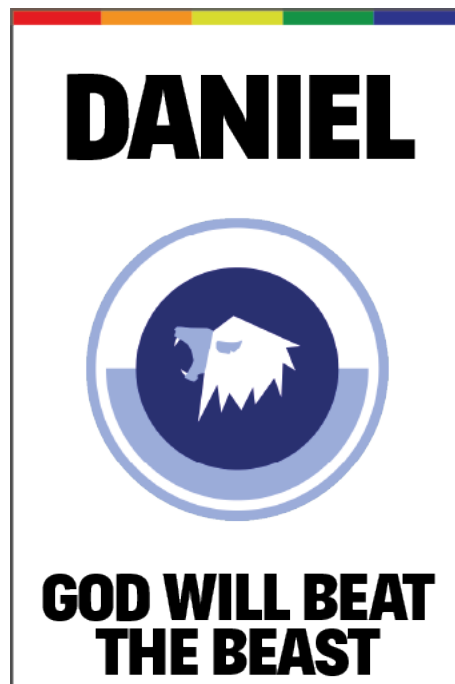




BIBLE IN A YEAR 2020



Summary

Part story, part prophecy, this book shows the amazing things which can happen when God's Spirit lives in people willing to be used by Him.

Daniel chooses to live in a distinctive, faith-driven way. His faith is put to some extreme tests, and by showing this in practice, others come to recognise God at work.

In his reflections on this book, Mal Calladine takes a deep dive into the minds of prophets and what we can do with God's inspiration. Whether or not we have a prophetic gift ourselves, God's promises and power can move us to expect and work for a radically different world from the one we see right now.

Bern Leckie

Monday May 4: Daniel 1-3

The force awakens

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today Mal Calladine gets into our first daily chunk of 'daring Daniel', an epic story of the force awakening...

What did I like about today's reading?

Happy Star Wars Day! May the fourth be with you! (Who else has the knee-jerk response from their church heritage of: "And also with you..."?!)

We start on a real blockbuster movie of a book today. It's extraordinary – Daniel's adventures in exile, after the empire strikes back, but still with a heart connection to a world far, far away. Crazy challenges of life in peril from many a phantom menace; but the force awakens in the return of the Jedi and their new hope.

Daniel is often treated with trepidation as an apocalyptic allegory (it was by me!). But I look at it differently now. Its main messages are based in a captivatingly engaging story, with each chapter bringing something new as the scene shifts.

It helps me understand prophets better, and prophecy as being like a telescope, where you look through two lenses. One lens is close by and the other is further away, but we need to view through both to get clarity on what is on the horizon. If we only look through one lens we miss a lot of what we are actually looking at! The first lens is the context Daniel finds himself in, the court drama of the Babylonian royal palace; the second lens is one of symbolic visions that point to a much bigger picture, that have application both concerning the political empires of Daniel's lifetime, and the bigger story of all humanity's time horizon. But they get best focus when viewed together.

The first three chapters are all set in the Babylonian court - and what a court drama! What I liked most of the stories of the first three chapters was thinking about how applicable they are for today. Friends taken into an imposing and opposing world of different values, but still wanting to stay sacrificially committed to their beliefs and their people. A tale of two cities – the one they are in and the one they wish they were in!

When an invading force wanted to subjugate another nation, they would take their wealth and their talent, their gold and their brains, back home to then steep them in their captor's culture (1:3-4), so they would be assimilated. Boney M's '[By The Rivers of Babylon](#)' (one of the Top 10 selling UK singles of all time!) is actually Psalm 137:1-6 written as a lament of the people of Daniel and his friends. That is their heart in Chapter 1 – 'how can we honour the Lord in a strange land?' Throughout this book they continue to answer that question with integrity.

In their three years of training before qualifying in court service, the culture is trying to take their identity, even re-naming them, and getting them to comply. But they asked permission to be different (defined by self-denial), received favour and sympathy; asked to be scrutinised, tested and compared; and it all increased their spiritual sensitivity (1:17)

where they were healthier (1:15) and had 10x more wisdom and understanding than anyone else! (1:20)

This discipline led to them being strong enough to face some major spiritual challenges in chapters 2 and 3. Firstly being able to interpret the king's dream, when the king's challenge to them had been "interpret or I'll kill you" (2:5-6). I wonder if it would improve and motivate our training to respond to the spiritual searching of others, if they said, "explain our spiritual longings and dreams, or we'll kill you! Get it right, and we'll reward you!" But is that what still happens in the emotional and spiritual realm in our interactions?

They continue to point to God as the source of all wisdom (2:20-23) and interpret where there is spiritual revelation and angst; and received more favour, staying loyal to each other (2:44-49).

