

*a study in*  
**DANIEL**

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*faithful*

*courage*

*leadership*

*courtesy*

*conviction*

*steadfast*

*confident*

*lead*

*chosen*

*faithful*

*steadfast*

*commitment*

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Faith Under Pressure: A Study in Daniel  
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# Introduction to Daniel

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Where Daniel fits in the Bible: Daniel is a book found in the Old Testament. It is classified as one of the Major Prophets. Here is where to find it in the roadmap of the Bible:

- ◆ The Bible is broken into 2 groups: Old and New Testament
  - The Old Testament is written primarily in Hebrew and is about God's choice of the people of Israel.
  - The New Testament is written in Greek and is about Jesus and the Church.
  - Daniel is in the Old Testament.
  
- ◆ Old Testament is broken down into 4 groups:
  - Law, History, Writings, and Prophets.
    - One of the biggest obstacles to reading and navigating the Old Testament is not understanding this four-fold division. Take out your Bible, open to the Table of Contents, and label the Old Testament books in these groups.
  - Law – Also called the Torah, Pentateuch, and the 5 Books of Moses. They are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.
  - History – Joshua through Esther. These books tell the story of the formation, division, collapse, exile, and restoration of the nation of Israel. (See below Old Testament History for more on this.)
  - Writing – Job through Song of Songs. These books are a collection of Wisdom Literature (Proverbs), Worship Songs (Psalms), Philosophy (Job, Ecclesiastes), and Love Poetry (Song of Songs).
  - Prophets – The rest of the Old Testament contains the writings of the prophets. They are divided into two groups, Major and Minor Prophets. This has nothing to do with the importance of each work. It has mainly to do with length. The Major Prophets wrote longer works.
    - Major Prophets – Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel (We include Lamentations, which was written by Jeremiah, in the list of the Major Prophets, though in the Hebrew Bible it is listed in the writings with Proverbs, Psalms, and etc.)
    - Minor Prophets – Hosea through Malachi.
  
- ◆ Old Testament History in a Nutshell – In order to understand any book of the Old Testament, you need to have a basic understanding of where it fits in the scope of Old Testament history. By placing it in context, you will be able to have a greater appreciation for the events.
  - Patriarchs – the story of God calling Abraham and working in the lives of his children. This is contained in the Book of Genesis.
  - Slavery/Exodus – The story of how God brought Israel out of Egypt, led them through the wilderness, and to the Promised Land. This is contained in Exodus through Deuteronomy.

- Conquest – The story of how the people of Israel entered the Promised Land, conquered the other people living there, and established an early system of rule. This is contained in Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel.
- United Kingdom – In 1 Samuel, Israel demands a king, and so God gives them Saul. The 12 tribes of Israel are only united as one nation for the reigns of three kings: Saul, David, and Solomon. This is contained in 1 Samuel.
- Divided Kingdom – After the excesses of Solomon, the ten northern tribes of Israel rebelled, broke away, and started their own nation. From this point on, the term Israel refers to the ten northern tribes. Judah refers to the nation composed of the two remaining tribes: Judah and Benjamin.
- Exile/Return – Both nations became wicked and were judged by God. Israel was destroyed by the Assyrians in 722 BC and was absorbed into their empire. They reappear as the Samaritans in the New Testament. The nation of Judah lasted until around 600 BC when it was also conquered. It was conquered by the Babylonians, who transported many of them to Babylon (modern day Iraq), where they remained in Exile for about 70 years before being allowed to return and rebuilt the city and the temple.
- For more, watch the intro to this sermon on Ruth (starting at about the 4:00 mark): <https://vimeo.com/136524262>.

- ◆ Where Daniel Fits in Old Testament History – Daniel is a story that occurs during the exile. It starts with Daniel and three of his friends being carried off to Babylon after the destruction of Jerusalem.
- ◆ The Organization of Daniel – The book of Daniel breaks down into two equal halves.
  - Chapters 1-6 tell stories that involve Daniel and his companions after they have been relocated to Babylon.
  - Chapters 7-12 recount a series of visions God sends Daniel about what God will do in the future.
- ◆ The Purpose of the Book of Daniel – This study is entitled “Faith Under Pressure” because a primary purpose of the book of Daniel is to provide hope and encouragement for people who are struggling in the midst of a hostile culture. Though it may seem like two different books (one of history, one of prophecy), there is a unity of message here. The stories about Daniel and his companions show how to resist the attacks of a culture trying to strip you of your identity and make you over in its image. The prophecies reveal that God has not forgotten them. He is still guiding things and working them out. He calls us to trust him and be faithful. The consistent message of the whole book is: In spite of present appearances, God is in control.
- ◆ Who Wrote It – The question of authorship is a hard one with the book of Daniel. We are not really sure who wrote it. Some people argue that Daniel himself is the author because the second half of Daniel lists a series of visions that Daniel had. These visions are all narrated in the first person (I, Daniel). Hence, Daniel must have written it. The problem with this reasoning is that Daniel 4 contains the story of how Nebuchadnezzar was driven mad by God and lived for seven years as a beast. Much of this chapter is also narrated in the first person, but not by Daniel. Daniel 4 says several times “I, Nebuchadnezzar.” So what do you do with that? Did Nebuchadnezzar write chapter 4?

- ◆ Why it Matters – It might seem like a pointless or secondary debate to argue over who actually wrote the book of Daniel. The reason it matters is because of another issue: Is prophecy possible? You see, some people believe that prophecy cannot or does not happen, and all that biblical prophecy was written after the fact. It was then made to look like they were written beforehand to give the author credibility. Such a view shows a strong bias against the supernatural. It seeks to undermine the credibility of the Bible and the God who inspired it.
  
- ◆ When Was it Written – If you are not confused by now, just wait. Trying to get a firm date for the writing of the book of Daniel is also difficult. One of the reasons some people insist on Daniel being the author is that it solves both who and when. If Daniel is the author, then it would date to around mid-500 BC; however, a problem emerges when we consider the language it was written in. Most people know that the Old Testament is written in Hebrew. The New Testament is written in Greek. And that is true, but there is also some Aramaic sprinkled through the Old Testament as well. Aramaic is the language Jesus spoke. It is the language that replaced Hebrew as the primary language in Judaea. The book of Daniel does not just have a few Aramaic words in it. Half the book is in Aramaic. Daniel 2:4b–7:28 (five of the stories and one vision) are in Aramaic. The reason this is a big deal is because Aramaic is to Hebrew what Italian is to Latin. If you find a text written in Italian, you would know that it was written later than a text written in Latin. That is the case here. The language evidence is some of the strongest in favor for a later date for the book of Daniel.
  
- ◆ So What is the Answer: At this point, many people are exhausted and confused. But how do you make sense of this? Can I preserve my faith in the truth of the scriptures and still account for all the historical and linguistic data? Yes. I think there is an answer. Here is my attempt at reconciling them. First: realize that writing did not happen the way it happens now. In the New Testament, Paul dictated all his letters. Someone else wrote them down, yet we still say Paul wrote them. The book of Jeremiah contains the words spoken by Jeremiah, but they were written down by someone else, Baruch. In Jeremiah 36:1-3, God told Jeremiah to have Baruch write down all the oracles he had spoken “from the day I first spoke to you...even to this day.” So chapters 1-35 of Jeremiah were spoken by Jeremiah but were written down by Baruch afterwards and in some cases many, many years afterward.

I think that something like this is going on in Daniel. Perhaps the visions and stories of Daniel were originally composed by the man himself. They were then circulated and handed down. Finally, in a later period when people realize that many of his prophecies had been fulfilled, they began to write them down in a more organized way. Such a view allows us to maintain our confidence in the historicity of the book and the supernatural nature of prophecy while still making sense of and factoring in the linguistic and literary evidence.

## Daniel 1

# Fighting for Your Identity

Have you ever found yourself completely out of your element? Whether through a family move, job transfer, or going off to college? Or maybe you did not change, but everything around you did. When times like that happen, it can leave you feeling whiplashed. We struggle to get our bearing. We wonder what is going on and who we can trust. Even positive change can be disorienting. But if the change is a negative one, it can leave us questioning our own worth. It can make us wonder if we are being punished or cast aside. It can cause us to question our faith and be perplexed about where God is, and what he is up to.

The good news is that we are not alone. These circumstances happen to a great number of people every day. But that fact does not offer much consolation about how to handle such times. When we look at the Bible through Daniel's story, it stands out as an example of people struggling to come to terms with calamity. Here is a group of young men whose lives have undergone a bewildering series of upheavals. They watched their country be destroyed. They were transported hundreds of miles to live in the capital of the country that conquered their homeland. They were enrolled, perhaps against their will, in a school to be trained in the ways of their conquerors, and they had their names changed. All of this was done to them to alter their identity and change their allegiance. By looking at what happened to Daniel and the decisions he made, we can learn ourselves how to handle life's trails.

### 1:1-7 IDENTITY ATTACKED

Daniel is a story about how a few people decided to stay committed to serving God in the face of an entire culture that was determined to oppose them. This first chapter starts off with all the things that were done to them. This was all for the purpose of stripping them of their identity as followers of the God of Israel and to remake them in the image of the culture that had conquered them.

1. Their homes were destroyed v. 1-2 – Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem, and then sacked and plundered what remained. So Daniel and his friends endured the horrible events of their countrymen starving and dying and watching the Temple of God robbed and destroyed.
2. They were relocated v. 3-4 – The text says that the loot was carried off to the land of "Shinar." Shinar is the old name for the region of Babylon. By using this word, the author of Daniel is reminding his readers of an earlier story that happened in the land of Shinar — the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1-9). This reference reminds the reader that the Jews are not just being taken from their homes; they are being taken to a land of sin and selfishness with a history of opposing the one true God.
3. They were reeducated v. 4 – In a new place, without a home to return to, Daniel and his friends were enrolled in education. They were not just learning to read and write, but were to be indoctrinated into the ways the Babylonians. It was re-education. They were to be trained in a new way of thinking, living, and acting.
4. They were re-aculturated v. 5 – They were not just to be given courses on "Life in Babylon" they were to become Babylonian. They were to eat the king's food and the finest things that Babylon had to offer.
5. They were renamed v. 6-7 – As a final proof of the desire of the Babylonians to remake the Jews in their own image; they took away their Jewish names and gave them Babylonian ones. This might not seem like a big deal to Americans because many of our names are made up or chosen because parents liked the way they sounded. However, the ancients saw names as identity and power. To know someone's name was to know something deep about them. To change their name was an attempt to change their identity.

Each of their names contains a reference to Yahweh, the covenant name for the God of Israel. Each of them is given a new name with a reference to a Babylonian god. Daniel, whose name means “Yahweh is my Judge” was renamed Belteshazzar, which means “Belte protects life.” Hananiah, whose name means “Yahweh has been gracious” became Shadrach, which means “Command of Aku.” Mishael, whose name means “Who is like Yahweh” became Meshach, which means “Who is like Aku.” And Azariah, whose name means “Yahweh has helped” became Abednego, which means “servant of Nabu.”

#### 1:8-13 DANIEL'S RESISTANCE

One wonders how many Jews were absorbed into Babylonian culture. With their homeland destroyed, they only had the bad behind them. The way forward seems to accept the good being offered to them by the Babylonians: education, employment, social standing, power, and eventually wealth. No doubt many were enticed, but Daniel decided differently.

It says Daniel decided that he would not defile himself and sought permission to refuse the king's meat and wine and to eat only vegetables and water. An important question arises – what was Daniel refusing?

