

Daniel

Quiet Time Series
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*His kingdom is an eternal kingdom,
and His dominion is from generation to generation.*

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Preface

The aim of this booklet is to help you to read, understand and apply the Bible to your life, via a series of short daily studies on the book of Daniel. This year we also include some “life lessons” for further consideration. For each section of scripture, we provide a mixture of notes and questions to help you get started, plus more detailed points for delving deeper into the text when you have time, and suggestions for applying the text. We have prepared studies for Monday to Saturday, leaving Sunday free for other study or catching up. The dates are a suggestion; feel free to read at your own pace. It is important to remember that the goal of Bible study is to understand and apply the Bible, not the quiet time series or a commentary. These extra tools are only a guide, an extra source of reference. This guide is not designed to feed you; God’s word should do that.

At the beginning of the booklet is some background material addressing basic questions such as: Who wrote Daniel? To whom was it written? Where and when was it written? What were the religious, political, economic, cultural and geographical circumstances at the time? If you have time you might want to read Daniel straight through at first, to get an overview in your mind. Do not be distracted by the details to begin with. Then the second read would be based on the quiet time series, at which time you can delve deeper into the text. For each day’s reading, we recommend that you read the Bible passage first — it is God’s word, this booklet is not! — and write down any thoughts and questions you may have, and then go through the questions and notes for the passage. Any questions that are not answered here can be raised with one of the east teaching ministry (Andy, Martin, Randal, Simon, Steve, Tony, Tuka and Ugo) personally. You are also very welcome to send any comments, criticisms and questions at any time by email to EastTeachingMinistry@gmail.com.

Daniel is a difficult book for most readers. There are two obstacles to getting a lot out of Daniel: the first is the symbolism (the beast with ten horns, the ram with one horn longer than the other, the bear with 3 ribs in its mouth!) and the other is understanding its relevance to your life today. You might find the symbols strange, but don’t be put off – it is just as common today as it was then! If you don’t believe me, just turn to the sport pages of a newspaper and you’ll find headlines like “Wallabies slaughter the lions.” If you didn’t know the genre, you might be confused for a moment — Aren’t wallabies herbivores? And don’t lions and wallabies live on a different continents? — but if you recognise that the topic is rugby, the meaning suddenly becomes clear. To understand Daniel, you don’t need to know anything about rugby, but we will explain necessary bits of world history so that you can make sense of the text.

There are several areas where Daniel is relevant to life today; primarily it is a book of encouragement, reminding us that God is in charge of this crazy planet, and that He is more powerful than any world empire, dictator or enemy. God’s plans can not be thwarted, and even if He allows us to suffer, His eternal kingdom will prevail. We can be inspired and imitate the faith of Daniel and his friends who stood their ground against all types of opposition to their religious convictions. For evangelism, Daniel is an amazing book of evidence of God’s foreknowledge of history, with hundreds of details that were revealed centuries before the corresponding events took place.

Ask yourself questions as you read; look for connections with other scriptures; take note of historical and cultural situations in which events took place and try to deduce the original meaning and purpose of each individual passage. Then look for central themes over the whole of the book, and draw out principles or lessons of application. Above all, enjoy the good news that God is in control, no matter how bleak the world outlook may be, and that His promised eternal kingdom has come in the person and work of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Introduction to Daniel

Imagine that you are a teenager, perhaps 15 or 16 years of age, from a middle class family, and reasonably well off (if you are a teen, this may in fact be reality for you). You live in the UK, a nation that has always prided itself on its strong sovereignty and independence, especially in this post Brexit era. Imagine that an aggressive and belligerent super-state invades the UK, and forces the government to pay heavy taxes to the invading nation. Furthermore, in the capital, London, many of the city's elite, political leaders, military personnel, and talented individuals with highly skilled professions and vocations, are deported against their will to the foreign invading state. If you were a healthy teenager with a high aptitude for learning, you may have been forcefully separated from your family in order to be indoctrinated with foreign culture, customs and rhetoric. Of those lucky enough not to be killed for rebellion, the young and smart are trained to be government advisors, while other skilled people are forced into slave labour. Perhaps your deported family was sold off to a slave owner in a different vassal nation while you were left in this foreign government academy. Maybe you saw your closest friends and relatives killed for resistance. If all this was not mentally and emotionally distressing enough, the foreign power attempts to erase your whole heritage and values from your life. You have now inherited a foreign identity, you have to speak a foreign language, eat offensive food, adopt a new dress code and live in an autocratic state run by an oppressive dictator. When you finally qualify and meet government approval to take an "official" advisory position, you are then tested by the ruler and measured against his most experienced advisors across the empire. In case you were wondering, there is no expected parole or early release for good behaviour. This is for life.

Now, if this person were you, what feelings would you be harbouring, both short-term and long-term? What emotions would affect you the most: grief, sorrow, sadness, fear, or anger? Would you be screaming for justice? Who would you blame for your predicament: the UK government, your family, UK society in general, the enemy nation, God, yourself? If you are a reader with Christian values, would you compromise godly integrity in this ungodly nation? Would you accuse God of being unjust or unloving in your heart even if you do not act on your thoughts? Would you react in anger and rebel against God? These are the questions that Daniel and his friends (Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah) and other deportees may have wrestled with at that time.

Daniel and his friends, probably about 15 years of age, were deported to Babylon in 605 BC during the first wave of the Babylonian invasion, one year after king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (606-562 BC) was crowned and during the reign of the Judean king Jehoakim (609-598 BC). As alluded to above, Daniel and many of his contemporary deportees would have been part of the young elite, privileged both by noble birth and education, as well as being physically fit. They and many other peoples were stripped of their national and cultural identity, and were subsequently indoctrinated to propagate the Babylonian propaganda throughout the empire.

It is amazing to see that after Daniel had interpreted King Nebuchadnezzar's dream in 604 BC, he and his three friends were appointed as provincial rulers over the Babylonian province (Dan 2:48-49). This was neither the first nor the last time that God's representative stood in an important worldly office. Consider the political lives of Joseph (1915-1805 BC; Gen 41) and later of Esther (478-473 BC). When you compare and contrast these three events in Israel's history, what similarities and differences do we notice?

Daniel as a teenager was promoted to political office. Imagine that! The whole province of Babylon including many of the king's officials were at the mercy of the maturity and wisdom of a Jewish boy who had been forcefully deported as an immigrant. Without the intervention and sovereignty of God, what is the likelihood of such an event happening? Furthermore, how long do you think Daniel's political office lasted? In America, no president may exceed two terms of office (a total of eight years); in the UK, Sir Robert Walpole, Britain's first Prime Minister, served 21 years in office (1721-42). Tony Blair and Margaret Thatcher were Britain's longest serving Prime Ministers of our time, winning three consecutive general elections. But what about Daniel? According to scripture he was in public office until the first year of Cyrus (1:21). Now was the "first year" the year Cyrus became king of Persia (558 BC)? Or when he defeated the king of Medes (550 BC) to become the ruler over the combined empire? From the perspective of the book of Daniel, it is quite natural to understand that it is counted from the time that Cyrus defeated and ruled over Babylon,

that is 539 BC, so we can safely say that Daniel was in public office for at least 65 years. This Jewish foreigner would have survived five Babylonian kings (three of them are not directly mentioned in the Bible) until he served and probably died during the reign of Cyrus.

As teenagers, Daniel and his friends might have been quite impressionable, but they were all extremely tenacious in preserving their integrity towards God when other contemporaries around them were losing theirs. Babylonian state religion was pluralistic; many different gods served specific roles governing over nature or a city, or they may have had attributes assigned to them like wisdom. Marduk, for example, was considered to be the patron deity over Babylon as well as a god of wisdom and later became the head of the Babylonian pantheon. Enlil was the god of the wind with Anu being the god of the heavens and father of the gods. Enki was like a god of the underworld but also believed to be the god of the earth and its humans. Many of these gods were represented as a family but they were quite belligerent and very capricious in nature. They were very much made and worshipped in the image of man. To remain faithful to God while studying Babylonian literature and religion would have been challenging to these boys. The heart of their faith had been the Hebrew God; they would have memorised the Shema (Deut 6:4-5) from the age of five. But would their upbringing be sufficient to sustain them, at the risk of their lives, to stand up for their convictions in an unholy and oppressive state? Probably not, but let us not forget that God is sovereign, and He is in control of the whole show. We will see this clearly as we follow the biblical account of Daniel.

Author and Date

There is sufficient internal evidence to attribute the book of Daniel to the historical character Daniel described in the book, since he often speaks in the first person singular (8:15,27; 9:2; 10:2; 12:4). There are other Daniels mentioned in the OT, but as they lived decades or centuries from the events described in the book, they can be eliminated as possible options. Daniel's last prophetic vision was revealed in the third year of Cyrus (536 BC), which means that Daniel completed the book some time after 536 BC, when he had probably retired from office (see 1:21), and before 530 BC, since there are no further visions after that and no mention of the succeeding Persian king Cambyses (530-522 BC). Beyond that, if we need a higher authority to advocate Daniel's authorship of this book then we can appeal to Jesus Christ himself (Matt 24:15).

On the topic of authorship, a further comment needs to be made in light of modern scholarship that has popularised the theory that Daniel was compiled very late (from around 160 BC). Many liberal theologians espouse this teaching as they themselves acknowledge the incredible historical timeline revealed in many of the chapters of Daniel. But what is the agenda? How could Daniel have possibly known all these future events from as early as 603 BC? The only way to discredit the book from being divinely prophetic is to propose a late date for it, after most of the events have happened. In fact, eighteenth and nineteenth century scholars and theologians were not the first to come up with this theory. They took their cues from a pagan philosopher known as Porphyry (232-303 AD). In his time he was a strong critic against Christianity. He himself could not refute the Greek and Persian historical blueprint seen in Daniel. Porphyry was left with only two options. Either this was divinely revealed prophecy of future history in the time of Daniel, centuries before the events happened, or it was written by another Daniel or pseudonymous author after the events had happened. Since he did not believe in God, it is not difficult to guess which option he chose. His commentaries on Daniel subsequently became the canon of interpretation for future scholars when it came to dating Daniel.

In the time of the Egyptian ruler Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285-246 BC), there were many Jews settled in the cosmopolitan city of Alexandria. After the conquest and the Hellenistic campaign run by Alexander the Great (356-323 BC), the Ptolemies in Egypt were surprisingly more tolerant of the Jewish religion than the Seleucids governing Syria and Palestine. In an empire where the main world language was Greek, many Jews no longer spoke Aramaic and the Hebrew Bible was even less accessible. Modern Jewish people wanted a translation of their Scriptures into the language that they spoke every day. It was a win-win situation, because Philadelphus also wanted to expand his library with a wide assortment of literature. The king himself sponsored the work of translating the whole Hebrew bible into Greek with the help of 72 elderly Jewish scribes in 250 BC. This translation of all of the Old Testament later became known as the Septuagint (LXX).

Why is all this important? Well, the book of Daniel was already part of the Hebrew canon when this translation was made. Daniel was considered divine scripture among the writings (Ketuvim) of the Hebrew Bible long before the 250 BC translation. Malachi, the last book of the English

OT, written around 430 BC is also part of the Septuagint canon, and it is 100 years later than Daniel. The authenticity and authorship of Malachi is not questioned by modern liberal scholars or higher critics. But in the case of Daniel, all know that if Daniel is indeed the author, as both the internal and external evidence indicate, then the prophetic messages in Daniel have far-reaching consequences for all mankind, past, present and future.

Genre and Structure of the Book

The literary structure and content, as well as the language style is worthy of comment, since different sections of Daniel are aimed at different audiences. The book comprises a combination of apocalyptic language (with abstract images and symbols that uncover a hidden message about the future, like the book of Revelation), prophetic prose and historical narrative. From 2:4 to 7:28, Daniel was written in Aramaic which at the time was the language of international business, a bit like English is currently the leading language for world trade and science. This section prophetically describes Gentile world history, which would have been of interest to an international audience. The other sections (1:1-2:3; 8:1-12:13) were written in Hebrew, and they included most of the apocalyptic language and prophetic messages relating to the Jews as a people and a nation.

