

Through The Bible In One Year

The Adventure of Many Lifetimes

Unpublished Work, December 2005, David W. Shockey.

Daily Devotional Companion

Week 48

Day 330. Read Daniel 2.24-3.30; 1 Peter 4.7-5.14;

Psalm 119.81-96; and Proverbs 28.15-16.

Daniel: It's generally considered unwise...if not downright deadly... to tell a despot (or anyone with strong dictatorial traits) something he or she doesn't want to hear. Daniel did so and lived to tell about it. King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream he wanted his 'wisemen' to interpret for him...without his first telling them what he had dreamed! When none of them could, he ordered that all his counselors be executed. Daniel went to him and said: 'No wise person, enchanter, or diviner can interpret the mysterious dream, but....there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries.' Beginning with this witness to God, Daniel interpreted the dream for the contrary king. In the dream, God was revealing the future of the king's dynasty. In the dream there was a huge statue with a head of gold, a body of bronze, and feet of clay. A rock—uncut by human hands—struck and smashed the clay feet, causing the great statue to collapse. The meaning? After a period of greatness his nation, which was the preeminent world power at the time, would decline and be destroyed. God would bring about another Kingdom—with another King—that would rule all nations and never be destroyed. When King Nebuchadnezzar heard the doom declared on his empire, instead of killing the messenger, he bowed prostrate before Daniel and declared, 'Surely your God is the God of all gods, and the Lord of all kings.' Wise move, King Nebuchadnezzar, to worship the God who reveals such mysteries. God knows everything that happens...or that will happen. Past, present, or future are all one and the same to God. All times...and all human lives.....are in his hands. He is the only wise one. Take your wisdom from him. But human wisdom fades fast. Shortly after King Nebuchadnezzar declared this, he made a huge statue of gold (an image of himself, perhaps?) and commanded everyone to worship it. Daniel and his two faithful friends were cast into the fiery furnace as their punishment for refusing to worship anyone or anything besides the God of heaven. And in the midst of the fire, from which they ultimately come forth safe and unscathed, a fourth person was seen talking with them. Could this one be the King whom God had promised one day would set up a Kingdom that would never end? His Kingly behavior is seen as he shares the sufferings of his people and joins them in their trials. **Questions:** 1. Why is it so often hard for me to believe, or even remember, that every detail of my life is known and of interest to God? 2. When and how has my Lord Jesus Christ been present in my trials or sufferings to deliver me? 3. When I am given an opportunity to stand up for my faith in Christ before others, do I tend to try to keep a low

profile, compromise, or boldly share my faith? How do the examples of Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and especially my King, Jesus Christ, strengthen me for witnessing boldly?

Peter: Live as though the end of all things is near. Be clear-headed and focused. Love one another deeply, Peter urges, reminding his hearers of something he knew about first-hand from his own failings: love covers a multitude of sins. Jesus had covered a multitude of his—including three denials in just one night. Live generously. Offer hospitality without complaining. Use the gifts God has given you to serve others. Leaders, don't lord it over those you lead; but be eager instead to serve as good shepherds of God's flock under your care. The young should be respectful and submissive to the older ones in the community of faith. Everyone needs to wrap themselves, their words, and actions in humility, as naturally as if putting on clothing. And don't be surprised if you face painful trials because of your faith. You have an adversary who seeks not just to destroy but to devour you. He prowls around perpetually seeking someone to destroy. That type of end is always near, too. Be alert and self-controlled always. Resist him, standing not on your own strength but on the faith of Christ, knowing that all other believers are undergoing the very same sort of sufferings as you. If you have any share in Christ at all, you must share in his sufferings. Count it an honor to suffer with him and rejoice, for this shows surely that you belong to Christ...and are part of his people throughout the world. **Questions:** 1. What are the most prominent ways the devil tries to attack me? What temptations and strategies does he use to try to trip me up in my faith and following of Jesus? 2. How would living every day as if the end of the world were near change my actions? What new intensity would there be for me to share my faith in generous words and actions, if I knew my end was near? 3. What is stopping me from living with that kind of intensity and spiritual focus? What would I do differently, not do at all, or do (that I don't now do) if I knew my end was coming today? How can I do them today, as if that were the case?

