

Read Daniel 1

As for these four youths, God gave them knowledge and intelligence in every *branch of literature and wisdom*; Daniel even understood all *kinds of visions and dreams*.

Dan 1:17

I have two diplomas hanging on the wall of my office. One is my bachelor's degree and one is my master's degree. Because I was working, it took me 11 years to get both of them. And do you know what they have done for me? They have made me appear smarter to other people. I don't mean to say I learned nothing in college and seminary, but the moment I received those pieces of paper, my intelligence level failed to increase, and I am certainly no better than people who lack those degrees.

There are two kinds of wisdom mentioned in Daniel 1. The first kind is wisdom of the world. The king of Babylon wanted men chosen who were wise, but he wasn't referring to godly wisdom. He was referring to intellectual prowess. He wanted men who were well-read, who could argue in the town square and who could advise him on certain matters. And while Daniel and his friends were wise, it was wisdom given directly from the efforts of God instead of their own. We can encounter a brand-new situation, and because of God, have the wisdom to know what to do if we submit ourselves to him. **Notice Daniel and his friends didn't just wise up. They determined to glorify God in their lives and as a result, God gave them wisdom so they could glorify Him and to benefit their own lives as well. Where are you seeking wisdom? From the Bible? That's great. From godly friends? Also great. But remember, we have the ability to simply ask God to grant us wisdom for situations we haven't even encountered yet, and He can prepare us. When is the last time you asked God to give you wisdom? If we fail to ask, we generally just go with the best plan we can formulate, and it usually has holes in it.**

Read Daniel 2

so that they might request compassion from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his friends would not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. Dan 2:18

When I worked in the insurance industry, our bosses had a favorite solution for solving office problems. They would encourage all employees to group up with other employees to find answers to the various issues that we were experiencing as a company. If a group of people came up with a solution that was adopted, they received some kind of reward or recognition. So people would regularly group up, not so much for the benefit of the company, but mainly to get compensated.

Daniel offers to provide the interpretation of the king's dream, even before knowing what it is. But look at the interaction of Daniel and his friends. They didn't sit around and brainstorm. They didn't draw up a personality profile of the king and determine what he was most likely to dream about. As Christians we know that we should pray to find wisdom, but we don't pursue that avenue as often as we should. The specific prayer of Daniel and his friends was that God would show them compassion by revealing the

dream and interpretation to Daniel. They weren't seeking credit, but their lives. **When you have a problem do you go to friends, or the Lord? There is absolutely no problem seeking godly advice from others, but is that where you stop? Imagine that a friend comes to you seeking godly advice...what should you do? Instead of trying to give them an answer that second, offer to pray for them at that moment and to continue to do so. God reveals His will to the people it affects. So instead of brainstorming for God's will, let us truly pray for one another. Let us come together as groups of believers and pray until we see something happen. Find people in your church to pray with, or in your neighborhood, or simply friends that you already have. Determine that you will pray on whatever the issue is until God moves.**

Read Daniel 3

But *even if He does not*, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up. Dan 3:18

My friend Chuck has been going through cancer for well over a year. During that year, I have seen him grow closer to the Lord and his attitude has been a testimony to me and many other believers I know. And when Chuck prays, he prays for healing. He prays that God will rid him of this cancer and allow him to continue to be around for his wife. And while he prays for God's healing, Chuck says that he'll be healed either way: God will remove the cancer, or God will take him to Heaven. If the cancer wins, Chuck is no less convinced in the God that He serves and loves.

Daniel truly appears to be unsure what will happen. He knows that they cannot worship the false idols. He knows that he has been condemned to death as a result. But, he has no idea what is going to happen. He knows that God is absolutely capable of rescuing him, but Daniel does not require that God save him in order that his faith be proven. Daniel was already sure of the God who had led him safely through so many situations. **Do you pray for specific results in your life? You should, otherwise how will you know when God is moving. What if God doesn't answer your prayer in the way that you want? Will it cause you to doubt? Think back to some other prayers you have prayed that God didn't answer the way you expected. Can you remember those times that God's answer was so much better than what you even requested? Let's live the faith of Daniel today, calling on the Lord, but leaving the results in His hands.**

Read Daniel 4

While the word *was* in the king's mouth, a voice came from heaven, *saying*, 'King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared: sovereignty has been removed from you, Dan 4:31

If I could just stop talking, it's amazing how much trouble I'd save myself. How many times in my life have I continued an argument with parents, siblings, or even my wife and took it too far in order to "win"? There are those times when you suddenly realize as soon as you say something, you have gone too far. It's hard to take back something you said only a few moments before. We have a chance to monitor our speech before it comes out, and restraint is always easier than repentance.

