



Faith as Exiles

Devotion on the book of Daniel

gateway
CHURCH

The flow

In this time of being physically apart, we wanted to encourage our community to be in the Word together. In the coming days, we invite you to read through the book of Daniel.

In this devotion are 14 daily readings and reflections, accompanied by thoughts from Don.

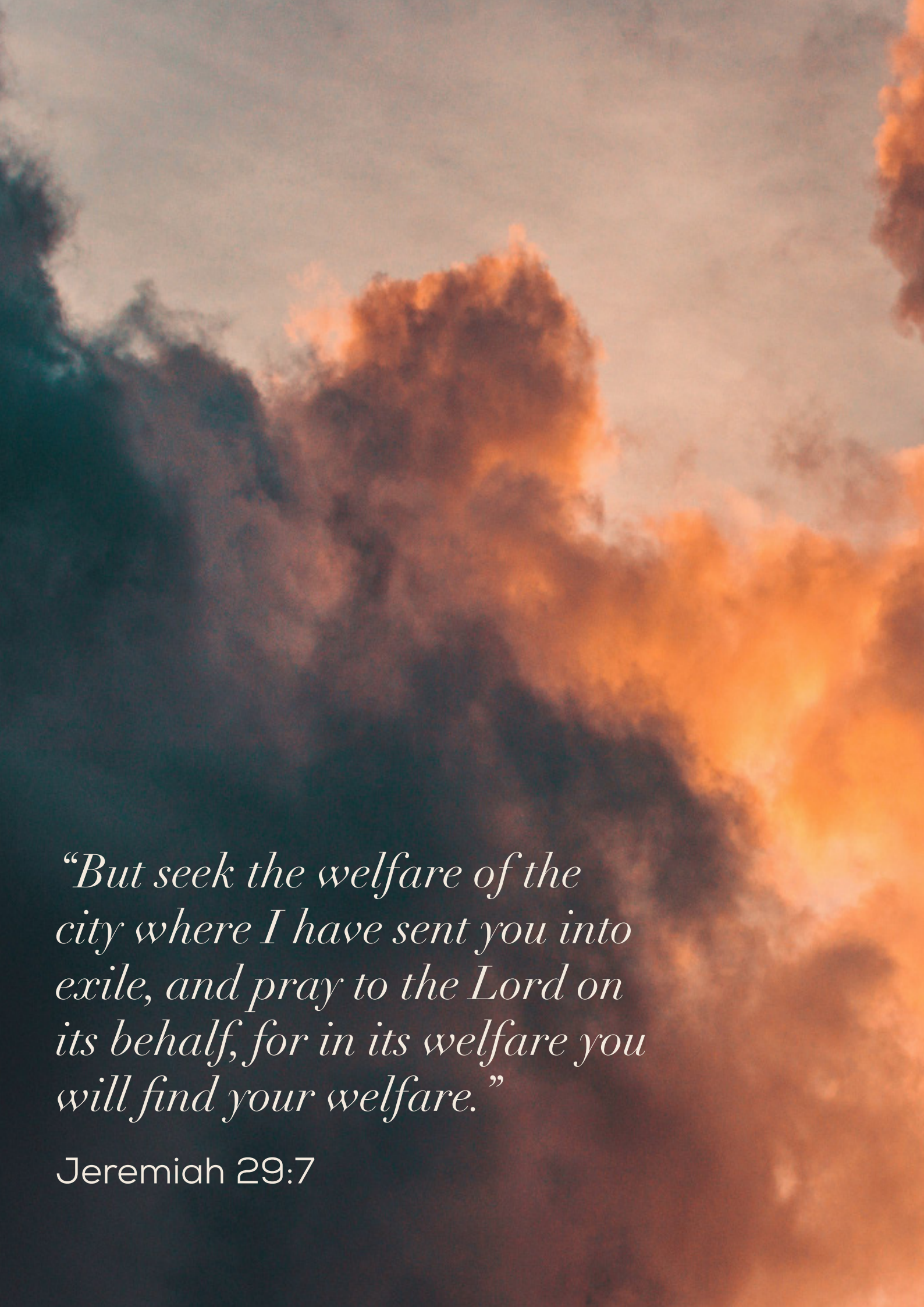
To get you started and to help frame the context for the book check out these two videos from The Bible Project:

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/exile/>

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/way-of-the-exile/>

We hope this blesses you and your journey with Christ.

