

Lesson 36: Strangers in a Strange Land: Israel in Exile with Daniel

The ancient Israelites got around. Early in the Bible, Abraham traveled the entire Fertile Crescent, from Mesopotamia to the Nile Valley. Then, several generations later, Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, through the Sinai, and to the edge of their Promised Land. Moses even named his first son Gershom, which means “stranger there,” reflecting “I have been a stranger in a strange land” (Exodus 2:22).

However, journeys like these were rare in antiquity. After all, travel agencies were nowhere to be found, and more importantly, strangers were usually enslaved or even killed if they entered a territory not their own. Yet, one of the remarkable results of the ancient Israelites’ migrations is that they discovered firsthand the difficulties of getting around. As a result, they thought differently about strangers, as is evidenced in their laws: “Love the stranger, because you were once strangers in the land of Egypt” (Deuteronomy 10:19).

Despite the difficulties of getting around in the ancient world, the Israelites found themselves once again strangers in a strange land. Only this time they were not in Egypt or the Sinai, but back where it all had begun: Mesopotamia. That’s right, just as God called Abraham to leave Mesopotamia and seek out his Promised Land, so now God was sending Abraham’s descendants back to Mesopotamia, courtesy of the Babylonians. I have a map of the area here showing Mesopotamia and the nation of Babylon. This was to be the new home for the Israelites. This area on the map is what we now know as Iraq.

A. Relocation, Relocation, Relocation

Babylonian kings are about as patient as sugar-eating squirrels and after repeated rebellions by Judah, the king of Babylon decided to put an end to this kingdom by destroying its capital city of Jerusalem. This took place in 586 BC. When he was done, the city and Temple that had been God’s “home” and the local point of Judah’s political and religious life for 400 yrs. now lay in ruins. But Jerusalem’s destruction merely marks the beginning of Judah’s struggle as strangers in a strange land.

Far from the Promised Land, the exiles face the most serious threat to their survival as a people: assimilation. Virtually all displaced peoples in antiquity eventually assimilated into their new surroundings. This seems to be what happened to the northern kingdom of Israel when the Assyrians deported many of its inhabitants throughout their empire. The Ten Lost Tribes were “lost” precisely because many assimilated into the cultures that surrounded them.

So, how will Judah and its culture survive these perilous times? Books such as Daniel and Esther seek to answer this question. But they raise the bar of expectation for those in exile: **Not only can you survive in a foreign land, you can thrive.** Individuals such as Daniel and Esther demonstrate that the exiles can remain true to themselves and their cultural heritage, and still rise to the top and make a difference in the world.

B. The Captivity of Judah

Daniel is born in Judah, but at an early age he is carried off into Babylonian exile, where because of his abilities, he rises to prominence. Here is a map showing the area of Babylon where the Jews were taken as captives from Jerusalem around 605 BC. This deportation of Daniel and the rest of the Jews from Jerusalem to Babylon was the fulfillment of many warnings from God's prophets of Israel's coming disaster because of her sins as a nation against God. Israel had forsaken the law and ignored God's covenant.

Isaiah 24:1-6 (GW)

¹ The LORD is going to turn the earth into a desolate wasteland. He will mar the face of the earth and scatter the people living on it.

² The same will happen to people and priests, male slaves and masters, female slaves and masters, buyers and sellers, lenders and borrowers, debtors and creditors.

³ The earth will be completely laid waste and stripped because the LORD has spoken.

⁴ The earth dries up and withers. The world wastes away and withers. The great leaders of the earth waste away.

⁵ The earth is polluted by those who live on it because they've disobeyed the LORD'S teachings, violated his laws, and rejected the everlasting promise.

⁶ That is why a curse devours the earth, and its people are punished for their guilt. That is why those who live on the earth are burned up, and only a few people are left.

In addition to ignoring God's covenant, Israel had also ignored the Sabbath day and the Sabbatic year wherein they were supposed to give the land a rest every 7 yrs. This command given to them by the Lord was insight into protecting the land and giving the land a year of rest which is something we learned the hard way here in the U.S. in the 1930s when we had the Dust Bowl, the worst man-made ecological disaster in American history.

Farm land was turned into desert, and deadly dust storms were unleashed on the land and the residents making it seem like the end of the world. All this occurred because the farmers never gave the soil a chance to rest and recover. Recurrent dust storms wreaked havoc, choking cattle and pasture lands, as well as driving 60% of the population from their homes and land.

