



***Becoming Fully Devoted Followers  
by Studying the Followers Before Us***

**WEEK 32**

**DANIEL**

**AUGUST 6-10, 2007**

<b>DAY</b>	<b><i>THROUGH THE BIBLE</i></b>	<b>ABBREVIATED STUDY</b>
<b>Monday</b>	Daniel 11-12, Psalm 6	Daniel 2:1-21, Psalm 6
<b>Tuesday</b>	Ezekiel 1-5, Psalm 7	Daniel 4:19-37, Psalm 7
<b>Wednesday</b>	Ezekiel 6-10, Psalm 8	Daniel 5:1-31, Psalm 8
<b>Thursday</b>	Ezekiel 11-15, Psalm 9	Daniel 6:1-28, Psalm 9
<b>Friday</b>	Ezekiel 16-20, Psalm 10	Daniel 7:1-14, Psalm 10



**READ**

Daniel 2:1-21

Psalm 6

**REFLECT**

The book of Daniel is an unusual one, preserving both history and prophecy. The first six chapters recount the dramatic account of Daniel's witness and that of his friends when in exile in Babylon, and the last six chapters contain Daniel's own prophetic words and experience. Since this series focuses on the personalities we find in the Bible and on their relationship to the Lord, we will give four days to the narratives of Daniel, and the fifth day to one of his prophecies.

Daniel was drafted into the court of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, with other gifted young men of the Exile, as part of an apparent policy to bring the captive Israelites into the mainstream of Babylonian culture. The resulting clash of cultures, religion, and identity serves as the mainspring for the tension of the stories about Daniel. Would Daniel and his friends conform, and capitulate to the incessant demands of the host culture, or would they be able to preserve their identity as servants of the Most High God even as captives in another land? Daniel's predicament has resonated with many generations of Jewish and Christian believers, wherever the worshiping community has felt the pressures of cultural conformity.

The first chapter describes the recruiting of the young men, and their efforts to maintain their Jewish identity (despite changes in their names). The second chapter tells the story of Nebuchadnezzar's first dream, and his wish for a truly inspired interpretation of it. In fact he tests the supernatural powers of his wise men by asking them not just to interpret it, but to be able to recount the dream itself (2:8-9). When they fail and he is at the point of executing them all, Daniel steps forward and

describes the dream, and also interprets it (2:31-46). Nebuchadnezzar is duly impressed, and rewards Daniel and his friends. He further acknowledges that Daniel's God has something going for Him: He is "a" god of gods, "a" lord of lords (2:2:47) – a nice pat on the back for Yahweh.

Our passage today focuses especially on Daniel's explanation of how it is that he has become a mediator for God's revelation. The wise men of the Chaldeans were proud of their "literature and language" (1:4) that included the manipulations of magic and sorcery. Daniel makes clear to the king that his knowledge does not come by the means of presumed abilities in the science of divination. Rather it is given as a gracious gift by the only God of heaven (2:27-28), so that the king may know that it is by Him that he rules (2:37). In these days of the popularity of Harry Potter, it is a nice reminder of how vast is the gap between the supposed technology of magic, and the true blessings of God, which are ours simply because of His love and grace. All He asks is that we turn to Him, give ourselves to Him, and glorify Him in obedience and in witness.

**RESPOND**

Technology is perhaps the prime obsession of our age, and it is an exciting one. Jason Bourne, Danny Ocean, Harry Potter and the Hogwarts curriculum, all testify to this, as do the iPhone, the Xbox, and their brethren. But no technology is free from ethical issues. The internet, with its powerful benefits and devastating evils, is a prime example. No technology can be used safely if it does not come under the lordship of the God of love. Only as we are careful to understand that only God can give what is good (James 1:17) can we engage safely with the wonders of our culture.

**PRAY**

"Return, O Lord, and rescue my soul. Save me because of Your lovingkindness." Psalm 6:4

D.D.

