

DANIEL — WEEK 8

POWER



F. Michael Slay
A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The cover image is Daniel in the Lions' Den by Peter Paul Rubens

Darius is trapped by his *wise men* and he doesn't like it. This causes him to "root for" Daniel and his God. This softens his heart towards the truth.

Then the book shifts gears and we treat Daniel's dreams. The first one is a corker, with terrifying beasts. But God shows up and the beasts are no longer of significance.

We're pleased to provide *the DEEP* studies in PDF format at no charge. We hope you will find them helpful and encouraging as you press on in your journey toward spiritual maturity in the Lord.

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We are a spiritual fellowship patterned after the Celtic Revival. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

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Thank you.

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1 Daniel 6:14–18

And the king, when he heard these words, was greatly displeased with himself, and set his heart on Daniel to deliver him; and he labored till the going down of the sun to deliver him. Then these men approached the king, and said to the king, “Know, O king, that it is the law of the Medes and Persians that no decree or statute which the king establishes may be changed.”

So the king gave the command, and they brought Daniel and cast him into the den of lions. But the king spoke, saying to Daniel, “Your God, whom you serve continually, He will deliver you.” Then a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signets of his lords, that the purpose concerning Daniel might not be changed.

Now the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; and no musicians were brought before him. Also his sleep went from him.

They got him. The king is cornered, and he knows it. They’ve won. They’re also dead men walking. When they noticed how unhappy the king was with what was going on, they should have caved right there and let the whole thing drop. Getting on the wrong side of the king is not how to “live long and prosper.”

But the amazing thing about this passage is that it says that the king was greatly displeased *with himself*.

That seals their fate.

The king’s displeasure with himself is also important to God’s agenda. It keeps it right on track. While his displeasure threatens the agenda of the governors and satraps, it fits God’s agenda to a tee. It pries the king’s mind open.

He is suddenly rooting that Daniel’s God is real. He didn’t believe in Daniel’s God before. He may not have even known anything about Him. He probably still doesn’t know much.

But *emotionally* he now finds himself on the same side.

That’s a lot of conversion for such a short period of time.

People usually believe what they want to believe—what they hope is true. That’s where a lot of denial comes from. If you wish hard enough something to be true, you won’t be very open to contradictory evidence. This happens all the time with parents, to an astonishing extent, when their kid gets in trouble. Even video evidence can have no impact.

Unfortunately, because of this phenomenon, we tend to sugarcoat the gospel. We don’t sell Christianity based on it being true (i.e., the resurrection is a historical fact); we sell it as terrific. That’s a problem.

When you sell Christianity based on its benefits, you get believers who believe it based on its benefits.

2 Daniel 6:19–24 (ESV)

Then, at break of day, the king arose and went in haste to the den of lions. As he came near to the den where Daniel was, he cried out in a tone of anguish. The king declared to Daniel, “O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?” Then Daniel said to the king, “O king, live forever! My God sent his angel and shut the lions’ mouths, and they have not harmed me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no harm.” Then the king was exceedingly glad, and commanded that Daniel be taken up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no kind of harm was found on him, because he had trusted in his God. And the king commanded, and those men who had maliciously accused Daniel were brought and cast into the den of lions—they, their children, and their wives. And before they reached the bottom of the den, the lions overpowered them and broke all their bones in pieces.

It turns out that Daniel has the best night’s sleep of anyone. Select Comfort has got nothing on sleeping on a warm, furry lion.

Of course, things don’t go so well for *those men who had maliciously accused Daniel*. They (and their families!) are destroyed.

And notice the justification given by the king for this action—nothing. He doesn’t do this because Daniel was saved. He doesn’t do this because of some rule of justice for false accusations. The accusations weren’t literally false anyway; Daniel broke the law that the king had signed.

Darius did this for one reason and one reason only—his choice. He is king and he can just do this. The king has absolute power (except for the limits of the laws of the Medes and the Persians) and everyone knows this. The accusers’ punishment, and the punishment of their families, doesn’t need to be proportionate or reasonable.

In fact, it could have been worse. After Daniel is found alive, *the king was exceedingly glad*. Imagine what Darius would have done if he’d been in a bad mood, which surely would have been the case had Daniel been killed by the lions.

The plan hatched by *those men* was that dumb.

So, we see spiritual evil in full bloom, with all manner of gore and death. Whole families are wiped out.

The spiritual forces of evil have no problem with killing off their servants. They just want a lot of people dead. The servants are disposable and apparently easily replaced.

Notice also that the agenda of spiritual evil doesn’t go anywhere. Unlike God’s agenda—which we’ll see in the next lesson—it doesn’t advance any cause or principle. Its goals are short term. That helps explain an important observation.

Spiritual evil sometimes wins battles, but it never wins wars.

3 Daniel 6:25–28 (ESV)

Then King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth: “Peace be multiplied to you. I make a decree, that in all my royal dominion people are to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel,

*for he is the living God,
enduring forever;
his kingdom shall never be destroyed,
and his dominion shall be to the end.
He delivers and rescues;
he works signs and wonders
in heaven and on earth,
he who has saved Daniel
from the power of the lions.”*

So this Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

Here we see God’s agenda at work. Darius has had a dramatic spiritual awakening. He displays that by writing a nice decree to all his world.