Then the opposition becomes more strategic... being forced to bow down to the gods the culture has made. Daniel's friends (known in our house as Rack, Shack and Benny; or Your Shack, My Shack and a Bungalow!) are thrown into the furnace for not bowing down to those self-made gods. And in that place, a defining story of history occurs, where the God they serve is both tangibly present with them in the fire and protects them from all harm in an impossibly difficult situation.

What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

That God IS faithful, in a world of fear and hardship, where people show integrity. I think it's often our biggest worry – is He really with me? And in that fear, we don't step out of comfort. In these three stories of taking a stand, God is incredibly faithful. Jesus is described by the Angel Gabriel as the one who will be called "Immanuel – God with us". Here we see stories of that favour fantastically fulfilled.

Also, as I try to step out for him and he draws close to me, strengthens me, and affirms my identity – not just in Him but in the people and culture to which I have a heart connection. He honours and gives favour to that commitment.

And that investing in understanding the prophetic more is really important! And crazily it seems these extraordinary flashpoints have huge consequences - leading to the salvation of the king of the culture they are in, as we will read tomorrow. (2:47, 3:28-28).

What am I going to do differently as a result?

I want to think about the places I need to make more of a stand and stick out. To not worry if God is faithful, until I put myself in the situation where he can show if he is or not!

I want to think more about "Who are 'my people' I need to show commitment to and make a stand for, at this stretching time?", and how do I need to do that?

Who am I going to share this with?

My wife Chriscelle, family, and some old friends I've got long relationship with, who I admire for living radically. I'm going to contact those trusted old friends who stretch me and give them permission to challenge me in the question I asked in the last section.

Tuesday May 5: Daniel 4-6

This is my story

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today Mal Calladine gets into our second daily chunk of 'daring Daniel', an epic story that helps us be sensitive to God's presence...

What did I like about today's reading?

Happy Cinco de Mayo! NOT Mexican Independence Day, but a morale-boosting day that commemorates an unexpected victory and has emerged as a day to celebrate cultural heritage. The battle remembered was actually a small Mexican Army defeating the much larger French forces in 1862. Beer sales normally spike today as high as Superbowl Sunday – a day for Burritos and drinking Corona! (How our understanding of that brand has changed...) How can today be morale boosting, as we reflect on past stories?

Although chapters 5 and 6 recount two very well-known Bible stories (the writing on the wall, and Daniel in the lion's den), I was most impacted by the weird dynamic (and brief change of author) of chapter 4. I love chapter 4 as unique in the Bible as a first-hand account of the person we read about in the previous chapters as the ruling enemy, now immediately telling personally of their encounter with God! (4:1-2). The NT equivalent might be Paul, as Owen unpacked in the talk on Sunday, but this example is immediate.

At the end of chapters 2 and 3 we saw King Neb involved in two extraordinary flashpoints: with Daniel (in chapter 2), then Dan's promotion seemingly taking him out of town, for him to be absent for the chapter 3 altercation with his friends Rack, Shack and Benny. But those two huge encounters led to the king of the culture they are captive within encountering their God (2:47, 3:28-28). And then King Neb takes over writing the next chapter in the book! He starts 'it is I... King Neb' and then says in 4:2:

"It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me."

He then goes on to tell his view of the story of encountering the living God, which we've already read in chapter 2, his disturbing dream and Daniel's interpretation.

There is something about hearing from someone who has newly encountered God first-hand, as a fresh reminder that He IS real and involved in our world.

And what got him to that place, by his own testimony, was God's people knowing how to handle dreams well.

What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

That it is MOST about our relationship with God! That as we think about prophecy and dream interpretation for those we journey with, it's not about the revelation so much as about our noticeable and contagious relationship with God. This hits me, especially in Daniel's humble response to King Neb's question: are you going to interpret my dream? "No wise man can do this; but there is a God who reveals mysteries" (2:26-27). He points to God,

not himself. King Neb then recounts this conversation in 4:18, as “No wise man can interpret, but you can, because the spirit of the Holy God is in you.” (He actually says ‘gods’ - a new believer still working things out!). But the defining trust issue is that he sees God’s spirit is in Daniel. People notice! How we are doing with other people, how much they trust us and let us in, is linked to how much they see God in us. God does work despite and outside of us, but the mad thing is that he mainly chooses to work through us, where others can see Him in us. He gives us opportunity to point to him. That's when it works, when we point to him more than ourselves.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

Where do I need to point to God more intentionally? I think I’ve become wary of ‘super-spirituality’ around the issue of humility. For a while there was a Christian comic that was in the style of “Viz” called ‘[The Winebibber](#)’. It had various comic strip characters – Gordon Bews (out of the Good News’) – Bible actor! (the stories of the stick man who illustrates that Bible); and “Richard Bumble – he’s so Humble”, and the caption had him saying ‘Oh no, I’m not!’ That’s where my mind goes when I think about humility and pointing to God! Or the sports stars who point to the sky after victory; or the artisan who says about their creativity ‘it wasn't me’, sometimes making me think ‘it wasn't THAT good!’

