

book are not of striving but of peace. Go your way, says the man in linen, go your way and rest.

### Prayer

Living God,  
you are the source of all wisdom.  
Make me wise to see all things against the background of eternity, and  
make me brave to face all the changes in my life which such a vision  
may entail, through the grace of Jesus Christ my saviour, Amen.

## Daily Devotions from the URC The Book of Daniel (2)



*Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> – Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> August*

We continue our journey through Daniel.

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### Thursday 1st August

The Rev'd Peter Clark is the URC Minister of the Bridport & Dorchester Joint Pastorate

Daniel 6: 1 - 11

It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom one hundred and twenty satraps, stationed throughout the whole kingdom, and over them three presidents, including Daniel; to these the satraps gave account, so that the king might suffer no loss. Soon Daniel distinguished himself above all the other presidents and satraps because an excellent spirit was in him, and the king planned to appoint him over the whole

regular burnt-offering is taken away and the abomination that desolates is set up, there shall be one thousand two hundred and ninety days. Happy are those who persevere and attain the thousand three hundred and thirty-five days. But you, go your way, and rest; you shall rise for your reward at the end of the days.'

### Reflection

Daniel is writing in the midst of terrible suffering. People are running to and fro searching in vain for a word from God, the wicked are acting wickedly and evil is on the increase. Where will all this end?

He is given a vision – a remarkable prediction of resurrection and judgement that is unique in the Old Testament. Now this is not a theological teaching, a dogmatic statement, but a splendid flight of imagination, Biblically based. Daniel envisages human life on earth in the light of eternity. People who were faithful but lost their lives will awake and be vindicated; those who were wicked but seemed to triumph will be exposed to everlasting contempt and shame. The discerning leaders who set people right may have been despised, may even have lost their lives, but would have a special place of honour in the new Jerusalem.

There is only one problem. Daniel is to close up these words, keep them secret and seal his book until the final crisis comes. The time is not yet. In the interim, Daniel's readers are challenged to be steadfast and faithful and encourage others to join them.

The vision crosses generations. It shapes the way we see Jesus, the wise leader who died a martyr and rose from the dead to strengthen and encourage his followers. It affirms that God's justice and righteousness will ultimately have the last word – even if this is beyond the limits of our human experience and imagination. In the end, we are to remain faithful to the heavenly vision. And the last words of the

to live that truth together as your church,  
no matter how hard or life changing it may be. Amen

Thursday 15th August

The Rev'd Fleur Houston, retired minister, Macclesfield and Bollington  
URC

Daniel 12

'At that time Michael, the great prince, the protector of your people, shall arise. There shall be a time of anguish, such as has never occurred since nations first came into existence. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book. Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever. But you, Daniel, keep the words secret and the book sealed until the time of the end. Many shall be running back and forth, and evil shall increase.'

Then I, Daniel, looked, and two others appeared, one standing on this bank of the stream and one on the other. One of them said to the man clothed in linen, who was upstream, 'How long shall it be until the end of these wonders?' The man clothed in linen, who was upstream, raised his right hand and his left hand towards heaven. And I heard him swear by the one who lives for ever that it would be for a time, two times, and half a time, and that when the shattering of the power of the holy people comes to an end, all these things would be accomplished. I heard but could not understand; so I said, 'My lord, what shall be the outcome of these things?' He said, 'Go your way, Daniel, for the words are to remain secret and sealed until the time of the end. Many shall be purified, cleansed, and refined, but the wicked shall continue to act wickedly. None of the wicked shall understand, but those who are wise shall understand. From the time that the

kingdom. So the presidents and the satraps tried to find grounds for complaint against Daniel in connection with the kingdom. But they could find no grounds for complaint or any corruption, because he was faithful, and no negligence or corruption could be found in him. The men said, 'We shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel unless we find it in connection with the law of his God.'

So the presidents and satraps conspired and came to the king and said to him, 'O King Darius, live for ever! All the presidents of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the counsellors and the governors, are agreed that the king should establish an ordinance and enforce an interdict, that whoever prays to anyone, divine or human, for thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be thrown into a den of lions. Now, O king, establish the interdict and sign the document, so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be revoked.' Therefore King Darius signed the document and interdict.

Reflection

Bureaucrats have a terrible reputation, whether civil servants, in the EU in Brussels or wherever. And here I have to confess that, for a short time in my pre-ministerial career, I was one in the NHS. I had a temporary job to monitor the spending of education-related money for professions allied to medicine. Interestingly, in my NHS career, it was the only job in which there was more money in the budget than was historically being spent. Thus, having analysed the spending and implemented robust procedures to ensure that it was spent wisely, I discovered I was, unexpectedly, a remarkably popular bureaucrat, congratulated by both an Audit Commission representative and the recipients of grants alike!

Not so for poor Daniel who, despite his impressive efficiency, provoked jealousy and ill-feeling amongst his contemporary bureaucrats (satraps and presidents.) I see this as yet another example of early

racism/antisemitism, also evident in the book of Esther, where a person of a group recognised as different or 'other' from 'us' is picked on, sidelined and discriminated by members of the majority.

What Daniel's colleagues did was the same evil evident in the attack on Catholics in Sri Lanka, Muslims in New Zealand, or, indeed, in random attacks such as the Manchester bombing or the Westminster Bridge atrocities. The words of Jacinda Aheron, the New Zealand prime minister, ring true when she responded to the attacks on Muslims in Christchurch referring to those on the end of the attack, saying, "They are us. The person who has perpetuated this violence against us is not."

Daniel's enemies ultimately paid a huge price for their prejudice and I only wish they had heard the words of St. Paul in Galatians 3:28 before setting up their evil plan!

Prayer

Gracious and all-inclusive God,  
as humans sometimes we seem incapable  
of recognising difference as anything other  
than threatening and discomfiting.  
May we learn to accept the 'other' as 'us'  
and learn to properly love our neighbour  
(whoever they are, however strange they might be) as ourselves. Amen

Friday 2nd August

The Rev'd Sheila Coop, Minister, Macedonia URC, Failsworth and  
Oldham Town Centre Chaplaincy

Daniel 6: 10 - 18

Although Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he  
continued to go to his house, which had windows in its upper room

Someone once told me that a prophet is someone who 'tells it like it is'. Sometimes for us all, despotic leaders or not, we have missed the truth of our own story, and we need the voice of a prophet telling it like it is, reflecting it back to us, so that we may see it in truth.