- Some think that Daniel trying to avoid eating non-kosher foods. But that does not explain why he also avoided wine, which is only forbidden in the Old Testament to people who have taken the Nazarite vow or something similar.
- Others think it was that he did not want to eat food sacrificed to idols. The problem with this is that the vegetables would have been offered to idols as well. So the vegetables would have also been defiled from that perspective.
- Another theory is that by rejecting the king's food, he is rejecting the king's table fellowship and by extension rejecting him as Lord. This theory fails for two reasons. First, the Daniel diet is private. No one, except the person put over Daniel, knows they are doing it. And second, Daniel does accept the vegetables from the king's table.

So what is the answer? I think the key to understanding it is to realize that the test was a private one. It was mainly for Daniel and his friends. It was a decision to choose to depend on God rather than the king for favor and success. They fasted. They intentionally rejected the more nourishing food to show that they are relying on God and not the king. When they appeared better nourished and healthier, they knew it was not the king who was responsible but God. They basically starved themselves to show that their strong physique was achieved miraculously.

By doing this, they demonstrated that you do not have to compromise to survive in a hostile culture. You can render unto Nebuchadnezzar the things that are his. You can go to his school, get his education, and climb his ladder, but still remain faithful, obedient, and dependent on God for everything.

#### 1:14-21 MIRACULOUS RESULTS

First, the guard noticed that the boys looked better than all the others (v. 15). Then, in v. 19 the king noticed it. It says that no one was found like them. They were ten times more capable than any others not of those who went through training with them but in the whole realm (v. 20). God had taken his disobedient nation of Judah and used a powerful, wicked nation to do it. Then God put four Jewish boys, who were willing to quietly remain faithful to God rather than men, in positions of great power in one of the most powerful nations on earth.

In looking at this story of Daniel, a couple of big picture lessons emerge:

### 1. God Gives Best

The phrase "God gave" occurs three times in chapter 1. It occurs first, in v. 2 when God gave the people of Judah into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. Next, in v. 9 when God granted Daniel and his friend favor with the Babylonia guard. And lastly, in v. 17 when God gave Daniel and his friends knowledge and intelligence. Each of these phrases reveals how God is guiding the story even when it looks like he is absent. Nebuchadnezzar did not conquer Judah. God gave it into his hands. The real power lays with God not the Babylonians. Daniel was not super persuasive; God granted him favor with the guard. They were not naturally smart; God gave them their intelligence. At each step in the story, it is God who intervenes and acts. He is guiding, protecting, and blessing them.

So many times, people feel pressured to fit in. They follow the culture's lead, because they are afraid that unless they do so they will never be successful. They may even justify selling out by holding out hopes of being a positive influence in a dark culture. But no compromise that is rooted in fear is from God. When we are afraid that something bad will happen unless we depart in some way from our faith, we show that we believe that the world is more powerful than a God who is guiding. In fact, a chief reason why many believers act sinfully is that they believe they have to commit or allow some small evil in order to prevent some bigger evil from occurring or to achieve some desired success.

That is how sin tempts us. It promises us good. We have to learn to reject the temptation, side with God, and see what he does. Moses provides the perfect example of this. Hebrews 11:24-26 says, "By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward."

But God is in control and God gives the best. Moses knew that it was better to be a slave with the people of God than to enjoy the power and privilege of being called Pharaoh's son. Daniel and his friends knew it and chose to depend first on him. When he learned to depend on God first and trust him, we put ourselves in a similar position to be used by God to amazing things.

### 2. Faithfulness is a Decision

Sometimes, if we are not careful, we can misinterpret God being in control as an excuse to either check out or be recklessly defiant. Notice, Daniel does neither. He does not assimilate. Nor is he openly antagonistic to his captors. He finds a quiet yet significant way to demonstrate his identity and dependence in the God of Israel. Daniel makes a conscious decision to serve God not man. In a hostile culture without a clear decision to identify and depend on God, we will drift in the direction of the culture and assimilate over time. Jesus says this same thing in the Sermon on the Mount, "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it." (Matthew 7:13-14). The path to destruction is easy to find and easy to follow. It takes a conscious decision to choose to go against the flow. Daniel made it. We need to make it too.



## **Discussion Questions:**

1. Whom do you depend on? Besides what we say, what are things that reveal what we truly depend on?
2. What does it mean to find your identity in something? Where do you find your identity? Besides what we say, what are things that reveal where we truly find our identity?
3. How does our society try to strip us of our identity as Christians?
4. How can we make a conscious decision to depend on God and trust him?

## Daniel 2

# God and How to Follow Him

Most people are not forced to evaluate the accuracy of their picture of God until times of crisis. Crises have a clarifying effect on it. They cause us to reevaluate. Perhaps, we have believed a lie, and we need to find an answer that satisfies. Perhaps, we encounter a situation we did not expect or were not prepared for. So we search for answers, solutions, and guides that we did not know we needed. Trials and tribulations are how God gets our attention. James 1:2-4 says, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." In C.S. Lewis' book, *The Problem of Pain*, he wrote, "God whispers in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain. It's his megaphone to rouse a deaf world." God uses all circumstances to get our attention and to shape us into who he wants us to be.

That sounds all well and good when times are good; however, when you are in the midst of a trial, it can be a heart-wrenching and deeply troubling experience. That is where the story of Daniel turns next. It is a time when King Nebuchadnezzar was alarmed by a dream he had. Through the course of the story, important questions are raised to which the king and his wise men do not have adequate answers about who God is and how man can relate to him.

### THE KING AND HIS ADVISORS V. 1-13

The story starts with a series of dreams that the king has that severely trouble him, give him insomnia, and produce great anxiety. He calls his wise men together and asks them to tell him not just what the dream means, but to tell him the dream itself. The term Chaldeans, though the name of an ethnic group, had become synonymous with soothsayers and dream interpreters.

Evidently, the king had forgotten his dream, or was testing his soothsayers, or both. He is deeply troubled and needs to know with certainty that they have access to the divine. The king sets for them a test that could only be satisfied if they are the real deal (v. 8-9). The extreme challenge of the king creates for the Chaldeans a new crisis which reveals their incomplete picture of who God is; God (or the gods) is far away from humans and does not concern himself with humans or tell them anything (v.10-11). The king is so upset with this answer that he decides to kill every last wise man in Babylon. That is where Daniel comes in. He belonged to the category of wise men and so a soldier went to go kill him.

### DANIEL AND THE DREAM V. 14-23

Daniel inquires about the source of the king's decree and is told the story. He then asks the king to give him time to seek the answer to his problem (v. 14-16). Daniel then goes back to his friends and asks them to join in praying for God to be merciful and give them answers that will satisfy the king's unreasonable request (v. 17-18). Verse 19 says very succinctly that God reveals to him the mystery in a night vision but does not reveal until later what that dream is. The most important part of this section is v. 20-23 where Daniel praises God for what He has done. He focuses specifically on three attributes: wisdom, power, and revelation. God knows what is best and what will happen. God is strong to do all that he wishes. He gives his wisdom and power to those whom he wishes by revealing to them things that are not understood, because they are difficult (profound things v. 22). And they cannot be understood, because they are secret (hidden things v. 22).

## THE DREAM AND ITS INTERPRETATION VV. 24-45

Daniel goes to the king and reveals to him both the dream and what it means.

1. The Dream (vv. 31-35): The king saw a giant statue (v. 31) whose head was gold, its chest and arms were silver, its belly and hips were bronze, its legs were iron, and its feet were clay (v32-33). He then saw a stone come out and crush the entire statue and turned it into dust (v. 35a). Then the stone turned into a giant mountain that filled the whole earth (v. 35b).
2. The Interpretation (vv. 36-45): Nebuchadnezzar is the head of gold. But Babylon will be followed by other kingdoms which are represented by the different metals. Scholars have associated the metals with the nations that followed Babylon in ruling this area: Silver (Persia), Bronze (Greece), and Iron (Rome). All of these will be crushed by stone. This stone was interpreted by Christians to be a prophesy of Jesus who appeared during the time of Rome, and his death and resurrection inaugurated a kingdom which will find complete fulfillment when he returns. The most famous passage that refers to the Messiah as a stone is mentioned by Jesus (Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17), and Early Christians (Acts 4:11; 1 Peter 2:7). It is a quotation from Psalm 118:22: "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief corner stone."

### LESSON FROM THIS STORY: ATTRIBUTES OF A SERVANT OF GOD

A key element of this story is the fact that God prophesied through Daniel the coming of Jesus, and his kingdom has come, is coming, and will come most fully when Jesus returns and reigns over all that he has made and redeemed. But to take only this is to miss the lesson from the rest of the story. These prophecies are wrapped in a larger narrative about the king and Daniel that revealed the nature of who God is, and offer Daniel as an example for what it means to serve God. Throughout this story, Daniel is shown as possessing attributes that make him distinctive and set apart from the other wise men in Babylon.

1. Discernment v. 14 – It says that when the guards came to kill Daniel, he exercises discretion and discernment. He had situational awareness and was able to think clearly and quickly about what to do. He did not respond rashly or recklessly. Think about how you would respond if your boss was going to kill everyone in your department. Now, think about how calmly Daniel responded. He was showing that he trusted that God was in control, and that God would show him how to navigate this difficult situation.
2. Devotion vv. 17-18 – After Daniel was granted a reprieve to produce an answer, he immediately joined in prayer with his friends seeking God and asking him to show compassion. Daniel knew that he did not have the answer; he knew that God did. So Daniel earnestly sought God.
3. Gratitude v. 19 – Once God revealed the mystery of the king's dream to him, the first thing Daniel did was not to run off to the king but to praise God. Gratitude is a hard thing to remember. After the anxiety has passed, most people move on. Luke tells the story in Luke 17:11-19 about ten lepers who were healed but only one returned to thank Jesus. We are often like the nine, forgetting to be grateful to God – but not Daniel. He immediately turned to praising God. Daniel praised God, because through this experience, he received a clearer picture of the God he served.
4. Humility v. 30 – Daniel at this point was powerful and successful, and he has the answer that the king needs. Daniel does not claim it as his own. He claims no special reason why God showed him the answer. Daniel is humble. When many would be tempted to claim credit for themselves to save their own skin or increase their standing, Daniel stays humble and gives all the credit to God.

## Discussion Questions:

1. Have you ever experienced a crisis where you realized your view of God was inaccurate or incomplete?  
What did you do? What did you learn?
2. When we are anxious and frustrated by our incomplete picture of God what are ways we can seek to know him better?
3. Why do you think it is so hard to be grateful?
4. What are some obstacles to humility?

## Daniel 3

# Trusting God in the Furnace

Have you ever felt cornered or called out by someone who looked down on your faith? They put you in a situation where your choice is to renounce in some large or small way some aspect of your faith, or risk losing power, position, and opportunity? Such events can be compounded by other personal circumstances like financial insecurity, or health concerns. What do you do when you “need this job” but are forced to choose between what is right and what you need? Which do you listen to or which speaks loudest: your faith or your fears?

Fortunately, the Bible broadly and the book of Daniel specifically contains many stories about how to stand for your faith in a hostile culture. There is probably none more famous than the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego being thrown into the fiery furnace. Watching, what happens to them and how they handle it, can give a window into our own circumstances. It shows how we can fight for our faith, and how we can trust God in the midst of the furnace.

### DEVOTION DEMANDED VV. 1-7

The story starts with a big statue of Nebuchadnezzar being constructed. Evidently, the king was worried about the unity and loyalty of his subjects, so he decided to unite them in their worship, admiration, and devotion to him. The king commanded everyone at the same time to all bow down before the statue to demonstrate their allegiance. He wanted everyone to realize that ultimate power and authority was in him.

Though I doubt we will ever be faced with a statue that we are expected to grovel in front of, believers are frequently put in situation that test their allegiance. Where do our loyalties lie? What is most important to us? What will make us give up, change, or modify our commitments to serve God?