- *Gateway*



“But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.”

Jeremiah 29:7

o n e

Daily Reading: 2 Kings 24:10-17, Jeremiah 29:1-7

Today we set the scene for where Daniel and his friends find themselves. Israel has been continually disobedient to God and so Babylon (the superpower of the day) comes in and takes the best and the brightest from Israel and Judah back to Babylon. This generation is now growing up in Babylon. In this passage of Jeremiah we find his letters and instructions to the exiles on how to live whilst they are in exile.

“But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.” -Jeremiah 29:7

t w o

Daily Reading: Daniel 1:1-7

The situation these exiles find themselves in is similar to ours. Empires, like Babylon, sought to subjugate weaker nations using a variety of tactics. Sometimes these are through the power and violence of the military, but often this goes hand-in-hand with colonial strategies designed to transform the language, economics and cultural imaginations of the conquered people. The book of Daniel is a vivid account of Babylon's culture-eradication campaign and how some exiles successfully resisted.

We live in a world that seeks to make us conform to its ways (Romans 12:2). The apostle Peter describes us as aliens and strangers in this world (1 Peter 2:11). The pressure to compromise that these exiles faced are similar to the pressures we also face.

Going deeper with Don - One

The Book of Daniel has 12 chapters and neatly divides into 2 sections with 6 chapters in each section. Chapters 1-6 are mostly historical. Chapters 7-12 are mostly composed of prophetic material.

In the first 6 chapters we follow the life and times of Daniel and his three friends as they work out their faith while in the civil service in Babylon.

We learn of their capture and deportation to Babylon in the first few verses of chapter one.

We follow them as they are trained in Babylonian culture and educated in the Babylonian system.

We watch as they are raised in influence and are appointed to serve at the very highest level of the civil service.

Ultimately we see them shaping their culture and impacting history, all the while maintaining their faith in God.

The story begins with Daniel in his early teens – probably 16-18 years of age and we follow him until he is in his 80's. Through these decades he lives through three empires and outlasts four kings. This is far more than a story in a 'time long ago and a galaxy far away.' The parallels between Daniel's time and our own are truly striking and there is much we can learn from him and his friends as they live out their faith in an uncertain, and mostly hostile environment. Daniel was such a remarkable individual that he became a legend in his own lifetime. Most prophets and statesmen aren't usually appreciated in their own time. It falls to subsequent generations to esteem and honour their memories. Daniel, by contrast, was so outstanding that his contemporaries acknowledged him during his lifetime.

Ezekiel was a contemporary of Daniel. He lived among, and prophesied to, the same people as Daniel. Check out Ezekiel 14:12-14.

He was a peerless character who shows unwavering godliness over many decades, not tucked away in some monastery, but in the thick of the push and shove of civil service and popular culture of his time.

Every way you look at him he is remarkable –

Outstanding character.

Tremendous giftings.

Obvious intellectual capacity.

Outstanding executive ability.

1:4 indicates he was picked for the civil service because he met the criteria laid down, "Healthy, handsome, skilful in wisdom with knowledge and understanding..." This reminds me of another outstanding man of the Old Testament – Joseph, of whom it was also said that he was, "Well built and handsome," to go along with his very obvious gifts and administrative skill.

Actually, as an aside that you might like to consider, there are remarkable parallels between Joseph and Daniel's lives.

Joseph

1. Captive in Egypt.
2. Slave to Pharaoh.
3. Tried and tested.
4. Falsely accused.
5. Imprisoned & preserved.
6. Dreams from God
7. Interprets dreams.
8. Reveals secrets.
9. No fault recorded.
10. Exalted to throne.
11. Ripe old age.

