

# DANIEL

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# DANIEL 1

Daniel was a winner! His story stands out in the Bible as one of a great hero who didn't seem to goof (we know he was a sinner like us). In one sense Daniel was unique among the characters of Scripture. In another sense however, he is meant to be typical of God's family. God wants to strategically gather and place thousands of men and women with hearts for Him who will be agents of change in their culture. He has always placed a clear alternative among humankind to the self-indulgent, relentless pursuit of prosperity and glory that obsesses us. Yahweh has always been gathering a people for that purpose.

Process the first chapter of Daniel more by thinking about the questions below. Then engage the "High-Yielding Followup" to help you find your way in becoming like Jesus to those around you, as Daniel did in Babylon.

1. In verses 3-4, the king lists the qualifications for Ashpenaz to look for in the search for the new key leaders he wanted. It is a classic human way to promote. What is legitimate about this? What is the liability of such a list? What are the things that you hold to that help you avoid holding EXCLUSIVELY to such criteria in your people choices?
2. In verse 8 it is said of Daniel that he "resolved" ("made up His mind" in NASB, Literally "set upon his heart"). What do you think the author was trying to tell us by using that expression?
3. As you look at your past and think about the Elder's call to us to engage 21 days of prayer and fasting, what do you think the Lord is "setting on your heart"?
4. Daniel demonstrates what we could call a "kind and respectful conservatism." How might that instruct us in the current political climate of our culture? What might God use in us to "give us favor?"

5. The good guys win in this story. The stories in the Bible don't always end like Daniel's. When God became a man His own story didn't appear to be that of a winner. However, why do you think God thought this story was so essential for us to have and know and remember?

## **A HIGH-YIELDING FOLLOWUP**

Psalm 119 is one that we should often return to for inspiration in our spiritual journey. It gives us hundreds of insights into who we are and who we can become with Yahweh's help. This week read carefully verses 33-40. Then go back and take a verse or two each day. Think about the words God inspired. Think about what they tell you about how you can hear from Him. Think about the things the author is asking God to do inside him.

Then "set your heart" on capturing some idle moments for the purpose of godliness. Write a verse or two of this cluster of verses on your phone. Look at these verses during the day. Reflect on them instead of whatever else tends to come to your mind. Do this instead of using technology for something more earthy. It's a "fast" that will change your life and yield fruit for all of eternity!

# DANIEL 2

Daniel and his friends continue their astounding journey of influence. As they stand firm together, Daniel 2 tells the story of them learning from Yahweh what He was up to in future world history. So in this second chapter the book takes on a nature that goes beyond amazing! We need to understand the information the book of Daniel gives us. We also need to understand more about what God is like and what He is up to.

Our ability to live life well depends on WHAT we know but also on WHO we know. We need the TRUTH of God, but we need God HIMSELF as well. This chapter gives us profound access to WHAT we need to know and to WHO we need to know. Don't miss taking time to reflect on it! It's life-giving!

1. Verse 14 says that Daniel spoke with “prudence and discretion” to an official of a very angry king. As you read the words of Daniel’s reply, what are some of the marks of a prudent reply in a hostile atmosphere? What are some personal applications of this for your life?
2. Read verse 17. Who are your “friends” that walk with you and that you share your spiritual challenges with?
3. Read Daniel’s words of thanksgiving and worship (verses 20-23). What are some things about God that help us stand firm in times of turmoil?
4. The fourth kingdom the vision speaks to is the rise of Rome and western civilization’s domination of the world. What are some statements made about that kingdom that history has clearly born out?

5. The average person will not have national influence. But God wants us to be His influencers in our culture. So far in Daniel's story, what are a couple of key things that could serve as principles of gaining godly influence? AND, what should a person who has a "need to lead" learn from Daniel?

6. What are some things you have learned so far about representing God to an ungodly culture from the story of Daniel?

## **A HIGH-YIELDING FOLLOWUP**

We are drawn to prophecy, and rightly so. It makes up much of the Bible and is purposely put there by God. It is not given just to make us smarter. It is certainly not given to make us smug and arrogant. But it IS given purposely by God for important reasons.