### DISOBEDIENCE DISCOVERED VV. 8-15

The three Jewish youth did not make a big deal about it, but they refused to worship the statue. When forced to pick between God and man, they chose God. The king confronts them, and makes both the requirement and the punishment explicit. He gives them a second chance to obey. The king makes his motives in setting up the statue explicit when he says in verse 15, “what God is able to deliver you out of my hands.” The king is drunk on his own power and desires everyone to acknowledge his supreme authority.

### DEFIANT DEFENSE VV. 16-18

It says that the three youth answer the king. One wonders if they had a spokesperson or if maybe one of them said each part. However they did it, they gave one of the most amazing responses in scripture showing they had complete confidence in God.

- Confidence in God’s Authority – They did not feel the need to even give an answer to the king. They believed that God and not Nebuchadnezzar was the one who was ultimately in charge. Their lives were in God’s hands not the king. They knew what they did, and they did it on purpose.
- Confidence in God’s Power – They knew God had the power to deliver them. They were not trapped by the weakness of a God who would not come to their aid. They knew that whatever happened God would deliver them from the hands of the king. God was not powerless. God was not passive. God was active. Whatever happened to these three will be an act of deliverance.

- Confidence in God's Wisdom – "But even if he doesn't..." Underline those words. They are extremely important. It revealed that these three trusted God to do what was best...and that may mean that they would die in the furnace. They have complete confidence that God would make the right decision. They served God not because he did what they wanted him to do, but because he knew what was best. And they were willing to follow God anywhere...even into the fiery furnace.

#### DIVINE DELIVERANCE VV. 19-27

The king's rage, which had been building up to this point, boils over. He rages and his face is contorted. He stokes the fire to seven times as hot. It is so hot that those who are commanded to throw them in are consumed by the fire. Once in, though, the youth are not consumed. Not just that, but there is a fourth individual seen walking inside the furnace with them. Nebuchadnezzar summons them to come out, and they just stroll out of the furnace with their clothes and hair unharmed by the fire. They did not even have the smell of fire on them.

Such an event demonstrates a couple of important lessons for God's people:

1. Obedience to Godless Commands Produces Death – The only people who died in this story were the soldiers charged with throwing the three youths into the furnace. Many times we acquiesce in an attempt to save our own skin. In doing so, we put ourselves in greater risk. Jesus repeats this idea in Matthew 16:25, "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it."
2. God Does Not Save Them From the Furnace; He Is With Them In It – Many times we pray and yearn for God to remove trials from us. And I think that is okay. We are told to pray in the Lord's Prayer "lead us not into temptation," but we also need to realize that God uses trials to perfect us and draw us closer to him. As James 1:1-2 says, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." Trials purify and perfect us, and they teach us to depend on God. God many times chooses not to protect us from the trial but rather to be present with us in the midst of the trial. He wants us to trust Him so completely that we do not fear the fire. He wants us to trust his presence and provision as we go through it. As Psalm 23:4 says, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me."
3. Sometimes the Safest Place Is In the Furnace – This is not a call to recklessness or stupidity or thoughtlessness. God desires that we exercise wisdom. But all throughout the scriptures are constant reminders that sometimes God's path leads in directions that do not make sense to our reason. If we refuse to obey until we understand and approve, we risk not just missing God's blessing but also experiencing greater calamity. As Proverbs 3:5-6 says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight."

## **Discussion Questions:**

1. How does our world demand our loyalty and allegiance? How are we sometimes cornered or called to renounce parts of our faith?
2. How can we demonstrate the confidence the three youths had? How can we acquire it, so we have it when trials come?
3. What might be risking a “fiery furnace” look like in our own day?
4. Do you have confidence to say “But even if he does not?”

## Daniel 4

# Becoming a Sinful Beast

“Like a dog that returns to its vomit is a fool who repeats his folly.” We have all heard the famous and often quoted saying, though some may not realize it is from the Bible. It is Proverbs 26:11. We have all experienced it or seen it happen in somebody close to us. We go in cycles of devotion it seems like. One minute we are running from our sin and pledging eternal faithfulness to God. The next, we start sliding back into old ways. The good news is that God each time raises us a little higher out of our former self and into greater conformity with who he created us to be. Because God does not weary of showing mercy, he sends judgment, humbles the proud, and punishes sin. He does it all because he desires us to see sin how he sees it. He desires us to return to him. One particular episode in the life of Nebuchadnezzar reveals how God works the cycle of redemption in the lives of both great and obscure people.

### NEBUCHADNEZZAR PRAISES THE LORD VV. 1-3

This chapter starts off with Nebuchadnezzar giving praise to God. God has done a lot in the life of the king. It is important to notice that the king did not pause and give God praise, honor, and recognition for what he had done. Some may charge that the king was being insincere based on what followed. But it is more likely that the king was as human as the rest of us. Capable of true, sincere praise of God followed by collapse back into former sin. That is what happened.

### THE VISION OF THE TREE AND STUMP VV. 4-18

Nebuchadnezzar has another dream. This time it is of a tree that grows and becomes large, and then an angel commands the tree to be cut down with only the stump remaining. The stump is surrounded with a metal band. Next, the image changes, and starting in verse 15 the stump is clearly revealed to be a man, who will become more like an animal. In verse 17, it reveals that the cause of this is arrogance. It is being done so that the man will know that it is God and not himself who is the source of power and authority.

### DANIEL'S INTERPRETATION AND PLEAS VV. 19-27

Daniel tells the king a disturbing fact; the dream refers to Nebuchadnezzar and not his adversaries. The dream is a warning that because of his arrogance God is about to humble him. For seven years, madness will overtake him, and he will live like a beast in the field. What is significant in this section is verse 27: “break away from sin by doing righteousness.” Daniel tells the king that it is not too late. He can avoid the dream's predictions if he will repent and act righteously.

### FULFILLMENT OF THE DREAM VV. 28-33

The king is given a year. The one day he boasts arrogantly of the magnificence of his city. The dream is fulfilled, and Nebuchadnezzar went from being king of the most powerful nation on earth to being barely more than an animal in the field. The purpose of the punishment was to humble him and to show him who really was in charge. It was also to show what sin does to you...it dehumanizes you.

### RESTORATION VV. 34-37

For seven years, Nebuchadnezzar lived like an animal. Then after the time appointed by God, it says the king raised his eyes to heaven, which is a form of plea or prayer. The king is longing for God to deliver him. And God does exactly that; he restores the king's mind. Nebuchadnezzar demonstrates that he has learned his lesson by immediately praising God. God not only restores the king's mind, but he returns him to a place of power and authority. Once he realized the true source of his strength, he was able to be trusted with power again.



In all of this, what can we learn from the way God dealt with the king? It is sometimes too easy to say that God in the Old Testament is a God of judgment. When we look at stories like this, we do see judgment. But if we will look closely and carefully, we will discern that the judgment is part of a larger cycle of redemption. God's judgment is purposeful, and part of his plan to draw us back to himself. So, what is the larger story? Well, the story revealed at least five things that God gave Nebuchadnezzar. And I think, we are also to believe that God does these in all our lives as well.

1. God Gives Warnings – God does not smite Nebuchadnezzar out of the blue. He sends a dream to let him know what is coming. And he sends someone who can help him realize what the dream means. There are enough indicators to reveal that Nebuchadnezzar knew what God was going to do, and why he was going to do it.
2. God Gives Opportunity – What is even more amazing was that the plan could have been changed. In verse 27, Daniel advises the king that it is not too late to turn back from the path he has taken. Not only that, but God waits a full year before he follows through on the dream. God is patient; he is slow to anger and long suffering. It is never too late to repent and return to God.
3. God Gives Judgment – God does follow through. He is not doing this to be a bully or to vent his anger. The biblical picture is that God's judgment is acted out to draw us into repentance. In Chapter 4 of the Old Testament book of Amos, there is a list of calamities that God sent to the people of Israel. Each followed by a repeated refrain, "Yet you have not returned to me, says the Lord." All of this is followed by Amos 5:6, "See the Lord that you may live..." The book of Haggai similarly points to God working judgment to make us aware of the destruction of sin, and our need for God. Haggai 1:7 says, "Consider your ways," and Haggai 2:17 says, "I smote you...yet you did not return to me." But then in Haggai 2:19 says, "Yet from this day, I will bless you..."
4. God Gives Mercy – God's judgment is not vindictive. He is not trying to get back at us. He is trying to restore us to life and keep us off the path that leads to destruction and death. God does not stay mad. Instead, he shows us mercy. Like grace, mercy is one of those church words that we sometimes do not do a good job defining. Put succinctly, mercy is: NOT getting a BAD thing we DO deserve. Grace is the opposite. Grace is: GETTING a GOOD thing we DO NOT deserve. God shows Nebuchadnezzar mercy. He has what he deserves. He is getting what he should get. God gives him what he does not deserve. God ends the time of torment and gives him back his sanity.
5. God Gives Restoration – Sometimes, we can believe that God's judgment is a part of his love. Maybe, we can believe that God is merciful. But true restoration is something that never bothers to enter into many of our minds. You can pull the nail out of the board, but there will always be a hole in it. You can glue something back together, but you can always see the crack. I think we often think this way about God. Though he might forgive us and take us back, he still looks down on us, because we messed up. We think he assigned us lesser roles, because we are not worthy. In short, we believe that even when God forgives he is still sort of passive-aggressively punishing us for our sins. It is important to realize that this view is not biblical. Romans 8:1 says, "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." God restored Nebuchadnezzar not just his humanity, but to his place of power and authority. In fact, God increased his power so that his end was greater than his beginning. God does not just release us from the prison of our own sin. He restores us to the place he always had for us. In Luke 15, it is the prodigal son who thinks he only deserves to be a slave. The father treats him like the son he is.

## Discussion Questions:

1. Why do you think we praise God one minute and turn back to our sin the next?
2. Have you ever seen sin dehumanize or turn someone into a beast?
3. Have you ever seen the cycle of redemption play out in your own life or someone else's life?
4. Have you ever seen God show true mercy and restoration after a period of judgement?
5. Which of these aspects of God is hardest for you to truly accept? Why?

## Daniel 6

# The Writing on the Wall

God is loving and patient and merciful. But that does not mean God will overlook or disregard sin. Or that he stays out of the way when wrong happens. It simply means that God's motivation in whatever he does is a desire to move us towards repentance and towards himself. 2 Peter 3:9 says, "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance."

God is also a righteous judge. He is the protector and defender of those who seek refuge in him. That means God promises to right wrongs. Romans 12:19 says, "Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,' says the Lord." The Lord will execute his judgment. Romans 1:18 says, "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." He will destroy sin because sin causes death. If you will not be separated from your sin, you will face and feel his judgment. This might sound mean, but God's hatred of sin is a sign of his love for us. It is proof he is the defender of those who seek refuge in him. He will not "be patient" with sin forever. As Adam Smith once wrote, "Mercy to the guilty is cruelty to the innocent." God knows when his patience will no longer be capable of producing repentance, when his being slow to anger looks like he is overlooking sin.

One such story of God's judgment follows on the heels of a story of his mercy. Daniel 4 is the story of how God chastised Nebuchadnezzar severely, brought him to repentance, had mercy on him, and restored him. Daniel 5 is the story of God's swift and final judgment on a sinful person. God knows when which approach is required.