Chapters one, three, five and six deal with the historical and practical parts describing the events and the lives of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah during their exile under Babylonian and then Persian rule. Chapters two, four and seven to twelve focus mainly on the prophetic dreams and visions revealed to the pagan king Nebuchadnezzar and to Daniel.

Main Theme

The biggest theme throughout the book of Daniel is the sovereignty of God: God is in control and he rules the nations. All earthly kingdoms, no matter how mighty or intimidating they are, rise and fall. All earthly kingdoms are inferior to God's kingdom, since his kingdom is not manmade but endures forever. In order to maintain your integrity for God and his values, you might suffer in an ungodly nation, but God is still in control and persecution is temporary. At the end, the saints will inherit the kingdom of God, and all other kingdoms will come to an end in judgement.

Outline of the Book of Daniel

- Daniel 1: Nebuchadnezzar chooses Daniel, Hananiah, Azariah and Mishael for service. They refuse to compromise with the world
- Daniel 2: Nebuchadnezzar's dream interpreted as four world empires and one spiritual kingdom
- Daniel 3: Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refuse to worship a pagan image even on pain of death
- Daniel 4: Daniel interprets the king's dream of a tree. The king is humbled by God but finally worships God when the dream comes true
- Daniel 5: Nebuchadnezzar's grandson Belshazzar is overthrown after the writing on the wall is interpreted. The Babylonian kingdom is defeated by the Medo-Persians
- Daniel 6: Daniel is thrown into the lion's den for violating a Persian decree outlawing prayer to God
- Daniel 7: Daniel's vision of the four beasts, God's judgement and God's kingdom
- Daniel 8: Daniel's vision of the ram (Persia) and the goat (Greece)
- Daniel 9: Daniel's prayer and God's response: 490 years to the Messiah
- Daniel 10: Daniel's vision of a man: an apocalyptic overview of Persia and Greece
- Daniel 11: Daniel's final vision: Persian, Greek, Egyptian and Syrian conflicts leading up to the final desolation of Jerusalem
- Daniel 12: The resurrection of the dead and the time of the end

Tables and Dates

Empires

Neo-Assyrian	911-612 BC
Neo-Babylonian	612-539 BC
Medo-Persian	539-331 BC
Greek	331-63 BC
Roman	63 BC-476 AD
(Eastern Roman empire)	(63 BC)-1453 AD
God's kingdom on earth	30AD-???

Kings from the Time of Daniel

Nebuchadnezzar	Babylon	605-562 BC	2 Ki 24:25; Jer; Dan 1-4
Evil-Merodach (Amel Marduk)	Babylon	562-560 BC	Jer 52:31
Neriglissar (Nergal Sharezer)	Babylon	560-556 BC	Jer 39:3
Nabonidus	Babylon	556-539 BC	
Belshazzar	Babylon	553-539 BC	Dan 5
Cyrus	{ Persia Media & Persia	558-530 BC	Is 44:28-45:13; Ezra 1:1-2;
		550-530 BC	Dan 1:21; 6:28
Cambyzes	Persia	530-522 BC	
Pseudo-Smerdis	Persia	522 BC	
Darius I	Persia	521-486 BC	Ezra 5-6; Hag 1:1; Zec 1:1
Xerxes	Persia	486-465 BC	Esther
Alexander the Great	Greece	333-323 BC	

The Four Generals of Alexander

Lysimachus	ruler over Thrace and Asia Minor
Cassander	ruler over Greece and Macedonia
Antigonus	ruler over Syria and Mesopotamia (later replaced by Seleucus)
Ptolemy	ruler over Egypt

Egyptian Ptolemies (Kings of the South)

Ptolemy I Soter	323-286 BC
Ptolemy II Philadelphus	285-246 BC
Ptolemy III Euergetes	246-221 BC
Ptolemy IV Philopater	221-203 BC
Ptolemy V Epiphanes	203-181 BC

Seleucid Kings (Kings of the North)

Seleucus I Nicator	312-280 BC
Antiochus I Soter	280-261 BC
Antiochus II Theos	261-246 BC
Seleucus II Callinicus	246-226 BC
Seleucus III	226-223 BC
Antiochus III (the Great)	223-187 BC
Seleucus IV Philopater	187-175 BC
Antiochus IV Epiphanes	175-163 BC

How to Read Daniel

The book of Daniel is a mixture of two literary genres: *historical narrative* (Dan 1-6; like Genesis, 1 & 2 Kings, Acts) and *apocalyptic literature* (Dan 7-12; like parts of Revelation, Zechariah, Joel, Ezekiel, Isaiah). You don't read your mobile phone contract the way you read poetry, and your approach to a newspaper is different again. In the same way, you need to adjust the way you approach the Bible when switching between law, poetry, prophecy, narrative and apocalyptic genres.

This is not just theory: if you confuse narrative and law, you might infer from the last supper (narrative) that Christians should always meet in an upstairs room (law). Don't laugh – there is a branch of the Church of Christ which does exactly this, and calls our ground-floor meetings “unbiblical”! In fact many false practices and false teachings arise from wrong interpretation of scripture due to a basic failure to understand how to read the Bible.

One does not primarily look for doctrine in narrative passages. Narrative usually records events, actions and speech of the characters involved, with neither a comment of approval nor of disapproval from God. The actions reflect the culture of the time and the choices made by individuals. Where there is no direct evaluation of an action, we can sometimes ascertain from the law whether a human choice was in accord with God's will. But beware: this is what the Pharisees did with Jesus, and they got it terribly wrong (Mk 2:7,24; 3:2). Note also that even in the passages where God does express approval for actions, this does not mean that he would approve of us repeating the same actions today (e.g. invading Palestine).

The word “apocalypse” means nothing more than “revelation”, but the apocalyptic style is very different from most Biblical revelation, as it involves the author's visions or dreams about the end times, usually revealed or interpreted by heavenly messengers. It looks at first sight like science fiction, but once the symbolism is understood, it is similar to other futuristic prophecy. Apocalyptic literature is dramatic and symbolic, and not intended to be taken literally. Thus we don't expect a literal goat to attack a ram with unequal length horns in order to fulfil the prophecy. How then should we interpret such a vision? Fortunately, most of the visions in Daniel are accompanied by interpretations which provide sufficient information to understand the substance of the vision. The precise meaning of some of the finer details may be debatable, but you will be amazed by the clear fulfilment in history of over a hundred details of the visions revealed to Daniel.

When reading Daniel, we need to remember that the Bible is primarily about God. Although this is obvious, many of us are not consistent in reading the Bible this way. Far too often I hear people focusing on what one of the people in a Bible passage did, said or (might have) thought, at the expense of the main character — God. God is the hero of the story, He is the reason why it all happened, and His purposes give history its meaning. So as we read, let us look first for God's purpose rather than the author's or the actor's.

Second, we need to understand that the Old Testament is *Christian* literature. It is Jewish scripture too, but there is a fundamental difference about the way we read it as Christians, as we are not under the covenant of law (Rom 3:19; 6:14-15). If you believe that all scripture is inspired by God and useful (2 Tim 3:16; Rom 15:4), then you will be looking forward to what you can learn from Daniel, not fearing that it won't be relevant. But just as the OT was misunderstood in Jesus' time on earth (see Jn 5:39; 20:9; Mk 12:10,24), there is the danger that we miss the point too. Note that the point in these cited passages is that the OT is about Jesus. The book of Daniel is no exception.

Third, passages must be understood in context. The most important context is what is called *salvation history*, the way that God has been working from the beginning of time to redeem a people for Himself through Jesus. This is the big picture of the Bible, and we should always think about how each passage fits into God's story. Some of the visions in Daniel give a sweeping view of history culminating in the establishment of God's kingdom. This is God in action, fulfilling His eternal purposes. Don't get lost in the details and miss this! Then there are also the cultural, historical, and legal situations, the fine details which help us understand the actions, interactions and language of the passages we read.

As we read through and understand the main themes of Daniel, we will pick up principles that have timeless application. We learn about God's character, that He is sovereign, righteous, loving and merciful; and about God's plans for His people and His eternal kingdom. When we face difficult times, we can gain comfort and encouragement, knowing that God has the world under control, even when it doesn't appear that way, and we can be inspired by seeing how faithful men responded to opposition as they served God and waited for God's kingdom to be revealed.

Quiet Times

Daniel 1 — Life in a Foreign World

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The book begins with the fall of Judah to the Babylonians, led by King Nebuchadnezzar, but focuses on Daniel and his friends, who have been exiled in Babylon.

Questions about the Text

- Why did God deliver Israel to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon?
- Why did the king have this policy of training foreign noblemen? What benefit did he expect?
- How might the 4 Jews have felt at being chosen for training? What would have been good about it; what would have been bad?
- What did Daniel decide to do and why? What could have stopped him taking this decision?
- The guard initially hesitates to grant Daniel his request; what solution does Daniel suggest to get around this problem?
- In what ways does God support Daniel and his friends?

Questions for Us

- Would God punish us, or allow us to get into trouble if we continued to sin against him, as the Jews had done prior to the Exile? Is that something the NT describes?
- In what situations do you feel a conflict between your faith and the expectations of those around you, as Daniel had in verse 8?
- Are you creative in finding ways of maintaining your convictions, like Daniel in v11-14?
- In what ways does God offer support to us as we fight to maintain our convictions?

Further Notes

v1 Jer 25:1-12 and 2 Kgs 24-25 describe the fall of Judah to the Babylonians.

v2 God was fulfilling His punishments to Israel, as they had forsaken Him. See also Deut 28:36-37; Is 39:5-7; Jer 21:3-10. The defeat of Israel's main city and the loss of sacred treasures from the temple would have been devastating for the Jews, but v2 shows that God was behind it all.

v3-7 The policy of training foreigners (royals, elite society members) would have had several benefits for Nebuchadnezzar: removing potential leaders weakened the chance of revolt in Jerusalem and provided better leaders in Babylon. Changing their names, diet and location would have reinforced the pressure to conform to the new culture, as well as the attraction of the privileges of the king's court. As Daniel and his friends were surrounded by foreign culture and religion, the question then was to what extent they should embrace these changes, given their knowledge of the true God.

v8 Daniel believed that the foreign food would defile him, though the text doesn't specify what the foods were. He may have reasoned that though he couldn't do anything about the change in his name or his education, he could make a stand on his diet to preserve his Hebrew identity.

v9 Even though Daniel and his friends were in exile, God was working behind the scenes, supporting the stand they made. Daniel did not confront the Chief Official, but humbly suggested a test to show that his plan could work.

v15-16 Though the dietary test is a success, we are not told whether that is because of the diet or God working in some miraculous way in response to their faith.

v17 God enables the four exiles to succeed by giving them extra gifts, including understanding of dreams to Daniel. Throughout chapter 1, God continues to help them as they make their stand.

The narrative switches to a significant event in Nebuchadnezzar's life which allows Daniel to involve God in Nebuchadnezzar's life through the miraculous interpretation of a dream.

Questions about the Text

- Why did Nebuchadnezzar not tell his dream to his advisors?
- How might Daniel and his 3 friends have reacted to the news of their impending death?
- In what way does Daniel share about God in his interview with Nebuchadnezzar?
- Why do you think God revealed a prophecy of the coming of His kingdom first to a Babylonian king and then to Daniel and his friends?

Questions for Us

- Do you try to involve God in your conversations with non-Christians, as a way to show how God is at work in your life? If not, try to think of some ways that you could do so.
- What encouragement can you take from the prophecy of the coming of God's kingdom that was revealed to Daniel?

