Command, setting him 'over the whole realm' (v3). What was it about Daniel that made him so trustworthy?

1. Integrity makes us trustworthy.

It seems that financial corruption was costing the king much money (v2) – those who could be trusted with money were rare. Daniel had proven himself in the handling of money, and in his commitment to honesty. Daniel's rivals could not find any charge in or corruption against him (v4). Here was a man whose 'integrity guided him' (Prov 11:3), a man who 'took pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of people' (2 Cor 8:21).

In our modern culture we tend to focus on authenticity over integrity. Authenticity is understood as being true to one's feelings, whereas integrity is being true to one's values. Integrity, however, will often mean we deny the desires and impulses we have, because they contradict the God-given values we have.



2. The ongoing development of our skills makes us trustworthy.

Throughout the book of Daniel, we see him using many different skills. Most notably he was skilful in navigating crisis situations and giving sage advice to the king. In this case he seemed to be operating in a new role – working in a tight team that were giving leadership to 120 other key leaders who were implementing better systems of financial control in an attempt to stamp out corruption leaks. Daniel was an old man but, instead of leaning into his prior competencies, he nonetheless was ready to develop his skills some more.

3. The spiritual substance of our heart makes us trustworthy.

Daniel was more than committed to excellence. He had 'an extraordinary spirit'. The Hebrew word 'ruach' is the same one that speaks of the Holy Spirit. Underneath all of his good character and dedication was a heart that was in sync with God's own heart. Similarly, king David was trusted with great leadership responsibilities because, as a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22), he led people 'with integrity of heart and skilful hands' (Ps 78:72). As we walk with God, and rely on his Spirit, our own spirit is fortified and made more substantial. His heart or spirit was the root-system that supported his character and efforts.

4. Consistency over the long haul makes us trustworthy.

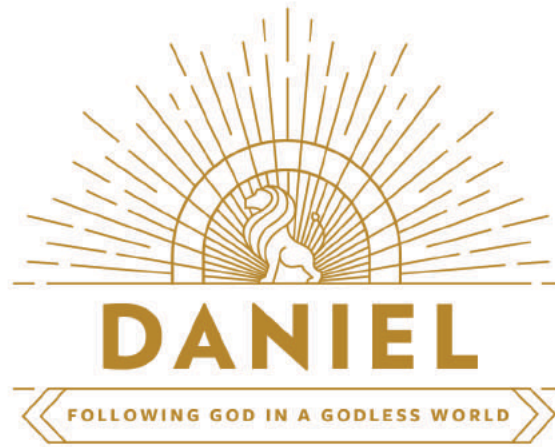
A reputation of trustworthiness takes a long time to build. Our giftedness may open up doors of opportunity for us, but if we prove to be inconsistent and flighty, those doors will soon enough close. Daniel stood out amongst the others because his consistent readiness to serve, and bring his best to whatever he did, had stood the test of time – in his case, over 60 years!

5. Letting God promote us in his way and time makes us trustworthy.

At the end of chapter 5, Belshazzar had promoted Daniel (v29) even though Daniel had not been ambitious for this promotion (v17). In a new kingdom, it would have been unlikely that Daniel would have even survived never mind be promoted once again. Yet this is what God did. Daniel had a very acute understanding that God is the one who promotes and demotes; and felt no need to play god in his own life.

Reflection

Consider the different aspects that make us trustworthy, describe them in your own understanding of what you have read – they are Integrity, Excellence, Developing our skills, spiritual substance, consistency, patience for God's will. Which aspect do you feel you can ask God to help you grow in? Spend time in prayer committing to investing in growing in that area.



Day 23: Snares and Prayer

Yesterday we discovered that Daniel had been one of 3 senior administrators overseeing 120 satraps, but then had been put in charge of all of them by the king. This created jealousy in the 122 other people. At this point, we notice that jealousy can make us nasty...

⁵Then these men said, "We will never find any charge against this Daniel unless we find something against him concerning the law of his God." - Daniel 6:5

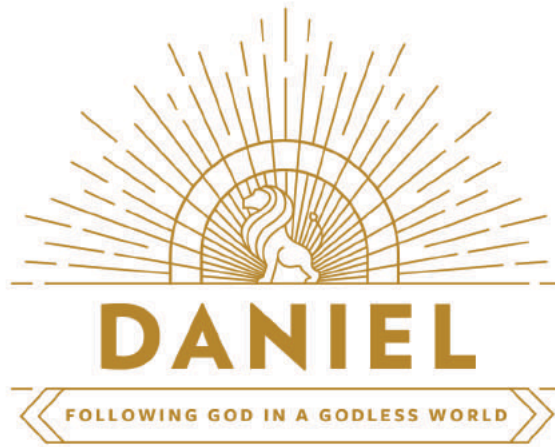
Beware the snare of jealousy.

We'd think that such a remarkable, trustworthy person would draw the admiration of his peers and those he served and led. But alas, it had the opposite effect – they became treacherously jealous. Still today, when someone gets promoted, their former colleagues can become envious or resentful. We read below what the jealousy caused them to do:

⁶So the administrators and satraps went together to the king and said to him, "May King Darius live forever.⁷All the administrators of the kingdom, the prefects, satraps, advisers, and governors have agreed that the king should establish an ordinance and enforce an edict that for thirty days, anyone who petitions any god or man except you, the king, will be thrown into the lions' den.⁸Therefore, Your Majesty, establish the edict and sign the document so that, as a law of the Medes and Persians, it is irrevocable and cannot be changed."⁹So King Darius signed the written edict. - Daniel 6:6-9

Beware the snare of flattery.

