

BOOKLET TO PRINT

The Prophet Daniel

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: July 21

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IN BRIEF

The Prophet Daniel

Young Jew deported to Babylon in the sixth century BC, faithful to God even in the lions' den, prophet of the "Son of Man".

Feast day	July 21
Era	6th century BC

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Credits and sources

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LIFE

The Prophet Daniel

Daniel is the hero of the biblical book that bears his name. A young Jew of noble family, he was deported to Babylon in the sixth century BC, after Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem. At the king's court, he stayed faithful to God and to the Law of his people, interpreted the dreams of rulers and read the mysterious writing on the wall at Belshazzar's feast. Thrown into the lions' den for praying to his God, he came out unharmed. His visions announce the coming of a "Son of Man," a title Jesus would take up. The Roman Martyrology commemorates him on July 21.

Who was the prophet Daniel?

The book of Daniel has two parts: stories of Daniel and his companions at the court of Babylon, then visions of the end of time. The Catholic Bible also contains passages preserved in Greek: the song of the three young men in the furnace, the story of Susanna and that of Bel and the dragon. His name means "God is my judge." Scholars date the final writing of the book to the second century BC, during the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes, to encourage believers to stay faithful.

Key dates

- **c. 605 BC**: Deported to Babylon with other young nobles of Judah, he is trained to serve at Nebuchadnezzar's court.
- **At court**: He refuses the king's food to stay faithful to the Law, living on vegetables and water with his three companions.
- **The dream of the statue**: He explains the king's dream of a statue with feet of clay, struck down by a stone.

- **The furnace**: His companions, who refuse to worship a golden statue, are saved from the flames.
- **539 BC**: He reads the writing "Mene, Tekel, Parsin" at Belshazzar's feast, the night Babylon falls.
- **Under Darius**: He keeps praying three times a day toward Jerusalem and is thrown into the lions' den, from which he comes out unharmed.

Faithful at the court of Babylon

With his companions Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, Daniel was chosen to learn the language and wisdom of the Chaldeans. They were given Babylonian names and food from the royal table. Daniel asked to eat only vegetables and drink only water, so as not to defile himself: after ten days, they looked healthier than all the other young men. God gave them understanding and wisdom, and Daniel received the gift of interpreting dreams.

Nebuchadnezzar dreamed of a huge statue of gold, silver, bronze and iron, with feet mixed with clay, struck down by a stone cut from the mountain. Daniel explained that human kingdoms would pass away, but that God would set up a kingdom that would never be destroyed. The phrase "feet of clay" comes from this story.

The furnace and Belshazzar's feast

The king set up a golden statue and ordered everyone to worship it. Daniel's three companions refused and were thrown into a blazing furnace. But they were seen walking in the flames with a fourth figure, "like a son of the gods," singing God's praise. This song of the three young men, "Bless the Lord, all you works of the Lord," is sung every Sunday in the Church's Morning Prayer.

Years later, King Belshazzar gave a great feast and drank from the sacred vessels taken from the Temple in Jerusalem. A mysterious hand then wrote on the wall: "Mene, Tekel, Parsin." Only Daniel could read it: God has numbered

your reign, you have been weighed and found wanting, your kingdom is divided. That very night, Babylon fell.

In the lions' den

Under King Darius, officials jealous of Daniel had a law passed forbidding for thirty days any prayer to anyone but the king. Daniel, his windows open toward Jerusalem, kept praying three times a day. He was thrown into the lions' den. The next morning the king hurried there and called him: "My God has sent his angel and closed the lions' mouths" (Daniel 6:23). Daniel was saved, and the king proclaimed the greatness of Daniel's God.

The Son of Man

In his visions, Daniel saw four monstrous beasts, images of the empires that crush the peoples. Then he saw "coming on the clouds of heaven one like a Son of Man," who received "dominion, glory and kingship": "his kingship shall not be destroyed" (Daniel 7:13-14). Jesus called himself the "Son of Man" and took up these words before the high priest at his trial. The book of Daniel is also one of the first biblical texts to speak clearly of the resurrection of the dead (Daniel 12:2).

Susanna and young Daniel

Chapter 13 tells the story of Susanna, a righteous woman falsely accused of adultery by two elders she had rejected. Condemned to death, she cried out to God. Young Daniel stopped the crowd and questioned the two accusers separately; they contradicted each other about the tree under which they claimed to have seen her. Susanna was saved. This story makes Daniel a model of the wise and upright judge.

Why do Catholics honor the prophet Daniel?

Daniel shows that one can stay faithful to God far from home, in a society that does not share one's faith, without closing oneself off: he served pagan kings loyally but never gave up his prayer. Christians pray to him to stay faithful in trials, to have the courage of their faith at work or at school, and for those persecuted for their faith.