The seventy years of the captivity for the children of Israel were, in effect, God claiming the Sabbath, which Israel had violated, in order to give the land rest.

Because of their sin, the people of Israel, who had given themselves to idolatry, were carried off captive to Babylon, a center of idolatry and one of the most wicked cities in the ancient world. It is significant that after the Babylonian captivity, idolatry never again became a major temptation to Israel.

In keeping with their violation of the Law and their departure from the true worship of God, Israel had lapsed into terrible moral apostasy. Of this, all the prophets spoke again and again. Isaiah's opening message is typical of this theme song of the prophets:

⁴ "How horrible it will be for a nation that sins. {Its} people are loaded down with guilt. They are descendants of evildoers and destructive children. They have abandoned the LORD. They have despised the Holy One of Israel. They have turned their backs on him.

⁵ “Why do you still want to be beaten? Why do you continue to rebel? Your whole head is infected. Your whole heart is failing.

⁶ From the bottom of your feet to the top of your head there is no healthy spot left on your {body}—only bruises, sores, and fresh wounds. They haven't been cleansed, bandaged, or soothed with oil.

--Isaiah 1:4-6

Here again, the ironic judgment of God is that Israel, because of sin, was being carried off captive to wicked Babylon.

C. Attending Babylonian University and Interpreting Dreams

Theme: God communicates with man.

Theme: God is supreme and sovereign

Kings expect to be waited upon, and because good help is hard to find most days, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon orders that many of the Judean youths among the exiles be treated as royal stewards. Such training included education in the language, literature, and culture of Babylon.

Among those enrolled in BU, “Babylonian University” are Daniel and three of his friends: Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. The first item on the agenda is to give these freshmen Babylonian names. Daniel, a Hebrew name meaning “God is my judge” is given the Babylonian name: Belteshazzar, which means “Bel protects his life.” Bel is a reference to the Babylonian chief god Marduk. Daniel’s three friends Hananiah which means, “The Lord is gracious”, Mishael which means “Who is like God?”, and Azariah, which means, “The Lord is my Help”, are also given Babylonian names: Shadrach, Meschach, and Abednego—all referencing Babylonian gods. Already, Daniel and his friends are engaged in a cultural battle now that they have been given names referencing other gods.

Daniel and his friends’ educations involve three years of physical and mental conditioning. During this time, they are expected to partake in Babylonian cuisine. Yet, according to the biblical dietary laws, Babylonian meat and wine are not even close to being ritually pure, or kosher in Hebrew. Therefore, Daniel asks that he and his friends be able to eat only vegetables and drink only water.

Let’s read about this in **Daniel 1:8-16 (GW)**

⁸ Daniel made up his mind not to harm himself by eating the king's rich food and drinking the king's wine. So he asked the chief-of-staff for permission not to harm himself in this way.

⁹ God made the chief-of-staff kind and compassionate toward Daniel.

¹⁰ The chief-of-staff told Daniel, “I'm afraid of my master, the king. The king determined what you should eat and drink. If he sees that you look worse than the other young men your age, he would have my head cut off.”

¹¹ The chief-of-staff put a supervisor in charge of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Daniel said to the supervisor,

¹² “Please test us for ten days. Give us only vegetables to eat and water to drink.

¹³ Then compare us to the young men who are eating the king's rich food. Decide how to treat us on the basis of how we look.”

¹⁴ The supervisor listened to them about this matter and tested them for ten days.

¹⁵ After ten days they looked healthier and stronger than the young men who had been eating the king's rich food.

¹⁶ So the supervisor took away the king's rich food and wine and gave them vegetables.

Nebuchadnezzar doesn't want his stewards to be scrawny weaklings, but Daniel's proposed diet is given a trial-run, and remarkably after ten days, Daniel and his friends look "better in appearance and fatter in flesh" than the others. Now there are some who have proposed that this vegetarian diet is an example for us of how we should be eating today. But, I suggest one caveat to this diet and that is that God was the one who enhanced the diet. God used this choice of diet to cause Daniel and his friends to not only look healthier but to gain weight and strength as well. If you and I just ate vegetables for ten days, I doubt that we'd gain weight—if anything we'd lose weight. So, here is an example of God enhancing this diet supernaturally which He can easily do—because He is Almighty God.