This passage shows us the immediacy of judgment. Daniel warned the king what would happen if he didn't repent of his pride. And then one prideful day, Nebuchadnezzar is praising himself and receives judgment as the words are even in his mouth. It was immediate. It was without delay. Sometimes we fail to take sin seriously, because we don't worry about immediate judgment. Sin is wrong at the moment we commit it, not the moment we realize it was sin. The moment the words are in our mouth or the actions are in our hands, it is completed. **Sometimes we see our sin quickly, and other times we walk around in ignorance until we submit to God's words for us. We shouldn't just pray forgiveness for our sins, but also for greater sensitivity to our sin. We should pray that God would make us wary of sin before it arrives on our doorstep. This makes our repentance more complete. Instead of just praying for a bad moment, we deal with the time periods before and after that we weren't more aware.**

Read Daniel 5

Suddenly the fingers of a man's hand emerged and began writing opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace, and the king saw the back of the hand that did the writing. Dan 5:5

My very first baseball game is a keen memory. It was 1990 and the St. Louis Cardinals (my favorite team) were playing the Colorado Rockies. Bryn Smith pitched for the Cardinals and it was a tight game until the 8th inning when Pedro Guerrero hit a double to drive in Ozzie Smith for the winning run. My parents also bought me a hat and a baseball with the players autographs stamped on it. I got home late at night, and re-watched the highlights on TV. It's a memory that is forever etched into my mind.

There are many things that frightened King Belshazzar on this night, but the hand writing in the wall had to be tops. Not writing on the wall, because he doesn't see a pen. He sees fingers and so they were digging the message of doom into the plaster of the walls. God wanted this moment etched in his memory and his wall. He didn't want there to be later confusion on what had been written. There would be no lack of clarity or ability to see the message again. Just like my first baseball game, it would be an inescapable memory. Think about a time you experienced conviction that you later dismissed. You heard a sermon that addressed your particular sin, but you later reasoned why the sin was ok for you. It wasn't etched on your heart, the severity of your sin and what it could cost you. **We need to deal sincerely with our sin. Let's admit it. We will not stand before God and hear Him dismiss any of the sins we failed to deal with. As believers, those sins cannot keep us from eternity, but they can keep us from eternal blessings and rewards, and from a better life here on earth. What message has God scratched into the plaster of your heart that you keep ignoring, even while the message remains?**

Read Daniel 6

The king then gave orders, and they brought those men who had maliciously accused Daniel, and they cast them, their children and their wives into the lions'

den; and they had not reached the bottom of the den before the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones. Dan 6:24

Sports talk radio should really be for talking about sports. Yet one host seems to go off on personal tangents quite often, usually about his divorce. He says on the air that divorce doesn't have to be a bad thing. "I'm happy, my ex-wife is happy, and my kids are happy." I'm sorry, but that's not true. He probably wants to believe they're happy, but reality and perception are often different. My guess is that he wouldn't want to admit that a divorce that once seemed like a good idea, had more consequences than he wished for.

Daniel in the lion's den is a classic children's Bible story. But there is a missing piece of the story...verse 24. It wasn't just the men who conspired against Daniel who faced consequences for their evil deeds, but even their wives and children suffered. Why? First of all, it was a judgment carried out by a king, not by God. And secondly, it's a grim reminder that our sin doesn't just affect us. Perhaps Darius feared that the families left behind would simply continue the same sin their father's committed. For whatever reason it likely served as a lesson to others. **Who does your sin affect? Hopefully you will admit that it affects you. Secondly, it affects your friends who see what you do and learn bad habits from it. If you're married, it can affect your spouse and/or your children. Sin is all about selfishness, and one of the most selfish acts of sin is to think that it affects no one else. Just like the radio host, you may be trying to pour potpourri on a manure pile.**

Read Daniel 7

I kept looking until thrones were set up, and the Ancient of Days took *His* seat; His vesture *was* like white snow and the hair of His head like pure wool. His throne *was* ablaze with flames, its wheels *were* a burning fire. Dan 7:9

Courtroom scenes are not uncommon on the local news, but I recall as a child watching parts of a man's trial on the local news. The odd thing to me is that he was wearing a suit. I thought that prisoners had to wear those orange jumpsuits and handcuffs at all time. Later I realized that the courtroom is set up to truly provide an atmosphere of innocent until proven guilty. While the accused may be jailed awaiting their trial, they are brought in with the opportunity to present a solid appearance to a judge and jury. So a defendant makes sure to walk into that courtroom with the best impression possible.

