

Dare To Be Different: The Book of Daniel

By David Feddes

Looking for excitement? There is not a boring moment in the book of Daniel. It tells of nasty villains, bold heroes, and miraculous rescues. It describes weird dreams that picture major world events. As you read Daniel's book and take his message to heart, your own life may become a lot more exciting. When you get to know Daniel's God and walk with him, you'd better figure on danger and mystery. But that's far better than dying of boredom.

In the book of Daniel, you will see boys walk through fire unharmed, a king who thinks he's a cow, and a leopard with wings. You will also find things that are even more astonishing: a politician who is honest, a visionary who is practical, a godly man in ungodly surroundings. Daniel is all those things and more.

Daniel's God still lives today. God knows and directs our lives and our futures as surely as he did in Daniel's time. So don't just go with the flow of the world around you. Get to know God. Dream his dreams. Live the adventure he sends you. Dare to be different!

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Daniel 1:1-7

WHO ARE YOU?

He was to teach them the language and literature of Babylon... [He] gave them new names. Daniel 1:4,7

You are a teenager. Born in Jerusalem, you now live in Babylon. Once a free noble, you are now a captive. Brought up in God's Word, you now have pagan teachers. Originally named Daniel, meaning "God is my judge," you are now called Belteshazzar, after the pagan idol Bel. Who are you?

You are still Daniel, whatever anyone calls you. You still trust God's Word, whatever your school teaches you. Your heart is still noble and free, wherever captivity brings you. You still pray facing Jerusalem (6:10), no matter how long you live in Babylon.

Greatness comes from knowing who you are. "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God... I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God" (1 Peter 2:11-12).

Who are you? If you are a Christian, you bear the name of Christ. You may live and work in worldly Babylon, but you are a citizen of heavenly Jerusalem. Babylon will try to shape you, but Jesus says, "Hold on to what you have... I will write on [you] the name of my God and the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on [you] my new name" (Revelation 3:12).

PRAYER—"How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! (1 John 3:1). Lord, never let me forget who I am, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Daniel 1:8-16

DARE TO BE DIFFERENT

But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine. Daniel 1:8

Daniel and his friends were supposed to eat food and drink wine from the king's table. But some of the meats violated dietary laws for God's people in the time before Jesus. Worse yet, the foods at Babylon's royal feasts were dedicated to pagan gods.

Daniel chose to act as one of God's people, not as a pagan. He could have said, "I have no choice but to eat whatever the king's official gives me." But Daniel dared to be different. He respectfully asked the chief official for a different diet. With God's help, Daniel convinced him. The four godly friends ended up stronger and healthier than the pagans who ate the royal food.

Young people still face tough choices. You may feel pressure to go along with anti-Christian ideas in order to get good grades. You may feel pressure to join in drunken parties or immoral sex. You may be told to work on Sunday instead of worshipping. You may be told to cut corners on quality and mislead customers. You may be tempted to think, "I have no choice. Success depends on acting like a pagan." But you *always* have a choice. You can choose to stand for what's right, or you can choose to sell your soul. So dare to be different.

Dare to be a Daniel.

Dare to stand alone.

Dare to have a purpose firm.

Dare to make it known.

Stand for God when you're young, and God will stand with you forever.

PRAYER

Take my life and let it be
consecrated, Lord, to thee.

Take my heart—it is thine own;
it shall be thy royal throne. Amen.

Daniel 1:17-21

EXCELLENCE WITHOUT EXCUSES

In every matter of wisdom and understanding, [they were] ten times better.

Daniel 1:20

Daniel and his three friends had many things against them. Torn from family and homeland, they had to live in a foreign country and learn a new language. They were a racial minority and faced religious discrimination. They could have made many excuses for becoming useless or downright evil.

But these youngsters aimed for excellence, not excuses. They did not waste energy on anger or self-pity. They worked hard and studied hard. They trusted the Lord, and “God gave them knowledge and understanding” (1:17). They did their best and became “ten times better” than those around them.

This brave faith and pursuit of excellence started young and continued through every change of life. As an old man, Daniel still “distinguished himself ... by his exceptional qualities... he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent” (6:3-4). His skill was immense, his honesty unquestioned. From youth to old age, Daniel had no time for excuses. He was too busy doing his best.

Like Daniel and his friends, choose excellence, not excuses. Be a winner, not a whiner. Don’t expect failure just because of a painful childhood, unfair treatment, discrimination, or whatever else makes your life difficult. Such things are challenges to overcome, not excuses for giving up or going bad. Trust God and try your best. “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord” (Colossians 3:23-24).

