

## **Epic: Daniel**

We've been doing a series entitled **Epic** that focuses on Epic stories in the Bible. We have looked at the stories of creation, Noah, Joseph, Moses, Esther, David and today we will be looking at the story of Daniel.

Like the story of David, the story of Daniel is a heroic story about faith and courage. It's one of those stories that many of you heard who grew up in church. In **David's story** last week, he demonstrated courage by **saying yes to the challenge of Goliath**. In **Daniel's story** we learn about what is to have **the courage to say "no" to some things**.

Now, prior to the context in which the book of Daniel was written, Israel had abandoned its singular faith in God and embraced other gods. Consequently, Israel removed itself out from under the protective hand of the Lord.

So, when King Nebuchadnezzar's decided to attack Jerusalem in 605bc, he was victorious.

Immediately, all the best and brightest young Jewish boys were forcibly removed from their families and taken by King Nebuchadnezzar's army to Babylon. It's safe to say that it was an incredibly traumatic time for Daniel and his young friends.

Once these boys were back in Babylon, they were reeducated in Babylonian schools and prepared to be servants in Nebuchadnezzar's palace. That is where the story of **Daniel begins**.

The **first six chapters** of the book of Daniel are set in Babylon and tell the story of not only Daniel, but his three friends, **Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah**. We remember them by the Babylonian names that were given to them: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Daniel's Babylonian name was **Belteshazzar**.

Now, as regular part of their 3-year training program, the boys were fed from the kings table. The first time Daniel saw all that amazing food - he knew he had a decision to make. Why? Because there were all kinds of foods that God told the Jews they weren't supposed to eat.

Daniel was okay accepting a Babylonian name, but he couldn't accept the idea of eating what God had told him not to eat. **He knew when to say "No."**

He could have justified it by saying, “well, *when in Babylon do as the Babylonians do.*” He could have said, “*Oh, I’ll never see Jerusalem again; so what’s the difference!*” He could have said, “*it’s not what goes into your body but what comes out of the heart that really matters!*”

But He didn’t. **Daniel had the courage to respectfully say “Please, NO.”**

The king’s servant said, sorry, but the king wants you guys to be healthy and if you don’t look healthy, my head is on the line.

*“Hey, would you be willing to let us eat vegetables and drink only water for ten days and then after that compare our appearance with the others who eat the king’s food, and then make your decision after seeing the results?”*

At the end of the 10 days Daniel and his friends looked healthier and better nourished (*not as fat and unhealthy looking as the rest of the captives who had 10 days straight of Burger King food*). So, the King’s official allowed them to remain on their own diet. Saying no paid off, God continued to bless them because of their decision to do things His way.

Daniel 1:17, “*To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of **all kinds of literature and learning**. And Daniel could understand **visions and dreams of all kinds.***”

Daniel and friends were both courageous **and wise**. God gave them worldly wisdom and spiritual wisdom; the starting point - small test obedience! **NO!**

Someone once said, “***If courage is the strength to say no,***” “***wisdom is the ability of knowing when to say ‘yes’ and when to say ‘no’.***”

So, Daniel’s first test in chapter 1, “***saying no to the kings table,***” was a rather small test compared to the ones He entrusted them with later.

And that’s one of the things Daniel’s story teaches us; **the little tests of life are what prepares us for the big ones**. They open up bigger opportunities

Jesus said, “*Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.*” **Luke 16:10. (NIV)**

In other words, Jesus is saying, if a person has a problem making the right decision with the small stuff, they can’t be trusted to make the right decisions with the big stuff. If you don’t pass the test for the small test – forget big ones.

So, Daniel and his friends passed the test when they **said no** to the king's diet.

From that time on **Daniel** became a rising star in the king's court.

**In the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter** of Daniel God gives him the wisdom and understanding to interpret a dream for King Nebuchadnezzar. Like Joseph in Egypt, Daniel demonstrated the superiority of **God's wisdom** over all the other **wisdom in the kingdom**. The king was so grateful, Daniel and friends are given **leadership positions** in his government.