### FROM PARTY TO PROFANITY VV. 1-4

The story switches abruptly. Chapter 5 begins with Belshazzar now king instead of Nebuchadnezzar. The scene is a large public feast at the royal house in the presence of a large crowd. The story escalates when the king tastes the wine. This seems to be a polite way of saying that he had overindulged in wine. Basically, he got drunk. While intoxicated, he remembers that they still had the holy vessels taken from the Temple in Jerusalem. He orders them to be brought forth to be used as drinking cups at his party. They then used the cups as acts of worship to pour libations (liquid sacrifices) to the gods they worshipped. These were the gods that they had portrayed in the form of idols. What started as a party ended with the king profaning the holy objects used to worship Israel's God.

### THE WRITING ON THE WALL VV. 5-12

The situation takes a turn for the worse when all of sudden the king sees a hand appear and start writing on the wall. The event terrifies the king, and he summons his wise men to help him understand the riddle. It is unclear whether other people saw the hand as it wrote. The text only mentions the king sees it. But no matter who saw it being written, everyone saw the text on the wall. But there was a huge problem. Evidently no one could read it. In verse 7, it says that the king offers a reward for anyone who could "read the inscription and explain its interpretation." No one was able until the queen remembered Daniel.

### THE INSCRIPTION INTERPRETED VV. 13-28

Daniel shows up and promptly refuses the rewards offered him. He tells the king the works God performed in the days of Nebuchadnezzar (v18-22). He then says Belshazzar has been arrogant and that the use of holy vessels in the

worship of idols was the last straw. Daniel then reveals the inscription: Mene Mene Tekel Upharsin. All of the words refer to money. The base unit of money was the Shekel. This is originally the using of weights to measure/value grain harvests. It is kind of like the British Pound. Mene means Mina, which was 50 shekels (tekel is just a rare alternate spelling). Parsin means "half (the u at the beginning of the word just means "and"). So, the phrase translates "A Mina, a Mina, A shekel, and a half." But what does it mean? On the surface, they are just monetary terms. The king might have been looking at the caterer's bill for the large party he had just hosted. It had a deeper meaning which Daniel now gives. Mene also can mean "appointed." Tekel means weight out (remember shekel was a using of weight). Peres (which is another form of the verb Parsin used above) means half, so "to divide." Daniel says the inscription means three things: (1) God has fixed the number of days for Belshazzar, (2) He has been weight and found lacking and, (3) His kingdom will be divided between the Persians and Medes.

#### SUDDEN FULFILLMENT VV. 29-31

Though God had granted Nebuchadnezzar's opportunity to change, this time the prophesy is fulfilled quickly. That same night a palace coup occurred, and Belshazzar was killed. The Medo-Persian Empire took over Babylon.

What lessons can we learn from how God dealt with Belshazzar:

The Dangers of Blasphemy – Blasphemy might sound like an archaic word or idea. It simply means "dishonoring God through speech or action." One of the Ten Commandants is "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain (Exodus 20:7). To take the Lord's name in vain means to use it as if it is meaningless. The common easy designation is using the word "god" as an exclamation as in the phrase OMG. But it means more than that. It means to treat God and the things of God as if they are of little value. He is saying to treat all things that pertain to me with respect. God is not being petty or humorless. He is simply saying that you call tell a lot about a person's priorities by what he treats as valuable, and what he disparages or misuses.

The Slippery Slope of Sin – There is a famous quote that says, "Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay." No one wakes up and decides out of the blue to reject God, commit murder, or destroy his life. The path into sin is a slippery one. As we toy with something we believe to be not very dangerous and end up where we never expected to be. This is what happens with Belshazzar. What starts as self-indulgence ends with sacrilege. Every sin, no matter how small, is a step down the path that leads to hell. And once we are on it, it is so easy for us to be pushed farther and farther down it.

The Jealousy of God – The flash point for this event was Belshazzar's use of temple cups used in his partying and in his worship of idols. It might seem odd that God allows a man to be killed because he used the wrong cups at a party. That is not the point. These objects had been set apart exclusively for use in the temple. This reveals that God is passionately devoted to the things that belong to him. The sacred vessels are an example of how seriously God is devoted to the things that are his. What is more important is that you are his. He is eager to passionately protect and defend all that he has made and to redeem from the attacks of the evil one. God's jealousy is an aspect of God's love for us. And because He loves us, he wants us to be set apart for his service.

## Discussion Questions:

1. What is blasphemy and how can we understand it in a way that is more significant than just “don’t say certain words?”
2. Do you have any first-hand examples of the “slippery slope of sin?”
3. How does talk of the “jealousy of God” sit with you? What are some bad ways that it might be misunderstood? What do you think it means?

## Daniel 6

# Daniel in the Lion's Den

Too many times, too many people believe that in order to succeed in our world you have to compromise your beliefs. What such selling out reveals is where a person's real love lies. We treat following God as important until it gets in the way of climbing the ladder, or it heads in the opposite direction. When that happens, we find ourselves revealing what and where our true priorities lie. We calculate just how much of our faith we can jettison and still please God enough to get into heaven while having some career success here on earth.

The story of Daniel stands as a declaration to us that we do not have to sell out our faith in order to succeed. It says in chapter 1 that God granted Daniel favor. That favor was bestowed by God on Daniel throughout his life. As governments and nations rose and fell, Daniel prospered, prayed, and served the lords of those nations. He found a way to render to Caesar what was Caesar's without also giving them what belonged to God. By looking at the life of Daniel, we gain insight in to how to succeed in both the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Man.

One such story of Daniel's willingness to serve and his reluctance to compromise can be found in Daniel 6. It is the famous tale of Daniel and the Lion's Den. It is a tale of God's miraculous protection, but it is more than that. It is a window into how to live, survive, and thrive in a culture that is hostile to the things you claim to believe.

### THE PLOT AGAINST DANIEL VV. 1-9

The story starts off in the palace of the new king Darius. The new king would not just come in and remove the entire civil administration of the government. He might make changes however Darius needed to rule a vast empire, and he would try to cause as little upheaval as possible in order to keep things running smoothly. So, Daniel finds himself in the service of the new king. The king kept promoting him because he "possessed an extraordinary spirit." His success made certain people around him jealous. They wanted Daniel out, and they looked for a reason to get him to fail. But Daniel was great at his job (v4). There was no corruption or negligence. He was faithful and diligent in everything he did. They therefore then determined to use his faith as a weapon against him (v5).

They contrived a plan to get Darius to sign a decree that no one could consult any God or man other than King Darius for 30 days. Perhaps this sounds crazy. Why would a king sign this decree other than because he was a megalomaniac? Well, Darius probably thought it was a good idea because he was trying to change a government and transfer power. He did not need people who used to work for the old king continuing to consult the old king's advisors. Perhaps, King Darius thought this decree would get people to come to him for answers and help solidify his newfound power. Whatever reason, he signed it and set their trap for them.

### THE TRAP AND RELUCTANT PUNISHMENT VV. 10-18

Daniel was not ignorant of the decree. He knew it was signed, but he prayed none the less. It says he "continued praying." He was not doing something new. He kept doing what he had always done, "as he had been doing previous" (v10). Once he was discovered breaking the law, his enemies confronted the king who regretted his decision. But sadly, the king was powerless to change his own law. So, he had the penalty carried out while hoping that Daniel's God would deliver him (v16).

## DANIEL'S RESCUE VV. 19-28

The next morning Darius runs to the lion's den to see if Daniel had survived. He calls down and finds that Daniel is in fact alive. God sent an angel to shut the mouths of the lions. The first words out of Daniel's mouth are very important. In verses 21-22 it says, "O king, live forever! My God sent His angels..." "O king live forever" is a statement of devotion and service to the king, like an oath of allegiance. Daniel then acknowledges a higher Lord, "My God." Daniel acknowledges Darius as his earthly Lord, but at the same time announces that he serves a higher Lord still. He is not trying to undermine or cheat or deceive King Darius. He simply must obey God first. Daniel repeats this statement again in verse 22 when he says that he was spared because "I was found innocent before Him; and also toward you, O king, I have committed no crime." Daniel's desire was to serve Darius truthfully, honorably, and faithfully. He simply had a higher obligation that came first. God rewarded it by preserving Daniel's life. King Darius honored it by realizing that God and not the king had the power to save Daniel.

So what lessons does this story teach us:

Do Not Be Surprised By Attacks – God granted favor to Daniel. Daniel stewarded his gifts and was successful in three different empires. People wanted to take him down. In Luke 6:40, Jesus says, "A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher." In John 15:18-19, Jesus says, "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you." If you are really seeking to be like Jesus, you will encounter obstacles. People will try to use what you believe as a weapon to bring you down. You need to expect it. When we encounter opposition, we need to realize a couple things.

1. Realize the attacks will not derail God's plan. "No weapon that is formed against you will prosper." (Isaiah 54:17) This does not mean that you will be immune. It means it will not succeed to overturning God's plan.
2. Realize it means you are a threat to the enemy. In Acts 5:41 after being arrested, threatened, and beaten for preaching about Jesus, Peter and John "went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name." They were not sad about the beating. They were happy, because it showed that they were succeeding as followers of Christ.
3. Realize it shows who you are really following. We become like those we follow. When the world persecutes you, it shows that they know whose team you are really on.

Do Not Think Compromise Will Help – Daniel does not try to negotiate with his attackers. He does not ask for an exemption. He does not offer to take a month off; he just keeps obeying. He knows that compromise with people like this is pointless. Jesus says in Matthew 7:6 "Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces." Trying to negotiate with someone trying to destroy you will be pointless and only give them more ammunition. As Christian author GK Chesterton once quipped, "If I am made to walk the plank by a pirate, it is vain for me to offer, as a common-sense compromise, to walk along the plank for a reasonable distance. It is exactly about the reasonable distance that the pirate and I differ."

Do Not Expect the Powerful to Protect – The main point of this story is that the powerful are powerless. God not Darius is mighty to save. This will be the case for you too. Do not be surprised when you discover that your boss or

coworker is not coming to your aid. When trials come, people realize that a lot of people have their hands tied in a lot of different ways. Some will not help because they will not stick their neck out. Some will show their true colors that they were never on your side to begin with. Some will just be flat out unable to help no matter their desire. Psalm 20:7 says, "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God." What do you think will save you when the time comes? Your intellect? Your connections? Your pedigree? Your bank account?

Don't Rule Out God's Provision – Daniel does what he does without expecting God to deliver him. Like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego earlier, he believed God could. But Daniel was willing to trust God even if He did not deliver him. We all have to die of something. The choice is not whether we will die. The choice is whether our life and death will count for something. Perhaps Daniel thought this was the end. He decided to make sure his life was a testimony of his service and trust in God no matter what. But he did not rule out God's miraculous provision, and neither should we. Too many times we are tempted to sin or despair, because we cannot figure a way forward or a way out. We are tempted to sin by thoughts like: "if only I do this one small bad thing, think of how many good things I would be able to accomplish. Perhaps, we sink into depression and despair when we cannot figure out what is happening or why; "I don't see what possible good to come of this situation." This story is one of the countless stories that fill the Bible encouraging us to realize we do not know everything, but we serve a God who does. Proverbs 3:5-7 says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes." Jesus tells his disciples in Matthew 7:9-1, "Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!"

Don't be tempted to sin or despair by the inability to trust that God knows what He is doing and knows how to give good gifts to his children. Daniel did not rule out God's miraculous intervention, and his life became a living monument of what God can accomplish in the lives of those who faithfully serve Him.

## **Discussion Questions:**

1. Have you ever felt attacked for your faith? How did you distinguish between being attacked because of your faith and criticism, because you were just bad at your job?
2. How did you handle the attack? How do you wish you had handled it?
3. Have you ever felt tempted to compromise your faith? Did you give in or resist? What was the result?
4. Have you ever experienced God's miraculous provision?