The sin of jealousy led the 122 men to do something awful. In turn, the sin of receiving flattery, caused the king to do something atrocious. The king signed an edict law, which (like in the case of Esther 1:19, 8:8) was forbidding prayer to any other gods than himself as the state-deity. He forbid anyone from worshipping any other god than himself! At the suggestion of these men, the king banned praying to any god other than the state-appointed god for 30 days. Darius was so flattered by the suggestion that he became even more blinded by his self-importance. We must be careful of flattery. Those who are flattering us may have an evil agenda that our resulting pride blinds us to. We also may make rash decisions in this state of self-glory that we will regret later.



*¹⁰ When Daniel learned that the document had been signed, he went into his house. The windows in its upstairs room opened toward Jerusalem, and three times a day he got down on his knees, prayed, and gave thanks to his God, just as he had done before. - **Daniel 6:10***

Obey God not people. Daniel modelled a respect for and obedience to authority. This should still be the normal posture of believers (Romans 13:1). However, when those in authority command us to do something that God prohibits, or prohibits something that God commands, obedience to God is the way forward. The king had prohibited what God commanded – prayer to the Living God. We are reminded of a similar situation where the religious authorities forbade Peter and the apostles from preaching the gospel. Their response was Daniel-like: ‘We must obey God rather than human beings!’ (Acts 5:29). Other people may have thought obeying God was the most dangerous thing to do, but Daniel knew it was the safest thing to do.

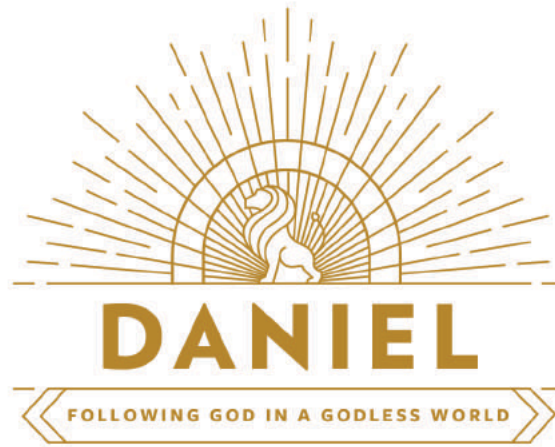
Pray, pray, pray. We learn much from Daniel’s prayer-life:

- 1. Prayer feeds humility.** It is a chance to empty ourselves of pride and self-reliance, and freshly humble ourselves before God. He knelt down in prayer
- 2. Praying is supported by habit.** No doubt Daniel prayed all the time, everywhere. What fed this prayerful spirit was a prayerful habit – he was in the habit of praying 3 times a day.
- 3. Prayer is a chance to thank God.** He not only presented requests to God, but thanked God for all that he had already received from God.
- 4. Prayer is the mark of a believer.** Too many of us are functional atheists. We may believe in God, but our prayerlessness reveals that we think we have what it takes to live life without God.
- 5. Prayer spares us from the sin of manipulating our futures.** Daniel serves as such a contrast to the 122 men who are betraying him – they tried to get their way in life through conniving and manipulating their way forward (v6-8). Daniel’s method of moving forward in life was to trust and ask God.

Reflection

What stood out to you today in your reading? Are you experiencing similar challenges to Daniel, where the world says we are to do one thing or accept something that God has warned us against or goes against God’s will?

Pray and give God praise that amidst this world even though we have trouble He has overcome the world. In John 16 v 33 Jesus says, “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

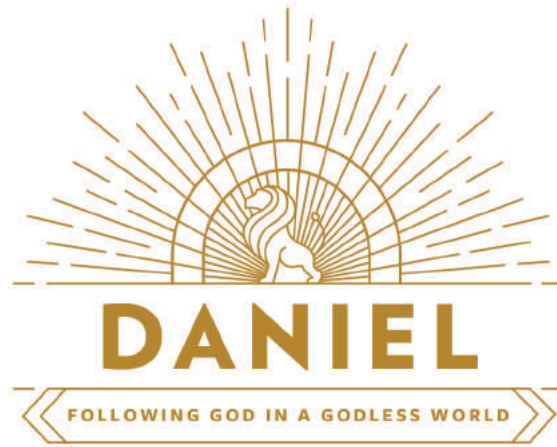


Day 24: Suffer for what's Right

*¹¹ Then these men went as a group and found Daniel petitioning and imploring his God. ¹² So they approached the king and asked about his edict: "Didn't you sign an edict that for thirty days any person who petitions any god or man except you, the king, will be thrown into the lions' den?" The king answered, "As a law of the Medes and Persians, the order stands and is irrevocable." ¹³ Then they replied to the king, "Daniel, one of the Judean exiles, has ignored you, the king, and the edict you signed, for he prays three times a day." ¹⁴ As soon as the king heard this, he was very displeased; he set his mind on rescuing Daniel and made every effort until sundown to deliver him. ¹⁵ Then these men went together to the king and said to him, "You know, Your Majesty, that it is a law of the Medes and Persians that no edict or ordinance the king establishes can be changed." ¹⁶ So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions' den. The king said to Daniel, "May your God, whom you continually serve, rescue you!" ¹⁷ A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den. The king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signet rings of his nobles, so that nothing in regard to Daniel could be changed. ¹⁸ Then the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting. No diversions were brought to him, and he could not sleep. - **Daniel 6:11-18***

Obeying God can lead to real suffering. There are times when the popular consensus of people or the systems of the world may conspire against God's people, especially when they are minorities. Suffering is involved on the path of faithfulness to Jesus. The entire 'group' (v11) spied on Daniel praying, and went to the king urging him to throw Daniel into the lion's den (v12). Daniel was arrested and mercilessly thrown into the lion's den (v16-17). This was a gruelling and gruesome act of injustice against a man who had spent his life in the service of the very people who were now seeking to destroy him.