Daniel

1. Captive in Babylon.
2. Servant of Nebuchadnezzar.
3. Tried and tested.
4. Falsely accused.
5. Imprisoned & preserved.
6. Dreams from God.
7. Interprets dreams.
8. Reveals secrets.
9. No fault recorded.
10. Exalted to throne.
11. Ripe old age.

three

Daily Reading: Daniel 1:8-21

There comes a point where cooperation can turn into compromise. Daniel's resolve in verse 8, is accompanied by the action Daniel takes in verses 11-14. In this strange land, Daniel is determined to stand in firm obedience to God. Throughout the book of Daniel we see these exiles under constant pressure to break or compromise on God's word.

four

Daily Reading: Daniel 2:1-23

Facing execution, we are told that Daniel responds with wisdom and tact. Living wisely in a time of pressure and crisis is something that we are all called to demonstrate, but is not something we can do in our strength. Daniel and his friends, knowing they are powerless, fervently seek God for his intervention and mercy.

five

Daily Reading: Daniel 2:24-49

Daniel acknowledges that no one can do what the king requests apart from God. Daniel tells King Nebuchadnezzar both the content of his dream and the interpretation of the dream. Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom won't last just as all the kingdoms of this world will end. But they will be replaced by a kingdom established by the God of heaven.

“

Daniel and
his friends,
knowing they
are powerless,
fervently seek
God for his
intervention
and mercy.

Going deeper with Don - Two

In many respects what was happening in Daniel's time is very similar to what is transpiring in our own time.

Let's examine this thought by using some simple headings and asking four questions of the text.

1. WHAT WAS HAPPENING?

Verses 1-2.

Tremendous change/upheaval was occurring.

The city was being invaded, overthrown.

All Daniel had ever known was undergoing tremendous change.

Verse 2

"Vessels of the temple were carried away."

Those things that had had long term significance and value were removed.

The temple had been ransacked and its vessels carried away to Babylon.

The old order was passing away – the established and the familiar was stumbling before the new and unfamiliar. The culture was undergoing radical change with new ideas, ideologies, and philosophies entering in.

Like Daniel, we are living in unprecedented times of change and upheaval.

Secondly, in the midst of this situation [Verse 6] God is raising up a group of men. God is calling to men and women – calling them out in the midst of the turmoil putting His stamp on them, imparting vision! God isn't inactive during this tumultuous time.

2. WHAT WAS THE BABYLONIAN SYSTEM TRYING TO DO?

It was seeking to undo; to overthrow all that was precious to this community of faith.

The Jews were, with all their imperfections, the people of God in this age. They were taken captive and transported off into Babylon.

It was a common tactic at that time to deport the people that were captured. The forced change into unfamiliar surroundings disorientated them. It reduced the chance of organized resistance and increased the chance of assimilating them into part of the empire.

It was trying to force conformity to the new order.

Verse 4.

"Teach them the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans."

It was trying to make them begin to think like Babylonians.

It sought to undermine their Jewish distinctiveness.

Verse 5.

The system was seeking to cultivate as habit, tastes that Gods Word had prohibited.

Verses 6-7.

It was trying to dictate their identity.

They took away their Jewish names and re-issued them with Babylonian names.

These Hebrews had names that were linked to their faith and served to remind them of their identity as God's people. The new names were intended to change that.

3. WHAT DID THESE CALLED OUT MEN PURPOSE TO DO?

Verse 8a.

They purposed in their hearts not to be defiled.

4. WHAT HAPPENED?

Verses 16-21

{especially verse 20 }

They proved the wisdom of Gods ways.

They were raised in influence. {Verse 19.}

They outlasted the system. {Verse 21}

They became examples for us to follow.

Hebrew 13:7 "Whose faith follow considering the end of their conversation..."



s i x

Daily Reading: Daniel 3:1-18

Daniel's friends are commanded to either bow or burn. The pressure these young exiles face, to accept the world's gods as equal to the one true God, is the pressure that we face too. These exiles are respectful in the way they answer the king even as they defy him. They trust that God will be faithful to his promises even if it doesn't look like rescue for them.

s e v e n

Daily Reading: Daniel 3:19-30

In a rage Nebuchadnezzar has the three friends tossed into the furnace. However he moves from fury to astonishment – he had thrown three into the fire and now there are four, he had thrown them to their death but they are alive, he had thrown them tied up but they are unbound walking around.

e i g h t

Daily Reading: Daniel 4:1-27

At the beginning of chapter 4 we see a surprising turnaround where Nebuchadnezzar acknowledges the Most High God. When the exiles had arrived in Babylon, the king wanted them to be assimilated into being Babylonian. But through the life and witness of the exiles we see Nebuchadnezzar submitting to the God of the Jews. The following verses outline how this happened through another dream and its interpretation.