## Daniel 7

# God's Conquest of "Unconquerable" Evil

Watch any super hero, alien, or action movies? I can guarantee you that before the hero gets to work saving the day, everything will go completely wrong. The bad guy seems to be winning and winning big. In fact, not only does the bad guy seem to be in control, but he seems unbeatable. There does not seem any point in opposing or resisting. Most people either fall into dejected submission or into conspiratorial assistance. They either go into hiding or join the bad guys. This is when the hero appears and gets to work.

We have seen it enough times to expect it in movies; however, what we need to realize is that this is the actual state of the world we live in. We are perpetually surrounded by examples of gratuitous and profound evil. Sometimes, it closes in so much that it suffocates us. Sometimes, it seems so powerful that there is nothing we can do but give in or give up.

We all have such moments, and this is nothing new. Such is the lot of every human that has ever walked the planet. We struggle to understand why there is such evil all around us, why the evil seems too powerful, and why nobody seems to be able to stop it. Sometimes, we wonder why God does not do anything. Maybe, we start to wonder whether he is absent, or uninterested, or powerless. How could all that we see around us be the conscious intention of a good and powerful God?

This is something that we have all found ourselves wondering. The same is true of the Jews. They thought that God has chosen them to be his people. They thought he promised them to protect and bless them. They now found themselves in a far-away land, their homes destroyed, their friends and family either dead or in exile. The nations that had conquered them had itself been conquered. And still they were stuck oppressed by a whole new enemy. Had they been wrong about God? What were they to think? In response to such thinking, God sends Daniel the vision of God's plan for the future. The purpose of the vision is to correct the reader's view of the true nature of evil and of God.

The Beasts from the Sea: vv. 1-8 — The first vision Daniel has is of the sea being stirred up by the wind. And out of the sea comes four great beasts: winged lion (v. 4), a bear (v. 5), a leopard with four wings and four heads (v. 6), beast with iron teeth and 10 horns (v. 7), and finally, a little horn that has eyes and attacks the other horns (v. 8).

Much has been made of the terrifying and bewildering images. Daniel himself asks later in the chapter (v. 16) and desires to know what these things mean. He is told that the four beasts represent four kingdoms. Much scholarly energy has been poured into trying to figure out what king or kingdom each beast stands for. Some think that the lion may be a symbol of Babylon. The fact that the feathers were plucked, and it was given a human heart [mind] may refer to the madness and restoration of Nebuchadnezzar. The bear may represent the empire of the Medes and Persians which replaced Babylon. The leopard with four wings and heads may be Alexander the Great, who conquered Persia and died young only to have his vast empire divided among his four generals. The last beast has caused people the most consternation. Some think it could be Rome or the Syrians. Some think it is the future nation that will rise up and oppress God's people.

All of this is interesting and important; however, what did the author want the original readers to walk away with? I think the main thing was not a detailed description of future oppressors. It was the very sober reality that evil kingdoms will continue to follow one after another until the end of time. This is not an accident or an oversight but a part of God's plan. Therefore, the people of God should not expect heaven on earth but rather prepare for persecution.

The Ancient of Days and the Son of Man: vv. 9-14— The evil beasts are not the end. It says Daniel “kept looking.” And he finally saw the thrones set up and “the Ancient of Days” take his seat. Once he takes his seat, the beasts are slain and have their power taken away. Then “one like the son of man” appeared and was given authority and power and an everlasting kingdom by the Ancient of Days. The Ancient of Days is God who has come to judge the evil of the world. Look at how he is described: white hair, which represents wisdom; white clothing, which represents righteousness; fire, which represents God’s power in judgment.

The Son of Man is just another term for man. In stark contrast to the bizarre animals who ruled in the first part of the chapter, a man assumes the role of ruler but not just any man. This passage also suggests that this man is also divine. He is described as riding on a cloud, which is something that only God is represented as doing in the Old Testament. He guided the Israelites in the wilderness by a pillar of cloud. (Exodus 13:21) Sinai is covered in a cloud when God is there with Moses. (Exodus 19:16) He appears as a cloud in the tabernacle (Leviticus 16:2) God, as cloud-rider, appears in Psalm 68:4, Psalm 104:3-4; and Isaiah 19:1.

It is clear that this Son of Man is a reference to Jesus. This is not least of which the Son of Man was one of Jesus’s favorite ways of referring to himself. But what is more interesting is that the victory prophesied in Daniel 7 has not yet happened. We still wait its fulfillment. We wait for Revelations 11:15 to be fulfilled which says, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever.”

The Divine Victory: vv. 15-28 — The chapter ends with Daniel being told a more detailed description of what some of the symbols mean. But to be honest, it raises as many questions as it answers. It is important to remember that the author is not writing history in advance but rather helping his readers grasp a biblical view about the nature of evil and God. If that is the case, what specifically are we supposed to realize.

#### CORRECTING OUR VIEW OF HUMAN EVIL

1. Evil seems unconquerable; it is not — Given the perpetual onslaught of bad ruler after bad ruler, it is very easy to become disillusioned or despondent. Sometimes life seems to follow the life-cycle of a small banana republic. The government is bad, so rebels rise up and take over. Then, they end up being even worse than those they replaced. Or in the work place, you think you have a bad boss until that boss is removed and replaced. Often times the replacement is with an equally bad (or worse) boss. It seems like there is nothing to be done in the face of evil. Bad guys seem to prosper and are never held accountable for what they do. Meanwhile, the good are exploited, abused, and taken advantage of. It is easy in such circumstances to feel like the only choice one has is to roll over and accept it or to become like them in order to succeed yourself.

There are other passages that address this common human expression of frustration at evil (Psalm 73 is a notable one). But it is important to see that one purpose of this passage of the four beasts is to show us that YES, evil is real; and YES, evil is powerful; and YES, evil goes from bad to worse; but NO, it is not unconquerable. When the Ancient of Days comes and the Son of Man is given authority, he defeats the most ferocious of the beasts. This is to remind us that God’s delay is not because of weakness. Evil is not stronger than God. God has a plan, and one day he will defeat evil conclusively and finally.

2. Evil seems never ending; it is not — Evil can sometimes seem like it will never end. Bad rulers get replaced by worse rulers; bad bosses get replaced by worse bosses. There is never a break in the onslaught. It seems not just undefeatable but unending. This is not the case. God will bring an end to evil. That is the meaning of one of the most enigmatic phrases in all of Daniel. Verse 25 says that the last of the evil beasts, the little horn, will be given power for “time, times, and half a time.” Many interpret time to mean year, and so this refers to one year plus two years plus half a year. It should be noted that it is not entirely clear that this is what it refers to for a variety of reason. But dates aside, what it does refer to is the way evil appears to those who are experiencing it. Time refers to our initial expectation that perhaps the evil will only last for a little while. Next, the plural “times” suggests the feeling that it is going to go on forever. Then finally, “half a time” refers to the evil suddenly and unexpectedly being cut off at a time we were not expecting. Evil sometimes seems like it is never-ending, but it is not.

CORRECTING OUR VIEW OF GOD IN THE FACE OF EVIL — The picture of the god given in the Ancient of Days is designed to correct our view of God, and how he handles evil.

1. Not ignorant but wise — First, God is shown as having white hair. This is a symbol of wisdom. God is not caught off guard by evil. He is not unsure about what to do. We may be tempted sometimes to think God does not know what he is doing. This image reminds us that God is wise. He has a good plan, and we can trust him.
2. Not compromising but righteous — Sometimes, we respond to overwhelming evil by feeling like we need to compromise. Maybe our standards are the problem. If we could relax, maybe things would go easier for us. We might be tempted to think that the reason God does not intervene in the midst of evil is because he is compromising as well. He makes deals and lowers his standards. This is not the case. His white clothes in this vision remind us that God is righteous, loving, merciful, and forgiving but that never means accepting sin or calling it good. God's love does not deny sin (Sin? What sin?) or dismiss sin (Do not worry about it; no big deal). God's love acknowledges the destructive power of sin and provides a way for us to be saved from it. All of that should remind us that God is righteous. He cares about right and wrong.
3. Not dismissive, but judging — Sometimes, it seems like the only verse some people know is Matthew 7:1: "Judge not, lest you be judged." It also probably ranks as one of the most misunderstood verses. One error it sometimes raises is the idea that God does not judge. That is not the case. God does judge and his judgement is correct. He hates sin, and he is coming to judge and destroy it. Romans 1:18 says, "The wrath of God is revealed against all unrighteousness of men." God is judging and destroying sin. He desires us to be separate from that sin and see us experience the life he has for us.
4. Not defeated, but conquering — The Ancient of Days gives the Son of Man a kingdom that is everlasting. Every beast, no matter how terrifying, only rules for a time. God is not exhausted or blindsided by sin. He is wise and powerful and is working out a plan that will achieve the final destruction of evil.

Our Response: Knowing the lessons we are supposed to get from this chapter, how are we supposed to respond? Three recommendations:

1. Trust — Do not fear, give up, or give in. Trust God. Remind yourself of who he is, and what he has promised. Believe God and not the world.
2. Persevere — Hebrews 12:2 tells us to "run with endurance the race set out before us." The race is long, and we need endurance. The race is hard, and we need to persevere. Perseverance just means to keep going. Do not worry about how fast or how far you are going. Just decide that you are not going to stop. Keep running the race God has placed in front of you.
3. Pray — The first two things on this list can be done impersonally. You can tell yourself to trust and tell yourself to persevere. But this last one is a reminder to stay in contact with God and pour out your heart before him. He knows the road is hard. We do not have to pretend that it is not. Hebrews 5:6-7 says, "Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God that he may exalt you at the proper time, casting your cares upon him because he cares for you." In prayer, cast your cares upon God. Tell him your doubts, fears, frustrations, burden, and bewilderments. He cares for you and will sustain you. You are not supposed to try to do it alone.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Have you ever felt overwhelmed or defeated by evil?
2. Have you ever wondered where God was or what he was up to?
3. How can we change our view of evil and God?
4. What does it mean to trust God? What change does it make in our daily life?
5. What does it mean to persevere? How can we do it better?
6. What are some reasons we have for not praying? How can we make sure we are staying connected to God? What does it mean to pour out our hearts to God?

## Daniel 8

# How Long, O Lord

The book of Judges is an often overlooked part of the Old Testament. Unless you are looking for stories of Sampson or Gideon, most people never stop for too long in this book. But it really is a remarkable book that tells the story of Israel's constant cycle of rebellion and repentance. It is also about God's faithfulness and devotion to those who cry out to him. One of the main themes in the book of judges is how God uses hard times to lead his people to repentance. Almost every story in the book of Judges breaks into four parts: (1) Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, (2) So the Lord delivered them into the hands of [insert the name of a foreign oppressor], (3) Israel cries out to the Lord for deliverance, and (4) God raises up a judge to deliver and restore.

This may seem like an off tangent to start a study on Daniel 8 with, but its not. It reminds us that God is not powerless in the midst of hard times. Instead, God is control and is able to use all things to work out his plan. Romans 8:28 reminds us that "God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." God CAUSES... not everything is good. But there is nothing that God cannot use for good.

Sometimes, God uses hard times and sometimes, the reason is to draw us to repentance and to lead us back to him. Haggai 2:17 says, "I smote you and every work of your hands with blasting wind, mildew and hail; yet you did not come back to Me," declares the Lord." The goal is to show us that we cannot find meaningful life apart from God. Amos 5:4 says, "Seek Me that you may live. Isaiah 55:3 says, "Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen, that you may live."

This is what was happening to the Jews in Daniel. They had rebelled against God, so God allowed them to be carried off into exile in Babylon. But God did not hate them. God had not forgotten them. He had not excluded them from his plan. God had not lost control of the situation. He was actually using this time of exile to purify and restore them. God tells the exiles through Jeremiah, "For I know the plans that I have for you," declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope." We often quote this passage at graduations and other life events, but we forgot that it was written to people in exile like Daniel. He is reminding them that even in the midst of the hard times he is still in control, he still has a plan, and it is a good plan.