The theme here is **God is all-powerful.**

God also increases their knowledge and understanding.

Theme: God is all-knowing and all-powerful.

Theme: God communicates with man.

Daniel 1:17 (GW)

¹⁷ God gave these four men knowledge, wisdom, and the ability to understand all kinds of literature. Daniel could also understand all kinds of visions and dreams.

So how did Daniel and his three friends learn so much more than any of the other students here in Babylonian U.? It's because of God. God gave them knowledge, wisdom and the ability to understand all kinds of literature. He also gave Daniel the unique ability to understand and interpret all kinds of visions and dreams.

Have you ever thought about praying and asking God to help you understand some subject in school or to give you wisdom. He is the source of all knowledge and here we see God giving increased knowledge to Daniel and his friends far beyond what was being taught in their Babylonian school. God knows everything, so we should not shy away from coming to Him humbly and admitting that we need his help in understanding some subject in school—or that we need his help in knowing what to study and how to study, which is wisdom. But beyond this, God gave Daniel the ability to understand and interpret dreams and visions which is really unique.

I don't think there is a single class at a university here in America that teaches this subject today and we have some really weird and bizarre subjects being taught in our universities.

To give you an idea, here are just a few of the strangest courses being offered at universities:

- **The Simpsons and Philosophy**, offering at Univ. of CA. at Berkeley. This course examines the popular animated series from the philosophy of Plato, Nietzsche, and others.
- **The Sociology of Fame and Lady Gaga**, offered at USC. The course covers Lady Gaga's career and her rise to fame.
- **Harry Potter and the Age of Illusion**, offering at the Univ. of Durham in England. Unfortunately, this course doesn't teach you how to cast spells but examines issues such as prejudice and citizenship.

- **Feel the Force: How to Train in the Jedi Way**, offered at Queen’s University, Belfast, where students learn psychological techniques behind Jedi mind tricks. The course examines broader issues like dualism, destiny, fatherhood and fascism. Never mind that we’re talking about an imaginary thing called the Jedi’s and the Force.
- **Zombie Studies**, offered at the University of Baltimore. This course analyzes zombie movies and shows such as *The Walking Dead* and *Fear the Walking Dead*.
- **Sex, Rugs, Salt & Coal**, offered at Cornell Univ. This course is full of topics students find compelling, including sex, slavery, money and more.
- **Whiteness, the Other Side of Racism, offered at Mount Holyoake College**. This course teaches students about their role as white members of society and has been much criticized for promoting guilt about students’ race.
- **The Joy of Garbage**, taught at UC Berkeley. This course is actually designed to teach students how to manage garbage and encourage them to make less waste and recycle more.

So Daniel and his 3 friends graduate at the top of their class and the king rewards them with important jobs in his royal administration.

D. Dreaming About the Future

All is well in his kingdom until King Nebuchadnezzar has a very disturbing dream. Because dreams were believed to be divine messages, the king seeks to know what this dream means for him and his kingdom.

But there’s a little catch: to guarantee that the interpretation he receives is from the gods, and because he can’t remember the dream. Nebuchadnezzar demands that his wise men first tell him what he dreamed before they interpret it.

Nebuchadnezzar’s servants fail, saying that only the gods could perform such a difficult feat. Nebuchadnezzar, totally unimpressed, orders all the wise men executed. As wise men, Daniel and his friends are among the condemned, but just before their execution. **Daniel prays, and God reveals the dream to him, saving his and the other wise men’s lives.**

So what was the king’s dream? A very bright and scary metal image appears before the king. Its head consists of gold, its breasts and arms are silver, its belly and thighs are bronze. Its legs are iron, and its feet are part clay. Suddenly, a stone appears “from heaven” and strikes the foot of the statue, causing the whole image to crumble. Then the stone becomes a giant mountain that fills the earth. And what does this mean? The metals represent future successive kingdoms. The head of gold is Nebuchadnezzar and the kingdom of Babylon, which will be replaced by “a kingdom inferior to yours” (hence, the silver). The belly and thighs of bronze represent another kingdom, which will “rule over the whole earth.” Then a kingdom will arise that will “crush all the others,” just as “iron breaks everything.” The clay mixed with iron represents the division of this kingdom.