But that can be an adventure in me missing the point – there is something for me to wrestle with here about how I appropriately do point to God and being spiritual; and acknowledge that He is the one doing the spiritual and impressive things around me. Intentionally pointing to God in the things people notice.

Who am I going to share this with?

I think the main opportunity we have to do this at the moment is with the Social Services team we get to work with day in, day out, in our role as foster carers. I enjoy being open with them about our household as one defined by faith; I’ll be looking for opportunities to echo Daniel.

Thursday May 7: Daniel 7-9

Sharing what you've seen

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today Mal Calladine gets into our third daily chunk of 'daring Daniel', an epic story of that helps us to be sensitive to God's presence...

What did I like about today's reading?

I liked Daniel's integrity in his prophetic gift – things that seem quite normal: a book by his bed to write down his dreams (7:1); how they troubled and affected him (7:28 and 8:27); how he turned to God in reading, prayer and fasting to try and understand the revelation he was getting (9:2-3). And I loved the humility of his petitioning prayer (9:4-19), especially the heartfelt cry at the end (9:17-19). How hearing God led him to cry out in prayer for his people, and for the city from which he had been taken captive.

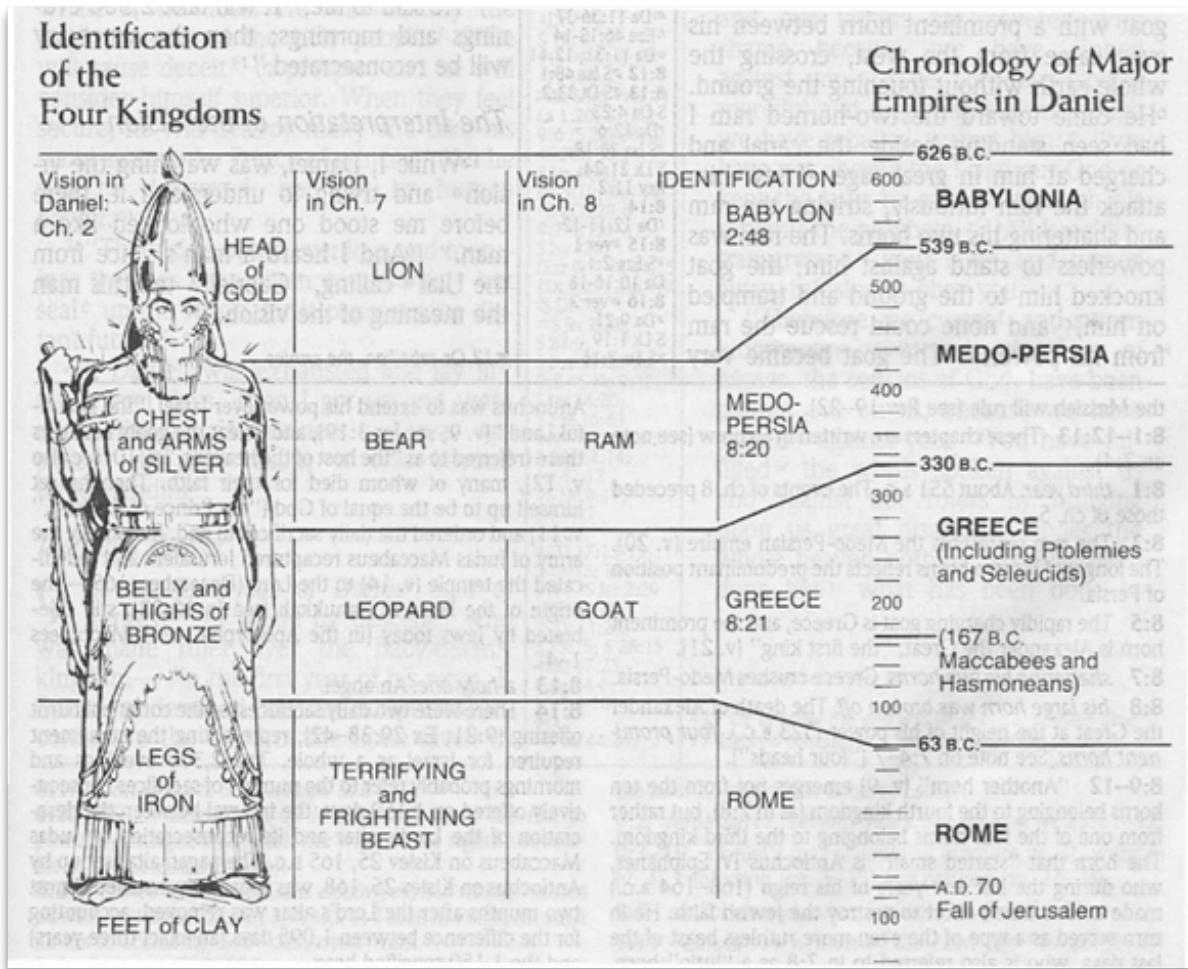
It reinforced to me the importance of the role of the prophet, and the need for us to encourage and support that dynamic in our community. Each day of Daniel I'm trying to connect what we are reading to what this day commemorates – today is a bit harder, but there are some nuggets!

