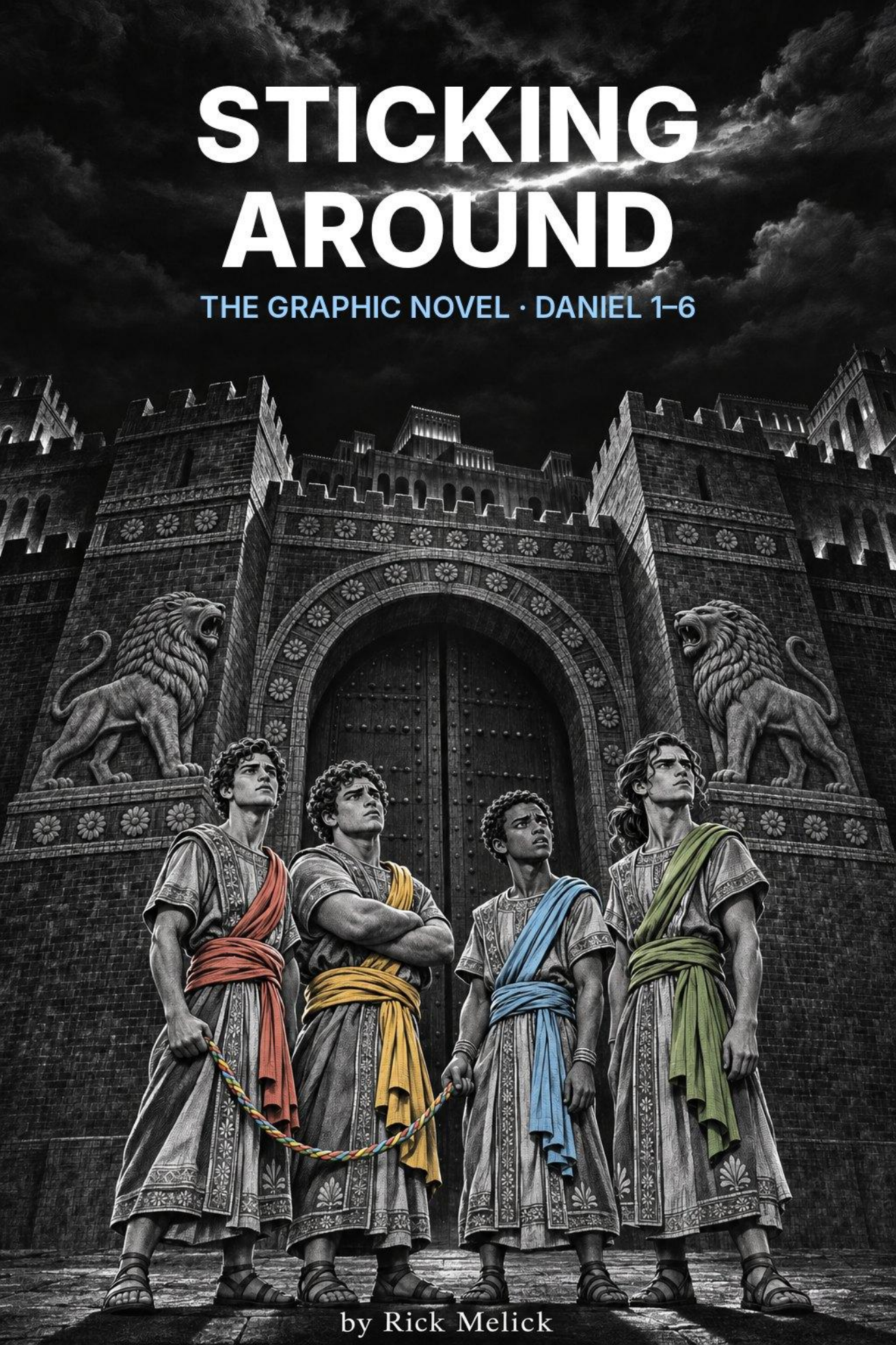
STICKING AROUND

THE GRAPHIC NOVEL · DANIEL 1–6



by Rick Melick

BEFORE YOU START

Who's who

Say it like this



DANIEL

DAN-yul

Also called Belteshazzar



SHADRACH

SHAD-rak

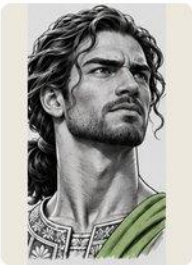
Hebrew name: Hananiah



MESHACH

MEE-shak

Hebrew name: Mishael



ABEDNEGO

uh-BED-nee-go

Hebrew name: Azariah

Nebuchadnezzar *(neb-uh-kad-NEZ-er)*: the king of Babylon

Belshazzar *(bel-SHAZ-er)* and **Darius** *(duh-RYE-us)*: the kings after him

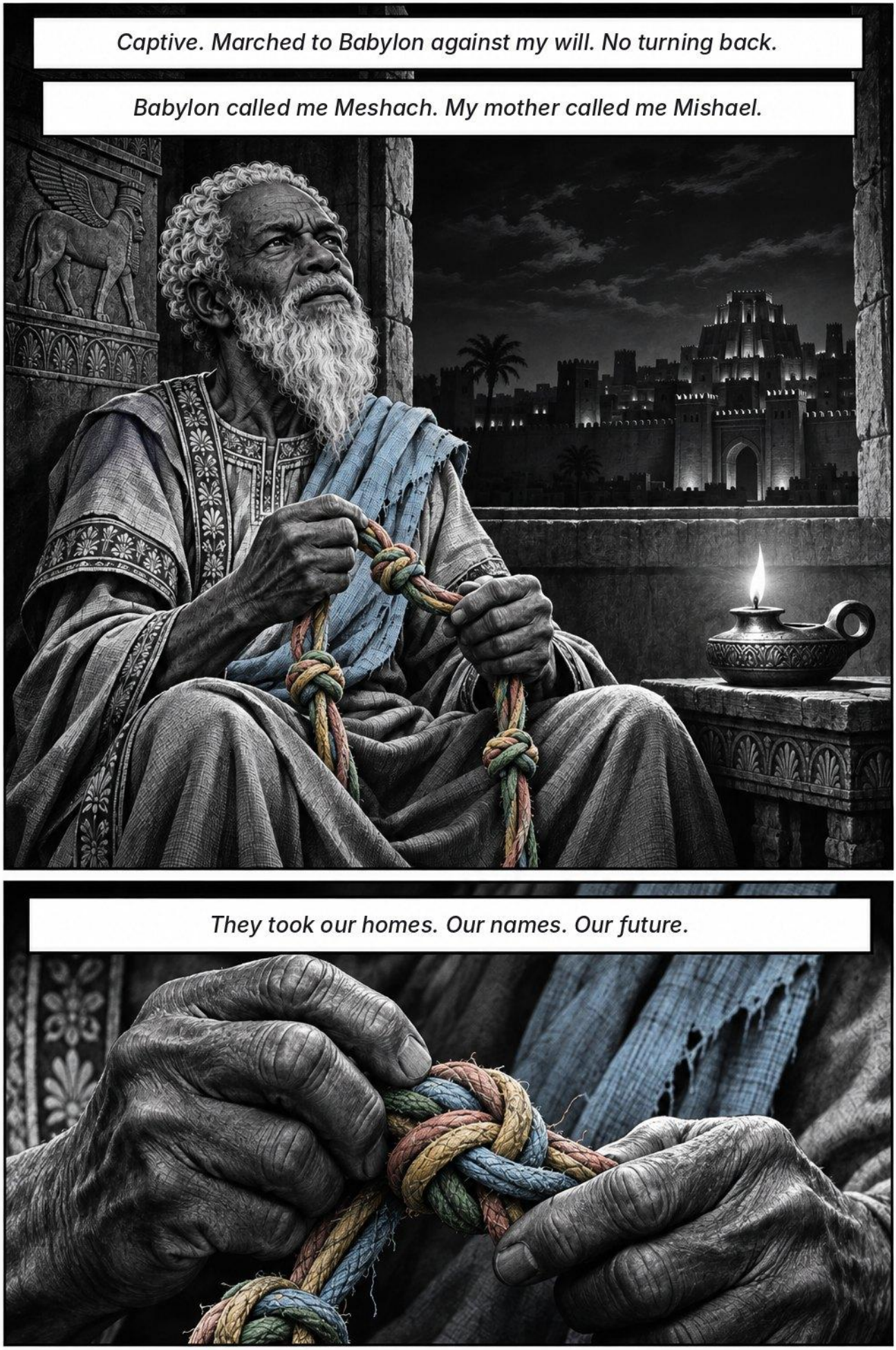
Nabu-iddin *(NAH-boo-ID-in)*: a classmate who becomes a rival

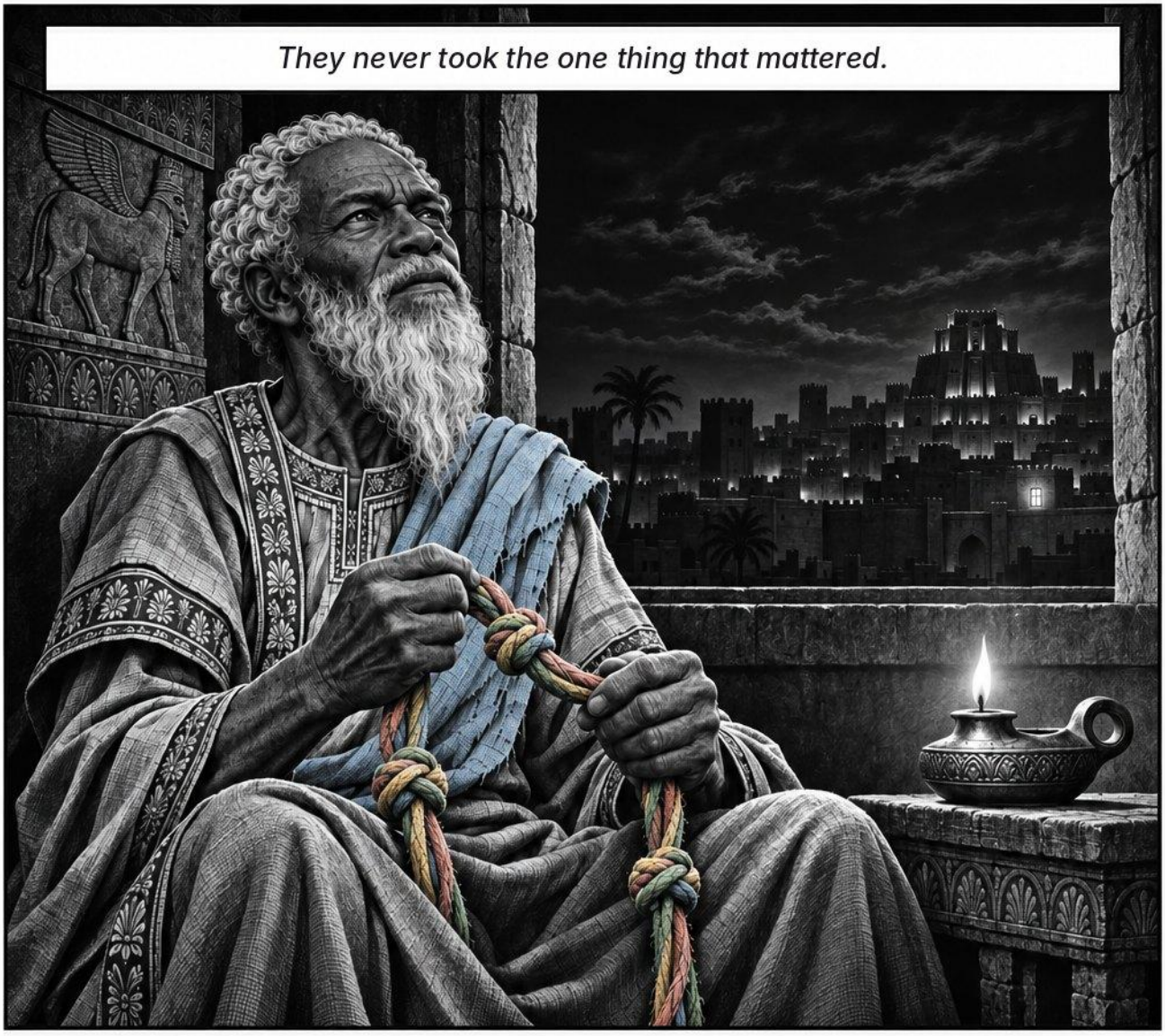
Tobiah *(toe-BYE-uh)*: a boy from the boys' street in Jerusalem, kidnapped with them, who drifts away

Ashpenaz *(ASH-puh-naz)*: the official in charge of the young captives

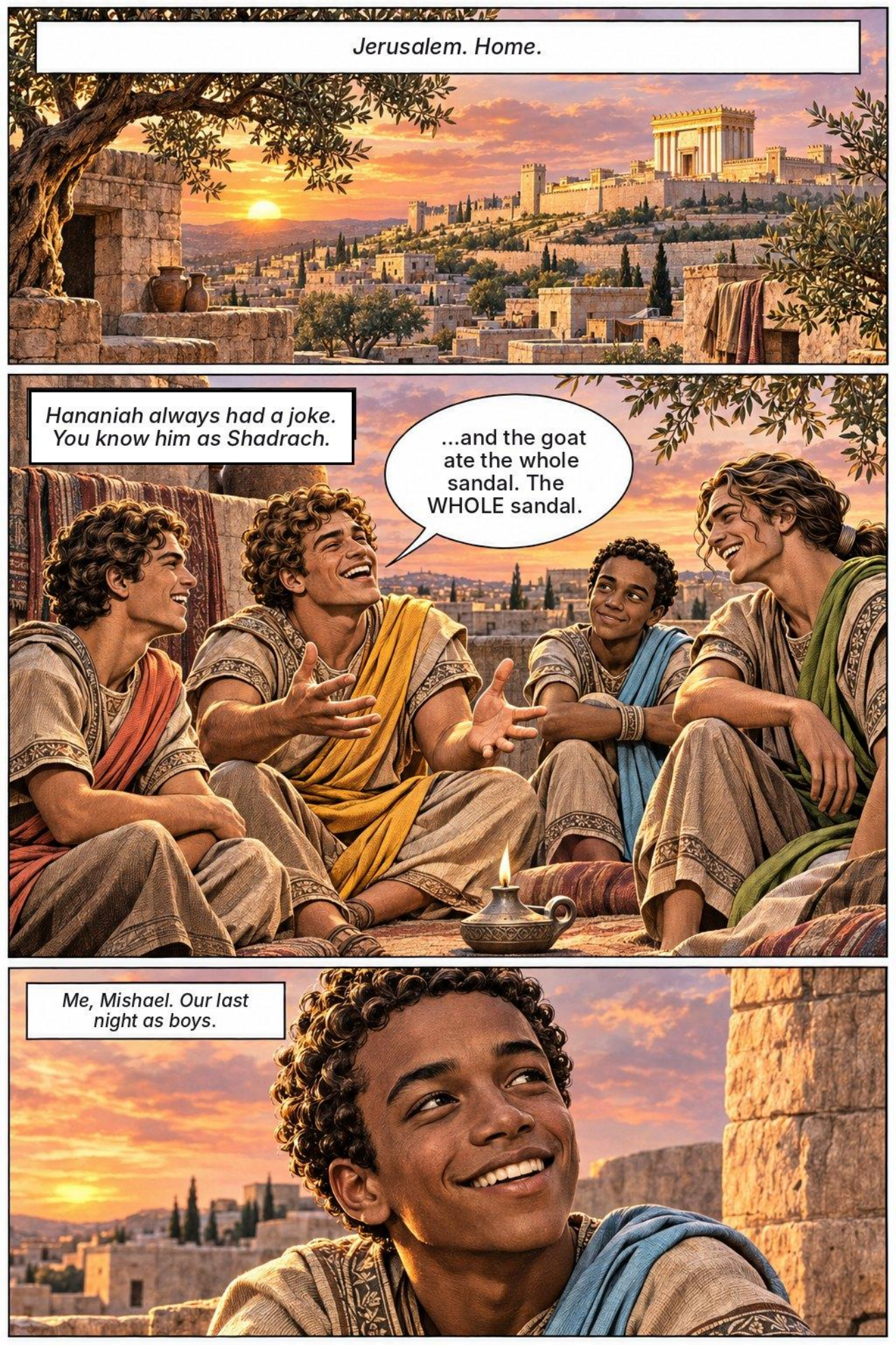
A note on the story. This book retells Daniel 1–6, told by Meshach. Nabu-iddin and Tobiah are made up for the story, and the Bible doesn't say Meshach lived to see the lions' den. Telling it through his eyes as an old man is a storytelling choice. The verses quoted are from the NIV.

