



DANIEL

FOLLOWING GOD IN A GODLESS WORLD

A 30-DAY DEVOTIONAL STUDY OF DANIEL 1-7

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK



COMMIT TO A DAILY TIME AND PLACE.

Set aside at least 10 minutes, but spend more time 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'* (Ps 119:18).



TAKE YOUR TIME.

If it's too much to take in, do a 'day' over 2 or 3 days.



READ WITH A PEN OR PENCIL IN HAND AND JOURNAL YOUR JOURNEY.

While you read, mark any sections or points that impact you most. At the end of each day, flip over to the 'Journal your journey' section (see pages 5-12). Make a few notes.



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.



MAKE IT A COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE.

Perhaps WhatsApp what you noted down to others. You may wish to form a WhatsApp group with one or more people and journey through this devotion together. This creates mutual accountability, support and depth to the journey.

You could also work through this as a life group over 5 weeks. Read 6 days in preparation for each week (see pages 3-4) and come ready to share what God has been saying to you.

This devotional was authored by Terran Williams, a pastor of Common Ground Church. It was created in 2019 as part of a sermon series exploring the book of Daniel. Please ask permission prior to reproducing or replicating it - info@commongroundchurch.co.za

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JOURNAL YOUR JOURNEY



To maximize your learning curve and track what God is saying to you over these weeks; after each day, flip back here and write down in the relevant box:

- A highlight verse, insight or application you want to hold onto.
- The answer to the relevant question.

DAY 1: AN AGONIZING RELOCATION (1:1-6)

A highlight verse, insight or life-application:

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Have you experienced an agonizing relocation of sorts in your life? What can you learn from Daniel?

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DAY 2: CULTURAL PRESSURE (1:3-7)

A highlight verse, insight or life-application:

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In what ways have you experienced society downplaying the importance and relevance of your faith?

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DAY 3: CHOOSE YOUR BATTLES (1:8-14)

A highlight verse, insight or life-application:

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How do you decide which issues to take a stand on in whatever institution you are part of?

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DAY 4: SALT AND LIGHT (1:15-21)

A highlight verse, insight or life-application:

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How can you be more winsomely respectful of the authorities in your life?

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DAY 5: FAITH AT WORK (1:1-21)

A highlight verse, insight or life-application:

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Where are you most struggling to integrate your faith with your work?

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DAY 6: POWER IS OVERRATED (2:1-12)

A highlight verse, insight or life-application:

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How have you seen power corrupt people and leave them empty or overburdened?
Either in your own life or in others?

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DAY 7: WHEN IN A CRISIS (2:13-19)

A highlight verse, insight or life-application:

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Looking back at your most recent crisis situation, how could you have faced it in a more Daniel-like way?

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DAY 8: THE GIFT OF KNOWLEDGE (2:19-30)

A highlight verse, insight or life-application:

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What knowledge or insight are you seeking God for at the moment?

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DAY 9: KINGDOMS RISE AND FALL (2:31-43)

A highlight verse, insight or life-application:

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What entities loom so large in our current landscape and yet likely won't be around in 20 years?

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DAY 10: THE SCOPE OF HUMAN HISTORY (2:44-45)

A highlight verse, insight or life-application:

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God orchestrated circumstances for the coming of Jesus into the world – how has he done the same in order to set you up for the coming of Jesus into your life?

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DAY 11: THE HOPE OF HUMAN HISTORY (2:34-35, 44-45)

A highlight verse, insight or life-application:

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

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DAY 12: GOD IN CONTROL (2:46-49)

A highlight verse, insight or life-application:

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Where are you most struggling to integrate your faith with your work?

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DAY 13: STATE AND RELIGION (3:1-7)

A highlight verse, insight or life-application:

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Do you know of, or have you experienced, the faith-damaging effects of a marriage between state and religion?

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DAY 14: REFUSE IDOLATRY (3:5)

A highlight verse, insight or life-application:

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Which idols have been most effective in drawing you away from God? In what ways have they failed you?

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DAY 15: FORTIFY YOUR OBEDIENCE (3:8-18)

A highlight verse, insight or life-application:

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Who are the spiritual friends you have who fortify your obedience?

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DAY 16: NO COMPROMISE (3:19-30)

A highlight verse, insight or life-application:

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Have you experienced God being present with you in fiery trials? If so, when?

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DAY 17: AN OPEN LETTER (4:1-37)

A highlight verse, insight or life-application:

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What verse or phrase stuck out to you the most?

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DAY 18: HUMBLED AND EXALTED (4:1-37)

A highlight verse, insight or life-application:

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Who are the people you know who are far from God that you are reaching out to?

What can you learn from Daniel as you do?

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DAY 19: WRITING ON THE WALL (5:1-31)

A highlight verse, insight or life-application:

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Belshazzar did not know about Daniel. Daniel had fallen into obscurity for a season. Have you experienced seasons of being 'benched'? Why does God allow this?

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DAY 20: PRIDE BEFORE THE FALL (5:1-31)

A highlight verse, insight or life-application:

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

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DAY 21: WARNING AND JUDGMENT (5:1-31)

A highlight verse, insight or life-application:

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Have you experienced God warning you of judgment if you do not yield to him? If so, what happened?

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DAY 22: A TRUSTWORTHY PERSON (6:1-4)

A highlight verse, insight or life-application:

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Which of the 6 things we see in Daniel do you most need to grow in?

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DAY 23: SNARES AND PRAYERS (6:5-10)

A highlight verse, insight or life-application:

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What is the quality of your prayer-life like? Following Daniel’s example, how can you improve it?

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DAY 24: SUFFER FOR WHAT’S RIGHT (6:11-18)

A highlight verse, insight or life-application:

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In your obedience to God, have you ever suffered rejection or accusation from others?

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DAY 25: GOD PROTECTS AND VINDICATES (6:19-24)

A highlight verse, insight or life-application:

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Have you experienced God’s protection or vindication? What happened?

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DAY 26: FAITH AT WORK, PART 2 (6:25-28)

A highlight verse, insight or life-application:

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Which of the 9 ways Daniel integrated his faith and work is most helpful in your efforts to do the same?

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DAY 27: BEASTS FROM THE SEA (7:1-7)

A highlight verse, insight or life-application:

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The remarkable fulfilment of Daniel's prophetic vision shows that God is in control of history – how can this comfort you personally?

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DAY 28: THE ANCIENT OF DAYS

A highlight verse, insight or life-application:

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Of the 7 descriptions of God in this passage, which is most meaningful to you today?

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DAY 29: THE SON OF MAN (7:13-14)

A highlight verse, insight or life-application:

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Of the 6 things you learn about Jesus in this prophecy, which is most meaningful to you today?

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DAY 30: THE HOLY ONES (7:15-27)

A highlight verse, insight or life-application:

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Of the 6 things you learn about God's people in this prophecy, which is most meaningful to you today?

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WEEK ONE

DANIEL 1:1-2:12



AN AGONIZING RELOCATION *(1:1-6)*

DANIEL FOLLOWED GOD IN A GODLESS WORLD

In the next 30 days let's learn all we can from him, as we go verse by verse through most of the book named after him. Let's glean the inspiration, insights and skills we so desperately need to follow God in our godless world.

Most followers of Jesus today, find themselves in faith-hostile waters. For those of us in the increasingly Post-Christian parts of the world, the age of Christendom behind us, it has become enormously difficult to be faithful to Jesus. But this is nothing to lament. We have a faith that can thrive in the open-seas.

The light shines brightest in the darkness. It is our destiny to represent our Saviour into contexts and cultures where he is neither known nor honoured. We are sent into a decaying culture as salt, and into dark places as light. Like Daniel, we must and can accept our assignment, and learn to thrive in a godless age.



1 In the third year of the reign of King Jehoiakim of Judah, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came to Jerusalem and laid siege to it. 2 The 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's story starts with agony. The year was 605 BC. As a teen, his city was ransacked by the latest superpower - Babylon. He was dragged from his Jerusalem home to the palace of his captor.

The fall of Jerusalem had been on the horizon for some time. Back in 1300 BC, the Lord had threatened his people of Israel with exile if they were unfaithful to the terms of the covenant established at Mount Sinai¹. For centuries God had warned the Israelites, through the prophets, that if they were disobedient to him and worshipped false gods, invading nations would destroy them. These warnings fell on deaf ears.

The judgment of God unfolded in a series of events. Over a century earlier, in 722 BC, 10 of the 12 tribes of Israel had fallen to the Assyrians. They were taken into exile, tragically assimilating into the false religions of Assyria, never to recover nor return. One would think the 2 surviving tribes, Judah and Benjamin, would have been more careful. They weren't. Their persistent rebellion against God meant their days were numbered too. Decades earlier, Isaiah the prophet had prophesied that the day would come when a new superpower, Babylon would attack Jerusalem and take them into exile, with some of the royal descendants becoming 'eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon'². Yet still they rebelled.