Who might be speaking into your life or church with a prophetic voice?

I, like the kings who sought Daniel's interpretation of their dreams, would have trusted him. There's something about him and the way he lived, a prophet of impeccable qualities, not just a seer of visions, but a servant of God, through whom God's power shone, whilst he was seemingly at the mercy of ruthless kings.

Are we as church a prophetic voice? It's surely something we should be concerned with, but do we have the same impeccable qualities that Daniel did. Are we a humble and vulnerable enough community for God's power to shine through us?

Perhaps we need to see our own truth in a new light. Listen out today for the voices who 'tell it like it is'. Those whose experience of racism, sexism, disability, poverty, the 'hostile environment', the benefit system, hatred and abuse, speak challenge to our privilege. Is there an obvious conclusion to our story?

Prayer

Challenging God,  
speak truth to our lives,  
through those we meet, live and work with.

May we also 'tell it like it is'.  
Give us courage to speak our own truth,  
that it might influence others to examine their stories.

Then give us the wisdom, humility and courage

puzzling to world around us and drawing many to Thy Kingdom.

Wednesday 14th August

Liz Kam, Church Related Community Worker, Levenshulme Inspire, Manchester.

Daniel 11: 40-45

At the time of the end the king of the south shall attack him. But the king of the north shall rush upon him like a whirlwind, with chariots and horsemen, and with many ships. He shall advance against countries and pass through like a flood. He shall come into the beautiful land, and tens of thousands shall fall victim, but Edom and Moab and the main part of the Ammonites shall escape from his power. He shall stretch out his hand against the countries, and the land of Egypt shall not escape. He shall become ruler of the treasures of gold and of silver, and all the riches of Egypt; and the Libyans and the Ethiopians shall follow in his train. But reports from the east and the north shall alarm him, and he shall go out with great fury to bring ruin and complete destruction to many. He shall pitch his palatial tents between the sea and the beautiful holy mountain. Yet he shall come to his end, with no one to help him.

Reflection

As visions often are, there is something poetic about this one; the beauty of the writing almost throws you off the scent of the horror of this apocalypse. As you read through it, however, the formula is familiar, and it's almost obvious that the last line is going to read "yet he shall come to his end, with no-one to help him". I often wonder about despotic leaders today – can they not see how things are going to end for them?

open towards Jerusalem, and to get down on his knees three times a day to pray to his God and praise him, just as he had done previously. The conspirators came and found Daniel praying and seeking mercy before his God. Then they approached the king and said concerning the interdict, 'O king! Did you not sign an interdict, that anyone who prays to anyone, divine or human, within thirty days except to you, O king, shall be thrown into a den of lions?' The king answered, 'The thing stands fast, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be revoked.' Then they responded to the king, 'Daniel, one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or to the interdict you have signed, but he is saying his prayers three times a day.'

When the king heard the charge, he was very much distressed. He was determined to save Daniel, and until the sun went down he made every effort to rescue him. Then the conspirators came to the king and said to him, 'Know, O king, that it is a law of the Medes and Persians that no interdict or ordinance that the king establishes can be changed.'

Then the king gave the command, and Daniel was brought and thrown into the den of lions. The king said to Daniel, 'May your God, whom you faithfully serve, deliver you!' A stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet and with the signet of his lords, so that nothing might be changed concerning Daniel. Then the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; no food was brought to him, and sleep fled from him.

Reflection

We don't know whether Daniel's window opening towards Jerusalem was a deliberate choice on his part or coincidence. One thing we can be sure of, however, is that his decision to pray at that window, and, therefore, to be seen to be praying at that window, was a deliberate choice. He didn't do this just occasionally, but continued to do this

three times a day, every day - presumably at regular times of the day. So there's no doubt that he knew it would be noticed and that his actions were in contravention of the edict signed by King Darius, an edict which, in their tradition, could not be countermanded or withdrawn.

Darius respected Daniel's leadership and had intended to promote him over all the satraps (viceroys/governors) but was forced to carry out the 'execution'. All he could do was express his hope that Daniel's God would deliver him from the lions. Darius spent the night fasting and, no doubt, tossing and turning, as he wondered how Daniel was doing in the lions' den.

Stories like this make me stop and wonder how I would behave under such circumstances. The fact of the matter is that God is not only interested in how we react to the major events in our lives, He is also interested in the ordinary and everyday stuff - our work, our leisure, our holidays. The question you and I need to ask ourselves is not whether we can match up to some grand gesture (like Daniel and others in the Scriptures) but whether we continue to make sure that God is part of our everyday life and that means that we should, like Daniel, make prayer a regular daily habit and not worry about who knows about it.

Prayer.

Heavenly Father, forgive us for the times when busyness crowds you out of our day and we are forced to carry on in our own strength. Help us to find those precious moments to spend time with you each and every day, to listen for your voice, your guidance and your wisdom, to rejoice with you for the good times and to feel your comforting presence when things are not going well. Amen

Our story follows Daniel's powerful prayer. It depicts kings and kingdoms waging war: trying to conquer by force what Daniel just managed to obtain by humility, fasting and prayer. Many attempts have been made to historically locate these events in the eschatological timeline. Yet, I want to focus on the believers' reactions and life-styles in this succession of violent turmoil. What do we do when we are not on the winning side? When idolatry seems more successful than faith in the Lamb of God?

Our first call may be to acknowledge our struggles, brokenness, bewilderment and even confusion. I think God is honoured by honesty and can even reward it. This requires ambiguous prayers, such as a prayer of Joan of Arc, whose integrity was not acknowledged in her time: 'if I am not, may God put me there; and if I am may God so keep me'

Our second call may be to remain faithful to our calling and identity in Christ. Verse 36b promises us that '...but the people who are loyal to their God shall stand firm and take action' That faithfulness needs to be countercultural and yet inspiring to others around us. Cardinal Suhard has captured this so beautifully:

'to be a witness does not consist in engaging in propaganda, not even stirring people up, but in being a living mystery. It means to live in such a way that one's life would not make sense if God did not exist'

Prayer

Lord, our shepherd,  
we confess you as our Alpha and Omega.  
Grant us the grace to cultivate honesty to you and others,  
make us grateful for the beliefs we firmly hold,  
make us humble and help us in our unbelief,  
may our lives, whatever we may go through, look like a living mystery,

‘At the time appointed he shall return and come into the south, but this time it shall not be as it was before. For ships of Kittim shall come against him, and he shall lose heart and withdraw. He shall be enraged and take action against the holy covenant. He shall turn back and pay heed to those who forsake the holy covenant. Forces sent by him shall occupy and profane the temple and fortress. They shall abolish the regular burnt-offering and set up the abomination that makes desolate. He shall seduce with intrigue those who violate the covenant; but the people who are loyal to their God shall stand firm and take action. The wise among the people shall give understanding to many; for some days, however, they shall fall by sword and flame, and suffer captivity and plunder. When they fall victim, they shall receive a little help, and many shall join them insincerely. Some of the wise shall fall, so that they may be refined, purified, and cleansed, until the time of the end, for there is still an interval until the time appointed.