The four colors of the sashes are the four strands of the rope. Watch for it.


Captive. Marched to Babylon against my will. No turning back.
Babylon called me Meshach. My mother called me Mishael.
They took our homes. Our names. Our future.


They never took the one thing that mattered.


I was thirteen when it started.


Jerusalem. Home.
Hananiah always had a joke. You know him as Shadrach.
...and the goat ate the whole sandal. The WHOLE sandal.
Me, Mishael. Our last night as boys.


Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and waged war against it. (Daniel 1:1)
The Lord let it happen. Even God's temple cups were taken. (Daniel 1:2)
If they can take God's things... what happens to us?


The king wanted the best: healthy, handsome, smart.
This one. And these three.
I never got to say goodbye.


Nine hundred miles. On foot.
Where is God? Seriously. Where is he?
Same place he's always been. He came with us.
Great. Can he carry my bag?

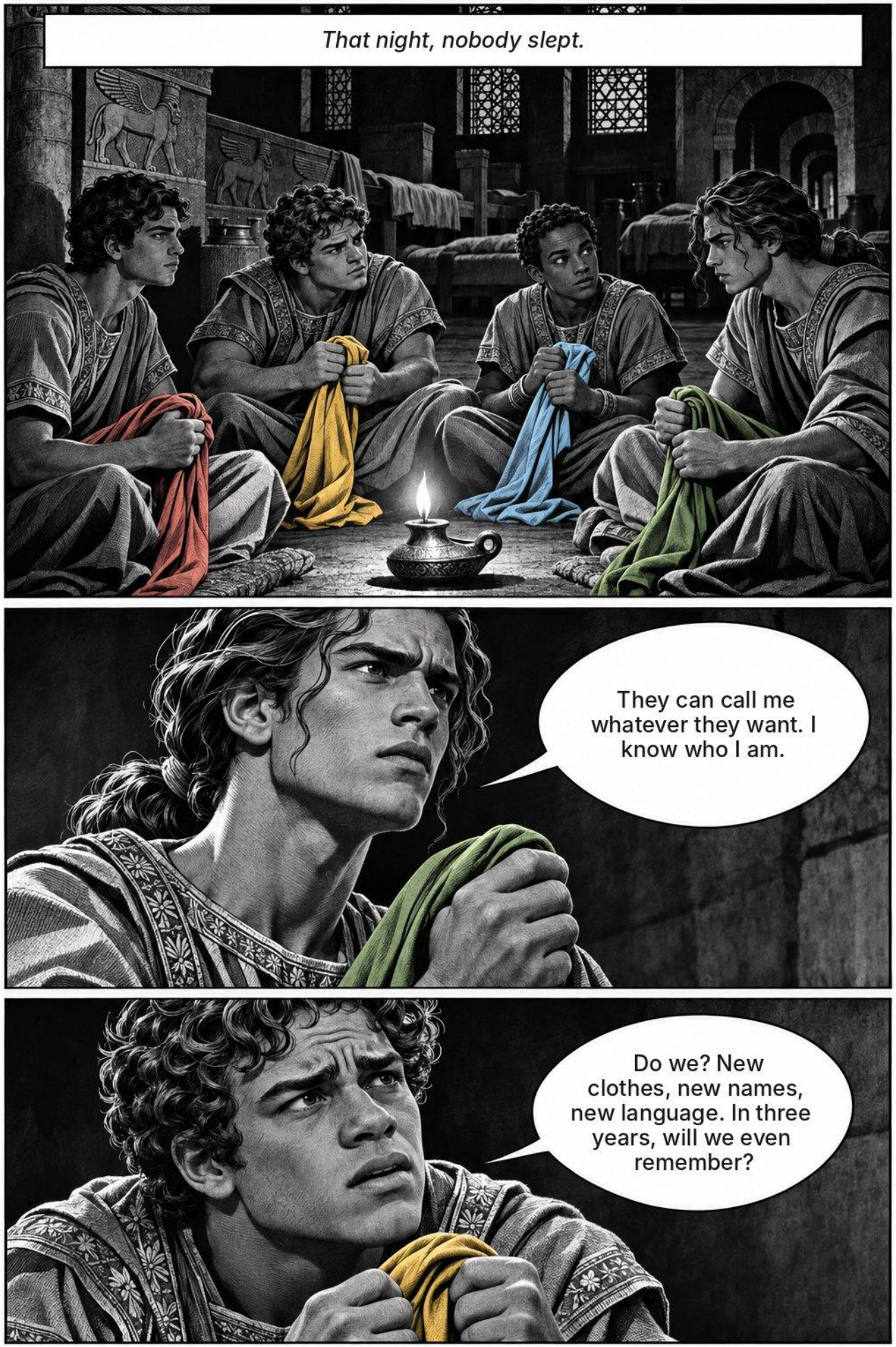

Babylon. The greatest city on earth.
Okay. That's... big.


The king's training school.
I'm Nabu-iddin. So these are the prizes from Judah.
Welcome to the winning side. Your God lost. Ours didn't.
Say that again.
Let it go.


Three years of Babylon's school. Their language. Their books. Their stars.
I think my tablet says "help."
New clothes.


From today, you have new names.
Belteshazzar.
His new name honored Bel, Babylon's chief god.
Shadrach. Meshach. Abednego.


My name asked a question: "Who is like God?"
Our old names all praised God. The new ones pointed to Babylon's gods.
Better names. You'll get used to them.


That night, nobody slept.
They can call me whatever they want. I know who I am.
Do we? New clothes, new names, new language. In three years, will we even remember?


Then we help each other remember.
Each of us added a strand that represented something our families taught us about God. Twisted together, they made a rope.


You keep it. You notice everything. You'll see if one of us starts to slip.
Why me?
Because you watch.
"A cord of three strands is not quickly broken." (Ecclesiastes 4:12) We had four.


Daniel prayed toward home. He would do it the rest of his life.
They could rename us. They couldn't rename God.


The next morning, the king sent breakfast.
We can't eat this.

TALK IT OVER · CHAPTER 1

New Names

Read it: Daniel 1:1–7

Babylon can rename you. Only God gets to tell you who you are.

REAL LIFE

New place, new people, and everybody seems to already know who you're supposed to be: a coach, a roommate, a group chat, your own camera roll. After a while it's hard to tell which version is actually you. Daniel and his friends lost their home, their families and even their names. Babylon tried to rename them. It didn't get the last word on who they were.

TALK IT OVER

1. Do you ever feel like you're playing a character (faking it) just to fit in?
2. Is there a lie people say about you that you've quietly started to believe?
3. Who knows the real you and still likes you?

> *"Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine."* **Isaiah 43:1**

TRY IT THIS WEEK

Write down the label that's been loudest in your head lately. Next to it, write what God says about you (start with Isaiah 43:1). Show one friend.

Carrying something heavy? Talk to someone you trust. In the U.S. you can call or text 988 any time, day or night.

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Food from the king's own table. Every day. Our friend Tobiah dug right in.
Sit! You have to try this. Best thing I've ever eaten.
Tobiah grew up on our street back home in Jerusalem. Babylon kidnapped him the same week they kidnapped us.


But Daniel resolved not to compromise by eating the royal food and wine. (Daniel 1:8)
It's lamb. Lamb is in the Bible. Lamb is basically a Bible animal.
It was offered to their gods first. And that's one of the ways they try to make us forget our God.

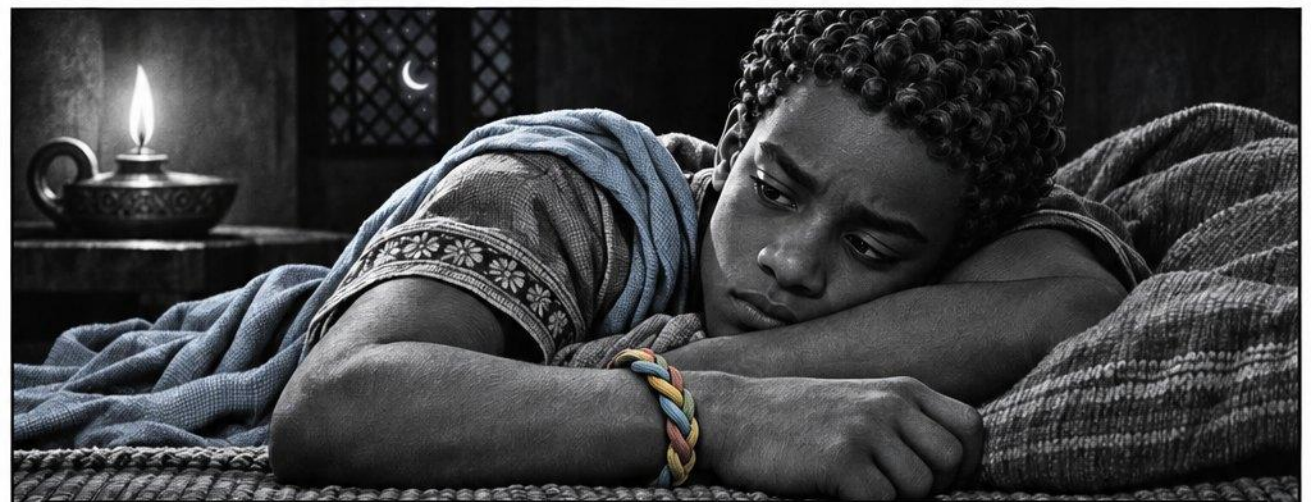

Not everyone noticed. Some did.
Look. The Judeans are too holy for lunch.
Guys, it's just food. Don't make it a thing.
I was hungry. And I didn't want to be different. Not here.


Sir, may we be excused from eating the food the king is offering us?
Okay, but if you end up in worse shape than the others, the king will have my head!
God had caused the official to show favor to Daniel. But he was still afraid. (Daniel 1:9–10)


Test us for ten days. Give us only vegetables and water. Then compare us with the others.
Ten days. If you faint, that's on you.
He didn't argue. He didn't go behind anyone's back. He asked. With respect.







Day seven, I almost quit. Then I looked at the rope. Four strands of faith and friendship.

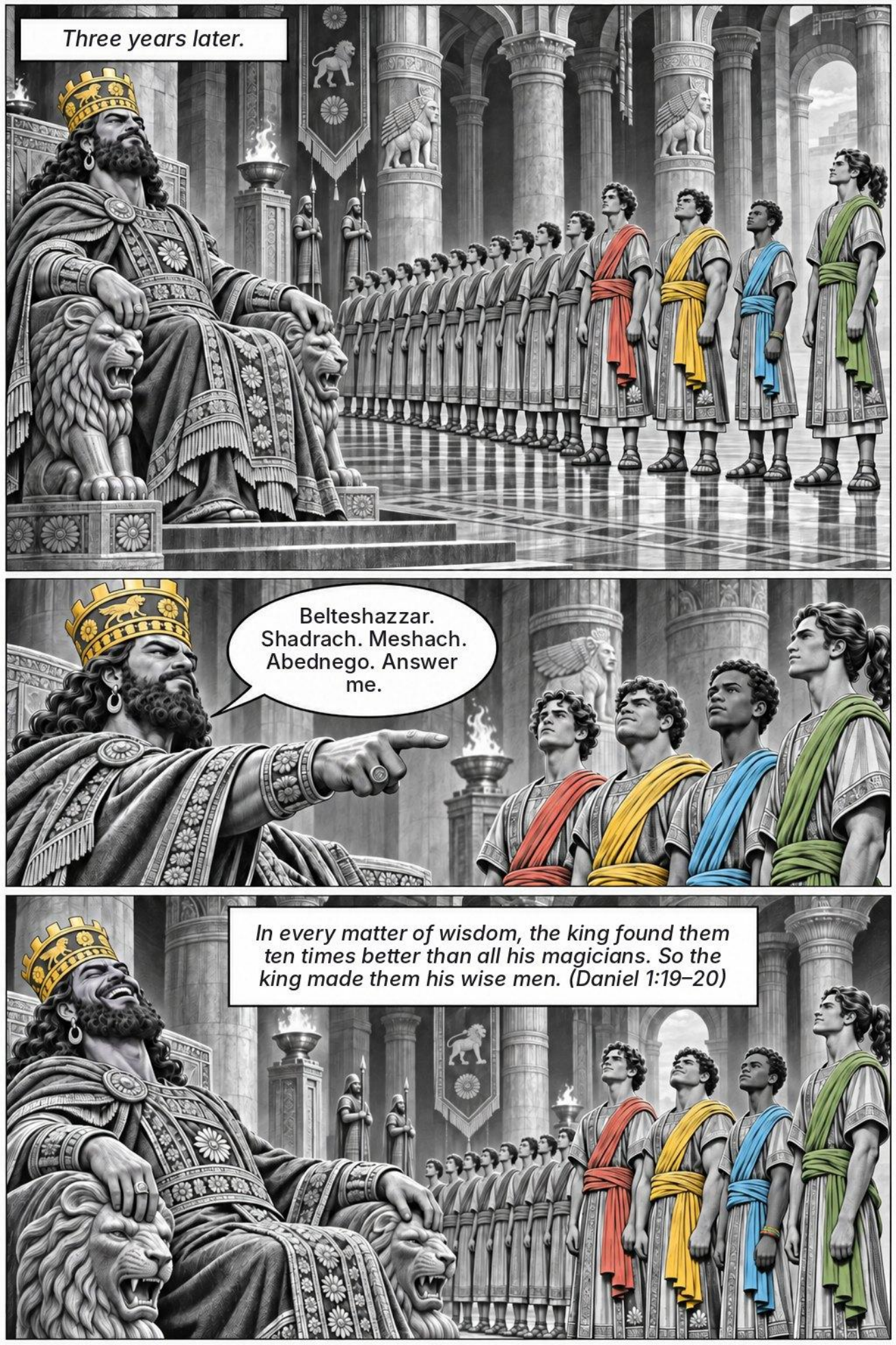

Tobiah, our friend from home, stopped sitting with us.
He wasn't a bad guy. He just wanted to belong.
Smart man. Babylon rewards smart men.