Eventually, God's axe fell. Babylon attacked Jerusalem in 605 BC, crippling but not destroying them. They plundered God's holy temple, stealing the valuable golden utensils and (horror of horrors) placing them in the Babylonian temple as an offering to the demon-god Bel. Eighteen years later, the final stage of judgment would fall when Babylon would properly finish Judah off – taking the entire nation into captivity.

Yet all this time God was in control. The key phrase in these verses is *'The Lord handed King Jehoiakim of Judah over to him'* (v2). God was superintending the chaos. Not the author of this evil, he nonetheless allowed one tyrant king to afflict his own people, and (as we will see) God found a way to use this painful scenario for his glory and for the ultimate good of his people.



3 *The king ordered Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the Israelites from the royal family and from the nobility— 4 young men without any physical defect, good-looking, suitable for instruction in all wisdom, knowledgeable, perceptive, and capable of serving in the king's palace. He was to teach them the Chaldean language and literature...*
6 *Among them, from the Judahites, were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.*

So who was Daniel? Daniel and his 3 friends had been hauled to Babylon. They were selected as the cream of the crop: top of the class, and outrageously talented, good-looking and athletic. The king of Babylon claimed them as his own, enlisting them into a radical cultural immersion program that sought to drive the faith of their youth out of them. Whether immediately upon arrival or sometime later, they were likely castrated³.

Their new city, in what is now modern-day Iraq, was the greatest in the world. Capital city of a sprawling empire, some 2500 acres in size, it was filled with magnificent buildings, the greatest of libraries and hanging gardens (one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world). Its elite set fashion trends for the world. Its cuisine was unsurpassed. Its gates and temples were covered with idols portraying the gods of Bel, Nabu, Marduk and Ishtar.

Traumatically stripped of his home, family, dreams, prospects of marriage and offspring, Daniel had to start his life over again in this strange land and culture.

How did he respond? In the same way we should in a similar situation. He rested in God's control over the circumstances beyond his own control. He accepted the relocation of his life as a God-given assignment. He refused to buy the lie that his faith in God was somehow yesteryear, misplaced, irrelevant and puny. He sought to bring the kingdom of God to bear in an earthly kingdom where god was neither recognized nor very apparent.

CULTURAL PRESSURE *(1:3-7)*

The king of Babylon enrolled Jerusalem's captive youth into a re-education program. He submersed them into a culture and a curriculum that was supposed to be superior in every way to anything they had previously known. Still today, Satan tries to intimidate the faith out of God's people in comparable ways:



3 The king ordered Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the Israelites from the royal family and from the nobility— 4 young men ... to teach them the Chaldean language and literature. 5 The 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. 6 Among them, from the Judahites, were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. 7 The chief eunuch gave them names; he gave the name Belteshazzar to Daniel, Shadrach to Hananiah, Meshach to Mishael, and Abednego to Azariah.

Nebuchadnezzar had a special strategy of bringing Judah, and other vassal nations, under his control: he handpicked the brightest and most promising of the youth of these nations – those who were upper class, handsome, educated and athletic. He brought them into his palace, and sought to win them over to Babylonian culture, and to allegiance to himself as their sovereign.

Later these youths – he hoped – would be fully indoctrinated, and would then either return to their homes as Babylonian representatives, inspiring Babylonian loyalty and culture to the people of their homeland. Or they would remain in Babylon, and would continue to serve him by helping him to govern their former people.

HOW SATAN ATTEMPTS TO MAKE OUR FAITH SEEM IRRELEVANT.

Having separated them 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 the God of the Israelites. They would likely have known the first 5 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 immersed in a culture that did not sympathize with their faith at all.

Let's explore how the king of Babylon sought to win them over, intimidating them with the apparent 'irrelevance' of their own faith. As we do, we trace out 5 ways that Satan seeks to do the same to us:

1. The knowledge of God is marginalized or challenged in educational institutions.

The centers of highest learning in Babylon gave no credence to their faith, and even taught things antithetical to it. For 3 years, Daniel sat through lectures in the

University of Babylon. He learnt the language of the Chaldeans (the Chaldeans were the ruling tribe in Babylon) and was exposed to the best literature in that part of the world. Additionally, he would have learnt the occult and astrology – fields of practice disallowed by Jewish Scriptures¹. Still today, believers can lose confidence in their God when highly esteemed centers of learning marginalize our faith, or directly confront it.

2. The reality of God is obscured by hedonism and materialism. The king wined and dined Daniel and his friends. Still today, we can lose our fervency for God and our eternal perspective on things, if we exaggerate the present moment and live for things like immediate emotional fulfilment, appetite satisfaction, and material comforts. Our materialistic and hedonistic culture suggests that financial prosperity and sensory pleasures are all we need.

3. The bounds of faith are limited to the private realm. Daniel and his friends had their names of origin 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 signaled their faith in God, their faith was marginalized to the private realm. Still today, society says, 'We don't mind what you believe, but limit it to your heart and your home. It has no use in the public world of work, society and governance. And please don't talk about your faith out in the 'real' world.'

4. Our identity in God is eclipsed by the way society sees us. These 4 young believers were given new names that pointed to a false god – Belteshazzar, meaning *'Prince of Bel'*; Shadrach, meaning *'Illumined by the sun-god'*; Meshach, meaning *'Who is like Venus'*; and Abednego, meaning *'Servant of Nego'*. Yet one of the most exquisite dimensions of the gospel is that we are bestowed with an eternal identity as a child of God. Society, as it did then, still 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, prestige, power, political ideology or physical prowess for example.

5. Our value is based on human approval instead of God's. 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 undermine what God says about us.

As effective as these forces are at downplaying the importance of God in our lives, Daniel teaches us that we can withstand them. We can live lives faithful to God even while Satan uses intimidating and deceptive tactics to try get us to leave our faith behind.

CHOOSING YOUR BATTLES

Daniel and his friends had many options in responding to the godless culture they found themselves in. They could choose to live as in a bomb shelter – simply denouncing the evil of the culture, hiding underground while they waited for God’s judgment to fall. Alternatively, they could act as mirrors – changing their beliefs and lifestyles to fit in and simply reflecting the culture around them. Thirdly, they could become parasites – adopting the parts of the culture that benefited them, but making no effort to shape or redeem it. What they chose instead, was to be salt-and-light – living out the creative tension of being faithful to God, while still trying to infiltrate, serve and shape the godless culture they lived in.



8 Daniel 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. 9 God had granted Daniel kindness and compassion from the chief eunuch, 10 yet 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.”

11 So 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. 13 Then 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.” 14 He agreed with them about this and tested them for ten days.

Though his situation was very unique, Daniel provides an inspiring example that may encourage us modern-day believers when we find ourselves in situations where we are tempted to assimilate into an ungodly culture.

1. Resolve to be true to God. Daniel determined that he would not defile himself (v8). He made a prayerful decision to not sin. He understood that though he lived in the world, he would not sin. Though he gave allegiance to the king, yet he gave ultimate allegiance to God, the King of kings. Even as we seek to liberate our surrounding culture from its idols and sins, we must not be taken in by those same idols and sins.

2. Don’t be self-righteous. Daniel’s decision not to 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 non-kosher food 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 to eat kosher food. He did not expect pagans to live according to the Law of Moses. Still today, we must not expect non-Christians to live by Christ's teaching. Without knowing God and the Spirit's power, that's impossible anyway.

4. Choose your battles. Notice that Daniel did not resist the education he had received, even though it had much 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 demon-honouring name given to him – after all, he knew who he was even if they did not. But he did choose to resist the culture at one point – the food he was being fed.

As Christians, we have no such God-given restrictions about diet¹. But he chose to take his stand on what he ate for three reasons: 1) the food would have included meats that were not kosher according to the law of Moses (e.g. pork); 2) the meat and wine had likely been offered to false gods; 3) he perceived that the royal food was perhaps too luxurious, and in his eyes, represented the Babylonian attempt to ensnare him into the godless excesses of their culture.

Primarily, we notice that Daniel drew his lines 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 (under the Law of Moses, which we are no longer under) biblically explicit.

Like Daniel, we must 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.

He still took the university course, which taught him the occult. He didn't get into an argument with the lecturer. Instead he applied his mind, graduating to the top of the class. He didn't ignore people, but rather turned his head, smile on his face, when people called out the name Belteshazzar. Had he drawn up battle lines on these points, we can only guess that he would have been such a nuisance to all, that he would have lost all influence entirely. Instead he built as much common ground as he could, and leveraged that commonality to take his stand on a single issue, all the while maintaining as much credibility as possible in the palace – a credibility base he would later use to bring much greater changes to Babylon. By selecting our battles, we run the chance of winning the war too.