The intolerance of tolerance. In the West today, one common way this happens is that Christians are called 'intolerant bigots' simply for believing that some things are not acceptable, and that not every religion leads to God. Tolerance is a trait we should excel in, if by tolerance we mean 'respecting people who see things differently to us and granting them the right to their view'. Unfortunately, society today seems to have redefined tolerance to mean, 'Everything is acceptable, and all belief systems are right.' Christians who honour God's revelation in Jesus and Scripture can never agree with this definition. The irony is that self-proclaimed 'tolerant' people are incredibly intolerant to those who still hold to the original definition of tolerance. When we



experience the pain of being false accused or publicly shamed, it hurts! One understands why so many people are people-pleasers rather than God-pleasers.

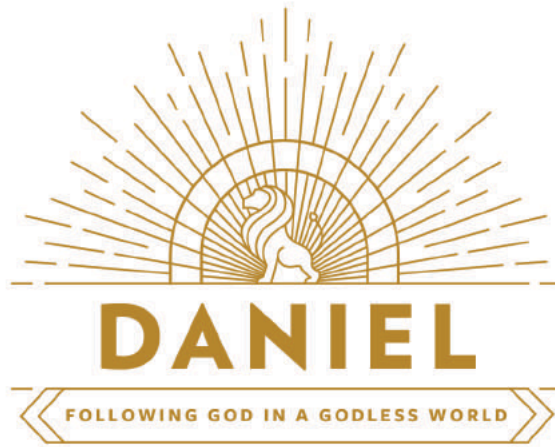
Nonetheless we should, like Daniel, cast our lot in with the will of God and entrust our lives to his care. Like the apostle Paul we should say, 'Am I now trying to win human approval, or God's approval? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.'

Beyond tolerance, there is love. We must give more than mere respect to those who turn against us or make our lives hard – as followers of Jesus, we are duty-bound to love and serve them. Our inspiration to do so comes in part from Daniel who continued to love and serve wicked men who tried to destroy him. He responded with the redemptive heart of God rather than with resentment.

Our inspiration also comes from the Crucified One. Until his dying breath, Jesus served and loved the very people who were crucifying him, pouring out every drop of blood for them. They saw things very differently to him, and he loved them still, giving them the freedom to their views, wrong as they were. He did not cry out on the cross, 'You are wrong! I will punish all of you!' Instead he prayed, 'Father, forgive them. They do not know what they are doing.' He responded to the fists of their brutality with the kiss of love. Like a jacaranda tree, he imbued the very axe that was cutting him down with the perfume of grace.

Reflection

Do you find it hard to follow Jesus in your normal everyday life? In your school, friendship groups or even family? God tells us not to be afraid but rather be courageous because He is with us.



Day 25: God Protects and Vindicates

Daniel had spent his entire adult life in a metaphoric lion's den, surrounded by wicked people in a godless and cruel culture. Then there came a night when what was merely figurative became a reality – he was literally tossed into a lion's den.

¹⁹At the first light of dawn the king got up and hurried to the lions' den. ²⁰When he reached the den, he cried out in anguish to Daniel. "Daniel, servant of the living God," the king said, "has your God, whom you continually serve, been able to rescue you from the lions?"

²¹Then Daniel spoke with the king: "May the king live forever. ²²My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths; and they haven't harmed me, for I was found innocent before him. And also, before you, Your Majesty, I have not done harm." ²³The king was overjoyed and gave orders to take Daniel out of the den. When Daniel was brought up from the den, he was found to be unharmed, for he trusted in his God. ²⁴The king then gave the command, and those men who had maliciously accused Daniel were brought and thrown into the lions' den—they, their children, and their wives. They had not reached the bottom of the den before the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones. - Daniel 6:19-24

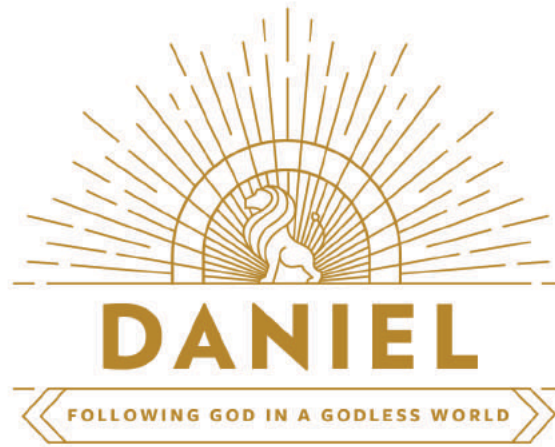
We can trust God to protect and preserve us. Amazingly, Daniel survived the night! He 'was brought up from the den... unharmed' (v23). How was he spared from the paws and the jaws of a pride of hungry lions? 'God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths' (v22). We still have angels to help us in times of danger: 'Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve' God's servants?'

In the den, perhaps Daniel used the Psalmist' prayer: 'Save me from the lion's mouth, for I will yet declare your name.' Trusting in God, he likely had a better night's sleep than Darius did who had tossed and turned waiting for the light of day. Not only had Daniel been free of bites and scratches, he had been free of turmoil and terror. The reason: he was a man of prayer who could cast his worries on God, assured that God cared for him.

Darius' wish happens to be God's promise to us: 'May your God rescue you' (v16).

Still today, when we are in dangerous or overwhelming situations, we can trust in our God, who 'is faithful, and will strengthen and protect us from the evil one'.

One disclaimer: God does not always protect us from physical harm. For example, 11 of the 12 apostles were martyred. Ultimately, he will protect our place in his eternal kingdom even if we have our place in this world taken from us earlier than we would have liked.



We can trust God to vindicate us. Daniel's reputation had been publicly assassinated in this experience of pleasing God. To the pagan onlookers, Daniel's being cast into the lion's pit would have been a sure sign that he had done wrong, and deserved this treatment. Yet Daniel trusted God to vindicate him, and vindicate him is what God did. When he exited the pit, Daniel could declare his innocence before God and king (v22). Not even the deceitful schemes of man nor royal dictate can destroy us when God is for us. As we take care of our relationship with God, he promises to take care of our reputation with others. Daniel was vindicated within a day of the accusation being brought against him. Though it is wonderful when God rapidly vindicates us from an unfairly assigned reputation, Jesus said that our vindication may take longer to come: 'great is your reward in heaven'. Already now we can rejoice that God knows the truth. God's approval is enough.

