

**God Needs
Men and
Women Who
Stand **UP**
and so He
Teaches Them
to Kneel
DOWN!**

Daniel and his many friends and cousins were young men of royal lineage, who lived in or around Jerusalem until Nebuchadnezzar, in 606 BC, deported them forcefully to Babylon. There they were made eunuchs and thoroughly groomed for service in the king's pagan and idolatrous court (Is. 39:5-7). In spite of the utter depravity of their own kings and the people of Israel, which brought upon them God's judgment, Daniel and three other young men stood out among their many companions; they served God with all their heart.

Twenty years before it happened, God had already told the prophet Habakkuk (in his first chapter) that the Chaldeans (Babylonians) were coming. It was a nightmare that Habakkuk just couldn't come to terms with, but then God's grace got him ready to face *whatever* it might be: "Indeed I am raising up the Chaldeans, a bitter and hasty nation which marches through the breadth of the earth, to possess dwelling places that are not theirs. They are terrible and dreadful..."

Habakkuk complained: "They take up all of [the nations] with a hook, they catch them in their net, and gather them in their dragnet. Therefore they rejoice and are glad... Shall they therefore empty their net, and continue to slay nations without pity?" (Hab. 1).

In chapter 2 God continues the conversation: "Though it tarries, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry. Behold the proud, his soul is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith. Woe to the Wicked. Indeed, because he transgresses by wine, he is a proud man, and he does not stay at home. Because he enlarges his desire as Sheol, and he is like death, and cannot be satisfied, he gathers to himself all nations and heaps up for himself all peoples."

Nebuchadnezzar was not yet king of Babylon, but God already knew him, what he was like and what he was going to be like: "Wicked and proud", and fond of wine, possibly an alcoholic. In sharp contrast, God also mentions "the just who lives by faith". In the terrible times of the moral decline that was bringing on God's judgment, there still were a few 'just persons' in Israel. They stood out; **they lived by faith**. Habakkuk was one of them, but though Daniel and his friends would still be children at this time, God must already have had his eye on them. Perhaps their mothers were home-schooling them in 'kneology'.

There is no sign that they resented being punished for the wickedness of others. They were not only God-conscious, they were God-fearers, and determined to do his will. We don't know at what point in their young lives they had begun to experience the love and the care and the faithfulness of the God of Abraham, but we find that they fully trusted him from the moment we meet them

in Daniel 1. In chapter 2 we discover that when they prayed, it wasn't perfunctory prayers they recited. They knew they were in touch with the throne of the Almighty - in awe they spoke to him. And God answered - wonderfully!

Then in chapter 3 Daniel's three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego hit a snag - such a snag, it became their baptism of fire! Yet it only ever was a simple choice: "Are we kneeling down or are we standing up?"

From the story in Daniel 3 we learn that the immense statue, some 27 m. (90 feet) high, which the king had erected, represented his god (or gods). All peoples, nations, and languages of the empire, represented by their governors and administrators, were commanded to fall down and worship it. Daniel evidently wasn't there on this occasion, but the three friends, who were over the affairs of the province of Babylon, they couldn't avoid taking their places in the crowd.

When the music sounded, it was like a mega-enactment of the old children's game when they shout: "We all fall down..." In this case it was, all *minus three!* In the vast multitude three young men stood out like sore thumbs, their knees stiff as rods. They didn't have to do anything, or say anything, just to stand there was enough. A ripple of alarm and consternation must have gone right through the huge throng of worshipers. The king's attention was drawn to the fact that three Jews, high officials, were defying his express orders. It left Nebuchadnezzar beside himself with fury, yet even so, he was willing to give them another chance.

But no second chance was needed. Their reply to the king was: "*Let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up*". Three times in the Old Testament Nebuchadnezzar and successors are called "*king of kings*". That is also the case with the Lord Jesus Christ in the New Testament; three times He is called "**King of kings**", but in his case the title "**Lord of lords**" is added every time.