**READ**

Daniel 4:19-37

Psalms 7

**REFLECT**

The book of Daniel describes Daniel's dealings with three successive kings: Nebuchadnezzar and his son Belshazzar, the last two kings of Babylon, and Darius the Mede, who killed Belshazzar and conquered the land. Three stories are told of encounters with Nebuchadnezzar. We read the first yesterday. The second (which we note but will not study this week) tells how God preserved Daniel's friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, when they chose to be cast into the furnace, refusing to worship the image of the king (chapter 3). In chapter 4 we read of a final lesson that God teaches Nebuchadnezzar, bringing the king to a new level of understanding and worship of the one true God.

Nebuchadnezzar has another dream, this one of a spectacular tree that provides massive resource for those living in and around it. But then the tree is destroyed, and an angelic voice declares a curse on someone who will be reduced to an animalistic life for seven years, at God's will. The king comes to Daniel for an interpretation, and Daniel is horrified, since he sees in it a curse upon the king himself, for his arrogance (4:25-26). But Nebuchadnezzar insists on hearing the interpretation; he does not, however, change his ways, and in a year the curse falls suddenly upon him. He is driven away from human companionship, and lives as a wild man in the open countryside for the appointed time. One thinks of King Lear, and of the 1994 movie "The Madness of King George." The moment of healing is interesting, indicating a sequence in which first Nebuchadnezzar looks upward to acknowledge God as Lord, and then finds his reason has returned to him, so that he then gives God the glory that he had neglected to give for so long (4:34).

This story sounds themes that recur elsewhere in Daniel, and in the Bible. What does it mean to be human? The clear answer here is that to

be truly and fully human is to be truly and fully a devoted follower of God. If we live by any other suppositions, we are abandoning the full potential of our high calling, and are regressing improperly to an animalistic state. Similarly, what does it mean to be reasonable? The king knew that reason was paramount for a good ruler; today in political debate we essentially argue about which courses of action are the most reasonable. Nebuchadnezzar discovered that reason comes only after God is glorified – that is, only after the human is put in his or her place as the servant of God. As we acknowledge God's love and power, reason "returns."

Another great theme is sounded in the language of dominion and kingdom. We were told that it was God who gave Israel over into the power of Nebuchadnezzar (1:2); now three times Nebuchadnezzar has heard that he himself remains in the power of the God of Israel. It is God who "removes kings and establishes kings" (2:21), and who delivers those who defy the king to do God's will (3:28). Now finally he himself is willing to declare of this God that "His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and His dominion is from generation to generation" (4:3; see also 4:34). Nebuchadnezzar's appreciation of God has reached a climax. However, the lesson he has learned will not make an impact on his son, the next king.

**RESPOND**

Some respond to the claim of God's dominion with anger, defiance, or denial. Some respond with gratitude, seeing the promise therein. None of us can be comfortable with the sovereignty of God unless we have been humbled, changed, and blessed by Him. If today you find yourself calling out to God about seemingly impossible circumstances, expect Him to act on your behalf, as the sovereign Lord of love. But expect also that you will change.

**PRAY**

Dear Lord, Thank You for allowing us to glimpse the truth of Your rule over all things. Thank You that we know that the Lord of all is the Lord of love.

- D.D.

**READ**

Daniel 5:1-31

Psalm 8

**REFLECT**

Today's passage recounts what was apparently the only encounter between Daniel and Belshazzar, the son of Nebuchadnezzar and his successor as king. Belshazzar seems to exemplify the tendency seen in some sons to forget as completely as possible the truths and values of the previous generation. We meet him as he throws a party for a huge group, too many to be his close friends, but he nevertheless gets drunk enough to act with far less dignity than his role requires. He decides to feature the captured vessels of the Jerusalem Temple at the party, and, using these implements sacred to the Most High God, toasts "the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone" (5:4). These materials, the substance with which empire is built, already have figured in a vision that placed them firmly under the massive power of God (2:35). And so here is Belshazzar's sin: the exaltation of all that is human over all that is divine.

Judgment is immediate, and is written by a hand as a message on the wall. None of the king's wise men can read or interpret the message, and panic ensues, until we read in 5:10 of the intervention of the queen. Commentators generally understand this to be the queen mother, the wife of Nebuchadnezzar, since Belshazzar's wives were all already present (5:2), and because this queen represents the lessons learned in the previous reign. She knows of Daniel, and in fact her recommendation represents the highest words of praise of him that we have. Her advice is taken, and Daniel is summoned and told of the reward he will be given if he succeeds in understanding the writing.