BEING SALT AND LIGHT

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



15 At the end of ten days they looked better and healthier than all the young men who were eating the king's food. 16 So the guard continued to remove their food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables. 17 As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.

18 At the end of the time that the king had said to present them, the chief eunuch presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. 19 The 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. 20 In 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. 21 Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus.

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.

1. Be winsomely 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 opted instead for the most respectful and winsome 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 thus would offer superior service to the king). The intriguing, respectful and realistic manner with which Daniel went about this conversation led the chief eunuch to oblige the request.

In this way, Daniel teaches us how to relate to our superiors – with respect, tact, thoughtfulness, courtesy and winsomeness. If we Christians are ready to obey God, but not ready to respect our earthly authorities, we shoot ourselves in the foot. We will quickly discover that we may pat ourselves on the back for our raw courage, but in the end, we have no influence to show for it. Put yourselves in the shoes of leaders for a moment: if you are leading others, and one of them is rudely demanding, contemptuous

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.'

2. 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 most elite Babylonian university. They did the hard work of learning all they could, while seeking to test it according to - and integrate it with, 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 our diligent, self-disciplined attempt to develop our talents and gifting as much as we can - not for our glory, but for God's.

3. Identify, cultivate and deploy the spiritual gifts God has given you. As much natural knowledge as they did acquire, they had an added advantage over their peers: 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 through occultic means and astrology. The demonically imbued special abilities pursued by the Babylonians were at best, counterfeits of the real spiritual gifts that God alone can give, gifts that he granted to Daniel.

4. 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 10-day test; who caused Daniel and his friends to grow in health; and who gave Daniel and his friends their knowledge and ability to discern visions and dreams. Still today, when we find ourselves in an environment that is hostile to our faith, we can trust God to work in the situation with us. After all, when we are on his side, he promises to be on ours - perhaps even promoting us against all odds as he did to Daniel and his 3 friends.

5. Commit for the long-haul. Daniel teaches us that being salt-and-light in society is not the result of flash inspiration and a short burst of energy. It grows rather from the deep roots of conviction and service - bearing fruit over decades not years. We're told that '*Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus*' (v21). How long did his ministry in Babylon last? He came to Babylon in 605 BC. After 3 years of training, he '*began to attend the king*' (v19) - so his official ministry began in 602 BC. And he reigned until King Cyrus came into power in 539 BC. That's 63 years of service!

FAITH AT WORK, PART 1 *(1:1-21)*

The story of Daniel's service within Babylon does more than guide us Christians to live out our faith creatively in a culture that is unsympathetic or hostile to our faith.

It also serves as a guide for modern day working professionals who want to excel in the workplace, yet remain true to God at the same time. His life and example is a highwater mark for all subsequent believers who try to integrate faith and work. Reflecting on Daniel, in chapter 1, what insights can we draw out to help us to do that?

1. As a general rule, Christians should avoid Christian-only institutions.

Though many believers will work in churches, parachurches, Christian-only businesses or Christian schools, this is by no means the norm. As tempting as this insularity is, if every believer did this, the church of Jesus would lose her influence within our culture. Daniel teaches us how to work out our faith in the secular institutions, businesses and even political parties that comprise most of our society. 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. Work for higher reasons than personal gain. Most people who work, do so for personal gain, whether it is financial recompense, job security, the personally fulfilling sense of career development, or the thrill and joy of creative and meaningful work. None of these are wrong. But a cursory glance at Daniel reveals a higher motive – he saw work as one way to worship God and serve others. Having this as our motive in work enables us to risk our jobs (and all the perks it fetches) if ever we needed to in the name of 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 and diligence. As brilliant and hardworking as Daniel was, 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 divine 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 *'10 times better'* (v20) than his unbelieving peers (v20). Though we certainly have a part to play in our success, we must be careful not to claim credit for our efforts or talents alone.

4. Don't violate your principles. Given enough time, every workplace will test our integrity or God-revealed convictions at some point. Whether it is deceiving others, turning a blind eye to wrong-doing, mistreating the poor or those beneath us, exploiting the vulnerability of others, or pandering to people's basest drives – at some points we must take a stand. Other than avoiding moments of compromise, this may involve limiting our practices in some way, so that there is at least some difference

between the way we go about work and the way that others work. For example, we might opt to close our business on a Sunday or at least once a week in the name of weekly rest, or we may decide to give a percentage of all profits to a select charity, or we may opt for a lower of standard of living than our pay could afford and is common for people in our particular line of work.

5. Get the best education you can, while keeping your discernment about you. Daniel studied all manner of occultic practices and false religious beliefs, yet he sought to eat the meat and spit out the bones. No doubt he and his believing friends discussed what they could and could not accept, and filled in the gaps as well as recasting their education with biblical insights. Still today, we must learn all that we can from those outside of the faith community, even while we critique, re-imagine and supplement it with good theology and biblical insight.

6. 'As far as it is possible for you, live at peace with everyone'¹. Daniel treated the people he worked with and for well. He built friendships with his superiors. He looked out for their well-being – for example when the chief eunuch admitted that veering from the prescribed diet could sabotage his own job and life (v10), Daniel offered a safeguard against that possible end (v11-13). It is not surprising that the chief eunuch in charge of him was so ready to show him kindness and compassion (v9).

7. Seek the prosperity of those you work for. Perhaps never hearing Jeremiah's counsel to others in Babylon, Daniel nonetheless put it into practice: '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 the city I have deported you to. Pray to the Lord on its behalf, for when it thrives, you will thrive."*². Similarly, we invest our lives in companies, institutions and organizations, not for what we can leach from them, but for what we can add to them.

POWER IS OVERRATED *(2:1-12)*

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. Whatever would they do? Let's read the story to find out what exactly happened...



2 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.

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 2 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 merely invite people into his presence, he summoned 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 can afford many privileges, and can solve many problems, but there are some things that it cannot claim – 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 pagan king does not know.

The more we are responsible for, the more we have to worry about. We must learn to entrust what we have responsibility for, to God: *'Unless the Lord builds a house, its builders labor over it in vain; unless the Lord watches over a city, the watchman stays alert in vain. In vain you get up early and stay up late, working hard to have enough food—yes, he gives sleep to the one he loves'*¹.

2. Power tends to corrupt. Power tends to corrupt and absolute power tends to corrupt absolutely. 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 (so the king reasoned) 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).

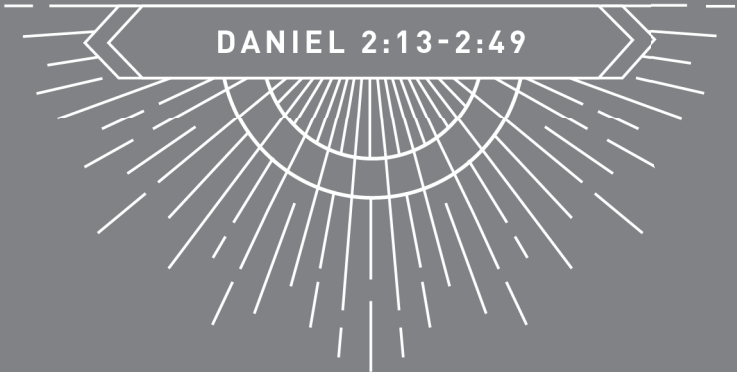
Throughout history people in power have tended to exploit and do violence against their own people. It is not that powerful people are especially evil, only that humans, left to our own devices, have seeds of corruption that tend to germinate when given the chance – such as being given power over others.

Daniel never seeks power, but it comes to him. In his case it does not corrupt him. He serves as a foreshadowing example of Jesus' own teaching and example: *'Jesus called them over and said to them, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those in high positions act as tyrants over them. But it is not so among you. On the contrary, whoever wants to become great among you will be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you will be a slave to all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*².



WEEK TWO

DANIEL 2:13-2:49



WHEN IN A CRISIS *(2:13-19)*

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.

Reflecting on yesterday and today's biblical text, let's see what we learn about God, and what we can learn from Daniel's actions.

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. In another amazing story, God drops a thought into a sleepless pagan king's mind, which leads to an action which results in one of God's servants being honoured rather than killed.¹

2. God is in the habit of creating difficulties that show us how helpless we are without God. The wise men of Babylon are driven to their wit's end. Despite all their learning, abilities and magic, and despite the gods that they worship, they are unable to do what the king demands of them. Still today, people 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 God for whom nothing is impossible. God likes to crash through this illusory security by bringing about situations that exceed our

wisdom and power. At the end of ourselves, we're more ready to reach out to a God who is greater than we are.

3. God likes to create opportunities for his people, as they rely on him, to excel where others fail. 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 theirs figuratively, and about to lose their heads literally.

2. Collect as much relevant data as you can. Daniel finds out from his soon-to-be executioner exactly what is going on (v15). Until he understands exactly the nature and causes of the crisis, he knows that he is not ready to respond wisely.