PRAYER—“Fill thou my life, O Lord my God, in every part with praise, that my whole being may proclaim thy being and thy ways.” For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

Daniel 2:1-13

PHONY FORTUNE TELLERS

The astrologers answered the king, "There is not a man on earth who can do what the king asks." Daniel 2:10

The fortune tellers of Babylon had a dream job: they got paid a fortune to listen to dreams and to explain the hidden meaning. When the king called them in to explain his latest dream, the psychics and horoscope experts expected a big payday. They smiled and said, "Tell us the dream, and we will interpret it."

The king shot back, "You tell me!" Weren't these men supposed to be mind readers? If they couldn't tell the king his dream, why should he believe anything they said about the dream's meaning? The king demanded that they first tell him his dream and then explain its meaning. If they failed, he would destroy them and their houses. If they succeeded, he would pay huge rewards.

The psychics and astrologers quit smiling. Their dream job had become a nightmare. They had no idea what the king had dreamed and no way to find out. They stammered, "There is not a man on earth who can do what the king asks! No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among men."

Only God reads minds. Only God know the future. And God does not speak through crystal balls, horoscopes, palm reading, psychic hot lines, Nostradamus, or other phony baloney. God speaks only through his chosen prophets and apostles, whose words are now written in the Bible. So forget fortune tellers who cannot read minds or see the future. Believe in God alone.

PRAYER—O righteous God, who searches minds and hearts, who knows and directs the future, protect me from deceivers. Help me trust your truth. Amen.

Daniel 2:14-30

REVEALER OF MYSTERIES

“The revealer of mysteries showed you what is going to happen.” Daniel 2:29

Daniel and his friends had no magic power to read minds or predict the future. Their only hope was to pray. And God answered. Thanks to the Revealer of mysteries, Daniel told the astonished king his exact dream and what it revealed about the future.

Some people today don't believe God knows the whole future. They can't figure out how God could know people's free choices until after those choices were made. But if you think there's anything God doesn't know, it only means you don't know God.

God knows all future people who will ever live. He knows every choice they will ever make. He knows the future of every society and nation, every atom and galaxy. God knows all things, and he directs all things according to his purpose. The Lord says, "I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please... What I have said, that I will bring about; what I have planned, that will I do" (Isaiah 46:9-11).

Some people speak of God taking risks. But God doesn't risk; he reigns. God is never surprised by an unforeseen event, never prevented from carrying out his plan. "He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him, "What have you done?" (Daniel 4:35).

PRAYER—"Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are his... he knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with him. I thank and praise you, O God." Amen. (2:21-23)

Daniel 2:31-49

ROCK OF AGES

The rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth. Daniel 2:35

The statue in the king's dream represented human power focused in four great empires. The head of gold was Nebuchadnezzar's empire of Babylon. Next would come the Medo-Persian empire, the silver chest and arms. After that would come Alexander the Great's bronze empire of the Greeks. Then would come the iron empire of Rome, the strongest in many ways, but with divisions and weaknesses, like iron mixed with clay.

The rock not made by human hands was formed by God himself in Mary's womb during the time of Rome's iron empire. The small rock at first looked unimpressive compared to the "enormous, dazzling, awesome" statue. What was one poor Jewish baby compared to the might of the emperors? But the Christ who seemed so small in a manger and so helpless on a cross turned out to be mightier than all tyrants. Great, glittering empires have been blown away, but the small rock has become a huge mountain that fills the whole earth.

God revealed all this to Daniel 600 years before Jesus' birth. The four empires rose and fell, and over the past 2,000 years the kingdom of Christ has spread worldwide and outlasted every ruler and political system. In hindsight we see that Christ has done exactly what Daniel prophesied, smashing political idols and building his kingdom. Believe in the dream come true, the King of kings, the Rock of ages—Jesus Christ.

PRAYER--"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever... Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns." (Rev. 11:15, 19:6)

Daniel 3:1-7

MASTER MANIPULATOR

All ... fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. Daniel 3:7

Adolph Hitler knew how to control people. The Nazi dictator used films and flags as visuals. He used music to sway people. He used prominent people to pressure their peers. Backing it all up was the threat of death ovens. The tyrant's tools were nothing new.

Many centuries earlier Nebuchadnezzar used similar methods of control. He set up an image as a splendid visual. He used musical instruments as the signal to worship the god of government. He ordered officials at every level—everybody who was somebody—to bow all at the same time. Backing it all up was the threat of a blazing furnace, a death oven.

Satan is the master manipulator. Satan goes after our eyes and ears, our desires and fears. In countries ruled by dictators, Satan uses statues and pictures of “the great leader,” government-controlled music and media, rigid conformity and social pressure, and cruel threats. In freer societies, Satan uses vile images on a screen, wicked music in a headset, pressure to be cool, and fear of not fitting in.

