

The Book of Daniel

A message for the 21st Century

by Adam Kleczkowski

Cambridge, England

Although the Book of Daniel is one of the best known books of the Old Testament, it is not one of the easiest to understand. Because of this, it is often misunderstood and misinterpreted. The book is full of strange visions that sometimes seem to appeal more to the imagination than to reason. Therefore it is easy to concentrate on its dramatic events or on the details of its prophecies and in this way lose the overall picture. Yet the Book of Daniel is even more applicable today than it has ever been. However, its practical teaching and example are perhaps more important than its description of miracles and prophecies.

The Book of Daniel shows us how to live in a multi-national, multi-cultural and multi- religious society. It tells us that - like Daniel - we are part of God's family. Accordingly, we need to consider ourselves foreigners living in a foreign country, no matter where we actually abide. The guidance for such a life is phrased best in Heb. 11:6:

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him (Heb. 11:6).

God exists and rewards those who earnestly seek Him.

We need to believe that God exists even when everything suggests that He does not. Moreover, He - and He only - is the Rewarder, but only of those who truly and earnestly seek Him.

God exists ...

The Bible clearly says that God was, God is, and that God will be:

*Holy, holy, holy
is the Lord God Almighty,*

who was, and is, and is to come (Rev. 4:8).

... even when everything suggests that He does not.

Like Daniel we are living in times of great changes and shifts of power. The dominions of man are in a constant conflict with each other and with those who believe in God (Dan. 2,7,8). The dominions change from one to another, but all of them are either without God or against God (Dan. 7: 20-21,25). The world moves towards a culminating point - the coming of a universal kingdom of Antichrist (Dan. 7:20-21,8.9-12, 23-25). The Saints (meaning here both Israel and Church) have been, are and will be persecuted (Dan. 7).

In the latter part of their reign, when rebels have become completely wicked, a stern-faced king, a master of intrigue, will arise. He will become very strong, but not by his own power. He will cause astounding devastation and will succeed in whatever he does. He will destroy the mighty men and the holy people. He will cause deceit to prosper, and he will consider himself superior. When they feel secure, he will destroy many and take his stand against the Prince of princes. Yet he will be destroyed, but not by human power (Dan. 8:23-25).

Some people call our times a post-Christian era, having already declared that God is dead (Rom. 1:18-3:20). They often turn to other gods or people (1 Tim 4:1-6). However, mankind's - and Satan's - dominion on the Earth is limited in scope and in time. God will put all earthly powers to an end (Rom. 14:11, 1 Cor. 15:51-58, Phil. 2:9-11) and will ultimately destroy all opposition (Dan. 8:25, Ps. 2:8-12, 46:8-10, Rev. 11:15-18). He will restore the Saints to their right position (Eph. 1:9-14). Thus, the focus of history from God's perspective is neither the culmination of man's power nor the rise of the Antichrist, but the Coming of the Messiah.

It is written: " 'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.' (Rom. 14:11).

Even if the earthly powers appear at their height nowadays, God is still in control. He gives signs both to His believers and followers (Dan. 1-12) and

to His enemies (Dan. 2, 5), works miracles (Dan. 1,3,5,6) and gives visions (Dan. 7-12). He reveals His plans (Dan. 7-12) to His people and thus strengthens their faith (Heb. 12:1-2). God assures us that we are not left alone, but that our struggle is a part of a bigger, supernatural war (Dan. 9-12, Eph. 6: 10-18). He also issues clear warnings and chastises those who ignore them (Dan. 4).

God can shield those who seek Him, by His power through faith (Heb. 11:33B-34, 1 Pet. 1:5), not from danger but in danger (Ps. 34:19). Faith in the face of persecutions comes from a knowledge of Him and His Word (compare Dan. 3 with Isa. 43:1-4).

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade - kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls (1 Pet. 1:3-9).

God rewards ...

God rewards (1Cor. 15:58), even if His reward is not seen yet (Heb. 11:1) and other so-called rewarders are nearby. Daniel always believed that God existed and followed God's path for his whole long life in a hostile environment in the exile. For more than 70 years of his active life he resisted the temptation of being converted by the Babylonian and Medo-Persian empires. He followed God's

commands even when faced with persecutions (Dan. 1-4 and 6, Dan. 5, see Heb. 10:32-38).

Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain (1 Cor. 15:58).

Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. ... So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised (Heb. 10:32, 35-36).

Daniel did his best to work for the powers of this world as long as they did not contradict God's commandments (Dan. 3:16-18, Acts 4:19, Rom. 13:1-8, 1 Pet. 2:13-17, 1 Thess. 4:11-12). He was rewarded by the earthly powers and received the highest honors, but the earthly rewarders gave and took back (like in Dan. 6). Daniel was, however, looking for the better reward (Dan. 3:16-18, Heb. 11:6, 13-16, Rev. 22:12).

Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody (1 Thess. 4:11-12).

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honour the king (1 Pet. 2:13-17).

But Peter and John replied, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God" (Acts 4:19).

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up" (Dan. 3:16-18).

... those who seek Him

God does not reward everybody, but only those who really and continuously seek Him (Jer. 26:13, Rom. 2:5-8, Col. 3:1).

You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart (Jer. 26:13).

... the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. God "will give to each person according to what he has done." To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honour and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger (Rom. 2:5-8).

The words "to seek" correspond to the Greek word 'ekzeteo', meaning to search out; (fig) investigate; crave; demand; (by Hebr.) worship (*Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*), and comes from the word 'zeteo', to seek (implying a search for something hidden).

"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened" (Matt. 7:7).

Living in God's country

Daniel lived as a foreigner in a foreign country (Heb. 11:13-16), because he had chosen the life of a foreigner.

All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country--a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them (Heb. 11:13-16).

We are also called to live the life of foreigners (Phil. 3:20). Like Daniel, we are living in a foreign land (Ps. 137:4, Jn. 17:14-16), as strangers (1 Pet. 1:1,17), surrounded by enemies (1 Pet. 5:8-9), and like Daniel we are to be God's ambassadors (2 Cor. 5:18-20, Dan. 2,4,6).

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body (Phil 3:20-21).

I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it (Jn. 17:14-16).

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to God's elect, strangers in the world ... Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear (1 Pet. 1:1, 17).

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ,

not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:18-20).

Daniel sought God: by a constant faith; by prayer alone (Dan. 2:20-23, 6:10, 9:2-19) and with others (Dan. 2:16-18); by studying God's Word (Dan. 9:2); by being meek when necessary (Dan. 1:12-13) and bold when necessary (Dan. 5:17-28). In this Daniel was a prototype of Jesus (Col. 3:12, Phil. 2:5-12, John 2:14-17) and is an example to us today (Col. 3:12-17).

In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes (a Mede by descent), who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom-- in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the LORD given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed: (Dan. 9:2-4).

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Col. 3:12-17).

Like Daniel we should not exclude ourselves from earthly life (Jn. 17:15). Instead we are to be vigilant and should not conform to earthly standards of: education and nourishment (Dan. 1); religion and objects of worship (Dan. 3, 6); desires (Dan. 2 and 4). Like Daniel we must carry out our daily responsibilities (Dan. 8:27, 2 Pet. 3:11); we must not be falsely secure (Dan. 8:25, 1 Cor. 10:12, Gal. 6:1); must trust that God is in control (Dan 7,9); that He will finish whatever He started in our lives (Dan. 12:13); and fellowship with others in prayer (Dan. 2:17-18, 6:10, 9:3, 10:2-3, 12).

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour (1 Pet 5:8-9).

Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen (2 Pet. 3:17).

Two examples

Regardless whether there are miracles in our lives or not, we are called to seek God with our whole heart. This is especially difficult if after a period of miracles and wonders we are back in our everyday life with its difficulties and temptations. The Letter to the Hebrews addresses this issue in detail, especially in chapters 10-12. The Book of Daniel also gives us a good lesson in this matter. King Nebuchadnezzar had at least three opportunities to see and experience God's mighty wonders (Dan. 2, 3 and 4). His dream about the tree and Daniel's explanation that followed provided him with clear warnings and guidance. Three times the king acknowledged God's power (Dan 2:47, 3:28-33, 4:31-34), but the conversions did not last long. Nebuchadnezzar experienced not only God's blessings but also God's wrath during his life (Dan.4), and became like chaff that the wind blows away (Ps. 1:4). The empire that he had brought to the heights of power did not last long after his death.

In contrast, Daniel kept his faith for many years. God worked miracles in response to Daniel's

faith - not because He wanted Daniel to be convinced or converted. He was already highly esteemed in the Heavens (Dan. 9:23). As a result, Daniel lived a long and fruitful life and saw its fulfillment, like a tree planted by streams of water (Ps. 1:3).

Daniel as a "Man of God"

The life of Daniel can be summarized in the words of Psalm 1:

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which

yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away. Therefore, the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous but the way of the wicked will perish (Psalm 1).

[Adam Kleczkowski, who is from Cracow, Poland, is presently working at Cambridge University, England. This article was originally presented in oral form at a Bible Conference, sponsored in part by *Foundation for Translation of Biblical Studies, Inc.*, in July of this year in the Tatra Mountains of Poland]

**