Further Notes

v1 These events can be dated to 604 BC.

v2 The titles of "magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers" indicate the level of science and wisdom (and superstition) of the times.

v4 The text changes from Hebrew to Aramaic until Dan 7:28, which meant it could be read by non-Jewish readers, which coincides with prophecies about the future of non-Jewish nations.

v5 The king was so disturbed by the dream that he demanded that his advisors tell him the dream and the interpretation, as a way of validating that their interpretation was correct.

v6-9 The king, despite his power and accomplishments, is afraid of a conspiracy against him. However, in v16 Daniel is able to gain time, using "wisdom and tact", to retreat and plead with God for an interpretation, which God finally grants through a vision (v19).

v24-49 Daniel explains that the dream was of a metal statue split into sections of diminishing value (gold, silver, bronze, iron mixed with clay) which is struck and destroyed by a rock.

v28-29 The dream was a prophecy of "what will happen in days to come": the golden head was identified with Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom (v38), and the other sections are then future kingdoms (vv39-40). The identity of those kingdoms is debated; some views are described below.

Most scholars who uphold the authority of Bible ("conservative" scholars) identify the kingdoms as follows: Gold = Nebuchadnezzar; Silver = Medo-Persia; Bronze = Greece, which relatively speaking ruled over the widest area (v39: "then a third kingdom ... will rule over the whole earth"); Iron = Rome, which crushed all other kingdoms and was dominant for over 1000 years; it was also divided, with the western empire becoming weak and falling (476 AD), while the eastern part (Byzantium) lasted until 1453 AD (see v42-43). Conservatives vary in their understanding of God's kingdom, which is established in "the time of those kings" (Dan 2:44). The most likely interpretation is that "those kings" are the Emperors of Rome, and the rock is Jesus, who established the kingdom of God (the church) in the first century AD (Acts 2), continuing to the present day. Premillennialists tend to see the iron mixed with clay as a future Roman government which will be ruling when Jesus returns (Rev 17:12-14). The rock is then the returning Messiah, but is not associated with the Kingdom of God or church. In both cases, there is much biblical support for Jesus being the rock (e.g. Ps 118:22; Is 28:16; Lk 20:17-18).

Liberal scholars claim that Daniel was written in the second century, and that the book describes history up to that time, so their four kingdoms are Babylonia, Media, Persia and Greece (although the Medes never had their own world empire). Another view (e.g. Goldingay) relates the sequence of metals to Babylonian rulers and the rock is then Cyrus (Is 45:1-13), who was used by God to bring the exiles back to Jerusalem. But Cyrus's kingdom was not eternal (v44; cf Dan 8), so this interpretation is not supportable.

The overall message is that man's kingdoms will eventually disappear and only God's kingdom will last eternally. So we can all take hope from the vision of the rock as we see the kingdoms around us stumble and falter, and find our citizenship in God's kingdom, submitting to His will.

King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold and then dedicated the image. He then gave a command that people should fall down and worship the image. It was reported to him that some Jews paid no attention and did not serve his god nor worship the image of gold.

Questions about the Text

- What do you think was the motivation for king Nebuchadnezzar to build the image of gold?
- What do you think was the motivation for people to worship the image?
- Do you think worshipping the image was a spiritual act or an act of loyalty to the king?
- How do you think exiled Jews who worshipped the image could have justified their actions?
- How do you think Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were caught out?

Questions for Us

- In what ways do you handle your insecurities and fears?
- How well do you think you resist the temptation to conform – at work, with neighbours etc.?
- What excuses do you make when you do not obey the word of God?

Further Notes

Assuming that chronologically the events of chapter 2 occurred before the events of chapter 3, King Nebuchadnezzar had been informed by Daniel (2:38) that he was the head of gold in the statue in his dream. Daniel's interpretation of the dream indicated that although King Nebuchadnezzar started out as the head of gold (the king of kings), his term would come to an end and his kingdom would be superseded by a succession of inferior kingdoms. This was symbolised in a statue (of human form) with decreasing value going from head to toe. For king Nebuchadnezzar to then build an image entirely of gold suggests that he did not want to accept God's order of events¹. His image of gold seemed to be the king trying to state that his kingdom would last forever.

The king then summoned a range of senior government officials to dedicate the image. They were expected to worship a physical image based on the king's order, with the consequences of disobedience being death. Worshipping the image was therefore not based on choice but rather a fear of the consequences of not worshipping. It was a test of allegiance, probably political, but made to look religious. The way the astrologers denounced the Jews indicates some form of tension, which may have been political, racial, religious, or simply jealousy.

It might be helpful to consider in what ways we can be like King Nebuchadnezzar. For instance King Nebuchadnezzar had been told by God that his kingdom would have an end and therefore for the king to build the image seemed to indicate that he refused to accept this fact. We too can have a fear of the future and we too can try and build many things in our lives to protect or safeguard our future. Many of these things are not in and of themselves wrong – good education, pension plan, health plan; the problem is when we do not submit to God's plan first (see James 4:13-15). Also, we can be insecure as it appears King Nebuchadnezzar was and led by fear. Ask yourself whether you use fear to motivate others – your children, your spouse, work colleagues, ministry, etc. It is better to lead by love.

We can also learn from Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego who were administrators in the province of Babylon and secure in who they were, not being afraid to be noticed for their faith. They chose not to fit in, they stood out and were noticed by their different attitude about serving other gods. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego's choice had consequences for their careers, families and indeed their lives. I'm sure they knew about the consequence of the blazing furnace. They put the commands of God ahead of career and safety. Think about yourself and whether you are tempted to put your security, job or status ahead of your relationship with God.

¹The form of the statue is not mentioned, and as the measurements seem out of proportion for a human figure, some suggest it was an obelisk. However, it is possible that it was an image of King Nebuchadnezzar himself on a pedestal.

King Nebuchadnezzar responds to the accusations against Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and gives them the space to respond. He is furious with their response and has them thrown into a blazing furnace.

Questions about the Text

- Why was King Nebuchadnezzar furious?
- What were the gods of King Nebuchadnezzar?
- What do we learn about Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego from their response to the King?

Questions for Us

- Are you willing to stand up against your boss, family members or friends, if you are asked to do something that is not right before God?
- What do you want your employer (and indeed others) to know about your commitment to God?
- How do you view pain and suffering produced as a result of making godly choices?
- Are you able to recognise the gods of this age that threaten your relationship with God?
- What are the gods of this age that you are tempted to worship?

Further Notes

Credit to King Nebuchadnezzar for asking Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego if the things he heard about them were true. He could have easily just had them thrown in the blazing furnace based on the stories he had heard, but instead gave them an opportunity to tell him their side of the story. We would be wise to do the same; to not react to what we hear third party without first going to the source (see Prov 18:17).

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were questioned directly by the king, not just any king, but a king known in secular history as a brutal, powerful and ambitious king. Nevertheless, the three men were not overwhelmed by the human personality who was questioning them. They did not give in to the fear of man (Luke 12:4 “I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more”). They held their ground, wanting King Nebuchadnezzar to know about the one true God and how their faith meant there were certain things they couldn’t do even if commanded to do so by the king. It takes tremendous courage to stand up against powerful personalities. This is rarely just a decision we can make on the spot but is usually gained from a close walk with God and a good understanding of His power. Does your employer or immediate boss know that there are certain things you cannot do because of the relationship you have with your God, for example times you would not want to work as they conflict with church, lying, and long periods of time away from home? Do your colleagues and friends know that you do not serve their gods – money, wanting to look good, joining in slander, cheating, etc.?

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had a very clear understanding of the nature of God, His will and also how He responds to prayer. They understood that God was able to deliver them but may choose not to. They also understood that unanswered prayer does by no means imply that God is unable to act, but rather brings to the forefront the sovereignty of God. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego come across as people who know God and place their trust fully in Him when faced with an immense challenge. The prospect of death and the fear that brought could have motivated them to compromise on their understanding of the scriptures. Our hope and prayer is that we will never have to make this decision in our lives, but if we do, we need to be prepared. We are called in Luke 9:23-26 to “lose our lives”, to put aside our own priorities, desires, dreams and wishes, and replace them with God’s. In Matt 6:10, Jesus teaches us to pray that God’s will be done, that we submit ourselves to His will and in doing so, trust that He will protect us when we face the accompanying trials and temptations.

Dan 3:24–30 — From “Being Fired” to Promotion

Fri 9 Dec

King Nebuchadnezzar was amazed to see not only the three men survive the blazing furnace, but also to see a fourth figure in the flames. This resulted in King Nebuchadnezzar calling for God to be praised and also for Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to be promoted.

Questions about the Text

- What do you think the fourth person was doing in the flames?
- Do you think Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego saw the fourth person?
- What do you think was the significance that the fire did not harm them nor their clothes?

Questions for Us

- Can you recall times in your life when it felt like you were in the fire?
- Do you see God working (the fourth man) when you are in the heat of challenges?
- King Nebuchadnezzar noticed that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego trusted in God. In what ways do people around you see your trust in God?
- In what areas of your life do you need to trust God?
- How do you recognize when you are trusting in God?
- Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were willing to “give up their lives” rather than worship “other” gods. Do you have this attitude in your life? Are there some things in your life that you are unwilling to give up even though they are ungodly?
- What do you think of the expression “If you are not willing to live for God, you are not willing to die for God”?
- How have you seen God bless you when you have done what is right in His sight?

Further Notes

God sent His “angel” to rescue Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego from the blazing fire. Some readers believe the fourth person to be Jesus. In any case, what was intended to be a sentence of certain death turned into a celebration of God’s power.

We too can face immense challenges in our lives, some of which make us feel that we are under a sentence of certain death. Paul, in 2 Cor 1:8-11, shares about the benefits and results of such trials. Regarding the angel that was present in the furnace with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, do you feel alone as you face life’s battles, or are you aware of God actively working to help you? (Hebrews 1:14 “Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?”)

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were aware that God might not choose to rescue them and they were confident in accepting God’s will either way. They were willing to give up their lives rather than worship or serve other gods. For most of us, we are unlikely to be in a similar situation to Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego where our faith and trust in God is challenged with such high stakes. It is therefore helpful to identify equivalences in our lives. Luke 9:24 (“whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it”) comes to mind whereby followers of Christ are told that “losing their lives” for Christ will result in them saving their lives. God saved them when they were *in* the flames; he did not save them *from* the flames. We might feel sometimes that being in the flames is a sign that God does not care. However, as in the case of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, we will do well to remember that God did not intervene and stop them going into the fire. Rather, from within the fire He delivered them. Also, by resisting the temptation to blend in, the faithful Jews were able to help people see God better. Conversely, the more a church blends in with the community, where the church compromises on its stance against sin, the harder it is for people to see God.

King Nebuchadnezzar shares about an event in his life and declares what God has done for him. It starts with a dream that he had which he wanted interpreted and after his wise men failed to interpret the dream, he asks Daniel for an interpretation.

Questions about the Text

- What do you think was the purpose of King Nebuchadnezzar in sharing this event?
- Why do you think King Nebuchadnezzar was afraid of an event that occurred in a dream?

Questions for Us

- Write down the miracles and wonders God has done in your life.
- Do you get afraid by events that happen in your dreams? Why?

Further Notes

Daniel chapter 4 consists of a letter written by a gentile, King Nebuchadnezzar. The chapter is recognized as a state paper or edict issued by the king to his subjects. It probably was circulated and incorporated into scripture by Daniel. It is a declaration from King Nebuchadnezzar of what God had done in his life, a testimony if you will. What God had done was to make him a great king, who was successful and prosperous. However, he did not respond to the revelations that God had given to him at various points in his life, so God chose to humble him.

What is your testimony? Spend some time writing down what God has done in your life. Try and recognize events that were outside your control and clearly demonstrate the involvement of God. King Nebuchadnezzar declares that he was contented and prosperous. This could be read as a statement of fact or it could be read as King Nebuchadnezzar glorying in his achievements (see v30). In the context of the passage it is probably the latter. This seems to be the reason why God brought about the humbling of the king, to make it clear to king Nebuchadnezzar and indeed to all of us that Heaven (that is, the One who dwells there) rules. And as such God should be given the glory not man. You might not think of yourself as contented and prosperous, taking credit for your achievements. However, Jesus says, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions” (Luke 12:15).

After receiving the warning dream, the king assembles his advisers, who are unable to interpret the dream. Last of all, Daniel is called in. This is interesting. Had the king forgotten about Daniel and his gift of interpreting dreams by seeking God? Why did he turn to those who had failed him in chapter 2? After the miraculous events of chapters 2 and 3, which Nebuchadnezzar plainly acknowledged, why did Nebuchadnezzar avoid seeking out Daniel? Often, we also fail to come to God first for help but rather we come to Him last when the things we have tried first fail. How much pain we would spare ourselves if we come to God first. When you need counsel who do you call on and where do you go?