To pray with him, read the prayer to the prophet Daniel, or follow the novena to the prophet Daniel, from July 12 to 20.

PRAYER

Prayer to the Prophet Daniel

About this prayer

The prophet Daniel is the model of the believer who stays faithful to God far from home, in a world that does not share his faith. The prayer below was composed for Saintspedia. It draws on the great moments of his life: his faithfulness at the court of Babylon, his prayer three times a day, the lions' den and his vision of the Son of Man.

Prayer to the Prophet Daniel

Saint Daniel, prophet of the living God,
exiled in Babylon,
you stayed faithful to the Law of your God
while loyally serving those around you:
teach me to live my faith wherever I am.

You kept praying, your windows open toward Jerusalem,
when prayer was forbidden:
give me faithfulness in prayer
and the courage not to deny what I believe.

God kept you safe in the lions' den:
remember those who are threatened,
persecuted for their faith, unjustly accused,
and all who are afraid.
May the angel of the Lord close the lions' mouths.

Today I entrust to you this intention: (state your intention).
Present it to the Son of Man whom you saw coming on the clouds,
Jesus Christ, whose reign will have no end.

Saint Daniel, pray for us. Amen.

Prayer composed for Saintspedia.

When to pray this prayer

You can pray to him at any time, especially on July 21, when the Roman Martyrology commemorates him, before an exam or a trial, when you are far from home, or when it is hard to live your faith at work or at school. For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to the prophet Daniel and read about the life of the prophet Daniel.

NOVENA

Novena to the Prophet Daniel

This novena was composed for Saintspedia and follows the book of Daniel in nine steps. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish on the eve of his commemoration, begin on July 12; it ends on July 20, before July 21. It can also be prayed at any time, especially before a trial or when you feel far from home.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the meditation and, if you can, the Bible passage given, then say the prayer of the day. The suggested act helps carry the prayer into the day. If you miss a day, simply pick up where you left off.

Day 1: Exile

While still young, Daniel is torn from Jerusalem and taken to Babylon, into a foreign language and culture (Daniel 1:1-7).

Prayer: Saint Daniel, I entrust to you my intention for these nine days. I also entrust to you those who have had to leave their country.

Act of the day: Make a welcoming gesture toward a foreigner or newcomer.

Day 2: Vegetables and water

Daniel refuses the king's food to stay faithful to the Law, and God blesses him (Daniel 1:8-16).

Prayer: Lord, give me the strength to stay faithful in little things.

Act of the day: Fast a little or give up a pleasure for God.

Day 3: Feet of clay

Daniel tells the king that human kingdoms will pass, but God's reign will never end (Daniel 2).

Prayer: Lord, teach me not to build my life on what passes away.

Act of the day: Name a fragile security you cling to, and entrust it to God.

Day 4: The furnace

Daniel's three companions refuse to worship the golden statue. In the midst of the flames, they sing God's praise (Daniel 3).

Prayer: Bless the Lord, all you works of the Lord. Lord, let me praise you even in the heart of trial.

Act of the day: Read or sing the song of the three young men (Daniel 3:57-88).

Day 5: Weighed in the balance

At Belshazzar's feast, a hand writes on the wall: "Mene, Tekel, Parsin" (Daniel 5).

Prayer: Lord, keep me from pride, and teach me to respect what is sacred.

Act of the day: Examine your conscience on how you use your time and possessions.

Day 6: Three times a day

Despite the ban, Daniel keeps praying three times a day, his windows open toward Jerusalem (Daniel 6:11).

Prayer: Lord, give me a faithful rhythm of prayer, morning, noon and evening.

Act of the day: Pray at three set times today, even briefly.

Day 7: The lions' den

Daniel is thrown to the lions. In the morning he is alive: "My God has sent his angel" (Daniel 6:17-24).

Prayer: Saint Daniel, I entrust to you those persecuted for their faith and all who are afraid.

Act of the day: Pray for persecuted Christians around the world.

Day 8: Susanna

Young Daniel saves Susanna, falsely accused, by exposing the liars (Daniel 13).

Prayer: Lord, protect the innocent who are unjustly accused, and give judges wisdom.

Act of the day: Refuse all gossip today.

Day 9: The Son of Man

Daniel sees "one like a Son of Man" coming on the clouds, whose reign will not be destroyed (Daniel 7:13-14).

Prayer: Jesus, Son of Man, I place in your hands the intention of this novena. Thy kingdom come. Amen.

Act of the day: Pray the Our Father slowly.

Closing prayer

Saint Daniel, you stayed faithful far from home and God kept you safe among the lions: present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you during these nine days. Obtain for me faithfulness in prayer and the courage of my faith. Saint Daniel, pray for us. Amen.

CREDITS

Credits and sources

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