Day ten.
They look... better. Healthier than all of them.
Vegetables must be the secret. They look great!

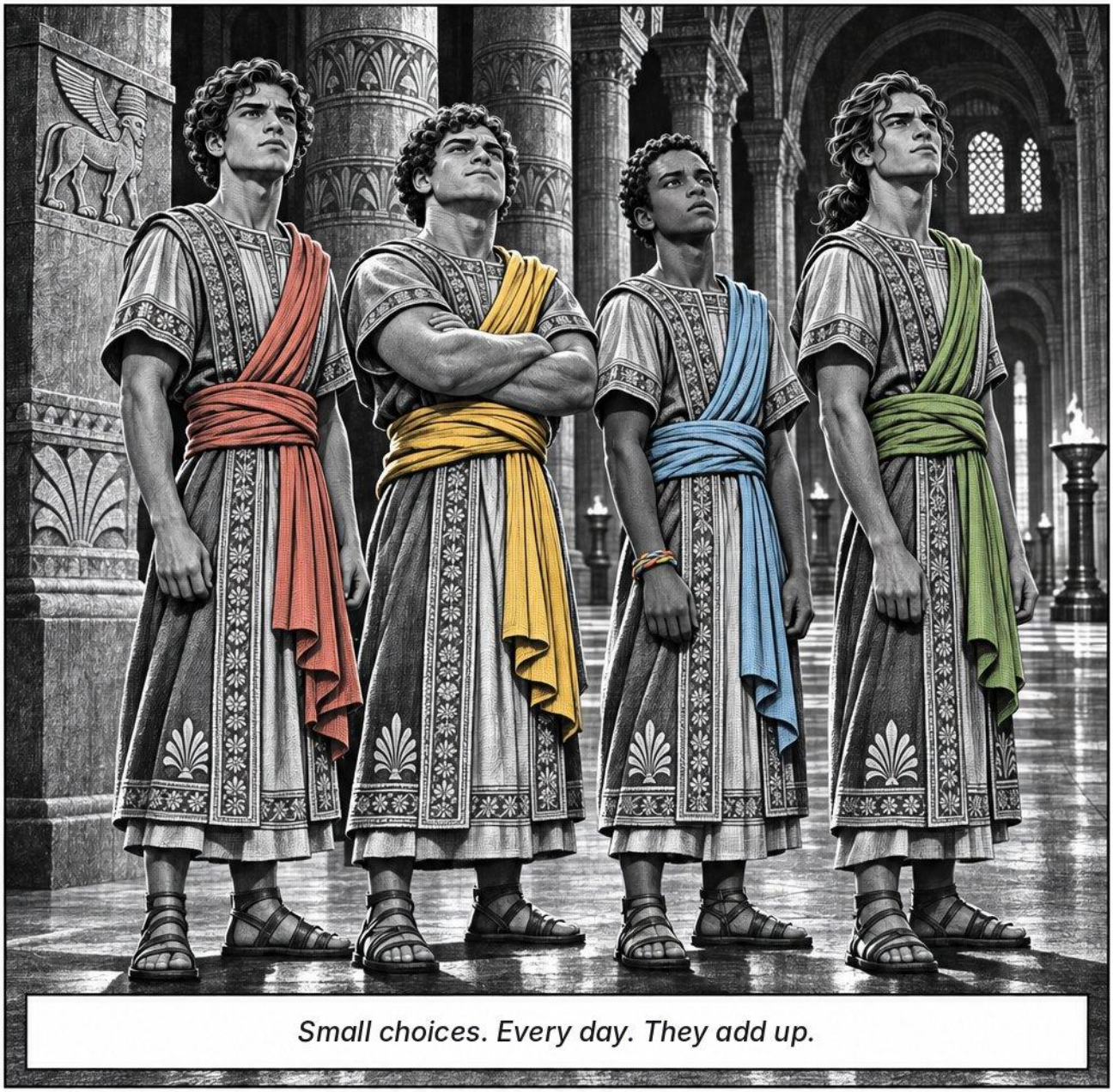

God gave them knowledge. Special knowledge. (Daniel 1:17)
The stars decide your fate. Read them, and you read the future.
The stars don't decide anything. The one who made them does.

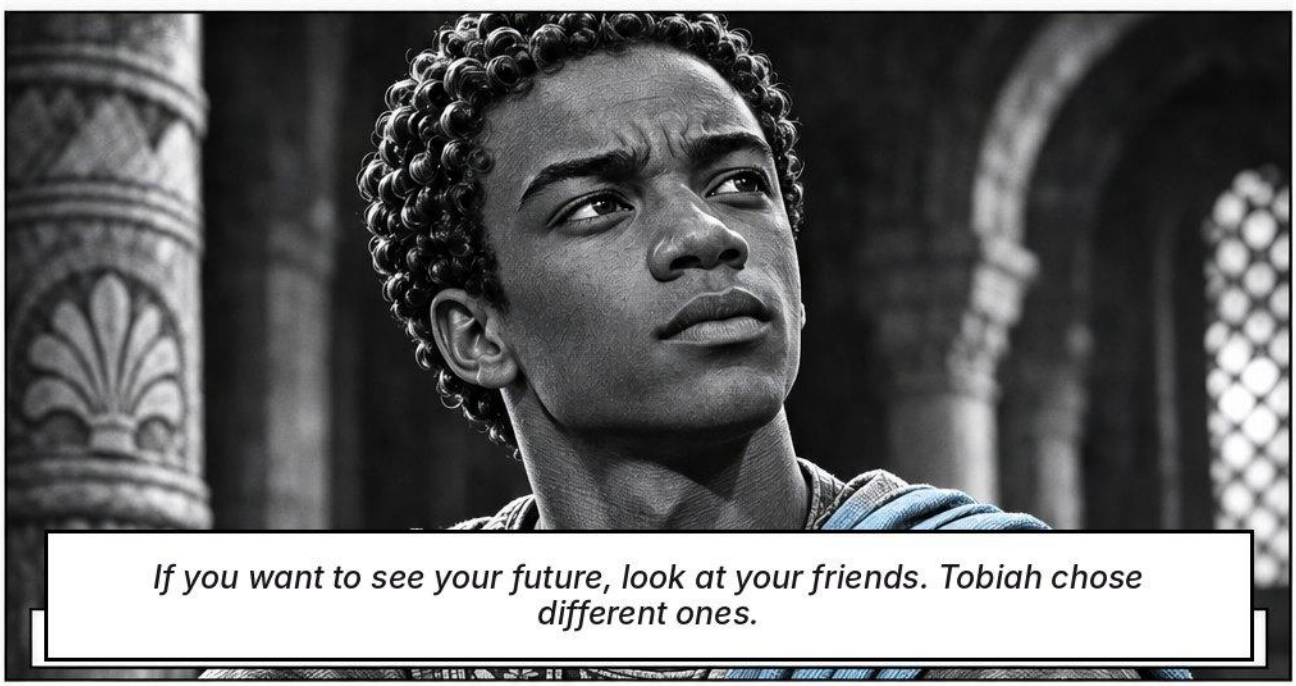

You're the smart quiet one. So be honest.
Your God let your city fall. Ours built the greatest empire on earth. Which god would a smart man choose?
I didn't have an answer. Not then.


What if he's right?
The Lord allowed Jerusalem to collapse. God wasn't beaten. He had a plan. He's always in charge.
It took me years to understand that.


Three years later.
Belteshazzar. Shadrach. Meshach. Abednego. Answer me.
In every matter of wisdom, the king found them ten times better than all his magicians. So the king made them his wise men. (Daniel 1:19–20)


Nabu-iddin came in second. He never forgot it.
Tobiah passed too. I don't think he used his old name anymore.


Small choices. Every day. They add up.


If you want to see your future, look at your friends. Tobiah chose different ones.

TALK IT OVER · CHAPTER 2

The King's Table

Read it: Daniel 1:8–21

Faith that lasts is built one small choice at a time, and the friends you choose shape who you become.

REAL LIFE

Nobody wakes up and decides to wreck their life. It's one shortcut, one party, one photo, one "it's not that big a deal." Then it's normal. Tobiah wasn't a bad guy. He just wanted in, and a little at a time he forgot his name. Daniel didn't make a scene or sneak around. He asked respectfully, made one small choice, and stood next to friends who'd stand with him.

TALK IT OVER

1. What's your "king's table": the thing everyone around you is fine with that you know isn't fine for you?
2. Who makes it easier to be the person you want to be? Who makes it harder? Be honest.
3. What small choice this week would future you thank you for?

> *"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."* **Romans 12:2**

TRY IT THIS WEEK

Pick one small "no" or one small "yes" and hold it for ten days, like Daniel did. Tell one friend so they can ask how it's going.

Carrying something heavy? Talk to someone you trust. In the U.S. you can call or text 988 any time, day or night.

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The king's dreams troubled him.
He could not sleep. (Daniel 2:1)
Bring me the wise men.
All of them. Now.


That same night.
Tell us the dream, O king. We'll explain it.
No. You tell me what I dreamed. Then I'll know you're not lying.
If you can't, you will die.


No one on earth can do this! Only the gods could. (Daniel 2:10–11)
Then every wise man in Babylon isn't very wise. They all will die.
Every wise man. That includes us.

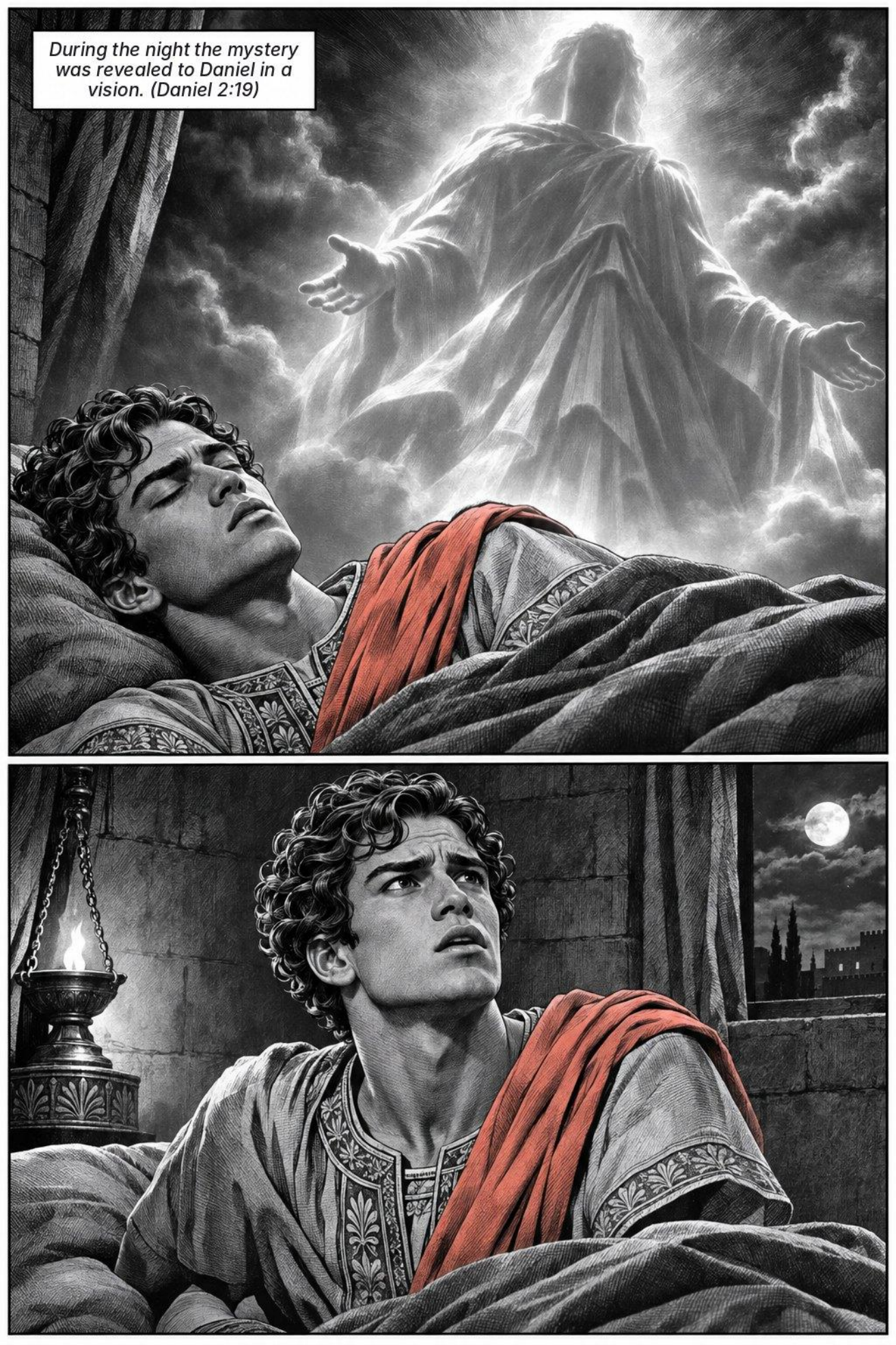

Arioch, the king's commander, came to round up the wise men and kill them. (Daniel 2:14)
Belteshazzar. By order of the king.
Commander, why did the king give such a harsh order? (Daniel 2:15)


He had a dream. Nobody can tell him what it was. So everybody dies.
Daniel didn't panic.
Daniel went straight to the king.


Give me time, Your Majesty. I will tell you the dream and what it means.
One night. No answer by morning, and you die with the rest of them.