King Nebuchadnezzar tells Daniel his dream. Daniel interprets the dream which describes how the king will be humbled and will lose his sanity. The dream is fulfilled and the chapter closes with King Nebuchadnezzar being restored to sanity and prosperity, but now with a healthy awareness of the God of the Jews.

Questions about the Text

- What do you think King Nebuchadnezzar meant when he said the “spirit of the holy gods” is inside Daniel?
- Why do you think King Nebuchadnezzar did not repent immediately after Daniel interpreted the dream for him?
- What do you think would have happened if Nebuchadnezzar had repented? cf 2 Kgs 20:1-5; Jonah 3:10; Jer 18:7-8.

Questions for Us

- King Nebuchadnezzar did not respond to being challenged on his pride when confronted by Daniel. He seemed to respond only when the consequences of his sin became too painful for him. Consider how you respond to sermons, lessons, corrections etc.

Further Notes

King Nebuchadnezzar recognised that a “spirit of the holy gods” was in Daniel. There are varied opinions on what the king might have meant by this. Was the king referring to the true God, or his own gods, like Marduk? It is interesting to note that the quality of holiness was not usually ascribed to other gods. Nevertheless, King Nebuchadnezzar noticed that there was something different about Daniel as a direct consequence of his spiritual life. Various NT passages tell us that our behaviour should invite a similar response in non-Christians (Matt 5:16; John 13:35; 15:8). Take some time to consider your own ways, be honest with yourself, and consider whether those around you recognize that you are different (for the right reasons).

God revealed an important message to King Nebuchadnezzar in a dream. This is not a common occurrence in the Bible and it certainly does not mean that every dream we have has significance. The purpose of the dream was to communicate that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes. Before telling the king the meaning of the dream, Daniel was perplexed and terrified, seeing that the dream was good news only for the king’s enemies. In v27 Daniel calls on the king to accept his advice to repent. Daniel’s behaviour suggests that he cared for the king and did not wish for this judgement to be pronounced on the king.

We are called to care for others, not wishing judgement. We similarly ask that others renounce their sins. Revealing sin to a loved one or a friend is a very difficult thing to do. We run the risk of offending that loved one and turning them away, but we are commanded to reveal sin in love: “Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted” (Galatians 6:1).

God gave King Nebuchadnezzar 12 months to repent. In the same way, God is patient with us. If we could only turn back the veil and see how God is working in patience. The text suggests that King Nebuchadnezzar behaved as if he didn’t believe the judgement. “Renounce your sins, doing what is right, being kind to the oppressed.” Oriental monarchs of the time were not known for their justice and mercy, and Daniel’s unsolicited advice would have been given at the risk of his life.

v30 Nebuchadnezzar’s pride in his building projects is attested by written and archaeological records. Inscriptions have been found such as: “In Babylonia is the palace of my dwelling for the glorification of my dominion”; such boasts defied God and His warnings through dreams and Daniel.

There are medically documented cases of humans who believe they are cattle. Boanthropy is a psychological disorder in which the sufferer believes he or she is a cow or ox.

v37 “Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.” What a wonderful end to the chapter!

King Nebuchadnezzar is dead, having died in 562BC. He was the “greatness” of the Babylonian Empire and without him the dominance of the empire began to wane. Chapter 5 opens by introducing us to King Belshazzar (meaning: “Bel protect the king”). It should be noted that Belshazzar was actually the crown prince, son of the actual king, Nabonidus. King Nabonidus was away either on campaign or exile (sources differ). Thus during his absence Belshazzar served as king. So when Belshazzar promised promotion to third in the kingdom to whoever could read the writing on the wall (5:7,16,29), he meant after his father and himself.

Note also in verse 10, when the queen came into the banquet hall to nominate Daniel to read the writing on the wall, she was most probably the queen mother, wife of King Nabonidus. Belshazzar’s wives were already at the banquet (v2) and only the queen mother could have entered the presence of the king without first having been invited.

v1-4 King Belshazzar sacrilegiously used goblets looted from the Lord’s temple in 587 BC to serve wine to his guests. He went even further by praising false gods of gold and silver during the event.

- What possession of yours have you consciously or unconsciously established as an ‘idol’ in your life? (This could also be valuing ‘your’ time or ‘your’ job above God).

v5-9 In the time it took for the finger of God to write the message on the wall, King Belshazzar’s world goes from “sitting on top of the world” to “his world came crashing down”.

- Imagine if God worked in your life like this. How would you feel about God bringing down your world around you so you can see Him clearly?

v10-31 Enter Daniel (probably now in his eighties). His tone with King Belshazzar is very different than with the former King Nebuchadnezzar (compare with chapter 2). King Belshazzar is to be afforded no more time or opportunity to repent as was the case with King Nebuchadnezzar. God’s judgement came “like a thief in the night” (1 Thess 5:1-3). Belshazzar’s sins included idolatry, lack of humility and lack of honour for God.

This should be a terrifying passage of scripture to all who read it. As disciples, as a church, as a chosen people, we must search ourselves daily to ensure we have made every effort to honour the Lord our God in all humility and have put no idols in our lives before Him.

- What do you do to search yourself daily?
- Do you meditate on the word? (Josh 1:8; Ps 119:97).
- Do you honour God in all your ways? (Php 4:8; 1 Tim 1:17).
- Do you humble yourself in the sight of the Lord in your sacrificial giving, and in your one another (discipling) relationships? (Jas 4:10; Rom 12:10; John 13:34-35).

This chapter concludes the historical narrative section of the book of Daniel with one of the most taught stories of the Bible: Daniel in the Lions' Den.

v1-15 Here we see King Darius manipulated by his satraps and administrators to establish a law with the sole intent to trap and condemn Daniel.

- Why did the satraps and administrators do this?
- When you have struggled with jealousy and vain ambition yourself, has it led you into other sin?
- How was King Darius manipulated so easily?
- Have you ever struggled in your pride, in the temptation to take the glory of accomplishment for yourself rather than giving the glory to God?
- Daniel knew of the new law, yet still made a point of visibly praying to God (v10), even to the point of opening the windows. Why?
- Do you feel yourself hiding your Christianity from the world? Not praying for your food in public? Not reading your Bible during your commute? Not sharing your faith in your daily walk? (See Luke 11:33.)

Daniel made a significant stand. He honoured God and not man or the law. God would repay him in the short term by allowing him to be thrown into the lion's den. This was the natural consequence of breaking the law of the land, certain death. God would repay him in the longer term by nothing short of miraculous intervention, an act that has been remembered by Christian and pagan alike for some two thousand five hundred years. The Lord's ways are mysterious indeed (Is 55:8-9).

v16-28 In this passage, we see "the living God", i.e. the God who is alive, the God who is apparent in everything we do. He did not just save Daniel from the lions, but also melted the heart of the warrior king Darius so that by the chapter's end he issues a dramatic decree (v26) for all Babylon to fear and revere the God of Daniel.

Compare the three kings of Daniel. They were all powerful, successful and wealthy men. Nebuchadnezzar humbled himself after being disciplined by the Lord. Belshazzar never repented of his arrogance and only grieved the consequences of his sin, not the sin itself. Darius, however, was "distressed" (v14), seemed to break his own law in appealing for God to rescue Daniel from the lions (v16), punished his own men (v24) and even honoured God (v26).

- Which king are you most like in your relationship with God?
- Do you think as Daniel landed in the lion's den that he started perhaps to doubt that he was going to make it out alive and unharmed?
- When have you doubted that God could or would deliver you from trial or suffering?

One theme of this chapter is Daniel's courage. When you are faced with a choice between your faith and some great loss, e.g. a job, an opportunity, a relationship, your standing amongst peers, etc., are you still ready to stand up for God? Maybe you did that as a young Christian, but how about now?

Chapter 7 is an amazing chapter of biblical prophecy. It predicts the rise and fall of world powers. Such is the accuracy of the book that many have tried to argue that it was written after the events. Daniel dreams of beasts which are an analogy of world empires spread over time. So when you read of *beasts*, think *empires* that like beasts are conceived, born, grow, develop and eventually die.

Daniel is a complicated book in detail and structure. The events of Dan 7 (about 553 BC) precede those of Dan 5 and are intrinsically linked to the vision in Dan 2 (50 years earlier).

Questions

- After receiving the vision in verses 1–14, Daniel was troubled and asked for help to understand it. Are you troubled when you don't understand God's word? Do you ask for help?
- What do you get out of this chapter? What happens to the kingdoms of this world? What happens in the end to those who persecute God's people?
- Do you see any similarities to chapter 2? Think about how the two dreams relate to each other.
- Read v13-14 (key verse). Does this remind you of any well-known New Testament passages? Jesus' language was familiar to those who knew the book of Daniel. He made it clear that his claims about establishing God's kingdom were based in Old Testament prophecy. (See Mt 24:30; 25:31; 26:64; 28:18,20.)
- Empires have come and gone but Dan 7 comes with a promise that God's kingdom is eternal. How then should we feel about where we store our treasures (i.e. invest our time and money)? See Matt 6:19-21.

Further Notes

In verses 17–18, a brief explanation of the vision is given: after four world kingdoms, God's eternal kingdom will come into force. The meaning of the dream is similar to that of Nebuchadnezzar's dream about four world kingdoms and the coming of God's kingdom (see Dan 2):

→ Head of gold = lion = Babylon (present day Iraq)

→ Chest and arms of silver = bear = Persia (Western Asia, extending from modern day Iran to Turkey, Palestine and Afghanistan)

→ Belly and thighs of bronze = leopard = Greece (established by Alexander the Great, the Greek Empire assimilated much of the known world and influenced every society; Greek was still the common language when the apostles were scattered and began to spread the gospel to all nations)

→ Legs of iron = terrifying beast = Rome (the Roman Empire was the dominant world force when Jesus was ushered into the human race and for another four centuries afterwards)

→ Rock = Son of Man = Jesus.

The imagery is different (precious metals vs wild animals); perhaps this is a contrast between the worldly view given to Nebuchadnezzar, emphasising the glory and power of the kingdoms (Dan 2) with the spiritual view recognising the violence used to gain that power (Dan 7) – the “inhuman character of imperialism” (Leupold). The “beast” image also emphasises the limited life-span of worldly kingdoms (v18). Remembering this, we should take confidence and not be troubled too much by current affairs because, as fragile as world economics and politics can be, God's will shall prevail in His time.

Then Daniel asked about the final, most terrifying beast, and its horns which persecuted God's people. The description of the fourth kingdom (v19,23) matches that in 2:40, but now we have more details: the horns, which represent kings (v24) of the Roman Empire. Opinions vary on the identity of these kings, but we can list the first ten Roman emperors: Augustus (27 BC - 14 AD), Tiberius (14-37), Gaius (Caligula, 37-41), Claudius (41-54), Nero (54-68), Galba (68-69), Otho (69-70), Vitellius (69-70), Vespasian (69-79) and Titus (79-81). Galba, Otho and Vitellius were each declared emperor by their troops, but they never ruled the whole empire; all three were conquered by Vespasian. Vespasian attacked Jerusalem in 67 AD, but on hearing of Nero's death, he departed for Rome to become Emperor, leaving his son, Titus, to complete the destruction of Jerusalem, which fell in 70 AD. The “little horn” is then Domitian (81-96 AD), also a son of Vespasian, who was the first systematic persecutor of the church (earlier persecution under Nero had been sporadic).

Daniel 8 — The Ram and the Goat

Fri 16 Dec

In 551 BC, Daniel received this vision about two aggressive animals, a ram and a goat, overpowering the other animals, growing horns in various directions and even trampling on stars. It is no surprise that Daniel was bewildered by the vision! What is striking about Dan 8 is that it predicts with precision what happens to future world powers and even names them: the ram represents the kings of Media and Persia (v20) and the goat represents Greece (v21). The details in this and the subsequent chapters are so striking that unbelievers are forced to claim that the book of Daniel was written after the events took place.