Daniel's response is abrupt to the point of rudeness. Rejecting the offered rewards and thus any implication in bribery, he first recounts the

lessons Belshazzar's father had learned about Israel's God, which Belshazzar should also have understood (5:22). Then he reads out the script on the wall and interprets it as a complete and immediate judgment upon the king and the empire. The three words – *mene, tekel, parsin* – are words related to market weights and money; Daniel's interpretation is based on word play relating to the verbal forms of the words. (It has also been pointed out that the sum of the amounts specified can total 62, the age of the coming conqueror – 5:31).

The story, then, is about the callous disregard of truths about the Most High God of Israel. The subjugation of Israel as slaves in Babylon does not excuse the Babylonians' studied ignorance of His reality. If anything, the fact that He has used Babylon for His sovereign purposes requires them to take heed of their own dependence upon Him. Only this God can determine the greatness and the fall of any nation. National successes and national disaster can both lead to the furthering of His own purposes in this world; in fact, by definition they must lead to the furthering of His purposes. But He does offer nations the chance to participate positively, rather than negatively, in the glorifying of His name, and witnessing to His love.

**RESPOND**

Some of us have learned that the small and large acts of obedience we are called to, if we obey, can make an out-of-proportion difference in our lives and in the lives of those we connect with on a daily basis. The story of Belshazzar pushes us to see this on a national scale as well: to have the courage and faith to understand that the spiritual ethos of our nation can deteriorate or improve as we respond in prayer and action.

**PRAY**

"What is man, that You take thought of him? Or the son of man, that You care for him? Yet You have made him a little lower than God, and You crown him with glory and majesty.... O Lord our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth." Psalm 8:4, 5, 9

- D.D.

**READ**

Daniel 6:1-28

Psalm 9

**REFLECT**

Today's passage describes Daniel's experience under the third ruler, Darius the Mede, who ruled the region after conquering the Babylonian empire. (On the details of the history of this period I have been helped by Joyce Baldwin's commentary on Daniel, and the articles in the *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*.) It has been suggested that the continuities of Daniel's life despite the comings and goings of the rulers is part of the message: we might worry about the differences brought by a new regime or administration, but nothing can alter the one high controlling power that determines the large and small details of our lives: our Lord reigns.

Daniel now came under attack by a new group of administrators with an old problem: his abilities and his appointment to power brought on their jealousy. His integrity left them only one route by which to topple him: his idiosyncratic religion, that acknowledged only one God. So they worked to oppose his unshakable observance of his "law" (6:5) by creating a new opposing law, "according to the law of the Medes and the Persians which cannot be revoked" (6:8). The immovable object meets the unstoppable force!

Darius the king exemplifies the man who is only half in control of his environment. In his kingdom, administration has taken on a life of its own. He signs into law the curiously shallow decree, that no one in his lands may "petition god or man" but only the king (6:7). This is to last 30 days, and disobedience will earn the penalty of sure death in the lions' den. The situation is similar to when Nebuchadnezzar set up his own idol for all to worship, putting Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in mortal jeopardy (chapter 3), although here there is an additional element of murderous intent against Daniel. When Daniel purposefully – and apparently with no hesitation – violates the command, Darius is horrified

at what he has done, and puts massive effort into getting his most valuable administrator off the hook. "The Law of the Medes and the Persians" is firm, however: Daniel must go to his death. But as Darius announced Daniel's condemnation, he also affirms to him that he believes that Daniel's God can protect him. And Daniel is sent to the lions.

We see the next part of the story through the experience of Darius, not of Daniel; Darius fasts through the night, and is up first thing in the morning to find out what happened. To his relief, Daniel is unharmed. But Daniel's accusers, thrown into the den soon after, find the lions to be hungry and vicious. We wish we could have the story from Daniel's perspective, and indeed most representations in song and art depict Daniel in prayer and the lions around him like affectionate house cats. All we know is that "My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths" (6:22); the firmness of Daniel's faith has made us envision a tranquil night, but it might have been very tense indeed.

Darius's part is to learn the lesson that Nebuchadnezzar learned before him: Daniel's God is the living God of dominion and kingdom (6:26-27). This is a higher "law" than any human law, and it alone is unshakably true.