The same thing is happening in Daniel 8. God sends Daniel a vision that shows that he is still in control of history and that the current oppression will not go on forever. The purpose of it is not to help them "count down the days." It is to give them comfort that God has not abandoned or forgotten them, and that there is a fixed end to the current situation. God promises to deliver them. The vision Daniel receives is of three different animals that stand for kingdoms/ rulers that will come and go.

Vision of the Ram: vv. 1-4, 20 — The first vision is of a Ram with two horns of differing lengths. It moves north, west, and south, and no one can stand in its way. This is revealed to be the kingdom of Media and Persia. The two horns stand for these two halves of the great empire. The second horn is longer because Persia was the more dominant part of the empire. The empire originated in Persia, modern day Iran, hence, that is why it moves west, north, and south as it expands.

Vision of the He-Goat: vv. 5-8, 21-22 — The He-goat from the west refers to Alexander the Great, who conquered everything from Greece to Afghanistan. After he died, his empire was carved into pieces among his four generals. The two most important ones were the Ptolemaic Kingdom that ruled from Egypt, and The Seleucid Kingdom that ruled from Syria, specifically Antioch. These two kingdoms were continually at war with each other and did a lot of their fighting in Israel which was caught between these two super powers.

Vision of the Little Horn: vv. 9-14, 23-26 — The final vision of the little horn that arises out of one of the previous empires exalts itself and oppresses the people of Israel. The vision points out several things that the little horn does: (1) exalts itself (like the two that came before it), (2) removed regular sacrifice, (3) throws down the place of the sanctuary (3) disregards truth, does what it wants, and prospers. This vision probably refers to a Seleucid Ruler named Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who ruled in the 2nd century BC. He started out small and rose to great heights. He was not actually supposed to be king. He seized the crown from his brother. Antiochus IV Epiphanes expanded his empire east and south. Most importantly in 167 BC, he ordered temple sacrifice in Jerusalem to stop. Antiochus IV Epiphanes placed an object sacred to the Greek God Zeus in the temple and sacrificed a pig to it. This was the event that eventually led to the Maccabean Revolt that led Jews to regain control of Jerusalem. The purification and rededication of the temple after the pig sacrifice is celebrated by the Jewish Festival of Hanukkah.

One of the most talked about portions of this vision is verse 14. It gives the number 2300 as the number of evenings and mornings that will pass before the holy place will be restored. Some think it is literal and refers only to the restoration of the temple. Others think days may mean years and refer to the time of Jesus's return. Still others argue about whether the phrase means 2300 days or just 1150 days, because it says 2300 evenings and mornings combined — 1150 evenings and 1150 mornings.

There is a place for such study, but it is not the primary purpose of the book. Such speculations are not the subject of this study. We are trying to learn what the original readers did when they first heard these visions recounted. In that line, it is important to remember that the purpose of given numbers is not date-setting but for comfort. So what comfort are we supposed to derive from these visions?

1. The goal of judgment is restoration — Verse 12 says that everything little horn will do is “on account of transgression.” As we said before, God uses calamities to draw us to repentance. God is allowing the evils of little horn because of the transgressions of his people. The goal is not for God to destroy his people, but to draw them to repentance and restoration.
2. God has fixed an end to evil — As we said earlier, the purpose of giving the dates and times is not so that we can set out watches. It is so that we can know God is not going to allow evil to run amok forever. Specifically, he has fixed a day when the evil of Antiochus will end. And more generally, he had fixed a day when all evil will end. In Acts 17:30-31, Paul tells the Athenians, “Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.”
3. God does not need our help — Sometimes, we justify our compromise by thinking we see a way to solve a certain problem that God does not. We think we need to sell out in order to find a way to undo or defeat evil. But verse 25 says, “But he will be broken without human agency.” The little horn will be destroyed not because of man's opposition but because of God's plan. This does not mean that there is nothing for us to do. It is simply that we need to stop playing God, trust that he knows what he is doing, and simply be faithful with what he has called us to do. We all have a race to run; we need to run it well. We just need to trust God with how things work out.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How do you think about God's judgment? Do you see how God uses judgement to draw us into repentance and restoration? Do you have times or stories where this was true in your life or someone you know?
2. Why are we so tempted to focus on setting our watch by the numbers in prophesy? What is lost when we do so?
3. How do we sometimes act like God needs our help? How can we learn to do what God has called us to do but still leave the outcome up to him?

## Daniel 9

# Daniel's Prayer of Repentance

There is a way of looking at the world which says that life is hard, but everything happens for a reason. We have to learn to trust in the divine plan, strengthen our resolve to be good people, and to endure hardships. It is a way of looking at the world that emerged from the Ancient Mediterranean World and endures to this day. It probably sounds familiar, but it is not Christianity. It is called Stoicism, a philosophy that emerged in Athens in the 4th century BC. You might be thinking, "But wait, all those elements are things that we have been talking about in Daniel: hard times, God's plan, perseverance, and righteousness. So why does that list describe Stoics better than Christians?" And it is true; all these things are things that Stoics and Christians share in common. The difference lies in what the Stoics leave out. Can you spot it? Is there something missing? It is the personal dimension. Stoics were very concerned with righteousness, and perseverance. They believed that there was a divine plan that they could trust. All this sounds very similar to Christianity. Unfortunately, they also happened to believe that god or the gods did not really care too much about individual humans. They figured it was up to each individual to grit his teeth, accept his fate, and muscle through as best as he could.

I started the study of this chapter here, because many Christians feel the same way. They believe God has a plan, and that he is wise and powerful. So they grin and bear it. Something happens in their life that confuses or wounds them. They either run from their faith or try to find the strength to make themselves believe that God knows what he is doing. They bury their questions and keep plugging along. All of that is true. God is good, wise, has a plan, and desires that we trust him. But he is also personal and desires us not to just "accept our fates" but to come to him with our questions.

Psalms 62:8 says, "Trust in Him at all times, O people; Pour out your heart before Him." Our questions are not signs that we do not trust God. They are proof that we do trust him. We are seeking to trust him more by seeking to understand who he is, what he is doing, and why. 1 Peter 5:6-7 says something very similar: "Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you." Verse 6 by itself sounds a lot like Stoicism. God is bigger, wiser, and stronger than you. Verse 7 makes all the difference. God cares for you and desires you to be free from your anxiety and worry. This is not through your own effort but through casting your worry on him and letting him take it.

Prayer is the difference. Prayer is the way we pour out our hearts to God. Prayer is how we seek God. Nowhere is this more important than when it comes to sin and repentance. Prayer is how we return to him when we have sinned. Frequently, when we have done wrong, we are tempted to act like children. We either run and hide or remain defiant. Both are motivated by fear. But 2 Chronicles 7:14 promises, "If My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land."

In the middle of the visions that fill the second half of the book of Daniel, there is a pause as Daniel stops to pray for himself and his people. It is a prayer of repentance and longing for the forgiveness and restoration that only God can provide. By looking at this prayer, we can gain a glimpse into how we too can seek God and return to him when we have gone astray.

Preparation for Prayer: vv. 1-4 — This passage starts with Daniel reading the prophet Jeremiah. While doing so, he realizes that God prophesied through Jeremiah that the exile would last 70 years. Realizing that God had promised to bring the suffering of Israel to an end and that the time was getting close, Daniel decided to pray and seek the Lord and ask him to fulfill his promises. In this Daniel revealed that he prepared himself to pray in a couple ways:



1. He prepared his mind through the study of Scripture — Sometimes, we think that prayer and Bible study are two unrelated aspects of the Christian life. Some people love Bible study; others love prayer. As if there are two separate paths to learning about and hearing from God. In truth, they are two parts of the same path. If you are not prayerful in your Bible study, your study will be dry, cold, cerebral, and sterile. If your prayer life is not grounded in what God has already revealed about who he is and how he interacts with his people, then you are at risk of believing things that are not true and stumbling into superstition or heresy. You need both. Daniel was searching and studying the scriptures. He learned something about what God had promised his people. This awoke in him a desire to pray.
2. He prepared his body through fasting — This might seem odd for a variety of reasons. Many people in the modern church tend to look down on things like fasting, because it can sound legalistic, like you are trying to earn God's favor by doing something. But Jesus seems to assume that his followers would fast on occasion when he gave instructions in Matthew 6:16. It is how his followers were supposed to fast correctly. "When you fast..." The point of Daniel's fasting is not that you have to fast before God will accept your prayers, but rather that the attitude of your body affects the attitude of your spirit. The two are connected. Body language reveals the status of a person's heart. Someone who is mad and defensive might cross their arms and legs. Someone who is nervous might pace or chew their fingernails; however, body language does not just reveal what is going on internally. It can help change it as well. Next time you have an argument, uncross your arms and instead have the same conversation holding the person's hand or giving them a hug. It will change your attitude. We are body and spirit. Our spirits frequently do what our bodies are doing. Daniel is about to pray for forgiveness and repentance. So he fasts, and he puts on sackcloth and ashes (all symbols of mourning). His body demonstrates his spirit of contrition and remorse.

DEPENDING ON GOD IN PRAYER –In this prayer, Daniel longs for God to rescue and restore Israel from their current situation. He also knows that Israel does not deserve it. She has rebelled continually. The prayer ends in verse 18b: "we are not presenting our supplications before You on account of any merits of our own, but on account of Your great compassion." The contrast in the prayer is between who God is, and who the people of Israel have been in response. It shows that there are no grounds for us to have confidence in ourselves. Our confidence in deliverance and restoration lies completely in the hands of God.

Dependence on God's Faithfulness v. 4-8 — Verse 4 describes God as someone "who keeps his Covenant" and possessing "lovingkindness." Lovingkindness is a word that attempts to translate the Hebrew word "Khesed," which describes the dedication and commitment God has to Israel. A better word might be "covenant loyalty" or "faithfulness." In short, God is dedicated to those he has chosen to be his own. He is dedicated to the covenant he has made. Daniel praises God so that he can depend on God's faithfulness, because he knows that Israel has shown herself completely faithless. In verses 5-6: Israel has rebelled, acted wickedly, turned asides from commandments, and did not listen to the prophets. If Israel was hoping to show itself worthy based on its loyalty to God, it failed. But it can depend on God's loyalty to her.

Dependence on God's Forgiveness v. 9-14– Verse 9 starts with the phrase "Righteousness belongs to you, but to us open shame." God is completely right and just in everything he does. Therefore, because of her rebellion, all Israel has is shame. If they remained in their current state, it would be completely justified, because they deserve all that has happened to them. In fact verses 11-14 show that everything that has happened to Israel is because of their rebellion, and that God was perfectly right in judging them that way. Verse 9 is important. It says: "To the Lord our God belong compassion and forgiveness." God's judgement is part of his love. He desires repentance and return. As we have seen in other parts of this study, he desires for us to return to him so that we might live. Judgment is not God's last word. God's compassion and forgiveness is for all who will seek Him.

This passage reminds us of the power and importance of prayer in the life of a Christian. It encourages us to remember three things when we pray:

Our Posture in Prayer— We will find it hard to compose our minds to focus on God unless our bodies are as well. Are you sad and penitent, perhaps you should kneel? Are you celebrating and excited, perhaps you should raise your hands? Do not get me wrong. You can pray anywhere and in any position. You do not have to do something special to get God's attention. It is simply a reminder that our bodies and spirits go together. The position of our bodies can frequently be an indicator of the situation in our souls. If you find your prayers are lazy, half-hearted, and distracted, perhaps, it is because you are putting your body in a lazy, easily distracted position. Are you having a hard time feeling joyful towards God? Perhaps, you should try raising your hands towards heaven when you pray.