Jesus is the true and better Daniel. We notice similarities in this story of the gospel:

1. In the same way the rulers banded together to destroy Daniel, so 'the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain; the rulers band together against the Lord and against his Messiah.'
2. In the same way the satraps found a law by which Daniel must die, so the Jewish leaders said, 'We have a law, and by that law Jesus must die.'
3. In the same way that 'a stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den' (v17) so a stone was rolled across Jesus' tomb.
4. Another contrast is that, in Daniel's story, the enemies of God are finally destroyed while the innocent one is spared. On the cross, the Innocent One suffers, while the enemies of God are spared.
5. In the same way, Daniel's friend rushed to the tomb at first light of day to joyfully discover he was alive, so Jesus' friends were overjoyed to find Jesus alive at his tomb early in the morning.
6. In the same way Daniel's enemies were destroyed in their attempt to destroy him (v24), so Jesus defeated the enemies of sin, death, demons and hell on the cross.

Reflection

Daniel trusted God even when everything seemed impossible. Take some time and consider how much you trust God to lead you in making decisions in your life? Do you believe God loves you and wants what is best for you? Pray and talk to God about how you are feeling, He loves hearing you talk to Him.



Day 26: Faith at School (Part Two)

On day 5, we learnt from Daniel how to integrate faith into the workplace, or for us school. Let's consider the same theme again today.

²⁵ Then King Darius wrote to those of every people, nation, and language who live on the whole earth: "May your prosperity abound. ²⁶ I issue a decree that in all my royal dominion, people must tremble in fear before the God of Daniel: For he is the living God, and he endures forever; his kingdom will never be destroyed, and his dominion has no end. ²⁷ He rescues and delivers; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth, for he has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions."

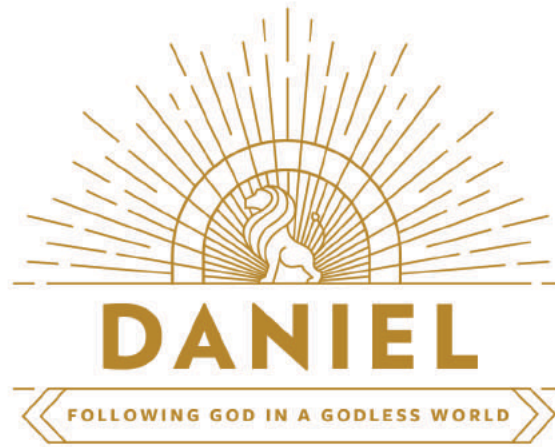
²⁸ So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian. – Daniel 6:25-28

God is interested in how we work at school and in life. Jesus says we are to be the salt and light in the world, that includes how we work at school. Daniel was a fantastic example of being salt-and-light in his place of work. Jesus said, *'Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your God in heaven.'*

Seek to thrive in school. Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius (v28). As dangerous and challenging as it was to be a man of faith in a godless setting, he found a way to apply his character, wisdom, faith and competencies to the common good of the Persian realm. As followers of Jesus we should seek to go beyond merely surviving at school, to thriving there – despite the obvious difficulties on the path. We can be inspired by Daniel's faith and poise in the face of godless leaders and military, political, and legislative setbacks.

Ask God to show his power in our schools. Many times in Daniel's career, God 'performed signs and wonders' (v27), whether it was through gifts of prophecy, knowledge or miraculous interventions. Of the 40 miracles recorded in the book of Acts, 39 happened outside church meetings. The main place God wants to show his power is wherever his people are, including in the school-related challenges we find ourselves in.

Respectfully take a stand on things. Darius' decree (v25-27) was the fourth time in the book of Daniel where a culture-changing decree was issued after Daniel or his friends took a stand on a select matter of conviction. Being faithful to God as well as faithful to our responsibilities at school is possible, though not without challenges. We should give our loyalty to our schools, but



never submit to any demands that make us compromise our God-given values. And even when we stand our ground, we should do it in the most respectful, courteous way possible. For starters, we should not impose Christian standards on others, only hold to them ourselves. Daniel chose his battles – knowing that if he put up a fight each and every time he was exposed to things that were incompatible with his faith, he would likely lose all. Though he was determined to not sin, he still put up with much that was offensive to him, opting to not draw a battle line.

Find support from other believers in your school or youth. We don't know at what point his friends passed away, but Daniel formed the habit early of meeting with 3 other believers for the purpose of mutual encouragement, prayer and guidance (2:49). Still today, it is great idea for Christians to be part of a group where they can share challenges, insights and support with other believers in the same situations.

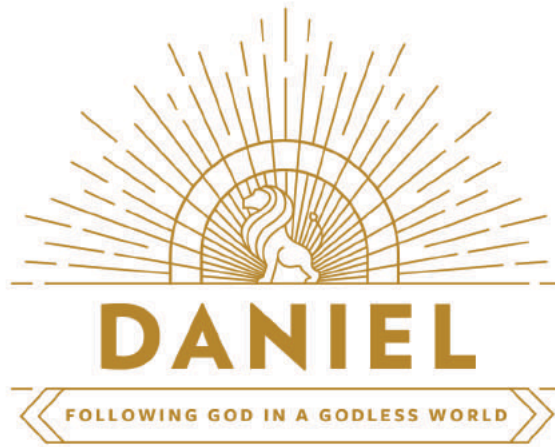
As we are faithful with the responsibility or influence entrusted to us, we tend to be given more. Throughout his career, we see Daniel getting promoted from one level of influence to another. Like the apostle Paul, we should 'boast only with regard to the area of influence God has assigned to us' and can pray that 'our area of influence among you may be greatly enlarged' (2 Corinthians 10:13,15).

