

Daniel Devotionals-Today in the Word

Daniel 1

Daniel 1:1-2; Jeremiah 25:1-14

During Jehoiakim's reign, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon invaded the land. - 2 Kings 24:1

TODAY IN THE WORD

New Year's Eve, 1999, saw the Y2K worriers stocking up on bottled water and canned goods; the turn-of-the-millennium enthusiasts planning extravagant celebrations to usher in the year 2000; and the history purists insisting there was no reason to get excited. These mathematically precise folks argued that the third millennium wouldn't begin until the two-thousandth year had ended and 2001 had begun. In other words, the year 2000 could be the turn of the millennium only if there had been a year zero.

A look at the accounts in Daniel 1 and Jeremiah 25 presents a similar conundrum. Did Nebuchadnezzar lay siege to Jerusalem in the fourth year of Jehoiakim's reign (Jer. 25:1) or the third (Dan. 1:1)? Some scholars believe that the Babylonians didn't begin numbering a king's reign until the year after he took the throne. The ascension year would essentially be that king's "year zero," while Hebrew writers would have referred to it as year number one. Other reasonable explanations exist, but it does make sense that Daniel was trained to use a Babylonian numbering style.

Daniel didn't blindly accept everything about the Babylonian culture, most notably their pagan religion. He was caught in a peculiar situation, as the prophecy of Jeremiah describes. After the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians, Daniel's native nation of Judah had been unwilling to listen to the Word of the Lord—and judgment for their sins was sure. Daniel was taken to Babylon after the first of three major attacks on Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar's forces. He had been forcibly taken to live in exile.

For Daniel, the hope of returning to his homeland wasn't good. Jeremiah foretold that the Babylonian exile would last for seventy years (Jer. 25:11). God allowed Nebuchadnezzar to take the people of Israel, the articles of the temple (Dan. 1:2), and something even more surprising: the role of God's servant (Jer. 25:9).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The authenticity of Daniel is disputed by people who refuse to accept the possibility of the supernatural elements of the book: miraculous rescue, inspired wisdom, and predictive prophecy. Although we may say with our mouths that we accept those truths, believers are sometimes reluctant to open our hearts to God's supernatural intervention. As you study this month, make room for the possibility that God will use you each day as He did Daniel, miraculously and boldly in a land of doubt.

Daniel 1:3-7

Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities. - Romans 13:1

TODAY IN THE WORD

Stella Ho lived in Venezuela for thirty years, running a shop with her unsaved husband. In January 2004, Stella was abducted by three thieves. God used her compassionate spirit and godly influence to change the hearts of her captors. In just eight days, Stella was freed, her captors' hearts were changed, and her husband accepted Christ after witnessing the outpouring of prayer and love from her fellow believers. Stella said, "Our time is short. We never know what may happen to us. We must strive to serve the Lord and discern what we can do for God."

If Daniel had been allowed to plot the course of his own life, he probably wouldn't have picked "abducted by Babylonians" as his first choice. He didn't get to choose his circumstances, but he served the Lord by accepting the position in which God had placed him. We usually remember Daniel for his courageous stands against compromise, but the first test of his allegiance to God was one of humble submission.

Some scholars conclude that Daniel was in his early teens at the time of his abduction, and the word for "young men" in verse 4 supports that theory. For Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, submitting to Babylonian rule could not have been easy. They had been the cream of Judah's crop, members of the nobility, and among the most promising young men in their nation. But their new

captors erased their Jewish names and assigned them names that would identify them with pagan gods.

Daniel and his friends could have rebelled. Along with adopting pagan names, they were to eat from the king's menu, learn the Babylonian language, study their literature, and enter the service of the king. But of all those foreign practices, these four young men would refuse to obey only the dietary guidelines. Overall, Daniel and his friends showed maturity beyond their years. Daniel's right attitude toward divinely appointed leadership gives us our first glimpse of his extraordinary character.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

If you find yourself working for an unsavory boss or living in a town you wish you could flee, take heart. Although you may feel desperate to escape your circumstances, ask God to use you to brighten your surroundings with His glory. That can be done by standing up to people who urge you to do wrong, but it's just as likely God will ask you to perform menial or undesirable tasks as a display of obedience and humility. Making yourself subject to others is a powerful act of faith in God's sovereignty.

Daniel 1:1-20

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

TODAY IN THE WORD

In 1877, a group of Cambridge University students began to study the Bible, pray, and witness to their classmates. This InterVarsity student movement spread across England to Canada, and in 1938 the first U.S. chapter opened at the University of Michigan. Today, more than a thousand InterVarsity staff members work on more than 550 campuses, publish books and training materials, and facilitate events such as the Urbana missions conference.

Like InterVarsity at secular universities, Daniel and his friends in the Babylonian palace stood out by contrast. They were God's lights in a dark place. From a human perspective, though, they were in no position to be leaders. They were young and inexperienced. They were exiles from a conquered nation, taking part in a highly competitive three-year imperial education program for a shot at a civil service job. The training rules were strict; the punishments for violations dire. This was a power-deficit situation if there ever was one!

Yet God called Daniel to be a leader, and Daniel knew that God's sovereign control (see v. 2) actually gave him the upper hand. He resolved not to accept the royal food and wine, and influenced his friends to do the same, probably because the prescribed food would have been offered to idols (v. 8). Instead, he boldly requested a special diet. Given the reality of the situation, he chose a non-confrontational approach: He asked permission from the proper authority and was ready with a ten-day-trial plan when the man (not unexpectedly) balked. God honored these steps of faith, and after the ten days their request was granted. In the end, Daniel and his friends graduated with honor. God gave them success in their studies and even gave Daniel an ability to interpret dreams (vv. 17-20).

This is how Daniel began his career, leading by tact and example and saturating everything he did with faith in the Lord. It wasn't flashy, but it was highly effective. and it honored God.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Instead of feeling overwhelmed by the obstacles to obedience in his life, Daniel tallied up the advantages on his side and stepped out in faith. Servant leadership or witness may seem to you like similar impossibilities. But have you counted the advantages you have? We all have a God who is sovereign over your bosses. You may also have favor in a supervisor's eyes, access to professional training, or whatever your circumstances may offer. You can approach your workplace challenges in the spirit of Daniel and his friends.

Daniel 1:1-17

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

TODAY IN THE WORD

Carolina Panther defensive end Reggie White, the NFL's all-time leader in quarterback sacks, is known for much more than his aggressive play. On and off the field, he has been a consistent witness for Christ.

This past off-season, Reggie turned his energy even more toward ministry. For instance, he and his wife, Sara, have been working with former gang member Nicky Cruz in efforts to reach urban youth. They have given not only money, but also time and energy, involving their whole family in ministry.

Says Reggie, "I would hope that my life off the field and the way that I carried myself and allowed Jesus to take control of my life ...

would have more of an impact than what I accomplished on the field.”

Reggie White’s light shines clear in the brutal world of pro sports. Similarly, Daniel’s witness was bright despite his hostile surroundings. That’s particularly evident in today’s reading, when he had everything to lose.

Daniel and his three friends were starting a three–year training course, reserved for the cream of the crop among Babylon’s captives. But they risked their privileged position by refusing to eat food from the king’s table (v. . Why? Since a portion of this food was offered to idols, and since ceremonially unclean animals were used, eating this food would have defiled them (cf. Ps. 141:4).

They took a stand, diplomatically proposing a ten–day test to the reluctant chief steward. During and after the test, God honored their faith and gave them great success (vv. 15, 17; cf. Ex. 23:25)--this no doubt spoke volumes to both their fellow captives and the court staff. Besides a fine education, God added the gift of interpreting visions and dreams, a gift He used throughout Daniel’s life.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

We suggest today that you spend some time before the Lord examining your witness in the world. Are you representing Him well? Ask Him to show you any changes He wants to make.

Daniel 1:1-21

Those who honor me I will honor. - 1 Samuel 2:30

TODAY IN THE WORD

In the popular children’s book *The Secret Garden*, Frances Burnett tells the story of the young girl Mary Lennox. Her childhood was spent in India, as her father worked for the English government there. For reasons un-known, Mary’s parents kept her hidden from the outside world. died... and Mary was forgotten until some soldiers happened upon her. As there was no family living in India to care for her, Mary was then sent to England to live with her Uncle Archibald Craven whom she had never met, in a place she had never been. far from family and all that is familiar! This happened to Daniel when King Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem and took the people to Babylon and Daniel was probably just a teenager when he was taken. foundation that kept him upright. Daniel had an amazingly strong commitment to the Lord. prisoners refuse to cooperate with their captors. But Daniel took that risk because he had his eye on Someone bigger than the king. He was committed to being pure before God, no matter the cost. Because God honored Daniel’s resolve, his diet became the diet of all the young men being trained for the king’s service (v. 16). And when the three-year training was over, God blessed them further by gifting them beyond the wisest counselors Nebuchadnezzar had around him. It’s worth noting that Daniel chose his battles wisely. He didn’t seem to object to being given a Babylonian name or to being trained in the language and learning of his captors. But when it came to the revealed law and will of God, Daniel was immovable. Daniel knew God and His Word, and nothing could make him say yes, or even maybe, when God had said no.

Daniel 1:3-20

You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you. - Isaiah 26:3

TODAY IN THE WORD

In 1924, Scottish sprinter Eric Liddell found his decisions questioned. His sister Jenny wondered if he was wasting time running races when he could be headed to the mission field. Fellow racers and the British Olympic committee doubted the wisdom of his decision not to race on Sundays. Eric famously told his sister, “I believe that God made me for a purpose, but He also made me fast. When I run it is in His pleasure.” He declined to run his best event, the 100-meter dash in the 1924 Olympics because it was held on Sunday, but he won the gold medal in the 400-meter race.

In our story today we read of Daniel and his friends standing for what was right. Their courage impressed the Babylonian leaders and was blessed by God.

Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were the cream of the crop of Jewish exiles in Babylon (v. 3). They were selected for service to Nebuchadnezzar, an honor that included luxurious meals of the king’s choicest food. The Babylonians stripped away their Hebrew names, but they could not take away their loyalty to God and His Law. Eating the food would have required Daniel and his friends to violate Jewish dietary requirements.

Rather than refuse outright to participate, Daniel asked the chief official whether they could abstain. When the official balked, Daniel proposed a test. After ten days on their diet of vegetables and water, the four Jews were healthier than the others; one wonders how happy the other young men were to discover their access to the king’s lush banquets was now curtailed (v. 16)!

Scripture is clear that God blessed Daniel (vv. 9, 17). All four young men became high officials in Nebuchadnezzar’s court and

sought to give him their best service (see Dan. 2:12-49). At the same time, they all remained faithful to God and continued to pursue obedience to Him as their highest priority (see Daniel 3, 6).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Most of us have obligations at work, school, or our community. At the very least, we are subject to the laws in our country. Daniel gives us an example of how to navigate tensions we might encounter as a follower of Christ and also as an employee, citizen, or student: first, commit to obeying God; second, be a responsible, hard-working contributor; third, try to negotiate solutions; and always surround every situation with prayer (cf. Dan. 2:18).

Daniel 1:8-13

But Daniel resolved not to defile himself. - Daniel 1:8

TODAY IN THE WORD

"Please, sir, I want some more." Those words from Oliver Twist are one of the most famous requests in literature. Even though Oliver spoke on behalf of his fellow starving orphans, barely surviving on paltry servings of gruel, his boldness earned him solitary confinement and dismissal from the parish.

Daniel put himself in similar peril, except he was being offered a feast prepared for a king and he asked to be given less. The text doesn't indicate what exactly about the meat and wine would have defiled Daniel, but we can assume the Babylonians prepared the food in a manner contrary to Mosaic Law. What we do know is that Daniel made up his mind that he wouldn't compromise on the matter of his diet

Daniel's resolve didn't detract from his overall attitude of respect. He asked for permission to have a different diet, and God rewarded him by granting him sympathy from the chief official (v. 9). Personal affection, however, was outweighed by fear of Nebuchadnezzar, and the official wouldn't grant the request. Daniel didn't react stubbornly or brazenly. Instead, he sought out a different opportunity with another authority figure, his personal guard. He asked for a ten-day trial run on a vegetarian diet. His request was reasonable and respectful, and it was phrased to allow the guard an alternative plan of action if the results of the new diet were unfavorable. Notice how Daniel operated within the construct of authority he was under. He opposed ungodly orders without being self-righteous or rebellious.

Both Daniel and the chief official spoke of comparing Daniel and his three friends with other young men their age. We can assume that they weren't the only young Israelites recruited into the three-year training program. Judging by Judah's history of floundering faith, Daniel and his friends were probably very rare examples of people who still remained true to the commands of the Lord. Daniel's faith didn't just stand out against the pagan culture, it was also one of the last signs of hope among God's chosen people.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

It's certainly unacceptable for Christians to silently adopt sinful behavior, but we should not loudly and proudly parade our rightness. If someone orders you to compromise your beliefs, make up your mind to stay true to the Lord. Then ask God to soften your heart to avoid heated conflict or pride. Respect for authority and love for others is more important than drawing attention to ourselves. Remember, forcing the spotlight on our righteousness tends to reveal our sinfulness as well.

Daniel 1:14-21

To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding. - Daniel 1:17

TODAY IN THE WORD

Although it was first introduced in 1972, the Atkins diet made its biggest explosion onto the weight-loss scene in 1999. People who employed the peculiar technique were shedding weight at an astounding rate, while boasting of eating as much bacon, steak, and other fatty foods as they pleased as long as they refrained from carbohydrates. What seemed like a formula for weight gain proved to be an effective weight-loss regimen for many people.

Daniel took more of a high-fiber, low-fat, high-faith approach, but weight loss was what he and his friends were hoping to avoid. At the end of the ten days, they shattered the expectations of the Babylonians, appearing healthier than their meat-eating peers. The results weren't necessarily miraculous, as a diet of beans, grains, fruits, and vegetables can provide more than adequate nutrition even for growing young men.

But the king didn't just want these men for their physical prowess. His chief concern appeared to be the areas of wisdom and understanding (v. 20). And the result of their faithful allegiance to God was unrivaled expertise in foreign fields of study. Daniel was

granted additional insight into dreams and visions. It wasn't the training program that made them so talented. The text clearly names God as the source of their gifts (v. 17).

One might expect a man of Daniel's faith in Jehovah to be marginalized or belittled in the Babylonian court. But Nebuchadnezzar found the faithful four to be ten times better than the competition, and not just the other graduates of the program. Daniel and his friends surpassed the abilities of the king's entire roster of mystical experts.