Today we remember some radical prophetic actions that were fire-starters to change: Socrates death; a big victory for Joan of Arc; today in 1700 William Penn began monthly meetings for black people advocating emancipation; and in the US today (the 1st Thursday of May) is their National Day of Prayer designated by the United States Congress, asking people "to turn to God in prayer and meditation." Every year since 1952, the President of the United States has signed a proclamation, encouraging all Americans to pray on this day. It's a day we are encouraged to be aware of God, and what He is saying...

And that's what I loved - Daniel's sensitivity to God's presence and revelation, and how it points to prophecy having more than one arena of outworking. That's the telescope analogy we looked at on Day 1 of Daniel: that there is stuff to understand of the first lens of the writer's era; and also to look through the second further away lens that has application on a wider time horizon. Telescopes work with clarity when you look through both lenses!

The first 6 chapters of Daniel were drama in the Royal Court; these last 6, beginning with today's chapters, switches literary style focussing on the visions and messages Daniel received from God through angelic messengers. It goes from practical narrative storytelling to cryptic, symbolic picture language, typical of apocalyptic literature.

The imagery in chapters 7 and 8 looks confusing – but I really appreciated the table in my NIV Study Bible. It explains how the imagery has application to the empires that ruled the known world in the centuries following Daniel.



This makes sense of the first lens. Many commentators say we then need to look through the telescope to include the second lens of what this means after Jesus.

What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

It reminded me of God not wanting us to engage in this stuff on our own. These scriptures point to a 4-stage process of:

- Revelation (*what is actually God saying?*) e.g. 7:2-14; 8:2-14
- Interpretation (*what does it mean?*) 7:16-27; 8:15-25
- Timing (the one often missed out – *when is the right time to share this?*) e.g. 8:26 (seal it up – this one’s for later!)
- Application (*what am I going to do about this?*); which Daniel’s response seems to be his petitioning prayer of chapter 9. Often the reason we get insight is to pray into the situation.

For Daniel, he gets the Interpretation from another spiritual messenger; but generally I think God’s wisdom is that we do this in community. I Corinthians 12: 7-11 lists the different outworkings of the Holy Spirit when we gather together “different manifestations... for the common good” of wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miraculous power, prophecy, distinguishing between spirits, tongues and interpretation. I think this is the safety net of community, of working these things out with others. No one person is supposed to have a

monopoly on understanding the truth – we need each other to get there. It's our safety net from falling into wrong understanding.

I'm most wary of error when someone tells me what God is saying, the interpretation and the application. I trust they had the revelation; but if they are not looking to include others in the interpretation and application; there is normally a background heart issue there that is 'out'.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

I think we are all called to hear God's voice; but some people have a particular gift, calling or emphasis in this area. I want to be more intentional and sensitive to the people I know I think carry this particular gift. They are often more 'exotic' plants who need a safe greenhouse where they can thrive. I don't think I'm one with this gift, but I see its benefit so much, and I want to be one who protects, encourages and champions those who do.

Who am I going to share this with?

Those more prophetic people I know... asking specifically how I can cheer them on more and encourage a greenhouse climate for them to grow within.

And with you... I want to share on this day of prayer, that we can declare blessing over our nation as we listen to the Lord and what He is saying... <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PUtII3mNj5U>

Friday May 8: Daniel 10-12

Focusing on victory

Every day we're reading or listening to part of the Bible together and sharing thoughts with you. Today Mal Calladine gets into our final daily chunk of 'daring Daniel'... an epic story of victory to rock out to!

What did I like about today's reading?