Prayer: God, my end is near...and nearer every day, in fact. How can I still live as though I live endlessly? Why am I so forgetful of the limited time I have in this world? Why do I omit so much that is needful to chase after what is unnecessary? Why do I neglect the opportunities you give to know you better or to love you by loving others? Father, give me purpose and focus. Give me the joy of knowing that the clock is running out on this interlude here, important as it is in shaping my character to be like yours, and that eternity with you is approaching ever nearer. Let me use this time and these gifts you have given me to give you glory and lead others to life with you. The end is nearer now, even than when I began this prayer. Bring it on, God, in your good time. But in the meantime, let me use all my time to love you by loving others to you! Amen.

Day 331. Read Daniel 4.1-37; 2 Peter 1.1-21 ;

Psalm 119.97-112; and Proverbs 28.17-18.

Daniel: A message about God to all the peoples and nations of every language in the known world? A testimony about what the Most High God had done for him personally, from a pagan king who conquered much of the known world at the time? Something inside drove him to do it, whether it was gratitude or duty or divine inspiration. 'It gives me joy,' he wrote, 'to tell you what the Most High God has done for me personally.' After Daniel had revealed the meaning of a dream, and it all came to pass just as God had appointed in the dream, Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, had to tell people—all the people he could—what God had done for him. In the dream a mighty tree, with branches spreading so far and wide that many birds and animals found shelter under it, was ordered cut down, till only a stump remained. Daniel was again the bearer of 'bad news.' The tree represented the king himself. He would soon suffer a mental illness and become little better than a beast for a time, which would keep him from ruling the country. Then Daniel, the exile and captive of the king, dared do something not many mortals would dare do to a monarch with life and death power over people: he gave him advice. Better than that, Daniel warned him. He begged the king to take action: 'Renounce your sins by doing what is right and being kind to the oppressed, and then your prosperity might continue unchanged.' Kings don't like such advice. No one likes to be told they are wrong and heading down a dangerous path they have chosen for themselves. This king didn't listen either. A year later he was surveying the magnificence of Babylon from the roof and ascribing to himself the credit for creating it, when a voice from heaven declared his royal authority had been taken from him. For a time he literally lost his mind. But afterwards, when all that had been predicted was fulfilled, he praised God and penned his personal testimony. All those who walk in pride, even the king himself, God is able to humble.

Questions: 1. When have I had the opportunity—or even the call—from God to help others gain insight and perspective on their lives, particularly through insights that made them face an unpleasant reality? What did I do when those opportunities presented themselves, seize them or ignore them? 2. Who is my best, spiritual friend who will truly 'tell it to me straight,' telling me what I need to hear and not necessarily what I want to hear? If I don't have such a spiritual friend and guide, who could become that for me; and what will I do to cultivate that relationship? 3. If asked by someone to say what God has done for me personally, what would I say? Why do I love, worship, and serve God?

Peter: Those whom God calls, God also provides of his own goodness all they need for life and godliness through personal knowledge of him. But how shall we know him, and how shall we lead a godly life? God has given great and precious promises, so that people everywhere might share in his divine nature and escape the corruption of the world created by evil desires of the old nature. What is our response to these gifts from God? Making every effort to add to our faith- goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and above all, love. Possessing these qualities...sharing this godly nature and character...will keep each believer from being ineffective and unproductive in our knowledge of God. There is a knowledge about God that does not personally share in the character and nature of God. It is unproductive and ineffective. The way to the fullness of life God longs for you to enjoy now and forevermore is, above all, to pay close and careful attention to the Word of God, as to a light shining in the dark. One day the day will

dawn; but until then, pay attention to the light. No scripture came about by the writer's own preference or wisdom. Rather, people spoke from God, empowered and guided by the Holy Spirit. In the Word is all that is needed to share in the divine nature and escape the corruption of the world. **Questions:** 1. What are the 'great and precious promises' Peter talks about that God has given us, and how do they affect my attitudes and actions in life? 2. How has the Spirit, working through the Word, shaped my character and nature to share more in God's own character and nature? 3. What am I doing to 'make every effort to add' to my faith the godly qualities, character traits, and actions that Peter speaks of? Which do I need to work on most to improve my effectiveness and productivity for God?

Prayer: God, the world...my world...is very dark, and I need your light to live by. Your promises in your Word give me courage and confidence to follow you, though the world pulls and pushes me in different directions. Let me trust completely in your promises and follow you, though the way seems dark to me; and I cannot see the end. Let me live in the light you provide through your Holy Word, inspired and guided by your Holy Spirit. I want to be like you and to reflect your very nature and character in all my words and actions. Form in me the character and nature of Christ, your Child, whatever crosses that may cost me. Help me make every effort to add to the faith your promises that have created in me all the godly qualities and actions your Spirit gives, so I can be effective and productive for you. For that means others may be touched by your great and precious promises, just as I have. Amen.