The last statement in today's reading shows Daniel's longevity of service even until the end of the exile. Through his consistent pattern of faithfulness to the Lord, he was able to see the fulfillment of his purpose: to help restore Israel to her past glory and favor in the eyes of God. Daniel was also proving his credibility as one of the most important of God's prophets.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Why not ask God to bless you with wisdom appropriate to your situation so that He can be glorified today? Perhaps increased emotional understanding and sensitivity could help you witness to your family, or maybe God could grant you insight into scientific and logical matters and use you as an apologist. No matter what you choose, diligently seek out the knowledge of God as a foundation for your development and growth.

Daniel 2

Daniel 2:1-13

No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among men. - Daniel 2:11

TODAY IN THE WORD

After the successful cloning of animals began in the 1990s, a joke made its rounds on the Internet about a proud scientist who said to God, "We can clone humans now, so we don't need you to create people any more." God replied, "Very well, let's see if you can create a man the same way I created Adam." The scientist knew that creating a man from dirt would be difficult, but he agreed. He bent down on his knees to pick up some soil, but God stopped him and said, "Not so fast. You'll have to create your own dirt, too."

Creating something from nothing is a task only for God. The wise men of Babylon likely would have agreed, especially after Nebuchadnezzar threatened to kill them if they couldn't interpret his dream. If they would have known the dream they could have used their methods to come up with an interpretation, however far-flung it might have been. But the king had firmly decided that if the magicians were really magical, they would be able to interpret his dream without being told what it was. This story tells us a lot about king Nebuchadnezzar. He had little patience, especially for those that he perceived to be inept servants. If the wise men couldn't interpret his dream, he would have them cut into pieces and their houses destroyed.

The wise men responded that no mere man could accommodate the request of King Nebuchadnezzar. They recognized that it would take godlike power to know the unspoken thoughts and visions of men, and their gods were completely inaccessible.

The king responded with utter fury. He decided that the entire notion of mystical seers was a sham, and he had no need for spiritual advisers who had such limited powers. Ordering the execution of all the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and astrologers would have meant a major policy change in the Babylonian government and culture, but it also would have dealt a blow to Daniel's purpose. He and his friends were wise men, and the decree of Nebuchadnezzar was their death sentence.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

There are two factions portrayed in today's reading: those who believe all religions are credible, and those who think all religious faith is pointless. The wise men's inability to fulfill the king's request shows the emptiness of false religion. But the king's angry reaction reveals the hopelessness of atheism. Take some time to thank God that He is both all-powerful and all-loving. As you go about your day, remind yourself that God is able to answer your requests and willing to display His power.

Daniel 2:1-28; 46-49

Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings! - Daniel 2:47

TODAY IN THE WORD

When youth pastor Craig Joseph was preaching the gospel to a group of four hundred and fifty kids, he didn't do it alone. Although he was the only one speaking, about twenty brothers and sisters in Christ were praying for him in the church loft. The task may have seemed impossible, but intercessory prayer made all the difference. Throughout history, this has always been the case, as today's reading shows us.

In 604 B.C., Daniel was part of the first deportation to Babylon. His great potential was recognized, and he was trained in Nebuchadnezzar's courts along with other promising Hebrew youths. In addition to intelligence and character, God gave Daniel the ability to interpret dreams. But early on in life, Daniel recognized that even God-given abilities were no substitute for prayer. Faced with the humanly impossible task of not only interpreting but also discerning the king's dream, Nebuchadnezzar's wise men were useless. Perhaps overlooked because of their youth, Daniel and his friends were also sentenced to death with the wise men who had failed.

But Daniel knew that a person fully given to prayer could do what "no man on earth" could (v. 10). Confident of the Lord, Daniel approached the king and was granted a reprieve.

The first thing that Daniel did was enlist the prayer support of his close friends. The Lord then revealed the "mystery" to Daniel. Immediately, even before he saw the king and "saved his life," Daniel praised the God of heaven, who had made such understanding possible. Perhaps God enabled him to dream the same dream or perhaps he simply revealed its content and significance to Daniel. No matter, God did it, and Daniel praised Him for His nature and His faithfulness! Daniel knew that his God was above even a powerful king like Nebuchadnezzar (v. 21).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

How do we respond to what seems absolutely impossible? Many of us often panic. But consider Daniel's response. First, he involved others in praying for him. Then, he praised God in advance for His faithfulness.

Daniel 2:14-18

He urged them to plead for mercy from the God of heaven. - Daniel 2:18

TODAY IN THE WORD

According to Hollywood folklore, Charlie Chaplin's last words were true to form for the comedic actor/director. On his death bed, a priest reading Chaplin last rites said, "May God have mercy on your soul." Chaplin replied, "Why not? After all, it belongs to him."

When Daniel faced death, he showed a proper understanding of God's sovereignty over the situation, but his appeal for mercy was courageous, not comical. When Daniel learned of the king's harsh decree that all the wise men be put to death, he showed no fear and no disrespect. He calmly asked for the reason why he was about to be executed.

Daniel's tact was rewarded with a fair explanation and an opportunity to approach the king himself and ask for more time. He didn't attempt to convince the king that his request was unfair, nor did he manufacture excuses to protect himself. Daniel just asked for time to be able to meet the king's demands, and we have to assume that the temporary stay of execution was granted. (v. 16). If this were a Hollywood movie, Daniel might have used the extra time to plan his escape from Babylon, or he and his fellow wise men might have led a revolt against Nebuchadnezzar. But Daniel and his friends employed a less dramatic but much more effective plan: they prayed. The specific prayer was for mercy, which showed that Daniel had unsurpassed wisdom for so young a man.

The fact that Daniel asked for mercy from God instead of from Nebuchadnezzar showed his faith in the limitless power of God. If he had asked the king for mercy, it would have been evidence of doubt in God's ability to match Nebuchadnezzar's request. But Daniel first turned to God for a solution, and he didn't do it alone.

Daniel urged Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah to pray with him, and that is just one of many examples of Daniel's unique leadership qualities. He didn't just behave spiritually in his own private bubble. He sought to involve his friends in earnest prayer and include them in the miraculous intervening work of God.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

We all come across seemingly impossible tasks and trials. How will you react to the next trial in your life or the one you are currently going through? The temptation is to complain, give up, or think of excuses. You may try to do the impossible through your own strength. Resist those temptations and seek God's help instead. Don't try to prove your own strength by facing the situation alone. Invite some trusted friends to join you in prayer. God owns your circumstances, so ask Him for mercy.

Daniel 2:19-23

He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. He reveals deep and hidden things. - Daniel 2:21, 22

TODAY IN THE WORD

The late Herb Brooks, head coach of the U.S. Olympic Ice Hockey team, was credited by almost everyone as the key to the

Americans' stunning victory over the Soviets in the "Miracle on Ice," voted ESPN's sporting event of the century. After that game, Brooks headed straight for the locker room, allowing his team to enjoy the applause of the exultant crowd. After accomplishing a nearly impossible task, he deflected the glory to his players. He later explained humbly, "It wasn't my spot."

At the outset of today's reading, Daniel was part of a much more important miracle, but he was just as quick to deflect the glory from himself. His act of immediate praise is a lesson in itself, and the content is loaded with valuable doctrine.

Lest he get carried away with his own intellectual prowess, Daniel attributed all power and wisdom to God. But he knew that the power of God extends far beyond one man. God orchestrates every shifting era, including Daniel's exile. This young man was able to see God's purpose in the fall of his native country and the captivity that resulted. God's sovereignty over the placement and removal of kings is a two-edged sword. Daniel had to respect Nebuchadnezzar because he was divinely appointed on the throne. But he also knew that this earthly king was still subject to the power of God, meaning that Daniel couldn't blindly obey everything the king ordered.

Daniel understood the big picture as well as the specific situation. God revealed an otherwise unknowable mystery to Daniel, and God's knowledge extended both to the dark inner workings of a pagan government and to the divine plans for future kingdoms. The content of the dream just revealed to Daniel forecast the future of world powers, and Daniel responded in awe of God's sovereignty.

But even the Master of the Universe took time to answer the request of four young men. God proved once again that He is powerful and accessible. He deserves all the praise, indeed.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

It's critical for us to bring our requests to God, so how much greater is the need to recognize Him for answering our prayers? And how much has God given us that we never even thought to ask for? Take an inventory now specifically of the wisdom and the power that God has imparted to you. Don't forget that God has offered you truth and power that even Daniel didn't fully realize: the mystery of the gospel and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Thank and praise Him for His gifts to you.

Daniel 2:24-35

But there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. - Daniel 2:28

TODAY IN THE WORD

Two men in the service of Macedonian ruler Philip II, father of Alexander the Great, each had only one daily task. The first man began the day by telling the king, "Philip, remember that you are but a man." Likewise, the second man ended each day by inquiring of the king, "Philip, have you remembered that you are but a man?"

That degree of humility is rare in kings and peasants and every station in between. Daniel was able to maintain a humble attitude, but it didn't take long for others to use his wisdom for their own glory. Daniel sought out Arioch, the man charged with the task of executing the less-than-wise men, and told him that he could interpret the king's dream. Notice that Arioch spun the story a bit differently for the king, making it sound as if he personally discovered Daniel among the nameless exiles of Judah.

In contrast to Arioch's false pride, Daniel acknowledged that he was just a man, and he gave all the credit to God, to whom it belonged. Daniel's praise of the Lord isn't some throwaway line, like some athletes who say in post-game interviews, "First, I'd like to thank God—for making me the best player in the world!" Daniel repeatedly states that he is unable to complete the king's task (vv. 27, 30). Three times, in verses 28-30, Daniel uses the word reveal to trace the path of knowledge back to God. Daniel made it known that though the people of God were in exile, God Himself was still in control.

Today, we'll look at the elements of the dream, but we won't delve into Daniel's interpretation until tomorrow. For now, notice the detail Daniel used to describe Nebuchadnezzar's dream. He didn't employ vague references like some bogus psychic. If Daniel had been mistaken about any details, he likely could have been killed. But he didn't play it safe. Daniel had complete faith that the dream revealed to him was from the Lord and totally accurate. Daniel might have been humble, but he was definitely not timid. Even without looking at the results of Daniel's actions, we can be certain that he did all the right things in precisely the right way.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

One of the most difficult balancing acts for a Christian is clothing ourselves with equal parts boldness and humility. We serve God effectively—but then become proud. Or we try to humble ourselves but in doing so withdraw from the action. Try to use this ABC reminder as a guide. Begin and end each day enforcing an Attitude of humility. Throughout the day, Behave according to God's purpose for you. And remember that you can do it all through Christ, who strengthens you.

Daniel 2:36-45

The dream is true and the interpretation is trustworthy. - Daniel 2:45

TODAY IN THE WORD

It's hard to know who was more famous, Edgar Bergen or his ventriloquist dummy, Charlie McCarthy. While attempting to attend a dinner at the White House, Bergen was forbidden entry by the Secret Service because he had no identification. Thinking quickly, he removed Charlie from his case and put on a brief performance. The dummy scanned his master briefly and told the guards, "Yeah, fellows, he's Edgar Bergen." They both were allowed entry immediately.

Likewise, Daniel gained access to the king's trust by doing something no one else could do. By correctly describing the king's dream, Daniel proved that his interpretation of the dream could also be trusted.

The interpretation begins with a reminder that Nebuchadnezzar's great power comes from God. Notice how Daniel is able to affirm God's superiority without disrespecting the king. It was an especially wise tactic considering that Daniel was about to describe the kingdoms that would ultimately remove Nebuchadnezzar from power. This dream, though, is not really a proclamation of judgment against Nebuchadnezzar. By describing three subsequent kingdoms represented by the metals in the statue and a final indestructible kingdom of God, Daniel is clearly laying out a plan for the destiny of the world.

Each kingdom has characteristics of its own, from the majestic gold head, to the inferior silver and bronze sections, to the mighty iron legs stemming from feet of composite iron and clay that can never completely be united. Although ultimately planned in God's sovereignty, all earthly kingdoms represented in the statue—and all current governments for that matter—were formed by the handiwork of men. The stone that shattered them all to pieces is different, uncut by men. It represents a kingdom that no council of men could formulate and no elections could ever produce. This kingdom will be completely devised by God. For Daniel, seeing this dream revealed must have been humbling and inspiring. He was able to see the future—God would ultimately bring the earth under His direct and supreme command.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Living in a God-honoring way gave Daniel something more valuable than high praise, authority, or wealth—he earned credibility, which led to God's glory. We can't undo history, but Christ's blood can wash away your sin, and the Holy Spirit can transform you. Bow before God today and let Him change you according to His will. He can remove the sin from your life, which will make your testimony both powerful and trustworthy for His glory.

Daniel 2:46-49

Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings. - Daniel 2:47

TODAY IN THE WORD

The first man to be photographed atop Mount Everest was not the first man to climb Mount Everest. Sir Edmund Hillary chose to be the man behind the camera, and instead photographed his guide, Tenzing Norgay. Hillary later explained why he didn't have his own picture taken instead, saying, "As far as I knew, he had never taken a photograph before—and the summit of Everest was hardly the place to show him how!" All humor aside, Hillary owed the success of his journey to his helper Norgay, and he rewarded his Tibetan sherpa with honor and fame.

King Nebuchadnezzar bestowed a similar honor to Daniel after his interpretation of the king's dream. It isn't surprising that Daniel was rewarded for such an act, but it must have come as a shock to the royal court to see the king falling at the feet of a man as young as Daniel. One might have at least expected Nebuchadnezzar to glory in the moment for himself, but he did not. He proclaimed rightly that Jehovah was supreme above all gods and kings. It wasn't a complete conversion to faith in God, as we'll see exemplified tomorrow, but in that moment, the king recognized that he had never witnessed such divine power displayed through a man.

Daniel's main reward was an elevated position in Babylon, especially over the wise men. Remember that at the beginning of this chapter, Daniel wasn't even among the wise men originally consulted to interpret the dream; he didn't learn of the dream until after the decree to execute the wise men.

We can't be certain what effect Daniel had on the studies of the magicians and astrologers in Nebuchadnezzar's court; the Bible doesn't say much more about this type of wise men. The only other magi that appear in the Bible still showed a fascination with stars; but they also had a deep interest in the God of Israel—so much so, they traveled a long way to bring gifts to His Son. Again, we can't know for sure that Daniel's influence had anything to do with leading the wise men to Bethlehem, but he most definitely directed the eyes of Babylon to the power of the one true God.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Daniel received quite a lot from the king, but the only spoken praise from Nebuchadnezzar's mouth was for God alone. Daniel wanted it that way, and we should follow his lead. When you do something well, make sure that God gets the glory. Don't wait to hear, "Thank you," or, "Well done." Thank God in your heart and encourage others to do the same. Praising God for what He does through you will help keep your attitude positive, even if your own contribution goes unnoticed.

