

Dare to Be a Daniel?

By Steve Burchett



The first lecture of one of my classes at a Christian college in the 1990s was titled, “I Dare You to Live Like Daniel.” I also recall hearing a message about Daniel during one of our daily chapels that concluded with a challenge to “Dare to be a Daniel.” But then at some point after college I remember thinking, “The book of Daniel isn’t about Daniel, it’s about God!”

A few years later, upon more mature reflection, I discovered that Daniel is

ultimately about God and his everlasting kingdom, but it’s also about faithfulness to God while living in a pagan culture. I was so eager to connect the Old Testament to the redemptive story about Jesus I had failed to grasp that we can also learn from godly and ungodly examples. Paul affirms this when, writing about the Exodus and the Israelites crossing the Red Sea, he says, “Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did” (1 Cor 10:6).

So let’s learn from Daniel’s life in Daniel 6 (famous for the lions’ den story). What does faithfulness to God look like in an ungodly society?

First, consider Daniel’s *consistency*. At the start of the book of Daniel (605 B.C.), Daniel is probably in his teens. By the time of Daniel 6, Darius is the king and Daniel is probably in his 80s. King Darius appointed 120 satraps (provincial rulers) and three “high officials” who were over the satraps. Daniel was one of the high officials, with only the King above them. However, “Daniel became distinguished above all the other presidents and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him. And the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom” (3). So here was Daniel, having lived under multiple kings over numerous decades, continuing to stand out such that even the world was saying, “Something is different about this guy.” That type of reputation is developed slowly, over decades of refusing to compromise.

Daniel’s consistent faithfulness had an ongoing effect on the king. He was not only going to promote Daniel, but even when he had been condemned to become lion food, the king agonized over the situation and tried to save Daniel (14), prayed for his deliverance (16), and the morning after Daniel was thrown into the lions’ den, the king ran to see if perhaps Daniel was still alive. Daniel shined God’s light in the darkness and Darius was significantly affected. Here’s an application for young men, those who are in the Daniel 1 season of life: stop (or don’t even start) trying to make a name for yourself by being brash or edgy online. Far better to make a name for Christ through steady faithfulness over the long haul.

But not everyone appreciates someone becoming “distinguished above all.” The satraps and other high officials “sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom, but

they could find no ground for complaint or any fault, because he was faithful, and no error or fault was found in him” (4). This highlights Daniel’s *integrity*. Ralph Davis notes, “Daniel 6 begins with a miracle: a squeaky clean politician!” (*The Message of Daniel*, Logos). Even though Daniel had held high positions in Babylon and could have been corrupt or oppressive or greedy, they found nothing. Daniel kept his word, worked hard, treated people fairly, and didn’t gossip or lie or slander; he was an honest, dignified, man. He was not sinless, but he was above reproach.

Sometimes when attending a funeral of a man I don’t know well, if there is a time for people to make nice comments about the man, I say to myself, “I wonder if his wife agrees with all of this.” And then I reflect, “What will they say about me?” And then I wonder, “And what will my wife be thinking?!” Sobering thoughts.

The government officials had to use Daniel’s commitment to the Lord against him (5). They went to the King, flattered him with the idea of saying he should become the sole mediator between any god and man for thirty days, and got him to sign an injunction that, if violated, would get the Persian death penalty (lions’ den) (6-9). The king signed it (10).

This is where, third, we see Daniel’s *tenacity*. He resolved to keep doing what he had always done — pray to the one true God — not because he was stubborn but because this was a non-negotiable. The choice was faithfulness to God versus man. He could have compromised: “It’s only 30 days. I’ve been praying three times a day for decades. I’m due for a break. And, besides, God needs me in this high position.” But he didn’t budge, though this wasn’t exactly “open” rebellion. He went to his house, which most likely had small, high windows (not a big picture window), and he prayed. So when the men found him (11), it’s more likely they intruded unfairly to catch him. But why did he remain committed to a discipline like prayer even when he knew it could cost him? Because this critical habit was already established in his life (“as he had done previously,” 10). We should learn this lesson from Daniel’s example: “Past faithfulness was simply a preparation for more faithfulness” (Sinclair Ferguson, Daniel, Logos).

Into the lions’ den Daniel went, and then out he came as if he had just gone to the zoo. And when asked by King Darius if God had delivered him, listen for Daniel’s *humility* in his response: “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” (21-22). That partly might sound like Daniel made the story about him. But by highlighting his blamelessness, he wanted Darius to know of his innocence as a way of then defending and exalting God who saved him. Even the lack of interesting details (“One of the lions rolled on its back and wanted a belly rub!”) indicates that the story was not about his experience, but about the God who delivers his people. We should always testify similarly.

So, yes, Daniel, and specifically Daniel 6, is a book about God and his kingdom (see Darius’ decree, 26-27). And, yes, this points to King Jesus! But let’s not miss Daniel’s consistency, integrity, tenacity, and humility. And then, with God’s help, let’s “Dare to be a Daniel.”