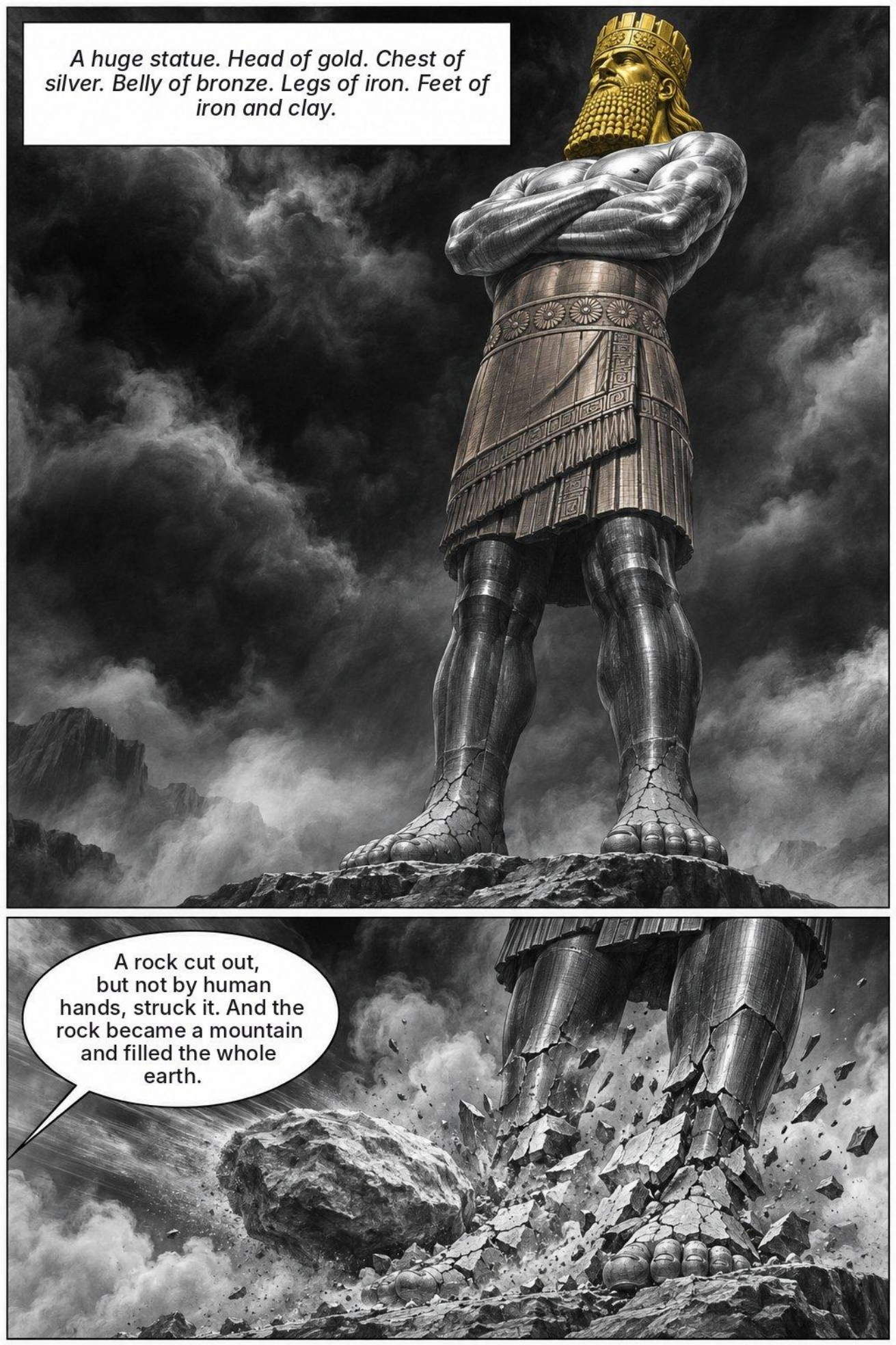

We need to pray. All of us. Tonight.
Good. My other plan was running away, and I'm really slow.
And if God doesn't answer?


They pleaded for mercy from the God of heaven. (Daniel 2:18)
I was scared. I told God so. It was my first honest prayer in a long time.
We didn't solve anything that night. But we still had our friendship and our faith.

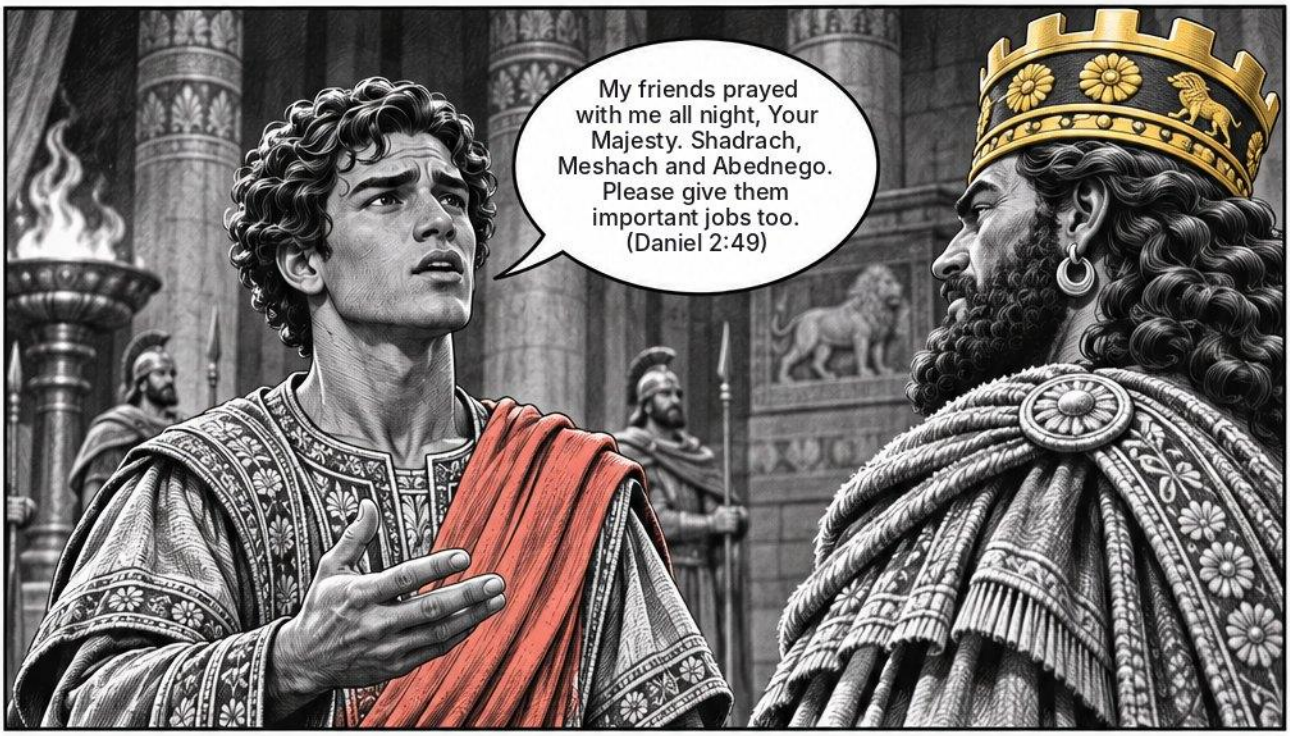

During the night the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision. (Daniel 2:19)

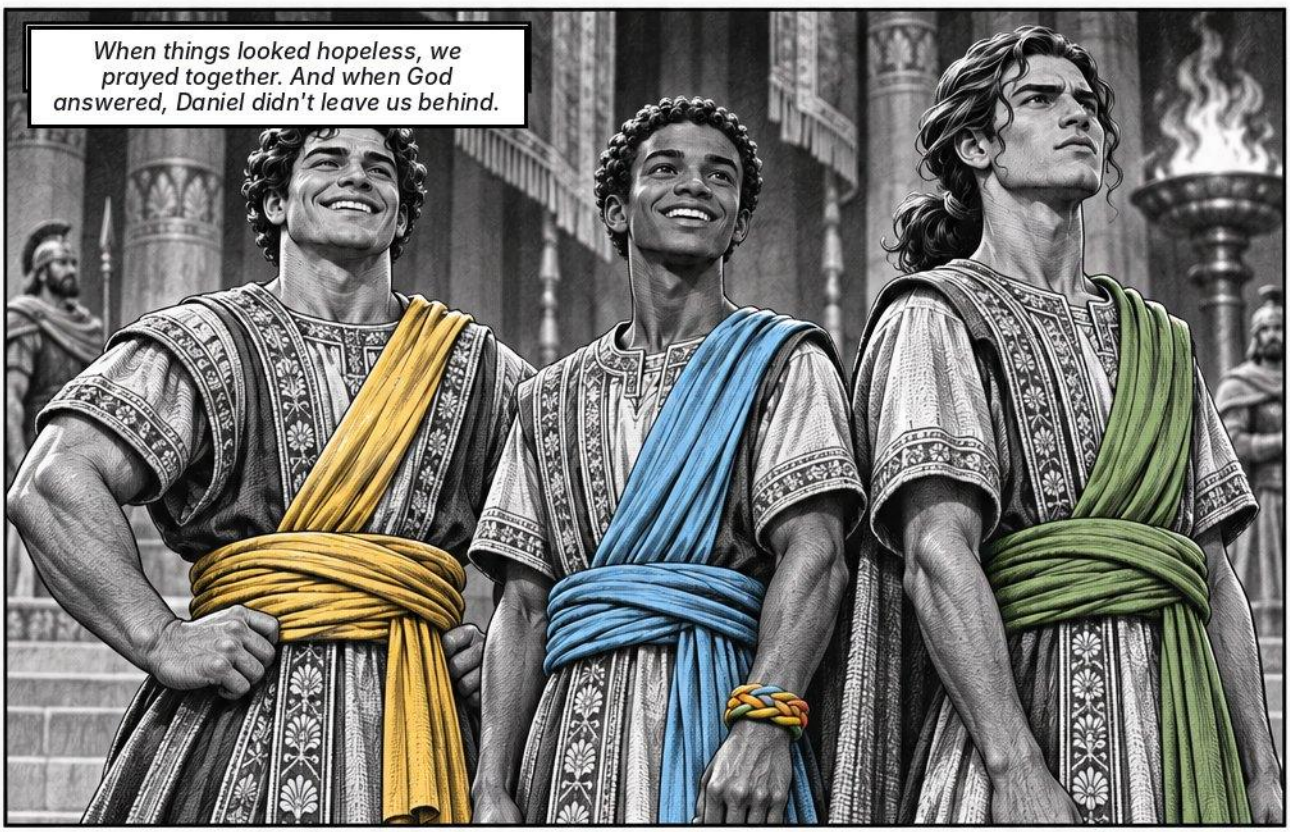

Did God answer? Tell us!
Wait. First we thank him.
Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever! Thank you, God. You answer prayer!
Daniel knew who deserved the credit.


He could have saved just the four of us. Instead he begged for every wise man's life. Even the ones who hated us.
Don't kill the wise men. Take me to the king.
Can you do it?
Only God reveals mysteries.


A huge statue. Head of gold. Chest of silver. Belly of bronze. Legs of iron. Feet of iron and clay.
A rock cut out, but not by human hands, struck it. And the rock became a mountain and filled the whole earth.


You are that head of gold. Kingdoms will rise and fall after you. But God will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed. (Daniel 2:38–44)
The king fell down, terrified.
Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings. (Daniel 2:47)


My friends prayed with me all night, Your Majesty. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Please give them important jobs too. (Daniel 2:49)


When things looked hopeless, we prayed together. And when God answered, Daniel didn't leave us behind.


That night tied the four of us together, like a knot in our rope.

TALK IT OVER · CHAPTER 3

The Dream

Read it: Daniel 2

When life threatens to crush you, don't carry it alone. Pray honestly, together, and thank God first.

REAL LIFE

Some nights your brain won't shut off: money, grades, applications, a family that's coming apart, a future you can't plan. Meshach was scared, and he said so. That was his first honest prayer in a long time. The four friends didn't get any immediate answers to their prayers that night. But they still had their friendship and their faith.

TALK IT OVER

1. What's the one thing you think about that keeps you up at night?
2. Everyone is afraid of something. Is it harder for you to admit your fears to God or to your friends? Why?
3. Who would you call if you really needed someone? Even at 2 a.m.

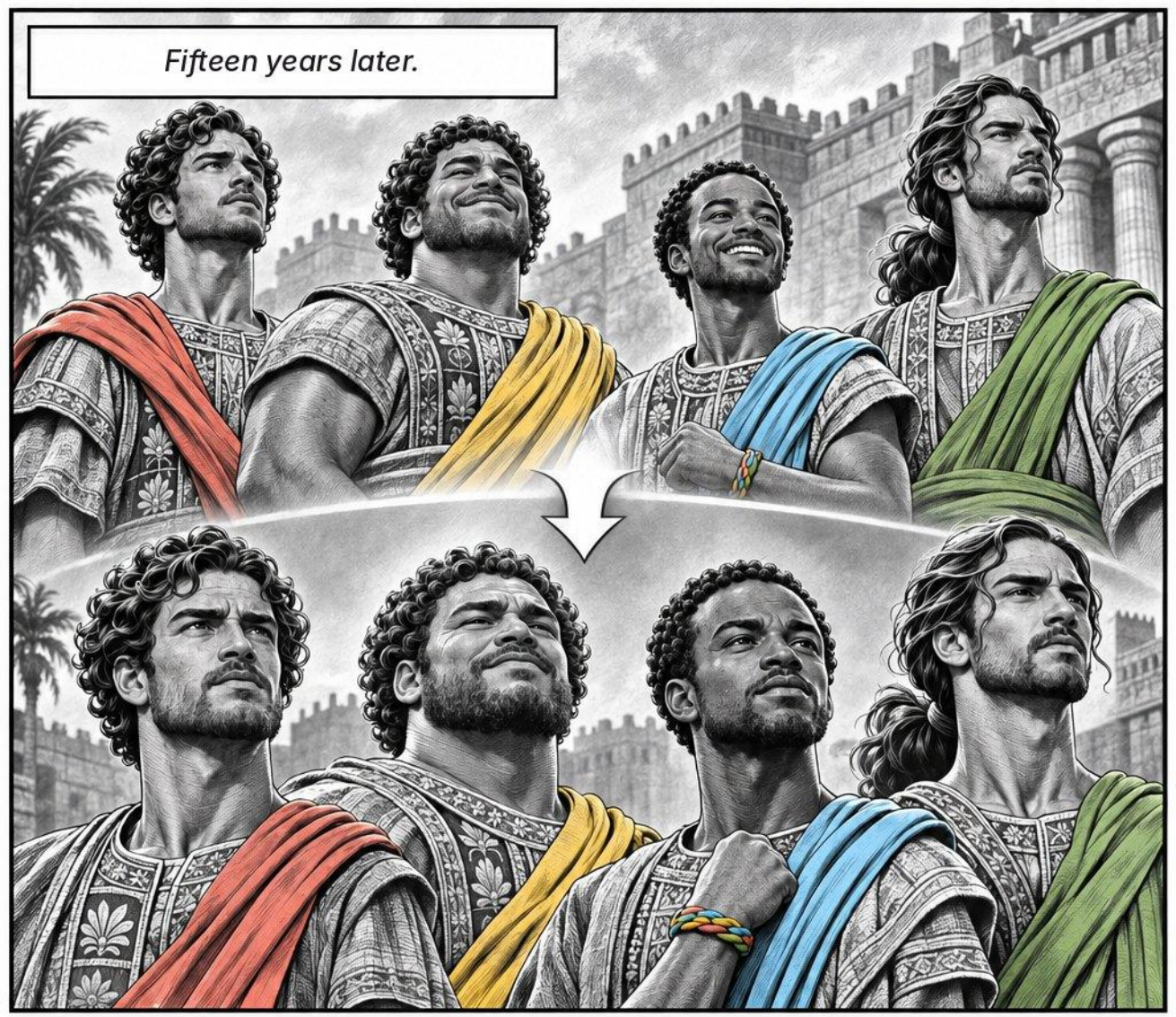
> *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."* **Philippians 4:6**