Our Position in Prayer— Nothing can be truer in prayer than that we become like beggars. Pagan religions sacrificed and gave gifts to the gods in order to win their favor and gain their attention. We come to God with hands completely empty; we have nothing to offer. This may lead some to be sad. But it can actually be a source of tremendous relief. You do not have to convince God to give you anything. He loves you, knows what you need, and knows how to give good gifts to his children. We can, like children, depend on him completely.

Our Pursuit in Prayer— Sometimes, we run from God when we know we have done wrong. We should not. God desires to show compassion and mercy. Sometimes, we run to God only when we need something. This is okay, because it is the beginning of our understanding that God is the source of everything that we need. But it is only the beginning. When he seeks God in this way, sometimes, it is referred to as "seeking God's hand." We want him to give us stuff. He knows what we need, and what he desires us to have. He is not a spiritual concierge, so he will many times not give us what we ask for. In fact, might give us things we specifically do not want. This is when we must make sure we are seeking God to know him, understand him, and be close to him. As we draw near to God and understand more and more about who he is, we will be able to trust him in the times where we do not understand what is going on in a specific circumstance.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why do you think we often times do not seek God in prayer?
2. What are some ways that scripture reading and prayer go hand in hand?
3. How do you think the position of our bodies affects our spirits?
4. What are some ways we depend on ourselves and our merits when we pray?
5. What does it mean to depend on God when we pray?
6. What attributes or aspects of God are most important to you when you pray?

## Daniel 10

# Daniel and Spiritual Warfare

The final three chapters of Daniel comprise of a single vision. First, in chapter 10, it introduces the heavenly messenger who delivers the vision. Then in chapter 11, it describes in detail a great conflict to come. Lastly in chapter 12, it contains the final details and instructions that God gives Daniel regarding these visions. These last three chapters are incredibly complex, and more time could be dedicated to studying them. In the scope of this study, we will focus on the main themes highlighted in each chapter. In Chapter 10, it focuses on revealing the spiritual battle behind human conflict. In chapter 11, it shows that ultimately God will judge those who oppose him and bring an end to evil. And in chapter 12, it promises that God will reward the faithful with new life.

The subject of this study is spiritual warfare. Just mention the topic and you are likely to get one of the two extreme responses: extreme fascination or extreme disinterest. Both are unhealthy. As CS Lewis said in his introduction to the "Screwtape Letters", a book written from one demon to another on how to tempt humans, "There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them."<sup>1</sup> And that is the place many people find themselves. Some focus too much on spiritual warfare and look for demons under every rock. Others are content to take the world at face value and cannot be convinced that there is more than what they see. CS Lewis called these two extremes "the magician" and "the materialist."<sup>2</sup>

As Christians, we need to find a healthy middle ground. We need to realize that there is more going on than what we realize, and we need to be focused primarily on the God we serve. This spiritual world is what we are exposed to in Daniel 10.

Divine Understanding Sought: vv. 1-3 — This chapter starts with a description of Daniel who has been in a state of mourning for three weeks. He had not eaten any good food, eaten any meat, drank any wine (This is a sign that the fast mentioned in Daniel 1 was temporary.), or had used any lotion. This might sound like a silly detail, but in a hot, dry, dusty climate protecting your skin was very important. The point being that he neglected every concern except seeking understanding from God over what was going on. He was not seeking the Lord in the midst of other things. He was seeking God first, and he was seeking God desperately. Psalm 42 says, "As the deer pants for the water, so my soul longs for you, O Lord." A deer in the middle of Judean desert would be desperate for water. Daniel sought the Lord to the absolute neglect of everything else.

This is an important reminder. Sometimes, we seek the Lord half-hearted. We want to know God, but we have other things to do. Jeremiah 29:13 says, "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." Daniel was seeking the Lord with all of his heart, and God answered.

A Heavenly Messenger Sent: vv. 4-9 — God answers by sending a divine messenger. The description of the divine messenger terrifies Daniel. The description is of a heavenly soldier coming from a spiritual battle. In response to seeing the vision, a couple things happen. First, everyone else flees from Daniel (v. 7) and Daniel passes out flat on his face (v. 9). This reveals the reason why seeking God requires our whole hearts. If we are looking for the approval or assistance of others, we will give up when we find ourselves abandoned. If we are looking for an easy road, we will give up when we find our endurance and perseverance tested.

A Spiritual Battle Described: vv. 10-21 — The heavenly messenger comes to Daniel, touches him, raises him from the ground, and gives him spiritual insight into what has been going on. The messenger says that he was sent by God but was prevented from reaching Daniel. This is because the Prince of the Kingdom of Persia opposed him. It refers not to the earthly ruler of the empire of Persia but rather to a spiritual being that controls Persia and is opposed to God. The messenger made it through to him with the help of Michael,

who as an angelic is being entrusted with protecting Israel (Michael is described in v. 21 as “your prince”), and who is one of the chief princes. Daniel is exhausted by the weight of the burden of knowledge and by the profundity of the encounter. The messenger then touches and strengthened Daniel. He says that he has to return to battle because another prince, the Prince of Greece, is about to come. But before the messenger leaves, he offers to tell Daniel what will happen in the future. The substance of his message will fill chapter 11, but chapter 10 reveals a great deal about the ultimate reality that lies behind what we see.

A Spiritual Battle is Behind Human Conflict — There is more going on than we realize. Scripture is full of moments where people get glimpses of what is going on in the spiritual realm. One occurs in 2 Kings 6:15-17, where Elisha and a companion are being pursued by an enemy. “When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. ‘Oh no, my lord! What shall we do?’ the servant asked. ‘Don’t be afraid,’ the prophet answered. ‘Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.’ And Elisha prayed, ‘Open his eyes, LORD, so that he may see.’ Then the LORD opened the servant’s eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.” Elisha wanted his servant to realize that they were protected by more than they could see.

Something similar also happens in the New Testament. Jesus sends out 70 disciples to go spread his good news. When they return, they report how it went. Luke 10:17-18 says, “The [seventy returned with joy, saying, ‘Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.’ And He said to them, ‘I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning.’ The disciples reported the instances of success they had experienced. Jesus revealed to them what was going on in the spiritual realm.

Spiritual Rank is Different than Human Rank — The messenger references the Prince of the King of Persia, who is the spiritual authority ruling the Persian empire. He also references the Prince of Israel, Michael, and the coming Prince of Greece. What is interesting is that he names Michael as one of the chief princes. Evidently, spiritual rank and power are not the same as worldly rank and power. Persia, the most dominant and powerful kingdom on earth at the time could not oppose the messenger once Michael began to help.

What is true in the spiritual world is true in our world too. Those whom we think are important might not be in the larger scheme of things. And the most important people, when it comes to God’s plans and purposes, are the ones that we might tend to overlook. We need to remember that God’s priorities are not the same as ours. We look at externals; God looks at the heart. We value the things the world values: power, wealth, and success. James 2:5 says, “God chose the poor of this world to be rich in faith.” The people we think are insignificant might be the ones that are doing the most damage and wreaking the most havoc on the spiritual battlefield.

God’s Enemies are Real, Strong...and Defeated – Sometimes, when people start studying spiritual warfare, people assume that since God will ultimately be victorious, that the fight will be easy. That is not true. God’s enemies are real and strong. 1 Peter 5:8 says: “Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” In the Daniel passage, Daniel’s prayers were heard but the spiritual enemy prevented aid from coming to him for 21 days.

It is important to remark here that God, through Christ, has won the victory over spiritual foes. Colossians 2:15 says: “When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.” Jesus has won the victory, but our defeated enemy still roams the earth looking for those he can destroy.

Our Fight is Part of a Larger Battle — The heavenly messenger remarks in verse 20, “Do you understand why I came to you? But I shall now return to the fight against the Prince of Persia.” This messenger has broken through to get a message to Daniel, but he must now return to his post. The idea is that the battle Daniel is facing is part of a larger struggle. This heavenly messenger was sent to strengthen Daniel, so that he will be able to fight the good fight. One of the chief purposes of this kind of writing is to convey to the reader the cosmic and spiritual significance of what can seem like minor or forgettable events. If we saw

things from the divine perspective, like Elisha's servant or the 70 disciples that came back to Jesus, we might realize the critical importance of what to us may seem like minor spiritual struggles. CS Lewis paints the picture vividly in *Mere Christianity* when he writes, "The smallest good act today is the capture of a strategic point from which, a few months later, you may be able to go on to victories you never dreamed of. An apparently trivial indulgence in lust or anger today is the loss of a ridge or railway line or bridgehead from which the enemy may launch an attack otherwise impossible."<sup>3</sup>

Be Ready for Battle — The only thing more dangerous than not realizing that you are in battle is going into battle unprepared and unarmed. You will be destroyed. One thing that continually recurs in this chapter is the physical toll that the spiritual battle takes upon Daniel. He collapses and trembles. He was struck speechless and experienced extreme anguish. He was exhausted. Spiritual warfare took everything out of Daniel. On his own, he did not have what it takes, but verses 18-19 are the turning point: "Then this one with human appearance touched me again and strengthened me. He said, "'O man of high esteem, do not be afraid. Peace be with you; take courage and be courageous!' Now as soon as he spoke to me, I received strength and said, 'May my lord speak, for you have strengthened me.'" Daniel received strength beyond his own ability. The heavenly messenger touched him and filled him with divine strength. Daniel carried on not in his own power, but in the power of the Lord. This idea also runs throughout scripture. Rely on yourself and fail; rely on God and receive strength. Isaiah 40:29-31 says: "He gives strength to the weary, and to him who lacks might He increases power. Though youths grow weary and tired, and vigorous young men stumble badly, Yet those who wait for the LORD Will gain new strength; They will mount up with wings like eagles, They will run and not get tired, They will walk and not become weary."

In the New Testament, Paul tells the Ephesians in Ephesians 6:10-11: "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil." If we are to stand firm against the schemes of the devil, we need the armor of God. We need to stand firm not in our own strength, power and ability, but in the strength that comes from relying upon God.

<sup>1</sup> C. S. Lewis and C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape letters* ; with "Screwtape proposes a toast" (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Harper One, 2001).

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What do you think of when you hear the phrase "spiritual warfare?" What are some negative connotations? What are some positive ones?
2. How can we walk the fine line between focusing too much and not focusing enough on spiritual warfare?
3. How can we take seriously the strength and severity of the enemy's attacks, while at the same time, realizing that Jesus has won the battle for us, and Satan is a defeated enemy?
4. What does it mean to stand firm in God's power and not our own?

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## Daniel 11

# Persecution and Judgment

Chapter 11 of Daniel is tricky. It is the chapter that causes many of the problems that have plagued scholars and students of this book. If the next couple of paragraphs are too complicated or technical, skip down to the end of this first section. Look for a paragraph that starts with "You might be thinking..." Hopefully, this moderately technical introduction will provide some information that can help you understand how to study the Bible, and how to seek answers to complicated questions.

The source of the difficulties with Daniel 11 center around two things. First, chapter 11 contains incredible specific and detailed prophecies. The details are so specific that mainly scholars think that it is enough to prove that the passages are not really prophecies, but rather history written down after the fact made to look like it was written beforehand. Though the claims should be taken seriously and not simply dismissed, often times these same scholars would refuse to admit that any events were actually truly prophesied. Their refusal to accept these prophecies says as much about their own beliefs as it does about the text.