3. Enlist the help of people. Instead of dealing with the situation as a lone ranger, move towards select people: 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, calls on his friends* (v17).

4. Lean into spiritual community. Daniel finds more than friendship in *'his friends Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah'* (v17) – he finds spiritual community. Together they seek God. They stand with each other in the trial, drawing on God's grace, and conduiting that grace to each other. We cannot control what trials will come our way, but we do have a measure of 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.

THE GIFT OF KNOWLEDGE (2:19-30)

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



Daniel praised the God of the heavens 20 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.

God knows everything. God cannot be truly in control if he does not know everything. Notice that God has all knowledge and wisdom. *'He knows what is in the darkness, and light dwells with him'* (v22). This is another way of saying that he knows everything.

Theologians speak of the omniscience of God. Job says something similar: *'His eyes are on the ways of men, he sees their every step. There is no dark place, no deep shadow, where evildoers can hide. He has no need to examine them further that they should be judged by him'*. 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 to us. As amazing as it is that God knows everything, he goes even further: he chooses to reveal some of his knowledge to his people.

God *'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 he had dreamed about – 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.

This reminds us of a place where the apostle Paul says, 'For who knows a person's thoughts, except that person's own spirit within? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have ... received ... the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us ... for, "Who has known the mind of the Lord ... ?" But we have the mind of Christ.'² God has revealed his thoughts to us in Scripture, in Jesus, and continues to reveal some of his thoughts to us by his Spirit.

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 Word of God, 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. This is a useful insight for all people gifted by God with the more miraculous gifts such as healing, words of knowledge and prophecy: though God gives us the gift, yet 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. True, God has a habit of using this person in this way – but let's not forget that God still reserves control of when and how he will use them in this way.

KINGDOMS RISE AND FALL (2:31-43)

Daniel intercepted 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 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 (v37-38) as the kingdom of Babylon under 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.

Let’s cross-check this remarkable prophecy with the history that followed 603 BC. A cursory study of world history from 600 BC until the coming of Jesus reveals 4 dominant world empires:

- The golden head: At the time of the dream, the Babylonian empire was at its zenith of world power.
- The silver torso: Less than 70 years later, in 539 BC, a new kingdom, the Medo-Persians suddenly eclipsed the Babylonian one by diverting the Euphrates River and entering the great walled city of Babylon by night.
- The bronze waist: In 331 BC, Alexander swept across the world of his day, taking the philosophy and culture promoted by Aristotle with him wherever he went. The Greek Empire ruled the known world.
- The iron legs: Finally in 146 BC, the Roman legions conquered and crushed everyone in their path.

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 as if it will last but it will not. Its days are numbered. 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 sovereign was utterly countercultural. So dominant was the throne in Babylon that it obscured in the imagination of people, the possibility that there was a higher throne in heaven.

Still today, faith in God's reign is countercultural. One reason is that there are organizations of people that are so great; that loom so large and dominant in our minds, that God seems less real. Whether it is a multinational company, a superpower nation, the latest technology, popular beliefs, so-called 'revolutions' or some political philosophy; these entities seem to rule the landscape of our day. We cannot imagine a time when they will not be dominant in society and in our lives.

But God does not share our myopia. Older than the mountains, God has witnessed kingdom rising and then falling. No kingdom has stood for very long in the history of the world. From his eternal vantage point, they are momentary blips in His Story. The very fact that their 'reign' is so short-lived puts a question mark on whether they ever reigned at all. Everything humankind makes, impressive as it may be at the time, is like a sand castle on the beach. Eventually the high tide of time will wash it away.

There is no progress without God. We tend to believe in the unyielding progress of the human race. Sure, we may have advanced in knowledge, in technology and into greater prospects of longevity, but are we truly better as people? The king's dream suggests the opposite. We're devolving – gold is replaced by silver, which is replaced by bronze, which is replaced by iron. It's as if God says, 'When the human race tries to march into the future without me, it marches backwards into even greater darkness.'

THE SCOPE OF HUMAN HISTORY *(2:44-45)*

Let's unpack the meaning of the king's dream as interpreted by Daniel. Although this dream unfolded in someone's head in 603 BC, near modern day Baghdad, nonetheless it was a dream packed with implications for the whole world.

Specifically it is a dream that encapsulates:

- the scope of human history with a statue, and
- the hope of human history with a stone.

THE STATUE AND THE SCOPE OF HUMAN HISTORY.

Though written, in the sixth century BC, the book of Daniel tells firstly of future kingdoms (Daniel explains that the four parts of the statue represent four empires) and secondly, exactly how many kingdoms before God sends his Messiah to the world.

- First, the head of gold. That's Babylon, a kingdom that lasted 66 years.
- Second, the chest and arms of silver. From hindsight we know that this is the Medo-Persian empire, with King Cyrus as its first king (cf 8:20) – an empire that ruled for 208 years (539–331 BC).
- Third, the belly and thighs of bronze. From hindsight we know that this is the Grecian empire, under Alexander the Great (cf 8:21), which ruled for 185 years (331–63 BC).
- Fourth, the legs of iron, which we now know to be the Roman Empire, which reigned unrivalled for about 500 years.

There are some liberal commentators who, refusing to believe in predictive prophecy, claim that Daniel was written not in the sixth century but much later in the second century BC. They split Median and Persian kingdoms into two, so that second part of the statue is seen as the Median Empire, the third as the Persian, and the fourth as Grecian. The problem with this line of interpretation is that Media was never an independent world power after Babylon fell to Cyrus in 539 BC. It was also ruled by Cyrus. Besides, Daniel in a subsequent vision, sees Media and Persian as conjoined kingdoms (*see Daniel 8:20, for example where God tells him in a vision 'As for the ram that you saw with the two horns, these are the kings of Media and Persia'*). All that to say, we have a remarkable example of 6th century prediction coming to pass in the ensuing 5 centuries!



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."

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. Though Daniel does not tell us explicitly what this rock represents, we know from the New Testament that it refers to the coming of the Messiah-King. Jesus said it refers to himself when he spoke of those 'on whom this rock falls, will be crushed to pieces'.¹

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 Kingdom – that's during the Roman Empire. Amazingly, this is exactly when Jesus came!

Was there a reason that Jesus came when he did? Yes, Galatians 4:4 says, '*When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son.*' In other words, 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 that Jesus came...

- **Synagogues were in the major cities of the world.** The Babylonians deported most of the Jews from their homeland, enabling them to live as Jews all over the world. By the time Jesus came, there were synagogues the world over. 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.** Through Alexander the Great, the Greeks 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. Additionally, the Romans built roads all across the empire, making it possible for the gospel to spread like wildfire.

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.

God still works circumstances today for the spread of the gospel. For example, difficult times, caused by wars and collapses in economies tend to make people more open to the gospel. Not surprising that in a 100-year period, Sub-Saharan Africa went from 10% Christian to 76% Christian. Or think of the way that previously unreached people are now converging in all the cities of the world. You just need to reach the people in your own city and you end up reaching 100s of different nations – many of whom then go back to their nations and spread the gospel. Or think of the void left in the wake of communism in China, where the fastest spread of the gospel in history is presently underway.

THE HOPE OF HUMAN HISTORY (2:34-35, 44-45)

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



Verses 34-35: 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.

Verses 44-45: 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.

Jesus is heaven's stone. Who is this stone in Daniel 2:34? It is none other than Jesus Christ himself. On this point, the Scriptures speak clearly. The psalmist wrote, 'The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone'¹. 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'². To Israel, the Lord Jesus Christ was a 'stone of stumbling.' Israel was looking for a political messiah to free them from Roman rule and oppression, but Jesus came the first time as a suffering Servant. To their disappointment, he entered Jerusalem on a donkey, not a stallion. His crown was made of thorns, and his coronation 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' (v44). It's not surprising then that Jesus' main message was: 'The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the good news'³. What do we learn about his kingdom from Daniel 2?

Christ's kingdom is a kingdom of God not of man. Though the statue is made by human hands, this rock is made by the hands of God (v45). It is a rock 'cut out of a mountain' (v45). That mountain is God's kingdom. The rock cut from the mountain is Christ's kingdom, which itself is the consummate expression of God's kingdom. Said 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'* (v45). In other words, the rock grows and grows. Although the population percentage growth of Christianity may have stalled or declined in Europe and North America, yet incredible growth continues elsewhere: Just this last Sunday, there were more Christians attending church in China than there were in all of so-called "Christian Europe". By 2020, Christianity will have grown from 11.4 million Christians in East Asia (China, Korea, Japan) in 1970 and 1.2 percent of the population, to 171.1 million and 10.5 percent of the population. In 1910 only 12 million people, or 9 percent of Africa's population, were Christians, but they will number 630 million, or 49.3 percent of the populace, by 2020⁴.