**RESPOND**

In many ways this story is about Darius. The miracle of Daniel's protection has an avid audience in the king. So also our efforts at Christian living are watched by others, often with more insight than we ourselves possess. But that's OK: Daniel reminds us that the story of our lives is the story of "my God," or at least it ought to be and can be.

**PRAY**

"Be gracious to me, Lord. Behold the affliction I bear from those who hate me, Thou who dost lift me up from the gates of death, that I may tell of all Thy praises." Psalm 9:13-14

- D.D.

**READ**

Daniel 7:1-14  
Psalm 10

**REFLECT**

The last six chapters of Daniel (7-12) are very different in style and substance from the first six. They relate a series of visions given to Daniel, in what is termed apocalyptic style. Apocalyptic prophecy sees present events in terms of the final end of all things, and uses imagery and language that can be very difficult to interpret. Three general approaches to interpreting these apocalypses of Daniel can be sketched. Since Daniel was supposed to have lived around 540 BC and the prophecies were fulfilled in detail over the next 200 years and more, some scholars simply conclude they were really written long after the events they are supposed to predict. Another group does full justice to the prophetic reality of these visions, but uses Daniel as the basis of an elaborate and detailed end-times expectation that is still playing itself out. The trouble is that they end up requiring over-specific interpretations of the apocalyptic images, that furthermore may be out of step with other clear teachings of Scripture. A third group appreciates the supernatural nature of Daniel's foretelling, and moves toward interpretation by finding echoes and parallels in other, more readily understandable texts.

The vision related in today's passage describes four beasts emerging one after another from the sea, and then a scene in the heavenly court, centering on "one like a son of man." It is generally agreed that the four beasts represent four consecutive kingdoms dominating the fortunes of Judea: the eagle given human reason reminds us of Nebuchadnezzar's experience, and Babylon. The bear speaks of Darius's Median empire. Then comes the leopard, representing Alexander's Grecian conquest of Asia Minor (the "four heads" being the four pieces it broke into upon his death). And finally the fourth beast represents the Roman Empire.

After these four, or perhaps over these four, Daniel sees another kind of kingdom being celebrated and established. No rough beast is involved, but the beauty and glory of God Himself. The imagery bespeaks His ample power and authority, as well as the equanimity with

which He reigns. As the earthly kingdoms in their boastfulness are tolerated merely for a time (7:11-12), a majestic human figure approaches the throne of God: "one like a son of man." In contrast to the bickering of the earthly kingdoms, this one is bestowed a kingdom by the hand of God: "dominion, glory, and a kingdom" (7:13-14). The kingdom will spread over all the earth, and it will last forever. This is a qualitatively different kingdom than the earthly counterparts; the kingdom God establishes is more effective, more extensive, and never-ending.

It is of greatest interest that it was during the rule of the fourth kingdom, Rome, that Jesus was born, and lived, and died, and rose. It is likewise of great interest that in the Gospels the phrase He most often used to refer to Himself was "the son of man" (see Mark 2:28; 8:31; 13:26; 14:41). Still, it was not an exact, detailed interpretation of Daniel that Jesus was drawing on. In His ministry He worked hard to avoid the mass hysteria that would break loose if the crowds decided to dub Him their Messiah and use Him for their own purposes. Rather he seems to have chosen this phrase because it was ambiguous, and might imply "a certain personage" or just "myself" (see John 9:35-38). It allowed Him to introduce the ideas of His own kingdom, without getting caught up in earthly, mundane expectation. It allowed Him to begin to establish the kingdom of God under the radar of the earthly kingdoms.

**RESPOND**

Before I was married, I was able to give a pretty good description of the type of woman I would marry. By the time I proposed to Ruth, inadequate typology had vanished in the face of wonderful reality. So also it seems to me that we can line up our spiritual expectations with any amount of detail and justification, but when Jesus arrives on the scene it's just Jesus, and nothing else matters. The book of Daniel, in its stories and prophecies, has amazing fulfillment in Jesus. That amazement has actually more to do with Jesus than the book of Daniel, I submit. Theology fascinates; Jesus saves.

**PRAY**

Jesus, Thank you that it's about You: yesterday, today, and forever.

- Dave Dorman