‘The king shall act as he pleases. He shall exalt himself and consider himself greater than any god, and shall speak horrendous things against the God of gods. He shall prosper until the period of wrath is completed, for what is determined shall be done. He shall pay no respect to the gods of his ancestors, or to the one beloved by women; he shall pay no respect to any other god, for he shall consider himself greater than all. He shall honour the god of fortresses instead of these; a god whom his ancestors did not know he shall honour with gold and silver, with precious stones and costly gifts. He shall deal with the strongest fortresses by the help of a foreign god. Those who acknowledge him he shall make more wealthy, and shall appoint them as rulers over many, and shall distribute the land for a price.

#### Reflection:

At the time of writing this reflection, we are about to launch the ‘Thy Kingdom Come’ movement in the UK. It is a global prayer movement whose aims include enabling the realization that every aspect of our life is a matrix for prayer.

Saturday 3rd August

Ann Barton, Member at Whittlesford URC

Daniel 6: 19 - 28

Then, at break of day, the king got up and hurried to the den of lions. When he came near the den where Daniel was, he cried out anxiously to Daniel, ‘O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God whom you faithfully serve been able to deliver you from the lions?’ Daniel then said to the king, ‘O king, live for ever! My God sent his angel and shut the lions’ mouths so that they would not hurt me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no wrong.’ Then the king was exceedingly glad and commanded that Daniel be taken up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no kind of harm was found on him, because he had trusted in his God. The king gave a command, and those who had accused Daniel were brought and thrown into the den of lions—they, their children, and their wives. Before they reached the bottom of the den the lions overpowered them and broke all their bones in pieces.

Then King Darius wrote to all peoples and nations of every language throughout the whole world: ‘May you have abundant prosperity! I make a decree, that in all my royal dominion people should tremble and fear before the God of Daniel:

For he is the living God,  
enduring for ever.  
His kingdom shall never be destroyed,  
and his dominion has no end.  
He delivers and rescues,  
he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth;  
for he has saved Daniel  
from the power of the lions.’

So this Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

### Reflection

Certainly, Daniel got a raw deal! He was set up by jealous, lesser men who wanted him out of the way. It seemed like they succeeded, except for one thing that they overlooked: Daniel's total trust in God. The interesting thing, however, about Daniel being thrown into the lions' den is that God didn't remove him before he found deliverance in it. Imagine if Daniel had fought against being thrown into the den (which he might have been expected to do) and gone into the den fighting against it every inch of the way. Chances are the lions would have torn him to shreds before he hit the bottom. But Daniel didn't do that! He accepted what was happening to him and trusted his life to God, who shut the mouth of the lions.

Perhaps, the next time that any of us ask God to save us from a difficult situation, we should be asking God for deliverance in it. Sometimes, like Daniel, God has a lesson for us to learn and before he delivers us out of it – perhaps we need to find deliverance in it.

### Prayer

Father, deliver us from anything that threatens to derail or throw us off your course for our lives. Give us strength to love people that are seemingly unlovable and build a confidence in us that is unstoppable and immovable but guard our hearts from pride. Deliver us from our own distorted thoughts, sickness, debt, sadness, struggles, hunger, pain, fear, oppression, conflict, and unbelief, for we proclaim your peace over our lives through prayer, today. Amen

forces of the south shall not stand, not even his picked troops, for there shall be no strength to resist. But he who comes against him shall take the actions he pleases, and no one shall withstand him. He shall take a position in the beautiful land, and all of it shall be in his power. He shall set his mind to come with the strength of his whole kingdom, and he shall bring terms of peace<sup>[b]</sup> and perform them. In order to destroy the kingdom, he shall give him a woman in marriage; but it shall not succeed or be to his advantage. Afterwards he shall turn to the coastlands, and shall capture many. But a commander shall put an end to his insolence; indeed, he shall turn his insolence back upon him. Then he shall turn back towards the fortresses of his own land, but he shall stumble and fall, and shall not be found.

'Then shall arise in his place one who shall send an official for the glory of the kingdom; but within a few days he shall be broken, though not in anger or in battle. In his place shall arise a contemptible person on whom royal majesty had not been conferred; he shall come in without warning and obtain the kingdom through intrigue. Armies shall be utterly swept away and broken before him, and the prince of the covenant as well. And after an alliance is made with him, he shall act deceitfully and become strong with a small party. Without warning he shall come into the richest parts of the province and do what none of his predecessors had ever done, lavishing plunder, spoil, and wealth on them. He shall devise plans against strongholds, but only for a time. He shall stir up his power and determination against the king of the south with a great army, and the king of the south shall wage war with a much greater and stronger army. But he shall not succeed, for plots shall be devised against him by those who eat of the royal rations. They shall break him, his army shall be swept away, and many shall fall slain. The two kings, their minds bent on evil, shall sit at one table and exchange lies. But it shall not succeed, for there remains an end at the time appointed. He shall return to his land with great wealth, but his heart shall be set against the holy covenant. He shall work his will, and return to his own land.

dominion with which he ruled; for his kingdom shall be uprooted and go to others besides these.

‘Then the king of the south shall grow strong, but one of his officers shall grow stronger than he and shall rule a realm greater than his own realm. 6 After some years they shall make an alliance, and the daughter of the king of the south shall come to the king of the north to ratify the agreement. But she shall not retain her power, and his offspring shall not endure. She shall be given up, she and her attendants and her child and the one who supported her.

