

A close-up, high-resolution photograph of a lion's face, showing its golden eyes and thick, brown fur. The lion is looking slightly to the left of the frame. The background is dark and out of focus.

Tuesday

Witnessing in the Court of Kings

Daniel as a witness

Throughout history faithful believers have been brought to the centers of political influence. We've already learned about Joseph. Others include Daniel, Esther, and Nehemiah. All of these were taken to court as captives or exiles and served in a variety of roles.

Daniel 1 describes Jerusalem's capture and the deportation of young men from royal and noble families who displayed wisdom, knowledge, and understanding. "Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah" (verse 6).¹

These young men further distinguished themselves by refusing to defile themselves with the king's food and wine. God blessed them with "learning and skill in all literature and wisdom," and Daniel was given "understanding in all visions and dreams" (verse 17).

DANIEL'S PUBLIC WITNESS

It becomes clear early on that Daniel would play an important role in the Babylonian government. His unique calling as a prophet placed him in a privileged and dangerous position.

Nebuchadnezzar's first dream, recorded in Daniel 2, is flattering to the king, who is represented by the head of gold. But his second dream was a direct condemnation of his pride and asserted that God was the true ruler of the world.

When the king called him to interpret this dream, Daniel was visibly upset. Imagine telling the king of the greatest empire in the known

world that if he didn't shape up, God would turn him into a beast! Daniel recognized that God had given Nebuchadnezzar a warning, however, and it was his duty to explain it.

After interpreting the dream, Daniel offered advice: "Break off your sins by practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity" (Dan. 4:27). This counsel did not come from his years of studying Chaldean language, wisdom, and literature—it came from his knowledge of the God of the universe. Sadly, Nebuchadnezzar did not humble himself, and the prophecy was fulfilled. His madness came to an end when he finally acknowledged God as sovereign.

The wise counsel from Daniel did not successfully pass to Nebuchadnezzar's successor. When Belshazzar called Daniel to interpret the writing on the wall, the Babylonian Empire was on the edge of extinction (Dan. 5). Daniel had been deferential and even sympathetic toward Nebuchadnezzar, but Belshazzar blatantly defied God and ignored the warnings given to Nebuchadnezzar.

Daniel's words to him were sharp: "And you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, though you knew all this, but you have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven" (verse 22). The city of Babylon fell that night, and with it Belshazzar. As predicted in Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the mighty statue, another kingdom arose in place of Babylon: Medo-Persia.

DANIEL'S PRIVATE WITNESS

Daniel's service was retained in the new royal court of Darius the Mede as one of three officials over the many satraps throughout the

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kingdom. He is described as being “distinguished above all the other presidents and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him” (Dan. 6:3). Indeed, when his colleagues attempted to find something in Daniel’s behavior or service to complain about, they could find nothing, “because he was faithful, and no error or fault was found in him” (verse 4). The only way they could accuse him of misconduct was by devising a law they knew Daniel could not keep: that no petition should be made “to any god or man for thirty days” except the king (verse 7). The punishment for disobedience was to be thrown into a den of lions.

When Daniel heard that the king had signed the law, he went back to his house. He was no longer a young man. He had seen power-corrupt rulers and officials. He knew something of the cruelty of empires and the fate of those who disobeyed kings. He could have said, “I’m too old for this,” and simply closed his windows while he prayed. After all, this was his pri-

vate affair. But Daniel was faithful to the King of kings, and the law he followed was more binding than anything a human could devise.

With his windows open toward Jerusalem, Daniel knelt and prayed three times a day. He might have seen the conspirators watching him, gleeful in anticipation of their triumph over their political rival. Despite the king’s efforts to rescue Daniel from the decree’s penalty, he was thrown into the lions’ den.

Daniel’s faithfulness had already been a profound witness to the royal court. But his deliverance from the lions’ den demonstrated to even his enemies that the God he served was the most high God and that his success and survival was a result of God’s blessing and intervention.

Daniel served the king well, but he served God better. Like Nebuchadnezzar, who had been awed and humbled by God’s revelation through Daniel, Darius wrote a decree following Daniel’s rescue that all people should fear God, “for he is the living God, enduring forever; his kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion shall be to the end” (verse 26).

Carlos Elías Mora writes that “God used the captivity to bring a powerful testimony to the center of the Babylonian and Medo-Persian nations. The failure of God’s people that resulted in the exile of Daniel and his friends was not an obstacle for the Lord to accomplish his purpose of revealing his character to the nations.”²

In his public and private life Daniel witnessed to those at the very highest levels of imperial courts. He was not corrupted by greed or the desire for power. His political success derived from the work of the Holy Spirit in his life and the faithful service that naturally followed. He was a

prophet to unbelievers and brought the Word of God to the very empire that conquered and destroyed his homeland, city, and temple.

Daniel did not dilute the stark truths God revealed to Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar or try to escape the punishment of a law he could not keep. He faithfully bore witness to a higher order and reminded those human rulers that there reigned in heaven a King above all kings whose law is just, merciful, and full of love.

We may not serve kings or rule provinces, but we can serve faithfully wherever we are. We can bear witness to God’s transforming power and the revelation given in His Word. There may be times we are called to testify to those in power about the higher laws of God; more likely, our witness will be in ordinary, everyday actions and attitudes. But whether in public or in private, let us be found faithful. ©

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² Carlos Elías Mora, “Daniel and Friends: A Model for Witnessing,” *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* 5, no. 1 (2009): 97.

Questions for Reflection:

1. How can you be a witness in your workplace?
2. How should a Christian respond to a law that goes against the Word of God?
3. Do you believe that you are faithful in your service to your work, your family, and God? Are there areas for improvement? Pray over those areas and ask God to help you be a witness in every aspect of your life.