Most scholars equate the silver with Media, the bronze with Persia, the iron with the Greek Empire, under Alexander the Great, and the iron mixed with clay with the division of Alexander’s kingdom among his generals.

Well, Nebuchadnezzar is justifiably impressed with Daniel’s wisdom and he worships Daniel’s God and promotes Daniel, and sacrifices on his behalf.

E. Daniel's Friends Thrown Into the Blazing Furnace

Theme: God is faithful; He never changes. He always keeps his promises.

Theme: God is everywhere all the time; He knows everything.

As was common at the time, [King Nebuchadnezzar](#) built a huge golden image and commanded all the people to fall down and worship it whenever they heard the sound of his musical herald. Anyone who failed to bow and worship the image would be thrown into an immense, blazing furnace.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were determined to worship the One true God only, and therefore, they were reported to the king. [Courageously](#) they stood before him as the king pressured the men to deny their God. They said, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter.

Let's read **Daniel 3:1-23 (GW)**

¹ King Nebuchadnezzar made a gold statue 90 feet high and 9 feet wide. He set it up in a recessed area in the wall in the province of Babylon.

² King Nebuchadnezzar sent messengers to assemble the satraps, governors, mayors, military advisers, treasurers, judges, officers, and all the other provincial officials to dedicate the statue he had set up.

³ Then the satraps, governors, mayors, military advisers, treasurers, judges, officers, and all the other provincial officials assembled to dedicate the statue King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. They stood in front of the statue.

⁴ The herald called out loudly, "People of every province, nation, and language!

⁵ When you hear the sound of rams' horns, flutes, lyres, harps, and three-stringed harps playing at the same time with all other kinds of instruments, bow down and worship the gold statue that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up.

⁶ Whoever doesn't bow down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace."

⁷ As soon as they heard the sound of rams' horns, flutes, lyres, harps, and three-stringed harps with all other kinds of instruments, all the people from every province, nation, and language bowed down and worshiped the gold statue King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

⁸ After that happened, some astrologers came forward and brought charges against the Jews.

⁹ They addressed King Nebuchadnezzar, "Your Majesty, may you live forever!

¹⁰ Your Majesty, you gave an order that everyone who hears the sound of rams' horns, flutes, lyres, harps, and three-stringed harps playing at the same time with all other kinds of instruments should bow down and worship the gold statue.

¹¹ {Your order said that} whoever doesn't bow down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace.

¹² There are certain Jews whom you appointed to govern the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men didn't obey your order, Your Majesty. They don't honor your gods or worship the statue that you set up."

¹³ Then, in a fit of rage and anger, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Immediately, they were brought to the king.

¹⁴ Nebuchadnezzar asked them, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, is it true that you don't honor my gods or worship the gold statue that I set up?

¹⁵ When you hear the sound of the rams' horns, flutes, lyres, harps, and three-stringed harps playing at the same time with all other kinds of instruments, will you bow down and worship the gold statue I

made? If you don't worship it, you will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace. What god can save you from my power then?"

¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered King Nebuchadnezzar, "We don't need to answer your last question.

¹⁷ If our God, whom we honor, can save us from a blazing furnace and from your power, he will, Your Majesty.

¹⁸ But if he doesn't, you should know, Your Majesty, we'll never honor your gods or worship the gold statue that you set up."

¹⁹ Nebuchadnezzar was so filled with anger toward Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego that his face turned red. He ordered that the furnace should be heated seven times hotter than normal.

²⁰ He told some soldiers from his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego so that they could be thrown into the blazing furnace.

²¹ Then the three men were thrown into the blazing furnace. They were wearing their clothes, hats, and other clothing.

²² The king's order was so urgent and the furnace was so extremely hot that the men who carried Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were killed by the flames from the fire.

²³ So these three men—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—fell into the blazing furnace. They were still tied up.

Daniel 3 is about Daniel's three friends who refuse to worship a huge 90-foot tall golden statue that king Nebuchadnezzar has erected. Their refusal takes some guts because the king's order that everyone must bow to the statue came with a sizeable threat to those who wouldn't—they will "immediately be thrown into a fiery furnace."

Despite the threat, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refuse, because they bow only to God. The king is furious when he finds out about their defiance, and he asks angrily, "What god can save you from my hand?" The three amigos have an answer: God will save them, and even if He won't, "We won't serve your gods or bow to the golden image you have built" (Daniel 3:18).