Going deeper with Don - Three

Daniel and his friends had been deported to Babylon.

In ancient times, when an area had been conquered by a foreign force, there were a number of ways of dealing with the subjugated population:

#1. EXPEL THEM.

They were simply driven out, going wherever they could to find safety and refuge. The problem with this strategy was that as soon as the conquering force departed they would return and resume normal life.

#2 ENSLAVE THEM.

This would require a garrison of soldiers from the conquering force to remain in the territory to control them. Such a garrison faced the constant threat of insurrection and it tied up soldiers who could be used elsewhere.

#3. ASSIMILATE THEM.

This was usually achieved by deporting the population to another geographical area where they would be in the minority and could be pressured to become like their captors.

Daniel and his friends were victims of strategy number three.

How could people living in exile respond?

How can you live by faith in a setting that is either indifferent towards you or is actively hostile towards your beliefs?

Responses tended to fall into two categories:

#1 TRIBALISM.

The captives created an ethnic enclave and interacted with their captors only as compelled to do so.

It amounted to an, "Them against the city," stance.

#2. ASSIMILATION.

"If you can't beat them, join them."

Become Babylonians.

Jeremiah wrote to the captives in Babylon and suggested a third, radical alternative.

Jeremiah 29:4-7

"The Lord All-Powerful, the God of Israel, had said:

I had you taken from Jerusalem to Babylonia. Now I tell you to settle there and build houses. Plant gardens and eat what you grow in them. Get married and have children, then help your sons find wives and help your daughters find husbands, so they can have children as well. I want your numbers to grow, not to get smaller.

Pray for peace in Babylonia and work hard to make it prosperous. The more successful that nation is, the better off you will be."

The instructions were,

"Don't be tribal – Love God but hate the city.

"Don't be Babylonian," – Love the city and forget God.

Love both.

Daniel lived in a 'bicultural manner.'

He had two names – a Hebrew one and a Babylonian one.

He didn't give up his Hebrew one and he didn't reject and refuse to answer to his Babylonian one.

He did refuse to eat from the King's table {1:8} but he didn't say 'No,' to everything Babylonian.

He was educated in the Babylonian system.

Learning what to say 'no,' to and what to say 'Yes,' to requires wisdom and discernment.

Like Daniel, we are called to be 'Salt and Light' in our 'Babylonian culture.

Salt and Light require two things to be effective:

#1 Purity.

#2. Proximity.

If we lose either we become ineffective.

If you follow Jesus in this manner it will be highly likely that you will be too pagan for your religious friends and too Christian for your pagan friends.

n i n e

Daily Reading: Daniel 4:28-37

At the beginning of this portion we see Nebuchadnezzar's response to the dream and its interpretation. In the year that had followed Nebuchadnezzar had failed to humble himself before God and so God humbles him. The effect of this judgement is the conversion point for Nebuchadnezzar. As the king submitted to God, both his sanity and kingdom were restored.

t e n

Daily Reading: Daniel 5:1-12

We get our saying 'the writing is on the wall' from the story of Belshazzar. Belshazzar throws a feast and wilfully ridicules the God of the exiles. Notice the change in the king as he goes from indulgent and proud to powerless and frightened at the sight of the finger of God.

e l e v e n

Daily Reading: Daniel 5:13-31

No one has been able to interpret the writing on the wall so Daniel is brought before the king to bring the interpretation. In contrast to Daniel's earlier responses to Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel pronounces judgement rather than an exhortation to change. Although Belshazzar didn't receive the dreams his father Nebuchadnezzar had, he knew what had happened to his father. Belshazzar knew that God was King and that he should live humbly before Him. At the end of chapter 5 we see the judgement come to be as the Babylonian Empire falls to the Persian Empire (539BC)

Going deeper with Don - Four

Most scholars believe that what Daniel describes is the 'Cosmic Prophetic flow' of the Gentile powers that will follow Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian Empire.