Daniel 3

Daniel 3:1-15

They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up. - Daniel 3:12

TODAY IN THE WORD

Upon discovering the formula for measuring the flow of electric current through a wire, high school teacher Georg Ohm thought he might earn himself a collegiate professor position. Although his formula would later be known as Ohm's Law, at the time it was roundly rejected in the science community and he was fired from his existing job. Sometimes being the only one in the right leads to unfair punishment.

Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah stood out from the pack because of their godliness. Up to this point, the group known more commonly by their Babylonian names of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had their faithfulness rewarded with positions of esteem and power. But that treatment took a serious turn for the worse when a direct order of the king came into blatant conflict with the laws of God. Their faith was put to a very simple but crucial test: either worship God or worship Nebuchadnezzar.

You might be wondering where Daniel fits into this story, and the simple answer is that we don't know. We know from the end of chapter 2 that Daniel was placed in a position distinct from that of his friends. But his absence from this story reminds us that Daniel is not the true hero of this book—God is. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had a lot to lose, and very little to gain, it would appear. These three men had positions of authority. The dedication of the statue seems to be a sort of national leadership meeting (v. 3). It's also clear that these men certainly knew the penalty for disobedience (v. 6).

Note that the men didn't make a spectacle of their defiance. It took the tattling of some astrologers to bring the matter to the king's attention. The Aramaic phrase translated "denounced" in the niv is particularly strong, literally meaning "ate the pieces of." Perhaps these other rulers were jealous of the Jews' quick ascension to power and picked the three easiest targets for their wrath. Tomorrow we'll discover that positions of power meant very little to these three servants of God.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

You may find that obeying God and obeying the laws of men usually go hand in hand. But that isn't always the case. When legal or social mandates require you to compromise your faith, are you prepared to do the right thing ... and to do it in the right way? Ask the Lord to give you the strength to stand for what is right, but also the humility to avoid self-righteous grandstanding. Make sure you are disobeying for God's sake, not for your own publicity.

Daniel 3:1-30

Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. - Isaiah 59:1

TODAY IN THE WORD

Political scientists analyze the best ways to measure power. Military capability is one measurement, but some countries with large militaries can't exert their will on other nations. Economic strength is another factor, but some countries with powerful economies can't protect themselves from an external attack. There's also cultural influence, or soft power, the ways that a country's culture or values are appealing to other nations. Identifying power can be tricky, much less attempting to measure it.

Nebuchadnezzar thought that he had maximized all of his potential power. To celebrate, he had created a massive golden statue and commanded everyone in his administration to bow down in worship. Nebuchadnezzar commanded the world's most powerful military, had the strongest economy, and could impose his cultural values on the whole world. But he hadn't factored in spiritual power.

Daniel's three friends Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah—here known by their Babylonian names Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—had been made provincial administrators (see Dan. 2:49). They were among the leaders ordered to bow down to Nebuchadnezzar's golden image. The text hints that those who reported their refusal to worship the idol were motivated by long-standing jealousy (v. 12). Nebuchadnezzar was furious at their defiance of his order.

Verse 15 reveals the core issue when Nebuchadnezzar sneered, "What god will be able to rescue you from my hand?" According to worldly calculations he was right. He had defeated Israel, therefore he had defeated Israel's God. But Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego knew that their God could still save them. And even if He did not choose to, they still would choose to be faithful to Him (vv. 17-18). Nebuchadnezzar upped the ante, heating the furnace seven times hotter than normal. God responded: not only did He save the three friends, they didn't even smell like smoke. Their obedience led to their protection and praise to God, the only one who could save in this way (v. 29).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had the courage to stand for God even when the stakes were life-and-death. What's interesting is that they didn't try to bargain with God or presume to know what He would do. They were confident that God could save, not presumptuous that He would save. They were committed to obedience. Do we have that level of commitment? Or do we try to bargain with God: "I'll follow you if..."? During your prayer time, praise God for who He is and commit to following Him no matter what may come.

Daniel 3:1-30

As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord. - Joshua 24:15

TODAY IN THE WORD

We are learning some good lessons about faith this month. For example, faith pleases God. Faith obeys God even when obedience doesn't seem to make any sense. And faith produces a confidence that's unshakable because it is anchored in God.

Today and tomorrow we're going to talk about another lesson that faith teaches us. Faith is such a powerful force that it can reverse any situation--even turning kings from judges into defendants. We'll see powerful faith in the book of Daniel as we step back from Hebrews 11 for two days and consider a few more figures from the hall of faith.

The writer of Hebrews mentioned those "who through faith ... shut the mouths of lions [and] quenched the fury of the flames" (Heb. 11:33-34). These events may have been listed out of chronological order, but there's no mistaking the reference to Nebuchadnezzar's furnace and Daniel's den of lions. The three Hebrew young men who were taken captive to Babylon along with Daniel made the same choice to honor God that he made. They accepted Babylonian education, names, and clothing, but they would not bow to any god but the Lord no matter what the cost.

These servants of God were tried by Nebuchadnezzar and sentenced to burn for disobeying him. But faith reversed the situation, because it soon became apparent that the king and his way of life were on trial, not the three Hebrews.

Nebuchadnezzar seemed to realize this when he looked into the furnace and saw a fourth person, either an angel or another appearance of Christ before His human birth. After the men were brought out and the miracle of their survival became obvious, the king showed amazing humility before God. Nebuchadnezzar was still years away from his own experience of faith (Dan. 4:36-37), but he admitted that the God of Israel had humbled him.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego took their faith to the limit by committing their lives to the Lord whatever the outcome.

Daniel 3:1-30

I am the Lord your God... You shall have no other gods before me. - Exodus 20:2-3

TODAY IN THE WORD

The statement of A.W. Tozer we referred to yesterday is a great illustration of the point we have been making this month: theology matters. You will also see how much it matters each month this year through the column we are introducing in this issue of Today in the Word.

Tozer said the most important thing we could know about him was what he believed about God. There are some other remarkable people about whom the same thing could be said. We want to study a few of them today and tomorrow. If you read today's Scripture passage, you already know three of these friends.

You have to admit that people who are willing to stake their lives on their theology are pretty serious about it. That was the case for the three young Hebrew men in Daniel 3. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego made a courageous, principled stand against King Nebuchadnezzar's order to bow to his golden statue.

At the heart of their commitment was their view of God. These young men, taken as captives from Israel to Babylon, took with them their knowledge of God's commands. From their very first days of captivity in this pagan country, these three and their pal Daniel decided that the most important thing they could do was obey God.

Actually, the Hebrew captives seemed to have made the same decision as Daniel to put their lives on the line for God long before the fiery furnace or the lions' den (compare 1:8-14 with 3:12). Daniel 1:1-16 may not sound as threatening, but these four men were making a dangerous decision. Had things gone wrong, they along with their Babylonian overseer may have lost their heads.

God honored their decision (Dan. 1:17), and now the three Hebrew young men became officials in Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom. They served him, but they worshipped God and God alone.

This is what we need to remember. Verse 18 of today's reading records an unconditional commitment to the God these Israelites worshipped. They didn't try to make any deals. They believed God was worthy of their allegiance, regardless of what might happen to them.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Have you ever tried to make a deal with God?

Most of us would be uncomfortable to admit it, but we often live our Christian lives by some unspoken assumptions: if we do this, God will do that. If we make certain decisions, they will produce certain results. God's Word does contain many promises, but they are not boxes into which we can stuff God. God has the freedom to work in our lives according to His plan and timetable. Maybe you need a Daniel 3 kind of commitment in some area of your life. Talk to the Lord about it today.

Daniel 3:15-23

We will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up. - Daniel 3:18

TODAY IN THE WORD

Philip II had brought his rule to almost all of the cities of Greece, except one: the Spartan city-state of Lacedaemon. So he sent the following statement to threaten them into submission: "You are advised to submit without further delay." He continued, "If I bring my army into your land, I will destroy your farms, slay your people, and raze your city." He soon received a bold but simple answer in the form of a one-word reply: "If." The small but resilient city was spared.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego couldn't match Nebuchadnezzar's strength, but they weren't afraid to take the punishment he dished out. Their first refusal to bow to his statue was difficult, but it was essentially a silent objection. This time, though, the spotlight of the king's wrath shined squarely on them, and there was even greater pressure to submit to his demands.

Nebuchadnezzar had already learned that the God of Israel is able to reveal truth to His servants, but he doubted God's ability to save the three dissenters (v. 15). They responded, not by proclaiming their own faith, but by calling attention to God's power. They knew that God was able to save them, and even if He did not rescue them in this instance, they were willing to die to uphold the integrity of His name.

The king took their moral stand as a challenge to his authority. He let his pride turn to rage, and that reaction only resulted in the loss of his own servants. He had the fire stoked to such a blazing degree that the strongest soldiers in his army, who escorted the men to the furnace, died from the scorching heat.

For Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, their faith in God wasn't a bargaining chip. There were no church leaders to impress and no religious activist groups to defend them. How easy it would have been to compromise and bow. But they were willing to lose their lives that very day to avoid breaking the commandment of God. Whether they survived the heat of the furnace, these men prevailed over the pressure to take the easy way out for their own benefit.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Today's reading is a reminder that the means are sometimes more important than the end result. Many believers have made similar stands, only to be martyred without being rescued. By doing the honorable thing, we can show the world the righteousness of God; only He can display His power. When this world tempts you to compromise your faith, be willing to accept the consequences that threaten your obedience. Our God is stronger than this world.

Daniel 3:24-30

No other god can save in this way. - Daniel 3:29

TODAY IN THE WORD

Rudyard Kipling was reading the newspaper one day when he discovered a story he was certain was completely untrue. He immediately called the newspaper's office to report the misprint. He said, "I've just read that I am dead. Don't forget to delete me from your list of subscribers."

Any news of the deaths of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in Babylon that day would have been quite premature. Those escorting them into the furnace had died from the intense heat, but Daniel's friends were, as King Nebuchadnezzar put it, "walking around in the fire" (v. 25). He had expected to see three burning corpses but instead saw four perfectly unharmed individuals, one of whom appeared to be a god.

Nebuchadnezzar may not have been a godly king, but he didn't deny the power of Yahweh. He rapidly switched from intense rage to amazement and then to high esteem for the Lord, referring to the men as "servants of the Most High God" when he beckoned them from the furnace (v. 26).

As Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego emerged from the fire, the gaze of the Babylonian leadership shifted. Just as at the beginning of the chapter, the satraps, prefects, governors, and royal advisers fixed their collective gaze on one place—but this time the ninety-foot statue was a distant afterthought. Now the leaders all wondered at the handiwork of a higher King. The Lord had saved His servants by His mighty hand, and everyone who was anyone in Babylon was there to see it.

Nebuchadnezzar summed up their faith (v. 28), and amazingly showed no hostility to their strict obedience to their God. He turned that hostility toward anyone who had anything bad to say about the one true God, threatening violent and extensive wrath to anyone who violated this new decree—apparently, Nebuchadnezzar wasn't a big fan of moderation. In one day he gave a religious ultimatum, cast the first violators into a furnace, then promoted them, and issued a new religious ultimatum that directly contradicted the first. Only God can cause such a dramatic change.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Nebuchadnezzar underwent a spectacular change of heart in response to God's power, but the miracle would not have happened if Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego hadn't shown such humility, conviction, and courage. Think of someone in your life who has a heart hardened against God. One of the best ways to bring about change in someone else is to commit your heart to serving God alone. Show love and respect, and also show what it means to obey God. Let Him take care of the miracle.

Daniel 4

Daniel 4:1-19

My lord, if only the dream applied to your enemies and its meaning to your adversaries! - Daniel 4:19

TODAY IN THE WORD

Owen and Mzee are the best of friends ... and the oddest of couples. Owen is a baby hippo, rescued from tsunami waters by rangers in Kenya. Mzee is a tortoise over 100 years old, living in the wildlife preserve where Owen was brought to safety. Traumatized by the loss of his mother, the 300-pound toddler found Mzee to be a more than suitable surrogate, following the tortoise every second of the day. He even shows aggression whenever a possible threat approaches Mzee, the same reaction other baby hippos would show on their mothers' behalf.

Daniel, too, was displaced from his home at a young age. And he showed a surprising affection for an even less likely individual. Daniel had great compassion for Nebuchadnezzar, the very man responsible for his abduction and the exile of his people.

Our one significant glimpse of Daniel's emotional bond to his king is preceded by Nebuchadnezzar's account of another dream. Once again he asked his wise men for help interpreting the vision, and again his servants were unable to do so. And again Daniel was the last man the king asked for help. This might indicate interpreting dreams occurred regularly in the royal court, and Daniel may have been called in only for the toughest assignments.

The dream itself is strange in that it begins with a description of a magnificent tree followed by a heavenly proclamation to have the tree cut down, but the voice from heaven goes on to speak of the "tree" as if it were a man. The latter portion of the dream doesn't seem at all mysterious, clearly spelling out that whoever this tree was meant to symbolize, he was about to lose his mind. It's possible that the wise men had a pretty good idea what the dream meant but were afraid to tell the king.

The dream upset Daniel, and the king knew it. The idea that his king was about to suffer such a humiliating affliction evoked compassion and sympathy in Daniel. Daniel didn't just obey and serve Nebuchadnezzar, he loved him as well.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

This world has no shortage of people who are hard to love, and oftentimes authority figures in our lives fit that description quite well. Today, move beyond evaluating your outward behavior toward your superiors. Examine the attitude of your heart. If you are harboring resentment or disdain for an employer, pastor, or government leader, ask God to soften your heart. Don't just submit to people in authority; God will help you find it in your heart to love them.

Daniel 4:20-27

Therefore, O king, be pleased to accept my advice. - Daniel 4:27

TODAY IN THE WORD

Wilhelm II of Germany was boasting to Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands about the strength of his army during World War I. He arrogantly said to the Queen, "Our guardsmen are seven feet tall." Unimpressed, her majesty replied, "But when we open our dikes, the waters are ten feet deep."

Nebuchadnezzar was a great king, but he wasn't invincible. Throughout the book of Daniel, he showed a remarkable sensitivity to the messages God had been sending him. He bowed to the God of Daniel after his first dream was interpreted. He praised the God Most High when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego escaped the fiery furnace. But he had still not completely submitted to the Lord. He seemed to recognize that the Lord reigned supreme over all other gods, but he stopped short of declaring God supreme over his own heart.