Well, this infuriates Nebuchadnezzar all the more, and he orders the furnace turned up seven times hotter than normal. The fire becomes so hot that the guards responsible for throwing the three young men into the furnace are killed as they carry out their command. Then, notice what happens next.

Daniel 3:24-25 (NKJV)

²⁴ Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished; and he rose in haste *and* spoke, saying to his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?" They answered and said to the king, "True, O king."

²⁵ "Look!" he answered, "I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God."

Here are some points of interest to consider here in this account from Daniel 3:

- The fiery furnace was not a small household oven. It was a huge chamber used to smelt minerals or bake bricks for construction. The death of the soldiers who escorted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego proved that the heat of the fire was not survivable.
- Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were young men when their [faith](#) was severely tested. Yet, even threatened with [death](#), they would not compromise their beliefs.
- Who was the fourth man Nebuchadnezzar saw in the flames? Whether he was an [angel](#) or a manifestation of Christ, we cannot be certain, but that his appearance was miraculous and supernatural, we can have no doubt. God had provided a heavenly bodyguard to be with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego during their intense time of need.
- God's [miraculous intervention](#) in a moment of crisis is not promised. If it were, believers would not need to exercise faith. **Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego trusted God and determined to be faithful without any guarantee of deliverance.**
- We need to refuse to bow down or give approval to false idols. Even during WWII in Germany, many believers succumbed to the lies and gave their allegiance to Hitler rather than to God. But a small minority continued to trust in God and His Word and refused to bow to Hitler and Nazism.

F. Pride Before a Fall (Daniel 4)

Theme: God is supreme and sovereign

Theme: Man is a sinner. He needs God and is helpless to save himself.

Years later, Nebuchadnezzar has another dream and he can't make heads nor tails of it. In his dream, he sees a large tree that provides food and protection for humans and beasts alike. But then a heavenly being orders that the tree be chopped down, and only the stump remains. The stump is then turned into a wild animal. Understandably, all the king's wise men are stumped at the stump until Daniel shows up and saves the day. According to Daniel, the tree is king, who, like the tree, has a vast kingdom that provides for his subjects. But this situation will soon change. God will make the king go mad because of his pride and he will live in the wild and eat grass like an ox.

A year passes. Then Nebuchadnezzar, while walking on his roof, reflects on his many accomplishments and says, "Isn't Babylon great, a royal residence that I have built by the power and for the glory of my majesty?"

Let's read about this dream, its interpretation by Daniel and its fulfillment:

Daniel 4:19-33 (NLT)

¹⁹ "Upon hearing this, Daniel (also known as Belteshazzar) was overcome for a time, frightened by the meaning of the dream. Then the king said to him, 'Belteshazzar, don't be alarmed by the dream and what it means.' "Belteshazzar replied, 'I wish the events foreshadowed in this dream would happen to your enemies, my lord, and not to you!

²⁰ The tree you saw was growing very tall and strong, reaching high into the heavens for all the world to

see.

²¹ It had fresh green leaves and was loaded with fruit for all to eat. Wild animals lived in its shade, and birds nested in its branches.

²² That tree, Your Majesty, is you. For you have grown strong and great; your greatness reaches up to heaven, and your rule to the ends of the earth.

²³ ““Then you saw a messenger, a holy one, coming down from heaven and saying, “Cut down the tree and destroy it. But leave the stump and the roots in the ground, bound with a band of iron and bronze and surrounded by tender grass. Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven. Let him live with the animals of the field for seven periods of time.”

²⁴ ““This is what the dream means, Your Majesty, and what the Most High has declared will happen to my lord the king.

²⁵ You will be driven from human society, and you will live in the fields with the wild animals. You will eat grass like a cow, and you will be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven periods of time will pass while you live this way, until you learn that the Most High rules over the kingdoms of the world and gives them to anyone he chooses.

²⁶ But the stump and roots of the tree were left in the ground. This means that you will receive your kingdom back again when you have learned that heaven rules.

²⁷ ““King Nebuchadnezzar, please accept my advice. Stop sinning and do what is right. Break from your wicked past and be merciful to the poor. Perhaps then you will continue to prosper.’

²⁸ “But all these things did happen to King Nebuchadnezzar.