The second issue in chapter 11 is that the writer seems to get it wrong in the end. For the first 35 verses, the prophecies are oddly specific, detailed, and accurate. It is very clear which leaders are being referred to. However, starting in verse 36 the prophecies go awry. They all of a sudden do not fit any information regarding any leader. Some think that this move from accurate to inaccurate information is the key to dating Daniel. They think that what is happening is that the writer had written detailed history as prophecy up to his present day. When he gets to his own day, he tries his hand at some real prophecy and gets it wrong. If this is the case, they believe the shift occurs in material dating around 164/164 BC; thus, pointing to when the book was written. Such a notion supports the secular scholars' preconceived notions that prophecy cannot happen but fails to fully appreciate the nature of biblical prophecy.

Help in pursuing solutions to these difficulties can be found in understanding a few key elements of how prophecy works in the Bible. First, biblical prophecy is sometimes fulfilled in a specific event, and then later it finds fuller fulfillment in another event. Think of the famous Christmas prophecy in Isaiah 7:14. It says, "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel." This was a specific prophecy for a specific king. It was later seen also as a prophecy of the Messiah and more fully fulfilled in Jesus.

Biblical prophecy also regularly exhibits what has been referred to as "telescoping." This refers to the way in which a more distant event appears to merge with the nearer event so as to become indistinguishable from it. The best example of this involves Jesus's prophecy of the fall of Jerusalem and of his second coming.

In Mark 13:1-4, Jesus and his disciples have a discussion about the temple:

As He was going out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, "Teacher, behold what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!" And Jesus said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left upon another which will not be torn down." As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew were questioning Him privately, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are going to be fulfilled?"

This same passage is repeated in Matthew 24:1-3 with one slight change:

Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him. And He said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down." As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"

Jesus is talking with his disciples and prophesied the destruction of the temple, which occurred in AD 70. But when it occurred, the disciples realized that certain things described by Jesus had not happened yet. That is why Mark, written before AD 70, says the disciples simply ask “When will these things be.” But Matthew, written after AD 70 and the destruction of the temple, has the disciples ask more detailed questions: “Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” Jesus’s prophecy is not just about the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. He has used his conversation about the temple to give the disciples prophecy referring to his coming. He has telescoped the two events.

This kind of thing is what I believe is happening in Daniel 11. The king being referred to in verses 20-35 is the Syrian King Antiochus IV Epiphanes, an evil ruler who defiled the temple. But starting in verse 36, the writer stops talking about Antiochus and starts talking about a coming evil ruler, of whom Antiochus is a shadow, symbol, and a forerunner.

You might be thinking “That is fine and all, but what is the point? Are we supposed to use this chapter to assemble a list of attributes so that we can spot the “Antichrist” when he comes? I thought you said we were not going to read the book of Daniel this way.” You are right. While much ink has been spilled on who the leader at the end of Daniel refers to, what would be the point that early readers were supposed to draw from this passage?

In a nutshell, here is the point of this chapter: The writing of Daniel up to this point has focused on how God used the Babylonian exile as a time of judgment and purification for his people. We have talked a great deal about how God uses hard times to lead us to repentance and to draw us closer to him. But it is important to remember that hard times and suffering are not always proof that God is trying to get us to repent of something or turn back to him. This passage reminds us that sometimes suffering happens because those who walk with God will experience evil at the hands of an evil world. This chapter teaches us that “rulers of the nations, in so far as they ignore God and are a law to themselves, becomes beasts who oppress others.” The followers of God suffer at the hands of rulers who oppress them; however, God promises that he will judge those who oppress his people.

Prelude to a Great Struggle: vv. 11:2-4 — This passage refers to the rise of Persia and Greece. After Persia conquered Babylon, it ruled for a handful of generations before being replaced by Greece and ultimately, Alexander the Great and his empires. These were referred to in an earlier chapter: the ram with two horns, and the he-goat from the west. Here they are presented as a prelude to a great struggle that will occur. Remember how Alexander the Great’s empire was divided among his four generals.

Prelude to an Evil King: vv. 11:5-20 — The two main empires that rose from Alexander’s empire were the Seleucids, who were centered in Syria and the Ptolemies, who ruled from Egypt. Israel was sandwiched between these two great empires, which continually fought each other. If you look on a map, you will realize that from the perspective of Israel, Syria is north and Egypt is south. Therefore, the description in this section of the kings of the south and the north all refer to these two great nations. It is interesting to study how these specific prophecies were fulfilled in the lives and conflicts of specific kings but is beyond the scope of this study. The point of all of this is to prepare us for the coming of a king who represents the wickedness that exalts human power over God.

Prelude to a Most Evil King: vv. 11:21-35 — Starting in verse 21, we are introduced to an evil king who matches the description of Antiochus IV Epiphanes. He is a schemer, a usurper, a betrayer, and a murderer. Starting in verse 29, we see unfold the encounter where Antiochus entered into the temple in Jerusalem and sacrificed a pig on the altar of God. These events are told in the intertestamental book 1 Maccabees. In verse 32, it reveals that he will divide the people of God. Notice in verse 33 it says that those who suffer are the ones who stay loyal to God. This evil is not befalling them, because they have forsaken God. It is happening, because they have stayed true to him.

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Persecution Proves Whose We Are — There is seemingly a never ending onslaught of evil rulers that can sometimes discourage us into thinking that God’s kingdom and victory will never come. This passage reminds us that some people are evil out of selfishness. The worst ones are the ones who set their hearts against God. This underscores the truth that God’s kingdom will not come unopposed. In Matthew 10:24-5, Jesus reminds us:

“A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master. If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign the members of his household!”

Persecution is proof that we are on the right side. When we are treated like Jesus was treated, we should not be upset. We should accept it as proof that that the world knows who our Lord is. Acts 5:40-42 shows us a scene like this where Peter and John are arrested, beaten, threatened, and released. When they leave, they are not cowed. Look what it says they did:

...after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then released them. So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

It says they rejoiced. They were in pain, no doubt. They were glad that the persecution showed that they were on the right team, and that they were being effective. So, far from being afraid, they were emboldened to keep preaching and teaching vocally as ever. We, too, should not be shocked when we encounter opposition because of our beliefs. We should accept it as proof that we are a threat to the enemy and be glad, even when it costs us.

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<sup>4</sup> Tertullian and T. Herbert Bindley, *The apology of Tertullian for the Christians* (London: Parker, 1890).

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How can we tell when suffering is from God to help us return to him or from the enemy as persecution?
2. How can we tell the difference between being hated because we follow God and being hated because we are being jerks?
3. Have you ever felt tempted to compromise or abandon your faith to save yourself? What was at stake? What were you afraid of? What did you do?
4. What does persecution look like in our world?

## Daniel 12

# Persecution and Judgment

Daniel 12 constitutes the final part of the vision that has spanned the last three chapters. Chapter 10 dealt with Daniel's encounter with a heavenly messenger. Chapter 11 focused on the rise and fall of empires, and the coming of a king that foreshadows a great evil king coming at the end of all things. It also focused on the evil destruction that poured out on those who serve God and, how ultimately God will judge the wicked for what they have done. Chapter 12 presents the other side of the coin. In the same way that there is judgment for those who oppress the people of God, there is hope of deliverance and new life for those who persevere.

**Deliverance Promised: vv. 12:1** — Chapter 12 continues the vision from chapter 11. It refers to a time of great tribulation at the end of time. In the same way that the wickedness of Antiochus Epiphanes was a foreshadowing a future lawless leader, in the same way the persecutions suffered, during that time and later by other believers, will be insignificant compared to what will come at the end. God promises that he will rescue those who he has chosen and whose name is written in his book.

It is important to note that this does not always mean deliverance from harm or from death. We all must face death. Hebrews 9:27 says, "it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment." God's deliverance does not exempt us from that fate toward which we all are headed. It means that evil will not have the final say in our life or in the world. When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were about to be thrown in the fiery furnace, they acknowledged that one way or another God was going to deliver them from the power of Nebuchadnezzar. He would do it either by saving them from the fire or by calling them to be with him.

Because evil will not have the last word, because God promises to deliver us, and because this life is not all there is, this is why we need not fear evil. In Matthew 10:28, Jesus told his disciples: "Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." Many of us do damage to our soul (through succumbing to sin), because we are trying to avoid damage or threats to our body. Jesus says, your body is not all that is of you. It is not even the most important part of you. One day you will get a new one, but you keep the same soul. Your soul is much more important. Do not be afraid of threats to your body. Trust your soul to God, and he will rescue you.

**Resurrection Promised: vv. 12:2** — A further dimension to this vision is the idea that those who have died will be rise again. Believers are promised a new life. Others are raised to everlasting contempt. There are at least two important things worth noting in this passage. First, it is worth emphasizing that the Bible teaches a bodily resurrection from the dead. The reason this is important is because if you ask people today what the hope of Christianity is, many would respond something like: "To go be with Jesus when we die." or "To go to heaven when we die." While that is true, Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:8, "to be absent from the body" is "to be at home with the Lord." When we die, we will go to be with God in heaven, but that is not the end. The Bible teaches that when Christ returns, a great resurrection will occur. The idea that our souls will be re-embodied is powerfully pictures in 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17. As you read the passage, try to keep track of where the "dead in Christ" are:

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

When Jesus returns, he will bring with him those who have died, and when they get here, they will rise. It is a somewhat difficult picture to form in our mind, but it is a powerful promise that unites God's whole story of

redemption. When God created the world, he said, "It was good." The world we live in today is still the good creation of a good God. It is good but fallen. God promises to redeem it. The resurrection is proof that God loves what he has made and will restore everything that sin has scarred. Romans 8:19-21 says:

For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

Creation groans in expectation looking forward to be set free from the slavery it is in because of our sin. James 1:18 says: He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creation." This verse shows that what God did for Christ in raising him from the dead, he will also do this for his whole creation.

Perhaps the finest presentation of the central the resurrection plays in God's plan comes at the end of the Bible when God describes what happens at the end of time. Revelation 21:1-5 says:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new."

Notice that it says I make all things new; not I will make all new things. God will fix everything sin has broken. He will wipe away every tear. There will not be any more death or any weeping. This is because all those things have passed away.

Confusion Promised: vv. 12:3-13 — It may seem like an odd heading to end the book on, but Daniel ends with a final word to the author. The author and the angel discuss when, and how long from now these things will occur. Several of the numbers given in the book are repeated (time, times, and half a time). Some new numbers ones are added: 1290 days...or is it 1335 days? There is a place to study these numbers and symbols, but as we have said, it is not here. I kind of agree with Daniel that who says in verse 8, "I could not understand." To which the angel simply responds, "go your way." Which I take to mean: live your life, and trust God. The theme that has run through the entire book comes back to the surface: despite appearances, God is in control. When we focus on trying to unravel the mystery, we start bickering and arguing and dividing. God will win, and he will reward his followers with new life. We are encouraged to persevere. How long? A little while longer.

Jesus told his followers very specifically that they would not be able to guess it, and they should stop trying. Matthew 24:36 says, "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone." I have heard people argue that though they cannot know the day or hour, they can know the month and year. That misses the point of this passage. In the ancient world, hour did not mean a period of 60 minutes. It referred to a season of time. Jesus says you are not going to know the day, and you are not going to know the season. So focus on God and focus on being ready. He promises to return when we least expect it. Our job is not to unravel a mystery that he promises we cannot. Our job is to be found at our post when he returns.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How does the Biblical notion of deliverance differ from what we mean when we ask God to deliver us?
2. Have you ever thought deeply about the promise of resurrection, and the central role it plays in Christian teaching?
3. Why do you think we do not talk more about the resurrection? How can we make the resurrection more central to what we believe and how we live?
4. What is your take on all the numbers and symbols; as well as, the promises that you cannot figure out? What are we supposed to make of all of this?