‘In those times a branch from her roots shall rise up in his place. He shall come against the army and enter the fortress of the king of the north, and he shall take action against them and prevail. Even their gods, with their idols and with their precious vessels of silver and gold, he shall carry off to Egypt as spoils of war. For some years he shall refrain from attacking the king of the north; then the latter shall invade the realm of the king of the south, but will return to his own land.

‘His sons shall wage war and assemble a multitude of great forces, which shall advance like a flood and pass through, and again shall carry the war as far as his fortress. Moved with rage, the king of the south shall go out and do battle against the king of the north, who shall muster a great multitude, which shall, however, be defeated by his enemy. When the multitude has been carried off, his heart shall be exalted, and he shall overthrow tens of thousands, but he shall not prevail. For the king of the north shall again raise a multitude, larger than the former, and after some years[a] he shall advance with a great army and abundant supplies.

‘In those times many shall rise against the king of the south. The lawless among your own people shall lift themselves up in order to fulfil the vision, but they shall fail. Then the king of the north shall come and throw up siege-works, and take a well-fortified city. And the

Sunday 4th August Psalm 108

The Rev’d Lindsey Sanderson, Minister, East Kilbride and Hamilton Joint Pastorate.

1 O Lord God,  
my heart is steadfast,  
and with all my soul I’ll sing.  
2 Harp and lyre I will awaken,  
and my song the dawn will bring.

3 LORD my God,  
among the nations,  
I will ever give you praise;  
In the midst of all the peoples  
I will sing of you always.

4 For your steadfast love  
is boundless,  
greater than the heavens high;  
And your faithfulness towards us  
reaches even to the sky.

5 Far above the highest heavens  
be exalted, O my God;  
And through all the earth  
around us  
let your glory spread abroad.

6 With your right hand save  
and help us;  
rescue all those whom you love.

7 God has spoken  
from his temple,  
from his holy place above:

“I will distribute in triumph  
every part of Shechem’s land,  
And the whole of Succoth valley  
I will measure with my hand.

8 “Mine is Gilead, mine Manasseh,  
Ephraim is my helmet true;  
Judah I will make my sceptre  
9 and on Edom toss my shoe.

“Moab will become my servant,  
and upon Philistia’s shore  
I will shout aloud in triumph;  
I am Lord and conqueror.”

10 Who will bring me to the city  
that is strongly fortified,  
And to reach the land of Edom  
who will be my help and guide?

11 Have you not, O God, rejected,  
turned us over to our foe?  
When our armies go to battle,  
with them you no longer go.

12 Since all human help is  
worthless,

13 God will give us victory;  
He it is who will defend us and  
tread down our enemy.

## Reflection

Scholars tell us that Psalm 108 is an amalgam of verses from two earlier Psalms – Psalm 57 and Psalm 60. It is suggested that ‘the combination of earlier Psalms illustrates the vitality of older Scriptures as they were appropriated and applied to new situations in the experience of God’s people’ (Allen Psalms 101-150 pp.69-70). The Psalm is described as a community lament with the following structure: invocation and prayer of thanks for deliverance (1-4), petition to God (5-6), divine assurance of deliverance (7-9), prayer of inquiry to God (10-11), petition to God (12), expression of trust and praise to God (13). On their return from exile the Israelites realised that their restoration was entirely dependent on the covenantal love of God. It was a gift to them and, as a consequence the people gave thanks to God and tried to learn to rely on God rather than their human efforts.

I find it a comfort and reassurance that the ancient Hebrews looked back into their faith tradition and from it drew new expressions of faith and worship. It reminds me of the part of the Statement of the Nature, Faith and Order of the United Reformed Church where we affirm, ‘our right and readiness, if the need arises, to change the Basis of Union and to make new statements of faith in ever new obedience to the Living Christ.’ Any new statement, or hymn, or prayer needs to enable the worshipper to look backwards and forwards. Looking backwards to connect us with the story and experience of faith which is rooted in Scripture and has sustained the Church since its origins but also enable us to look forward to embrace the new challenges and opportunities of our world through the lens of faith, hope and love.

‘LORD my God, among the nations, I will ever give you praise;  
In the midst of all the peoples I will sing of you always.  
For your steadfast love is boundless, greater than the heavens high;  
and your faithfulness towards us reaches even to the sky.’

alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of heaven on earth. God does nothing but in answer to prayer’

## Prayer

Prayer-answering Lord,  
give us a fresh awareness of the power of persistent prayer.  
Faithful Lord,  
help us to be discerning you at work even while we are praying.  
Mighty God,  
dazzle us with your glory.  
Lord our friend,  
by your grace, help us stand where even angels fail to tread.  
Lord of the heaven’s army,  
send down your messengers to bring us your life-changing  
and hopeful Word. Amen.

[Tuesday 13th August](#)

The Rev’d Bachelard Kaze, Marlpool, Eastwood and Langley URCs in Northamptonshire

Daniel 11: 1 - 39

As for me, in the first year of Darius the Mede, I stood up to support and strengthen him.

‘Now I will announce the truth to you. Three more kings shall arise in Persia. The fourth shall be far richer than all of them, and when he has become strong through his riches, he shall stir up all against the kingdom of Greece. Then a warrior king shall arise, who shall rule with great dominion and take action as he pleases. And while still rising in power, his kingdom shall be broken and divided towards the four winds of heaven, but not to his posterity, nor according to the

Greece will come. But I am to tell you what is inscribed in the book of truth. There is no one with me who contends against these princes except Michael, your prince.

#### Reflection:

I am amazed by how you can control satellites from command centres on earth. Spiritually, we can have a huge impact on what goes on in this heavenly realm; more impact than we can see and are even aware of.

This reading emphasizes that Daniel's faith and faithfulness influence the deployment and ministry of angels and archangels. The same promise is made to all of us. I wonder what made him have such an impact in the heavenly realm? Daniel, humbled himself, sought understanding, and prayed.

Firstly, he approached the throne of grace with the right attitude: humility. Such humility can involve exalting God. The Lord's prayer begins with worship. Likewise, it is good practice to always start praying by humbling ourselves in worship and thanksgiving, however much we itch to utter petitions and hurl our needs.

Secondly, his humility did not lead him to offer a comprehensive shopping list, but to fast and seek understanding. This requires taking time to listen to God as we pray. This also involves the Spirit who helps us to pray (Rom 8. 26-27) and can even take over on our behalf.

Finally, Daniel prayed in such a way that Archangel Michael, who must be very busy, is deployed by Jesus to rescue the angelic messenger sent to Daniel. How amazing it is to know that Christians can influence the deployment of angels from heaven to earth. This revelation should only encourage us to pray with humility, discernment and persistence. That is probably why, John Wesley once argued that lay or ordained preachers, who 'fear nothing but s<sub>3</sub>n, desire nothing but God ... they

Prayer.

O God, thank you for the statements, stories and songs we have received from prior generations. Though them may we be connected with all your people who have gone before us. Thank you for the opportunity to create our own statements, stories and songs. Enable us to articulate faith in our day, sharing insights we have gleaned about you, so that all people will come to know your faithfulness and will sing your praise. Amen.

[Monday 5th August](#)

The Rev'd Revd Peter Meek, East Midlands Synod Moderator

Daniel 7: 1 - 14

In the first year of King Belshazzar of Babylon, Daniel had a dream and visions of his head as he lay in bed. Then he wrote down the dream: I, Daniel, saw in my vision by night the four winds of heaven stirring up the great sea, and four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another. The first was like a lion and had eagles' wings. Then, as I watched, its wings were plucked off, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a human being; and a human mind was given to it. Another beast appeared, a second one, that looked like a bear. It was raised up on one side, had three tusks in its mouth among its teeth and was told, 'Arise, devour many bodies!' After this, as I watched, another appeared, like a leopard. The beast had four wings of a bird on its back and four heads; and dominion was given to it. After this I saw in the visions by night a fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong. It had great iron teeth and was devouring, breaking in pieces, and stamping what was left with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that preceded it, and it had ten horns. I was considering the horns, when another horn appeared, a little one coming up among them; to make room for it,

three of the earlier horns were plucked up by the roots. There were eyes like human eyes in this horn, and a mouth speaking arrogantly.

As I watched, thrones were set in place, and an Ancient One took his throne; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames, and its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and flowed out from his presence. A thousand thousand served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood attending him. The court sat in judgement, and the books were opened.

I watched then because of the noise of the arrogant words that the horn was speaking. And as I watched, the beast was put to death, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire. As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time. As I watched in the night visions,

I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.

### Reflection

For the early Christians, and many today, this passage from Daniel was, is, of high importance, for two main reasons. One is that, traditionally, “one like a human being, coming with the clouds of heaven” was interpreted to be a reference to the pre-existent Word, Jesus Christ. The other is that in this graphic and apocalyptic language the prophet exposes the futility of world powers - they seem strong, like lions, beasts and great birds but really they are exposed for what they are before the throne of God, the Ancient One. They speak boastfully but all “earth’s proud empires” vanish before God. And in great contrast,

roar of a multitude. I, Daniel, alone saw the vision; the people who were with me did not see the vision, though a great trembling fell upon them, and they fled and hid themselves. So I was left alone to see this great vision. My strength left me, and my complexion grew deathly pale, and I retained no strength. Then I heard the sound of his words; and when I heard the sound of his words, I fell into a trance, face to the ground.

But then a hand touched me and roused me to my hands and knees. He said to me, ‘Daniel, greatly beloved, pay attention to the words that I am going to speak to you. Stand on your feet, for I have now been sent to you.’ So while he was speaking this word to me, I stood up trembling. He said to me, ‘Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia opposed me for twenty-one days. So Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, and I left him there with the prince of the kingdom of Persia, and have come to help you understand what is to happen to your people at the end of days. For there is a further vision for those days.’

While he was speaking these words to me, I turned my face towards the ground and was speechless. Then one in human form touched my lips, and I opened my mouth to speak, and said to the one who stood before me, ‘My lord, because of the vision such pains have come upon me that I retain no strength. How can my lord’s servant talk with my lord? For I am shaking, no strength remains in me, and no breath is left in me.’

Again one in human form touched me and strengthened me. He said, ‘Do not fear, greatly beloved, you are safe. Be strong and courageous!’ When he spoke to me, I was strengthened and said, ‘Then he said, ‘Do you know why I have come to you? Now I must return to fight against the prince of Persia, and when I am through with him, the prince of

But I wonder. Maybe this Psalm reveals something we'd prefer remained hidden. When lies are spoken against us, when we hurt and smart after simply doing our best, isn't there a childlike cry in our hearts of 'It's not fair!' And we all want fair, even though our parents' answer to our cry was, so often, 'Life's not fair!'

God's not fair either. We see in the Bible and in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus that God is not fair. He is outrageous. Outrageous in love. He calls us to take that momentous leap out of our child's heart and into His, where there is empowering for a better way to deal with the injustices of life. Settling for 'fair' is way below second best.

'Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.'  
And give us Your outrageous love to bless those who do not bless us.

Monday 12th August

The Rev'd Bachelard Kaze, Marlpool, Eastwood and Langley URCs in Northamptonshire

Daniel 10

In the third year of King Cyrus of Persia a word was revealed to Daniel, who was named Belteshazzar. The word was true, and it concerned a great conflict. He understood the word, having received understanding in the vision.

At that time I, Daniel, had been mourning for three weeks. I had eaten no rich food, no meat or wine had entered my mouth, and I had not anointed myself at all, for the full three weeks. On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river (that is, the Tigris), I looked up and saw a man clothed in linen, with a belt of gold from Uphaz around his waist. His body was like beryl, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the

God responds in great humility, even though all the power and glory is God's, all dominion is given to the One who came with the glory of heaven (the clouds) but was like a human being. Remember the wilderness temptations? The Accuser offered Jesus all the kingdoms of the world in return for his worship. It was a test of how much faith Jesus had in his true identity; an existential test. If he "truly is the Son of God" then the Accuser's offer was meaningless to the One who had been given "dominion, glory and kingship". Other interpretations see the "one like a human being" as the nation of Israel - but, as a Christian, I feel it is out of kilter with the thrust of the passage - after all that would be just one more earthly power would it not? To Christians, oppressed by powerful dictators and the might of oppressive empires, this passage was, and is, very good news!

Prayer

"So be it Lord, thy throne shall never, like earth's proud empires pass away; thy kingdom stands and grows for ever, till all thy creatures own thy sway." Humble, gentle, Lord, to whom all earthly powers and empires are accountable, we pray for encouragement for all those who suffer under power misused. May we always use the power we have to bless and help, never to trample or harm. To you be the glory. Amen!

Tuesday 6th August

The Rev'd Dr Susan Durber, Minister, Taunton United Reformed Church

Daniel 7: 15 - 28

As for me, Daniel, my spirit was troubled within me, and the visions of my head terrified me. I approached one of the attendants to ask him the truth concerning all this. So he said that he would disclose to me the interpretation of the matter: 'As for these four great beasts, four kings shall arise out of the earth. But the holy ones of the Most High

shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom for ever—for ever and ever.’

Then I desired to know the truth concerning the fourth beast, which was different from all the rest, exceedingly terrifying, with its teeth of iron and claws of bronze, and which devoured and broke in pieces, and stamped what was left with its feet; 20 and concerning the ten horns that were on its head, and concerning the other horn that came up, and to make room for which three of them fell out—the horn that had eyes and a mouth that spoke arrogantly, and that seemed greater than the others. As I looked, this horn made war with the holy ones and was prevailing over them, until the Ancient One came; then judgement was given for the holy ones of the Most High, and the time arrived when the holy ones gained possession of the kingdom.

This is what he said: ‘As for the fourth beast,

there shall be a fourth kingdom on earth  
that shall be different from all the other kingdoms;  
it shall devour the whole earth,  
and trample it down, and break it to pieces.

As for the ten horns,  
out of this kingdom ten kings shall arise,  
and another shall arise after them.

This one shall be different from the former ones,  
and shall put down three kings.

He shall speak words against the Most High,  
shall wear out the holy ones of the Most High,  
and shall attempt to change the sacred seasons and the law;  
and they shall be given into his power  
for a time, two times, and half a time.

Then the court shall sit in judgement,  
and his dominion shall be taken away,  
to be consumed and totally destroyed.

The kingship and dominion

8 May his rule pass to another;  
short and wretched be his life.  
9 Fatherless shall be his children;  
make a widow of his wife.

10 May his children  
beg and wander,  
driven from their ruined gate.  
11 May his goods be seized  
and taken—  
strangers plunder his estate.

12 May no one take pity on him  
or his orphans in their plight.  
13 May his fam’ly line be ended,  
and their names be lost to sight.

14 May the LORD remember  
ever all his parents’ sin  
and shame.

15 May their sin  
be held against them,  
and forgotten be their name.

Reflection

I’d be surprised if anyone announced this was their favourite Psalm. It confronts us with such anger and vindictiveness, even against the enemy’s descendants. Surely we’re not like that, we people of the New Testament? Haven’t we moved on in our understanding of God, our God of love who forgives everyone who turns to Him in repentance? And as we exchange handshakes, hugs and smiles at church on Sunday morning, aren’t we living out of love and not this primitive desire for vindication when we are wronged?

16 For he never thought of helping  
those in trouble or distress;  
But to death the poor  
he hounded,  
and the weak and comfortless.

17 He was always cursing others—  
may his curse on him rebound;  
He took no delight in blessing—  
far from him may it be found.

18 He wore cursing  
as his garment—  
to his bones it soaked like oil;  
It poured down his throat  
like water.

19 May his curses round him coil.

May they cling to him for ever,  
wrapped around him like a cloak.

20 May this be  
the LORD’s repayment  
to those false, accusing folk.

Confessing the world's injustice is the first step towards God's justice. Confessing the damage we cause to the natural environment is the first step towards reconnecting with creation.

Confessing the pain we cause others and the pain we cause ourselves, is the first step towards community and wholeness.

As you watch or read the news today, take a moment to confess humanity's iniquity, as a first step towards God's Kingdom. Take time to remember Gabriel's message, that this period of 'exile' is not what God desires for us and it will end.

#### Prayer

Loving God, help us to connect confession and action and to know, deep in our hearts, that pain and injustice are not part of your plan. Inspire expectation and hope within us as we walk your way with joy! Amen

#### [Sunday 11th August Psalm 109 1-20](#)

Dorothy Curtis, Lay Preacher and writer, attending Thurso URC

1 O my God, whose name I worship, be not silent, LORD, I pray;	4 In return for love they blame me, though for them I daily pray.
2 For the wicked and deceitful speak against me every day.	5 They reward my good with evil, for my friendship hate repay.

They have uttered lies against me; with malicious tongues they fight.	6 Set an evil man against him at his right hand to denounce.
3 Without cause they rush upon me, closing in with words of spite.	7 May his very prayers condemn him; let the court his guilt pronounce.

and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the holy ones of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them.'

Here the account ends. As for me, Daniel, my thoughts greatly terrified me, and my face turned pale; but I kept the matter in my mind.

#### Reflection

Readings of this kind don't appeal so much to the kind of people who like parables from every day. The writer tells us that 'the visions of my head terrified me' repeating this for us at the end, making sure we know that 'my face turned pale'. This is the kind of Biblical passage that, if it were a TV drama, would be described as 'dystopian'. It evokes the stuff of nightmares, of sweaty awakenings and anxious dreams. Perhaps there is reassurance in finding echoes of our most disturbed moments recorded and repeated in the Bible. This too we can bring before God – for others certainly have.

On the 6th August, Hiroshima Day, such a reading as this one from Daniel bears echoes of events from history, the repeated visions of which might justly terrify us. For anyone who grew up in the Cold War period, fears that the world would bring itself to nuclear destruction were terrifyingly real and many a political conscience was forged in the midst of fears that 'bestly kingdoms' might tear the world apart. Our visions of dystopia have changed over the years, but they have not left us. They emerge to terrify us from time to time, just as Daniel's visions put into words the terror of his people then.

This day is also, for some Christians, the Feast of Transfiguration, a day on which the disciples were terrified, but then inspired. They saw a vision that day that was holy, full of love, not of this world's kingdoms, but of the kingdom of God. I pray and hope that, as the followers of Jesus, we shall know that we belong to that everlasting kingdom of

God, the one in which fear is overcome with love. Daniel seems to foretell such a hope, a hope we need today as much then, or as in 1945.

Prayer:

O God, I lay before you the things that terrify me, and I trust to you my deepest, even unspoken, fears. Let your light and your love possess all that is in me, to bring healing, comfort and hope. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Wednesday 7th August

The Rev'd Dr 'frin Lewis-Smith is a Healthcare Chaplain in Salford

Daniel 8: 1 - 14

In the third year of the reign of King Belshazzar a vision appeared to me, Daniel, after the one that had appeared to me at first. In the vision I was looking and saw myself in Susa the capital, in the province of Elam, and I was by the river Ulai. I looked up and saw a ram standing beside the river. It had two horns. Both horns were long, but one was longer than the other, and the longer one came up second. I saw the ram charging westwards and northwards and southwards. All beasts were powerless to withstand it, and no one could rescue from its power; it did as it pleased and became strong.

As I was watching, a male goat appeared from the west, coming across the face of the whole earth without touching the ground. The goat had a horn between its eyes. It came towards the ram with the two horns that I had seen standing beside the river, and it ran at it with savage force. I saw it approaching the ram. It was enraged against it and struck the ram, breaking its two horns. The ram did not have power to withstand it; it threw the ram down to the ground and trampled upon it, and there was no one who could rescue the ram from its power.

be an abomination that desolates, until the decreed end is poured out upon the desolator.'

Reflection

Do I want to use my 300 words to try and work out how long Israel will have to wait in exile? Not really!

Daniel prayed, confessing the sins of Israel, and Gabriel came to him with reassuring words. Reassuring in that, at some point (buried in the complicated chronology), the Exile will come to an end. The take-home message of the vision is that the end of this terrible time will come.

I am, then, interested to consider what this divine message may have done for the community.

On my first hearing, I must confess to being heartbroken that Israel was having to wait. The Exile was an appalling period and I grieve that any people or nation should face such injustice, then or now, but perhaps knowing that it would eventually end was comforting in some small way.

There is a sense of God's longer 'plan' here: despite the machinations of humanity, God consistently promises, as he did to Julian of Norwich, that 'all will be well'. That can sound a bit blasé when you're facing the heat of the fire, but Gabriel is reassuring us that pain and injustice is not God's plan – so take heart!

This does not mean, sit back and let God's plan unfold. It means, be expectant of God's plan and be part of its unfolding.

There is an important relationship in Daniel's prayer, between confession and action.

Confessing Israel's sin is a first step<sub>25</sub> towards changing that behaviour.

finding distraction easy and excuses plentiful, forgive us.  
When we break fellowship with You,  
through shutting you into small corners of our lives, forgive us.  
Help us to keep You at the centre of our being, and the motive for our  
doing. Amen.

Saturday 10th August

The Rev'd Martin Knight is minister of St Paul's URC, South Croydon

Daniel 9: 20 - 27

While I was speaking, and was praying and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the Lord my God on behalf of the holy mountain of my God— while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen before in a vision, came to me in swift flight at the time of the evening sacrifice. He came and said to me, 'Daniel, I have now come out to give you wisdom and understanding. At the beginning of your supplications a word went out, and I have come to declare it, for you are greatly beloved. So consider the word and understand the vision:

'Seventy weeks are decreed for your people and your holy city: to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place. Know therefore and understand: from the time that the word went out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the time of an anointed prince, there shall be seven weeks; and for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with streets and moat, but in a troubled time. After the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing, and the troops of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed. He shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall make sacrifice and offering cease; and in their place shall

Then the male goat grew exceedingly great; but at the height of its power, the great horn was broken, and in its place there came up four prominent horns towards the four winds of heaven.

Out of one of them came another horn, a little one, which grew exceedingly great towards the south, towards the east, and towards the beautiful land. It grew as high as the host of heaven. It threw down to the earth some of the host and some of the stars, and trampled on them. Even against the prince of the host it acted arrogantly; it took the regular burnt-offering away from him and overthrew the place of his sanctuary. Because of wickedness, the host was given over to it together with the regular burnt-offering; it cast truth to the ground, and kept prospering in what it did. Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to the one that spoke, 'For how long is this vision concerning the regular burnt-offering, the transgression that makes desolate, and the giving over of the sanctuary and host to be trampled?' And he answered him, 'For two thousand three hundred evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary shall be restored to its rightful state.'

Reflection

How often we enjoy a well told apocalypse: a vision of the world passed through refining fire. We want to hear that those who deserve a comeuppance will inevitably get one, some will die nobly, others succumb needlessly, but somehow life will begin anew. We like the satisfaction of seeing tyrants fall. The reassurance that justice will be done, on earth as in heaven.

Who is the ram and what of the horned goat? No spoilers today, tomorrow's reading gives answers. Best not to Google it, lest you lose hours contemplating our time as the End Times, caught up in a giddy excitement that we will witness destruction unfold around us. Unless you are drinking the Kool-Aid you may feel slightly nauseous.

The prophet feels sick to his stomach. He sees the Temple of God falling, and being despised. A whispered voice asks: how long will this last? The reply depends on how you read it: if 2300 days then around seven years, but (like a prison sentence) the time served might be half of that, if Daniel means 2300 missed offerings, one each morning and evening. But are these human days or symbolic ones? Getting caught in the maths can distract from the story.

It is wickedness that allows the Temple to fall. The perversion of the little horn headed ruler who dares to pretend to rival heaven's power has cast truth to the ground. This is not a reference to fake news, but to the audacity of believing that God's people would be subdued by a show of power. The Israelites have learned to sing the Lord's song in a strange land (Psalm 137) and wondered if the best of sacrifices is a clean and contrite heart, not the Temple offering (Psalm 51). Losing the form and ritual of the Temple is traumatic and brings deep grief, but the people of God will persist faithfully, reading the signs of the times and looking for symbols of hope.

#### Prayer

If it be your will, may even the worship I love, the buildings I know, and the certainties I cling to fall away. For if it be your will, it shall be done on earth, in heaven, and within my heart. Amen

Thursday 8th August

The Rev'd Dr Matthew Prevett, Trust Secretary for Yorkshire Synod

Daniel 8: 15 - 27

When I, Daniel, had seen the vision, I tried to understand it. Then someone appeared standing before me, having the appearance of a man, and I heard a human voice by the Ulai, calling, 'Gabriel, help this man understand the vision.' So he came near where I stood; and when

recorded in Scripture unless we were meant to wrestle with them and seek to discern meaning under the guidance of the Holy Spirit?

It would be a gross error, however, to obsess over them and dig out "meaning" that is not intended.

Daniel had been wrestling with Jeremiah's prophecy of seventy years of exile for the people of Judah. He was getting nowhere in making sense of it all. Then he prayed and fasted and confessed his sins and the sins of the people. He worshipped God and he prayed for God's mercy. You will have to wait until this time tomorrow to find out the result of this!

But let's think of the process. Daniel was studying the Scriptures and finding a part of them difficult to understand. His response was not to turn to the next chapter or a different book. It wasn't to put his "Bible" (such as he had) down and walk away. Neither was it to start to make things up – to pull out meaning that wasn't there.

Rather, it was to commit to more prayer and continued study. He might well have brought to mind those passages in Leviticus 26 and 2 Chronicles 7 that when God's people humble themselves and seek God in prayer, then God will hear us them from heaven and answer our prayers.

What shall we learn from this? Can we become like Daniel? Can we take after the first Christians who devoted themselves to studying the Scriptures and to prayer, and then sought to apply what they learnt of God (see Acts 2:42, Acts 6:4, etc.)?

#### Prayer

When we are careless with Your Word,  
finding meaning You did not put there, forgive us.  
When we neglect Your Word,

servant of God, have been poured out upon us, because we have sinned against you. He has confirmed his words, which he spoke against us and against our rulers, by bringing upon us a calamity so great that what has been done against Jerusalem has never before been done under the whole heaven. Just as it is written in the law of Moses, all this calamity has come upon us. We did not entreat the favour of the Lord our God, turning from our iniquities and reflecting on his fidelity. So the Lord kept watch over this calamity until he brought it upon us. Indeed, the Lord our God is right in all that he has done; for we have disobeyed his voice.

‘And now, O Lord our God, who brought your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand and made your name renowned even to this day—we have sinned, we have done wickedly. O Lord, in view of all your righteous acts, let your anger and wrath, we pray, turn away from your city Jerusalem, your holy mountain; because of our sins and the iniquities of our ancestors, Jerusalem and your people have become a disgrace among all our neighbours. Now therefore, O our God, listen to the prayer of your servant and to his supplication, and for your own sake, Lord, let your face shine upon your desolated sanctuary. Incline your ear, O my God, and hear. Open your eyes and look at our desolation and the city that bears your name. We do not present our supplication before you on the ground of our righteousness, but on the ground of your great mercies. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, listen and act and do not delay! For your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people bear your name!’

### Reflection

Our exploration of these apocalyptic (that is, to do with the End Times) writings continues. We will, perhaps, never fully understand what is meant by books such as this until we reach those End Times. That doesn't stop endless speculation and interpretation, and neither should it. What point would there be in having visions such as this

he came, I became frightened and fell prostrate. But he said to me, ‘Understand, O mortal, that the vision is for the time of the end.’

As he was speaking to me, I fell into a trance, face to the ground; then he touched me and set me on my feet. He said, ‘Listen, and I will tell you what will take place later in the period of wrath; for it refers to the appointed time of the end. As for the ram that you saw with the two horns, these are the kings of Media and Persia. The male goat is the king of Greece, and the great horn between its eyes is the first king. As for the horn that was broken, in place of which four others arose, four kingdoms shall arise from his nation, but not with his power.

At the end of their rule, when the transgressions have reached their full measure, a king of bold countenance shall arise, skilled in intrigue. He shall grow strong in power, shall cause fearful destruction, and shall succeed in what he does. He shall destroy the powerful and the people of the holy ones. By his cunning he shall make deceit prosper under his hand, and in his own mind he shall be great. Without warning he shall destroy many and shall even rise up against the Prince of princes. But he shall be broken, and not by human hands.

The vision of the evenings and the mornings that has been told is true. As for you, seal up the vision, for it refers to many days from now.’

So I, Daniel, was overcome and lay sick for some days; then I arose and went about the king's business. But I was dismayed by the vision and did not understand it.

### Reflection

As a project at school, we were invited to design some packaging for a product and prepare a poster advertising the item. As someone lacking any form of artistic skill, this was not something I found easy. I tried to make the ‘campaign’ fit my ability as an artist – blocks of colour and stick-people. My efforts had little to commend them based on the

advertising standards of the time, let alone the visions we're shown today: dancing dogs, singing animals, cars that fly.

I frequently get to the end of an advert break on television and wonder what it is I've just seen. The things broadcast to us seem more and more surreal, and less and less understandable. We're being sold a message, but it often seems a challenge to interpret it.

Daniel seemed to have the same trouble. Faced with something that seemed to make little sense, Daniel is dismayed and confused. He's been given an insight into something of God, and yet he is left uncertain about what it means. He heads to bed to try and sleep it off, and yet that dismay remains.

Sometimes we are certain about what we are to do, where we are to go, what God is saying to us. We discern what we see or hear, and it seems clear what we are to do. But often it is not so clear. We hear God speak to us – or we're sure we do – but it's not certain what that means or how we are to respond. We're given a vision of the future (for us or the Church) and yet it leaves us confused.

Whether we can understand what God is saying to us (or not) it's important we keep looking for that vision, however unrealistic it may be. In even the most surreal of visions, God has a message for us to discern.

#### Prayer

God who speaks in visions,  
help us to understand your message  
and discern your direction for our lives.  
Fill us with understanding that we may know your way  
and live certain of your call on our lives. Amen

Friday 9th August

The Rev'd Steve Faber, Synod Moderator, West Midlands Synod

Daniel 9: 1 - 19

In the first year of Darius son of Ahasuerus, by birth a Mede, who became king over the realm of the Chaldeans— in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the Lord to the prophet Jeremiah, must be fulfilled for the devastation of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years.

Then I turned to the Lord God, to seek an answer by prayer and supplication with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the Lord my God and made confession, saying,

'Ah, Lord, great and awesome God, keeping covenant and steadfast love with those who love you and keep your commandments, we have sinned and done wrong, acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and ordinances. We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our ancestors, and to all the people of the land.

'Righteousness is on your side, O Lord, but open shame, as at this day, falls on us, the people of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and all Israel, those who are near and those who are far away, in all the lands to which you have driven them, because of the treachery that they have committed against you. Open shame, O Lord, falls on us, our kings, our officials, and our ancestors, because we have sinned against you. To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him, and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God by following his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets.

'All Israel has transgressed your law and turned aside, refusing to obey your voice. So the curse and the oath written in the law of Moses, the