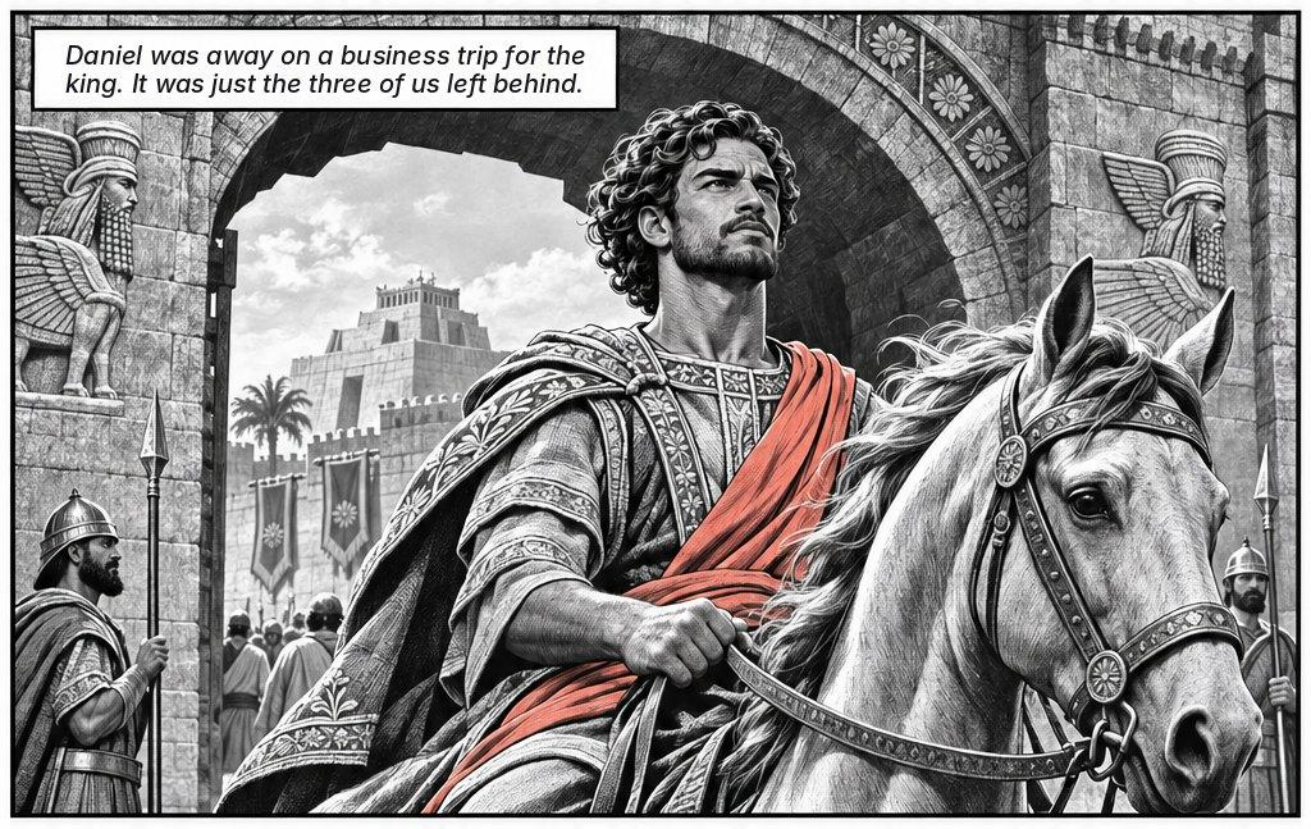
TRY IT THIS WEEK

Text two friends: "Can I pray for you this week?" Then actually pray. And let them pray for you too.

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Fifteen years later.


Daniel was away on a business trip for the king. It was just the three of us left behind.


The king set up a statue of gold, ninety feet tall. (Daniel 3:1)
In his dream, he was only the head of gold. So in real life, he built a real statue that was gold from head to toe.
He missed the point. God said his kingdom wouldn't last. The king wanted to last forever.

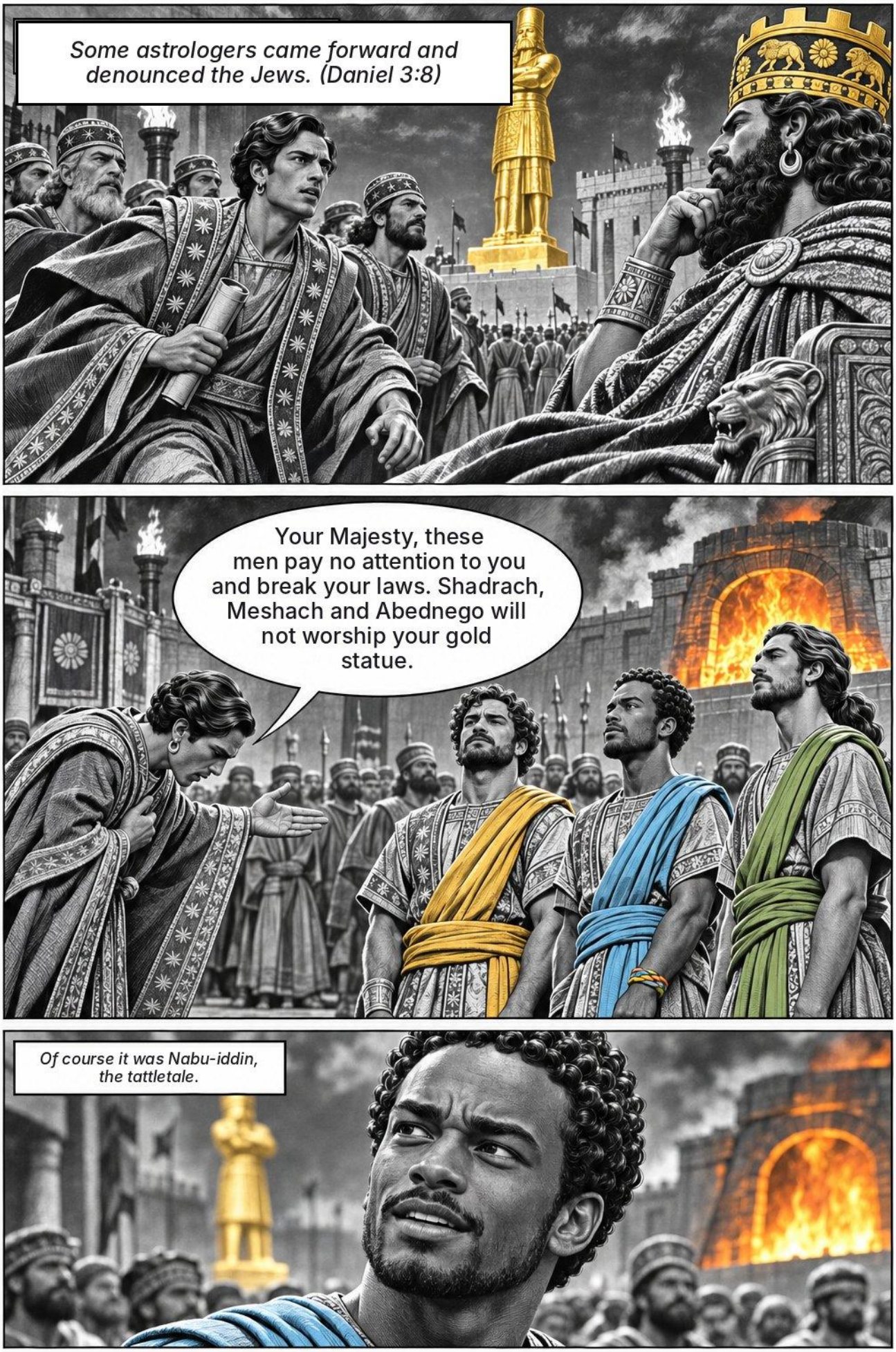

By order of the king! When the music plays, fall down and worship the gold statue!
Whoever does not will be thrown into a fiery furnace!
Just worship the statue. You don't have to mean it. Nobody can see your heart.




Thousands hit the ground and worshiped the statue.


Three young men stayed on their feet.


My knees were shaking. I thought I was going to die. I want you to know that. Brave doesn't mean you're not scared. It means you stand anyway.
You okay?
No. But I'm standing.


Some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews. (Daniel 3:8)
Your Majesty, these men pay no attention to you and break your laws. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego will not worship your gold statue.
Of course it was Nabu-iddin, the tattletale.

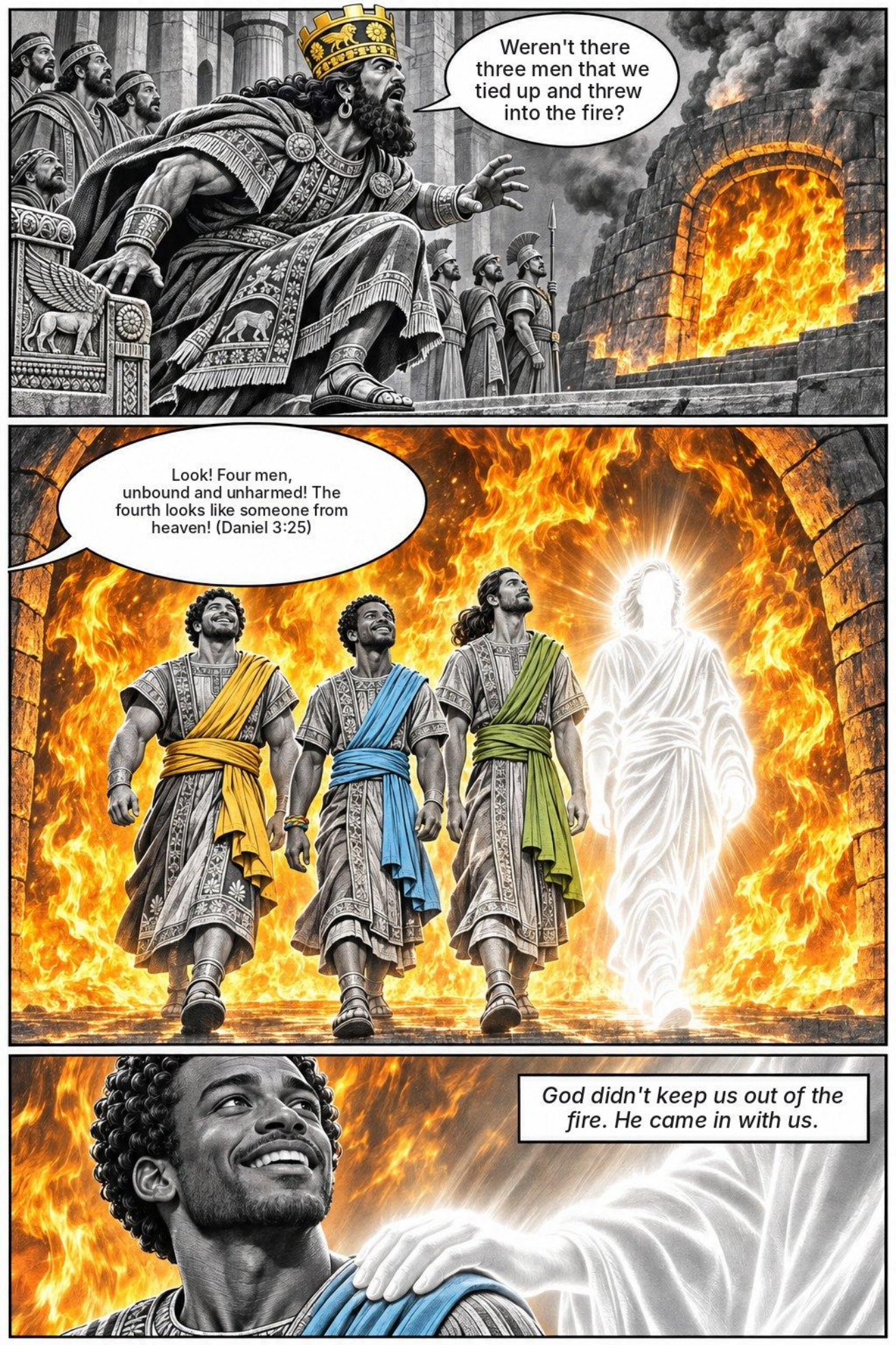

Bring them to me!
Is it true? I'll give you one more chance. When you hear the music, bow.
If you don't, into the furnace you go. Then what god will rescue you from my punishment?

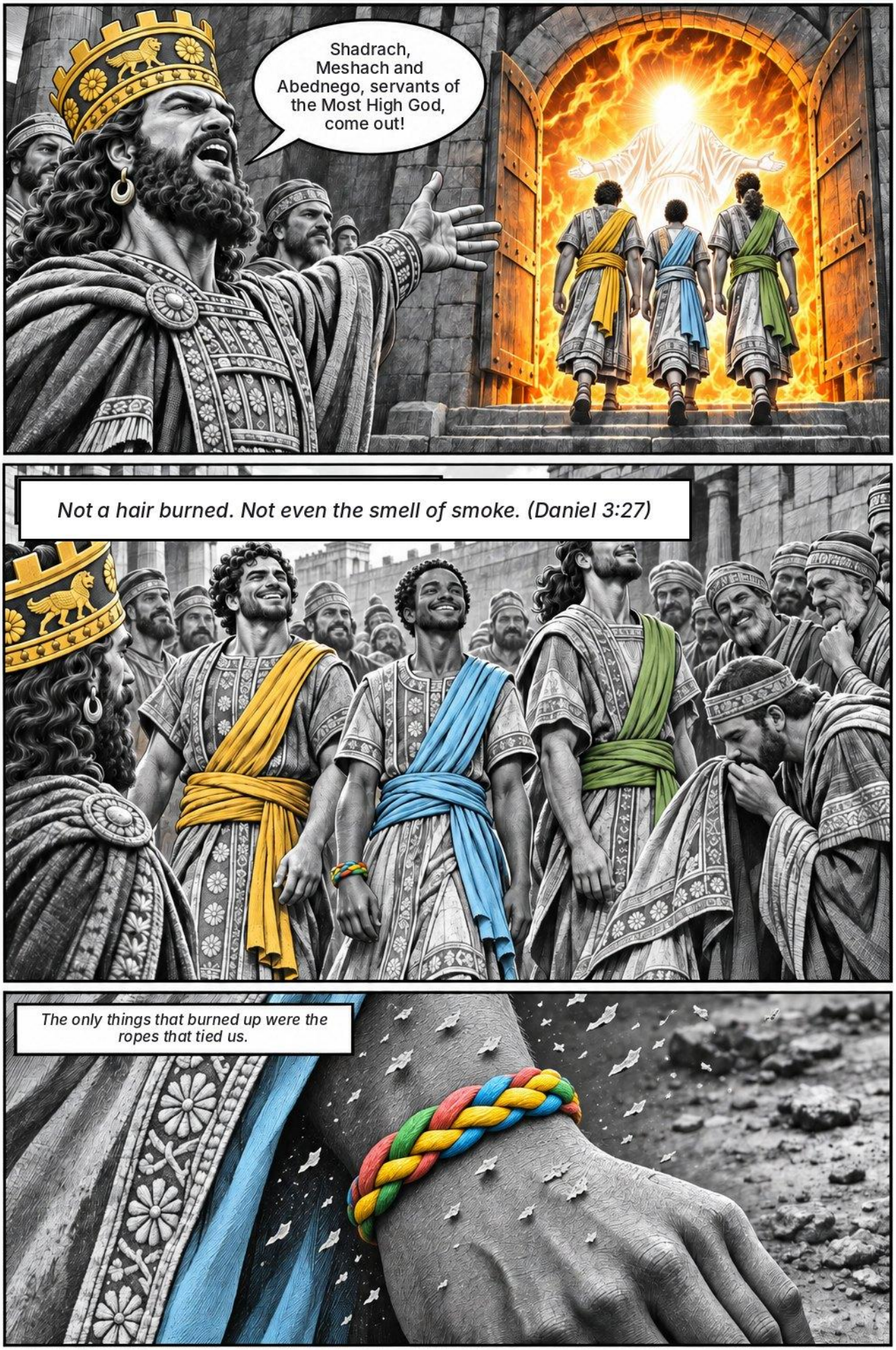

We do not need to defend ourselves before you.
If we are thrown into the fiery furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's punishment.
But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up. (Daniel 3:17–18)