**In chapter 3**, King Nebuchadnezzar's makes a 90-foot-high gold statue and commands everyone to bow down and worship him as king. But Daniel's friends say **no and refuse** to worship the idol. They are thrown into a fiery furnace but miraculously saved when **God Himself joins them** and protects them. Wow! **The king is drawn one step closer to knowing God.**

**In chapter 4**, God gives wisdom once again for Daniel to interpret another dream of king Nebuchadnezzar. It was a difficult one. Daniel knew he had to say some very harsh things to the king that would endanger his life.

***"You're a wicked sinful king – repent - and do what's right – then God will prosper you."*** When everything that Daniel said came true, the king eventually comes to saving faith and worships the Lord. **Fantastic!**

**In chapter 5**, a new godless king appears on the scene, King Belshazzar, who during a drunken party defies God and desecrates Holy Jewish temple artifacts. A hand appears and starts writing on a palace wall: "Mene, mene, tekem, and Parsin." Everyone there saw it! King Belshazzar calls for Daniel who interprets the writing:

**Mene** means '*numbered*'—God has numbered the days of your reign and has brought it to an end.

**Tekem** means '*weighed*'—you have been weighed on the balances and have not measured up.

**Parsin** means '*divided*'—your kingdom has been divided and given to the Medes and Persians."

Bold things to say **to a ruthless king!** And that very night Belshazzar, the Babylonian king, was killed and **Darius the Mede took** over the kingdom.

This is the **3<sup>rd</sup> king** that Daniel becomes advisor to in Babylon. He is outlasting all these powerful kings! Amazing story of God's **staying power**.

Which brings us to the story I want to focus on today in **chapter 6**. It's the story of **Daniel and the Lion's Den!** Clearly one the Epic stories of Daniel.

The story of Daniel in the Lion's Den is one of the most familiar in the Bible. Many of us can recall hearing it in kids church.

It is a story of a brave young man who would not disobey God, even if it meant death by lions, and how God sent an Angel to close the lion's mouths.

So, let's look at that story more closely:

**Daniel 6:4-9**, *"Then the other administrators and high officers began searching for some fault in the way Daniel was handling government affairs, but they couldn't find anything to criticize or condemn. He was faithful, always responsible, and completely trustworthy. So, they concluded, "Our only chance of finding grounds for accusing Daniel will be in connection with the rules of his religion." So, the administrators and high officers went to the king and said, "Long live King Darius! We are all in agreement—we administrators, officials, high officers, advisers, and governors—that the king should make a law that will be strictly enforced. Give orders that for the next thirty days any person who prays to anyone, divine or human—except to you, Your Majesty—will be thrown into the den of lions. And now, Your Majesty, issue and sign this law so it cannot be changed, an official law of the Medes and Persians that cannot be revoked." So King Darius signed the law."*

**This story offers some extraordinarily meaningful lessons for us.** These lessons are sometimes missed because this story has somehow become exclusive to the Children's curriculum.

These are character-building lessons that adults need to put into practice too.

Here we find **three significant places** where Daniel's character shine through. And that is what I want us all to glean from today in this story.

First, we see Daniel:

### **1. AT HIS WINDOW: DEMONSTRATING CONSISTENCY.**

**Daniel 6:10**, *"But when Daniel learned that the law had been signed, he went home and knelt down **as usual** in his upstairs room, with its windows open*

*toward Jerusalem. He prayed three times a day, **just as he had always done**, giving thanks to his God.!"*

The key words that reveal this character trait of consistency in the life of Daniel are found in the words.

***“as usual” ...and... “just as he had always done.”***

It becomes obvious that Daniel had made a relentless commitment to God.

Now, there are various ways you could look at Daniels decision to pray.

A. One might say that *“when Daniel knew that the writing was signed,” he used this as an occasion for witnessing. In effect, that he shouted: “Hey, all you heathen, I want you to know I am not afraid of you. I am going to pray to my God, and I’ll show you what it means to be a Christian!”* Attitude!