Of all the interesting things that Daniel saw in this chapter, the end of verse 9 sticks in my mind the most. God's throne is more like a chariot. It has wheels and is mobile. I don't believe the idea is that God has a nice motorized wheelchair, but the point is that His rule is not limited to one place. A guilty defendant may be able to fool a judge and jury in court by cleaning up, but we are never out of the presence and awareness of God. While we may work to make ourselves "presentable" on a Sunday morning, we are no more or less the person that we were on Saturday night. We have to get rid of the idea that God hangs out in the church or in Heaven. He hangs out in your home. He hangs out in your car. He is in the midst of our thoughts and conversations. **God's rule extends to every part of your life. What areas of your life have you been living as if God doesn't have access to them? As a believer, remember that the Holy Spirit has indwelt us and**

goes everywhere we go, whether good or bad. Are you allowing Him the rule of your life, or telling Him where you will go and what you will do? Who are you trying to fool?

Read Daniel 8

The broken *horn* and the four *horns that arose in its place represent four kingdoms which will arise from his nation, although not with his power. Dan 8:22*

The "Back to the Future" movies caused two wants in my life: a desire for time travel and to own a Delorean. However the most intriguing plot twist came in "Back to the Future II" when Marty buys a book that tells the outcomes of major sporting events for the past several decades, which was actually his future. He decided that if he could get the book and take it back to the past, he would get very wealthy from it. I thought that would be amazing, not so much for the money, but just to be able to know what was going to happen before it actually happened.

Some people read Daniel, and find it difficult. Daniel is having dreams about all kinds of weird looking creatures, and now we have a goat with extra horns, and it seems confusing. The interpretation is given that the shaggy goat is actually the nation of Greece that will one day rule and then in verse 22 we see that Greece will split into four kingdoms. And this is absolutely what happened. Alexander the Great died and his four generals were given control of the kingdom that remained. This doesn't seem so noteworthy until you realize that Daniel wrote this down about 250 years before it happened! Alexander hadn't been born and Greece wasn't a major player yet. **What does this teach us? First of all, the Bible is trustworthy. Reading it in hindsight makes it seem less impressive, until you realize this wasn't history being written down, but accurately predicated. Secondly, is there anything that God is unaware of in our lives? He knows what we need? He knows where we'll be in five years. Our stress comes from the fact that we don't know where we'll be in five years. Why do we need to? If we will trust God to lead us where we should go, that's all we need to know. Let this be a reminder to us today to trust Him. Daniel 7 reminds us that we can never escape Him. Let this be a reminder to willingly place our will in His hands.**

Read Daniel 9

O my God, incline Your ear and hear! Open Your eyes and see our desolations and the city which is called by Your name; for we are not presenting our supplications before You on account of any merits of our own, but on account of Your great compassion. Dan 9:18

High school physics was the only class I ever had to drop. I had gotten about 6 weeks in, and I only took it because I loved science. But the math elements were leaving me in the dust, and my first test proved that I was in over my head. So I went to the teacher and asked him to let me drop the class before I had to live with the grade. He was a nice guy and we got along just fine, and he told me that he didn't want me to drop his class. He said he could guarantee that I would get a "C". If my grade got too low, he would give

me some extra credit assignments to help me keep it up. I said no, because I just didn't feel like I would be earning my grade.