Be prepared to work for difficult people. When we find ourselves under an unkind or unwise superior or teacher or coach, let's remember Daniel's first boss, Nebuchadnezzar who served a demonic god, pillaged Jerusalem, destroyed Daniel's family, mocked God, and was often wrong-headed, big-headed, hot-headed and ready to behead innocent people,

Accept your assignment. Daniel had very little control over the many assignments he was given by wicked and often foolish leaders, yet his bias was to assume that each job had come to him from the hand of God. He never took on a woe-is-me attitude. He did the very thing the apostle Paul said we should all do: *'Sink yourself into [the work God has given you]. Don't be impressed with yourself. Don't compare yourself with others. Each of you must take responsibility for doing the creative best you can with your own life'* (Galatians 6:5 MSG).

Reflection

List the challenges you are facing at school or in friendships because of your faith. Think of who you can meet with or spend time with that shares your faith, reach out to them and encourage each other in prayer and support.



Day 27: Beasts from the Sea

The final 6 chapters of Daniel consist of 4 stories that each revolve around a vision Daniel had. These 4 visions are found in chapter 7, 8, 9 and 10-12. Starting today and the final 3 days, we have time to explore just one of Daniel's dazzling visions:

¹In the first year of King Belshazzar of Babylon, Daniel had a dream with visions in his mind as he was lying in his bed. He wrote down the dream, and here is the summary of his account. ²Daniel said, "In my vision at night I was watching, and suddenly the four winds of heaven stirred up the great sea. ³Four huge beasts came up from the sea, each different from the other. – Daniel 7:1-3

The vision is of 4 empires. They are all beastly, fierce and savage. That they come out of 'the sea' means that they arise out of the chaos and restlessness of fallen humanity. 'The nations rage like the raging sea.' These empires correlate with the same 4 kingdoms of Daniel chapter 2:

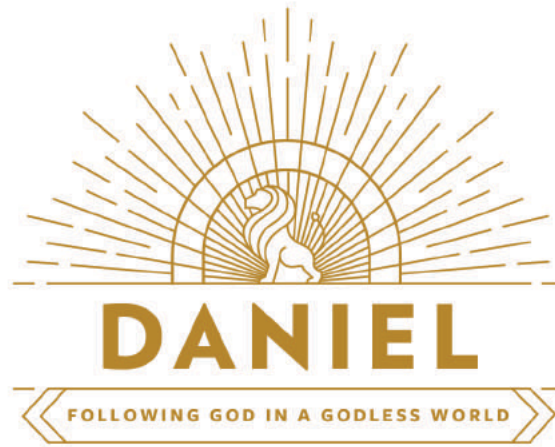
⁴"The first was like a lion but had eagle's wings. I continued watching until its wings were torn off. It was lifted up from the ground, set on its feet like a man, and given a human mind. – Daniel 7:4

This refers to Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian kingdom, of which Belshazzar was a part. Torn-off wings remind us of God's reducing the first king of Babylon to animal-likeness. Eventually, God restored him to his feet and sane mind.

⁵"Suddenly, another beast appeared, a second one, that looked like a bear. It was raised up on one side, with three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. It was told, 'Get up! Gorge yourself on flesh.' – Daniel 7:5

This is the Medo-Persian empire. It is raised up on one side, ready to strike once again, even though it already has its mouth full. King Cyrus had an unyielding appetite for empire building – devouring Babylon, Lydia and Egypt for example.

⁶"After this, while I was watching, suddenly another beast appeared. It was like a leopard with four wings of a bird on its back. It had four heads, and it was given dominion. – Daniel 7:6



The Greek empire, under Alexander the Great, combined leopard-like ferocity and speed with the bird-like ability to see and move in all directions at once. The 4 heads refer to the 4 generals his kingdom was divided amongst when he died: Antipater, Lysimachus, Seleucus and Ptolemy.

7 "After this, while I was watching in the night visions, suddenly a fourth beast appeared, frightening and dreadful, and incredibly strong, with large iron teeth. It devoured and crushed, and it trampled with its feet whatever was left. It was different from all the beasts before it, and it had ten horns. – Daniel 7:7

This refers to the Roman empire (the brutal beast with iron teeth). 'Different from all before' it surpassed their power, longevity, and reach. The 10 horns probably refer to the numerous empires that have continued its ways.' It can be argued that most modern civilizations, have adopted what the Romans pioneered: law, government, roads, technology, communications and disciplined armies for example. In this sense, all modern nations are horns arising out of the ways of ancient Rome.

What do we learn from this? Still today, life comes at us with a brutality that we are left to wonder, 'Is God really in control?'

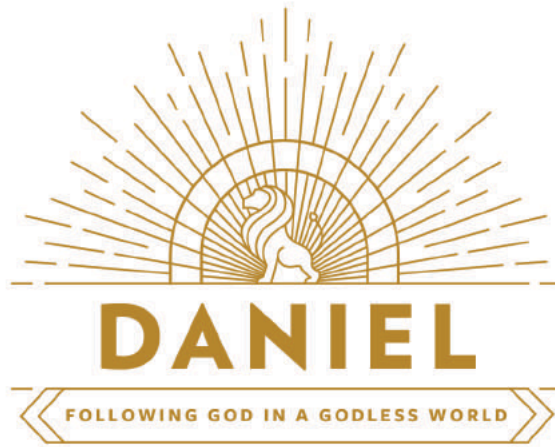
God will have the last say. The powerful forces and people that restrict or damage our lives will not last forever. As we will see tomorrow, there is only one kingdom that will last forever.

Our experiences are Father-filtered. The apparently random events of history, including those brought about by power-hungry people, are all under God's ultimate control. We may feel our lives to be subject to the choices and powers of others, or the tragic turn of circumstances, but this is not entirely true.