- **Gold = Babylon.**
- **Silver = Medo -Persia.**
- **Bronze = Alexander the Great and the Greek Empire.**
- **Iron= Roman Empire.**

The dream can also be looked at as a picture of the dreamer himself – Nebuchadnezzar.

He was a towering colossus of a man who dominated the political landscape of his time.

He ruled for 44 years as Babylon's King.

He ruled nearly twice as long as all of Babylon's other kings combined. Outwardly he was splendid and spectacularly successful, and yet inwardly he seemed haunted and deeply troubled.

Verse 2:1 "Dreams." – Plural. This isn't a one-off incident. It seems to indicate something of a process, a mindset.

There seems to be a deep insecurity that haunts him. He has made a name for himself but it doesn't seem to have produced inner security.

He is aware that he has, "feet of clay."
His foundations are fragile.
The colossal structure rests on shaky ground.

The word 'troubled,' in verse 1 means, 'to tap, to beat regularly like a drum.'

There is something 'tapping' away deep inside this outwardly successful man. He is deeply aware of his tenuous grasp on success.

This is a frighteningly modern story.
People who are outwardly successful and yet inwardly insecure and frail can be found in every field of endeavour.

In the dream, 'a stone, cut without hands,' knock the image over and crushes it so that it is no more than "chaff on the threshing floor." {Vs. 35.}

The threshing floor in Scripture represents a place of sifting and testing.
{Matthew 3:12}

Every dream and every life will be sifted and tested. They will be 'weighed in the balances' and if they are found to be resting on 'feet of clay,' or, as Matthew 7 states, 'built of a foundation of sand,' then they will be 'found wanting.' {Daniel 5:25.}

The key to thriving in the secular city {Babylon} is to build our lives and dreams on a solid foundation.

In Judges 13:25 we have a passage that speaks about Samson's early life.

It speaks of him being 'stirred or moved by the Lord."

This is the same Hebrew word that is used to describe Nebuchadnezzar as being 'troubled.'

The drumbeat in Nebuchadnezzar's life sounded out his emptiness, his inner fragility, his 'feet of clay.'

In Samson it is the drumbeat of eternal purpose and of God's call.

We all march to an inner 'tapping,' a 'drumbeat.'

The question is, which one?

Of our own ambition, of the need to make a name for ourselves?

Or is it the drumbeat of God's call and purpose?

THE

WRITING

IS ON

THE

WALL.

Going deeper with Don - Five

Daniel was a man who was in touch with a supernatural God who was a revealer of secrets. Daniel heard, with tremendous clarity, the voice of God and saw with some regularity the supernatural activity of God.

The Book of Daniel has been 'savaged' by liberal critics. Their main point of contention is the supernatural elements in this book.

They claim that there is no way the things recorded in this book could be true – people don't survive being thrown in fiery furnaces, been thrown into lion's dens and the so called prophetic revelations of Daniel are far too accurate to be believed.

Their conclusion is that they were written after the fact of the historical events predicted, and then presented as if they were uttered before them. You can only arrive at this point if you start with a conclusion before you examine the evidence.

Daniel provides a significant problem for them because it is full of the supernatural activity of God. I don't think I have to argue for the fact that God is a God who speaks or who acts in our world.

What I would like you to note is that Daniel wasn't a 'full time' minister, prophet or priest. He was a civil servant.

He was what we sometimes [unfortunately] call a 'layman.'

Yet this book, and his life, is full of the supernatural activity of God.

Don't count yourself out of encountering a supernatural God and becoming a channel of God's supernatural activity because you aren't in full time service.

The reality is that the Bible is a story full of God's interactions with, and revelations to, people who weren't in 'full time ministry.'

Some of the greatest heroes of faith were not, and never became, full time workers."

- **Abraham was a livestock owner.**
- **Joseph was a government official.**
- **Joshua was a soldier.**
- **Ruth was a housewife.**
- **David was a shepherd, soldier and finally King.**
- **Nehemiah was in the civil service.**
- **Esther was a Queen.**

I don't want to be unrealistic at this point.