Don't assume that something must be okay just because everyone around you is doing it. Almost everybody worshiped the king's image. Almost everybody in Germany went along with Hitler. When “everyone is doing it,” dare to be different. “Resist Satan, standing firm in the faith” (1 Peter 5:9)

PRAYER—“Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings from the wicked who assail me, from my mortal enemies who surround me.” In Jesus' mighty name, Amen. (Psalm 17:8-9)

Daniel 3:8-18

BUT IF NOT

“Our God... will deliver us... But if not... we will not serve your gods or worship the image.” Daniel 3:17,18 KJV

In the darkest days of World War II, Hitler’s mighty army trapped a weaker British force near the seaside town of Dunkirk. Escape seemed impossible. The Nazis paused for a few days, preparing to deliver the final blow. In that desperate hour, a British officer sent a message to his homeland: BUT IF NOT.

Nowadays, when few know the Bible, people might respond to such a message by saying, “Huh?” But in 1940, the officer’s message fired up British civilians. They recognized the biblical words of three young men who believed that God would rescue them from the fire—*but if not* they still would not bow to the dictator’s idol. Neither would the British bow to Hitler’s Nazi ideology, even if they died resisting. Inspired by that message, thousands of British boat-owners crossed dangerous waters, braved Nazi firepower, and rescued over 350,000 troops. Historians call it “the miracle of Dunkirk.” The forces of freedom lived to fight another day, and they won.

Faith is full confidence that God can rescue us from anything. Faith is also full commitment to God even if he chooses not to rescue us. Heroes of faith know nothing can kill them if God wants them to go on living. Heroes of faith also would rather lay down their lives than deny God. “This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4).

PRAYER—Lord Jesus, our comfort in life and death, increase our faith.

Strengthen our confidence and our commitment, that we may stand firm for your sake. Amen.

Daniel 3:19-30

FIREPROOF

“Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed.”

Daniel 3:25

A century before the three friends faced Babylon’s fire, God foretold exile and persecution, but he also told his people, “Fear not, for I have redeemed you... When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze” (Isaiah 43:1-2). God kept his Word. While pagan soldiers burned, *not a hair* of God’s faithful was singed. They were fireproof, thanks to the fourth “man” in the fire. This awesome figure was either an angel or, more likely, the Son of God himself.

If the Lord fireproofs the faithful, what about believers who have died in the fires of persecution? Early Christians were lit as torches by the cruel emperor Nero. Reformation heroes were burned at the stake. Countless martyrs in various ages have died for their faith. Did God fail them? Not at all. Jesus said, “They will put some of you to death... But *not a hair* of your head will perish. By standing firm you will gain life” (Luke 21:16-19).

In the furnace, God showed how he saves all believers from fire. Jesus descended into hell to make his people safe from the flames. “Raging fire... will consume the enemies of God” (Hebrews 10:27), as fire burned the king’s soldiers. But fireproof believers will be resurrected to enjoy “the glorious freedom of the children of God... the redemption of our bodies” (Romans 8:21-23). As the three friends were promoted, we will be promoted to reign with Christ.

PRAYER—Mighty Father, give us faith under fire. Dear Savior, walk with us through the flames of affliction. Holy Spirit, equip us to rule vast realms as sons and daughters of the King. Amen.

Daniel 4:1-18

THE MOST HIGH

“The Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes.” Daniel 4:17

In King Nebuchadnezzar’s early years, Babylon had two main rivals, Assyria and Egypt. In 612 B.C. Babylon crushed Assyria and made it part of the Babylonian empire. In 605 B.C. Babylon defeated the Egyptian army. After that Nebuchadnezzar mopped up lesser nations, including Judah and its capital, Jerusalem.

Nebuchadnezzar took pride in these conquests. The king thought that Babylon alone had triumphed over Assyria and Egypt. He didn't realize that long ago, God’s prophets had declared Assyria’s downfall and Egypt’s defeat. The king thought that his unstoppable armies had crushed Judah and Jerusalem. He didn't realize that God’s prophets had predicted the destruction of Jerusalem long before it ever happened, as God's judgment on Judah’s wickedness. The king was proud of his power, but he was really just God's errand boy.

God is not merely an inner feeling. He is the Most High. Jesus is not just an inspiring teacher. He is King of kings, Ruler of presidents and prime ministers, Master of history. He raises up governments for his own purposes, and he can bring them down. Nebuchadnezzar thought he was a tough guy, but God scared him sick just by sending a dream. The king felt successful and secure, yet a mere word from God could take away his mind and his crown. "I most high" is a lie. It soon becomes a nightmare.

PRAYER—“How awesome is the Lord Most High, the great King over all the earth. God reigns over the nations; God is seated on his holy throne.” (Psalm 47) We worship you, Lord. Amen.

Daniel 4:19-27

FINAL WARNING

“Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed.” Daniel 4:27

Nebuchadnezzar had a huge name, a huge army, a huge empire, and a huge ego. As a commander, he won great victories. As a builder, he constructed the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It was all for his own power and glory (4:30).

British statesman Lord Acton said, “Power corrupts. Absolute power corrupts absolutely.” Nebuchadnezzar had absolute power. “Those the king wanted to put to death, he put to death; those he wanted to spare, he spared; those he wanted to promote, he promoted; those he wanted to humble, he humbled” (5:19). The king’s word was law—or so he thought. Daniel spoke of a higher law and warned the king to turn from sin and do right.

Nebuchadnezzar loved the glory of conquest, regardless of how many troops and civilians perished in his campaigns. He loved the splendor of grand buildings, regardless of how many slaves toiled miserably to make them. Daniel told the king to be kind to the crushed, to stop boasting of victories and start caring about victims, to stop gloating over his opulence and start helping the oppressed. If the king would heed Daniel’s warning, his prosperity might continue. Otherwise the nightmare would surely come true.

If you are prospering, do you take pride in being a self-made success? Do you live in luxury without caring for the needy? Wise up, or God will bring you down.

PRAYER—Lord, my talents are gifts from you. Much of my success would be impossible without other people. Give me a humble heart to glorify you and to be kind to others, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

Daniel 4:28-37

SANITY RESTORED

“I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored.” Daniel 4:34

The king’s officials knew something was wrong when the king went to the palace lawn for lunch—and started eating the grass. The only command he could give was "Mooooo." Sure, Nebuchadnezzar had been a great commander and a skilled ruler, but when a king starts thinking he's a cow, it's time to put him out to pasture!

When politicians oppose God, what does the Almighty do? "The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them" (Psalm 2:4). The Lord certainly had a good laugh at Nebuchadnezzar's expense. One moment the man was a military genius, a proud monarch; the next he was half cow, half bird, completely crazy. He was not fit to live anywhere but in the wild.

If insanity is being out of touch with reality, Nebuchadnezzar was insane long before he thought he was a cow. He was insane to think that he was supreme and accountable to no one. Ignoring the Most High is as crazy as thinking you're a cow or a bird.

Nebuchadnezzar returned to his right mind only after he looked up to heaven. That's the only way any of us can be truly sane, truly in touch with reality: look up to heaven, and forget the crazy idea that we are in charge. “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up” (1 Peter 5:5-6). PRAYER—“Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done... For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”

Daniel 5:1-12

PARTY CRASHER

Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall. Daniel 5:5

The rich and famous roared with laughter. This king really knew how to throw a party. The most hilarious part came when he mocked a conquered country and its religion. An invisible God named *I AM*—what a joke! How could those fool Jews ever have worshiped such a deity? The party animals enjoyed the orgy, they guzzled wine from *I AM*'s golden goblets, and they praised their gods of sex and success.

Suddenly the laughter died. *I AM* crashed the party. He didn't do much, really. A hand appeared and wrote just four words. But that was enough to leave the king pale and trembling with terror.

What did the writing mean? Nobody knew. Finally they brought in a diehard worshiper of *I AM* named Daniel. Years ago this old Jew had been an important advisor for Nebuchadnezzar, but Daniel had been sidelined during Belshazzar's administration. Now King Belshazzar himself was about to be sidelined—permanently.

"Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked" (Galatians 6:7). When Belshazzar mocked God, his feast became a funeral. When church people handled Holy Communion in an unholy way, many got sick and some died (1 Corinthians 11:30). If we profane sacred things, we invite judgment. This is a stern warning to the wicked. It is strong encouragement if you worship the great *I AM* and want all mockery of him to end.

PRAYER—"How long will the enemy mock you, O God? You are my king from of old. Remember how the enemy has mocked you. Rise up, O God, and defend your cause." For your glory, Amen. (Psalm 74)

Daniel 5:13-31

WHAT DO YOU WEIGH?

“You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting.” Daniel 5:27

Daniel spoke truth without flattery: “Sir, you have no excuse. You knew of the time Nebuchadnezzar’s pride cost him his mind and his throne. But you remained proud, praised idols, and mocked God. You have been weighed, and you don’t measure up. You’re doomed.”

If Belshazzar should have known better, what about you? You know more than he did; you have the whole Bible and the truth of Jesus. If God destroyed Belshazzar for not learning from Nebuchadnezzar and for drinking from sacred goblets, “how much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?” (Hebrews 10:29)

If God’s revelation is on one side of the scales and your response is on the other, how much do you weigh? Do you measure up? Nobody does. “All have turned away, they have together become worthless” (Romans 3:12). Only Jesus’ perfect life and precious blood can provide what is lacking and balance the scale for you.

Accept Christ by faith. Don’t mock or ignore him. Instead, love God and value what he values. Daniel knew Babylon had no future, so he didn’t care about rewards that would perish overnight. We, too, live in a perishing world whose rewards will not last. Seek the kingdom of God with its eternal rewards, and count on Christ.