Daniel was given the unenviable task of telling the king to change his ways. He confronted Nebuchadnezzar for his sin and wickedness, pleading with him to acknowledge God and avoid the humiliation that was prophesied in his dream. It was a bold move on Daniel's part, moving beyond an interpretation of the dream and venturing to advise the king how he should behave. Even though the dream included hope that Nebuchadnezzar would regain his kingdom, Daniel wanted to give the king the opportunity to escape judgment.

But there is no evidence that the king heeded his warning. Nebuchadnezzar needed more than words to convince him. After his dream in chapter 2, he wanted the wise men to prove their worth by describing the dream without being told. God used Daniel to do it. At the fiery furnace, only a miracle could cause him to rescind his decree that his statue should be worshiped. God used Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to do it. So when Daniel pled with Nebuchadnezzar to change, that change would only happen when God used Nebuchadnezzar himself to do it. He was a man who had to see to believe, even if it meant living outside and chewing on grass for seven years. He was about to become insane with pride.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Sometimes, nothing you can say will change another person's mind—but that doesn't mean you shouldn't say anything. If you know someone who has to learn about sin the hard way, don't let that stop you from lovingly confronting them. Even if it takes years and years, your words can have an effect long after you speak them. Also, let the Lord scour your heart for any traces of stubborn sin. If you're unwilling to change, you can't expect anyone else to budge, either.

Daniel 4:28-33

The Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes. - Daniel 4:32

TODAY IN THE WORD

There was no lack of evidence that Daniel Sickles, a congressman, had murdered Philip Key, whose father penned the U.S. national anthem. The motive was clear. He had no alibi. The murder weapon was Sickles's gun. There were no other suspects. Even his own attorney didn't deny that Sickles was indeed the killer. Nevertheless, Daniel Sickles was set free. He became the first American ever acquitted under the plea of temporary insanity.

For Nebuchadnezzar, temporary insanity wasn't the defense, it was the verdict. It came twelve months later as the king was uttering an unbridled speech of self-praise. And as quickly as he could say, "by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty," his kingdom, his glory, and his might were all stripped from him (v. 30). Unfortunately, he was unable to appreciate the irony of his words as his sanity was gone, too.

Boanthropy is the modern name for a mental disorder that makes people so ill that they literally behave like cows. That's a pretty accurate description of Nebuchadnezzar's symptoms. The Bible doesn't give us the specifics of what happened to Nebuchadnezzar in relation to his kingdom, only that he was "driven away from people" (v. 33). Whether his high commanders knew of his whereabouts or he wandered off into obscurity, Nebuchadnezzar no longer controlled his kingdom. We do know the constitutional

bylaws of Babylon to know that God was preparing Nebuchadnezzar's heart for a thorough reformation.

The resplendent king let his hair and nails grow uncut for seven years. His diet was high in fiber but low in pride. The architect of the hanging gardens of Babylon was hanging around like a common animal. With a mind out of his own control, Nebuchadnezzar was forced to endure a degrading existence for seven years. God didn't need to raise up another mighty kingdom to humble this king. The downfall of Nebuchadnezzar began inside his own head.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

It appears that Nebuchadnezzar was enjoying a private moment when he uttered his famous last words that launched his bout with insanity. That should help us dispel the notion that with privacy comes immunity. It's easy to put on a public act of humility only to let pride swell in our hearts and self-praise flourish in our minds. Replace those attitudes with worship for God. Keep your thoughts focused on Christ, and praise Him in your quiet moments.

Daniel 4:1-37

Now I ... praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right. - Daniel 4:37

TODAY IN THE WORD

Several decades before Christopher Columbus came to America, a remarkable event happened in the South American Incan Empire. King Pachacuti began to question his people's worship of the sun when he observed that the sun did the same thing over and over, acting more like a laborer than a god. There was a legend of an omnipotent creator God, named Viracocha, and Pachacuti decided that this must be the true God who alone must be worshiped.

Equally remarkable is the account of the conversion of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, which the king himself narrates. Before his dream, he had a fairly high opinion of himself, which is understandable considering that this king's rule spread from Egypt to modern Iran. If we were to walk beside the king as he surveyed the city of Babylon (vv. 29-30), we would see one of the greatest cities of antiquity, boasting two of the seven wonders of the world: the hanging gardens of Babylon and the great city wall. But human pride is a dangerous thing, and Nebuchadnezzar's pride had to be broken if he was ever going to come to know the Most High God.

Daniel had already demonstrated his God-given ability to interpret the king's dreams (see Dan. 2). The tree of this dream symbolized the prosperity and growth of Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom. Although this cosmic tree extended over a very large region, it was cut down, with only a stump remaining. Such a dream would have been disturbing to most people, but when Daniel understood that it applied to Nebuchadnezzar, we can understand why he was hesitant to explain it to the powerful king (v. 19).

Despite the unusual way in which Nebuchadnezzar was humbled, God was merciful to protect him and to lead him to a correct understanding of himself and of God. After his ordeal, the great king understood that the Most High ruled over the eternal kingdom—even Babylon the great couldn't compare to that. Moreover, he wanted all peoples to know about the Most High God (v. 1), not the great king Nebuchadnezzar.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

No matter how powerful, no one is beyond God's reach. Like the Incan king Pachacuti, Nebuchadnezzar realized that only one God alone must be worshiped.

If you would like to read other accounts like Pachacuti's, we recommend, *Eternity in Their Hearts*, by missionary Don Richardson, available at most Christian bookstores. This book further illustrates what we see in Daniel 4: God is sovereign over even the most powerful human rulers, and He desires to reveal Himself to the peoples of the world.

Daniel 4:1-37

Those who walk in pride he is able to humble. - Daniel 4:37

TODAY IN THE WORD

The proverb "pride goes before the fall" (cf. Prov. 16:18) rings true in many cultures and times. When a person grows overly arrogant, it usually signals impending discipline. Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar certainly learned the truth of this proverb through hard experience.

In today's passage, the chastened Nebuchadnezzar testifies to the power of Israel's God and the supremacy of His kingdom. He does that by recounting his dream, its correct interpretation by Daniel, and its fulfillment. Looking back, Nebuchadnezzar sees God's

hand in his being humbled. Often this is similar to our own testimonies--when we come out of a difficult time, we look back and see how God has been at work.

The description of the tree in Nebuchadnezzar's dream harkens back to the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11. Both the Tower of Babel and this tree spread across the land and reach to the high heavens. Both are symbols of human arrogance which defies God. Just as God brought down the tower and confused the builders' languages, so He cut down the flourishing tree that was King Nebuchadnezzar and confused his mind until he recognized the power of the Most High. Yet God left the stump intact and raised him up again.

The description of this tree also harkens ahead to Jesus' parable of the mustard seed. In this parable, the kingdom of heaven is imagined as a spreading tree in which the birds of the air find rest and shelter. This parable helps us see why the tree image was used as a symbol of Nebuchadnezzar's usurpation of the rightful place of God's kingdom. Only one tree, the Kingdom of God, is to be exalted. All others will be cut down.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Perhaps you are going through a difficult time at the moment, and its purpose is not clear. "Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord" (Ps. 27:14). Trust that at the appropriate time He will restore you and your perspective, and that you will be able to see and to praise Him again. Or perhaps you have just come through some hard circumstance--look back over it, asking God to show you how He was present with you in it. Praise God for the assurance of His presence at all times.

Daniel 4:1-37

Those who walk in pride he is able to humble. - Daniel 4:37

TODAY IN THE WORD

Michael Vick, star quarterback of the Atlanta Falcons football team, was on top of the world. He was young, he had fame, he had money. But his dream turned sour last summer when he was indicted on dogfighting charges. Though at first he claimed innocence, he was forced to plead guilty when several other defendants struck legal deals in exchange for their testimony against him. He apologized to the league, his team, and the fans, but he still lost lucrative endorsement deals, was suspended indefinitely by the NFL, and will probably spend time in prison. The Falcons also demanded back \$22 million of his bonus money.

Vick went from the top of the world to the bottom of the heap. Nebuchadnezzar knew that feeling, too. Today's chapter is in the form of a royal proclamation or letter, one in which the king told the story of how his pride had incurred God's humbling judgment. Since that judgment had been a very public seven-year ordeal, he wanted to make sure the entire Babylonian empire understood the meaning of what had happened.

The narrative falls into three parts: (1) The dream. A huge tree was chopped down, a picture of what would happen if the king's pride continued (vv. 15b-16). Through this warning, God offered mercy even to a pagan ruler. (2) The interpretation. It took some guts for God's prophet, Daniel, to interpret the dream further. Imagine telling one of the world's most powerful men that he needed to repent! (3) The judgment. Nebuchadnezzar's immediate response to these warnings is not recorded, but about one year later the events prophesied came to pass. The moment he boasted of his own glory (v. 30), God took his reason and exiled him to live like a wild animal. The lesson ended only when the king gave proper honor to the Lord (vv. 34-35).

We should not trust in our achievement or success. Pride in such things displaces God, the only One worthy of our humble trust. Those who walk in pride he is able to humble.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Keeping a spiritual journal or diary is a good habit, one that helps us keep track of where, how, and why we've been on our journey of faith. Today, we recommend that you write a spiritual journal entry on the topic of pride. Specifically, what area of your life do you feel is the most full of pride? Why? What have you tried to do about it? What has God done to teach you humility in this area? What more do you want the Spirit to do in the future?

Daniel 4:1-37

The fear of the Lord teaches a man wisdom, and humility comes before honor. - Proverbs 15:33

TODAY IN THE WORD

When the curtain rises on Shakespeare's historical play Richard II, the king is seated in the full glory of his throne with the firm belief that as royalty he is not subject to human limitations. By the end of the final act, Richard II has been imprisoned, murdered, and

replaced on the throne by Henry IV, an enemy of the deposed king and a friend of the lower classes.

Richard II discovered too late that while a king may receive power from God, he should not confuse himself with deity or ignore the plight of the oppressed. King Nebuchadnezzar received a second chance to learn that lesson. He was a bad boy whose primary offense was self-worship.

Nebuchadnezzar had praised the God of Daniel before, but none of his encounters truly changed his heart or his behavior. He still preferred to consult his pagan advisers before Daniel (v. 7). He had not subjected himself to the rule of God (v. 26). And he generally reigned oppressively and without compassion for the poor (v. 27). What followed was the ultimate in degradation for a man who ruled over one of the largest, most impressive kingdoms in the history of the world.

Daniel's warning obviously hadn't sunk in, because Nebuchadnezzar's assessment of his kingdom was the epitome of pride. One moment he was giving himself all the glory, and the next moment he was eating grass. He was afflicted with boanthropy, a form of insanity in which he thought he was an animal, for seven times (probably seven years, although in Nebuchadnezzar's state of mind, it was a moot point). The important thing was that Nebuchadnezzar came to an understanding that his power was subject to the unlimited power of God.

When the king returned to his senses, he lavished unrestrained praise upon the God he now knew reigned over him. His majesty returned with his sanity, but his pride had vanished. People often need to sink to their lowest point before they realize the need to lift up His name.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

God has many ways of humbling His people, but we don't always recognize it for what it is. Whereas Nebuchadnezzar's pride was voiced in extreme boasting, complaint is usually a good sign of someone failing to get the message from a punishment less severe than insanity. If there is a complaint that consistently leaves your lips, ask God if the source of your dissatisfaction should be a warning to be humble. The sovereign God has control of your situation. Humbly thank Him today.

Daniel 4:1-37

Now I ... praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right. - Daniel 4:37

TODAY IN THE WORD

Several decades before Christopher Columbus came to America, a remarkable event happened in the South American Incan Empire. King Pachacuti began to question his people's worship of the sun when he observed that the sun did the same thing over and over, acting more like a laborer than a god. There was a legend of an omnipotent creator God, named Viracocha, and Pachacuti decided that this must be the true God who alone must be worshiped.

Equally remarkable is the account of the conversion of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, which the king himself narrates. Before his dream, he had a fairly high opinion of himself, which is understandable considering that this king's rule spread from Egypt to modern Iran. If we were to walk beside the king as he surveyed the city of Babylon (vv. 29-30), we would see one of the greatest cities of antiquity, boasting two of the seven wonders of the world: the hanging gardens of Babylon and the great city wall. But human pride is a dangerous thing, and Nebuchadnezzar's pride had to be broken if he was ever going to come to know the Most High God.

Daniel had already demonstrated his God-given ability to interpret the king's dreams (see Dan. 2). The tree of this dream symbolized the prosperity and growth of Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom. Although this cosmic tree extended over a very large region, it was cut down, with only a stump remaining. Such a dream would have been disturbing to most people, but when Daniel understood that it applied to Nebuchadnezzar, we can understand why he was hesitant to explain it to the powerful king (v. 19).

Despite the unusual way in which Nebuchadnezzar was humbled, God was merciful to protect him and to lead him to a correct understanding of himself and of God. After his ordeal, the great king understood that the Most High ruled over the eternal kingdom—even Babylon the great couldn't compare to that. Moreover, he wanted all peoples to know about the Most High God (v. 1), not the great king Nebuchadnezzar.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

No matter how powerful, no one is beyond God's reach. Like the Incan king Pachacuti, Nebuchadnezzar realized that only one God alone must be worshiped.

If you would like to read other accounts like Pachacuti's, we recommend, *Eternity in Their Hearts*, by missionary Don Richardson, available at most Christian bookstores. This book further illustrates what we see in Daniel 4: God is sovereign over even the most

powerful human rulers, and He desires to reveal Himself to the peoples of the world.

Daniel 4:28-37

Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall. - Proverbs 16:18

TODAY IN THE WORD

In 1988, Mike Tyson and Michael Spinks met in the boxing match with the richest purse in history up to that point. Spinks was undefeated and a legitimate title contender, but Tyson knocked him out of the match—and out of boxing—in just 91 seconds. At that moment, Tyson appeared to have cemented his place at the top of his sport. But his success crashed down almost as quickly as his opponents once fell to the mat. Controversy in the ring and financial, personal, and legal trouble out of the ring brought his career to an ignoble demise. By 2005 he lamented, “I’m really embarrassed with myself and my life. People put me so high; I wanted to tear that image down.”

A place of fame and renown might be the most precarious perch in all the world, especially when the person enjoying that position believes he or she is solely responsible for getting there. Nebuchadnezzar was on top of the world when he proclaimed his own greatness (v. 30). No sooner than he had finished his statement, the Lord informed him of his lowly sentence.

