

Who was Daniel in the Bible?

We can read about the life of Daniel in his own writings in the book of Daniel and also in Ezekiel 14:14, 20 and 28:3. There are some striking similarities between the life of Daniel and that of Jacob's son Joseph. Both of them prospered in foreign lands after interpreting dreams for their rulers, and both were elevated to high office as a result of their faithfulness to God.

After Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, besieged Jerusalem, he chose noble men from Israel's royal household who were handsome and showed an aptitude for learning, to be trained in the ways of the Babylonians. After their three years' training, they would be put into the king's service (Daniel 1:1-6). Daniel, whose name means "God is my judge," and his three countrymen from Judea were chosen and given new names. Daniel became "Belteshazzar," while Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah became "Shadrach," "Meshach," and "Abednego." The Babylonians most likely gave them new names that were completely disassociated with their Hebrew roots to hasten Daniel and his friends' assimilation into the Babylonian culture.

Daniel and his compatriots proved to be the wisest of all the trainees, and, at the end of their training, they entered the service of King Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel's first sign of faithfulness to God was when he and his three friends rejected the rich food and wine from the king's table, because they deemed it a defilement, and became vegetarians. As their health improved, they were permitted to continue with their chosen diet. In their education, the four men from Judah became knowledgeable in all Babylonian matters, and Daniel was given by God the ability to understand dreams and visions of all kinds (Daniel 1:17).

In the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar was troubled with a dream that he could not interpret. Beyond interpretation, Nebuchadnezzar commanded his magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and astrologers to also describe his dream. These men were willing to try to interpret the dream if Nebuchadnezzar first told them what it was, but they said that revealing the dream itself was an impossible task for humans. The king decreed that all the wise men, including Daniel and his companions, must be put to death. However, after Daniel sought God in prayer, the mystery of the king's dream was revealed to Daniel, and he was taken to the king to interpret it. Daniel immediately attributed his ability to interpret dreams to the one true God (Daniel 2:28). The key feature of the dream was that one day there will be a kingdom set up by God that will last forever, and that God's kingdom will destroy all previous, man-made kingdoms (Daniel 2:44-45). For his wisdom, Daniel was honored by King Nebuchadnezzar and placed in authority over all the wise men of Babylon. At Daniel's request, his three countrymen were also placed in positions of authority as administrators of Babylon.

Later, King Nebuchadnezzar had another dream, and again Daniel was able to interpret it. The king acknowledged that Daniel had the spirit of his holy God within him (Daniel 4:9). Daniel's interpretation of the dream was correct. After experiencing a period of insanity, Nebuchadnezzar was restored to health, and he praised and honored Daniel's God as the Most High (Daniel 4:34-37).

Nebuchadnezzar's son, Belshazzar, became the new king, and during a banquet he ordered the gold and silver goblets that had been stolen from the holy temple in Jerusalem to be brought out for use. In response to the defilement of such holy items, Belshazzar sees a hand writing on the wall. His astrologers are unable to assist him in its translation, and so Daniel is called upon to interpret the writing (Daniel 5:13-16). As a reward for

interpreting the writing, Daniel is promoted by King Belshazzar to the third highest position in the Babylonian kingdom (verse 29). That night, as Daniel had prophesied, the king was slain in battle, and his kingdom was taken over by the Persian Cyrus the Great, and Darius the Mede was made king.

Under the new ruler, Daniel excelled in his duties as one of the administrators to such a degree that King Darius was contemplating making him head over all the kingdom (Daniel 6:1-3). This infuriated the other administrators so much that they looked for a way to bring Daniel down. They could find no wrongdoing on Daniel's part, so they focused on the matter of Daniel's religion. Using flattery, the administrators coaxed Darius into issuing a decree forbidding prayers to any god other than the king for the next thirty days. The penalty for disobedience was to be thrown into a den of lions. Daniel disobeyed the edict, of course, and continued to pray openly to the true God. As Daniel made no attempt to hide his activity, he was seen praying and arrested. With much regret the king gave the order for Daniel to be thrown into the lions' den, but not without a prayer that Daniel's God would rescue him (Daniel 6:16). The next day, when Daniel was found alive and well, he told the king that God had sent an angel to shut the lions' mouths and so he had remained unharmed. This miracle resulted in King Darius sending out a decree that all his subjects were to worship the God of Daniel. Daniel continued to prosper throughout King Darius' reign.

Daniel is also well known for the prophetic dreams and visions God gave him, recorded in the book of Daniel. Daniel's prophecies cover a broad range of human history, as he predicted the rise and fall of the Greek and Roman Empires and the rise of a powerful king who "will do as he pleases. He will exalt and magnify himself above every god and will say unheard-of things against the God of gods" (Daniel 11:36). Daniel's "seventy

weeks” prophecy spoke of a Messiah who would be killed (Daniel 9:24-27). We saw this prophecy fulfilled with Jesus. The remainder of the prophecy—the seventieth week—will be fulfilled in the end times. Daniel had other apocalyptic visions as well, and understanding his prophecies is important to eschatology.

Daniel exercised great integrity and, in doing so, received the respect and affection of the powerful rulers he served. However, his honesty and loyalty to his masters never led him to compromise his faith in the one true God. Rather than it being an obstacle to his success, Daniel’s continual devotion to God brought him the admiration of the unbelievers in his circle. When delivering his interpretations, he was quick to give God the credit for his ability to do so (Daniel 2:28).

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 whom we are dealing with, no matter what their status is, we are to treat them with compassion. See how concerned he was 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 (Romans 13:1-7; Acts 5:29).

As a result of his devotion, Daniel found favor with man and with God (Daniel 9:20-23). Notice also in those verses what the angel Gabriel told Daniel about how swiftly the answer to his prayer was dispatched. This shows us how ready the Lord is to hear the prayers of His people. Daniel’s strength lay in his devotion to prayer and is a lesson

for us all. It is not just in the bad times but on a daily basis that we must come to God in prayer.