The three friends were directly facing the most powerful man on the face of the earth, the "king of kings"; their lives as a bit of dirt between his fingers, and he demanded to know: "*Who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?*" All this happened centuries before New Testament times, yet there was not a doubt on their part. They knew the One "*who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords*" (1 Tim. 6:15). Realizing full well that if their God didn't intervene right then and there, the fiery furnace would be unavoidable, they *still* stood up for HIM!

If things didn't exactly leave them cold, what really matters is that they were resolute! The thrilling story of God's faithfulness to his servants then unfolds – it

is about his faithfulness to those who stand up for him! Their testimony never marred by any compromise, they'd held their heads high from the beginning, and God saw to it that now, in the midst of the furnace, they could do the same: stand up, walk around unbound and hold their heads high. His angel joined them in the furnace for a stroll around!

The king, humbled and dumbfounded, kindly asked them to step outside. The ropes that had tightly bound them had been immediately consumed by the fire, but of their clothes or bodies nothing was even singed or had any smell of burning. Then and there, the empire was put on notice that all the king's subjects must keep in high esteem the God of S, M and A.

There is more to this story than just the ***“standing up for the Lord of heaven and earth”***. We mustn't kid ourselves into considering this a wonderful case of human fortitude in the face of adversity. Far from it; these young men, right through the preceding chapters, are seen to be truly humble servants of the Most High. We see them being carefully trained and groomed by Nebuchadnezzar's men. Yet *at the same time* we find that they were consciously 'enrolled' in a far more important school - they were learning the disciplines of “kneeology”! When, in chapter two, their lives are in imminent danger, they know where to go. They take to their knees, bowing deep before the Lord of life and death.

That is what God honors, there, and throughout the book. Even as the story of Daniel's long life starts to draw to a close in *chapter 6*, once again it seems to hang from a slender thread. For thirty days, all citizens of the empire, which is now Medo-Persian, are forbidden by law to petition any god or man, except King Darius himself. Any prayer or petition directed to someone else, whether god or man, will be punished by immediate execution of the petitioner – who will be thrown to the lions.

Daniel has been aware for a while that his esteemed colleagues are out to get him, like the “accuser of the brethren” in Revelation 12, always out to find grounds for accusation. However, his testimony in the world is blameless and they are stumped... Until they remember his “kneeology”.

At this point we come to realize that the world around Daniel and his friends was fully aware that the strength, courage and testimony of these Jews had everything to do with their daily appointments with the Lord of heaven. So the attack centers on Daniel's knees: No more praying - for a whole month! And the official petition was presented to King Darius - *“Please, sign on the dotted line!”*

They knew the king's vanity would readily have him sign the decree. They also knew, as did Daniel, that the new decree would not make the slightest difference to his prayer habits. And so they must have gloated - wasn't the noose practically around his neck? Or should we say, they could already hear the lions munching on Daniel's bones?

In the previous chapter, Daniel had faced the "writing on the wall", now he was facing a different writing, not by God but by his worst enemies:

"When Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days."

"He knelt down on his knees"! That is a lot of emphasis on Daniel's knees. He could have sat down, he could have closed the windows, he could have kept his voice down, but there was no going back on his time-honored custom. He continued to fully trust his Lord and to simply unburden his heart to him, 3x-a-day! God would take care of him! And so it happened...

Daniel was duly denounced, and on the fatal day was escorted to the lion's den. There he found God's angel already waiting for him. When the hungry lions (probably) sniffed out their prey, the angel told them to shut up, that this prey was a special praying prey. It made them politely decline their dinner that evening. The king himself also fasted, realizing how foolish he had been. After a sleepless night, he got up at the crack of dawn to find out what might have happened to Daniel, for the king knew that Daniel's God was not like his own gods. He knew that Daniel's God was faithful to his faithful servants. And so he found it to be. After getting Daniel out, the king made sure that the lions' fast was turned into a lion's feast....

But more importantly, Darius also made sure that, in all of his empire, the testimony of the one living God, the God of love, wisdom and power, was broadcast to all of his citizens.