PRAYER—“Search me, O God, and know my heart. Test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” Amen. (Psalm 139)

Daniel 6:1-9

SQUEAKY CLEAN

“We will never find any basis for charges... unless it has something to do with the law of his God.” Daniel 6:5

Daniel was so talented and trustworthy that King Darius wanted to put him in charge of the whole kingdom. That made the other officials jealous and nervous: jealous that Daniel got the promotion they wanted, and nervous that honest Daniel would not let them go on with bribes, backstabbing, and misuse of government money.

Like many politicians before and since, they tried to bring down their rival by digging up dirt on him. They figured everybody has a dark secret somewhere or makes a wrong move at some point. But no matter how deep they dug, no matter how much they spied, these veterans of dirty politics couldn't come up with anything on Daniel. The man was squeaky clean. They couldn't get him in trouble for being bad, so they would have to nail him for being too good!

These clever crooks went to King Darius with flattery: "Who needs God when they have you, O divine Darius? People should put their faith in the blessings of big government. Why not outlaw prayer for a while? Faith and prayer don't belong in work or school or government anyway. All who insist on praying are religious fanatics, enemies of society. Such people ought to be lion chow!"

Are you a Daniel? Are you skilled and honest in your work? If someone spied on you, would they find that you live by God's Word? If you were accused of serving God, would there be enough evidence to convict you?

PRAYER—Father in heaven, forgive my sins and make me clean. Make me a noble person who suffers for being good, not for being evil. Make me like Jesus. Amen.

Daniel 6:10-16

PRAYER PATTERN

Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God. Daniel 6:10

A friend asked me, "Do you know the #1 wrecker of spiritual life and family relationships? Fast food!"

"Fast food?" I snorted. "Fast food may be bad for your body, but how does it hurt relationships?"

My friend explained that with microwaves and fast food restaurants, many families don't sit down at meals together. Mealtime used to be a built-in pause for family members to spend time with each other and with God, but mealtime is vanishing.

My friend probably blamed too much on fast food, but he was right about one thing: relationships take time. Many of us don't have a daily pattern where we set aside time for our family members or for God. Few families read the Bible and pray at mealtime or at any other time of day. As a result, we feel distant from God, far from family members, and burnt out by daily demands.

Daniel had a daily prayer pattern, and he would not let anything ruin it: not busyness, not rivals, not kingly decrees, not even hungry lions. Daniel would rather spend a night with lions than go a day without prayer.

Don't let Big Macs or busy schedules keep you from doing what even lions couldn't keep Daniel from doing. The time you spend with God is the key to everything else you do. If you want to become a person like Daniel, stick to a daily prayer pattern like Daniel's.

PRAYER—Lord, teach us to pray without ceasing. By your Spirit, fill us with such love for you and such faith in your power that nothing can keep us from daily conversation with you. Amen.

Daniel 6:17-28

RESCUED FROM LIONS

“My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions.” Daniel 6:22

Daniel didn't land in a den of lions that just happened to be friendly. Those man-eaters were so vicious and hungry that they took only a few moments to devour a whole gang of bad guys. Yet the lions went all the previous night without harming Daniel. God's angel and Daniel's faith “shut the mouths of lions” (Hebrews 11:33).

God's power and our faith form an unbeatable combination. No lion can harm us, not even the ultimate man-eater, Satan. “Your enemy the devil goes around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith” (1 Peter 5:8-9). People without God are easy prey for Satan, but the devil cannot devour God's faithful.

Christians fed to lions in Roman arenas knew about the miracle of Daniel's physical rescue from a lion's den, but they knew the resurrection of a martyr would be even greater (Hebrews 11:35). By faith you can survive every showdown with Satan and death. With Daniel you can say, “My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions.” With the apostle Paul you can say, “The Lord stood at my side and gave me strength... And I was delivered from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safe to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.” (2 Timothy 4:17-18)

PRAYER—“O Lord, be not far off; O my Strength, come quickly to help me. Rescue me from the mouth of the lions” (Psalm 22). “Deliver us from the evil one.” For Jesus' sake, Amen.

Daniel 7:1-14

SON OF MAN

There before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven.

Daniel 7:13

In Daniel's vision, the lion with eagle's wings was Babylon. God humbled Babylon's Nebuchadnezzar with insanity, then gave him the heart of a man. The bear chewing three ribs was Medo-Persia, which devoured the three kingdoms of Babylon, Lydia, and Egypt. The leopard was Greece. Its wings pictured the speed of Alexander's conquests; its four heads pictured the empire's four-way division after Alexander died. The beast with iron teeth and bronze claws was imperial Rome with its deadly war machine. The beastly urge for world domination would sprout various horns, including a final, vicious loudmouth. All had power for a time, but none of them could approach God's throne and reign supreme. Only one could do that.