²⁹ Twelve months later he was taking a walk on the flat roof of the royal palace in Babylon.

³⁰ As he looked out across the city, he said, ‘Look at this great city of Babylon! By my own mighty power, I have built this beautiful city as my royal residence to display my majestic splendor.’

³¹ “While these words were still in his mouth, a voice called down from heaven, ‘O King Nebuchadnezzar, this message is for you! You are no longer ruler of this kingdom.

³² You will be driven from human society. You will live in the fields with the wild animals, and you will eat grass like a cow. Seven periods of time will pass while you live this way, until you learn that the Most High rules over the kingdoms of the world and gives them to anyone he chooses.’

³³ “That same hour the judgment was fulfilled, and Nebuchadnezzar was driven from human society. He ate grass like a cow, and he was drenched with the dew of heaven. He lived this way until his hair was as long as eagles’ feathers and his nails were like birds’ claws.

So God strikes the king with madness, driving him into the wild where he eats grass, grows long hair and nails. After seven years of insanity, Nebuchadnezzar repents of his pride and acknowledges God as the ultimate sovereign, and then he regains his sanity.

G. The Writing’s On the Wall (Daniel 5)

Here in Daniel 5, Nebuchadnezzar has died after a 43 yr reign, and we now have a king named Belshazzar. Belshazzar the king made a great feast for a thousand of his lords, and drank wine in the presence of the thousand.

So Belshazzar decides to throw a wild party. All is fine until he decides to boast about Babylon’s might by drinking wine from the gold and silver cups stolen from the Jerusalem Temple. Bad idea. Those cups were for one purpose only—to worship God, and were to be used in only one place, the Temple in Jerusalem. **They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone:** This party is going on while a hostile army surrounded the city

Suddenly a hand appears out of nowhere and writes mysterious words on the wall. The king, realizing this can't be good, offers a reward to anyone who can read it.

Although the penmanship was undoubtedly flawless, no one can make out the message until the queen remembers some guy named Daniel who did pretty well at things like this. Daniel is summoned and immediately recognizes the penmanship as God's, and then reads the writing on the wall: *mene, mene, tekel, uparsin*. These are Aramaic words and Daniel gives the following interpretation:

Mene—means “to count.” Daniel says, “God has numbered the days of your kingdom and is bringing it to an end.”

Tekel—means “to measure.” Daniel states, “You’ve been weighed (on the moral scales) and have been found wanting.”

uParsin: the u is Aramaic for “and,” and parsin means “to divide.” Daniel informs Belshazzar, “Your kingdom is divided and will be given to the Medes and Persians.”

Unfortunately, the king had little time to appreciate God's message to him because that very night the Persians took over Babylon and killed Belshazzar.

H. Daniel in the Lions' Den (Daniel 6)

Theme: God is everywhere all the time; He knows everything.

Theme: God is faithful; He never changes.

This following account comes from **The Bible For Dummies**, written by Jeffrey Geoghegan and Michael Homan, and published by Wiley:

With Persia in and Babylon out, Daniel's new employer, King Darius, immediately recognizes his gifts and appoints him to one of the highest posts in the Persian administration. But the other administrators are jealous and set out to ruin Daniel. Realizing that the only way to bring a good man down is by exploiting his goodness, they decide to frame Daniel for his religious convictions. They convince the king to order an edict that no one can pray to any other god or human other than the king for a month. If they do, they'll be fed to the lions.

Daniel, fully aware of the edict, continues his practice of praying three times a day in front of his window, so he could face Jerusalem. Lingered in the shadows below are the officials, who report Daniel's behavior to King Darius and have him arrested. The king is distraught to learn that his friend, Daniel, is guilty, but because Persian kings could not change an edict, he must comply.

Thus, Daniel is thrown into the lions' den, which is sealed to ensure no one tries to rescue Daniel. That night, the king is so upset that he can't sleep or eat. Fortunately for Daniel, the lions couldn't eat either, because an angel appeared and “shut their mouths.”

At daybreak, the king rushes back to the pit and finds Daniel miraculously unharmed. Darius then orders that those who led him to make this silly law, along with their families, be thrown to the lions. They are, and they are eaten “even before they hit the floor.”

I. Daniel's Visions

Theme: God communicates with man.

Theme: God is all-knowing and all-powerful.