It's two anniversaries today - Happy V.E. day! And, less profoundly, Motörhead day!! Time to sing out in full Lemmie style: "the 8th of May; the 8th of May!"! V.E. Day is a wonderful frame to the readings today – the day that marks victory at the end of WWII.

I've often heard the analogy to explain where we are in history (as we understand the 'now and not yet' of kingdom theology) of the timeline of the WWII. That it's agreed that 'D' Day in June 1944 was the defining moment of the war with the decisive act of ground being taken, creating a western front; but victory wasn't assured or confirmed for another eleven months. And it was not a triumphal procession to confirm victory, in fact more people died in those later battles with an army in retreat, than in the previous years of the war. <https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/why-d-day-was-so-important-to-allied-victory>

In our New Testament worldview we understand ourselves to be in the 'in-between' of the 'D' Day of the cross and resurrection, where the defining victory was established; and the V.E. day of Jesus' return, where victory is confirmed.

Daniel points to a similar worldview in these, his final chapters of cryptic, symbolic picture language, called apocalyptic literature; wrestling with the question 'what happens at the end?'

As we've looked at the telescope analogy through this book, these are the chapters where the focus most is on the second, further away, lens that has application on a wider time horizon. The angel says to Daniel:

"Now I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future, for the vision concerns a time yet to come..." But the explaining still seems pretty confusing to me! A great war, loads of imagery and symbolic use of numbers; these are not simple ideas to unpack.

I most like that even for Daniel it was overwhelming - he needed to ask for spiritual strength because it was too much to engage with (10:18-19). And that requested strength was given to him, and he persevered in wrestling with this stuff.

What did it show me about Father God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?

It reminded me that, when push comes to shove, God is much bigger and smarter than me. Some people obsess on the details of the "end times", others ostrich it. But more than anything, God want us to walk in his deep, 'shalom' peace which is beyond and greater than our understanding (Phil 4:7), and perfect 'all consuming' love which pushes off fear (1 John 4:18). That verse defines fear as to do with punishment; psychologists define fear as 'the

apprehension of future evil'. If we know it's not about future evil, but good, and embracing peace that is bigger than our ability to understand, then we have these writings in the context of our relationship with our Heavenly Father.

Daniel was written as an encouragement to deflated, oppressed people to bring hope and keep them going. That, I believe, is the Father's message in Daniel for us.

What am I going to do differently as a result?

This week I was listening to a favourite podcast - Elis & John's Isolation Tapes (*67 if you want a listen!). They were discussing the end of lockdown and the angst it was creating in them. One said, "I don't care 'when'; I just want the reassurance of knowing 'how'." Another replied, "I don't care 'how', my peace is in knowing 'when'!"

That no-one could confidently give answers to their queries was impacting for me. I don't think anyone right now (scientist, politician or pundit) can accurately offer them the definitive answer of hope to align their plans to right now. We just need to ride it out. Their heart's cry is reasonable. But the reality is to keep going, we must find peace in it all despite not fully knowing or understanding yet how it's going to pan out.

This reminds me of Jon Mark Comer's teaching (which is incredibly relevant for this time!) both in his book ['The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry'](#) and his teaching from Vineyard's NLC 2020 where he quotes the research of Dr Friedman, that the only solution to the cycle of a world in crisis, is to insert people who are "[a non-anxious presence.](#)"

I want to be one of those coming in an opposite spirit to the angst of the age! To be a 'person of peace, doing what Daniel was told: "Go your way Daniel because the words are closed up & sealed until time of the end." (12:9)

To get on with living, and be at peace, in my relationship with God and His plans. To treat being afraid as a trigger to fear only God... and that brings peace.

Who am I going to share this with?

I want to be that '*non-anxious presence*' in the supermarket aisles of my life! Especially with those ignoring the 2m social distancing guidelines, reaching over me to get to a shelf and ignoring the one-way system!

And a final thing to share with you, as we finish this book of Daniel: I wanted to end with a flourish! When I reference Daniel's stories in my head, my own filter is through having the pleasure of kids who grew up with VeggieTales! In these animated stories, King Neb is a big old marrow, who loved Daniel & the other jealous court official's response I found unforgettable:

*"Oh no, what we gonna do? The king likes Daniel, more than me and you;
Oh no, what we gonna do? We've gotta get him outta here."*

It finishes with one of the finest fear-inducing rhymes in lyrical history:

“We can use him as a footstool, or a table to play Scrabble on; or tie him up and beat him up, and throw him out of Babylon!”

Whatever worries & fears are assaulting you this day... whatever enemy assaults & plans...

May you know today the peace, that the defining battle is won, victory is assured; and whatever devious plans are being hatched, you hold the hand of the all-powerful one who holds the future... Enjoy... <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lk5LhR2LzNI>