Day 332. Read Daniel 5.1-31; 2 Peter 2.1-22; Psalm 119.113-128; and Proverbs 28.19-20.

Daniel: 'The writing's on the wall,' we say. What do we mean by that? That the consequences of our actions are already determined and coming, without question. The saying comes from this very passage of scripture. The Babylonian king gave a great banquet and ordered the golden goblets taken from God's temple in Jerusalem by used for the drinking. As they drank, they praised their gods—their idols of gold, silver, and stone. Suddenly, a human hand seemed to be writing on the wall. The king, who might well have been the most powerful person alive then, turned pale and quaked with terror. He called for his enchanters, astrologers, diviners; but none of these 'wisemen' could decipher the writing or tell what it meant. The incentive was there all right. The reward for interpreting the words was to be made the third highest ruler in the whole country. When all his own wisemen could not interpret it, the king became even more frightened and worried. The queen remembered that an old-timer, who was once counselor to his father, had had the gift of interpreting dreams and explaining riddles. Old Daniel was brought before the king and offered the reward. 'Keep the reward or give it to someone else,' he said, declining any benefit for himself; 'but I will tell you what the writing on the wall means: Because you have not humbled yourself, but instead set yourself against the Lord of heaven, God has numbered the days of your rule and brought it to an end; you have

been weighed as on the scales and found lacking; your kingdom will be divided between two of your enemies.’ That very night the Babylonian king was assassinated, and King Darius of the Medes ruled instead. The writing is on the wall for anyone who sets themselves up against God. **Questions:** 1 In what ways do I tend to set up myself against God, going my own way and satisfying my own will (creating my own ‘kingdom’) rather than giving him Lordship of my life? 2. When the writing is on the wall, and the consequences are coming for my going another way than God’s, do I repent or keep on my self-chosen course? 3. Who tells me directly what I need to hear when I am going the wrong way? Do I ‘reward’ that person with my thanks and support, or do I tend to respond angrily or with rejection?

Peter: There will be...in fact, are...false teachers. As it was in ancient times, so it is now and will be in the future. Many will follow their false ways and bring the Way into disrepute. They will seek to exploit you with the myths they have made up themselves. Their reward is coming. After all, God did not spare even the angels who fell, but cast them into hell. He did not spare the people of Noah’s time, but sent the flood. Sodom and Gomorrah were reduced to ashes because of their wrongdoing. All false teachers will be paid back in harm for all the harm they have caused others. They seduce the unstable and seek only their own pleasure. Worst of all, they are like springs without water—they really offer no life. They promise freedom but are enslaved themselves; for a person is a slave to whatever masters them, and they are mastered by their selfish desires. They escaped the corruption of the world by coming to know the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, only to get entangled in the world again and overcome by it. The worst is, by their false ways, these false practitioners and teachers bring the Way of life into disrepute, so people can’t find their way. **Questions:** 1. How does knowing God’s Word help me to recognize and refuse to follow false teachers? 2. What false teachings are prevalent in society today? In those who reputedly follow Jesus? 3. Whom do I know who has been scandalized by false teachers, so they are fearful to follow Jesus Christ as the Way? How can I help to heal the damage false teachers have done to them and help them to know Jesus as their loving Lord and Savior?

Prayer: My God and Father, the world around me clamors constantly for my attention and allegiance. Please protect me from false teachers that seek to lead me astray for their own benefit. Keep me in your way. Let me always follow the One who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life I seek, Jesus Christ, your Son. And because the way is illumined only by your Word, keep me ever in your Word. Draw me closer to your side, by drawing me deeper into your Word. And then, knowing the Way rightly, let me help others find the Way for themselves. Make me a true teacher to others by first making me a learner who sits at your Son’s feet, seeking from him the one thing needful. Amen.

Day 333. Read Daniel 6.1-28; 2 Peter 3.1-18;

Psalm 119.129-152; and Proverbs 28.21-22.