And this may have sparked a great spiritual awakening. Darius wrote to a huge number of people. The deliverers of the letter may have been able to tell their own eyewitness version of how Daniel survived a night in the lion’s den. The people who received the letter may have asked, “Did this really happen?”

That’s perfect.

Daniel surviving the lion’s den, and the glorious things that follow, highlight an interesting problem with answered prayer. As awesome as that can be—it’s the great faith strengthener—it can be hard to move beyond. We want to relive the moment over and over.

Don’t get me wrong here; it’s good to praise God for what He has done and to share it with others. But God’s agenda is growth. Don’t let great things freeze yours. Learn and move on to His next lesson.

Which is exactly what the book of Daniel does here. The historical narrative is over, and Daniel moves on to more important things.

The history of Daniel with the kings he served taught us some fundamental lessons in obedience, discernment, and interpretation. With those fundamentals now learned, we can tackle some more difficult lessons.

Difficult and interesting.

4 Daniel 7:1–8 (ESV)

In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel saw a dream and visions of his head as he lay in his bed. Then he wrote down the dream and told the sum of the matter. Daniel declared, “I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea. And four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another. The first was like a lion and had eagles’ wings. Then as I looked its wings were plucked off, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man, and the mind of a man was given to it. And behold, another beast, a second one, like a bear. It was raised up on one side. It had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth; and it was told, ‘Arise, devour much flesh.’ After this I looked, and behold, another, like a leopard, with four wings of a bird on its back. And the beast had four heads, and dominion was given to it. After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong. It had great iron teeth; it devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns. I considered the horns, and behold, there came up among them another horn, a little one, before which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots. And behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things.”

At last! We finally get a scary dream that’s actually scary. This isn’t about statues and trees being felled. I’ve felled plenty of trees myself; it’s not all that scary.

And Daniel’s reaction isn’t to go running around like some Chicken Little with its head cut off, screaming that the sky is falling. He writes the dream down, telling *the sum of the matter*. In other words, he writes it all down in detail.

Daniel’s visions look into the future—in this case, future kingdoms and kings. Everyone wants to know the future. So, this gets everyone’s attention.

However, that can miss the point. God almost never tells people their future, and when He does, it’s to teach them something they need to know—not just satisfy their curiosity or quell their fears.

Of course, Daniel is a prophet. So, God isn’t just telling Daniel his future; He’s telling everyone their future. Still, the purpose has to be for God’s glory. People must be able to use the prophesy for God’s purposes—to obey Him better or somehow do the right thing.

Prophesy isn’t for amusement; it’s for a purpose.

“Lord, give me patience and give it to me now.”

Our desire to know the future has the same root as impatience—insecurity. It isn’t born of a desire to serve the Lord better through better planning; it’s born of worry. We don’t enjoy unexpected plot twists in life the way we enjoy them in a novel or a movie.

This isn’t a major sin, but it’s something we should try to outgrow. Prayer is the key.

5 Daniel 7:9–12

*“I watched till thrones were put in place,
And the Ancient of Days was seated;
His garment was white as snow,
And the hair of His head was like pure wool.
His throne was a fiery flame,
Its wheels a burning fire;
A fiery stream issued
And came forth from before Him.
A thousand thousands ministered to Him;
Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him.
The court was seated,
And the books were opened.*

“I watched then because of the sound of the pompous words which the horn was speaking; I watched till the beast was slain, and its body destroyed and given to the burning flame. As for the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away, yet their lives were prolonged for a season and a time.”

Notice that the most powerful, most terrifying beast gets the biggest smackdown. *The pompous words which the horn was speaking* seem to be its downfall. He (or it) is doing fine until *the Ancient of Days was seated*. Then he isn't.

This is all about power. The four beasts are scary, with the fourth being the worst. He's also the one who makes boasts. Conversely, *the Ancient of Days* is described in glorious terms but not scary ones. Yet, the fearsomeness of the beasts is comparatively nothing.

But it's more than that—much more. Notice that what happens to the beasts is written in the passive voice. *The beast was slain, and its body destroyed and given to the burning flame*. They are so insignificant that no one commits the action; it just happens.

The Ancient of Days [that] was seated isn't the one who slays the beast; He is the *author* of it all.

We see here the difference between the Creator and His creation.

The simple message here is the most important one—this is a heavenly battle. As we'll see, the beasts represent kingdoms, but this passage shows the real action isn't down on earth where the kings are.

This is similar to the book of Job, where we see what happens in the presence of God and then we see the action down below, where Job is getting blitzed. The parallels are important. While we can't see the action in the heavenly realms, it's important to know that it's there.

Our prayers must be informed by this understanding.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. When have you been in denial about something?
2. Have you seen something so dumb you couldn't explain it naturally?
3. Have you ever had a moment you wanted to last forever? Did that become a problem?
4. Do you enjoy life's little surprises? Big ones too?
5. Do you ever pray for angels to come help?

Items for prayer: