

We all know classic summary titles of key stories in the Bible. “David and Goliath.” “Noah and the Ark.” “Daniel and...”.

Now, it’s likely that you just finished that sentence in your head: perhaps “Daniel and the Lion’s Den.”

Daniel’s full story is so rich and compelling, with the likes of the Hollywood-ready story of the lion’s den, for example, that it’s easy to overlook some foundational takeaways that are highly relevant for Christian leaders. Only a handful of personalities made the cut of appearing in a fully positive light in the Bible—and few of those were as powerful in impact across a lifetime as Daniel. So the key idea we are taking away first from Daniel is not “Daniel and the Lion’s Den,” but instead “Daniel and God’s Perfect Time and Place.”

Now, along those lines, let’s take a fresh look at Daniel. In working to grasp the importance of any circumstance, then or now, the first thing we should always ask for is “context.” And, wow, did Daniel have context in his life! For him, context meant a huge heritage in the living God! A young man from the nation of Judah, steeped in the practical realities of God and His people. Let’s recount some meaningful history here.

Abraham and his family are a good point in time to pick up the full Daniel narrative. God established a covenant with Abraham, who begat Isaac and Ishmael (hey, not many podcasts using the word “begat”...)! Anyway, Abraham’s son Isaac begat Esau and then Jacob, who became Israel. You do remember that Abraham’s kids and grandkids had very serious trouble getting along with each other, back then—and certainly now, in the Middle East! Talk about Biblical family values, whoa....!

Well, Jacob-who-became-Israel had twelve sons, and one of them, Joseph, was sold into slavery by his brothers and reported as dead to their dad, Isaac. Unfortunately, those are shaky family values again! But those very eleven brothers ran into trouble and needed food assistance from a key leader in Egypt, who, by God’s hand and a readiness of spirit, was Joseph. And Joseph, full of forgiveness, helped his family.

Turned out the Israelites ended up in captivity in Egypt for a long time, until Moses led them right up to the Promised Land. But the Promised Land was not his place to go. So Joshua brought them in. Moses’ time and place were not the same as Joshua’s time and place, even though they were contemporaries! So God established the Chosen People in Israel, but of course, they were rebellious, ultimately asking for a human king to replace God as their King. Twists and turns for the kingdom under Saul, David, and Solomon, and then it all split into two kingdoms: Judah and Israel.

God was faithful to Israel, and some Israelites were faithful to God, but the nation of Israel was not fully faithful, for sure—and the prophets that God sent, like Isaiah, certainly made that clear. Accordingly, under merely human kings, the nation of Israel fell around 721 BC.

Unfortunately, the nation of Judah had similar issues to those of Israel. So God allowed King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon to sack the nation of Judah about 588 BC, even though there were serious followers of God in Judah. And the young Daniel was one of those followers.

It’s just too bad that God couldn’t use Daniel now that he was no longer in Judah. But, of course, that wasn’t true at all—God did use Daniel! The entire book of Daniel documents how God used Daniel, but in an entirely different place...outside the Promised Land...than the generations before him.

You see, Judah's sacking happened during Daniel's early years—right in line with prophecies for that time from Jeremiah himself. And Daniel was steeped in the things of God. Inevitably, the stories, the history, the faithfulness of God—all these and more were the deep personal context of Daniel. And every one of these contexts included time and place. Time and place. That framework is crucial for you and me, too.

First, then, from Daniel's historical perspective, God used His serious followers in their time, no matter when that was. Abraham. Joseph. Moses. Joshua. David. Isaiah. Jeremiah. Whatever the fortunes of God's people at the moment in time, God's track record was using His people for His glory. Israel's eleven sons in desperate need of food? God used Joseph. Israel expanding to full bloom? God used David. But now, the Promised Land under the rule of foreigners? Daniel could be used too, if faithful like Joseph and David.

In fact, God notably uses people when they are differentiated from those around them, as Joseph was. You know, as a witness of something better, something different. In our time, an ambassador for Christ!

The psalmist tells us that God knits each person together in the womb. God's timing for doing just that is perfect. It was perfect for Joseph. It was perfect for David. And, of course, it was perfect for Daniel!

Second, then, God used His serious followers no matter the place. Inside the Promised Land, yes. Outside the Promised Land, yes: Joseph and Moses and Daniel. God is not bound to work only in certain holy places. God works through His people wherever they are, and whether they are in power or not. Could Daniel supposedly have been used better, born earlier for lifetime service in a soon-to-be crumbling Judah? God knows best, both time and place.

Now, go take a quick read of Daniel, Chapter 1, to be amazed at Daniel's God-directed time and place in Babylon, down to the specifics of the king's palace. And, not long after the time and place of Daniel, Esther was also used in her specific place, Persia, "for such a time as this!" That's just like your current and future opportunities—in your workplace enterprise...your neighborhood...your community...your nation.

You and I live in service to a God who plans to use each of us in our time and in the places we inhabit, even if and when he directs our steps in the face of hostility. Daniel was not born too late—he was born at just the right time to live his entire adult life under kings who did not truly know Yahweh, the God of Israel. And Daniel's handling of his time and his places was amazing: from Judah where he diligently learned in his very earliest years and then in Babylon where he served God faithfully for decades.

This truth is an ultimate truth for you and me: we were born in this time, our time, and we are to glorify God even when it looks like God's economy might have lapsed or even failed...just like when Israel and Judah had been overtaken and the temple was desecrated.

Your time and your place as a leader are really no different. Are you the only Christian in your workplace enterprise? Well, then you're assured all the more that your mission is right there, this very day. No whining. And no pining after a different time or a different place. God has directed your steps, even if your envy is aroused that others are situated differently. God has appointed you in leadership roles: family, church, workplace, neighborhood, community, nation. And some of those just may not always feel ideal.

Time and place. Relevancy #1 from the life of Daniel. Time and place. You, my friend, are appointed and trusted by God as His ambassador to live well in your time and place. Never, ever forget that.

Glory to God—He has placed you exactly where you are...this...very...day!