Nebuchadnezzar went from mighty king to senile beast. While he likely didn’t turn into a literal animal (he could have been stricken with a disorder called boanthropy, which would cause him to think he was a cow), he definitely did live like an animal. He spent seven years outside of society, unkempt and wild. He didn’t cut his hair, shave his face, or trim his fingernails (v. 33). The man who had an entire empire at his beck and call was eating grass in a bout of insanity.

But after the seven years were over, Nebuchadnezzar did something profoundly human: he repented. He praised God. He saw the Lord’s kingdom as superior to his own (v. 35). He realized that despite all his vast earthly power, he was helpless against the mighty hand of God the Father. With the restoration of his sanity and the destruction of his pride, Nebuchadnezzar returned (v. 36). He escalated to even higher greatness in his kingdom, but the most valuable acquisition for Nebuchadnezzar was his humility before God.

APPLY THE WORD

Animals don’t have to choose to be made low. They are put in their place by God and never question their role in His creation. But we can be tempted to think that we can assign to ourselves the majesty of God, or to devalue our worth below the lowliest of animals. It can be especially tempting to think highly of ourselves when we’re involved in the work of His kingdom. But we must remember that we join Him because of His grace and His love and His care for us.

Daniel 4:28-37.

TODAY IN THE WORD

German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche was hardly the first intellectual to declare his atheism. But Nietzsche’s contempt for God was more blatant than that of many other nineteenth-century atheists. Nietzsche ridiculed Christian virtues such as humility, proposing that they be replaced by aggressive pride. His ideal of humanity was a “superman” who would ruthlessly exploit others, unburdened by notions of sympathy or brotherly love. Nietzsche himself boasted, “I am not man; I am dynamite...my truth is fearful.”

Friedrich Nietzsche, meet King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. This ancient monarch, recognized as one of the greatest rulers of antiquity, could have taught modern boasters like Nietzsche a life-changing lesson in theology.

For instance, despite his boasts Nietzsche proved to be quite human, suffering a complete physical and mental breakdown in 1889. Nebuchadnezzar suffered a similar fate described in Daniel 4, but there the similarities end.

We know from today’s text that Nebuchadnezzar was in dire need of a lesson about pride and humility. His boasts about his “great Babylon” give us clues to his pride problem. He built the great city and his kingdom to the glory and majesty of himself (v. 30).

This was not just patriotism gone overboard. The king was setting himself in opposition to God. And because Nebuchadnezzar had conquered Jerusalem and brought back the gold vessels from the temple and Jewish captives such as Daniel, there was more at stake than just the pride of one monarch. Israel’s God’s was being dishonored.

Nebuchadnezzar’s sin was even more blameworthy because it was committed in defiance of a vision from God. The king also ignored Daniel’s warning that his arrogance and cruelty would bring judgment (4:24-27).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY Independence Day is a good day to ask ourselves how patriotism fits into the picture for committed Christians.

Today's lesson gives us an important clue. If our celebration of America's birthday leads to praise and thanksgiving to God for His blessings and to humility before Him as our sovereign King, then we can offer God our Fourth of July as a sacrifice of worship.

Daniel 4:28-37

Everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble. - Daniel 4:37

TODAY IN THE WORD

"Pride is a vice," said eighteenth-century writer Samuel Johnson, "which pride itself inclines every man to find in others, and to overlook in himself." Another anonymous saying warns: "Temper gets you into trouble. Pride keeps you there." Author and Christian apologist C. S. Lewis observed: "A proud man is always looking down on things and people; and, of course, as long as you're looking down, you can't see something that's above you."

These observations describe well the sin for which Nebuchadnezzar was judged in Daniel 4. He ruled Babylon, the military superpower and leading culture of its day, and was therefore the most powerful man on earth. When his pride grew, God sent him a dream as a warning. The dream was about a strong tree that got chopped down. Even an emperor should not imagine he is beyond the reach of God's justice and power, for the Lord has a habit of humbling the proud (James 4:6).

This warning was even more specific: Nebuchadnezzar would not just be defeated in battle or suffer a political setback—he would be personally shamed and humiliated. Daniel explicitly told the king that the purpose would be to demonstrate God's sovereignty over all human kingdoms (v. 17). Although God had shown mercy by putting Daniel in position to interpret the dream and urge a repentant response, everything happened exactly as foretold. Nebuchadnezzar made a prideful statement about his own power and glory (v. 30), triggering judgment. For seven years—too long to keep it hushed up—he was out of his mind and lived like an animal.

The king was released from this embarrassing affliction only when he publicly acknowledged the one true God's eternity, power, righteousness, justice, and supremacy. Nebuchadnezzar brought glory to God for who He is and what He has done. Sin seeks glory for self, but worship gives glory to whom it is due.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Do you think you're beyond God's reach? Think again! "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18). He can take away any part of your life, and He can give it back again, not arbitrarily but as part of His divine plan. How should we respond? Like Job: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised" (Job 1:21).

Daniel 4:33-37

Everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble. - Daniel 4:37

TODAY IN THE WORD

Muhammad Ali was one of the most prolific boxers in history, and his verbal jabs packed plenty of punch as well. Some called him larger than life. He called himself "the greatest." But his battle with Parkinson's disease dealt the outspoken star a near knockout blow. After coping with the humbling disease, he has learned many lessons, saying, "God gave me this illness to remind me that I'm not Number One. He is!"

Nebuchadnezzar had lost control of his mind for seven years, plenty of time for him to learn his lesson. Although he was certifiably insane, that doesn't mean he wasn't aware of his situation. The tone of his praise to God seems to indicate that he had been tormented by the state of madness his pride had caused, and he had fully repented of his wicked ways.

Nebuchadnezzar was the king of radical shifts. In chapter 3 he went from cursing Daniel's friends to increasing their power and praising God. In this chapter he was chewing on grass and mooing like a cow one moment and delivering the most eloquent speech of praise to God the next. And the amazing thing about his words of praise is the state from which he delivered them. He hadn't been around people for seven years, so his outburst of worship must have been based on what he had learned about God from Daniel.

For Nebuchadnezzar, the story had a happy ending. He was returned to power, even greater than ever. He praised and worshiped God with a sincerity beyond any he had ever shown. His word choice in the final verse of this chapter is very interesting. In the past, Nebuchadnezzar had called attention to the power of God, but in this passage, he focused on other characteristics of God. He stressed the goodness and justice of God, and then he worshiped Him for His ability to make a proud heart humble. Seven years prior, Nebuchadnezzar would never have appreciated those attributes of our Lord. Chapter 4 is our last impression of

Nebuchadnezzar, and humility and love for righteousness is a great way to be remembered.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Do you love God's justice? When is the last time you praised God for being right in all His ways or for humbling you? When we sin, God's righteousness can be painful; when we suffer the consequences, His justice can be humiliating. But when God exposes our sin and disciplines us, He draws us closer to Him. And being close to Him is wonderful because He is so good. Praise Him for His righteousness today, even if it means confessing your most embarrassing sins.

Daniel 5

Daniel 5:1-16

The discerning heart seeks knowledge, but the mouth of a fool feeds on folly. - Proverbs 15:14

TODAY IN THE WORD

In Shakespeare's *Henry V*, people doubted young Henry's ability to rule after his father passed away. Whereas his father had been revered and loved, the son was known for carousing with less than regal company. The son, though, revealed that his irresponsibility was just an act to lower the expectations that the elite would set for him—Henry planned to surprise his detractors and display true leadership when the time was right.

If that was King Belshazzar's plan, he miscalculated. He showed up in the Bible just long enough to have his doom foretold and executed. He bore no evidence that the faith of King Nebuchadnezzar had been passed down through the generations. Daniel doesn't record the transition from Nebuchadnezzar to Belshazzar, but most historians agree that eventually Nabonidus was on the throne. His duties took him away from Babylon, leaving Belshazzar his son to rule in his absence. Belshazzar himself is hardly a scratch on the tablets of Babylonian history, and the writing on the wall explained why. Belshazzar desecrated the temple articles (v. 3). He worshiped false gods (v. 4). He was scared half to death by a mysterious writing hand (v. 6). When he begins calling out for his wise men to decipher the writing, you might feel like you're experiencing *d'Nealian* script. Clearly, Daniel was not in the business of self-promotion, because he always ended up being the last wise man to be asked to interpret anything.

Not surprisingly, the wise men had yet to lay claim to competence, and Daniel was once again summoned to save the day. It's no shock that Daniel was not in attendance at the drunken feast, but the fact that the king had to be informed of Daniel's existence testifies to the king's outlandish folly. Daniel's proficiency in wisdom must have been known and celebrated throughout the land, no matter how long it had been since his interpretations of Nebuchadnezzar's dreams. Finally, the acting king was seeking his counsel and offering him the highest position of leadership he had the authority to give. But Daniel was about to inform him that his authority would soon run out.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Daniel's status probably declined in the kingdom after Nebuchadnezzar died. But when he was called, Daniel was ready to speak for God. We should remember that faithfulness to God doesn't always result in earthly reward. The path of God's will might lead you out of the spotlight and into the trenches. On the other hand, riches, fame, and comfort aren't strong indicators of righteousness. Whether all eyes are on you or you feel like an unknown, prepare your heart to do His will.

Daniel 5:17-28

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

TODAY IN THE WORD

The great English reformer and Bible translator William Tyndale was strangled and burned at the stake for his actions of faith. After a long imprisonment and despite the diligent efforts of his friends to get him released, Tyndale's strongest desire was actually not for freedom or mercy. He likely could have been freed had he merely denounced his claims of faith. His last moment was spent pleading, not on his behalf, but for the heart of the king and the spread of God's Word. With his final breath, he said, "Lord, open the king of England's eyes."

Daniel's response to the king was not intended to earn himself glory or power. He didn't candy coat the message of the writing on the wall to ease Belshazzar's fears or temper his reaction. He said he didn't want the king's gifts. And before he translated the writing on the wall, Daniel gave the king a thorough explanation of why the writing had come in the first place. He recounted Nebuchadnezzar's great power and his seven-year lesson in humility. He even criticized Belshazzar's failure to learn from the lessons of the past and his foolhardy drunken offenses against God.

When he finally read and translated the message, the tone didn't get any cheerier. Belshazzar's days were numbered. He had been weighed and found wanting. His kingdom was destined for the Medes and Persians. Again, this is one of those messages that the wise men were not likely to have translated for the king, even if they could. The king was already filled with fear and anxiety. Informing him that he was on the way out doesn't seem to be the best way to advance your career. But Daniel didn't fear the consequences of telling the king the truth. He spoke for God without flinching, and he confronted the most powerful man in the world at that moment. He had no reason to fear. Daniel knew that the most powerful king still rested in the palm of God's hand, and he made sure the king knew that, too.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Most of us aren't slow to react when someone offends us—when we get cut off in traffic, it might be second nature to honk the horn in protest. But we don't always react that way when someone offends God. We should switch our priorities around today. Keep an eye out for attitudes and actions that blatantly defy God's glory. But don't start with your local politicians or your boss. The first place to look for sinful pride that offends God is in your own heart.

Daniel 5:29-31

That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain. - Daniel 5:30

TODAY IN THE WORD

aseball pitchers aren't usually known for their power hitting, and Gaylord Perry wasn't really known for power of any kind. He was a junk-ball pitcher and a downright awful hitter, so no one doubted his prediction early in his career when he said, "They'll put a man on the moon before I hit a home run." He was right. On July 20, 1969, Neil Armstrong stepped out onto the surface of the moon. A few hours later, Gaylord Perry hit the only home run of his career, fulfilling one of the best-timed predictions in sports.

Daniel's prediction about the demise of Belshazzar's kingdom didn't take long to come true either. But first, Daniel received yet another reward for faithfully delivering the message of God. It was ironic that he would receive such an extravagant bonus considering that he asked not to receive it (v. 17) and the substance of his prediction was judgment against the king. When Israel's kings were issued God's judgment, they lashed out at the prophets. In Babylon, however, the respect for prophets must have been exceedingly great. Daniel was awarded the highest available spot in the kingdom.

But Daniel's prediction came about too quickly for his promotion to make much difference. The very night that Daniel interpreted the writing on the wall, the forces of Darius took Babylon and executed the king. The biblical record of Darius the Mede differs from other historical documents that identify no such name, instead naming Cyrus the Persian as the leader who overtook Babylon. It's possible that Darius was either a ruler who served under Cyrus or even another name for Cyrus himself.

For Israel, the rule of Cyrus opened the door for the return of the exiles and the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. Daniel never returned to his homeland, but he upheld the faith across a seventy-year span of exile and testing. His courageous moral stands kept his own integrity intact and brought glory to the name of God and His people in an otherwise pagan kingdom.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Daniel seemed to be the lone voice of faith in a decadent kingdom. He was outnumbered but never marginalized.

That is a crucial lesson for believers in today's world. We may not be able to sway the beliefs of an entire nation, but by boldly living out our faith, we can bring attention to God's name. Direct your steps according to God's ways, and His glory will be made known.

Daniel 6

Daniel 6:1-4

Now Daniel so distinguished himself ... that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. - Daniel 6:3

TODAY IN THE WORD

At 88 years old, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes had distinguished himself as a Supreme Court justice who could not be swayed by party lines, political pressure, or even his fellow justices. A reporter conducting man-on-the-street interviews about the venerable Holmes, nicknamed "The Great Dissenter," got an interesting response from a construction worker. He said, "Oh, sure! He's the young judge on the Supreme Court that's always disagreeing with the old guys."

The early chapters of Daniel contain so many great stories of courage and drama that it's easy to lose sight of how much time has passed since Daniel was first abducted by Babylonian forces. As we begin the beloved story of Daniel in the lions' den, we need to

remember that he wasn't a scrapping young man from Israel anymore. By the time Darius took over, Daniel was probably in his eighties. As wise as Daniel was as a teenager, how astute must he have been at eighty!

Clearly, Darius caught on to Daniel's value, appointing him as one of three rulers over all his other administrators and even eyeing him for a position over the entire kingdom (v. 3). Daniel wasn't just a great man of faith; he was an all-around great man. He had always stood out from the other wise men in the kingdom, and Darius noticed. As he had done so many times before, Daniel proved his worth to his king and was rewarded for it. With reward, though, came the downside: envy.

It's one thing to impress the king with your abilities, but it's an even bigger feat to show absolutely no weaknesses to your enemies. That's what Daniel was able to do, frustrating his jealous colleagues to no end. The king appreciated Daniel's flawless performance, but the petty administrators couldn't hide their true selfish colors. They found Daniel to be upstanding, trustworthy, and competent, and decided that was a bad thing. So the plotting began. Some people can't appreciate good qualities in others, especially if power is at stake.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Is there any question that God can do a better job leading than we can? But so often we fight for control of our own lives, searching for excuses about why we can't follow God's plan. Commit in your heart today to give God authority over your whole life. Desires in your sinful nature will try desperately to gain control, but ask God to suppress and conquer them. He is a better ruler than we could ever hope to be!