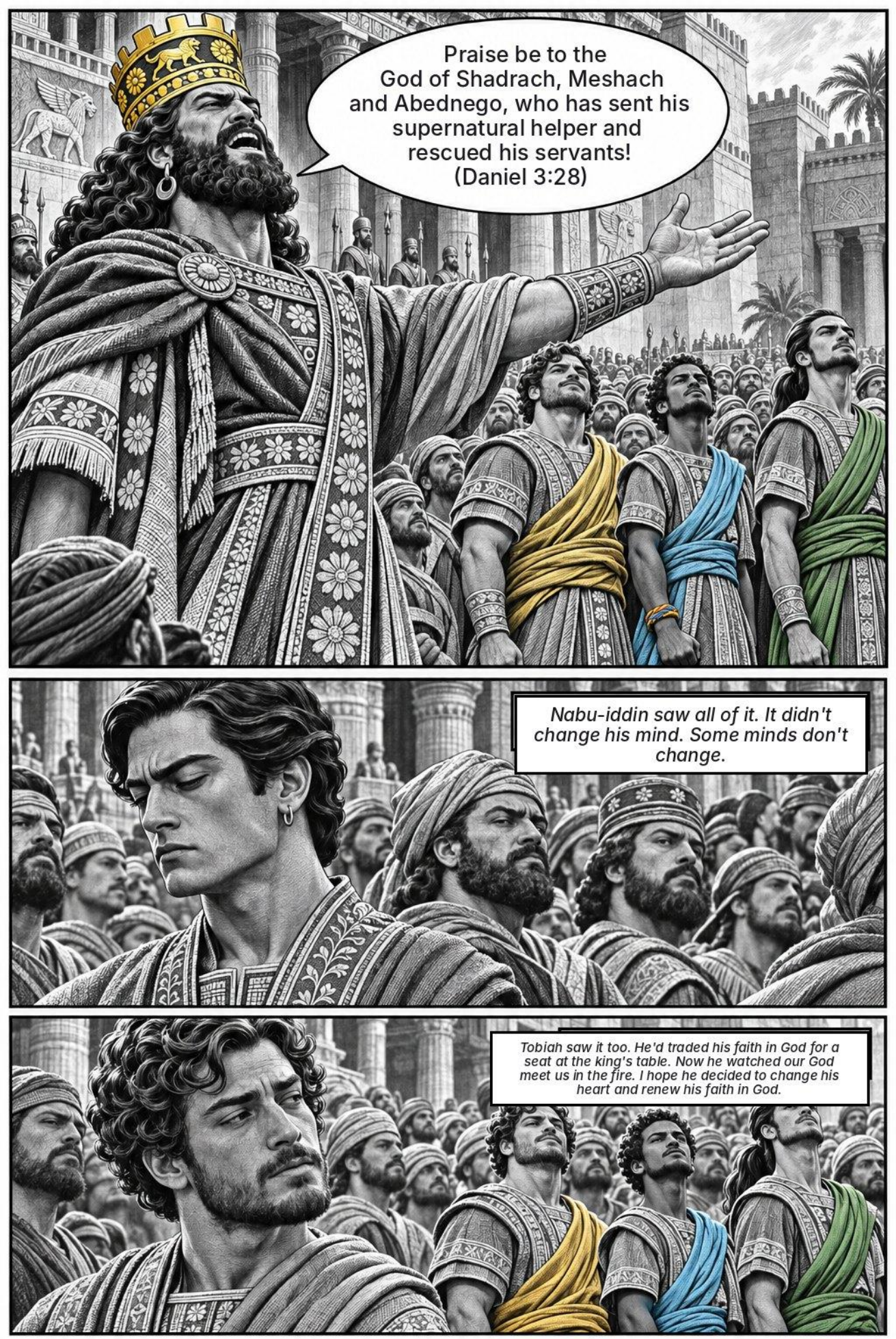

Where did that come from?
I still don't know. Fifteen years of practice, I think. If you make the right small choices every day, the big ones are easier.
The king's attitude toward them changed. (Daniel 3:19)


Heat the furnace seven times hotter!
Whatever happens in that fire...
...we face it together. All three of us.


The fire was so hot it killed the soldiers who threw us in.
Then the king saw something impossible...


Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?
Look! Four men, unbound and unharmed! The fourth looks like someone from heaven! (Daniel 3:25)
God didn't keep us out of the fire. He came in with us.


Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out!
Not a hair burned. Not even the smell of smoke. (Daniel 3:27)
The only things that burned up were the ropes that tied us.


Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his supernatural helper and rescued his servants! (Daniel 3:28)
Nabu-iddin saw all of it. It didn't change his mind. Some minds don't change.
Tobiah saw it too. He'd traded his faith in God for a seat at the king's table. Now he watched our God meet us in the fire. I hope he decided to change his heart and renew his faith in God.

TALK IT OVER · CHAPTER 4

The Fire

Read it: Daniel 3

God doesn't always keep us out of the fire. He gets in it with us.

REAL LIFE

Standing up for what's right usually isn't dramatic. It's not joining the pile-on. It's telling the truth when a lie would be easier. It's saying no and getting left out. And sometimes the fire isn't something you chose: a sickness, a funeral, a divorce, depression. "Even if he does not" doesn't mean it won't hurt. It means you won't be in there alone.

TALK IT OVER

1. Where is everyone around you compromising (bowing down to an idol) right now? What would it cost you not to?
2. Have you ever prayed hard for something and God didn't come through the way you wanted? What did that do to your faith?
3. What fire (tough time) are you, or someone you love, in right now? Have you seen God anywhere in it?

> *"When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze."* **Isaiah 43:2**

TRY IT THIS WEEK

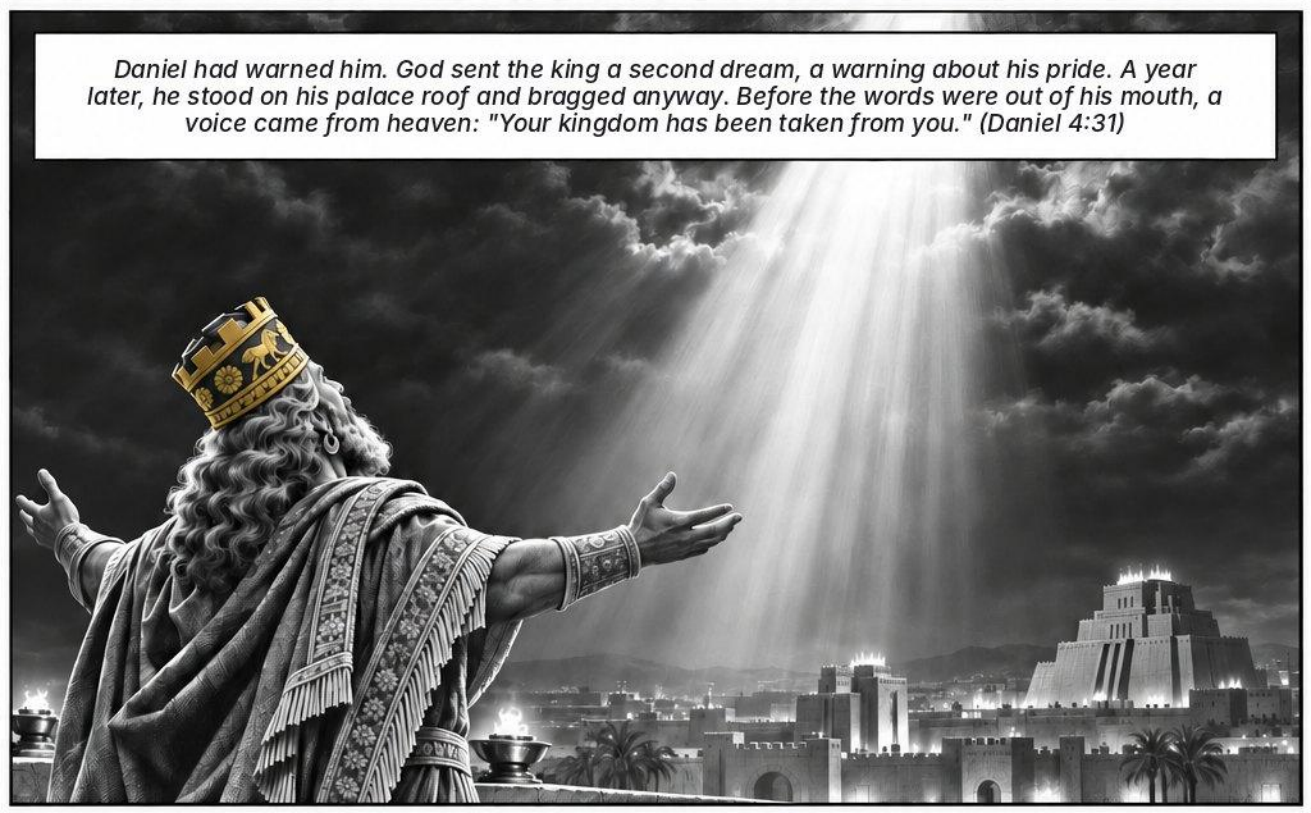
Think of someone who's in a fire right now. Show up. Sit with them, text them, bring food. You don't need the right words.