Daniel: A king can be tricked by his trusted counselors. Darius was. Out of envy for Daniel's distinctions, all the other administrators in the land conspired to destroy him. They looked for some legal cause against Daniel, but he was blameless; so they had to engineer a reason for the king to kill him. Enter the lions. On the pretext of uniting the country through king worship, they persuaded Darius to issue an edict. If anyone prayed to any god or man other than to the king during one solid month, that person should be thrown into a lion's den. The king, who was obviously a little vain, liked the idea and issued the decree. It was easy for them to set up Daniel. He always prayed by his window—looking toward Jerusalem. It might have been better if he had more private ways of praying, but he was not about to pray to anyone but God alone, not even his king, even if the king should order his execution. Now, King Darius was actually pretty smart, really. He finally figured out who the real predators were. And to his credit, he tried to release Daniel when he realized it was all a set-up. The law was the law, however; so Daniel was lowered into a den of lions. Hungry as they were, these natural predators did not even touch Daniel all night. They were pussycats, compared with the human predators that set up Daniel. At dawn the king ordered the den opened and called, 'Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God whom you always serve been able to rescue you?' Great question, king! Can God really deliver people from tough spots...or even impossible and hopeless spots? There was Daniel, unharmed. Oh, by the way, Darius then had all the human predators who set up Daniel put in the lions' den, for the lions who lunched on them. The message of the story is simple: the living God delivers! King Darius even passed another edict ordering everyone in his kingdom to fear and reverence the God of Daniel, which was a nice gesture, and much better than ordering everyone to worship himself; but nobody can be forced to love and follow God. They have to want to. They have to experience his love, and desire his deliverance. **Questions:** 1 How much do I love God for what he can do for me, and how much simply because God is so awesome and loving? 2. What difference does it make whether I follow God because of what he can do for me, or simply because I love him for loving me, so that he delivered me from death through the death of his Son? What difference do the two different motives make in my attitudes and actions in life? 3. From what has God delivered me? How can I thank him properly?

Peter: Peter wrote down these words to stimulate followers of Jesus to wholesome thinking. He urged them to 'recall,' which means more to reflect on, the words spoken by the prophets in the past and the apostles in the present time. In short, he means the scriptures and the teachings of the Bible. Scoffers will say nothing has ever changed, that the world goes on just as it has forever. They don't understand that the same Word which created the world now sustains the world until the judgment day, when it will disappear in fire. God is not dilly-dallying. God is patiently taking his time, because he doesn't want one single person to perish. He hopes everyone can come to repentance...and live with him in the next world forever. Since everything in this world is transitory and temporary, how shall we live here and now, in the time until the end comes? With expectancy. Anticipating. Looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, our true home. Making every effort to be spotless and at peace with him, growing in faith and knowledge of him, so we reflect him more and more in our thoughts, words and deeds; so when he comes we

are ready to share eternity with him. Now that's something to reflect on! **Questions:** 1. Do I live now as if every *thing* around me is temporary and perishing, and as though every *person* was eternal and precious to God? 2. Whom do I know who needs a nudge closer to God, so they can come to know and love him and live eternally with him? How can I, through my serving and inviting, help them closer to God? 3. Who is the biggest 'scoffer' I know, who maybe even doubts that God exists? How can I show them through my actions and words that God is real?

Prayer: God, I was lost, except you found me. I was perishing, except you thought me so precious and important that you sent your Son to perish on the cross, so I might live with you forever. If you did that just for me, you did that just for everyone. Everyone matters to you, even the most skeptical and sinful, if I mattered to you. Lord, let everyone matter to me as much as they matter to you. Give me the heart of Jesus for those who are perishing, and make me the hand of Jesus to reach out to them for you. Amen.

Day 334. Read Daniel 7.1-28; 1 John 1.1-10;

Psalm 119.153-176; and Proverbs 28.23-24.

Daniel: Daniel, the interpreter of dreams, dreamed himself. Thank God he wrote it down. The four winds churned up the great sea and four beasts came up from the sea. One was like a lion, with the wings of an eagle. Another was like a bear. Another a leopard with four bird-like wings on its back. The last was so terrifying it defied description. It had ten horns and large teeth of iron, devouring its victims and crushing whatever remained underfoot. The beast grew another horn which had eyes like a man and a mouth that boasted. The scene switched to heaven and the Ancient of Days seated on his throne. Books were opened. The beast was slain and its body thrown into blazing fire. Then the climactic scene came: One, like a son of man, came to the Ancient of Days and was given authority, glory, and power, so that all nations and peoples of every language worshipped him. His kingdom will never be destroyed. His dominion is everlasting. Now that is a dream. The whole of God's saving work shown in a minute in the middle of the night. What does it take to have a dream like that? God has to give it to you. There is no other way. **Questions:** 1. How does Daniel's prophetic dream, centuries before the birth or sacrifice of Jesus Christ, further strengthen my faith in God and my resolve to follow him through my words and deeds every day? 2. Have I truly worshipped Jesus Christ and declared him my king recently? Can I possibly do that too often? 3. How does Daniel's dream demonstrate that all times—including the times and details of my own life—are in God's sovereign hands and under his ultimate control? How does this reality affect my attitudes and actions in my daily life?