It is good to understand why prophecy is given. Read a portion of Isaiah that was written before the Israelites were conquered by the Chaldeans and exiled to Babylon. Begin reading at Isaiah 44:1. Read through the end of chapter 48. There will be sections you don't understand. Don't let that stop you. When you are done, pay special attention to 48:1-8. After doing that write down some of the reasons given by God for giving us prophecies.

These reasons and others given in Scripture mean that we should pay attention to prophecy. Even though it is hard to understand we should invest time to have a reasonable understanding of it. It will strengthen our faith. It fuels hope. Because of this that it builds in us, prophecy will help us stand firm and stand together in troubled times.

# DANIEL 3

Daniel's friends stand firm. They contend for the faith in a foreign culture. It would have cost them their lives, but they get a grand assist from God! And so they continue their astounding journey of influence.

We know that our ability to live life well depends on WHAT we know. It also depends on WHO we know. We need the TRUTH of God, but we need God HIMSELF as well. We must know the King of kings. We know He saves/rescues. But we need to know Him well enough to trust Him, AND dare to live by our convictions graciously and humbly.

God humbles Nebuchadnezzar through this event. God is well equipped to humble the arrogant. We are often able to sense the arrogance of people. But rather than trying to humble them, we must ask for God's help to bring about receptive hearts in them. Our own pride can incite us to words and actions that humiliate them. That generally confirms them in their arrogance. Remember, arrogance is often a reaction to past hurts and threats, both real and perceived. God knows hearts and deals with arrogance best.

The question we want to always be asking as we read the Bible is this; "Why is this that I am reading included in the Bible?" The questions below will lead you to understand why this one is important for you. Then you'll understand why God has you processing it!

1. Nebuchadnezzar's arrogance was that he let himself set aside what he had learned 20 years earlier about God. What do you think are some of the early signs of this kind of arrogance in your life?
  
2. If you had faced this trial that "the three" faced, what rationales might you have used to just bow down to the image, make it look like you were obeying the command? What would have been lost if Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had done this?
  
3. What is one thing you see in the lives of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego that you would like to be true of you? How can you develop it?

4. Nebuchadnezzar actually blesses God for the three having set aside his command (verse 4). Given this result, what are some things we must ponder carefully about their actions?
  
5. Read the king's decree in verse 29. What good things happen among Christians when such a decree is made? What things that aren't so good come about in them?

## **HIGH-YIELDING FOLLOWUP**

You will likely not have to make a decision that could result in you being thrown alive into a furnace. But in practicing your faith you will have to make painful choices. Read and think about Romans 12:1-2. Think about what kind of sacrifices God might be calling you to make.

Pastor Bob's commentary on Romans 12:1-2 is below. It will help you understand and apply these verses better.

### **12:1—I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.**

From a discussion of ethnic Israelites, and based on the hard lessons illustrated by their experience, Paul gives this urgent word of exhortation to his spiritual brothers in the body of Christ. He is also giving these words based on what he has just stated, that God's purposes are the designed end of all that He allows to be. Paul's "therefore" also reaches back and captures the entire message and tone of his letter that he summarizes here as "the mercies of God." Those mercies have been great, but they are not for all time and the opportunity presented by them is to be seized. There is only one logical personal response for all people.

The action Paul is urging his readers to take involves their bodies. In terms of the philosophies that were looming on the horizon of his time, our physical body's value and importance to God would be greatly minimized. It often is. Ours is a faith that focuses on the inner being. But it is also one which is not complete until it is worked out in thought and deed manifested by our tongues, our eyes, our hands and our feet. God's desire is to capture our hearts, but to do with our bodies what He does with all He has created, bring about actions of Him, dedicated to Him (11:36).

There is a sense in which God's work of grace in us begins with the recognition of the nature of the deeds we are doing with our bodies. There is then a work of His Spirit in our inner being of repentance through which our minds are changed about those deeds. It leads us to reflect on what is present within us that prompts such deeds. The gospel can then work to transform us beginning with our inner being. Transformation is always with a view toward this, that God be glorified by that which our bodies begin to outwardly reveal and demonstrate of his Spirit working inside us.