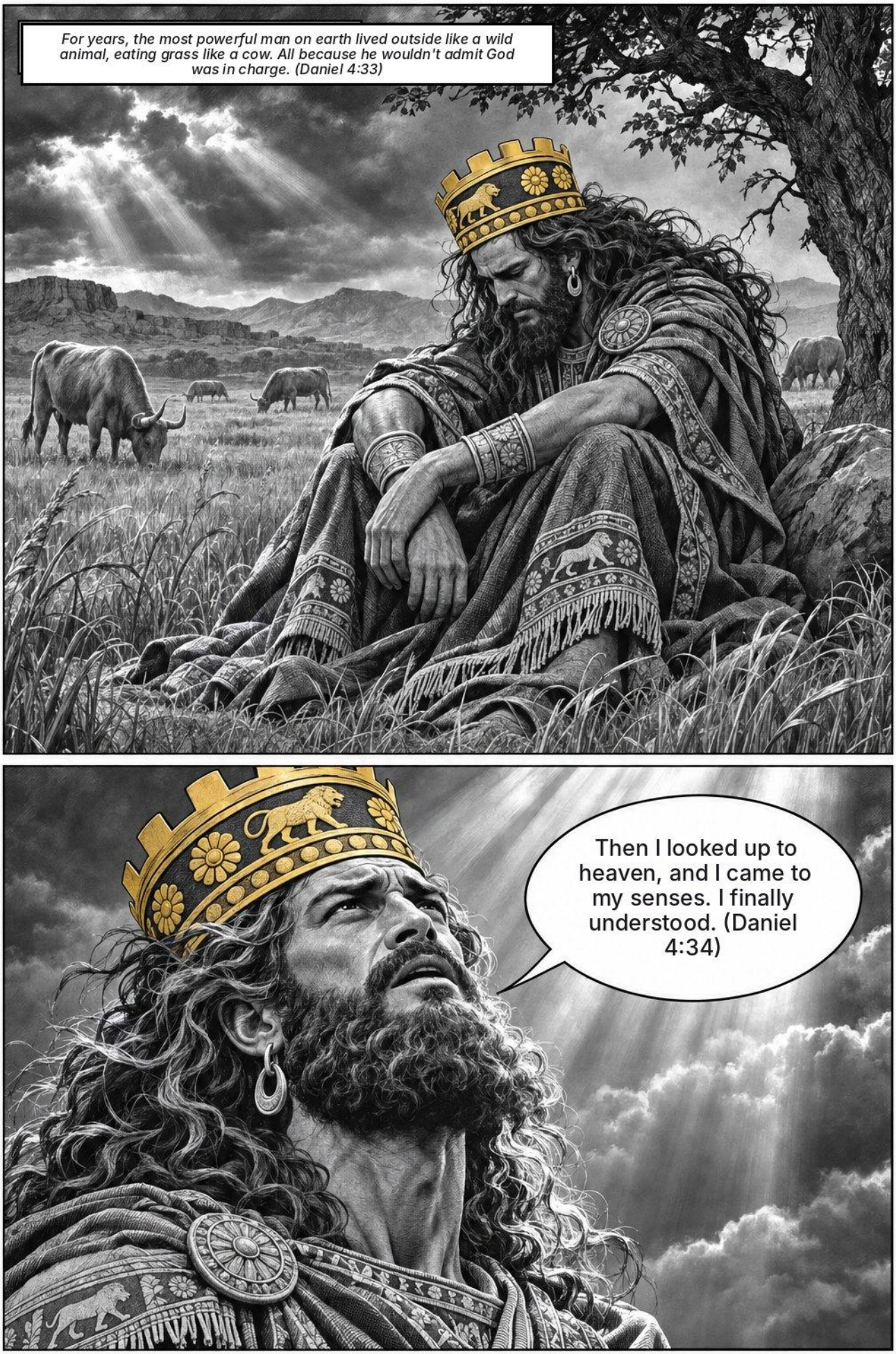
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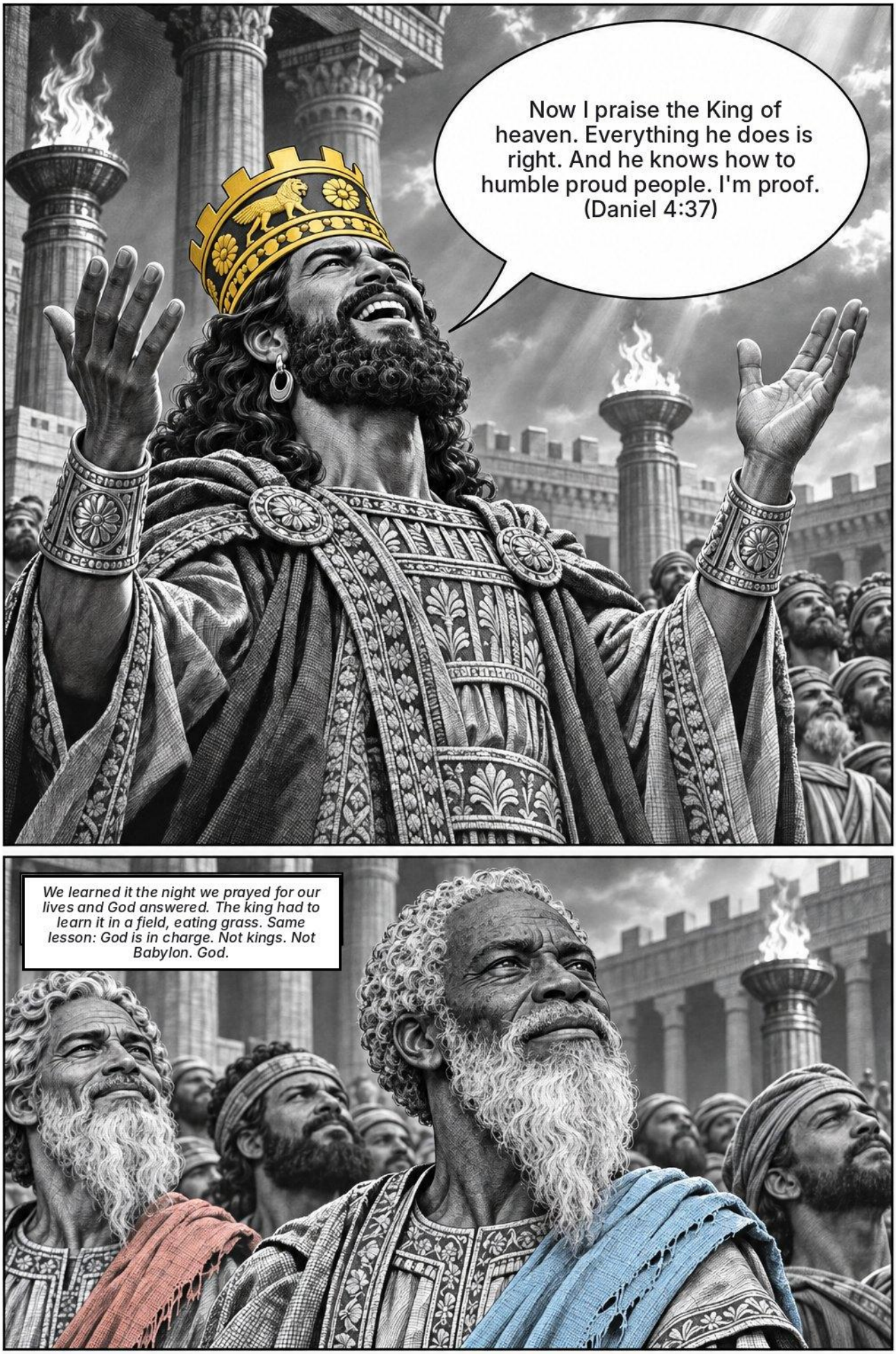
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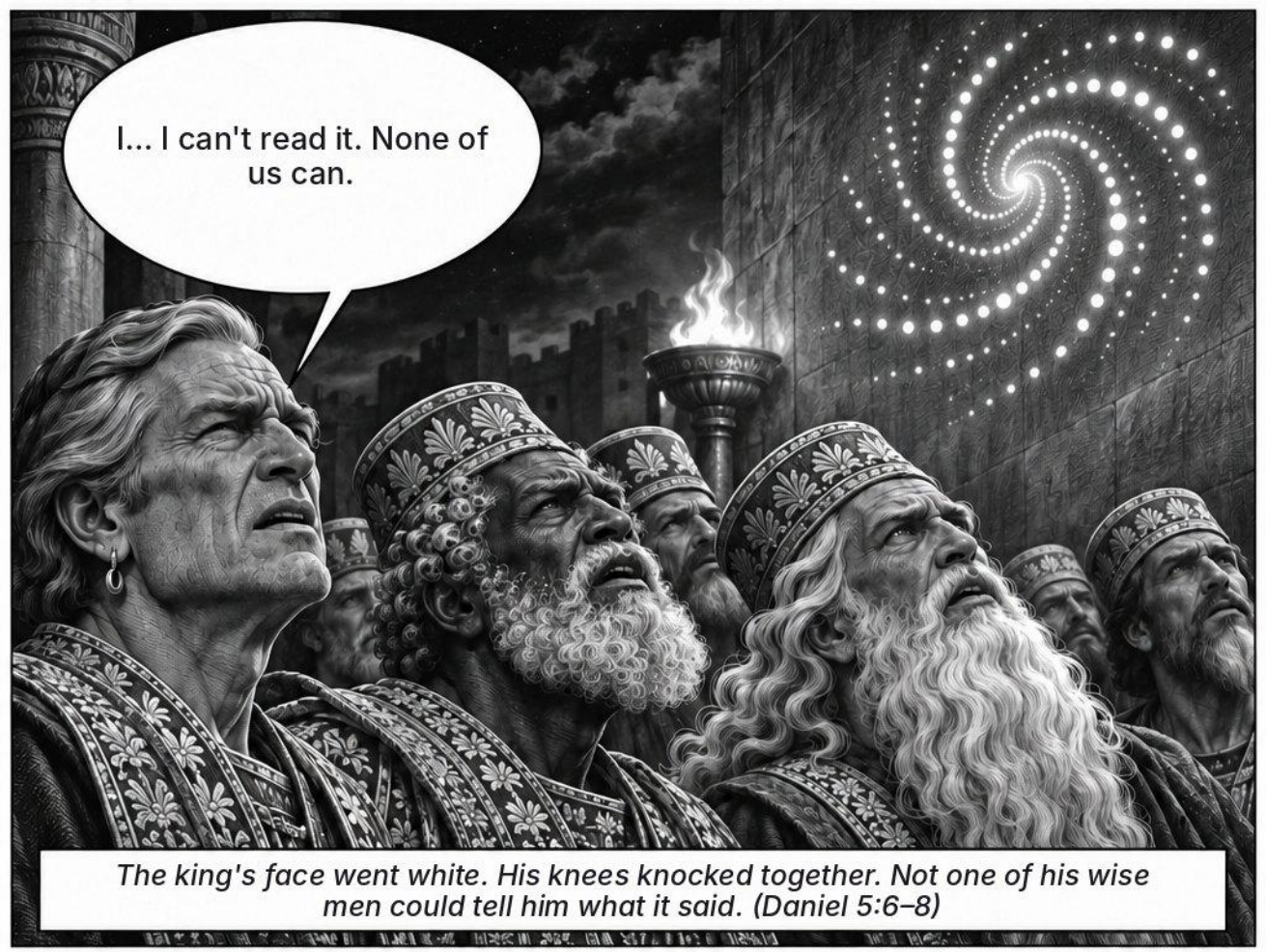
Daniel had warned him. God sent the king a second dream, a warning about his pride. A year later, he stood on his palace roof and bragged anyway. Before the words were out of his mouth, a voice came from heaven: "Your kingdom has been taken from you." (Daniel 4:31)



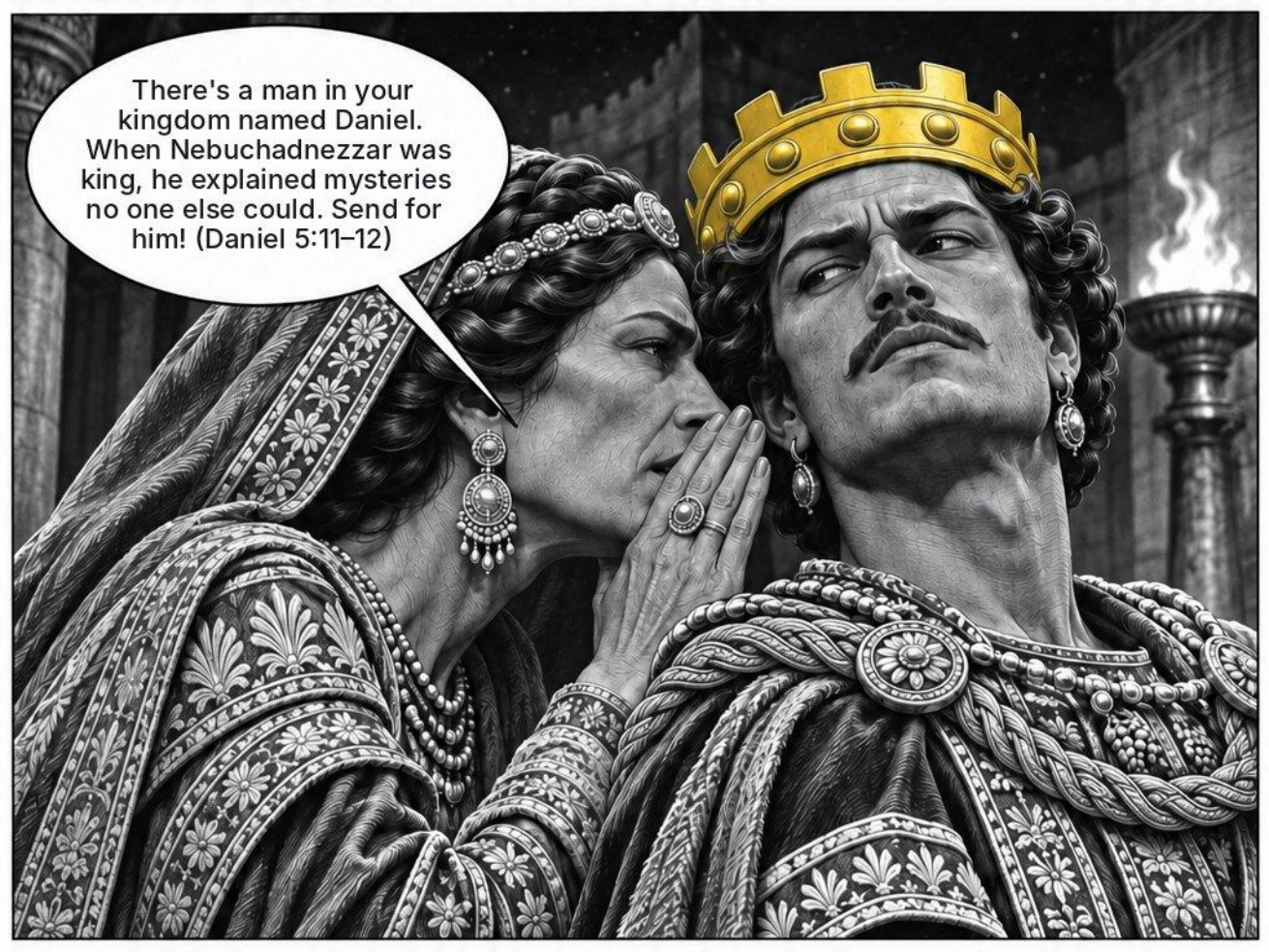

For years, the most powerful man on earth lived outside like a wild animal, eating grass like a cow. All because he wouldn't admit God was in charge. (Daniel 4:33)
Then I looked up to heaven, and I came to my senses. I finally understood. (Daniel 4:34)

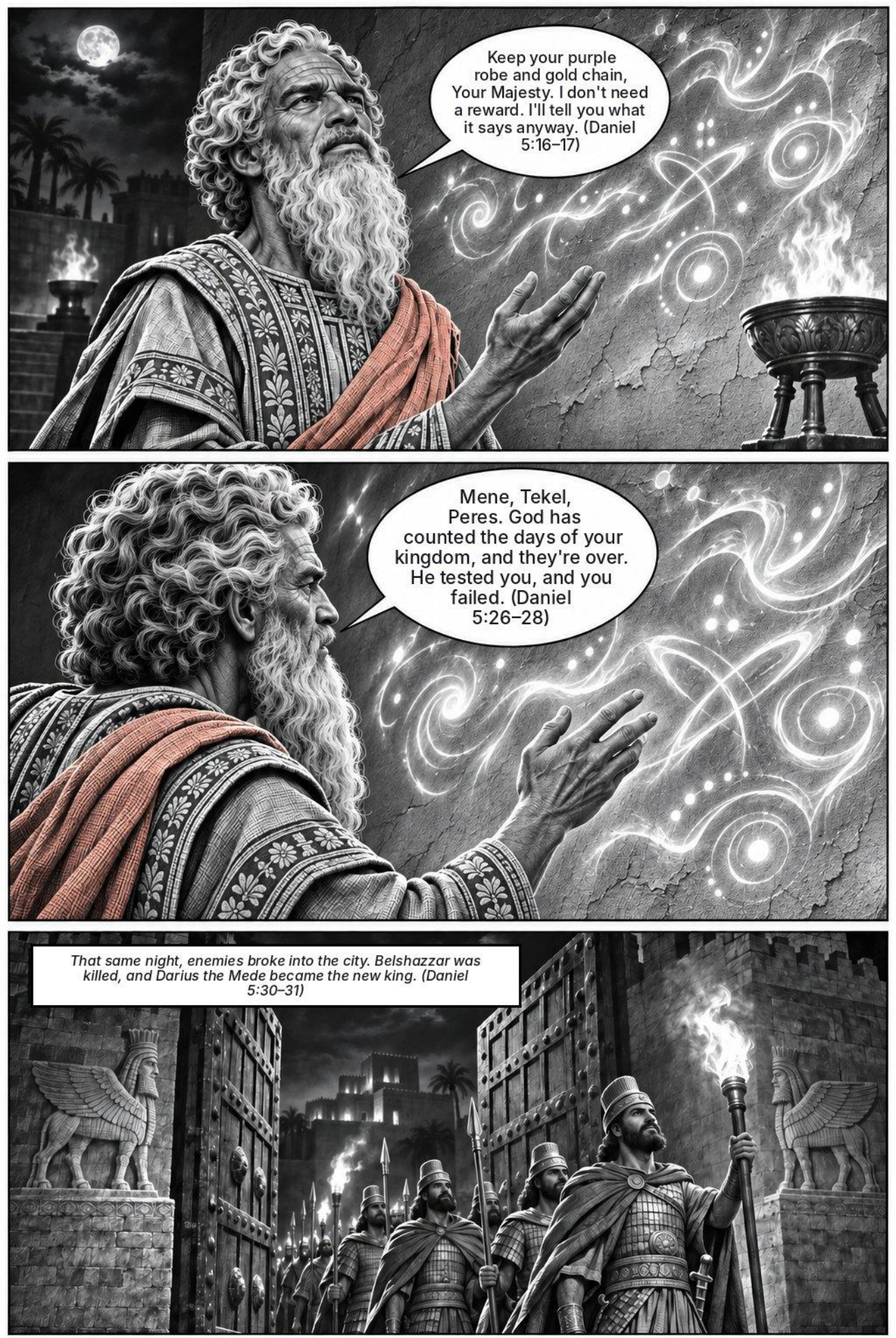

Now I praise the King of heaven. Everything he does is right. And he knows how to humble proud people. I'm proof. (Daniel 4:37)
We learned it the night we prayed for our lives and God answered. The king had to learn it in a field, eating grass. Same lesson: God is in charge. Not kings. Not Babylon. God.