Daniel 6:1-28

You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble. - Psalm 32:7

TODAY IN THE WORD

A Gallup Poll recently commissioned in Great Britain by The Daily Telegraph produced some surprising results. While most of the British are proud of their nation's history as a great empire, fifty-three percent of the people polled did not know that the United States was once a British colony. And nearly half believed that Australia was still being governed from London! An eminent British historian said of the poll: We're living in a world which is terribly, and dangerously, ignorant of history. God had honored his commitment as a teenager in Babylon and had delivered his friends from a fiery furnace when they took their stand (Dan. 3). rule of another pagan empire. Daniel's jealous fellow administrators convinced King Darius of Persia to take the title of god for a month. The decree put Daniel squarely on the spot, which was the goal of their conniving plan. spiritual integrity. They were confident that when it came to the law of his God (Dan. 6:5), Daniel would not hesitate to follow his convictions. faithfulness to the true God, and he wasn't about to let a no prayer law stop his daily worship. disobedience, and they immediately went to Darius with their evidence. The sentence for any violator had already been declared so, without recourse, it was the lions den for Daniel (vv. 15-16). Daniel in the Lions Den has been relegated to children's Bible storybooks for so long that we adults often overlook its power. The fact is that Daniel was exposing himself to the fury of an all-powerful state, and there was no place to hide and no other human who could help him if he chose to do right. do. He knew what was right, and he believed God would prove Himself faithful again. Daniel's godly courage should give us new resolve to serve God without reservation. ve been talking for the past two days about Daniel's spiritual strength of character. Each of us has weak points, places where we are vulnerable to Satan's seductions. Do you know your weak spots? You can be sure your enemy does! Today, choose one area and jot down two or three steps you can take to guard yourself. Then submit your list to God and ask Him to protect you and keep you pure for His service.

Daniel 6:1-28

May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you! - Daniel 6:16

TODAY IN THE WORD

Lou Brock was one of the most outstanding baseball players of the 1960s and 70s. Playing mostly with the St. Louis Cardinals, he made the All-Star team six times, collected more than 3,000 hits, and set a record of twelve straight seasons with more than fifty stolen bases, including one season with a then-record 118 steals. He helped lead his team to three league pennants and two World Series championships. In 1985, Brock was rightfully inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame.

Anyone can have one good season—it takes someone special to have a truly excellent career. In exile, Daniel lived a life of consistently visible faith and wisdom. That's why King Darius promoted him to a high position. His abilities and integrity made enemies, though, and since they couldn't find any skeletons in his closet they decided to get him by using his faith against him (v. 5). He had not kept his faith a secret in order to climb the career ladder in this pagan palace.

They brought the unwitting king on board by flattering him, and he signed an irrevocable "god-of-the-month" decree with a death

penalty attached. Daniel ignored it and continued to pray three times daily facing Jerusalem. Why? Worship was too important a principle to compromise. He wasn't ashamed of his God. If his enemies wanted to catch him praying, let them. They knew exactly when and where to find him. His witness was bright and clear to his peers.

King Darius finally clued in, realizing that his favorite official had been set up, but there was nothing he could do (vv. 14–16, 20). God, however, was not bound by “the law of the Medes and Persians,” and honored Daniel's faith by miraculously saving his life in the lions' den (vv. 22–23). The ravenous animals had to wait until morning to make a meal of Daniel's enemies!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Daniel shone like a bright light against the dark, pagan background of Media-Persia. We can do the same! As believers who follow the Light when most of the world lives in darkness, we can “shine like stars.”

Daniel 6:1-28

I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel. - Daniel 6:26

TODAY IN THE WORD

Last year, Chinese provincial official Xia Yisong discovered that honesty didn't pay.

During his first month in office, he found under his door envelopes with cash from businesspeople and others hoping for favors. He returned the money and refused the bribes. A few months later, he received more money. Once again he refused the attempted bribes, which by this time totaled nearly \$90,000. He later uncovered a fake diploma and résumé scam, through which 181 local government officials had obtained their jobs.

While some admired Xia, many powerful people hated him, and he received many death threats. Last April, he was “promoted” to a safer desk job in another city, but in fact, he regards his career as “already dead.” Like Daniel, he learned that integrity can be costly.

As prophesied, Israel had been conquered and exiled (cf. 2 Chron. 36:15-20). Daniel, one of the captives, had achieved a high position, and in today's reading he was on the verge of another promotion. But he'd made enemies, ones motivated by jealousy, greed, and probably racism. In the face of Daniel's integrity, his well-known faith was their only possible target, and by flattering King Darius they aimed right at it.

Daniel was no dummy. He saw them coming and understood the nature of the test. What harm would it have done him to change his habits or to pray more discreetly? Under the circumstances, to alter his routine would have meant hiding his light under a bowl and betraying God (cf. Matt. 5:14-16).

So, with godly integrity, Daniel prayed as he always did. He prayed regularly, three times a day. He faced Jerusalem, showing a longing for the Temple, symbolizing God's presence. He offered both praises and petitions (Dan. 6:10-11).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Do you work in a secular environment? If yes, is your witness as good as Daniel's had been to the unbelievers?

Daniel 6:1-28

They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. - Daniel 6:22

TODAY IN THE WORD

Jim Jablon began 2011 with a pair of houseguests named Ed and Lea: he was residing in a lion's sanctuary, and Ed and Lea are the not-yet-ferocious feline occupants with whom he lived for an entire month. The publicity stunt raised money for his wildlife rehabilitation shelter in Florida. Some critics feared Jablon would foster the misconception that lions make good pets, while others pointed out the safety concerns. Jablon completed the month together with the two-year-old lions with just a few minor scratches and many donations to his cause.

There's a reason Jablon's stunt made news. Even if the great cats were completely calm, the risk of injury would frighten the bravest soul. In today's reading, that brave soul was Daniel. He knew his prayers would put him in the lions' den. He refused to let that change a thing.

Daniel was a man of excellence. Not only did he instill so much confidence in King Darius that he was in line to be the first in command (v. 3), but Daniel's worst enemies were unable to find fault with him (v. 4). Misguided as his fellow administrators and satraps were, they understood Daniel well—his allegiance to God and His Word took precedence over his loyalty to the king (v. 5).

After the plotters coerced the king into issuing a temporary ban on any prayer to any being, Daniel's response was the perfect mix of humility and boldness. He did exactly what he had been doing before the decree was issued. Without protest, without compromise, without fear, Daniel prayed. He knew the consequences of his actions. He prayed and thanked God and asked Him for help (vv. 10-11).

To the chagrin of King Darius, Daniel was thrown to the lions, sealed in, and imprisoned overnight. An angel of God shut the lions' mouths—but notice the angel did not take away their hunger. The animals feasted on Daniel's enemies, who were punished for their wicked schemes. Daniel escaped without a scratch, all to the glory of God.

APPLY THE WORD

Daniel's response to unfair treatment is a good example of how to respond. Daniel thanked God despite the outrageous injustice. Even without considering the punishment awaiting Daniel, think of how hard it would be to wield the immense influence Daniel held without using it to complain—how is such a grateful attitude possible? Probably because Daniel did pray so fervently. He was accustomed to depending on God. May we do the same with frequent prayers of thanks!

Daniel 6:1-28

In you our fathers put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them. - Psalm 22:4

TODAY IN THE WORD

After floods had devastated the country of Mozambique last year, a missions photographer working there noticed the absence of older people. When she asked why, she was told that the older men and women were not strong enough to hold on to the trees when the water came, and many were swept away.

This tragedy reminds us that old age is not generally considered a time of great strength. There are exceptions, to be sure, and they are encouraging to see. We have an incredible example today in the prophet Daniel, who was an elderly man when he was promoted by King Darius and then set up by his jealous enemies. Daniel proves that age is irrelevant when it comes to living by faith.

Daniel had already been serving the kingdom of Babylon for many years when it was conquered by the Medo-Persian army. Daniel had been taken captive from Jerusalem to Babylon in 605 b.c., when he was about sixteen. He was thrown into the lions' den about 539 b.c., being over eighty years old.

This makes Daniel's continued outstanding service for the Persian kingdom even more amazing. His excellence was so undeniable that Darius was planning to make Daniel number two in the kingdom when his officials decided to take action.

They quickly realized that Daniel's record was untouchable, but they knew enough about him to understand that he wouldn't compromise his faith in God for anyone (vv. 4-5). So they appealed to King Darius's vanity and convinced him to declare himself as "God for a month." They also persuaded him to punish anyone who dared to worship any other god but him during this time.

Being a monarch with an ego, Darius liked the idea. So the decree was issued, and the officials who hated Daniel went straight to his house to gather their evidence. Daniel didn't disappoint them, opening his window to pray toward Jerusalem.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Whatever your age, you have an important place in the body of Christ and a unique contribution to make.

Daniel 6:1-28

People must fear and reverence the God of Daniel. For he is the living God. - Daniel 6:26

TODAY IN THE WORD

When the early Bohemian reformer John Hus was brought to the stake to be burned for his stand for Christ, he was given a chance to renounce his teachings. But the courageous reformer replied, 'What I have taught with my lips, I now seal with my blood.' Hus died for his commitment to the truth.

What John Hus believed about God was as important to him as it was to the prophet Daniel. Daniel in the lions' den is one of those Bible stories we adult Christians ought to read a couple of times a year, just to remind ourselves of the kind of courage it takes to stand for the Lord.

You may not see any great theological statement made by Daniel in these verses. In a way, that's true. Daniel is only quoted once in the text (vv. 21-22). The irony is that the good theology flows from King Darius after the incident (vv. 26-27).

But the whole story came about as a result of the quality we have been studying the past few days. Daniel placed his commitment to God above every other loyalty in his life, because what he believed about the true God was the most important thing to this courageous prophet.

Daniel's faith was the same here as it was years earlier with his three friends. The God of Israel was the only true God, and He had commanded His people to worship no one else. Therefore, Daniel would not bow to any idol, regardless of the cost involved.

Daniel wound up in the den of lions because Darius's vanity led him to agree to a very bad idea cooked up by some very bad men.

Talk about bad theology. The government officials who hatched the plot knew Daniel wouldn't go for it, and they were right. In the words of our theme this month, theology mattered way too much to Daniel for him to accommodate a human king's ego.

There's no doubt that God's nature and power were the focus of Daniel's theology. Darius made that clear in his prayer for Daniel just before the stone was put in place (v. 16). He knew what Daniel believed.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

This story is really the same song, second verse when it comes to the importance of what we believe about God.

Today, on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, God's people need to examine how their belief in God needs to impact their attitudes toward others. We worship the God who, in Christ, has broken down every racial and cultural barrier that seeks to divide us. Reconciliation is not only possible, it is God's will that we be one body. Let's pray today that God's people will lead the way across all barriers.

Daniel 6:5-9

O king, issue the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered. - Daniel 6:8

TODAY IN THE WORD

Several infamously silly laws decree that in one city it is illegal to tie a giraffe to a telephone pole or street lamp. In another town it is supposedly against the law to walk down Main Street with a lunchbox. It seems pretty clear that these laws are written because one person's behavior makes waves in a community. There's no fundamental precept being violated by parking a giraffe, so banning it requires some pretty creative lawmaking.

That was the approach of Daniel's enemies within the leadership of Darius's kingdom. They knew there was nothing wrong with anything he did, so they attacked Daniel at his most devoted point: his God. They knew from Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego that in a conflict between the king's law and God's law, Daniel would choose God every time.

So they approached Darius with a wicked proposal, and they followed the anatomy of a con game perfectly. It began with an outright lie. They claimed that all the royal leaders agreed on a new edict, when the king's top official obviously had not been consulted. How many of the leaders actually agreed to this edict, we don't know, but they sold the king the falsehood of universal acceptance.

The next part of their plan catered to the king's ego, a vulnerable spot for any leader. To an ancient king, a law requiring worship of only yourself doesn't sound so bad. The proposal served only to boost his own image without achieving any other purpose, and that should have alerted the king to the futility of the decree. He was blinded by pride, though, opening himself to the final and most dangerous part of the deception.

The leaders eliminated the escape clause. They suggested that the king make the law irrevocable. Why would the king need to restrict himself? If he were truly worthy of worship, he wouldn't have let his subjects tell him how to write his own laws. But there was no turning back. He found nothing wrong with the suggested law, and he put the foolish edict into writing.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Deceptions like these aren't unique to the ancient world. Individuals and businesses are constantly looking for ways to take advantage of people who are easily fooled. Always be on the lookout for offers that mirror the proposal in today's reading. Verify the facts and read all the fine print. Be especially wary of offers that aim to boost your own ego. We tend to open ourselves to be tricked when we divert glory to ourselves that belongs to God.

Daniel 6:10-18

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

TODAY IN THE WORD

Prayer is one of the pillars of Islamic faith, a practice required of devout Muslims five times a day. One of the particular details to be

observed is that prayers should be offered while kneeling and facing the direction of the Islamic holy city of Mecca, Saudi Arabia, a practice some scholars believe is done in imitation of Daniel's method of prayer toward Jerusalem recorded in today's reading.

No one knows for sure where Daniel learned this practice. Praying toward Jerusalem and praying three times a day aren't specifically mandated anywhere in the Old Testament, although the general idea is alluded to in passages like 1 Kings 8:44. The point is that Daniel didn't allow the faith of his homeland to dissolve. Rather than being influenced by the foreign rituals practiced all around him, Daniel influenced his culture by displaying faith worthy of imitation.

We all know that Daniel didn't let the decree stop his faithful prayers to God, but how he went about it deserves a closer look. If a modern-day ban on prayer were issued, we might expect demonstrations, rallies, and protests from throughout the church. Daniel didn't wage a publicity war. The first thing he did was pray. And we have two clues about the content of his prayer.

First, the text specifically mentions that Daniel thanked God (v. 10). He didn't complain to God. He thanked Him just like he always did. Secondly, verse 11 states that the men who had plotted against Daniel found him asking for God's help. The verses that follow show precisely why Daniel needed God's help. He was cast into the lions' den for breaking the king's new law, even though the king himself regretted having to do so.