John: He saw it with his own eyes. He heard it with his own ears. He touched him with his own hands. From first-hand knowledge of the One who is the Word of Life, John wrote down his words so we might have life. The Life just appeared. They saw it and

testified to it. And what is more, John passed on what he had seen and heard for one purpose only: that I and others like me might have fellowship—not just with John—but with God the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ. Fellowship with God! Not casual conversation, but real relationship! God is light. In him there is no darkness at all. If we walk in that light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with God and one another; and Jesus' blood purifies us. I may pretend to be without sin, rationalizing it away in my own mind, but that is only fooling myself. Worse, it is lying to myself, when there is no need for such self-deception. No, if I admit my sins to him, he is faithful and fair, and will totally forgive all my wrongdoing and wrong-being. To say and do otherwise is to make him out to be a liar. That's the worst disaster of all; for then his word of life has no place in my life...and I am lost. **Questions:** 1. How does John's eyewitness account and testimony strengthen my faith in Jesus Christ, and my trust in his promise of full forgiveness and full fellowship with God and God's faithful people? 2. How does the fellowship I have with Christ through the forgiveness of my sins by his sacrifice on the cross 'level the playing field' between me and all other people, and thereby open the way to true fellowship (real spiritual relationship and love) with others? 3. How (and why) do I try to rationalize my sin and make it seem not so bad after all, minimizing my need for my Savior? Why do I have trouble admitting to God, others, and especially myself, how sinful I am, even though I know God forgives me and I am purified for Christ's sake?

Prayer: God, one day I will see with my own eyes, hear with my own ears, and touch with my own hand the Word of Life, your Son, my Savior, Jesus Christ. Let me live in his light now, just as he is in the light. Every moment, may I live in your light, though it reveal to myself and others around me the darkness the still clings to me, my sin in all its ugliness. Your grace and glory shines all the purer as it reveals and cleanses my sin. When I was lost and alone, you sent your Word to restore me to true fellowship with you. Now Lord, let me share with others the Light, even if it means them seeing the shadows in me. Amen.

Day 335. Read Daniel 8.1-27; 1 John 2.1-17;

Psalm 120.1-7; and Proverbs 28.25-26.

Daniel: What must it have been like for Daniel, wondering when...or if...another vision might come from God? When one came, it riveted his attention totally, so irresistible was its power. Yet another vision came to Daniel. A ram, with long horns, charged toward the west, north, and south. No animal could stand against it. But then, suddenly, a goat flew from the west, without touching the earth, charging the ram in great rage, shattering his horns, knocking him to the ground and trampling him. But at the height of its power, the goat's own horn was broken. Four more grew in its place toward the four winds, and out of them a small horn grew until it reached the heavens. It threw down some of the heavenly host and set itself up to be as great as the Prince of Heaven himself. 'How long will the vision take to be fulfilled?' asked one of the heavenly beings. Gabriel was sent to explain the meaning. The kings of Media and Persia will be defeated by the king of

Greece, whose own kingdom will be divided into four after him. The king of Greece will cause terrible devastation and even set up himself to be a rival god. After the stunning vision...and the visit by the archangel, Gabriel, Daniel is exhausted and sick for several days, appalled by the vision that was beyond understanding. Daniel got up and went about the king of Media's business, even though that kingdom was doomed to destruction. He did his appointed daily work. But he was never the same. People touched by God-people given even a glimpse of God's great plan- are never the same again. **Questions:** 1. How has God's revealing to me his plan to save the world through his Son and giving me a vision of his eternal kingdom changed the way I think and act at my workplace and neighborhood every day? 2. How has catching the vision of God's purpose in the world changed me? 3. How does the prophecy of the rise of Alexander the Great given to Daniel before it happened strengthen my faith in God's control over all the events of history and of my life, too? 4. How does God's omniscience and sovereign control give me a sense of peace in the tumultuous and troublesome times I live in? How does it help me to live with courage and confidence, though I cannot see how things will play out through my own limited insight?