One of the things that makes the book of Daniel special is that we see demonstrated before our eyes the fragility of even the greatest of powers in the world. No matter how big and terrifying a person or power becomes their days are numbered. In contrast our God will always reign supreme.

Questions

- What do you do when confused by a passage in the Bible? Do you seek to understand it, as Daniel did (v15), or do you ignore it and read something else?
- Do you ever wish that God would tell you more about the future? Daniel is one of the few men in history who was given very specific knowledge of the future. How did he respond (vv17,18,27)? Why do you think Daniel reacted so strongly?
- Why do you think God revealed these details of history in advance? How can it help us today?
- Have you ever tried to convince non-Christians that the Bible is inspired by God? What evidence do you show them? Do you think a passage like this could be used?

Further Notes

v3,20 The ram represents the empire of the Medes and Persians (the two horns); the Persians arose later and became the stronger power (“the longer one coming up last”).

v4 The Persian empire expanded in three directions: west to Babylon, north to Lydia (Asia Minor) and south to Egypt (see also the three ribs in Dan 7:5).

v5–7,21 The Greek army under Alexander the Great (Dan 11:3) swiftly conquered the whole Persian empire, building an empire of one and a half million square miles in ten years.

v8,22 Alexander exalted himself as a god, but died suddenly of a fever in 323 BC, at the height of his power. His kingdom was divided between four of his generals: Antigonus, Ptolemy I Soter, Cassander and Lysimachus (“4 horns”; see also Dan 11:4; 7:6).

v9 Within 20 years, Antigonus lost to Seleucus I Nicator, who started a dynasty in Syria (the kings of the North in Dan 11). This verse jumps forward to the second century BC, when Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 BC), the eighth of these kings, expanded his power to the south (Egypt), east (Persia), and the beautiful land (Palestine).

v10 The stars represent God’s people (Dan 12:3; Gen 15:5; 22:17; Php 2:15; see also Dan 8:24).

v11 Antiochus IV claimed to be divine; “Epiphanes” means “manifestation” (of god). In 167 BC he stopped Jewish sacrifices, offered a pig on the altar, and set up an idol in the temple (see 1 Macc 1:41-59; 4:42ff for details).

v12 “Fling truth to the ground”: Antiochus ordered the burning of Scriptures.

v14 It is disputed whether this means 2300 days or 1150 days (counting the evenings and mornings separately). Since the previous verses are about the stopping of sacrifices, it makes sense to interpret this as the number of regular sacrifices (1150 morning sacrifices and 1150 evening sacrifices, from 167-164 BC), until the temple was cleansed and sacrifice restored.

v23,25 Antiochus is known for gaining power by intrigue and bribery. He usurped his nephew’s throne while pretending to protect him. He was “broken without human agency”: he died of disease.

v26 “Seal the vision” does not mean to hide it, but to preserve it for the future. One reason for the vision was to reassure God’s people that even though terrifying powers would rule with devastating implications, these powers were numbered in days and one day their number would be up! God does not abandon His people, but warns them of what will come (cf. John 16:1-4).

Prayer Focus

Dear Lord, we give you thanks for the signposts you give us in scripture so that that we can brace ourselves for the big hits that life throws at us. We take comfort that there is no evil, no power, no authority that can stand against you and survive.

Daniel 9:1-19 — Daniel's Prayer

Sat 17 Dec

Daniel realised from Jeremiah's prophecy (Jer 25:11-12; 29:10-14) that the period of captivity in Babylon was about to end, and Babylon would be judged. Like other faithful Jews (Ps 137:1-6), Daniel longed for the restoration of God's people to their land, so he did what he always had done (recall Dan 6) and took it to the Lord in prayer.

Daniel's prayer recorded here is one of the great prayers in the Bible, which illustrates much about how to approach God with our requests. Firstly there is the respectful adoration. Daniel knows he is coming before God himself and he acknowledges God's awesomeness and sovereignty over all mankind. Secondly Daniel then confesses corporate sin before God. He does not attempt to separate himself from the body of Israelite believers. In fact the main body of the prayer is taken up in humble confession. Thirdly Daniel lays his requests before God. He pleads with God. Daniel really cares for his people and God's reputation. ("For your sake my God, do not delay because your city and your people bear your name.") The narrative is also an encouraging indicator of the Holy Spirit at work. The Holy Spirit intercedes for us, even when we don't know what to pray (Rom 8:26-27).

Questions

- In v3, why did Daniel pray, if God had already promised to end the captivity at a specific time? Compare with Mt 6:10.
- What was the reason for the captivity of Judah and Israel? What was God's purpose? Was this purpose achieved?
- List the topics that Daniel prayed about. What was the main focus of Daniel's prayer?
- What did Daniel eventually ask for? What reasons does he give in his prayer for why God should answer it?
- When you want God to answer a specific prayer, how do approach Him? Do you pray like Daniel?
- Pause for thought a moment. What about you? What have you been praying fervently for recently?
- Reflect on how much time you spend in sober confession when you pray. How mindful are you of God's reputation when He is slandered and the Bible is ridiculed by non-believers?

Further Notes

v2 The 70 years can be counted from the deportation of Daniel (around 605 BC) to the return under Cyrus (536 BC), see 2 Chr 36:17-23. There was also 70 years from the destruction of the temple in 586 BC to its rebuilding around 515 BC.

v4-15 Consider Daniel's prayer: God is never blamed for the situation; Daniel was clear that God had acted righteously, according to his warnings via the prophets. The fault lay entirely with God's people, for rejecting God and His word. Like Jesus, Daniel took the responsibility for the people's sin upon himself, and he also shared in the punishment.

Daniel realised that the predicted time was coming, but there was no sign of an end to the Babylonian rule and the promised return to Jerusalem. Most importantly, the purpose of the punishment, to bring God's people to repentance, had not yet been achieved (v13). They had been humbled, but they had not humbled themselves. Daniel led the way in repentance, but it is not stated whether the people followed Daniel's lead.

v16-19 Daniel first expressed the basis for his request (v4-15) before making any request. He knew he did not deserve what he was asking for, so he based his plea on God's righteousness (v16), God's compassion (v18) and God's name (v19), and he recalled God's past acts of mercy (v15) as a precedent. How different is his humble request compared to modern teachers who say we should "claim" God's promises! Note also his use of scriptural language – his prayer was based on biblical terms and concepts.

The effect of Daniel's prayer is dramatic. While he is still praying, Gabriel visits him. Daniel receives another revelation from God. Daniel is given a new time frame, which pinpoints the arrival of the Messiah (Anointed One). This is the climax of the book of Daniel. Here we see how God's objectives steer the course of history. Daniel correctly understood Jeremiah's prophecy of 70 years (9:2), but now there would be another period, this time 70 "weeks", in which God completes His work. There are many different interpretations of this passage (Jerome, around 400 AD, already knew of 9!); the differences often arise from different views about Jesus and the kingdom of God.

Questions

- How would Daniel have felt about the visit and reassuring words from Gabriel? When have you had a prayer answered? What did it do for your faith?
- Read v24 carefully. How do each of the points listed here relate to Jesus?
- What do you understand from the Old Testament about the Messiah? What about the New Testament? (Note that Messiah (from Hebrew) and Christ (from Greek) have the same meaning: the Anointed One.)
- What does it mean for the Messiah to be "cut off"? In what sense did He "have nothing"?
- From God's point of view, why were the sacrifices and offerings stopped?
- Reflect on Daniel, who discerned from scripture that the desolation of Jerusalem was about to end, and imagine that you understood from the scriptures that Jesus was to return any time now. What would your next prayer be like? How might your evangelism be different?

Further Notes

v21 "Time of the evening sacrifice": sacrifices had not been offered for about 50 years, but Daniel still prayed at these regular times, showing his faith that God would one day restore His people so they could worship Him again in the promised land.

v24 The word translated "weeks" also means "sevens", and is understood by many to be seven-year periods, following the OT cycle of sabbatical years (see Lev 25:2-4,8; 26:33-35).

v24 This verse is rich with promises about God achieving His purpose: atoning for sin (2 Cor 5:19), bringing in eternal righteousness (Rom 5:21), fulfilling prophecy ("seal up vision and prophecy") and anointing the Holy One (rather than "holy place" (NASB); see Lk 4:18-21; Is 61:1). These are all references to the work of Christ, fulfilled at His first coming, particularly in His death and resurrection. This passage is central to Daniel and its fulfilment is the focal point of human history.

v25 God revealed the timing of Christ's coming: 69 "weeks" after a command to rebuild Jerusalem. There has been much discussion about which command this verse refers to, but we can anchor our interpretation by working backwards from the historical fulfilment of the prophecy. Note also that the first return under Cyrus (538 BC) followed a command to build the temple, not the city (Ezra 1:2-3; but cf Is 44:28); likewise the confirmation of this command by Darius I (Ezra 6:7; 517 BC) is not about rebuilding the city. Artaxerxes was the one who finally gave the command to Nehemiah (Neh 2:1-8; 445 BC) for the walls of Jerusalem to be rebuilt. 69 years of 360 days takes us to about 32 AD, which fits well with the date of the crucifixion. The reason for the division into 7 weeks and 62 weeks is not clear (perhaps it is the first Jubilee after the return from captivity; see Lev 25:8-10).

v26 Here is a clear prophecy about the death of the Messiah and the subsequent punishment that would come upon the city of Jerusalem. The almost 40 year gap until the Romans sacked Jerusalem is not mentioned, but just that "war will continue" until the end suddenly comes. See Luke 21:20-24 and Matt 24:15-16 for related New Testament prophecies.

v27 This verse is difficult, and differences in translations lead to very different interpretations. In the first half of the verse, "he" refers to the Messiah, the main subject of this section, who brings in the New Covenant, putting an end to the OT sacrificial system (Heb 8:13; 9:25f; 10:8f). The second half of the verse refers to Titus performing idolatrous sacrifices (an "abomination") in the temple (favouring the NASB translation over the NIV), and God's eventual punishment of the Romans.

The references to the final week are difficult to interpret, and various explanations have been offered. One popular view proposes a very large gap between the 69th and 70th weeks, with the final week being a future "great tribulation"; but this view takes the focus away from Christ's completed work in the first century AD, so it detracts (and distracts) from the main message of the Bible.

Daniel is relayed a message from a special messenger. He initially struggles with weakness and feels inadequate to receive this message. He is encouraged and strengthened by the heavenly messenger in preparation for the revelations of the future to be uncovered in the final chapters of the book.

Questions

- Why do you think was Daniel fasting? What drove him to fast? What do you think he would have been praying about?
- How can you develop the spiritual discipline of fasting? (Matt 6:16-18)
- Why was Daniel weakened as he saw the vision and heard the voice (v8-9) of the heavenly messenger? What other passages relay human weakness in light of spiritual revelation? How does this reflect on Jesus' humanity?
- Who do you understand the messenger to be? Does your view of the spiritual world acknowledge the existence and action of such beings?
- What do the terms of endearment used by the messenger reflect about God?
- What similarities can you find between this passage and Eph 6:12-13?

Further Notes

Daniel chooses an occasion to fast and pray for 3 weeks. His reason for doing this is not given, but this may have been an initiative to draw closer to God and seek understanding (v12), or perhaps he had a specific prayer request on his heart (2 Sam 12:16-17). God responded to his devotion to prayer by sending a messenger.

Although the appearance of the man (v5-6) is described using imagery found in other texts (Rev 1:12-16; Ezek 1:26-28), which describe Jesus' and God's glory, in this case it probably portrays the power and authority of a messenger of God. Because of associations with Michael the messenger is probably an archangel.

Visions of a divine or heavenly origin often left a profound effect on the recipient both physically and emotionally. Isaiah, Ezekiel, Paul and John also witnessed visions of divine glory at various times (Is 6:1-7; Ezek 1:28; Acts 9:1-9; Rev 1:12-18). What Daniel sees saps his strength, but the messenger, after many interventions, gives Daniel the ability to finally stand and address him. The striking term "man dearly loved" (v11, ESV) used by the messenger indicates that God is pleased with Daniel. How encouraging this must have been for Daniel to hear and afterwards remember these words! In the Bible only a few are so described: Abraham (2 Chr 20:7; Jas 2:23), David (1 Sam 13:14) and Mary (Lk 1:28,30).