Jesus often called himself "the Son of Man," the Savior Daniel dreamed of. When Jesus was on trial, he told his enemies, "In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Matthew 26:64). Jesus was crucified for saying this and declaring himself on God's level. But Jesus rose from the dead and went to God's throne. When he later appeared in a vision, he looked like a son of man *and* like the Ancient of Days (Revelation 1:13-16). The Son of Man is one with God. We will all see him someday, "coming with the clouds of heaven... His kingdom is one that will never be destroyed" (Daniel 7:13-14).

PRAYER—"Father, let your hand rest on the man at your right hand, the son of man... Restore us, O Lord God Almighty; make your face shine upon us that we may be saved." (Psalm 80) Amen

Daniel 7:15-28

ANTICHRIST

He will speak against the Most High and oppress his saints. Daniel 7:25

The four empires in Daniel's vision all treated government as God and attacked God's faithful. Babylon's Nebuchadnezzar threatened fire for any who would not worship his image. Persia's Darius threatened lions for those who prayed to any god but himself. The Greco-Syrian dictator Antiochus IV claimed divinity and murdered Jews who kept walking with God. Rome's "divine" emperors killed Christians who declared "Jesus is Lord" and not "Caesar is Lord."

History is an ongoing conflict between the city of God and the city of man, between Christ and Antichrist. The last day will come after a final rebellion led by the ultimate "man of lawlessness... proclaiming himself to be God" (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4). He will "utter proud words and blasphemies." He will target God's people for destruction and set up a worldwide government. "All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the book of life" (Revelation 13:5-8).

Antichrist's reign will be terrible but short. "The Lord Jesus will overthrow [him] with the breath of his mouth and destroy [him] by the splendor of his coming" (2 Thess. 2:8). Authority over all nations "will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High" (Daniel 7:27). "They will reign forever and ever" (Revelation 22:5). After the ultimate villain comes ultimate victory.

PRAYER—Lord Jesus, you will triumph over Antichrist, so we trust you for victory over lesser antichrists currently opposing you and your people. Keep us alert, faithful, and bold. Amen.

Daniel 8:1-14

TRIBULATION

It took away the daily sacrifice... truth was thrown to the ground. Daniel 8:11,13

Historians speak of Alexander as “the Great”; Scripture merely calls him a goat’s horn (8:5-8,21). After he defeated Persia, nothing could stop Alexander but himself. At the height of his power, the 33-year-old conqueror died following a drunken binge. His empire spread Greek humanism, emphasizing reason, art, and sports. The system was man-centered, not biblical. It approved pagan religion, baby killing, sexual perversion, and other evils.

Greek humanism later grew another horn: Antiochus. This aggressor wanted to change “the Beautiful Land” of Israel. Antiochus tried to replace biblical faith and culture with “civilized” humanism. Many Jews went along with him, rejected God’s covenant, and became humanists. The rest suffered horribly. Antiochus banned Sabbath observance. He plundered the temple, built a pagan altar over God’s holy altar, and slaughtered pigs there, an abomination. Anyone caught with a Bible scroll was killed and the scroll was burned. Any baby found circumcised was hung around the mother’s neck, and then the whole family was killed. Daniel’s vision of this ruler made him sick (8:27). Antiochus was a preview of Antichrist.

We do not live under Antiochus or Antichrist (at least not yet). Most of us are free to read the Bible and to worship in church. Make the most of that precious freedom while you have it.

PRAYER—Lord, thank you for freedom of worship. Make our faith strong enough to hold up under any future attacks we may face. Help your people in some places who are persecuted right now. Amen.

Daniel 8:15-27

NOT JUST HUMAN

Yet he will be destroyed, but not by human power. Daniel 8:25

Antiochus was nasty and tricky, “a stern-faced king, a master of intrigue.” He acted in Satan’s power and followed Satan’s pattern. Just as Satan is “a murderer... and the father of lies” (John 8:44), Antiochus was a deceiver and destroyer. Just as Satan proudly tried to replace God, Antiochus considered himself “superior” (8:25) and called himself *Epiphanes*, “God manifest.”

In foreseeing Antiochus, Daniel’s vision previewed “the time of the end” (8:17). Like Antiochus, Antichrist will “become very strong, but not by his own power” (8:24). Satan will give antichrist “his power and his throne and great authority” (Revelation 13:2). He will deceive, destroy, and claim to be God. Antichrist will be the ultimate humanist, saying that nobody is higher than himself. This attitude is not just human but demonic.

Satan and his human allies are strong, but God is stronger. Antiochus harmed many, but three years later the Maccabee brothers led faithful Jews to victory and rededicated the temple, an event celebrated at Hanukah. Antiochus Epiphanes died soon afterward of an unseen, unknown cause.

Antichrist will rise even higher and fall even harder than Antiochus. Driven by Satan, Antichrist will “take his stand against the Prince of Princes.” The Lord Jesus will fight back and will cast Antichrist, his followers, and his boss—the devil—into eternal fire (Revelation 19:20; 20:10). The man who claims to be God cannot match the Man who really is God.