John: Where shall we walk? In the light or the darkness? The stunning news is, for those who know and follow Jesus Christ, we don't have to sin anymore. We will sin, it is true; but it is no longer inevitable that in every situation, even in our so-called 'best actions,' we must and shall sin, as happened before we believed. But if we do sin, John is quick to point out (for he knows believers still will), we have an Advocate—somebody who will speak to God on our behalf, in our defense—Jesus Christ. He has atoned for the sins of the whole world, and that certainly means my sins; though I have what seems like a world of sin to my credit. But if I say I know him and don't do what he commands me to do-if I pretend and dissemble-then I am lying, and the truth is not in me. If I obey his word-if I hear and heed him, so I put into practice what he tells me- then God's love is truly made complete in me. God's word then ripens in me and bears fruit for him. If I claim to live in him, then I must walk as Jesus did. I cannot claim to be in the light and then walk in the deeds of darkness. I cannot hate my brother or sister while claiming to love God, for that is the deepest darkness of all. That is the darkness of self-blindness. If I love the things of this world, the love of God is not in me. The world and its desires will pass away, but the one who does the will of God endures forever. The one who walks in the light will live in the Light forever. **Questions:** 1. How does the reassuring truth that Jesus still pleads on my behalf when I sin and repent free me to do and be better? 2. Are there people I am 'hating' (treating wrongly or un-lovingly)? 3. Am I totally walking in the light, as He is in the light? In what areas of my life am I still straying into the shadows or dancing with the darkness? When and how will I give Christ complete control over these parts of my life, too?

Prayer: God, you have touched me so deeply with your love in Christ, I will never be the same. Oh, I know, too much of me is still the same. The same old anger, jealousy, resentment. The same old desire, greed, and grabbing after lesser things. Now that I am in the light, as he is in the light, all those old ways seem...well...old. Worn.

Worthless. I don't know why I still do them...except that I know part of me is still in shadow. Shine your Light, the light of your Christ, on me always, God; though it reveal all my blemishes and weaknesses. Let me walk in the Light, as he is in the light, day by day, renouncing the deeds of darkness to follow his commands. Above all, let me love...not hate...everyone. Let me love them as he loves them...and most amazingly, as he loves me. That is the light I want to walk by. That is the light I want to shine forth from my words and deeds every day. Amen.

Day 336. Read Daniel 9.1-11.1; 1 John 2.18-3.6; Psalm 121.1-8; and Proverbs 28.27-28.

Daniel: Daniel was a student of scripture. In the reign of King Darius, he understood from the scriptures—the prophecy of Jeremiah especially—that Israel's exile would last seventy years. Then desolate Jerusalem would be consoled again. His understanding of scripture impelled him to action. He prayed and he fasted. His prayer was a confession of his ancestors' sins, as well as his own. His prayer was a plea for forgiveness and restoration. He made his prayer and plea, not counting on his own righteousness but simply trusting in God's great mercy. A funny thing happened. An angel came to him while he was speaking his prayer. And not just any angel, Gabriel, the archangel. 'As soon as you began to pray,' he told Daniel, 'an answer was given, which I have come to tell you...' And he proceeded to explain the vision that was so puzzling. Later, as he was again praying, now in the reign of Cyrus, the king of Persia who followed Darius, the king under whom the exile ended, the king who ordered the restoration of Jerusalem and the temple, another vision—along with another visitor—came to Daniel. A hand touched him and set him on his hands and knees from where he had fallen flat from the force of the vision, overcome with anguish. 'Your words were heard, and I have come in response to them,' the angel says. He would have come sooner, only a fallen angel had battled him so that Michael, the archangel, had to come to help him fight through. Then one who looked like a man touched him on the lips, so Daniel could speak. 'Do not be afraid,' he said to Daniel. 'Be strong now; be strong.' **Questions:** 1. How is prayer itself, and the peace I experience when I am in God's presence as I pray, knowing he hears me, part of the answer to my prayer? How does the act of prayer itself strengthen my faith and help me in times of need? 2. How does it give me confidence to know that heavenly beings are fighting for me against the evil, spiritual powers that would keep God from my life? 3. How does it affect my attitudes and actions to know that the world is a scene of spiritual warfare, and my life is part of the battleground? How does the reality of spiritual warfare change my perspective and my sense of purpose? What part does prayer have in my own spiritual warfare?