Christ's kingdom threatens every other kingdom. In the vision, the rock smashes the statue. This shows how Christ's kingdom is at odds with 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'⁵. Christ's kingdom is eternal and here forever, every other one is temporal. Wonderfully, Jesus has outlasted the very kingdom that crucified him.

What happened after the Roman Empire ended? The vision does not go beyond the empire in which the Messiah came. Though these kingdoms have fallen, yet the iron, bronze, silver and gold 'are all together, broken in pieces'. In other words, all subsequent kingdoms are made of similar stuff to those earlier kingdoms.

Michael Eaton writes on this point: 'The kingdoms of paganism are still around. Relics of the four empires are still around. It is not that the Roman Empire will be revived - an idea not found in the Bible. It is rather that the various international systems of rule and government pioneered by these four empires are still with us. (For example, Babylonian interest in science, the Persian's postal system, the Grecian passion for wisdom and athletics, and the Roman use of law). The influence of these empires continue. All modern countries use the science, the technology, the technical language and the government methods of these empires'⁶.

Daniel's vision began to be fulfilled in the first coming of Jesus. Now God's kingdom and earthly kingdoms exist side by side. But the vision will be completed at the second coming of Jesus when his kingdom will be victorious over all other kingdoms' - which will then be blown away by the wind, without trace (v35).

GOD IN CONTROL *(2:46-49)*

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

GOD IS IN CONTROL OF EVERYTHING.

Daniel believed God was in control of the circumstances of his life. This helped him to survive major trauma.

He did not conflate the brutality of life with the character of God. He knew that life is tough and God is good. Think how harsh life had been for Daniel. One day he turns 16, enjoying a big supportive family, in a culture that esteems his faith, a bright future in Jerusalem ahead of him. Then within the year, he is kidnapped and hauled off to a godless land where he is castrated, forced to study forbidden magic arts, renamed after a demon and put to work for the same wicked king who pillaged his homeland, mocked his God and later gives the order to execute him and his friends for no legitimate reason.

Daniel 2 reveals a God who is in control of the history of the world, even the tectonic transition of kingdoms, as well as the events of our lives, even the agonizing shifts of circumstance.

How do we reconcile the goodness of God with the grim realities of life? We learn four things from Daniel:

1. God tolerates much evil and suffering for now. He allows our evil choices though he is not the author of them. God's sovereignty does not mean that we are puppets on his string. Sure, no one can thwart his plans, but we are still free to make sinful choices, for which we are responsible. God puts up with this evil, as he waits for more people to respond to the gospel¹. If God were to eliminate evil, we would all be destroyed. He chooses instead to work into a world where much happens that is contrary to his character.

2. God superintends evil and suffering for higher purposes. As a master-weaver, he takes the evil choices of people, and weaves them into his great big plan. For God's people at least, we have the promise that God works all things for good². No harsh experience that comes our way surprises or overwhelms God – it comes to us through the filter of his wisdom and love. Like playing against a chess champion, every evil and loss that contradicts God's character, he absorbs into his own long-term victory game; turning evil for good.

3. God will not put up with evil and suffering forever. The stone that crashes into the fallen kingdoms of this world refers to the coming of Jesus, who sets up God's renewing and redemptive kingdom in human history. When Jesus came, he launched his kingdom and released his liberating power into human history; one life at a time.

The mountain of justice, healing, forgiveness and changed lives grows square inch by square inch in millions of lives – even as we read these words. Though Christ's kingdom co-exists with a fallen world for the time, eventually Jesus will come back and displace poverty, hatred, injustice, racism, grief, death and tears with his mountain, which will fill all things in every way – a kingdom where justice, peace, love, life and vibrant harmony are the order of the day.

4. While we wait for this glorious future, already now we trust that God is with us.

Daniel had been plucked from his former life and dumped into a severe situation. There he experienced God's presence, guidance and preservation. We as God's people 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.

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.

Amazingly, God uses this life-threatening 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 continued existence to Daniel's intervention. Daniel then used his position to promote his three friends.

Nebuchadnezzar, having seen Daniel's God-given ability to describe and then interpret the dream, admits 'your God is indeed God of gods and Lord of kings' (v47). But notice that he was not converted: he fell on his face and paid homage to Daniel, but not to God (v46)! In fact, in the very next story (chapter 3) he commanded his empire to 'fall down and worship the golden image' he himself sets up. Thus far into his journey, the king had not begun to build his life upon the Rock, the 'tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation.'³



WEEK THREE

DANIEL 3:1-4:37



STATE AND RELIGION *(3:1-7)*

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.

Nebuchadnezzar built a statue that either represented himself, or the main god that Babylonians worshipped, Marduk. The statue was close on 30 metres high and 3 metres wide – a gargantuan sculpture. (By the way, a fascinating archeological discovery confirms this account – on the plains of Dura there stands to this day, a rectilinear mound, about 20 feet high, an exact square of about 46 feet at the base, resembling the pedestal of a colossal statue.)

Then he created an elaborate day of national worship. All the people who represented the Babylonian government (the 'satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates, and all the rulers of the provinces') 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 made up of 'horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, drum, and every kind of music' as well as a climactic moment when all are to fall face down in worship of this image. To heighten the importance of the occasion, the king issued a threat that if anyone failed to attend and worship, they would forfeit their lives.

THIS IS AN EXAMPLE OF AN ATROCITY CALLED STATE-RELIGION.

This is when the government chooses one religion and imposes it upon all the people of the land. Civic officials, especially, are to give honour to the god of choice. In fact, every state occasion doubles up as a religious occasion, where the god or religion of choice is honoured. Sometimes there are special places of worship where people gather together. The focus is on a united external observance, so that in many situations people are permitted to have other belief systems in private. But in public, the nation is meant to stand united around this common religion.

Almost all states in history have taken this approach, certainly all pre-Christian societies, and still most societies today, though in a softened less militant form. For example, it is commonly claimed in India that if you are not a Hindu you are not a true Indian. Or in most Arab states, everyone is to submit to Muslim law or sharia, or suffer the consequences. The first Christian version of this happened after Emperor Constantine's 4th century conversion.

THERE ARE AT LEAST 3 MAJOR PROBLEMS WITH STATE-RELIGION:

1. The state supports religious persecution. That's what we see happening in Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar – 'worship this god – or else!' Think of how damaging it was for the church to be merged with the European states in previous centuries. For example, Emperor Theodosius demanded that all his subjects were to be Catholic Christians, and he proceeded to persecute all non-Christians and non-Catholic Christians. He said rightly, that God will punish all those who do not believe the gospel, and then wrongly, that the state was to execute that judgment upon its unbelieving citizens! Or think of how Zwingli the Swiss Reformer influenced the government of his own country to drown Christians who believed in baptism!

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 minority belief system that contradicted the prevailing belief system

3. A pressure to externally align with some belief, while holding another belief privately, guarantees hypocrisy. Historically, when the church has been a department of the state, it has always led to Christian nominalism, where people claim to be Christian, but have no real interest in Christ himself.

The solution is to 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 merging divine and state authority; in this single statement, he showed how both God and government had a legitimate claim upon people, but they were clearly separate entities. Surely the state's religious policy should secure freedom of worship – where national unity is fostered despite religious diversity, and where minorities are protected from persecution. All things considered it is better for church to be the servant of all, winsomely loving and serving, rather than seeking to control people through legislation and state power.

REFUSE IDOLATRY *(3:5)*

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

This is called idolatry. At the heart of the Jewish faith is the determination to worship God alone (1st of the Ten Commandments) and to not worship any false gods (2nd of the Ten Commandments). Worshipping this image of gold was a serious sin. Nebuchadnezzar, though he knew about of the God of Israel, worshipped idols nonetheless. More than that, he commanded all the people and provinces under his rule to do the same.

Idol worship is as old as history. People have looked at the forces of nature, and have attributed these forces to invisible gods – gods such as the Babylonian god Marduk, the god of fertility, the storm and the dew; or Ishtar, the god of sexual potency, violence and war.

Though these gods are personified in nature, yet they were nonetheless 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 thus became a god itself.

MODERN DAY IDOLATRY

Though the worship of statues is still common around the world, in the West this has largely been done away with. But idolatry is as strong as ever.

Echoing the prophet Ezekiel who spoke of those who *'have set up idols in their hearts, embracing things that make them fall into sin'*¹ - John Calvin, the Reformer said, *'The heart is an idol factory'*.

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

The modern *'gods'* that captivate many people are the gods of love, pleasure, money and power. People live for these things as though they were God. Though a person may believe in God, often they give their daily devotion to lesser gods, to idols. Even atheists worship in this sense.

CULTURE-SPECIFIC IDOLS

Still today various cultures tend to worship select idols. Though our government may not demand such idolatry, nonetheless each specific culture or society tends to elevate certain idols, socially pressurizing its people to worship these idols.

Modern day idols are less about worshipping an actual statue and more about finding our identity, meaning and hope in something other than God.