God will turn it all for good. We will discover that all the events of history, both large and small, whether brought about by individuals or large corporations or nations will ultimately be used by God to bring about good.

Reflection

What encouragement did you get from today's reading? Spend time thanking God for His sovereignty and ultimate control. Listen to this song by Bethel music, 'Victory is Yours' (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZCJKL0bP1bE>).



Day 28: The Ancient of Days

Yesterday we read of Daniel's vision of the four consecutive beast-kingdoms which were devouring and would devour the world's people.

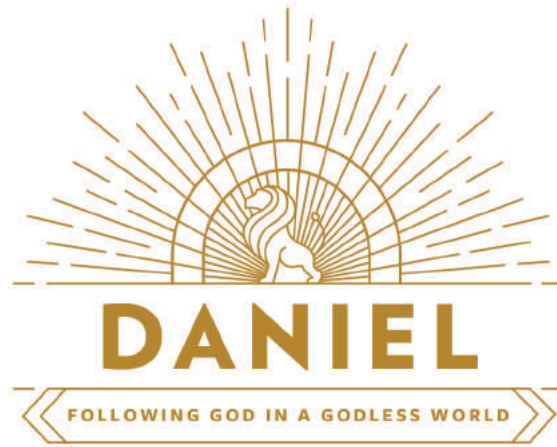
The fourth beast had 10 horns (v7). Bible scholars are divided on what these 10 horns refer to. Some say the 10 horns underline the extreme power of this empire (5 times more than the normal number). Others say it signifies 10 rulers – in the Roman empire, from Julius Caesar to Domitian there were 12 Caesars (though 2 of them reigned for only a few months). A third option, which is the one highlighted yesterday, is that these 10 horns represent an indefinite number of kingdoms (10 is a round number, so need not be taken literally) that follow on from Roman power, even while continuing its pattern. Let's read what happens next in Daniel's vision:

⁸ "While I was considering the horns, suddenly another horn, a little one, came up among them, and three of the first horns were uprooted before it. And suddenly in this horn there were eyes like the eyes of a human and a mouth that was speaking arrogantly. -Daniel 7:8

Small as the horn begins, it overpowers 3 other horns, becoming more intelligent (many eyes) and arrogant (boasting mouth) as it becomes more powerful.

3 of the 10 horns are uprooted. Interpreters find this line difficult to interpret. In some way the rise of 'the little horn' will have damaging and destructive consequences among a smallish section of the nations that arise out of the Roman empire. What this means in exact detail, no one seems to know. It must be that the rise of the little horn will cause great disturbances political and socially.

⁹ "As I kept watching, thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was white like snow, and the hair of his head like whitest wool. His throne was flaming fire; its wheels were blazing fire. ¹⁰ A river of fire was flowing, coming out from his presence. Thousands upon thousands served him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was convened, and the books were opened. ¹¹ "I watched, then, because of the sound of the arrogant words the horn was speaking. As I continued watching, the beast was killed and its body destroyed and given over to the burning fire. ¹² As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was removed, but an extension of life was granted to them for a certain period of time. -Daniel 7:9-12



What do we learn about God the Ancient of Days in this vision?

God is king over all. God takes his seat on a throne. In heaven's courtroom, God the Father sits as ruler of all things and all people in history. The 'ten thousand times ten thousand' speaks of the uncountable peoples of human history that God rules over, and more specifically those who will worship and enjoy him for all eternity.³

God plans to share his rule with vice-regents. 'Thrones were set in place' – this refers to God's plan to bring redeemed humanity up as his vice-regents, executing his will in his world.

God is untainted purity. His snow-white clothing represents his radiant goodness. As the incorruptible king and judge, he will always do what is right.

God is wisest of all. White hair speaks of the wisdom that comes with age. By virtue of his creating everything and everyone else, the Ancient of Days is older than all. As king and judge he will always know the best path to take.

God holds us accountable. One day the books will be opened. There in the heavenly throne room, each of us and every nation, will give account to God and receive our due from God. God may delay in his judgment, but not indefinitely (v12).

God is blazing holiness. The flaming river of God's holiness flows from him into every situation he attends to, burning away what's evil and defiled, and catching it alight with his purity and perfection.

God is a fierce warrior. The throne is on wheels. It is a chariot. God has a fearsome ability to take on and destroy all his enemies, including the arrogant little horn of an Anti-Christ (v11). One day Satan will make one last attempt to defy the Living God, only to be thrown into the flames of hell along with the Anti-Christ and the God-marginalizing nations.

Reflection

Consider the wonderful images of God's character we are given in this vision. If you enjoy drawing, painting or sketching, take some time and be create picturing these different images. You can also take some time to meditate and think about these images and how wonderful God is.



Day 29: The Son of Man

¹³ I continued watching in the night visions, and suddenly one like a son of man was coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was escorted before him. ¹⁴ He was given dominion, and glory, and a kingdom; so that those of every people, nation, and language should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will not be destroyed. – Daniel 7:13-14

What do we learn about the 'son of man'?

Centuries after Daniel's vision, Jesus claimed to be him. Of all the titles Jesus took for himself, 'Son of Man' was the one he used most. He got it from verse 13: 'one like a son of man'. For example, Jesus spoke of himself as 'the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One coming on the clouds.'¹ He turned a prophetic symbol into a title.

He is the heavenly rock. Four decades earlier, Daniel had interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the statue, a statue made of gold, silver, bronze and iron – where each new metal represented a subsequent kingdom. In that dream, a heavenly stone crashed into the statue, during its fourth and final kingdom (the Roman empire), and grew to become a great mountain, representing God's eternal kingdom. In this parallel vision, the Son of Man is the heavenly king who, during the fourth empire, sets up an eternal kingdom that would start small but would outlast and eventually replace every other earthly kingdom.