The evil schemers' trick had worked. Ironically for Daniel, obeying God was exactly what the wicked men were hoping he would do. The king was forced by his own foolishness to place his seal of approval on the stone covering the den. But he came close to violating his own decree and praying to God for Daniel's rescue (v. 16).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Daniel asked for help before he was in danger. That's a valuable lesson for us, especially if we tend to pray only in the difficult times of our lives. Establishing a prayer routine doesn't make our prayer any less genuine or heartfelt. Consider devoting as much time to praying as you do to eating. Instead of a quick prayer at the table, find a quiet place for half an hour. Do it before you come face-to-face with the lions in your life.

Daniel 6:19-28

For he is the living God and he endures forever. - Daniel 6:26

TODAY IN THE WORD

Wan Zainab Wan Abdullah was sitting on the beach in Penang, Malaysia, with her family when the first wave of the tsunami rushed toward her. Her home was destroyed, but her family was spared. The unique thing about her survival was that she didn't consider the tsunami to be the worst tragedy she had ever experienced. She realized the terrible horror the flood waters caused, but being 115 years old, Wan Zainab was much better acquainted with suffering than the average person. She rated the World War II occupation of her hometown by Japanese forces as a more painful ordeal.

For most people, even most believers, being trapped in a lions' den would have been terrifying. But Daniel had been around the block of faith more than just about anyone, so he was probably the least surprised person on the scene when the king demanded that the den of lions be opened.

The king's faith was mixed. He called out to Daniel expecting a response, but the anguish in his voice revealed a lingering doubt in his heart. Daniel answered with his trademark wisdom and praise for God. Daniel's critics may have thought that God hadn't saved him and that the lions simply weren't hungry. If so, they were about to find out just how wrong they were. They were severely punished for their wicked manipulation of the king and their conspiracy against Daniel.

The king immediately drafted a new decree that was far different than his last. His praise for God is an amazing tribute to Daniel's faith. How many of Israel's kings failed to show such inspired allegiance to the living God? But the steadfast devotion of one man was enough to turn the hearts of foreign kings to proclaim the praises of the God of Israel. God's people may have been in exile, but God's glory could not be suppressed by any kingdom.

And God rewarded Daniel for his faithfulness. In yet another regime, Daniel was able to prosper because he allowed God to work through him.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

We have a God who has seen it all; how easily we forget that. He isn't caught off guard when politicians draft self-serving laws. He isn't surprised by tragedy or shaken by trouble. He can close the mouths of lions and change the hearts of kings. And think about it: all Daniel did in this story was pray. God was glorified, the king praised His name, the wicked were judged, and Daniel prayed. Cast aside your worries with a prayer today.

Daniel 7

Daniel 7:1-28

I, Daniel, was deeply troubled by my thoughts. - Daniel 7:28

TODAY IN THE WORD

Modern scientists and psychologists have found great value in the study of dreams. Some counselors have been able to help their patients deal with the most troubling problems by talking through their dreams. One such process, called "lucid dreaming," requires a patient to realize he or she is dreaming without waking up. By becoming aware that a dream is taking place, a patient can uncover the source of their subconscious worries.

Daniel was a dream expert if ever there was one. Chronologically, this dream took place in between chapters 4 and 5. But the revelations of his dream were not the fruit of his subconscious; they were the prophecies of God, and they were more than even Daniel could neatly interpret. That's important for us to remember as we strive to understand these next few chapters of Daniel. If the dream was troubling to Daniel, we can't hope to know it without much prayer and guidance from the Lord.

We can, however, simplify two major themes that emerge from Daniel's dream about the powers that rule over the earth. The first is that the kingdoms of man are temporary and will ultimately be replaced by the divinely designed kingdom of Christ, a kingdom that will never be destroyed (v. 27). If we learn nothing else from this chapter, the unshakable sovereignty of God is a wonderful lesson and a good place to start. The creatures used to symbolize kingdoms are no match for the glorious Ancient of Days.

The other theme is that the establishment of Christ's kingdom is not a gentle transition. Daniel was troubled and disturbed by the images he saw (v. 15). Even concluding the matter with God's everlasting kingdom and eternal obedience to Him, Daniel still felt very deeply troubled (v. 28). His heart must have been broken by seeing several ages worth of evil and wicked rebellion against God. Daniel probably witnessed unspeakable acts of evil and unthinkable suffering in the forecast that is recorded in verses 24 through 26 alone. It was too much for Daniel's mind to process, and it was just the beginning of what God had to show him.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

A solid understanding of these prophecies requires much more than a few minutes of study. To get an adequate grasp of the content of Daniel 7-12, consider reading a few different commentaries on the subject, and talk to your pastor about your interest. Throughout your study, remember to maintain a heart of humility, because the details can be difficult to grasp and many a proud heart has been carried away by the fascinating endeavor of trying to look into the future.

Daniel 7:13-14; Matthew 16:21-28

The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many. - Mark 10:45

TODAY IN THE WORD

Here's a short Bible quiz for you today. Of all the names and titles of Jesus Christ in the Bible (Names of Christ by T.C. Horton and Charles E. Hurlburt lists more than 300!), do you know which name Jesus used most often for Himself? Hint: the answer is in today's verse!

Jesus called Himself the Son of Man dozens of times in the Gospels. In fact, with just one exception whenever this name is used in the New Testament, Jesus is either speaking Himself, or His words are being quoted or reported (the exception is in Acts 7:56).

Why did Jesus choose this name? Some Bible teachers suggest that this unusual name had a startling effect on people, catching them off guard and causing them to pay attention to Him.

There's no doubt that Son of Man was not a name people heard every day. But there's more to it. Daniel saw ""one like a son of man"" coming to God to receive power and glory and ""everlasting dominion"" (v. 13). This is a powerful prophetic picture of Jesus receiving the kingdoms of this world from His Father--which required the Son's suffering and death.

Jesus used the name Son of Man, then, in connection with His humanity. It spoke of Jesus' earthly life and mission, particularly His death on the cross. Just after Peter confessed Jesus as the Son of God (Matt. 16:16), Jesus began teaching the disciples that He had to go to Jerusalem and suffer death. He spoke about His ministry as Son of Man.

The miracle of Christianity is that God became a man so He could live and die as a man to save the human race. As the Son of God, Jesus knew the eternal joys and glory of heaven. But it is as the Son of Man that He identifies with us in our humanness.

Without Jesus' incarnation, His coming in human flesh, we would be hopelessly lost in our sins. The writer of Hebrews says He took on flesh and blood like ours so that He might destroy the works of the devil and free us from our slavery (Heb. 2:14-18). The Son of Man was like us, and tempted like us--except that He had no sin (Heb. 4:15).

The beauty of this name is that because Jesus became the Son of Man, we can approach Him in confidence (Heb. 4:16), knowing that He understands us completely.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

What an incredible Savior we have.

As the Son of Man, Jesus can identify with us because He lived as a human being, suffering every kind of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual pain. As our Brother, Jesus has compassion for us. But as the Son of God, He can do more than just say, ""I know how you feel."" Jesus can do something about our needs! Let's thank God today for Jesus' unique ministry to us and for us.

Daniel 7:13-14; Mark 10:32-45

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. - Mark 10:45

TODAY IN THE WORD

In 1855, J. Hudson Taylor did a radical thing--he adopted traditional Chinese dress as he ministered through China. Few had taken such a bold step prior to this time. But Taylor knew that if he were to be successful in reaching souls in the isolated, inland parts of China, he must speak the language, dress in traditional clothing, and make every attempt possible to adopt local customs. In short, Taylor knew that he had to become as much like those to whom he ministered as possible. His thinking was clearly inspired: the work of the China Inland Mission was enormously effective in reaching China with the love of Christ.

In God's infinite love and mercy, He also knew that to redeem His people, He had to become like them. Perhaps this is why Jesus' preferred title for Himself was "the Son of Man." In Semitic languages, this term was used idiomatically for humanity in general or for a particular individual. Think back to our study in Philippians 2 (see December 9). Jesus was "found in appearance as a man" (v. . In Daniel's vision, he said that "one like a son of man" appeared before him (Dan. 7:13). Both verses affirm the fully-human nature of our Lord.

It is significant, however, that Jesus always referred to Himself as the Son of Man, not a Son of Man. Jesus is not merely a human being--He is the human being--the perfect representation of God's plan for humanity. Only in Jesus Christ do we behold humanity fully restored from the fall.

It's not surprising that this perfect human being should be given "authority, glory, and sovereign power" and receive the worship of all peoples and nations (Dan. 7:14).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

What would it be like if our Savior had not been able to speak our language?

Daniel 8

Daniel 8:1-27

He will be destroyed, but not by human power. - Daniel 8:25

TODAY IN THE WORD

Hurricane Charlie was part of a violent series of hurricanes that ripped across the coastal southeastern United States in 2004, but one part of the destruction that the storm left behind added a bit of perspective to the people of Florida. A billboard advertising a video game was almost completely stripped of its outer fabric, but a previous ad was left intact. Big white letters stood against the black background that read, "We need to talk--God."

Sometimes God speaks through a still small voice, but to Daniel He used a forceful charge to get across His message. Once again, Daniel encounters an overwhelming vision. This time, however, the specifics are spelled out in greater detail.

The ram was the empire of Media and Persia. Keep in mind that at this point, the Medo-Persians had yet to take over Babylon. Prophesying their emergence as the dominant world power was no small feat. In Daniel's vision, this future empire was just a blink. They were quickly overtaken by the next power, represented by a goat. The next part of the prophecy is too much for many modern readers to accept. How could Daniel have predicted the reign of Greece, which wouldn't grow to full power under Alexander the

Great's rule for another two centuries? Even more astoundingly, Daniel's dream foretold the division of Alexander's empire between four rulers after his death. The final stroke of predictive perfection is the description to the day of the length of the tyrannical oppression of Antiochus Epiphanes over the Jews in the second century b.c. For people of faith, however, the precise accuracy of Daniel's predictions demonstrates the unquestionable validity of the key messages and themes of the book.

The prophecies in this chapter are among the most important of the Old Testament, as they helped construct the framework of expectation for the coming of the Messiah. Daniel may have been exhausted, sickened, and disheartened by what he saw, but restoration, hope, and true redemption would ultimately win out through the blessed gift of Jesus Christ.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Being God's messenger can oftentimes be a difficult proposition. Even when Daniel was overwhelmed in his private moments, he was still strong enough to perform the duties God required of him. You might be called to witness to people resistant to the gospel or minister in places where evil has caused unbelievable pain. This chapter is a stark reminder that comfort doesn't always come with the territory of obedience. Take heart, because Christ gives us peace that passes understanding!

Daniel 9

Daniel 9:1-19

For your sake, O my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name. - Daniel 9:19

TODAY IN THE WORD

Eighteen-year-old Hudson Taylor stumbled upon a gospel tract in his father's library. He was convicted, fell to his knees, and accepted Christ as his Savior. Days later, his mother, who had been away, returned home. When Hudson told her what had happened, she said, "I already know. Ten days ago, the very date on which you tell me you read that tract, I spent the entire afternoon in prayer for you until the Lord assured me that my wayward son had been brought into the fold."

What confidence we can have to know that God answers prayer even when we don't see an immediate response! From Jeremiah 25:1–11, Daniel gained insight into the timing and significance of the exile. Such understanding prompted Daniel's earnest prayers (v. 4). Notice the diligence with which Daniel prayed; fasting and sackcloth were signs of humility.

As with previous prayers we have considered, Daniel began by praising God's faithfulness but then moved quickly to confession of the people's sins. One of the most touching aspects of Daniel's prayer is his identification with his fellow exiles, even though it is unlikely that he himself sinned by rebel-ling and turning from God's laws (v. 5). Daniel understood that all that had happened to him and to his people was in fulfillment of the law of Moses (see Deut. 28–29).

Daniel prayed with concern for God's glory and name. First, he prayed that the people would no longer be an object of scorn (v. 16), which dishonored God's name. Daniel also prayed that the city bearing God's name might be restored to honor and glory (v. 18). Daniel's appeal was firmly rooted in God's mercy. Acknowledging the name and mercy of the Lord, Daniel beseeched Him to act!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

It's no coincidence that God's Word was tied to Daniel's prayer. Seeing his circumstances in light of Jeremiah's prophecies enabled Daniel to pray according to the Lord's will.

Daniel 9:1-27

O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and act! - Daniel 9:19

TODAY IN THE WORD

An editor once suggested that Oscar Wilde make some significant changes to one of his plays, but the outspoken and vain playwright had no intentions of following his advice. Wilde replied, "Who am I to tamper with a masterpiece?"

Success breeds conceit in many people, sometimes to the point that they believe they are flawless. That's what makes Daniel's prayer so refreshing. Nothing we have read so far about Daniel seems to indicate the slightest evidence of sin in his heart. He seems to be flawless. But Daniel confessed, putting himself on the same level with the rest of God's people. He praised God's righteousness and confessed to turning away from it. As great a man as Daniel was, he wasn't perfect ... but once again we see him doing exactly the right thing by admitting his faults and acknowledging his part in Israel's sinfulness.

Daniel prayed with the knowledge that the seventy years Jeremiah described were coming to a close, and He asked for God's mercy and for restoration for His people. It didn't take long for Daniel to hear an answer straight from heaven.

Gabriel laid out a to-do list of God's ultimate plan for His people: finishing sin, defeating sin, paying the price for sin, initiating everlasting righteousness, confirming prophecy, and anointing the Holy One. He also provided the timeline, a stretch of seventy weeks, frequently interpreted to represent seventy seven-year weeks, a total of 490 years. The first seven weeks (49 years) would begin with the decree to rebuild the temple, which was probably issued very close to the time of Daniel's vision (see Ezra 1). The next 62 weeks (434 years) aren't described in detail, but verse 26 tells us what happens after they are completed. It appears to point to the crucifixion of Christ and the destruction of Jerusalem. The final week in the prophecy is described separately from the rest and is referred to as the Great Tribulation. The details aren't easy to understand, but the end is clear: the Evil One will be destroyed (v. 27).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Daniel assumed responsibility not only for his own sin but for the sins of his people as well. We see here three things to imitate. First, be quick to admit your guilt in comparison to God's glory. Second, instead of looking down on the weaknesses of others, confess to God the sin of your family, church, community, and country. Finally, acknowledge that Christ alone has the power to overcome sin and praise Him for doing so!

Daniel 9:1-19

O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and act! - Daniel 9:19

TODAY IN THE WORD

The National Day of Prayer takes place the first Thursday of every May, as designated by President Ronald Reagan since 1988. Prayer events involving millions of people are organized at courthouses, city halls, parks, and other public places. This tradition of public prayer dates back to the Continental Congress's nationwide call to prayer in 1775. The vision is "to communicate with every family the need for personal repentance and prayer, and to mobilize families to personal and corporate prayer, particularly on behalf of the nation and those in leadership on all levels of local, national, church and educational areas of influence."