Paul has just spoken in detail of a people with a lengthy tradition of ritual sacrifice. There had been no shortage of ceremonial sacrifice in Israel. But something had been missing in it all, a point which God had made abundantly clear in prophetic declarations (Psalm 50:8-15, Isaiah 1:11-16; Hosea 6:6). God longed for his people to demonstrate by deeds done with their mind, souls and bodies their allegiance to Him and to His Law. Paul wants his readers to do the thing most Israelites had failed to do, to be themselves living sacrifices.

This is a wonderfully descriptive term of what God desires to produce in us. He wants people to be fully alive while fully dead. Through His Spirit we can be fully alive to God, aware of His desire for us in each moment of the day. Through that same Spirit we can deny all that our own desires might seek to lead us into. This is the state that Paul is wanting us to journey into, described in some detail in Chapter 6-8, and described perfectly by this metaphor of a living sacrifice. In this state, we have made a very intentional decision about the instinctive, fleshly way of living. We have died to it and are putting all that remains of it to death. In its place we are searching for God's mind and leading.

This pursuit is our spiritual service of worship. The term "spiritual" is NASB rendering of the Greek word *logikos*. It would be more naturally rendered logical or rational within the Christian framework of what logical thought is. The Greek word by its etymology is formed by making an adjective out of the word *logos*, which means "word." It sounds like our word "logical" which comes from this Greek word for speech or reason and the Latin word *logica*. In Greek thought the *logos* was the kind of spiritual/mystic entity that lay behind reality. In Christian thought that *logos* is the mind of God, recorded in Scripture and embodied in Christ. Our presentation of our complete being to God is what we could call a logical response, the only rational thing to do in view of what God has made plain about Himself, us, and life in this evil world.

Now it IS a spiritual act. It happens through the work of the Holy Spirit stirring the powers of reason within us so that we respond positively to the truth. We must not minimize the importance of the Holy Spirit in all things pertaining to God. At the same time, we must not discard the importance of us using our own minds and applying thoughtful analysis to behavior decisions. We must think through rationally even AS we are guided by the Holy Spirit. Given the history of Israel and all that we can learn from it, presenting our bodies as living sacrifices to God is the only logical decision to make and the Spirit will help us see the particulars of this. As always He will help us apply the Scriptures to matters of real life.



**12:2—and do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.**

In this verse Paul speaks to the more practical activity entailed in presenting our bodies. It is not an act that is done once in the church service. It may be one that has such a beginning. But this must be followed by a lifetime in which thought patterns are individually scrutinized and transformed. Because it is a process, it is not because of this any less of a transformation.

Transformation is a command in this verse. That affirms to us that it is a divinely inspired work that we must intentionally engage ourselves with. Transformation does not overwhelm our own mental and emotional faculties, but instead fully utilizes them. It is in this sense both rational and spiritual. There is a presenting of ourselves that the Holy Spirit orchestrates within us that we must not resist.

When in response to His leading we present ourselves to Him, He leads us in thought that results in the renewal of our mind. It might be thought spurred on by the ministry of others to us, thought flowing out of time spent praying, or thoughts stimulated by the Scripture. But it will be thought that is new and different from that which is routine for us. This thought then begins to transform our actions. Our actions begin to be shaped not by our instincts but by the hand of God. By such actions our lives begin to incarnate, or document what the will of God is. We become a pattern for all who would desire their own lives to be shaped by His powerful hand. We become a documentary for all to watch of what such a life lived in fellowship with God looks like.

Paul uses three words to describe God's will. Some have suggested that within God's will there are three zones. We can do what is good, we can do what is even better—that which is acceptable, or we can do what is perfect. To interpret this verse in this way is a mistake on at least two counts.

First, this verse is making a statement about the overall direction one's life takes as they are beginning to be transformed. It is not dealing with individual instances in which one needs to discover God's particular mind and heart. As our minds are transformed and we present our bodies for service to God, we work by our actions His will. There comes to be a dominant tone in our lives of goodness and completeness.