John: The Antichrist is coming. Many antichrists have already come. Many more antichrists will come in the future, trying to lead us astray, until Christ comes. These are beings—human or spiritual beings—who deny that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Whoever denies the Son denies the Father. Whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father as well. This is the truth: the Father has lavished his love on us so that all who believe can

be called children of God. *Children of God!* As children, it does not yet appear what we will be; because, by definition, a child is still growing and changing. Even so, we do know what we will be like with absolute certainty as children of God: we will be like him, like the Father who made us his children, and like his Son, our brother, Jesus Christ. This certain hope purifies us, forming us over time to be pure as he is pure. This hope impels and empowers us to become like him, to grow up and mature to be like him. When we finally see him as he is, then we will also see ourselves as we truly are in him. We shall be just like him. **Questions:** 1. What does the phrase 'child of God' mean to me personally? What does it tell me about my deepest identity? About my future? 2. How does being God's child now influence my attitudes and actions in life? When others experience my words and actions, do they see a reflection of God's own character in them or the old nature? 3. When I reflect on the day when I see God face-to-face and finally am freed from sin for eternal life in a perfect world with God forever, how does that change me? How does it change the way I think and act now, on this side of that great meeting?

Prayer: God, I am your child. Though I do not deserve it, and often act differently, you still acknowledge me as your child and love me as your own precious child, because of your own Son's sacrifice for me. Very well, God. I will show you my thanks and my love by striving to be your child. I will seek in all my words and actions to reflect your character, to walk in your ways. It will be rough. I will stumble...and fall. But then, Lord, lift me up again, with your strong and gentle hand, as any loving father or mother will do, and walk beside me. I long for the day when I will see you face-to-face and finally be who I long to be, your perfect child, like your Son, Jesus, my Savior. In the meantime, do whatever it takes to form me more and more into who I am by the grace of your Son: your child. May others around me come to recognize the likeness between you and me, as I reflect more and more your character, will, and actions. Amen.

Through The Bible In One Year: Week 48

Sunday Worship Lessons

First Lesson (Old Testament): Daniel 6.10-23

Psalm: 121.1-8

Second (New Testament) Lesson: 1 Peter 5.6-11

Theme: How To Live In A Lion's Den

Sunday Scripture Selection and Theme Explanation, Week 48:

How can we survive these difficult days? Everywhere people suffer. People are torn and tempted from all directions, as if clawed at by the world and Satan who want to

turn them away and tear them away from God, who is life itself. In the Old Testament story, Daniel is literally thrown into a den of lions because he practices his faith relationship and prayer with God. God keeps him safe there in the very home of the lions. Because of his faithful example, even the foreign king comes to acknowledge that God is God and no other. In the New Testament scripture lesson, Peter talks about our relentless adversary, the Devil, prowling about the earth, like a lion seeking people to devour. The whole world is the haunt of evil, literally this lion's den where he is at home. Peter urges the Christ-followers of his day—and us today—to resist him. The secret is to draw closer to God, trust in him totally, and cast all our cares and anxieties on him. Suffering is the lot of all who follow Christ in this world; but in the end, all who believe overcome the world and Satan.

Alternate Readings & Themes:

1. **“Participating In The Divine Nature—Or Not”** The possibility is open to us not just to know about the divine nature but to participate in it. Most people are trapped in our fallen, human nature, which sets the Self in the center, like the Persian emperor in Daniel who idolized himself and became little more than an animal because he made himself the center. Believers in Christ, on the other hand, place God in the center of everything and will actually come to participate in the divine nature by doing so. This is the ultimate gift of God: that we share in the very life which God lives, participating in his divine nature. Daniel 4.29-37; Psalm 119.169-176; 2 Peter 1.3-11.
2. **“The End and the Endless”** What truly lasts in the world? The Bible says nothing in this world will except people—who are eternal because God wills people to be raised and given eternal life once we die. The rest of the universe will perish in fire one day at the end of time. In Old Testament times, God prophesies through Daniel the fall of the Persian empire and the rising of an eternal kingdom that will never end. That is the kingdom of Jesus Christ. His kingdom endures forever. People of faith seek to live in the coming kingdom now, sharing in the qualities and character traits of a citizen of Christ's endless kingdom now. Daniel 2.31-44; Psalm 119.89-96; 2 Peter 3.1-13.