Note the prophetic nature of the message (v20): Daniel's final years overlapped with the early years of the Medo-Persian Empire, and he received the following vision in 536 BC. The messenger declares the heavenly nature of the war he is involved in, and states that his direct opponent is Persian and that a Greek opponent would eventually come. Thus he correctly predicted the sequence of world powers that would rule over God's people. Note that it was over 200 years from the time Daniel received the vision until the Greek conqueror Alexander the Great overcame the Persian Kingdom. This is a reassuring observation that God controls the nations and defines history as we know it.

Note also that we are given a rare glimpse of the battle between angels and "princes" – surely these are also spiritual beings, and not the mortal kings who represent them – giving us insight into occurrences in the spiritual realm (see Eph 6:12). Consider how Cyrus was stirred to allow the first Jewish repatriation from captivity (Ezra 1:1-4). The Jewish people, although they had no physical defender, had powerful spiritual defenders that made headway in the unseen realms, providing significant concessions from worldly rulers. See also Neh 1:1-2:8 and the account of the Persian King Ahasuerus (Xerxes I), Esther and Mordecai in Est 5:2; 6:3-10; 8:1-2; 10:1-3.

The messenger reveals that Persia will continue to be pertinent to the people of God for at least a few reigns but a new kingdom (Greece) will eventually come to play a significant part in the future of the Jewish people. The messenger elaborates on how the Persian Kingdom will peak in strength but will eventually find its demise in the hands of the emerging Greek Kingdom. But then, this initially powerful Greek kingdom will quickly splinter, leading to fighting within its ranks. Many of the details of this chapter would have been a mystery to Daniel himself, however with hindsight and the passage of history, many specific details can be corroborated in Persian, Greek and Roman history.

Questions

- What do you think fundamentally drove the ambitions and actions of the various peoples related in this passage? How is this different from what drives your ambition and actions?
- Consider the durability of the kingdoms and even the prominent men who ruled these kingdoms. What legacy did they leave? How did this shape the world in which we live?
- What do you think were some of the hopes of the conquering peoples? What happened in reality? How is this different from recent history? How are your ambitions, spiritual or secular, tempered as you reflect on these passages?
- A few passages show non-violent schemes to gain control of situations. What are some strategies you use to get what you want and could these reflect selfish ambition (Php 2:3; Jas 3:14,16)?

Further Notes

Daniel 11:2 is not meant as an exhaustive list of kings, as there were nine Persian kings in total after Cyrus. The four kings mentioned here are the next four kings, Cambyses to Xerxes I, covering the period 530-465 BC. Xerxes I (Ezra 4:6; also known as Ahasuerus, Est 1:1) used his great riches to amass an army of hundreds of thousands of men (some say two million) for what turned out to be an unsuccessful attack on Greece (480 BC). This was the turning point in Persia's fortunes, and the remaining kings are not mentioned.

The mighty Greek king of v3 is the well known historical figure Alexander the Great, who conquered the Persians in 331 BC. Several years later, Alexander died of illness, leaving no successor, and his kingdom was divided among 4 of his generals (see also Dan 8:22-23). From these, two dynasties arose (Ptolemaic in Egypt and Seleucid in Syria) and, driven by ambition and desire for retaliation, engaged in a retracted tussle for wealth and power. This led to some fallout against the Jewish homeland as geographically Palestine was en route of any advancing or retreating armies.

As an example of the precision of the vision, v6 describes how Ptolemy II Philadelphus (king of the south) gave his daughter Berenice to Antiochus II Theos (king of the north) with the intention of creating peace. Antiochus divorced his wife Laodice to marry Berenice, but when Antiochus died in 246 BC, Laodice had Berenice and her son poisoned, and placed her own son Seleucus II Callinicus on the throne. Berenice's brother, Ptolemy III Euergetes ("branch from her roots", v7) took revenge in a series of victories against Seleucus.

In v14, mention is made of a Jewish revolutionary movement siding with one of the empires, probably as an opportunistic move motivated by nationalism in the guise of God's will. This verse seems to condemn the violent means employed and may echo some of the popular expectations of the Messiah in Jesus' time – a military, politically powerful and imposing ruler solely interested in the welfare of Jews. We see men desiring to take control and exert justice in God's name but God alone defines who will be his instrument of justice (Ps 75:3-7).

In these passages, campaigns of force and political schemes to control and consolidate potential opponents and the conquered are shown to be futile and transient (v6-7,17). The details of v11-19 were fulfilled in the reign of Antiochus III the Great, ruler of Syria from 223-187 BC. The big picture is that life is transitory and we do well to set our hearts on God and a legacy that will last (Jas 4:13-15).

This passage elaborates on the theme of suffering to be inflicted on the people of the holy land, i.e. the Jews, by one particular king. God forewarns his people that suffering and destruction await the holy land.

Questions

- Why do you think this passage of scripture gives so much attention to the unnamed king who oppresses God's people?
- In what ways does this suffering relate to that of early Christians and also with Christianity today?
- According to the text, what are some of the merits of the suffering of the people? How does this relate to some of the promises about enduring suffering as a Christian today?
- How does the king's moral decline and self elevation escalate?

Further Notes

The theme of the suffering of God's people at the hands of the kings of the North begins in v16 and extends over the reigns of the next two kings. After the reign of king Seleucus IV is briefly mentioned in v20, the remainder of the chapter focusses mainly on the next king, Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 BC). The moral character of this king seems to be lacking as he is described as contemptible (v21), using flattery to gain his way and benefit a few (v21,23), deceitful (v23,27), and making promises he will not keep (v23). His agenda was to conquer the southern kingdom and he opposed the people of the covenant in the process (v28,30-32) using both force and flattery.

While many kings from the Persian and Greek empires allowed the conquered nations to exercise a degree of cultural and religious freedom, this king was interested in cultural and religious homogeneity. Antiochus IV was educated in Athens and he believed that the only acceptable culture was the Greek (Hellenistic) culture, so he went to great lengths to Hellenise the Jews. He was keen to destroy any strong religious identity like the Jews at the time, and he outlawed circumcision and Jewish temple worship, and eventually sacrificed a pig (an unclean animal according to Hebrew law) on the altar of the temple in Jerusalem and also set up an idol, an image of Zeus, in the temple. These acts are probably what is meant by "the abomination that causes desolation" (v31) and contributed to the Maccabean revolt which was an initially successful uprising by devout Jews.

There is in the narrative a sense of loss as devoted Jews suffered persecution (v32,33b) even to the point of death. Jews in general were caught in wars between empires (v41) while other Jews compromised their faith and gave into the seductions (v32) of the king. God, however, was looking to forge something spiritual and greater (v35) in those who remained faithful to Him. Consider the encouragement these passages must have given to the Jews of the time, as well as to early Christians undergoing persecutions by Roman emperors as they caught a glimpse of God's plan through persecution. God's plans and encouragements are reiterated many times in the New Testament, with a call to focus on things above (1 Pet 4:12-19; Rev 2:10).

The king was to do as he willed (v36) and would be accountable to no-one, exalting himself above all, even God. Commentators have various views of the remaining verses: some say this still refers to Antiochus, others to early Roman conquests, and yet others to a future Antichrist. In any case, we see here human nature left to its own devices; left unchecked, man becomes a god to himself. We see this pattern repeating itself in the book of Daniel (e.g. Nebuchadnezzar, Alexander the Great) and all through history. Consequently, in time, the king comes to his fall (v45). Likewise, without God, human nature will elevate itself, at times under the pretense of religion. Thankfully, as Christians draw close to God, we can check this destructive tendency and be lifted by God himself (Eph 2:5-6).

Following on a major theme of the previous chapter, a future time promises much suffering for the people of God, who are admonished to seek and hold onto God in spite of the suffering and pursue a heavenly perspective to their suffering. Daniel tries to get more clarity from what is revealed, but only enigmatic answers are given, and he is called to “seal” the revelations and leave the matter.

Questions

- From the text, in what context will God’s judgement and God’s deliverance be meted out?
- What qualities are the people of God called to have? Can you think of New Testament passages that call God’s people to have the same qualities?
- What are your thoughts and feelings when, instead of revelations, insights and answers, a challenging situation provides no clear biblical answer, advice or direction except that we should trust God with the outcome? How does this affect your relationship with God?
- In a situation like the previous question, what can help you flourish? What does not help you? Do people close to you have an understanding of who you are in these situations?
- Verse 13 mentions an allotted place for Daniel. How does your consideration of your allotted place (or reward) in heaven (John 14:2; Col 3:24) affect your actions and thoughts?

Further Notes

The theme of suffering of God’s people is continued from chapter 11 until the end of the book. Michael, a heavenly helper, will oversee God’s people; he will offer some support but he will not take away the suffering, as God has a purpose for suffering in his followers. The time frame described in this passage is not limited to the intertestamental period. The language used is very similar to that in the book of Revelation, and more broadly points to judgement day when the living and the dead shall rise before God to receive a great reward or punishment (Rev 20:11-14). Also, Jesus must have reflected on this passage as he spoke Mt 25:46; Jn 5:28-29. Christians can easily identify with the mission of leading others to righteousness and the wisdom of living God’s way.

With regards to all the symbols and enigmatic language in this passage, it is difficult to make sense of it all. Daniel himself was keen to understand all it meant but more than once he was advised “shut up the words and seal the book” indicating that the full meaning of the revelation would not be revealed in his lifetime and perhaps not in ours either. This can be frustrating for us but ultimately this calls us to surrender our desire to know to God, and trust in his providence even in times of trouble and even when we don’t know the full story. This must have been a source of tension for early Christians as they lost property, livelihoods, friends and relatives to persecution or voluntarily gave up life comforts (Mk 10:29) being reassured that God was in control and that like Daniel, they would receive an allotted place and rest (Heb 10:34). And like Daniel, we will receive an inheritance and find rest ourselves if we heed the warnings and encouragements of this book.

Verses 11-12 refer to two durations of 1290 and 1335 days. What do these durations mean? Considering the highly symbolic nature of the book of Daniel, they were possibly not literal days but instead symbolic durations². If symbolic, the first duration possibly indicated that the Jews of that time would suffer for a significant time, ultimately limited by God’s decree, and the second duration (1335 days) may just highlight the need to persevere beyond the allotted time of suffering to the end. The interpretation depends very much on whether this is understood to refer to Antiochus Epiphanes’s time, when he desecrated the temple (11:31), or the later destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by Titus. If referring to Antiochus, these durations could relate to events surrounding the cleansing of the temple and recommencement of sacrifices after the death of Antiochus IV in 164 BC. Various events related to the desecration of the temple took place in 167 BC, so it is possible that a literal interpretation of the dates is correct. Similarly it may be possible to find a literal fulfilment in the events leading up to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD. In any case we must try to understand the main point of the passage. Indeed the call is that the faithful Jews suffering persecution in that era, and by extension we as Christians, persevere until the last day. God’s eternal blessings are dependent on us keeping this command (Heb 10:36; Jas 1:12; 1 Tim 4:16).

²Note that both figures are close to three and a half years, which is half of seven years. Seven often represents perfection or completion; three and a half would then represent something that is incomplete or cut short.

Life Lessons from Daniel

This closing section of the series steps back from the chapter and verse studies to look at the “big picture” of Daniel’s life. It is a series of reflections on godly principles that come to the fore through Daniel’s life. As such, it is a big departure from the rest of this quiet time series because it does not cover specific parts of the biblical text and also its style is very different. It does not fit neatly into one section per day bits and while I have asked lots of (hopefully) thought provoking questions, I have also included my own reflections. Please do not let my personal reflections limit what you yourself can get out of the passages; rather use them as tools to develop your own convictions.

Researching the book of Daniel has been a richly rewarding experience for me and I hope this quiet time series has been for you too.