It definitely pays to be faithful in prayer, completely open to all of God's Word, his Will and his Way!

Daniel didn't *have* a Bible to read in his exile. We *have* Bibles, but *don't* have the sense to read them...

"To whom much is given, from him much will be required!"
(Lk. 12:48).

What makes us think things are different today?

When Daniel was thrown to the lions, he was prime minister in the Medo-Persian Empire, which comprised both modern Iran and Iraq, and was later conquered by Alexander the Great.

Daniel's real successors in Iran, a staunchly Muslim nation, are not 'government ministers' like he was, but, like him, they are ***God's ministers*** - ordinary men and women, yet God's beloved servants.

The Gospel is spreading and the number of secret house meetings continues to multiply, with the number of Muslims, who experience the saving power of the Jewish Messiah, increasing ever more rapidly. The ayatollahs are getting worried and desperate. The death penalty has been decreed for any Muslim who becomes a follower of Christ. It is hanging over the heads of thousands of young followers of the Lamb; there are prison sentences, there is torture...

Through the years, many an imprisoned Christian has eventually been set free, mainly through foreign pressures, only to be assassinated in mysterious circumstances shortly afterwards.

**"I met God in the morning
When the day was at its best,
And His Presence came like sunrise,
Like a glory in my breast.**

**All day long the Presence lingered,
All day long He stayed with me,
And we sailed in perfect calmness
O'er a very troubled sea.**

**So, I think I know the secret,
Learned from many a troubled way:
You must seek Him in the morning
If you want Him through the day!"**

Ralph Cushman

"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Fil. 4:6-7).

Daniel's Legacy

Sometimes, when the Bible doesn't explicitly state something, e.g. concerning history or geography, there may still be things which we may glean from the records as having occurred in all probability, some to a greater degree than others.

Here are two examples: Moses was raised as the grandson of Pharaoh, so did that make Moses the adoptive cousin of the later Pharaoh whom he and Aaron kept confronting in the name of the LORD?

On the road to Emmaus, the risen Lord walked with two disciples; were they two men? It seems much more likely that they were Cleophas and *his wife*; so then, wouldn't she be "Mary the wife of Cleophas", of John 19:25?

Daniel lived about 1,000 years before the birth of Christ, but he could not have been soon forgotten. The greater part of what had been the Medo-Persian empire was never conquered by the Romans, and they continued to cherish their age old traditions. Among these it is likely that Daniel, and his extraordinary life, writings and prophecies, were still remembered and valued. He had been the head of the very powerful elite-stargazers, though not a stargazer himself.

In his book, he only mentions 'stars' in connection with 'soul-winners'; they will shine like "stars" (12:3). As he interprets the king's dream in ch. 2, he does mention the "Stone cut out without hands", which eventually "filled the whole earth", a wonderful Messianic prophecy.

Even so, could it not have been a legacy of Daniel that, a thousand years after him, stargazers in the east one day 'recognized' a most striking phenomenon in the night sky as something prophesied by Daniel (possibly in other writings of his), and as signaling the birth of the Messianic "King of the Jews"?

These stargazers then made time-consuming and thorough preparations of at least a whole year for a delegation of them to set out on the long and arduous journey in order to pay their respects to the newborn 'King of the Jews' (in Jerusalem, as they thought), arriving about 18 months after having seen the "star". We know this because Jesus was not quite two at the time of their arrival at the house in Bethlehem, where the family were then living.

They worshiped Jesus! Gentile pagans were doing what the Jewish priests and theologians were definitely **not** doing, even if they were very much aware of Micah's prophecy. They were totally indifferent! Herod on the other hand did realize that a 'King' was born; he sensed his Jerusalem throne getting very shaky. In other words, his rival must be eliminated, immediately! But it was the priests who would eventually achieve that goal! And yet, it is the 'Stone' shown to Daniel - the true King of kings - **who will reign over the world, and from Jerusalem!**