B. Or, one might suggest that Daniel, in a Religious Right sort of way, stuck out his jaw and challenged the people and the leaders of the kingdom of Darius and said, *“I advocate civil disobedience, a peaceful protest if you will, to show you politicians a thing or two. I’ll going to do as I please, and worship my God the way I want to.”* An in your face Attitude once again!

C. Or it could be simply interpreted, in what I think is the most accurate way this action is described. ***“When Daniel knew that the writing was signed,” he did not alter, did not change the procedure of his devotional life. He simply continued consistently in his devotion, his dedication to God. No demonstration, no great show...just consistency. No attitude!***

Crises did not throw Daniel into panic mode. He just continued his life with God as he had ever since he made his commitment to God as a boy.

**A Window of Consistency!** No wonder the Holy Spirit had the writer of Sacred Scripture to insert **verse 5** into the record:

*“Then these men (Daniel’s accusers) said, “Our only chance of finding grounds for accusing Daniel will be in connection with the rules of his religion.”*

**Powerful reputation!** We all have a window from which we can be seen!

The serious question is: ***Is my consistent devotion and dedication to God clearly seen by others?***

This isn't a call to civil disobedience when laws go against our faith. It isn't about a flamboyant display to the world of what fine Christians we are!

**To the contrary.** It is simply the **day by day consistency**, so that our responses and reactions to life's situations are **predictable by observers**.

*Can we be accused of being loyal to God in the face of whatever comes along? That is the challenge of a window!*

*What do people see when they look into our windows?*

Next we see Daniel:

## **2. IN THE LION'S DEN: DEMONSTRATING CONFIDENCE.**

**Daniel 6:16a**, *"So at last the king gave orders for Daniel to be arrested and thrown into the den of lions."*

The royal order comes. Daniel's accusers have tricked the king. The king really likes Daniel, but Daniel is still thrown into the den of hungry lions.

The law of the Medo-Persian Empire prevented the king changing any signed law. So, a stone is rolled in front of the Lion's Den and sealed. And that is where we get magnificent view into the deliverance God brought to His servant, Daniel.

**Daniel 6:16-18**, *"So at last the king gave orders for Daniel to be arrested and thrown into the den of lions. The king said to him, "May your God, whom you serve so faithfully, rescue you." A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den. The king sealed the stone with his own royal seal and the seals of his nobles, so that no one could rescue Daniel. Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night **fasting**. He refused his usual entertainment and **couldn't sleep** at all that night."*

There are several famous paintings of Daniel in the lion's den. In nearly every one, Daniel is standing with his hands folded serenely in front of him, and looking calmly up to God as a source of light filters down through the ceiling of the den above, landing gently on him, the lions always subdued, remote and calmly looking on. It is peaceful but powerful scene.

Do you remember when your kid's church teacher told you the story? ***The miracle of God, closing the mouths of the lions, it just thrilled us.***

I don't want to detract from that miracle, nor lessen its impact on our lives. Yes, the lions could have had a full course Daniel meal but they didn't. All that said, the real miracle of the story is not seen in the closing of the mouths of hungry, vicious lions.

No, the real miracle is in the stirring confidence we see in Daniel who stood his ground fully committed to worship and serve God and never bow to the idols of this world.

I know that in my own power, I could not have gone through with it given the threat of hungry lions! Obviously, it was a God given confidence and empowering. It was the spirit of might, we read of in chapter 1 given to Daniel.

**It is a miracle of grace** in the heart that places implicit trust in the God!

Daniel had walked with the Lord from youth and trusted Him in the little things and now he was granted the might to go through the big things.

He already knew firsthand that the Lord was able to save Him no matter what the circumstances.

We too need **to be consistent in our walk** with the Lord. That is what gives us the **strength and courage to put our confidence in Him** for the big stuff!

We have our deep dark dens. We may not know when the next one will pose a threat to us, but we have them.