He is more than a man. The human-like figure in Daniel's vision is also god-like. The first hint of this is that he comes 'with the clouds of heaven'. In Psalm 103:4, God is the one who rides the clouds of heaven. The clouds represent God's presence. In the book of Exodus, God's presence is evident in the pillar of clouds above the ark of the covenant. The second hint of his divinity is that he is worshipped and served by all tribes and tongues. God alone is worthy of worship. When Jesus would later call himself 'the Son of Man' his opponents rightly interpreted this as him saying he was God.

He is heaven and earth's true king, God's co-regent. Many of the Old Testament prophecies speak of a divine king on earth who represents and operates in tandem with his heavenly counterpart. Likewise, the Son of Man is given dominion or authority on the earth as the true divine king. We're told that 'the Son of Man' is given or authority (v14). In the same way, when Jesus overcame the grave, he announced that 'all authority in heaven and earth' had been given to him.³



He is the king of a better kingdom. In Daniel's vision, the kingdoms of the earth are compared to beasts from the sea. Earthly kingdoms can be savage and beastly. They are spread and sustained by bloodshed. Jesus' kingdom on the other hand is merciful and gracious. The blood that is shed is the sacrificial blood of its crucified king. Far from being beastly, the heavenly kingdom is ushered in by 'a son of man' – it is humane not heartless; it is guided by wisdom, not driven along by cravings for power. Jesus' kingdom is from the clouds, not from the sea – it is not restless and wicked, but godly and good.

He is the king of a global and eternal kingdom. It consists of 'those of every people, nation, and language.' It is not parochial or limited to one culture or place. It is 'an everlasting dominion that will not pass away' (v14). In the book of Revelation, Jesus is worshipped as the One who purchased members of every tribe and language and people with his blood, making them into a kingdom and priests to serve God and to reign on the earth. So doing, he is 'worthy to receive power, wealth, wisdom, strength, honour, glory and praise' (5:9-12)

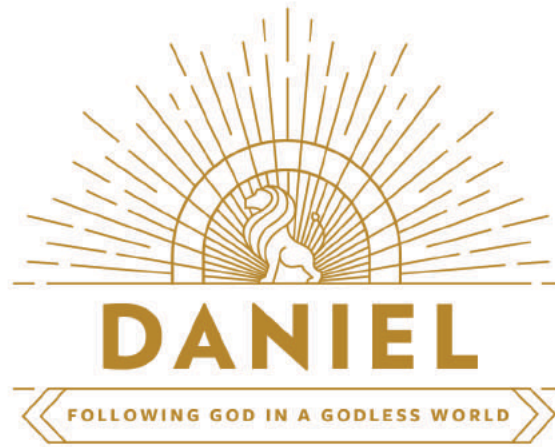
Jesus claimed to not only be the Son of Man, but also prophesied that he would extremely soon come with the clouds of heaven. For example, he says, 'the Son of Man will come in his Father's glory with the holy angels. Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power.'

The coming with the clouds does not refer to Jesus' second coming, but to his triumphant and glorious return to the Father, after living a perfect life, dying a sacrificial death and rising victorious over death. The outpouring of his Spirit was (and is) the evidence that Jesus is reigning with power.

So, it has already happened. That said, it will happen again in a far more public and dramatic way: one day 'the Son of Man will appear in the sky' and the peoples of the earth will 'see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.'

Reflection

Consider the different images we see here of Jesus, the Son of Man. Which image stood out to you the most? What did God reveal to you in the reading today? Pray and praise Jesus for how wonderful and marvellous He is.



Day 30: The Holy Ones

*¹⁵ "As for me, Daniel, my spirit was deeply distressed within me, and the visions in my mind terrified me. ¹⁶ I approached one of those who were standing by and asked him to clarify all this. So he let me know the interpretation of these things: ¹⁷ 'These huge beasts, four in number, are four kings who will rise from the earth. ¹⁸ But the holy ones of the Most High will receive the kingdom and possess it forever, yes, forever and ever.' ²³ 'The fourth beast will be a fourth kingdom on the earth, different from all the other kingdoms. It will devour the whole earth, trample it down, and crush it. ²⁴ The ten horns are ten kings who will rise from this kingdom. Another king, different from the previous ones, will rise after them and subdue three kings. ²⁵ He will speak words against the Most High and oppress the holy ones of the Most High. He will intend to change religious festivals and laws, and the holy ones will be handed over to him for a time, times, and half a time. ²⁶ But the court will convene, and his dominion will be taken away, to be completely destroyed forever. ²⁷ The kingdom, dominion, and greatness of the kingdoms under all of heaven will be given to the people, the holy ones of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will serve and obey him.' – **Daniel 7:15-27***

The book of Daniel is grouped with the 4 other major prophets of the Old Testament for good reason: he had an unusual gift of prophecy. In this extended, overwhelming vision, he was even able to ask an angel the meaning of the events and characters portrayed before him (v16). In these verses, we learn 6 things about what it means to be God's people.

God's people are meant to be holy. 3 times God's people are called 'the holy ones of the Most High' (v18, 22 and 27). To be holy means to be made pure, and to be set apart by God for his special purposes. Daniel is an example of someone who maintained contact with the sinful culture, but did not engage in the sin.

God's people can expect persecution and hardship. The 4 beasts represent 4 godless kingdoms, the worst of which would be the fourth. 10 other kingdoms would rise up, and in the midst of them there would eventually come an Anti-Christ, who would take over parts of the world, resist God's people, try to re-organize society around his wishes and eventually bring about a short period of severe persecution against God's people. We read in v26 God will deal with him eventually.

God's people will one day be freed from suffering. God will not tolerate the suffering of his people forever. There will come a day when the heavenly court will sit, and Satan, the Anti-Christ and



savagery 'be destroyed forever' (v26). On that day the church militant will become the church triumphant. Idolatry will be eclipsed by true worship of the living God.