PRAYER—Lord, help us, for our battle is not against flesh and blood but against supernatural forces of evil. Make us strong in you and in your mighty power until the final victory. Amen.

Daniel 9:1-19

PRAYER POWER

I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting.

Daniel 9:3

Prayer believes God's promise. Daniel read a biblical prophecy that God would bring his people back from exile after seventy years. Daniel believed God and realized the time was near. His faith did not make him take the promise for granted; it encouraged him to pray harder. Our prayers without God's promises would be mere wishes; God's promises without our prayers would go unclaimed. Where God is about to fulfill a promise, he moves people to pray.

Prayer depends on grace. Daniel admitted the sins of his people and did not exempt himself from their guilt. He based his appeal not on human works but on God's undeserved mercy. We too must say, "The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him... We do not make requests of you because we are righteous but because of your great mercy. O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and act!" (9:9,18)

Prayer prizes God's holy city and God's holy name. Daniel prayed not just for personal success but for the building of God's kingdom and the glory of God's name. When Jesus says, "I will do whatever you ask in my name" (John 14:13), he does not mean that we can get every selfish request by saying "Jesus" as a magic formula. He means that when we pray for the advance of his kingdom and for the glory of his name, he will keep his promise and do what we ask.

PRAYER—God of truth, Savior of sinners, Builder of the eternal city, teach us to pray with power. Fulfill your promises, pour out your grace, and advance your kingdom. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Daniel 9:20-27

GABRIEL'S GOOD NEWS

While I was still in prayer, Gabriel ... came to me in swift flight... He instructed me. Daniel 9:21

Daniel prayed for God to bring the Jews back from exile and restore Jerusalem. God answered his prayer by sending the angel Gabriel to explain that the Lord would indeed rebuild his city—and go on to do other things, such as “put an end to sin, atone for wickedness [and] bring in everlasting righteousness” (9:24). The Anointed One (*Messiah* in Hebrew; *Christ* in Greek) would appear 483 years after Jerusalem was restored (seven “sevens” plus sixty-two “sevens” is 483.) The Anointed One would be cut off, but his death would be the ultimate answer to Daniel’s prayer for God’s grace.

Many years after Gabriel came to Daniel and called him “highly esteemed,” Gabriel came to Mary and called her “highly favored.” He told the young virgin that she would have a miracle baby named Jesus, meaning *the Lord saves*. “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High,” said Gabriel. “He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end” (Luke 1:26-33).

Gabriel’s good news came true, of course. After God’s Anointed One grew to adulthood, he was crucified and “cut off” from life in order to save sinners. Christ Jesus “appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself... and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him” (Hebrews 9:26).

PRAYER—“My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.”
Thank you, dear Jesus. Amen.

Daniel 10:1-11:1

BE STRONG!

“Do not be afraid, O man highly esteemed,” he said. “Peace! Be strong now; be strong.” Daniel 10:19

Sometimes events in the news are hard to watch. But the news we can't see is even more overwhelming: fierce conflict in the spirit realm. Daniel was no wimp; he dealt calmly with mighty kings and major crises. Yet his vision of “a great war” devastated him for three full weeks.

Much more is happening in this world than meets the eye. Behind the ruler and religion of Persia loomed a demon “prince of Persia.” Behind Alexander, Antiochus, and Greek aggression loomed a demon “prince of Greece.” Behind the embattled people of God stood the archangel Michael. Behind rulers and religions of many nations today are dreadful demons contending against God's angels.

The more we learn about war in the spirit realm, the more it may seem that we are as helpless and useless as insects in a battle between elephants. But we are more like hobbits in the war between gigantic powers. We may be small, but we can make a big difference. Like Daniel, we may feel weak as we pray, yet our prayers mobilize God's air force and result in a breakthrough.

We are up against “the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:12). But we do not fight alone. Michael and his angels triumph over Satan and his demons, and we too triumph in the power of Christ (Revelation 12:7-11). So don't be afraid. Be strong!

PRAYER—“I love you, O Lord, my strength. I call to the Lord, who is worthy of praise, and I am saved from my enemies. You arm me with strength for battle. Exalted be God my Savior!” Amen. (Psalm 18)

Daniel 11:2-20

HEADLINES AHEAD OF TIME

His successor will send out a tax collector... In a few years, however, he will be destroyed. Daniel 11:20

After some shocking events in the news, a shaken pastor began a public prayer by saying, "Lord, have you read this morning's *New York Times*?" Daniel would understand the pastor's dismay, but he would remind us that God doesn't need to read yesterday's news; he's been planning on it all along.