Daniel understood and acted on a similar vision in today's reading. As a young man, he had been taken in exile to Babylon and had a long career there as a civil servant and prophetic interpreter of dreams. In chapter 9, the Medes and Persians had just conquered Babylon, confirming God's prophecy through dreams from chapters 2 and 7. This encouraged Daniel to search for more information. When he found Jeremiah 25:11–12, which prophesied the Exile as lasting seventy years, he knew the time must be drawing to a close and he got on his knees.

Earnestly, he pleaded for God to relent and bring the punishment of Exile to an end. This punishment had lasted his entire adult life, and the whole time he had kept the faith, and wasn't bitter or self-righteous. He identified with the sins of his people and repented on their behalf. The sackcloth, ashes, and fasting show us the deep intensity of his prayer. He admitted the fairness of God's judgment and praised Him for His covenant-keeping faithfulness, righteousness, justice, and love. He knew that God's character was the only effective basis for his petition to be granted: "We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy" (v. 18).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Pray today with the nationwide vision of Daniel. Though his personal situation was relatively secure, he identified with his people, confessed Israel's rebelliousness and disobedience, and acknowledged the justice of God's judgment. In the same spirit, we might confess America's various sins—including abortion, pornography, adultery, homosexuality, and racism—and plead with God for mercy and revival. Like Daniel, we can pray motivated by love both for the people around us and for God's holy standards.

Daniel 9:1-19

I turned to the Lord ... in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes. - Daniel 9:3

TODAY IN THE WORD

Bonnie Pruett Wurzbacher has climbed from sales representative to senior vice president at the Coca-Cola Company. But she doesn't measure success in those terms. Instead, she believes success is "positively growing the business I'm responsible for in a sustainable way and developing the people I manage to be their best—and doing it in a way that's honoring and glorifying to God." In charge of global accounts, she aims to make a difference in communities worldwide: Coca-Cola creates jobs, provides healthcare benefits, and invests in medical and education projects in developing areas. "Leaders with integrity ensure that their companies are contributing to the needs of their community in many ways," she says.

In his secular workplace, Daniel had a similar philosophy. As a man of faith in a pagan imperialistic system that had conquered his

country, he faced racial and religious prejudice. The deck was stacked against him, yet God had placed him in a position of leadership and influence and empowered him for a life of witness from inside the system.

Daniel was faithful to this calling, but his heart was always with his people. So when he learned from the writings of Jeremiah that the years of exile were almost over, he got on his knees and interceded for his fellow Israelites (vv. 2-3; cf. Jer. 25:11-12). He didn't kid himself—he knew that the nation had sinned and deserved the punishment that God had meted out. In fact, he identified with his people and took personal responsibility: We have sinned, disobeyed, and ignored the prophets. We are rebellious and got what we deserved.

Daniel knew his only hope lay in the character of God, so he prayed on the basis of His mercy and lovingkindness: Your power can do this. The glory of your name requires it. Despite all, we remain your people. Like Daniel, leaders pray for their communities. Like Daniel, they know where to put their hope (cf. Ps. 121).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Prayer and confession were just two among many spiritual disciplines practiced faithfully by Daniel. Spiritual disciplines help draw our minds, hearts, and wills closer to God and to fellow believers.

Daniel 9:4-19

We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy. O Lord, listen! - Daniel 9:18b-19a

TODAY IN THE WORD

In the midst of the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln proclaimed a national fast: "We have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us! It behooves us then, to humble ourselves before the offended Power, to confess our national sins, and to pray for clemency and forgiveness."

Daniel did precisely this. His prayer, offered during the Exile, is another of the Bible's great intercessory prayers. To demonstrate humility and sorrow, he fasted and put on sackcloth and ashes. His prayer also revealed faith in Jeremiah's prophecy that the Exile would last seventy years. Daniel alternated between worship of God's character and confession of Israel's sin. God is awesome and faithful, yet the people had failed to love and obey Him, or to heed His prophets (vv. 4-6). He's righteous, but Israel had been unfaithful and was "covered with shame" (vv. 7-8). He's merciful and forgiving, but the nation was rebellious and disobedient (vv. 9-11). This continuing contrast between God and Israel eliminated potential excuses by honestly acknowledging responsibility for sin. It also showed humility and a submissive knowledge of God's person and Law. Daniel's understanding of sin and forgiveness was based on the truth of Scripture.

Daniel, a righteous man, identified with his people. During the prayer, he used the pronouns "we" or "us" about 32 times to refer to Israel's sin and guilt. God's punishment was just. He responded to disobedience just as He said He would (vv. 11-14).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

To complement the prayer of Daniel in today's reading, read the tax collector's very short prayer in Jesus' parable in Luke 18:9-14. What does the tax collector have in common with Daniel? How can you imitate them?

Daniel 10

Daniel 10:1-21

TODAY IN THE WORD

Christian financial counselor Larry Burkett tells of meeting a Chinese evangelist who had endured persecution for his faith. When Burkett asked the man what amazed him most about Western Christianity, the evangelist replied, ""What amazes me most is how much you are able to accomplish without God.""

That insightful comment reflects something that is too often true for those of us who have been brought up in the so-called ""Christian West."" We can be tempted to settle for a ""safe"" version of Christianity instead of the real thing. But every believer needs to learn the lesson Jesus taught: ""Apart from me you can do nothing"" (John 15:5).

Perhaps one reason we do not see more of God's power is that we have never encountered the kind of fierce spiritual opposition that is commonplace in countries such as China.

Whatever the case, one thing is certain: the spiritual warfare being waged in "the heavenly realms" is far above our ability even to comprehend, let alone engage in, on our own power. The prophet Daniel's glimpse of just one heavenly warrior, an angel who was probably Gabriel, left him weak and speechless.

Daniel 10 is an amazing text by any measure. Aside from the angel's awe-inspiring appearance, his message to Daniel was even more startling. As Daniel prayed and fasted, waiting for understanding of a vision, the angel dispatched with the answer was delayed for three weeks, locked in intense warfare with the forces of darkness.

This angel had to call for help from Michael, the archangel with a special relationship to Israel. Michael freed the angel to deliver Daniel's answer, but the warfare was to continue.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Did you notice how our unique glimpse into spiritual warfare was closely linked with Daniel's prayer?

Passages like this help us understand why the Bible tells us to "pray continually" (1 Thess. 5:17). Prayer is not shooting up emergency flares to God when things get rough. He is interested in our spiritual development, and that includes learning the value of perseverance in prayer.

Daniel 10:1-21

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Daniel 10:10-21

Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against ... the spiritual forces of evil. - Ephesians 6:12

TODAY IN THE WORD

Not long ago, an American citizen returning to Florida from the Netherlands became the victim of a bizarre incident. As the man was preparing to board his flight in Amsterdam, a Dutch officer secretly put two explosive devices in his luggage to test airport security. Unfortunately, the officer was called away and forgot to remove the devices. The American flew to Orlando with his extra "baggage" and was detained when the explosives were found. The mess was straightened out, and Dutch officials were told to stop their "bombs in the baggage" tests.

Imagine how much different the story would have been if this passenger had been made aware of what was happening. Chances are he would never have boarded that plane without definitely knowing that the explosives had been removed from his bags.

There's someone trying to put bombs in our luggage too, only this isn't a test. Satan is trying to bring us down spiritually, as he did with Peter (see yesterday's study). The difference is that we are not ""unaware of his schemes"" (2 Cor. 2:11). God's Word clearly instructs us that we are in a spiritual battle.

What does this have to do with our prayer lives? Everything, judging by this intriguing incident in the life of Daniel. The setting for the story is the visions given to Daniel concerning the future. The prophet prayed intensely for wisdom to understand the awesome and overwhelming things he was seeing.

The angel sent to communicate with Daniel revealed to him the reason for the three-week delay in the answer. This angel had been withstood by an evil spirit called ""the prince of the Persian kingdom."" The conflict was so intense that the archangel Michael had to come and clear the way.

Someone might read this and say, ""Well, I'm no Daniel receiving heavenly visions. My prayers aren't important enough to attract this kind of heavenly attention.""

Really? The Bible doesn't say that. Every time the Word mentions spiritual warfare, we are included in the battle. We need to pray with persistence and power because the devil hates our prayers and would shoot them down if he could. But he can't!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Daniel 10 seems so far removed from our daily experience that it's hard for us to identify with the prayer battle described there.

But don't miss the point of the lesson. Prayer is not a private exercise we do to make ourselves feel better. Our prayers are not just little sentiments and requests we shoot up toward heaven. When we pray, we assault Satan's kingdom and arouse his opposition. So if you encounter resistance in your prayer life, that's a signal to keep at it instead of giving up.

Daniel 10:10-21

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Daniel 10:1-11:1

Peace! Be strong now; be strong. - Daniel 10:18

TODAY IN THE WORD

Some of the most widely believed urban legends tell of superhuman strength in times of crisis—a mother lifting a car to save her baby, or a child moving a tree trunk to rescue his father. The theory is that adrenaline can trigger potentially unlimited power in even the weakest people if the situation is dangerous enough.

Who would have imagined that an answer to prayer could be such a situation, so terrifying that Daniel needed superhuman strength to cope with it? Daniel saw a vision of one who, it is safe to assume, was an angel of God, and he said he was coming in response to Daniel's plea for understanding (v. 12). Now, if humankind could choose one representative from all of history who was strong, wise, and godly enough to receive a message from God, Daniel would be on the short list of candidates. But even he was overcome by the vision. It was only by the strength transferred by the angel's touch that Daniel was able to stand and listen (v. 19).

The message itself is enough to send a tingle of fear through our hearts. The angel says that he fought for twenty-one days against

the Prince of the Persian kingdom. This is probably not a reference to a human prince (v. 12). Coupled with the idea that Michael is Daniel's or Israel's prince (v. 21), we get the idea that angels both godly and fallen rule over nations—or at least protect them—in the spiritual realm.

Even more chilling is the thought that such battles are not instantly won by the armies of God. It took this angel twenty-one days to get past the opposition and into Daniel's presence, and he was headed to rejoin the fight after he delivered his message. There's no indication of a guaranteed victory for this angel, as it seems that his place in the fight was to be filled by the angel of Greece (v. 20). The forces of the enemy are real and formidable, and they wage war against the armies of God. We should surely thank God continually for His protection and love for His people!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Daniel's vision is proof of two things: angelic wars transpire that are of great importance to humankind, and angels can respond to the prayers of one person. In light of these facts, never underestimate the importance of your prayer. Even though you can't see the spiritual battles being fought, you can engage in the action with prayer. Ask God to send reinforcements to help His people; He can and will answer that prayer!

Daniel 11

Daniel 11:2-35

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

TODAY IN THE WORD

In 2003, reporter Geraldo Rivera was removed from his embedded position with troops in Iraq for disclosing too much information in one of his telecasts. Rivera drew a map in the sand to depict details of an upcoming military operation, and military officials and the American public believed that the loose and rough data he let slip could have affected the outcome of future operations.

It wasn't a worldwide newscast, but Daniel's vision forecast the military future of the world in much greater detail than any news agency could ever hope to do—and over the course of several centuries, those predictions came true. Comparing Daniel 11 to a book of ancient history, we can see that Daniel gave the world advance notice of the progression from the Persians (v. 2), to Alexander the Great's Greek empire (vv. 3-4), to the Ptolemies and Seleucids (vv. 5-20), and into the terrible reign of Antiochus Epiphanes (vv. 21-35).

Scholars debate who is being described at the end of the chapter, whether it's Antiochus Epiphanes or Antichrist—or both. But it seems most likely that at least some of these events have yet to be fulfilled, especially in light of Chapter 12, which describes the resurrection of the dead to their eternal destinations (12:2). What can't be questioned is the precise accuracy of Daniel's message, so we know that we can trust the end-times predictions in this book with complete confidence.

Many scholars have used this passage, along with the details of Revelation, to map out thorough timelines of the Tribulation, and for a devotional study like this, the specifics of this eschatology can overshadow the impact of the point of verse 45. In the end, the bad guy is defeated. No one who glorifies himself over God can expect anything but ultimate defeat at the hands of the Lord, and no wicked leader will escape the righteous judgment of God.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Once again we invite you to expand your study of this complex and often controversial topic beyond the pages of Today in the Word. Many believers dismiss this topic as “above their heads,” but God delivered the message through Daniel and other prophets for a reason.

Even if we never fully grasp all the details in these passages, we can still understand that these truths should motivate us to live lives that please God.

Daniel 12

Daniel 11:36-12:13

Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens. - Daniel 12:3

TODAY IN THE WORD

Corporal Kevin Clarke wanted to do one last thing before his Marine platoon embarked on a mission while deployed in Iraq. He asked a fellow Marine to print out the testimony he had recently typed. Corporal Clarke was killed on that mission, and his personal

statement of faith was his parting message to his friends, his family, and the world. The testimony was circulated among the Marines, sent to his parents, and even printed at his funeral, preserving the story of his faith and promoting the glory of his God.

A life lived in honor and obedience to God leaves an indelible mark on the world and inscribes a message that can never be erased. The angel speaking to Daniel referred to the destiny for the resurrected in the final days, and he calls special attention to people who lead by example, imparting wisdom and directing others to righteousness (v. 3). Their destiny is everlasting life, and their reward is eternal glory. And when the angel tells Daniel to close up and seal the words of the scroll, it isn't a command to hide the truth. It is a call to preserve the message and officially acknowledge its truth as God's Word.

Daniel then saw an exchange from two beings on opposite sides of the river that forecasts more details of the last half of the Tribulation. The expression "time, times, and half a time" is interpreted as a year, two years, and half a year—three and a half years. Maybe the most important concept for us to grasp is in verse 8, when Daniel himself admits that he doesn't understand. Only with God's revelation and illumination can we ever hope to comprehend these prophecies—with that humility, there is hope for understanding (v. 10).

The prediction Daniel could cling to is found in the final words of this book. God promised that Daniel would rise from death to receive his inheritance, and for an Israelite displaced from his homeland and serving foreign kings, the hope of his eternal residence with his glorious Lord was the perfect way to end an amazing life of faith.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

You can cling to that same promise offered to Daniel, if you have faith in Christ. With an eye toward eternal reward, never lose sight of the guiding principles of verse 3. Lead a life filled with wisdom and help lead others to righteousness. Studying God's Word is an excellent start. Follow it up with praise and prayer for God, then imitate Daniel's example of faithfulness wherever God has placed you. Daniel didn't possess anything you lack—trust God to use you in the same way!