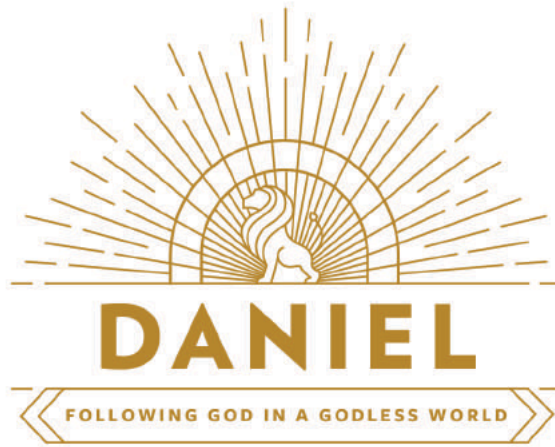
God's people will one day rule the world. 'The holy ones took possession of the kingdom' (v22) 'The greatness of the kingdoms under all of heaven will be given to the holy ones' (v27). Jesus will be king of the earth, but he plans on sharing his rule with us. We will be his envoys and instruments, his princes and princesses, reflecting his character to all creation, enacting his will and wisdom in the cultivation of a God-filled eternal society – where humility, justice, ethnic diversity, harmony, creativity, joy, peace and love will be the order of the day. Truly 'the meek shall inherit the earth.'¹

God's people are already in training for reigning. The life of Daniel inspires us to not only wait for God's kingdom to come in finality one day, but to already be an ambassador and instrument of it into whatever situation we find ourselves in. The Son of Man has already come to the Father and has released the Spirit upon the church. Like Daniel, it is our privilege to reveal God to a godless world through our 'purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left.'²

God's people point people to the True King. Daniel did a sterling job of doing just this. In fact, over 500 years later, 3 wise men from Persia followed a star in pursuit of this king. It is likely Daniel's impact on their ancestors played a part in that. The Magi had heard about the coming Saviour because of the uncompromising witness of a Hebrew captive that had given over 60 years of his life to following God in a godless world. He had spoken of one that would be history's hope, the Son of Man whose 'kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom' and whom 'all rulers will serve and obey' (v27).

Reflection

How do the truths above about God's people, change the way you think about how you can live in this world? What has God said to you throughout this Daniel devotion? Write it down so you can remember how God spoke to you.



BACK OF BOOK

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- Day 1 1: Leviticus 26:33, 39, 2: Isaiah 39:5-7 3: see www.gotquestions.org/Daniel-eunuch.html
- Day 2 1: see Deuteronomy 18:9-13
- Day 3 1: see Acts 10:9-15
- Day 5 1: Romans 12:18, 2: Jeremiah 29:4-7
- Day 6 1: Psalm 127:1-2, 2: Mark 10:42-45
- Day 7 1: Esther 6:1-3
- Day 8 1: 1 Corinthians 2:11-12, 16
- Day 10 1: Luke 20:18,
- Day 11 1: Psalm 118:22, 2: Isaiah 8:14, 3: Mark 1:14-15, 4: This data came from 'Making sense of God' by Tim Keller, 5: Revelation 11:15, 6: Eaton, M: 2009, PTTB, Daniel
- Day 12 1: 2 Peter 3:9, 2: Isaiah 26:3.
- Day 13 1: Matthew 22:21
- Day 14 1: Ezekiel 14:3, 2: Philippians 3:3-6
- Day 15 1: Hebrews 3:13, 2: see Luke 11:28, 3: Mark 8:34-38
- Day 16 1: Isaiah 43:1-2, 2: Matthew 25:21, 3: Hebrews 10:35-36
- Day 18 1: Romans 11:26, 2: Matthew 19:26
- Day 20 1: Romans 1:18, 2: 1 Peter 5:5
- Day 21 1: John 3:17, 2: Romans 2:4-5
- Day 22 1: Proverbs 11:3, 2: 2 Corinthians 8:21, 3: Acts 13:22, 4: Psalm 78:72
- Day 23 1: See Esther 1:19, 8:8, 2: Acts 5:29
- Day 24 1: Luke 6:26, 2: Galatians 1:10
- Day 25 1: Hebrews 1:14, 2: Psalm 22:21-22, 3: see 1 Peter 5:7, 4: 2 Thessalonians 3:3, 5: Hebrews 11:33, 6: Matthew 5:11-12, 7: Psalm 2:1-2, 8: John 19:7, 9: see John 20:1-18, 10: Colossians 2:15
- Day 26 1: see Matthew 5:13-15, 2: Matthew 5:16
- Day 27 1: Isaiah 17:12
- Day 28 1: Eaton, M: 2009, PTTB, Daniel 2: 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4, 3: see Revelations 5:11, 4: see Revelation 4:4 and 20:4, 5: see Revelation 19:20; 20:10
- Day 29 1: Matthew 26:64, 2: Matthew 26:64-65, 3: Matthew 28:18, 4: Mark 8:38-9:1, 5: see Acts 2:33, 6: Matthew 24:29-30
- Day 30 1: Matthew 5:5, 2: 2 Corinthians 6:6-7



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Web-based bible study tools...

The interlinear and cross-reference tool at <http://bible.cc/john/3-16.htm>.

The study of the original manuscripts, as well as other uses of the same Hebrew words elsewhere in the Old Testament: <http://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Bible.show/sVerseID/1/eVerseID/1/opt/inter>

MORE RESOURCES

What is assumed is that Daniel and his three friends had strong believing parents who had effectively disciplined them from the youngest age. Likewise, every Christian parent should do all they can to raise up and send out into the world modern-day Daniels. The free eBook 'In-Reach: how to disciple our kids' tells us how.

To download that eBook, go to www.commonresources.co.za and click on 'Missional Potency' to find this resource. For other devotional studies like this one, click on 'Bible Studies'.