1 Staying Power

Daniel was probably a teenager when he was exiled to Babylon and would have been in his eighties when he spent a night in the lion’s den. When he was young, Nebuchadnezzar tried the promise of a bright future in Babylon to co-opt him. When he was old his fellow governors tried the threat of violence to make him go away. Neither worked.

If you asked Daniel his secret to staying faithful throughout his long life, what would he say? Let’s look at what we know.

- He was a man of prayer – his prayer in chapter 9 is a wonderful example of humility and passion. In fact, if you compare it to the Lord’s prayer you will see many of the elements of the Lord’s prayer in it. Go on, take a look!
- He was a man of God’s word. The spark that led to the prayer in chapter 9 was his knowledge of Jeremiah’s 70 years in exile prophecy.
- He didn’t “go it alone”. When confronted with non-Kosher foods in chapter 1 he included his friends in his plan. Similarly, Christianity requires that we actively engage with the community of believers.
- He kept his priorities and values in the right place. He was mega-successful in his career – the equivalent of a cabinet level position such as Home Secretary, and ultimately Prime Minister – but he was always known to all the people as a Jew. He didn’t try to hide who or what he was to get ahead. Yet he did not flaunt it or use it either. He just was what he was and you either accepted him or you did not.
- He used his position to protect his fellow Jews (if you are not sure how, it comes later when we look at “lionsdengate”).
- As a follower of the Law of Moses he didn’t just eat differently, he looked different to those around him. He would have had a full beard (not trimmed into a goatee in the Babylonian fashion – Lev 19:27) and he would have worn tassels on his clothes (Num 15:38-40).

There is no magic formula to being a faithful follower of God throughout your life but my sense from Daniel’s life is this: be outward focussed like Daniel rather than “what’s in it for me” and you will receive so much more than you give. Or as Jesus put it, “Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” (Luke 6:38)

2 Living as a Godly Person in a Pagan World

Daniel lived as a godly person in a very pagan world. Even though our world is far from Christian in its values, attitudes and behaviour it is nonetheless based on a Christian legacy. For example, it was churches that historically provided free education and healthcare before the government took over this function.

In Daniel's day the king was an absolute monarch and there is a reason we say "power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely." He got arrogant and self-obsessed to the point God felt it necessary to intervene with a bout of eating grass like an animal – imagine working for someone like that!

So here are some top tips from Daniel:

1. Be reasonable where possible

When the young Daniel asked to not eat the royal food in chapter 1 he didn't make a fuss, demand his rights or try trick the guy in charge. He recognised the pressure the guy was under and made a deal that also met his needs. That said, if the guy in charge was not willing to give Daniel's plan a go, given how Daniel and his friends acted when forced to pray to false gods, it is safe to assume that Daniel would have held firm in the confrontation even at a high personal cost.

2. Be firm on your "red lines"

Being reasonable doesn't mean compromising on what is not negotiable. When ordered to pray to a false god, king or otherwise, the answer was simple – not on your life! Or in this case, nor on his own life! Would you take a job or study at a university in a place where you would be spiritually isolated? Or would that cross a red line?

3. Don't be absorbed in worldly behaviour

If Daniel had conformed to Babylonian culture they would have welcomed him as one of their own. His chances of career success would have shot up. But throughout his life he was always not just Belteshazzar the court official, but Daniel the Jew. The temptation to be a social chameleon is always with us – laugh at off colour jokes, tell the odd lie to avoid trouble or join in a bit of gossip. A simple test for any interaction is this, what would someone say if immediately after the interaction you invited them to church? If you think they would raise an eyebrow in surprise you know you are "going over to the dark side".

4. Be actively engaged in the body of Christ

I touched on this in the previous reflection – Daniel was part of a Jewish community and they were his closest friends.

5. Have a "real" prayer life

His prayer in chapter 9 is fantastic. In his brush with the lions in chapter 6 it says that "Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before." His vocal prayer life was not an act of protest – it was a continuation of his daily habit. Which is also why having godly habits is so important. It is said that gravity isn't the strongest force in the universe – habit is! So make sure you have godly habits (like going to bed early enough to wake up early enough to have a nourishing quiet time) that work for you, not bad habits that undermine you.

6. Be willing to have hard conversations

In chapter 4 Daniel is put on the spot by King Nebuchadnezzar to interpret his dream. Telling your boss he is going to go insane is one thing; telling it to a cantankerous, brutal, absolute monarch is quite another. But sometimes you have to say it like it is because a person will not change what they do not acknowledge. Having said that, notice how Daniel concludes his bad news "Therefore, Your Majesty, be pleased to accept my advice: renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue."

Being truthful does not mean being rude or overbearing. Daniel offers a solution and his best wishes. Always make sure people know you are trying to help them, not hurt them. Paul gives some good advice in 1 Thessalonians 5:14 "And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone."

7. Recognise that how you live communicates 80%, what you say only the 20% balance

Did you know that 80% of your impact on others is through informal communication as opposed to formal communication? The context of this statistic is research on leadership. CEOs spend a

lot of time on presentations, speeches, company memos and newsletters etc., but the truth is such formal communications only make up 20% of their overall impact. Informal communications are how you say “good morning” and showing a genuine interest in the people around you such as “how is your two year old settling into his new nursery?” It’s being patient when something is irritating, being polite when someone else is being rude, and being gracious when you are wronged.

Daniel made some pretty serious formal communications when he interpreted dreams to kings, but through the course of his life he acted with integrity to the point that when the bad guys who got him thrown in with the lions were looking for some dirt on him they found nothing. That’s why they had to resort to such desperate measures.

8. Recognise that the pagan world wants to “absorb” you

The idea was to co-opt Daniel and his friends and make them good Babylonians. They were given Babylonian names, gods, food, customs, education, clothing and language but still they remained true to their values and beliefs.

As any nutritionist will tell you – you are what you eat. This is actually literally true. If you want to know geographically where someone grew up you can do a bone analysis – they do this sometimes when doing historical and archaeological research. Of course, culturally and socially you are also what you eat. Here are some ways the pagan world around us is trying to absorb us as Christians into its ways and also some tips to avoid being absorbed:

a. Avoid gossip magazines – gossip is wrong whether it is said by a colleague or a journalist. As Eleanor Roosevelt once said, “Great minds discuss ideas; average minds discuss events; small minds discuss people.” Can you see Jesus reading a gossip rag? I can’t either.

b. Be careful what movies you watch – if hate, revenge, lust, rage, deceit, violent retribution, profanity, (add your own thoughts to this list) etc. are wrong – why is watching someone else do them for entertainment a good idea? I am not saying never watch any movies that are beyond PG rated (I personally enjoyed Saving Private Ryan although I have to admit I am still somewhat shell shocked years later). I am saying blindly sucking up all Hollywood has to offer is a serious mistake.

c. Watch out for tabloids – I would suggest the greatest harm against Christian values is not the outrageously evil, because it is plain to see it for what it is; the greatest harm is making the “sort of evil” normal. Tabloids have achieved this with stunning success with page 3 girls. In the UK if you said page 3 was shocking many people would look at you like you are weird. The truth is it is outrageous to put full frontal pictures in a “newspaper” read in families. I used to work at a campus / business park and not surprisingly they had anti-pornography rules. And yet I would walk past the caf and common area and see papers lying open on page 3 with the students walking past. How is that okay? What really gets my goat is that up and down this country there are small children growing up in families where such newspapers are purchased and they are desensitised to what the material actually is. And then as a society we wonder why women are devalued. You couldn’t make it up!

d. Consider TV show values – many sitcoms, soapies and shows like the Simpsons are banned in my house. You may think this is extreme but I for one don’t want my children growing up on a diet of lies, disrespect, cutting remarks, put-downs and potently dysfunctional family environments. Yes they can be very funny at times but there is also a dark side to them.

e. See through marketing ploys – adverts and “special offers” are designed to get you to behave in a way (buy their product) that you otherwise would not. There is a whole psychology to marketing and advertising called “retail science”. The problem is that clever marketing can get us lusting after stuff we don’t need, building negative feelings like envy and greed. The godly opposite of this is called contentment, as Paul wrote to the young evangelist Timothy: “But godliness with contentment is great gain.” (1 Tim 6:6)

f. Enjoy music with your eyes open to the lyrics – many songs are filled with sexual innuendo and worldly values. As one example among many, read the lyrics to Tinie Tempah’s song “Pass Out” and ask yourself whether humming along to this song is a good idea. Paul wrote “It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret” (Eph 5:12). These days it’s no secret – it’s broadcasted on the radio!

In conclusion, bear in mind that when you are in a river you move at the same speed as the water. If you relax and lie on your float you will drift downstream without even realising it. Only when you look at the riverbank do you see how fast you are travelling. For us, that riverbank is the Bible. Let’s make sure that it is the source of our values.

3 Guarded by Integrity

How would you fare if there was an internal audit at your work and they singled you out for “special attention”? They looked at every purchase, every decision, every transaction, every email, and every relationship. If you are a student imagine they looked at every assignment, every exam, every sporting event, and every friendship.

What would they find? They did this to Daniel when Darius planned on setting him over the whole government in Babylon. And the result?

“At this, the chief ministers and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent.” (Dan 6:4)

Imagine you found out this was going on behind your back. How would you feel? What would you do? Almost certainly Daniel would have known, he was mega-shrewd – you don’t get promoted to Prime Minister for being a dummy.

Integrity has been defined as doing the right thing even when no-one is watching. It is sobering to remember that in truth someone IS watching, and you know who I mean.

The book of Proverbs has tons to say on the subject, here are a few to whet your appetite: “Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but whoever takes crooked paths will be found out” (Prov 10:9); “The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity” (Prov 11:3); “Righteousness guards the person of integrity, but wickedness overthrows the sinner.” (Prov 13:6)

The basic idea is that integrity protects you and you can live with confidence. And when it counted it saved Daniel’s life. Sadly, Daniel also got to experience this proverb: “The bloodthirsty hate a person of integrity and seek to kill the upright.” (Prov 29:10)

Integrity is also doing the right thing even when it is not popular or easy. Integrity is not lying when someone asks you to cover for them, integrity is doing your best even when the person you work for is unworthy, integrity is not cheating on the test even if you know you won’t get caught.

If you do a study on the opposite of integrity – cheating, corruption, lying, deceiving, stealing, laziness etc., you will find a great many scriptures on the subject. To God your behaviour is a really big deal. Hopefully it is to you too.

4 Accepting Responsibility

Read Daniel’s prayer in chapter 9 again. Notice that when he prays for the nation of Israel he talks about “we” when referring to their sin even though Daniel was a very righteous man himself. Here’s what he did not do:

- He did not make excuses
- He did not blame anyone else
- He did not water down their sin

It is called taking responsibility. The opposite of taking responsibility is blaming. Here is a profound truth: when we pass blame we make ourselves powerless. When we pass all blame to other people or even the situation then in our minds we are not part of the problem, therefore there is nothing for us to learn. We are purely victims of circumstance. So long as we have this attitude, we cannot learn from our mistakes, and if we don’t learn our lessons, history has a habit of repeating itself. The truth is there is always something we can do, even if it is painful or means walking away. Perhaps the mistake was being there in the first place. It is always a bad idea to cast ourselves as the victim and have a martyr syndrome. I once read in a financial magazine this piece of advice from an investor to other investors: if a mistake is expensive, don’t pay for it twice. I would suggest this advice has a universal application in our lives. When we don’t take responsibility for our part in a situation we condemn ourselves to repeat our behaviours that contributed to the situation.

Here is an example of not taking responsibility from an accident report: “The telephone pole was approaching fast. I attempted to swerve out of its path when it hit me.” It is easy for us to look at this example and see how ridiculous it is, but what would an independent observer say of

your excuses? If you find yourself in the same uncomfortable situations time and again I urge you to reflect on this principle deeply.