God's angel told Daniel major events many years ahead of time. Daniel recorded the Persian attempt to conquer Greece (v. 2); the Greek conquests led by Alexander (v. 3); the four-way division of Alexander's empire after he died (v. 4); and various alliances and conflicts between two areas that had been parts of Alexander's empire: the part centered in Egypt (King of the South) and the part centered in Syria (King of the North). Daniel recorded all this in 539 BC, six decades *before* the Persian invasion, two centuries *before* Alexander's campaigns, 350 years *before* Seleucus IV was betrayed by his tax director (v. 20). Though Daniel was distressed at much that he saw, he knew God would be in charge through it all.

God knows the headlines ahead of time. He knows movers and shakers, ruthless men and scheming women, before they are even born. He knows in advance every treaty, secret deal, military campaign, tax policy, assassination, and strange twist. Headlines may shake us, but headlines do not shake God. He foresees and reigns over all.

PRAYER—"The plans of the Lord stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations. You are our help and our shield. May your unfailing love rest upon us, O Lord." Amen. (Psalm 33)

Daniel 11:21-35

ABOMINATION

They will set up the abomination that causes desolation... but the people who know their God will firmly resist him. Daniel 11:31-32

In 168 B.C. Antiochus desecrated the temple in Jerusalem with pagan altars and pigs' blood. That abomination fit Daniel's vision, but more would come. Jesus warned his generation that they, too, would "see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation' spoken of through the prophet Daniel" (Matthew 24:15). The temple would be destroyed and Jerusalem would suffer its worst distress ever (24:2,21). Jesus' words came true in 70 A.D. Roman legions led by Titus marched in with images of the "divine" emperor. Titus massacred many and demolished the temple.

The final abomination is yet to come, when Antichrist "sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God" (2 Thessalonians 2:4). Whether this happens in a rebuilt temple or in the upper leadership of the Christian church, Antichrist will twist what ought to be holy and healthy into a filthy horror.

"The antichrist is coming," but "even now many antichrists have come" (1 John 2:18). So don't just guess about the end times; beware of "the spirit of the antichrist" right now (1 John 4:3). "Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist" (1 John 2:22). Every religion that denies Jesus as God and Savior, every government that rejects and opposes his rule, is an abomination like that of Antichrist.

PRAYER—Father, fill us with your Spirit of truth, that we may reject lies and abominations. Help us to firmly resist corruption and to remain faithful to Christ. Amen.

Daniel 11:36-45

ARMAGEDDON

Yet he will come to his end, and no one will help him. Daniel 11:45

There have been many guesses about who Antichrist might be, what nation he might come from, and the meaning of his code number 666 (Revelation 13:18). Millions read fiction about Antichrist. Many are fascinated by this dreadful figure and the horrors he will bring. However, God tells us about Antichrist not to fuel speculation nor to scare us but to *encourage* us. Whatever we may guess about Antichrist, the most important fact is this: he loses!

“He will invade many countries... He will set out in a great rage to destroy and annihilate many” (11:40,44). Aided by a false teacher performing demonic miracles, Antichrist will gather earth’s rulers for battle “to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon... They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen, and faithful followers.” When Christ appears, Antichrist’s armies will panic and perish. With no one to help, Antichrist and the false prophet will be captured and “thrown alive into the fiery lake” of hell (Revelation 16:16; 17:14; 19:20).

Is the final Antichrist already alive? Will the battle of Armageddon be fought in our time? We don’t know. We do know that when Armageddon does come, it will be “the great day of God Almighty” (Rev. 16:14). Until then, we must follow our Commander’s orders, trusting his strategy, confident of his victory. PRAYER—“Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory... Come, Lord Jesus. May the grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people. Amen.”

Daniel 12:1-13

SHINING LIKE STARS

Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens... like the stars forever and ever. Daniel 12:3

After hearing some of Daniel's visions, you might echo Daniel and say: "I heard, but I did not understand" (12:8). Still, many things make more sense in light of resurrection. If you wonder how God can let his enemies prosper and his friends suffer, it helps to jump ahead in the story and read the last chapter. The wicked may gain wealth and power, but they do not get away with their sin; they rise again to shame and everlasting contempt. Wise, righteous believers may suffer many attacks and heartbreaks, but they do not believe in vain: they will rise again and shine forever.

Resurrection is the grand reality that makes sense of world history. It is the only satisfying answer to the problem of godly people suffering. It is also a very personal promise. Near the end of a long, hard life, Daniel was told, "You will rest, and then at the end of the days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance" (12:13). God says the same to every believer.

Is your name in God's book of life? Have you become wise through God's Word and righteous through Jesus' blood? Believe in the risen Lord. Receive Jesus as your personal Savior. Join his mission to "lead many to righteousness." Then you can look forward to joining Jesus, Daniel, and all God's people who "will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matthew 13:43).

PRAYER—Thank you, Lord, for what you have taught me through Daniel's life and dreams. I embrace your reign over my life. May I shine for you now and shine with you forever, for Jesus' sake. Amen.