Still today, depending on the family or culture we grow up in, we tend to have specific gods that are thrust upon us, in much the same way the idol worship was thrust by Nebuchadnezzar upon his people.

One family or culture may give primary devotion to the god of comfort, another the god of family cohesion, another the god of mammon, another the god of educational achievement, another the god of pleasure, another the god of reputation.

We must learn to discern what kind of gods have been explicitly or implicitly urged upon us by our specific family or culture, and refuse to treat them as ultimate.

FROM IDOLATRY TO TRUE WORSHIP

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.

For example, the apostle Paul tells² of his liberation from idolatry to true worship. Before coming to Christ, dictated by his religious culture, he had found his worth and placed his hope in religious markers (circumcision), his nationalist identity (an Israelite), his blood pedigree (tribe of Benjamin), his culture and language (Hebrew), the elite group he was part of (Pharisees), his moral decency (faultless legalism), his remarkable dedication (persecuting the church) and his gifts of leadership and knowledge.

Had he been saved out of a more Western culture, perhaps his idols would have been the pursuit of romantic love, the security wealth can bring, the status and comfort of one's possessions, the success of one's achievements, the approval given by an elite group, the acceptance of his family, his physical looks and strength, or the respect his power and position could fetch him.

All of these idols attract God's judgment. They are false idols that fail to satisfy the deepest core of our being, fill us with despair when we can't have them or when we lose them, fill us with anxiety when we have them but realize we might lose them, exhaust us in our efforts to attain and maintain them, condemn us if we fail them, and ultimately will be taken from us.

It is much better to find our identity in the God who blesses us, as we trust him, who alone can fill our souls with lasting joy, who cannot be lost any more 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 put it, '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.'

FORTIFY YOUR OBEDIENCE *(3:8-18)*

The decisions we make every week are shaped either by personal conviction or external pressure. In today's reading, Daniel's friends teach us that there are two things that strongly support our efforts to live true to our inner compass: the support of community, and the courage to stand with God no matter what:



8 Some Chaldeans took this occasion to come forward and maliciously accuse the Jews. 9 They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, “May the king live forever. 10 You 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. 11 Whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire. 12 There 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.”

13 Then in a furious rage Nebuchadnezzar gave orders to bring in Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king. 14 Nebuchadnezzar 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? 15 Now 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?”

16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied to the king, “Nebuchadnezzar, we don’t need to give you an answer to this question. 17 If 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. 18 But 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.”

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego obey God rather than the king. The 2nd of the Ten Commands rang in their hearts: ‘You shall not bow down to worship an idol for I am a jealous God’. How did they obey God in the face of such resistance? How can we imitate their obedience?

1. Spiritual friendships fortify our obedience. 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 common devotion to the same God. There were other young men from Israel, but they did not 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 initial catalyst for these friendships.

It is doubtful that these four men, if they did not have each other, would have had the courage to stand against the luxuriance of Babylon and the prospect of eating of non-kosher foods (1:8-16), or if they would have been able to calmly face the crisis of imminent execution (2:17-18)

Still today, we desperately need to find some friends who share our common love for God. These friends serve as a source of strength and courage when the temptation to quit or compromise comes our way. One verse says it well: 'Encourage one another daily, as long as it is called "Today," so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.'¹

2. An unconditional pre-decision to obey God no matter what, fortifies our obedience.

Though obedience releases joy into our lives², there are times where obeying God can come at great personal 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 it would have been to justify this momentary disobedience to God by saying they could do more for God if they were alive than if they were dead. What would they do?

In direct disobedience to the king, they decided to not attend the worship event. All would have gone well, except that some of the wise men, probably because they were jealous of the prior promotion of these 3 (see 2:49), told the king about their disobedience. Nebuchadnezzar was furious when he found out and interrogated them to see if the rumour was true, threatening them with death in a fiery furnace.

We learn a secret form of obedience from them. They had decided to go all-in for God before the temptation came. They had pre-decided to obey God no matter what. 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 resolved to obey God no matter what.

Jesus calls us to something similar: 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for you to gain the whole world, yet forfeit your soul? Or what can you give in exchange for your soul?'³

NO COMPROMISE *(3:19-30)*

Today we witness the evil king respond atrociously to the open defiance of Daniel's friends. Yet this story gives us a glimpse into the outworking of two of God's great promises to believers: 1) A promise to be with us in difficult times and 2) A promise to reward our faithfulness.



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."

1. God promises to be with us in intensely difficult times. The men had decided to obey God and consequently to disobey the king, and therefore 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. When he first called the men in, he was already in a furious rage (v13). After they defied him to his face his anger notched up: he was *'filled with 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 scorching heat that even the soldiers who threw these 3 bound men into the flame were scorched.

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 clothing 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!'

Though few of us will experience life-threatening persecution, and almost certainly if we were thrown into flames, we would die, yet when we experience intensely difficult times in life and on the path of obedience to God, we can remember this story and remind ourselves that indeed God is with us.

Still God speaks the encouraging words over us: *'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.'*¹



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.

2. God promises to reward our determination to not compromise. The astonished king recognized that the God of these 3 men was ‘the Most High God’. Though he had just, minutes before, punished them for disobeying him, he now honoured them for doing so. He made their religion one of the acceptable religions in Babylon (and therefore not to be persecuted at the risk of death) (v29) and promoted them even more highly in his kingdom!

When we stand with God, he stands with us. When we honour him, he honours 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!’²

As we refuse to compromise God’s calling on our lives, we have this promise: ‘Do not throw away your confidence in God; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised’³

AN OPEN LETTER *(4:1-37)*

Today we read an abridged version of Daniel 4. We read of the king's second dream, which Daniel interprets, then of the king's humiliation and final restoration. Tomorrow we will explore 4 insights that emerge from this chapter, but already today let God speak to you as you read it. Look for sentences and ideas that stick out to you.



4 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.

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 palace 30 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. 33 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.

HUMBLLED AND EXALTED *(4:1-37)*

Let's recap 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 (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).

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 that streetlights can dim our view of the stars above them.

After these events, the king had been converted. He repented. He had a radical change of mind and heart. He saw reality in a whole new way. No longer would he merely flatter God and Daniel, God's servant. Finally 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 pointed others to the faith.

2. If we will not humble ourselves, God is able to humble us. Listen to the king's words: *'Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?' Standing on his palace rooftop (v29), he looked upon the ornate temples, the famous hanging garden, and the impenetrable city walls and*

said to himself, 'This city is from me, through me and for my glory'. These words are an eerie echo of words that should only be spoken about God: 'All things are from God and through him and for him. To him be the glory forever!'¹

The king's hubris led to a mighty fall. Like a lumberjack, God cut him down. He had thought of himself as godlike. God made him animal-like, until he could learn that he was merely human. Still today, when we think we are greater than we are, God may reduce us to lower than we are. Until such time as we humble ourselves.

The opposite is also true. In the end the king had even more than before (v36). If we humble ourselves, God is able to exalt us.

3. 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.'²

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 even people with great fame and wealth.

4. 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 who are far from God:

Like Daniel, we can earn the respect and trust of people. Since Daniel previously helped the king interpret a dream, he had remained faithful to him. He had shown the king respect even on 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 the 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. Our goal should always be to win people over, not to wipe them out. We will never persuade anyone if we harbour anger or resentment towards them.

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.



WEEK FOUR

DANIEL 5:1-6:18



WRITING ON THE WALL (5:1-31)

The first 4 chapters of Daniel cover his service under Nebuchadnezzar. In chapters 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 for you. Over the next 2 days we will unpack what we read today.



5 King Belshazzar held a great feast for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine in their presence. 2 Under 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. 3 So 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. 4 They drank the wine and praised their gods made of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone.

5 At 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, 6 his face turned pale, and his thoughts so terrified him that he soiled himself and his knees knocked together. 7 The 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." 8 So all the king's wise men came in, but none could read the inscription or make its interpretation known to him. 9 Then King Belshazzar became even more terrified, his face turned pale, and his nobles were bewildered.

10 Because 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. 11 There 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, 12 did this because Daniel, the one the king named Belteshazzar, 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."

13 Then 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? 14 I'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.

PRIDE BEFORE THE FALL *(5:1-31)*

Who is Belshazzar? Living 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 that the 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):

"Mene, Mene, Tekel, and Parsin" (v 25)

Because these were Semitic words, only Daniel who was of Hebrew origin could read them. All 3 words – Mene, Tekel and Parsin – were kinds of weights used for measuring substance and value. How did Daniel draw meaning out of these words? He explained that 'Mene' meant that God had evaluated the life of Belshazzar and found him valueless, and his days were now coming to an end. The double usage of 'Mene' doubly emphasized this point.

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.

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.