Another thing – sometimes it is not us who have been hurt, it is us who have done the hurting. Hopefully such times are rare and not on purpose but they do happen. Once again the saying applies: “You cannot change what you do not acknowledge.” If you have hurt someone then acknowledge it. Daniel acknowledged the extent of his people’s sin to God. Sin outrages God and causes Him severe emotional pain (for example read the language used by prophets like Isaiah 16:9 when God weeps over the impending destruction of Moab brought about by “her conceit, her pride and her insolence”). If you have hurt someone and you play it down, you demean them and belittle their pain. That is not cool! If you have hurt someone own up to it and do what you can to repair the hurt.

5 For Praying Out Loud!

Here is a question that has puzzled me for a long time: Why did Daniel pray out loud, in public view when Darius issued the “pray to me only” edict (chapter 6) but was non-confrontational when in his earlier years he was asked to eat royal, non-kosher food (chapter 1)? Before reading on I strongly urge you to read chapter 6 again – there is a lot more going on than the highly sanitised Sunday School version you were probably taught.

I cannot say I definitely have the answer because that would require a time machine to go back and interview Daniel and I am fresh out of those so speculation will have to do. Here’s my theory.

Let’s agree that Daniel was a seriously bright guy. In fact he was more than that, he was wise, insightful and shrewd. He made it to the top under two successive regimes as an outsider and you don’t achieve that by being naïve or incompetent.

He would have known about the original plan to discredit him by digging up dirt and the frustration of his detractors when they came up with nothing. So when the “pray to me only” edict came out he knew exactly what was afoot. Daniel knew that this was another plot to get to him and he knew that if this plot failed there would be another one and these plots did not just affect him – they affected all the Jews in exile. Let’s remember that the core of the hatred against Daniel was racism. Yes, go back 2,500 years and racism was alive and well – it is by no means a new phenomenon. Daniel was an Israeli Jew and there was no way the Persian government administrators were going to let him be top dog! If they couldn’t out him as a corrupt, greedy Jew (does that stereotype ring a bell?) then they would resort to violence. Because he was so friendly with the king they couldn’t eliminate him themselves so they resorted to skulduggery.

Think about Darius’s position for a moment. Darius was a foreigner who became king of Babylon by force – not a great way to become popular with the locals. So when the administrators came to him and said “the royal ministers, prefects, satraps, advisors and governors have all agreed that the king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or human being during the next thirty days, except to you, Your Majesty, shall be thrown into the lions’ den,” what went through Darius’s mind? “I have been accepted by the locals, this is their way of saying they like me and all the invasion and killing their people business is behind us. Let bygones be bygones and all that. This is very good news.”

Now let’s think about the baddies. What did they expect Daniel to do? My guess is they probably expected Daniel to cower and take a long sabbatical. Perhaps they thought he would show disrespect to the king by not joining others in public prayers to the king and thus show disloyalty to the king. The message would be trumpeted – “He is not one of us, he is not a friend of the king like we are. Therefore, how can he get the promotion to top dog? In fact, he needs to be fired (preferably in a furnace but a metaphoric firing will also do).”

And what about all the other exiled Jews in Babylon? I have already mentioned the anti-Semitic racism that was going on. It was much wider than just Daniel. Think of the events of the book of Esther which took place not too long after Daniel was around. Haman and his henchmen tried to eliminate the entire Jewish population in an act of “ethnic cleansing”. If the baddies took Daniel out, would they have stopped there or would they have continued their evil intent on the broader Jewish population? I think the answer is it would only have been a matter of time.

Back to Daniel. I started out by saying he was wise, insightful and shrewd. I think he had this all figured out so by praying out loud he forced their hand to “out” him to Darius. The point Daniel

made was clear – there was no question of loyalty to the king, but he would only worship Yahweh, the God of Israel. By deliberately springing their trap he ensnared the baddies in their own trap. The key is that by walking into the trap he made very clear to Darius what was really going on. Darius had not been accepted by the locals. Far from it, they were treating him like a chump to get their own way! No one likes to find out they have been manipulated and Darius was no exception. Daniel knew this and used it against his persecutors.

I suspect he did not know whether God would rescue him but he did know that either way Darius would be furious with the people who tricked him. This is like chess when you sacrifice your queen, the most powerful piece on the board to later get a checkmate and win the game (note for the younger generation: there actually are games you can play without a computer).

When Daniel defied the “pray to me only” order he sacrificed himself but made a stand for all the people of Judah in exile and directed the anger of the king onto the anti-Semitic powerful court advisors. There comes a time in life when we must choose between doing what is easy and doing what is right. Daniel could have taken the easy route and laid low for a while, but he didn’t. He did what was right. He had the courage to face the lions’ den.

God saved Daniel from the lions which is a pretty cool miracle and so that normally gets the lion’s share of attention (excuse the pun). That puts the focus of the story on God’s sovereignty and that is a good thing, but there is so much more to this story. It is a story of great courage and great wisdom in the face of unjust racism and hatred. I can only pray that one day when it is my turn to choose between doing what is easy and doing what is right I will have the courage and wisdom of Daniel.

6 Where Have I Seen That Before?

Does Daniel remind you of another Old Testament character? How about Joseph? Here are some things they had in common:

What happened	Joseph	Daniel
Badly treated at a young age	Sold into slavery as a boy	Forced into exile as a teenager
Lived in a foreign land	Egypt	Babylon
Given a new local name	Zaphenath-Paneah	Beltshazzar
Successful in occupation	Head of Captain of the Guard’s household and ultimately Prime Minister	Senior government administrator and ultimately Prime Minister
Interpreted dreams	Interpreted Pharaoh’s dreams	Interpreted King Nebuchadnezzar’s dreams
Gifts evolved	Went from a dreamer to an interpreter	Went from an interpreter to a dreamer
Foresaw the future of God’s people	Requested his children to take his bones with them when they left Egypt	Had several visions of the future
Saved God’s people	Provided food and a home for his family in a famine (not to mention for the whole nation of Egypt)	Thwarted the evil plan during “lionsden gate”

Can you think of any other things they had in common?

Moving forward, what does the book of Daniel remind you of in the New Testament? How about the Revelation to John (that is, the book of Revelation)? Both books use apocalyptic language and were written to God’s people at times they were being badly treated through exile or open persecution. Pagans were dominant and harsh with them. Both books answer questions like this: if God’s people are being persecuted by pagan baddies, where is God? Why doesn’t He act? Have we been abandoned? What is our future? Will we be rescued? Will there be justice? What is the purpose of this suffering?

What do you think the answers to these questions are? Here is a very quick, oversimplified thought with regard to the Revelation designed to provoke thinking, not give all the answers.

God is in control and He has a plan. He allowed temporary persecution because the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church. It was in their death that their faith, hope and love was most visible to the pagans and it shone brightly. But nonetheless, the ultimate end of the persecutors was foretold and indeed did happen. Revelation also tells us how God viewed the Roman Empire – our age sees them as brilliant – God saw them as decadent, greedy, and drunk on the misery of others. God values justice highly and with the Romans he saw massive injustice and judged them accordingly. In the Revelation they were called “Babylon” after the decadent Babylon we read of in Daniel.

Back to Daniel – do you think God saving Daniel and his friends means God will save you if you are in a pickle? If so, what about the fact God allowed some of the Christians to whom John wrote the Revelation to die?

7 The Madness of King Nebuchadnezzar

In Daniel 4 we read how King Nebuchadnezzar has a dream about a tree being cut down. The dream worries him greatly and he gets Daniel to interpret it for him. It’s not good news. King Nebuchadnezzar is going to become insane for a while if he doesn’t learn humility. As the story plays out, he doesn’t learn humility and he does acquire a taste for chewing grass.

The story of the madness of Nebuchadnezzar illustrates how our strengths nearly always have a flip side weakness. In Nebuchadnezzar’s case he was a brilliant military leader and forged the largest, most powerful empire the region had ever seen – a great achievement. To do this he would have had qualities like confidence, courage, intelligence and charisma. The flip side was that he was proud and boastful and he stopped listening to people (and even God). Because of the miraculous dream episode of chapter 2 he would have known Daniel was explaining divine meaning to the chapter 4 dream. His failure to deal with his flip side weakness brought him to his knees in spectacular fashion.

This is a very predictable behaviour pattern which I have seen play out many times in high profile figures (think of hugely talented political, business or sports people who stopped listening to those around them) and sadly I have also seen it ruin marriages when one partner stopped listening to the other.

The flip side weakness works in any direction and is not only the domain of the successful. Someone who is quiet, does not push their opinion on others and listens well can struggle with making their opinions heard and standing up for what they believe in. They can be susceptible to going along with the crowd, which is a big problem if it is a worldly crowd.

There is a strong application of this principle for all of us. It is very important that we:

- Grow in self-awareness – we should know our strengths and talents, and use them for good. We should also know our weaknesses and work on them to ensure they are not our undoing.
- Value humility (defined as not including our ego or view of self in how we make decisions or respond to input – as someone said, “Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less”).
- Make a conscious decision to listen to others, especially when we disagree. The context in chapter 4 was for the king to “Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue.” In other words, the call was to repent. The word “repent” means to change your mind or thinking. Let’s have soft hearts that are open to a call to repent. When Jesus called people to repent he was calling them to change their mindset or way of thinking, and as a result, their behaviour. Some did and some didn’t. Let’s be among those who did.
- Recognise we are on a journey of personal growth and welcome input to help that journey. We should regard all input, even painful input, as an opportunity for growth, not an attack.
- Value the fact that the church is a “Deliberately Developmental Organisation” – this mouthful means that church is an organisation with culture, practices and personal ambition for spiritual and personal growth. It is a core defining feature of who and what we are.

- Keep spiritual people in our lives who have the wisdom and love to “speak the truth in love” to us. Once upon a time we called them disciplers. In truth it doesn’t matter what we call them – discipler, mentor, coach, friend, confidant, prayer partner, Christian comrade (okay I made that one up) – we just need to have them.
- Remember that when we refer to ourselves as “disciples of Jesus”, the word disciple means “student or follower”. We are all students on a journey to become more like Christ. It is part of the very definition of what it means to be a Christian.
- Recognise that it is human nature to listen to facts we agree with and disregard facts we disagree with. We need to be open minded, and this takes conscious effort. When you disagree with others make a conscious effort to be open minded, respectful, curious about their view and accept them as a person.

There are a great many scriptures that teach on the subjects of humility, listening, personal growth and self-awareness such as: 2 Peter 1:5-9; Romans 12:3; 1 Peter 2:2; 2 Thessalonians 1:3; Colossians 1:10; Ephesians 4:15; Proverbs 29:23; Proverbs 13:10; Proverbs 21:28; Proverbs 25:12; Proverbs 19:20; Proverbs 18:13; 1 John 1:5-10; Hebrews 5:12; James 1:19. This list is far from exhaustive – I certainly encourage you to do your own in-depth study on this subject.

Judging by the number and tone of scriptures on the subjects, self-awareness, humility and personal growth are a big deal to God. Let’s make sure they are a big deal to us.

This brings us to the end of this quiet time series and these reflections. Daniel was a man of great faith, integrity, courage and wisdom. There is much to like and to emulate in our own lives as we follow the greatest example of them all, Jesus Christ.

Further Reading

- Daniel: Prophet to the Nations (J.M. Oakes, Great Commission Illustrated 2000)
Good overall; easy to read; some minor historical errors, but gives the most consistent interpretation of Daniel
- Exposition of Daniel (H.C. Leupold, Baker 1949)
Conservative, amillennialist, readable but sometimes unclear or inconsistent
- The Prophecy of Daniel (E.J. Young, Eerdmans 1949)
Conservative, amillennialist, harder to read, inconsistent style of interpretation
- Daniel: Walvoord Commentary Series (J.F. Walvoord, Moody 2012/1971)
Conservative, strongly premillennialist, very readable
- Daniel: Everyman’s Bible Commentary (J.C. Whitcomb, Moody 1985)
Conservative, premillennialist; readable but somewhat shallow
- How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth (Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart)
General resource on literary genres in the Bible
- The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature (Sidney Greidanus, 1988)
Highly theological yet useful
- Preaching Christ from the Old Testament (Sidney Greidanus, 1999)
As above
- Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture (Graham Goldsworthy, 2000)
A more readable book, but less balanced than the two above; harsh critique of certain styles of interpretation with which we might be very familiar