Second, grammatically all three of these adjectives describe God's unfolding plan. His will is singular and the three adjectives are all singular. They are to be taken together as describing God's will. This too indicates that Paul is making a generic statement about the overall nature of God's will as it will prove to be in our lives, our lifetimes, and in the universe when all events have run their course. It will all prove to be good, and acceptable and perfect.

# DANIEL 4

1. Nebuchadnezzar makes great statements about God in verse 3 and then again in verses 34-35. Which of the things he mentions about God is most inspiring to you, that you need to be reminded of? What statements should give you peace in an election year?
2. Nebuchadnezzar had seen enough of the Lord's work in his life that he should have been more convinced of God's greatness. What are some of the things in us as human's that cause us to become hard-hearted and unaware of God's goodness to us?
3. Look at Nebuchadnezzar's statement in verse 37. What is particularly hard for you to accept as "just" right now? How can this story as told by Nebuchadnezzar help you with that?
4. As you look back over the years of your life, what are some circumstances the Lord used in your life to humble you?
5. What are some practices that we could regularly engage to keep ourselves on a course of humility so we do not have to be corrected by God? (Check out 1 Timothy 2:1 for ideas)

## **HIGH-YIELDING FOLLOW-UP**

Humility is a key quality that the Holy Spirit wants to develop in us. It is one of the most elusive areas to grow in because in a fallen world we have many scars, many coping skills and many strategies we use to gain a diminished sense of worth.

Check out these Scriptures where Jesus tries to teach people how to deal with situations where they seek affirmation or where they deal with their own feelings of inferiority. Look at the four situations reported in Luke 9:46-57. Then look at Luke 14:7-11, where Jesus gives some words of wisdom to those who sought to be honored. We can see ourselves in these stories.

If the Lord is speaking to you about this area of pride, it is a good idea to read more. Take some time to begin reading at Proverbs 10:1 and mark every verse that speaks to you about pride, humility, honor and praise. Read through to the end of Proverbs. Revisit often the marked verse. They will help you back away from the instincts that strongly work from within to make you prideful. It's a great investment in yourself to visit frequently these Scriptures.

# DANIEL 5

1. Based on what you have learned about ancient kings and their gods, what makes the behavior of Belshazzar's call for the temple vessels extra-brash and offensive? What statement was Belshazzar making to his guests, to his gods, and to the God of Israel?
2. What are some observations/warnings you would make for yourself and others about God's future confrontation of the arrogant based on this account?
3. In verses 11-12 the queen states several things that were found in Daniel because the "spirit of the holy gods" was in him. Who wouldn't want all of these! What do you think goes wrong in many of our lives that keeps these from developing?
4. In verse 23, Daniel makes a powerful statement about Belshazzar's worship, particularly in the last phrase of the verse. What are some ways you feel moved to give greater honor to the One in "whose hand is your breath, and whose are all your ways . . ."?

5. Daniel was greatly honored by Belshazzar. According to the next verse, how long did the reward last? We love special awards and honors. What should every child learn as they win such awards and honors?

## **HIGH-YIELDING FOLLOW-UP**

There is a New Testament parallel to the story of Belshazzar's life. It is a parable told by Jesus. He told it when someone interrupted him and asked him to command his brother to divide the inheritance with him. You'll find it in Luke 12:13-21.

It's a short story with a powerful, concluding statement in verse 21. I know that verse by heart and try to re-visit it regularly in order to squelch my tendency to give God the leftovers. Remember Belshazzar, and remember the unnamed person in Luke 12. Let these stories properly humble you, regularly.

# DANIEL 6

1. As you have read and heard teaching on how Daniel lived, can you spot some things in you that limit your trust of God.
2. No doubt your career or character has been sabotaged at some time by someone who saw you as a rival. How does this story help process experiences like that?
3. Who are some acquaintances of yours that need to know God, specifically the hope of His character and kingdom? Will you commit to praying for them?
4. Many Christians know a fair amount about God, but don't really know Him on a relational level. Do you believe He wants a personal friendship with you? How are you being led to strengthen your personal interaction with God?