6 SIGNS OF PRIDE

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 manifestations of pride:

1. Trying to impress elite people. 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 them. Each person there was another stroke of approval for his ego. Instead of glorifying God (v23), he glorified himself.

2. Self-gratification. There were no limits to this party – every appetite was meant to be satiated. There was 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 usually an attempt to compensate for the emptiness of soul that comes from lack of spirituality.

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

4. Suppressing what we know. 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'¹.

5. Mocking God. At the height of his party and drunkenness, Belshazzar ordered that the golden and silver cups (which had decades earlier 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 rebuked 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. It is likely that Belshazzar knew that the army of Cyrus of Persia was imminently going to attack the city of Babylon. Yet instead of admitting his vulnerability, repenting of his sins and calling on God for help; he instead projected 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).

'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'² Humility is the opposite of pride. In most cases, doing the opposite of Belshazzar is the way to receive God's grace.

Humility means:

- living for God's glory not our own,
- finding our joy in God,
- learning from the mistakes of others,
- cherishing what God has already showed us,
- honouring God as the one who gives us our every breath and
- letting our vulnerability drive us to our knees in prayer.

WARNING AND JUDGMENT *(5:1-31)*

We continue to reflect on Daniel 5, and the fall of both Belshazzar and the Babylonian kingdom. The defeat at the hands of King Cyrus also revealed the hand of God's own judgment. We learn much about the judgment of God in this terrifying account:

1. God would rather save than judge. Even as we ponder 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 (Nebuchadnezzar) and 5 (Belshazzar), a powerful king was given a warning by God, which had been interpreted by Daniel, and both kings then made a choice in response. In the latter's case, the king's lack of humility meant that he forfeited the salvation that could have been his. Yet in the former's 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'.¹*

2. Before God judges us, he tends to issue a warning. The supernatural writing on the wall was not God's attempt to taunt Belshazzar, but 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 or may not 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 defiance of God 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 as transparent as possible, God sent Daniel, his messenger to share with him his message. Still today, God often sends 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 and 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 mattered. Daniel's abrupt dismissal of this gesture (*'You may keep your gifts and give your rewards to someone else'* (v17)) hints at the offence that 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 God's 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.'* ² *Ultimately, we will experience God's judgment when we see him face to face, but some of his judgment may erupt long before, in this life, even as we carry on in our wicked ways.*

In Belshazzar's case, the judgment arrived within hours of the final rejected warning. The date was 16 October 539 BC. 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.

A TRUSTWORTHY PERSON (6:1-4)



6 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 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 Medo-Persian kingdom, Persia. Most likely, Darius (his Median name) was another name for Cyrus (his Persian name). Daniel 6:28 could be translated: *'So this Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius, that is, during the reign of Cyrus the Persian.'*

Darius would reign from 522-486BC 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 Daniel, initially to be one of his top 3 (v2), and because he was so trustworthy in that role, finally to be his 2IC (2nd in Command), setting him *'over the whole realm'* (v3). What was it about Daniel that made him so trustworthy? Here are 6 of his inspiring traits...

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 or corruption against him (v4). Here was a man whose *'integrity guided him'*¹, 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.

When corruption is rife, as it apparently was in the Persian kingdom, people with integrity stand out. Darius had probably heard about Daniel's courageous confrontation of the previous fallen king the night before his death – honest people like this, people who would do and say the right thing regardless of what it cost them personally, were exactly what he needed.

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 skillful 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 of 3 who were giving leadership to 120 other key leaders, and who were implementing better systems of financial control so as to stamp out corruption. Daniel was an old man who, instead of leaning into his prior competencies, sought to develop his skills some more.

3. Excellence makes us trustworthy. Daniel stood out above his peers because he had *'an extraordinary spirit'* (v3). Many English translations use the words *'an excellent spirit'*. Excellence is doing the very best we can, with what we have. It speaks of a whole-heartedness in everything we do, and a determination to become everything that God wants us to become. It is the refusal to put in the minimum so as to just get by. It involves an intolerance for mediocrity, sloppiness and half-heartedness.

4. 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, he led people *'with integrity of heart and skillful hands'*. 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.

5. 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. Amazingly, Daniel was in his mid- to late-eighties at this point. He stood out amongst the others because of his consistent readiness to serve and to bring his best to whatever he did for a period of no less than 63 years!

6. 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. Nowhere in the book of Daniel does one notice the slightest hint of any restless longing in Daniel to be exalted – he 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.

SNARES AND PRAYERS *(6:5-10)*

Yesterday we read how Daniel had been one of the 3 senior administrators overseeing 120 satraps, but then had been promoted to second-in-charge in the kingdom. This created jealousy in the 122 other people:



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

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.

Perhaps there was more than simple envy at play. It’s plausible that some of these 122 people were corrupt themselves. Having Daniel scrupulously heading up the anti-corruption efforts ruined their chances of lining their own pockets, so they wanted to get rid of him:



6 So the administrators and satraps went together to the king and said to him, “May King Darius live forever. 7 All 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. 8 Therefore, 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.” 9 So King Darius signed the written edict.

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 the book of Esther!) was irrevocable, forbidding prayer to any other gods than himself as the state-deity. Darius was so flattered by the suggestion that he became even more drunk on his self-importance.

Still today, we must be careful of flattery. Those who flatter 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 - decisions we will regret later.

This story is an example of one more thing that is wrong with state-religion (see day 13) – it leads to persecution of minorities who do not enjoy freedom of religion and conscience.



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.

Obey God not people. Daniel modelled a respect for, and obedience to authority. This should still be the default posture of believers². However, when those in authority command us to do something that God prohibits, or prohibit 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!’³ Other people may have thought that obeying God was the most dangerous thing to do, but Daniel knew that it was the safest thing to do.

WE LEARN MUCH FROM DANIEL’S PRAYER-LIFE:

1. Prayer is the way to turn spiritual truths into spiritual experience. From his earliest days, Daniel had many Scripture-based convictions about God taught to him. Yet he was not satisfied to merely know about God. Through prayer, he came to know God. In prayer, the truths about God became a rich spiritual experience of God. As long as his soul was satisfied by God, he was able to refuse the sensual and material enticements of Babylon, as well as its offer of human applause on succumbing to its demands.

2. 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. As competent as Daniel was, he did not overrate his own powers.

3. Prayer feeds humility. He knelt down in prayer (as others in the Bible, like Jesus, Stephen, Peter, Paul and Luke, used to). This humble posture reminds us that it is best to empty ourselves of pride and self-reliance, and freshly humble ourselves before God.

4. Praying is supported by habit. Daniel likely prayed all the time, everywhere. What fed this prayerful spirit was a prayerful habit – he was in the habit of, 3 times a day, praying some time, somewhere. Still today, we must form rhythms of praying that prop up our prayerfulness.

5. 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.

6. Prayer spares us from the sin of manipulating our futures. Daniel serves as such a contrast to the 122 men who betrayed 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. Instead of using the weapons of the world, we should utilize the weapons of the Spirit: relying on God and being true to him in constant prayer.

SUFFER FOR WHAT'S RIGHT (6:11-18)



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.

Governmental laws can be used to uphold wickedness. In this story, the satraps incited Darius to create a law that upheld wickedness, instead of righteousness. It amounted to a state-sponsored character assassination and then execution of a very good man. Still today, a common kind of wicked law is one that eliminates religious freedom or endorses the oppression of the weak or minorities.

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 grueling 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.

Jesus warned, 'Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you.' If we consistently do God's will - at least at some point - we will cut against the surrounding culture in such a way that the culture will seek to deal with us, publicly shaming us or worse.

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.'²

It is right in a so-called 'tolerant' society to graciously and winsomely insist on our 'freedom of religion and perspective' as well as our right to our view on things, even if our views are out of tune with the latest choir-song of culture. We should grant the same respect to others too.

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 too. 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.



WEEK FIVE

DANIEL 6:19-7:27



GOD PROTECTS & VINDICATES *(6:19-24)*

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.



19 At the first light of dawn the king got up and hurried to the lions' den. 20 When 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?"

21 Then Daniel spoke with the king: "May the king live forever. 22 My 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."

23 The 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. 24 The 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.

1. 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?*¹

In the den, perhaps Daniel used the Psalmist's prayer: *'Save me from the lion's mouth, for I will yet declare your name.'*² Trusting in God, he likely had a better night's sleep than Darius, who had tossed and turned waiting for the light of day (v18-19). 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.³

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'*⁴. Daniel had faith that God would protect him, which is why the book of Hebrews says of him, *'By faith he stopped the mouths of lions.'*⁵

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.

2. 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.

We have the promise of Jesus: *'Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you, because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.'*⁶ 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 that was 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 yet: *'great is your reward in heaven'*. Already now we can rejoice that God knows the truth. God's approval is enough.

