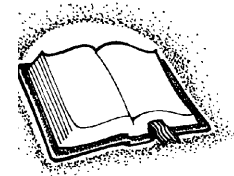


Unlocking the Bible (32)



He's got the whole world in his hands.

Lessons from the Book of Daniel

Although classed as one of the Major Prophets, Daniel is quite unique. It is concerned with what happens to Daniel, as opposed to being a message that Daniel speaks. But it also has cosmic significance.

The book itself can be thought of as a series of concentric circles around Daniel, his friends and the wider concept of the people of God. Based in Captivity, it starts with Daniel himself in a simple matter of declining foreign food and moving out to a wider, celestial scene with Michael and the Dragon as adversaries. In each case, there is conflict, pressure, protection and victory each at each level on a grander scale.

Daniel and his noble companions refuse to eat the special food made available to them in the (foreign) palace. At the end of the ten days, *they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food.* God had protected them and vindicated their stand.

In another incident, three friends – Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego experience that same protection in the fiery furnace into which they had been thrown for not bowing the knee to the image. God protected them, so much so, that *there was not even a smell of burning on them.*

Daniel, himself, was to experience that same protection when he was thrown into the lions' den for praying even though it was forbidden by the king's decree. When the anxious king enquired, Daniel replied: *"My God sent his angel, in addition to he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me"*, God had protected him.

Interspersed with these chapters is a series of incidents involving kings and the future of their kingdoms. There are pronouncements from God through dreams and visions indicating that the kingdoms – whether of Nebuchadnezzar or his successors - were of limited duration. The power was finite and time would herald its demise.

Thirdly, the scenario broadens again to suggest that behind these temporal and secular powers there is a spirit world. Depicted by animals and their movements there is an insight into unfolding events where powers emerge from the east and take over for a while only to be overthrown and deposed by stronger forces. The powers that be are simply pawns in a cosmic game. Even when these mortal and temporary powers arise and exercise their short lived prowess they will be overcome and replaced.'

Strongest among these players is the force of God, represented by beasts and by *one like unto the son of man.* Daniel is party to this mystery. He is given to understand that there are heavenly forces at work and that secular power, even demonic power, is limited. Ultimate power belongs to God.

That scenario is extended further in the final chapters when there is an indication of time scales, due periods and ultimate victory. Some of these powers, such as Greece, Persia etc. are identified and the space and time limits set out clearly. Daniel is given access to this mystery so that he can provide encouragement and reasons for hope to the exiles and to those who 'fear the Lord'.

What lessons can we learn from the book as a whole?

One is that there is protection from God for His people, whether in immediate situations or as part of cosmic operations. That protection is at different levels and varies extensively in its scope. But it is real and powerful. It has the last word: It generates assurance. Surely, *"He's got the whole world in His hands"*. That knowledge inspires faith and fortitude now. By trusting, His people will overcome, whether as individuals - like Daniel and his friends - or in mysteries affecting empires, *God is still on the throne; and He will remember His own.*