That teacher was trying to show me compassion I suppose, but I really felt that grades should be earned on merit. And while education and merit often go together, merit and faith rarely meet. Daniel didn't ask for God to hear his prayer because of the things he had done in the past. He didn't point to the time that he was thrown into the furnace because of his stand for God. Daniel asked for God to hear based on God's compassion, not Daniel's merit. Even the mighty, faithful acts of Daniel, were filthy rags before a perfect God. Let's remember that we hold no merit before the Lord. **We may impress our boss or co-workers, but we do not impress God. When we are obedient, we're simply doing what we're supposed to do anyway! Obedience shouldn't require a reward! Are you trying to gain favor with God? For what purpose? Are you trying to please Him, or hoping to get something out of the deal? Let's remember that our salvation, and God's willingness to answer our prayers is based on His compassion, and not our accomplishments.**

Read Daniel 10

But the prince of the kingdom of Persia was withstanding me for twenty-one days; then behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left there with the kings of Persia. Dan 10:13

Frank Peretti is an incredible fiction writer. His writing impacted me so much because he clearly tries to teach spiritual lessons even through a fictional story. "This Present Darkness" was one of his early books that depicts a small college town that is dealing with some shady characters who are taking control of the school. However, Peretti writes of the spiritual battle going on that the humans are mostly unaware of. Peretti is fast paced as he moves from the earthly participants to the angelic ones in the various situations of the book. I was impacted mostly by realizing how much is going on in the spiritual realm around me that I am totally unaware of.

Here as Daniel hears from the angel Gabriel, the angelic messenger says that he would have arrived sooner, but was delayed by the prince of the kingdom of Persia. It seems unlikely that this would reference Cyrus, because he was taking no actions on the influence of angels. Instead, I think this refers to a demonic ruler who was in charge of the plans of Satan for Persia and its kingdom. As a result of this conflict, the angel Michael had to intervene to free up Gabriel to arrive to Daniel. **This should be a reminder that there are spiritual wars raging all around us. As we pray, we need to remember it's not just us and Jesus. There are angels and demons who are working against each other for the purposes of their masters. When we grow stale in our faith, is often when we forget the spiritual aspects, such as the reality of angelic beings or even of Heaven and Hell. We know they're real places, but at times they don't feel very real to us. Pray that God might keep you focused on spiritual things. Ask that He open your eyes to the unseen situations that influence your life on a daily basis.**

Read Daniel 11

But instead he will honor a god of fortresses, a god whom his fathers did not know; he will honor *him* with gold, silver, costly stones and treasures. Dan 11:38

Bob Goudzwaard is a professor, politician, and Christian author. I recently came across his list of three basic biblical rules, and found them to be simple yet accurate. 1) Every person is serving gods in his life. 2) Every person is transformed into the image of his god. 3) Mankind creates and forms a structure of society in its own image. Goudzwaard's point is that we tend to look at society and go backwards towards man. In fact, it is man who becomes morally upended and as a result, society becomes so as well.

This ruler being described has set up his own gods. He not only has rejected the god of his fathers, but has rejected the wisdom of the past as well. He worships a god of fortresses and as a result, he is transformed into the image of that. He is distant and aloof. He is constantly worried about his own security, just like a fortress. **The principles we saw earlier essentially say, "Everyone worships something" and "You will turn into the image of what you worship". This principle certainly bears out in the life of this ruler. What about in your life? What are you worshipping? If it's money, you are probably like money: uncaring and unfeeling, constantly trying to increase in value. What image is being displayed in your life? The image of an eternal God in which you were created, or the image of some man-made thing that has an expiration date?**

Read Daniel 12

But as for you, go *your way* to the end ; then you will enter into rest and rise *again* for your allotted portion at the end of the age. Dan 12:13

Thomas Aquinas was an Italian priest of the Catholic church, and one of the great theologians of his time. One of my favorite accounts from his life came from a man who found Thomas working in his garden one day. While they were talking, the man asked Thomas, "What would you do if you found out that the Lord was returning by the end of the day?" Aquinas replied, "I'd finish hoeing my garden." The point was that instead of rushing around trying to do the Lord's will at the end, Thomas already felt that he had been seeking the Lord's will day by day, therefore he had no need to rush around.

Daniel gets some very specific words regarding the ending of the rule that was over God's people. But instead of getting out a calendar or marking the days off on his wall, Daniel is instructed to go his way. Literally, God is telling him to live his life. If we knew when the end of our lives was coming, it shouldn't change who we are. We should already be living with the knowledge that there will one day be an end. We don't live our lives however we want, and then try to please Him with a few extra works at the end. **If we live each and every day for Him, then knowledge of His return certainly wouldn't or shouldn't frazzle us. Today, let's just go our way. Let's seek God's will, and ask for the wisdom to handle unforeseen events of today, but instead of worrying about them, let us live! Let us trust in God that His plans will play out when we seek to live for Him.**