With the aid of **The Bible For Dummies**, written by Jeffrey Geoghegan and Michael Homan, we will briefly consider two of Daniel's most famous visions.

The beasts and horns.

Daniel has a dream where he witnesses four remarkable beasts: a winged lion, a bear, a four-headed winged leopard, and a "terrifying beast" with ten horns. I've put this illustration up to help you get a better handle on this vision.

The first beast was like a lion with eagle's wings, The wings are plucked later. He is lifted up from the earth and given a man's heart or human mind. It is thought that this first beast represents the Babylonian Empire. Daniel in his vision sees the wings plucked and the lion made to stand upon his feet as a man, with a man's heart given to it. This is most commonly interpreted as the symbolic representation of Nebuchadnezzar's experience in chapter 4 when he was humbled before God and made to realize that, even though he was a great ruler, he was only a man. His lion-like character, or royal power, was his only at God's pleasure.

There are those who believe that today, Daniel's lion is England, whose coat of arms carries three lions. [The eagle's wings removed from the lion represent the United States](#), which we know separated from England during the American Revolution.

The second beast was like a bear, who raised up on its side and had 3 ribs in its mouth and was told to rise up and devour much flesh. The bear is described as having three ribs in its mouth. Normally a bear lives mostly on fruits, vegetables, and roots, but will eat flesh when hungry and attack other animals and men. Scripture does not tell us the meaning of the three ribs, and many suggestions have been offered. Probably the best is that it refers to Media, Persia, and Babylon. The bear, however, is the symbol of government and military conquest and the ribs are the people subdued. The bear is instructed to continue its conquest and to "devour much flesh." This apparently refers to the additional conquests of the Medes and Persians in the years which followed the fall of Babylon.

There are those who believe that today, Daniel's vision of the bear represents Russia who national symbol is a bear.

The third beast was like a leopard with 4 wings of a bird and it had 4 heads and dominion was given to it. It is thought that the third beast represents Alexander the Great and the empire of Greece, with the four heads as representing the four corners of the earth.

There are those who think that today, Daniel's leopard represents Germany, whose Leopard tanks have been used predominantly in European armies since their introduction in the 1960s.

We can understand the four heads of this leopard by remembering that Germany's Third Reich historically attempted to gain world dominion during World War II, and that the Fourth Reich is emerging in our time.

The fourth beast was an exceedingly dreadful, terrible beast, with iron teeth, brass nails. It had 10 horns, and a little horn, which plucked 3 horns. This fourth beast is thought to represent Rome.

The fourth beast for today is thought to be some world government that will be controlled by the anti-Christ.

On Earth As It Is In Heaven:

On the banks of the Tigris River, Daniel has a vision concerning the “end of days.” The messenger who seems to be the angel Gabriel, tells Daniel that he would have arrived earlier, but there is a heavenly battle currently being waged between angels, with Michael representing the Jews and another heavenly angel representing Persia. Daniel’s vision foretells the successive kings and empires.

Not long after these events, God’s kingdom will arrive, and, in the Hebrew Bible’s most explicit reference to heaven and hell, Daniel writes: “Those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, some to eternal life, and to eternal damnation” (Daniel 12:2).

[Revelation 20:4-6](#) mentions a “first resurrection” and identifies those involved as “blessed and holy.”

[Revelation 20:12-13](#) identifies those comprising the second resurrection as the wicked judged by God at the [great white throne judgment](#) prior to being cast into the lake of fire. The second resurrection, then, is the raising of all unbelievers; the second resurrection is connected to the second death. It corresponds with Jesus’ teaching of the “resurrection of damnation” ([John 5:29](#)).

Daniel’s integrity as a man of God gained him favor with the secular world, yet he refused to compromise his faith in God. Even under the intimidation of kings and rulers, Daniel remained steadfast in his commitment to God. Daniel also teaches us that, no matter who we are dealing with, no matter what their status is, we are to treat them with compassion. See how concerned he is when delivering the interpretation to Nebuchadnezzar’s second dream ([Daniel 4:19](#)).

As Christians, we are called to obey the rulers and authorities that God has put in place, treating them with respect and compassion; however, as we see from Daniel’s example, obeying God’s law must always take precedence over obeying men.

Next Lesson 37: Home for the Holidays: Returning to the Promised Land.