The miracle we all need to get us through them is the ***calm, resolute confidence in the God who walks into the den with us.***

A Window of consistency – A Den of confidence – and lastly, we need to experience what Daniel did...

### **3. IN THE PALACE: FINDING CONFIRMATION.**

**Daniel 6:19-23; 28,** *“Very early the next morning, the king got up and hurried out to the lions’ den. When he got there, he called out in **anguish**, “Daniel, servant of the living God! Was your God, whom you serve so faithfully, able to rescue you from the lions?” Daniel answered, “Long live the king! My God sent his angel to shut the lions’ mouths so that they would not hurt me, for I have been found innocent in his sight. And I have not wronged you, Your Majesty.” The king was overjoyed and ordered that Daniel be lifted from the*

*den. Not a scratch was found on him, for he had trusted in his God. So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian.”*

Morning comes at last...in the palace as well as in the den. The sleepless king hurries in anguish to the den. He knows now that he’s been deceived by his advisors. Without any other reason to believe that Daniel might still be alive than Daniel’s consistent life loving his God, the king calls out to Daniel.

The answer came calmly, resolutely, serenely out of the grill in the small opening above the den. I’ll bet Daniel got more sleep than the king did!

**Daniel is lifted out, taken to the palace, and is quite obviously blessed by God throughout the rest of his earthly life. He becomes the chief advisor to the king. Why? Look...**

**Daniel 6:24 says,** *“At the king’s command, the men who had falsely accused Daniel were brought in and thrown into the lions’ den, ... and before they reached the floor of the den, the lions overpowered them...”*

*Oops, no more enemy advisors! I guess you are my chief counselor Daniel!*

In the palace, we get a confirmation of the faithfulness of God. Daniel’s life makes a difference in yet another King’s life. King Darius made this decree:

**Daniel 6:25-27,** *“Then King Darius sent this message to the people of every race and nation and language throughout the world: “Peace and prosperity to you! “I decree that everyone throughout my kingdom should tremble with fear before the God of Daniel. For he is the living God, and he will endure forever. His kingdom will never be destroyed, and his rule will never end. He rescues and saves his people; he performs miraculous signs and wonders in the heavens and on earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions.”*

In marvelous and mysterious ways God will confirm our commitments and our convictions. For Daniel it was recognition in the highest court of the land...the palace of King Darius...**Daniel’s Palace of Confirmation!**

***IN CLOSING:*** Our “palace of confirmation” *is where we proclaim and practice our Christian witness.*

It may be in **our homes**, where the secrets of our hearts are disclosed to those closest to us. It may be in the mingling of our lives **with fellow-believers** in our Church, where we share our spiritual insights. It may be in

our workplace, where we live out our lives of quiet conviction, knowing what is appropriate to say openly at the appropriate moment.

**But when life on planet earth ends** and we burst through the barrier of time into the very presence of Jesus Christ.

We will be in the “palace of HIS confirmation,” knowing that by His shed blood our sins have been forgiven, and our hearts and lives cleansed, and there in the glory of heaven we will live with Him, and sing His praises forever.

It will be for His glory when all God’s children, from every village and city, from every island and desert, from every mountain and valley, the saints from all the ages past, present and future will join together and blend their voices in the song reserved for the only One worthy to receive the honor, glory, and praise. JESUS. The Lion of the Tribe of Judah who is able to overpower and Shut the mouth of the one who goes about like a lion seeking who he can devour.

Jesus follower, the Spirit of Jesus, the one who is in you, is greater than he that is in the world. Be consistent (*in the little tests and the big ones*), be confident in the God who is all powerful, and He will confirm your faith.

If you don’t know Jesus today, you are going to face deep dark dens; we all do. Question is, will you try to do that alone or will you trust the God who loves you dearly. He has sent His son to stay the lion’s mouths. Put your trust and comfort in Him – Jesus – who put himself in harm’s way to secure your safety and freedom.

**Let’s Pray**

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