Some people claim God is doing miracles in their lives every day, all day, on the hour. This sounds wonderful, desirable and exciting, but I'm not sure how realistic it actually is.

It seems to me that there are significant periods of our lives where we live in what seems 'the mundane' activities of life, without dramatic, supernatural interventions of God. Because it doesn't happen every day, it doesn't mean it won't happen on any day. It is a matter of finding that balance between not being unrealistic in our expectations and not being unbelieving about anything supernatural occurring at all.

Daniel was pre-eminently a 'man of the spirit.'

Daniel 5:12,14

The word 'excellent' used here is used only 8 times in the Old Testament – all in Daniel. He is described as having an 'excellent spirit.'

It literally means that his spirit was 'pre-eminent, it was extraordinary; it jutted out.' When you encountered Daniel you were immediately in touch with a man of the spirit. When you meet some people you are immediately aware that they are dominated by their fleshly appetites – they exhibit sensuality, laziness; they are undisciplined with food or drink. It is what encounters you – it 'juts out.'

With others it is the area of the mind that 'juts' out and encounters you. They are intellectually curious, or perhaps opinionated or argumentative.

With others it's the will or the emotions that dominate and that 'protrude;' they may be stubborn and willful or moody and unpredictable.

In all of us something dominates, protrudes or 'juts out.'

Whatever we give ourselves to and cultivate is what we communicate.

With Daniel it was his spiritual life; his excellence of spirit. He was a man of the spirit who had cultivated a dynamic relationship with a supernatural God who acted and spoke.

God reveals secret things to people, ordinary people, like Daniel.

I think there are three things that the Scripture speaks of that position us to receive revelation about the secret things of God.

1. Cultivating the fear of God.

Psalms 25:14

"The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him..."

Psalms 19:9

"The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever..."

It's pure and this purity puts us in a place where we can see and hear with clarity.

Matthew 5:8 says that "the pure in heart shall see God..."

2. Cultivate Integrity.

Proverbs 3:32

"For the froward is abomination to the LORD: but his secret is with the upright."

Proverbs 11:3

"The integrity of the upright shall guide them..."

3. Cultivate a servant's heart.

Amos 3:7

"Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he reveals his secret unto his servants the prophets."

twelve

Daily Reading: Daniel 6:1-10

Daniel is promoted in the new Persian kingdom. But Daniel's rise to power isn't welcomed by those he has been promoted above and they come up with a plan they think will lead to, not only his removal from office, but also certain death. This chapter mirrors chapter 3 where we see the exiles pressured to conform. In chapter 3 they were pressured to do something God forbade (worship an idol) and in chapter 6 the pressure was to not do something that God commanded them to do (pray to Him).

thirteen

Daily Reading: Daniel 6:11-28

Today ends our devotion in the Book of Daniel.

In verses 11-16 we see the jealous officials report Daniel to the king, who ironically, is powerless to do anything because he is bound by his own law. Daniel is thrown into the lion's den and as with the fiery furnace in chapter 3, his fate looks inevitable. But we see again that God is in control and rescues Daniel from the den of lions. Much like Nebuchadnezzar's response at the end of chapter 4, Darius also declares God as the living God.

fourteen

We encourage you to take some time today to reflect on all you have read in this devotion.



Going deeper with Don - Six

Daniel's integrity.

Daniel 6:1-5.

"It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom a hundred and twenty satraps, that they might be over the whole kingdom. And over them were three presidents (Daniel was one of them), so that these satraps might give account to them, and the king should have no loss. Then this Daniel was made overseer of the presidents and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him. And the king was planning to set him over all the kingdom. Then the presidents and rulers sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom. But they could find no occasion or fault, because he was faithful. Neither was there any error or fault found in him. Then these men said, We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel unless we find it against him concerning the Law of his God."

Daniel 6:22

"My God has sent his angel, and has shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me..."

The word 'fault,' in the first passage is an Aramaic word that has the idea of 'decay or corruption.'

They were putting a 'fine-tooth comb' over Daniel's life looking for something going on beneath the surface of his life that had corruption in it.