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

- 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.'⁷
- 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.'⁸
- 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.
- In contrast to Daniel who was preserved from the lion's mouth, Jesus was devoured on the cross, not only by a torturous death, but by the hordes of sin, Satan, demons and hell.
- Another striking 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.
- 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.⁹
- In the same way Daniel's enemies were destroyed in their attempt to destroy him (v24), so Jesus has ultimately defeated the enemies of sin, death, demons and hell on the cross.¹⁰

FAITH AT WORK, PART 2 *(6:25-28)*

On day 5, we learnt from Daniel how to integrate faith into the workplace. 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.

1. God is interested in our work. With Darius' decree, Daniel brought about substantial societal change. This demonstrates that God cares about the everyday issues of governance in a broken world. Just because God intends to replace the current regime eventually, doesn't mean that he doesn't care about making it more just, more fruitful, more livable now. Sometimes we don't engage with God in our work because we believe that our work doesn't seem important to God. But each decision is important to our God, and every worker needs to know this. The question that the theology of Daniel presents the worker is, 'Whose kingdom are you building?' Daniel laboured in both an earthly kingdom and in God's kingdom. His serving pagan kings was his way of serving God.

2. Be salt and light in the marketplace. Jesus commissions us to take his taste and light into the flavourless and colourless parts of the world and also into our own lives.¹ Daniel was a fantastic example of what it means to be salt-and-light in our place of work. Jesus said, 'Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your God in heaven.'² Daniel's life in the marketplace achieved that end – Darius praised and commended the worthiness and reign of Daniel's God, as well as the reality of God's work in and through Daniel (v26-27).

3. Seek to thrive in the marketplace. Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius (v28). As precarious 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. Followers of Jesus should seek to go beyond merely surviving in our place of work - to thriving there – despite the inevitable 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.

4. Ask God to show his power in our place of work. 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 of church meetings. The main place God wants to manifest his power is wherever his people are, including in the daily work-related challenges we find ourselves in.

5. Winsomely 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. (See also 2:49, 3:28-30, 4:36-37.) Being faithful to God as well as being faithful to our responsibilities at work is possible, though not without challenges. We should give our loyalty to the people we work for, but never submit to any demands they might make that 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, we should only hold to them ourselves. Daniel let pagan people live like pagans even while living his own godly life in full view. Also, 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 not to sin, he still put up with much that was offensive to him, opting not to draw a battle line. All in all, Daniel and his friends found a way – within a culture more resistant and oppressive than anything we face today – to stand for what's right in such a winsome way that kings, peasants and an entire nation took note of the Living God.

6. Find support from other believers in the same field. We don't know at what point his friends passed away, but Daniel formed the habit early on in his, 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 forum where they can share challenges, insights and support with other believers in the same field.

7. 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 pray that *'our area of influence among you may be greatly enlarged'*³.

8. Be prepared to work for difficult people. When we find ourselves working under an unkind or unwise superior, 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.

9. 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'*⁴.

BEASTS FROM THE SEA *(7:1-7)*

The first 6 chapters of Daniel all contain a separate story, each with a lesson.

- **Chapter 1:** *Daniel shows us that God's people can thrive even in a godless culture.*
- **Chapter 2:** *Daniel's interpretation of the king's dream tells us of a coming kingdom.*
- **Chapter 3:** *When Daniel's friends survive the flames, it becomes clear that God's people can survive, even when persecuted as a religious minority.*
- **Chapter 4:** *Even kings can be humbled and saved.*
- **Chapter 5:** *Those who will not humble themselves will be destroyed.*
- **Chapter 6:** *Daniel's unscathed exit from a lion's den reveals that if God is for us, then it matters not who or what is against us.*

So, in the first 6 chapters of Daniel, there are 5 event-based stories and one story that revolves around a vision (chapter 2). What about the final 6 chapters? They consist of 4 stories that each revolves around a vision Daniel had between the years of 522-537BC when he was an old man. These 4 visions are found in chapter 7, 8, 9 and 10-12.

Notice the fantastic symmetry of Daniel's book: if we group chapter 2 with the latter category, there are 5 event-based stories and 5 vision-based stories.

Starting today and the final 3 days, we have time to explore just one of Daniel's dazzling visions:



7 *In 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. 2 Daniel said, "In my vision at night I was watching, and suddenly the four winds of heaven stirred up the great sea. 3 Four huge beasts came up from the sea, each different from the other.*

The vision was of 4 empires. They were all beastly, fierce and savage. That they come out of 'the sea' means that they arose out of the chaos and restlessness of fallen humanity. 'The nations rage like the raging sea.'¹ These empires correlate with the same 4 kingdoms referenced in 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.*

This refers to Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian kingdom, of which Belshazzar was a part (v1) 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.’*”

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

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. Alexander was only 32 when he conquered the whole Persian Empire. The 4 heads refer to the 4 generals, amongst whom the kingdom was divided when Alexander 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.*”

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. Ten is a complete number, so can be taken to mean ‘many.’ It can be argued that most modern civilizations, even non-European ones, 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 leaves us to wonder, ‘Is God really in control?’ Looking back on the remarkable fulfilment of Daniel’s prophetic vision, we know for sure that God is in complete control of history.

1. 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.

2. 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.

3. 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, large corporations or nations will ultimately play into the interests of the Kingdom without end.

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 that 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.*

Small as the horn begins, it overpowers 3 other horns, becoming more intelligent (many eyes) and arrogant (boasting mouth) as it becomes more powerful. What does this horn refer to? We quote Michael Eaton in full¹:

This little horn is one of the earliest mentions of the figure that Paul calls ‘the man of sin’. Paul taught that the second coming of Jesus would be preceded by the arrival of a fearful enemy: ‘Don’t let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshipped, so that he sets himself up in God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be God.’²

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 (‘three of the first horns’) 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. The anti-God movement that will, at some point, precede the second coming of Jesus will [it seems] have both political and religious aspects. Daniel stresses the former; Paul stresses the latter. More than that we cannot say. When it happens we shall be clearer as to what precisely is intended. Fulfillment is the final interpretation of prophecy.’

Come what may, God never gives too much airtime to his enemies. As we are asking our questions about the Anti-Christ, Daniel's unfolding vision moves to a King whose greatness and beauty is unrivalled:



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.

WHAT DO WE LEARN ABOUT GOD THE ANCIENT OF DAYS IN THIS VISION?

- 1. 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
- 2. 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 within his world.⁴
- 3. God is untainted purity.** His snow-white clothing represents God's radiant goodness. As the incorruptible king and judge, he will always do what is right.
- 4. God is wisest of all.** White hair speaks of the wisdom that comes with age. By virtue of his creating everything and everyone, the Ancient of Days is older than all. As king and judge he will always know the best path to take.
- 5. 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 him. God may delay in his judgment, but not indefinitely (v12).
- 6. 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 afloat with his purity and perfection.
- 7. 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.⁵

THE SON OF MAN *(7:13-14)*



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.

WHAT DO WE LEARN ABOUT THE 'SON OF MAN'?

1. 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.

2. 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 (see 2:34-35, 44-45). 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.

3. 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 Jesus saying he was God.²

4. 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 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

5. 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.

6. 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)

When exactly does 'the Son of Man come with the clouds of heaven'? Is it still to come, or has it already happened?

Jesus claimed not only to 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.'⁴

We tend to wrongly interpret these words to refer to Jesus' second coming, when he will come from the Father to the earth. But a closer look at the Daniel vision shows that the Son of Man does not come from God but to God. The 'Son of Man' was coming with the clouds... He approached the Ancient of Days' (v13).

In other words, 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 now reigning with power.⁵

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.'⁶

THE HOLY ONES (7:15-27)



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.’

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.

1. God’s people are meant to be holy. Three 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, like salt, maintained contact with the sinful culture, but was distinct and apart from it.

2. God’s people can expect persecution and hardship. The 4 beasts represent 4 godless kingdoms (v17), the worst of which would be the fourth (v23). Ten other kingdoms would rise up, and in the midst of them, there would eventually come an Anti-Christ, who would subdue parts of the world (v24), 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 (v25). God will deal with him eventually (v26).

The church between the two comings of Christ is called 'the church militant' because we are locked in battle against the forces of darkness – the continual assault by a godless culture, the enticement to sin, the wiles of Satan and various kinds of persecution. Although we have peace with God, we live out our faith in the midst of a cosmic war.

3. 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 will *'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.

4. 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

5. 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 envoy and instrument of the kingdom in whatever situation we find ourselves. 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

6. God's people point others 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 a stone 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).

REFLECTIONS & QUESTIONS

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REFERENCES:

- 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: Job 34:21-23, 2: 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: Romans 8:28, 3: 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: Romans 13:1, 3: 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, 3: 2 Corinthians 10:13, 15, 4: Galatians 6:5 (MSG)
- 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 it go to www.commonresources.co.za and click on 'Missional Potency.' For other devotional studies like this one, click on 'Bible Studies'.