5. What are some things you have observed about Daniel that are good advice for us in pursuing our occupations? What are some things you would love to have said about you in your role as an employee?

## **FOR ADDED GROWTH**

Daniel's life was very fruitful. Not coincidentally he was close to God. A great New Testament passage on living fruitfully is John 15:1-17. It is a series of comments made by Jesus on fruitfulness.

Read through those verses. Read all of them first. Then return to it and move through it slowly during the week. Underline words and phrases that are great advice on how you can live a fruitful life. Make a list of three to five rhythms you would like to develop in your life that will help you bear fruit in the years God has for you.

And don't forget to turn to Psalm 50:14-15. Kyle told you about these on Sunday. Mark them well in your Bible. You'll need a frequent reminder of what He really wants from all of us!

# DANIEL 7

1. Verses 18, 22, 27 all speak of the saints being given the Kingdom. Under whom will they rule and why is this important?
2. How does this harmonize with what God proclaimed when He made humanity in His image and placed them in His creation?
3. Even after Daniel was told what “the end of the matter” (verse 28) would be, he was still greatly alarmed. Why do you think that was? How should this ending encourage us and how should we be properly alarmed by it?
4. In this chapter, it is said several times that the world ruler of the end times says “great things.” What is meant by this term “great things”? What would characterize his words?
5. What are some of the reasons God gave us this information?



## **FOR ADDED UNDERSTANDING . . .**

Read Jesus' words in Matthew 24. In verses three through fourteen, He gives some information about events that will occur just as a matter of course over the centuries leading up to His return. These are part of normal life on the earth.

But notice that in verse fifteen that seems to change. Jesus begins giving a number of signs of the approach of the things Daniel witnessed, mainly His return to reign on earth. It is good to know these and to be aware of them, so that we are not deceived by false movements of false Christs if we are alive during these times. It is also good to know what these signs are that really do mark the end. Then when they come about we will not misunderstand them as simply more of the normal, routine fallen-world troubles.

Luke 24 also records Jesus' words on the same or a similar occasion. His words have a little different slant, possibly because Luke was a Gentile and included things Daniel had spoken of regarding the Gentiles occupation of Jerusalem. Both Matthew and Luke's records are significant in that in Jesus' mind there remained significant things in Daniel's writings which had not come about. The entire New Testament in speaking of future things bears this out.

These things are recorded for your understanding. Give time to learning the words of these messages. The time will come when their meaning is plain.

# DANIEL 8

1. What kind of things are you concerned or fearful of that Daniel 8 helps you process?
2. Alexander the Great's achievement was stunning in a number of ways. It came unraveled just as fast. What are some of the lessons of that era?
3. In Antiochus Epiphanes (vs 9-14, 23-27), we have seen something that is related to events that occur when earth's kingdoms are about to be brought to an end by Jesus. From Daniel 8, what are some of the things that we should be expecting in our culture if we are nearing the end?
4. Since earth's kingdoms are at God's disposal, what role should we play in our democracy in matters of justice and injustice, morality and immorality and the like?
5. As you look back on your life, would you say you are able to pray with the right spirit for our nation's leaders, whether your party is in power or not?

## FOR MORE UNDERSTANDING

Covid is a legitimate concern for all people at this moment in history. Stewardship of our planet is a matter of concern. People-needs are overwhelming among the seven-billion-plus inhabitants of the earth. There are so many grave concerns and the resources and understanding to address them limits us.

## DANIEL 9:1-19

1. Daniel sought to use the prophetic writings to understand his times. Are you able to do that? What are some things that get in the way of you practicing this?
2. Daniel sought Yahweh “for mercy.” Why are we able to do that? Why will He listen to our plea? What are some things right now in your life that you need His mercy on?
3. What are some things about confession that you learned or re-learned?
4. What are some things in your history, your ancestor’s history, or the world’s history that you have been led to converse with God about? What have you “declared” (perhaps even publicly), about these sins? Why do you think this is hard for us?
5. Why do you think it is good to use “we” language, to own the sins history records? Why do you think that Scripture shows us examples like Daniel, of people “owning” the sins of others?