The word 'error,' has the idea of negligence or something remiss in his service.

This doesn't have the idea of something that is deliberately disguised beneath the surface as 'fault' does. It simply refers to his competence.

Daniel couldn't be faulted in error arena.

Daniel's life is marked by a profound degree of integrity and competence.

The Hebrew word translated by our word integrity, is 'toom.' The idea is 'complete,' 'full,' 'perfect,' 'entire.'

It's used in the following passages;

1 Kings 22:34

"And a certain man drew a bow, at a venture and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness..."

The idea here is that this man did not know he was about to shoot the King. He did it in his innocence.

2 Samuel 15:11

"And with Absalom went two hundred men out of Jerusalem, that were called; and they went in their simplicity and they knew not anything."

They were not conscious of the evil design behind this invitation.

In these Scriptures the idea is that there is no duplicity. The inside is the same as the outside. There's no underlying motives or agenda. The affectations and the

affections are the same thing.

1 Chron. 12:33,

Of Zebulun, such as went forth to battle, expert in war, with all instruments of war
I fifty thousand, which could keep rank: they were not of double heart..."

The margin says "They did not have heart and a heart."

A heart of integrity is one that is wholly set on God – single purposed; it's complete and full in its direction and devotion towards the Lord.

David Vaughan states,

"A person with integrity does not have divided loyalties [that's duplicity], nor is he or she merely pretending [that's hypocrisy]. People with integrity are 'whole people;' they can be identified by their 'single-mindedness.'"

The question arises, "How do you get such a heart, or is it even possible?"

"Doesn't the Bible say "The heart is deceitfully wicked, above all things, who can know it?" {Jeremiah 17:9.}

How can our hearts be wholly His when we don't even know what's wholly in our hearts?

It isn't talking about perfection in the sense of fastidious flawlessness.

It's about the direction of the heart. It's about the willingness to live in, and responsive to, the light that the Holy Spirit gives to us. Psalm 25:21

"Let integrity and uprightness preserve me; for I wait on thee."

Integrity is intimately related to the presence of God.

It's a willingness to go before the presence of God – defences down – and to hear His commentary on our life, our actions, our attitudes, our motivations.

It displays a willingness to let Him pass judgment, and openness on our part to listen to it.

There is a willingness to constantly allow, and invite the Holy Spirit, to make me sensitive to matters that make a difference to God – however small or unperceived they may at first seem to us.

Integrity requires us to lay down what we think or assume and listen to what the Lord's deliberations are.

That level of vulnerability is not easily achieved.

To the degree that we refuse to be this vulnerable, we create shadows in our experience and those shadows prevent us from functioning in integrity of heart.

Luke 11:33-36

"No one, when he has lighted a lamp, puts it in a secret place, or under a grain-measure, but on a lampstand, so that they who come in may see the light. The light of the body is the eye. Therefore when your eye is single, your whole body also is full of light. But when your eye is evil, your body also is full of darkness. Therefore take heed that the light in you is not darkness. Therefore if your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, the whole shall be full of light, as when the shining of a lamp enlightens you."

This is an illustration taken from the market place in Jesus' day. Cloth merchants would, by sleight of hand, hide the flaws in a piece of cloth by skilfully folding the material as they displayed it and thereby deceive the buyer into thinking they had a good piece of cloth.

Jesus was saying, "Don't do this as you come before the Lord. Unfold your life out in his light and let him deal with the flaws."

W. E. Vine says of this word,
"Singleness of purpose [being unfolded in his presence] keeps us from the snare of having a double treasure and consequently a divided heart."

J. W. Hayford, described integrity as 'living in the power of an ungrieved spirit.'

Proverbs 20:7.

"The just man walks in his integrity: his children are blessed after him,"

Daniel was a tremendous blessing to his people and to the nation that he was exiled to.

We can only guess the impact that his life might have had. It has been suggested that the Magi that came to Bethlehem were from Babylon and that the reason they knew about the coming King was because of the legacy that Daniel left in that nation.

Integrity is vital if we are going to last in, and be a shaping force to, the secular city we have been placed among.

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