## **MORE ON THIS CURIOUS SUBJECT:**

As Kyle stated on Sunday, Daniel was just one example of a person in Scripture who owned the sins of others and pleaded to God for mercy toward them. If the sins of others only make us angry, we have not arrived where God wants us.

Sorrow and intercession is a mark of one who is a servant leader among sinful people. Look at the example of Moses in the aftermath of Israel worshiping the golden calf (Exodus 32:30-34). He shows us how far we have to go in learning to care for the lost.

Jeremiah describes the ache in his heart for Israel's sin and the resultant pain (Jeremiah 8:18-9:1). He describes the culture's realities in a way that we can see our own culture in his words. Read all of chapter nine to get a good sense for what God sees of our own world, and what our perspective should be.

This characteristic of godly people being willing to bear the sins of others is seen in Paul in the New Testament. Check out his words in Romans 9:1-5. He showed the degree to which he had become like Christ. He could easily have hated Israel given how they had treated him.

Cultivate the habit of having sorrow for the sins of our beloved America! It will lead to greater power in bringing about change.

Without minimizing any of these and the host of other needs that are pressing, read Revelation 6. It is short, only 17 verses. It lays out a series of events that will happen in a three-and-a-half year period, approximately seven years before Christ returns to rule the earth. The things spoken of in this account are not meant to frighten us. They are given to make us wise, reverent and respectful toward God. They are given to help us trust Him in all such trial. He will be near, and very near in such hard and difficult things.

The events of Revelation 6, will come on us one after another. Again, not to minimize the events of the present time, but the things mentioned in these few verses will make all previous trial and tribulation seem like nothing (Matthew 24:21). These fearful events will signal even worse things ahead before Jesus returns to reign.

Many of the events are human-caused. Many are actions of God. All are meant to humble humanity and turn their thoughts to God for rescue. Many will do so. Many will drift further away.

All trial is meant to ground us in Him and lead us out of our mediocrity. Are you different in the really important ways because of Covid? Are you drifting?

## DANIEL 9:20-27

1. What was a new thing you learned through these verses? What is a question or two that they raised?
2. We mentioned on Sunday the six blessings listed in verse 25 that God's plan will bring to us. Which one means the most to you?
3. Israel means "he fights with God." Is Israel worse than any other of the world's people groups at doing this? Why do you think God gave them this name?
4. This prophecy predicts much trouble for Israel. Historically Christians have allowed this and even participated in it. Why do you think this mistake on our part came about? Are we free of this now?
5. We have seen over and over in Daniel the fact that God is sovereign over earth's rulers. How will this affect you in November once you know the outcome of our election?

## **MORE ON THE “PRINCE WHO IS TO COME”**

Daniel has learned from God about a prince who would come and rule the earth. He would seek to bring great harm to God’s people (see Daniel 8:9-27). Daniel was deeply disturbed and “rattled” by this prospect.

Many rulers have sought to do this since Daniel wrote what he did. But the writers of the New Testament were inspired by the Spirit to tell us that this ruler is still to come. They remind us of things Daniel said about this prince. They also speak in more detail about him. Their words show us that his time is still in the future, though it is certain that at various times Satan has tried to set up this kingdom. His desire is always thwarted by God unless God’s plan intends for it to come about for a season.

There are two passages you should read about this ruler. One is written by Paul. You can find it in 2 Thessalonians chapter 2. Read that chapter. John wrote another chapter on this ruler and another personality that would work with this ruler to influence the world and convince them that he is divine. You’ll find it in Revelation chapter 13. It is important to know as much about this coming leader as you can. His deceptive power will be stronger than has been seen to date. You want to be ready to see through his schemes if you’re alive. Learning his schemes will help you see through schemes that Satan routinely uses in your life to steal from you things God has for you. We want you to win that battle!

# DANIEL 10

1. After reading this passage, what is one question you have?
2. What kind of spiritual warfare have you been facing this past month?
3. How is your communication with God going for the past month?
4. When you think about a specific sin issue in your life, what is the agreement you have with evil thinking that leads to that sin issue?
5. What stories/passages/verses do you turn to in order to help you fight against the arguments of the evil one?