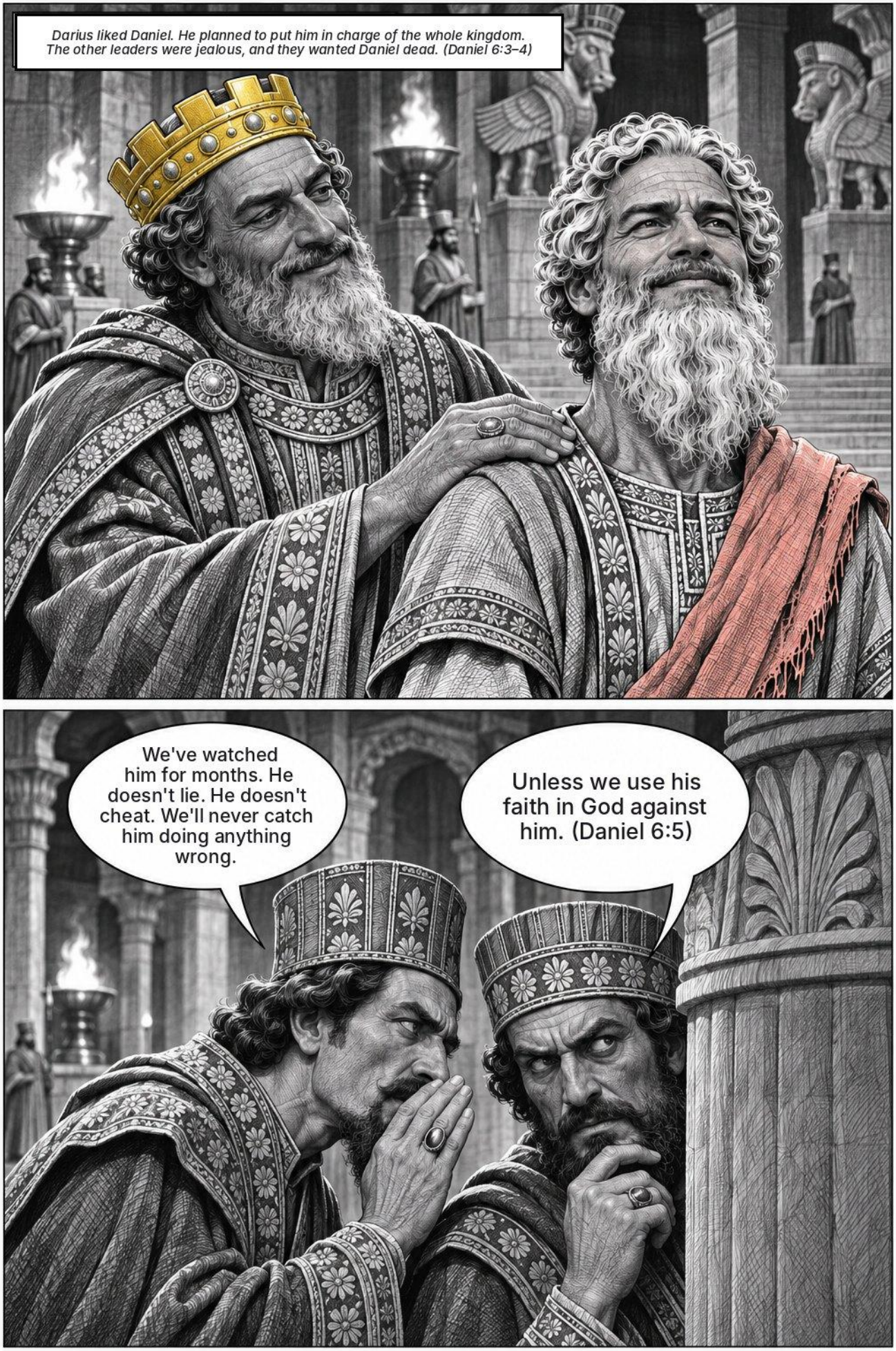

Years later, Babylon had a new king, Belshazzar. He threw a wild party for a thousand of his nobles, and he wanted to show off. (Daniel 5:1–2)
He drank from the gold cups stolen from God's temple, mocking the one true God and praising his idols. (Daniel 5:2–4)
Then, in the middle of the party, the fingers of a human hand appeared and started writing on the wall. (Daniel 5:5)

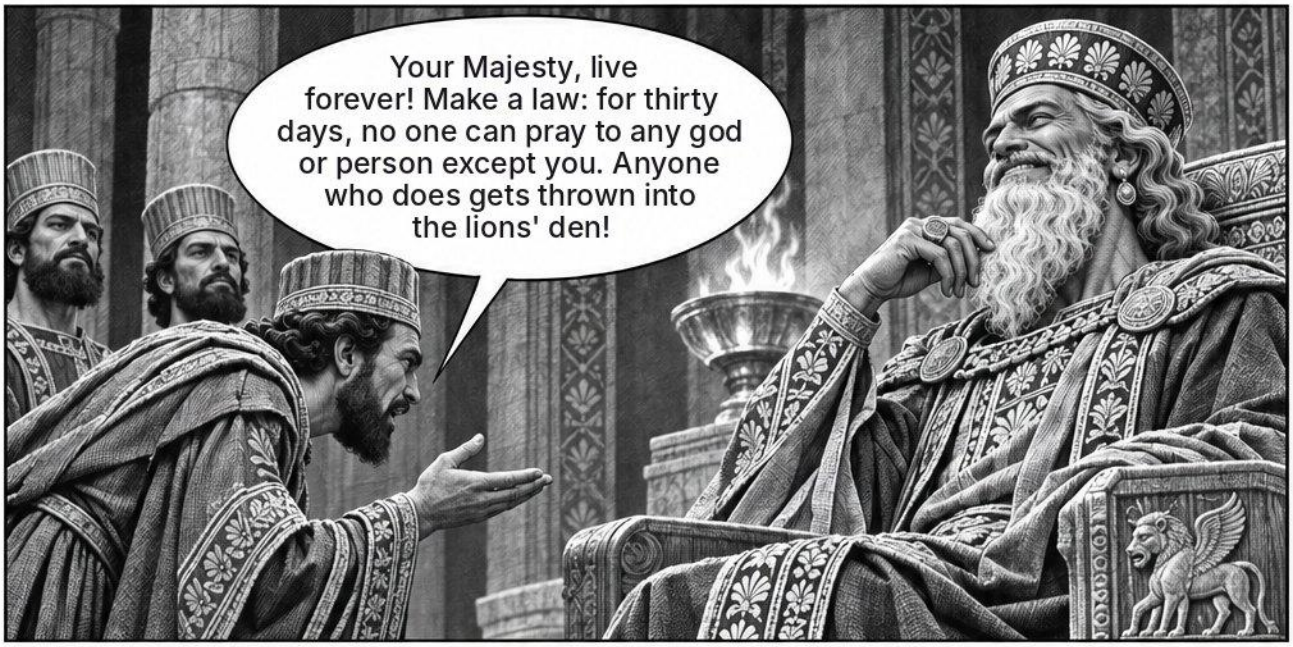


The king's face went white. His knees knocked together. Not one of his wise men could tell him what it said. (Daniel 5:6–8)




Keep your purple robe and gold chain, Your Majesty. I don't need a reward. I'll tell you what it says anyway. (Daniel 5:16–17)
Mene, Tekel, Peres. God has counted the days of your kingdom, and they're over. He tested you, and you failed. (Daniel 5:26–28)
That same night, enemies broke into the city. Belshazzar was killed, and Darius the Mede became the new king. (Daniel 5:30–31)


Darius liked Daniel. He planned to put him in charge of the whole kingdom. The other leaders were jealous, and they wanted Daniel dead. (Daniel 6:3–4)
We've watched him for months. He doesn't lie. He doesn't cheat. We'll never catch him doing anything wrong.
Unless we use his faith in God against him. (Daniel 6:5)

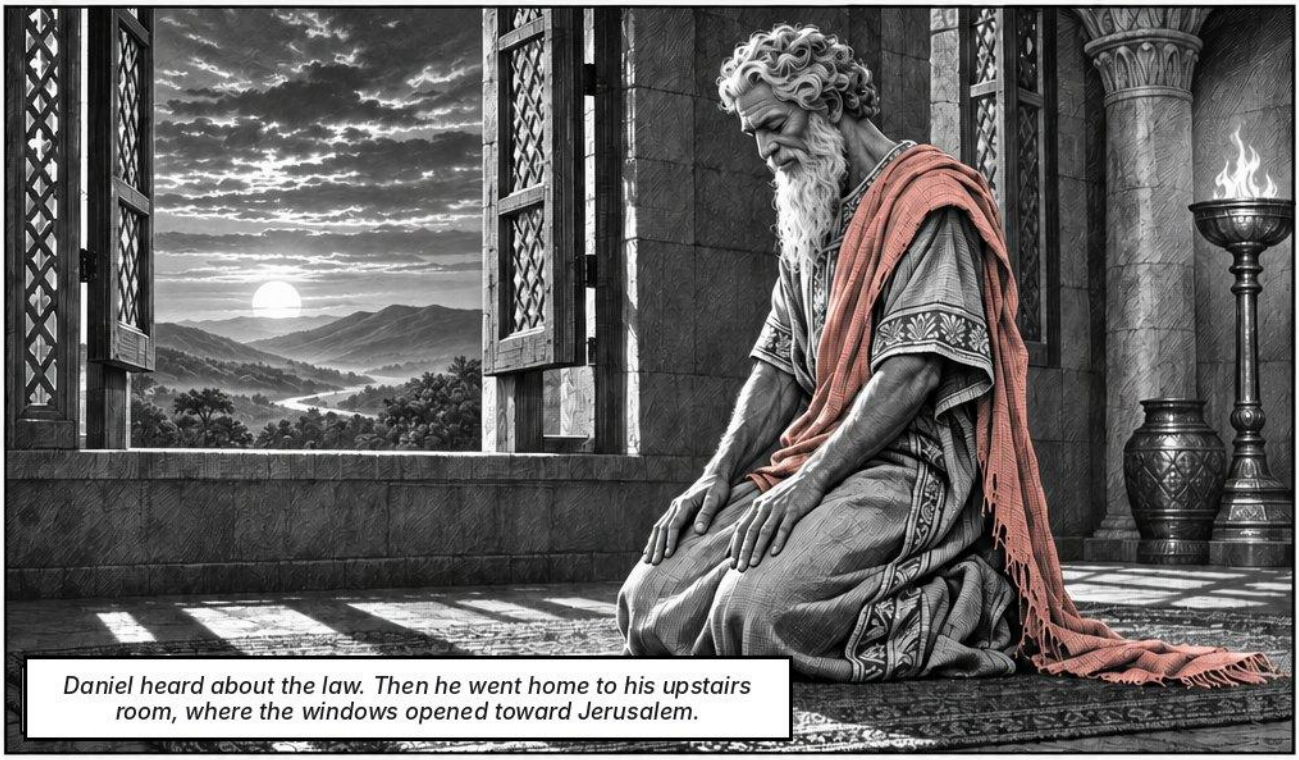


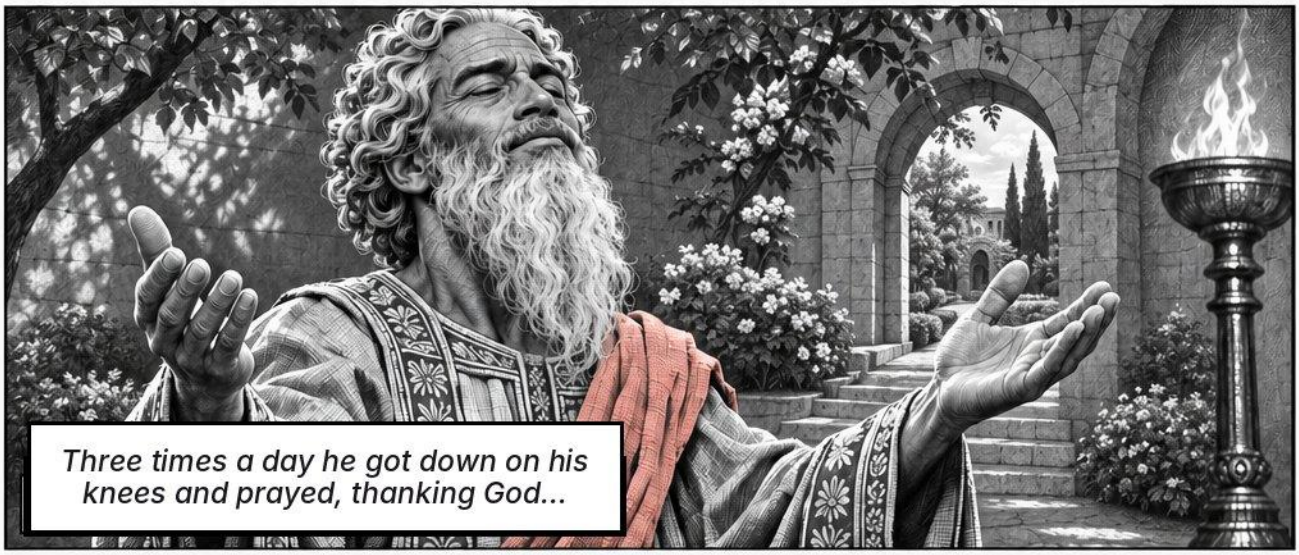


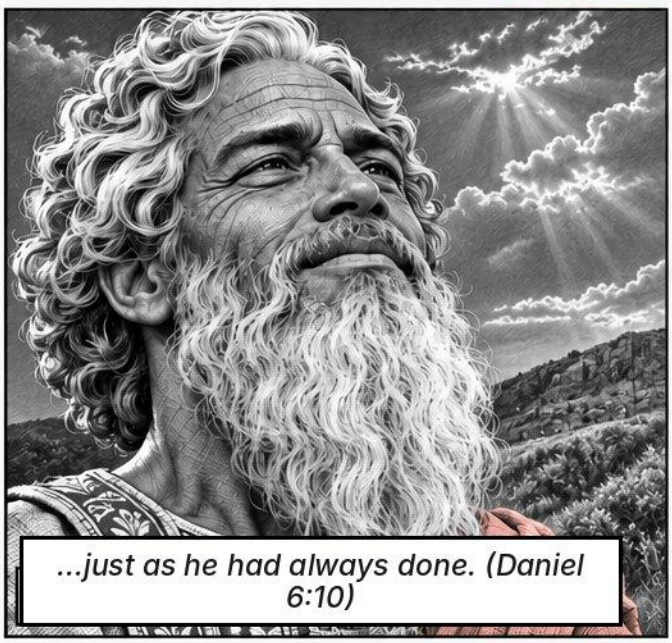
The king signed it. And once the king signed a law, it could never be changed. Not even by the king. (Daniel 6:8–9)

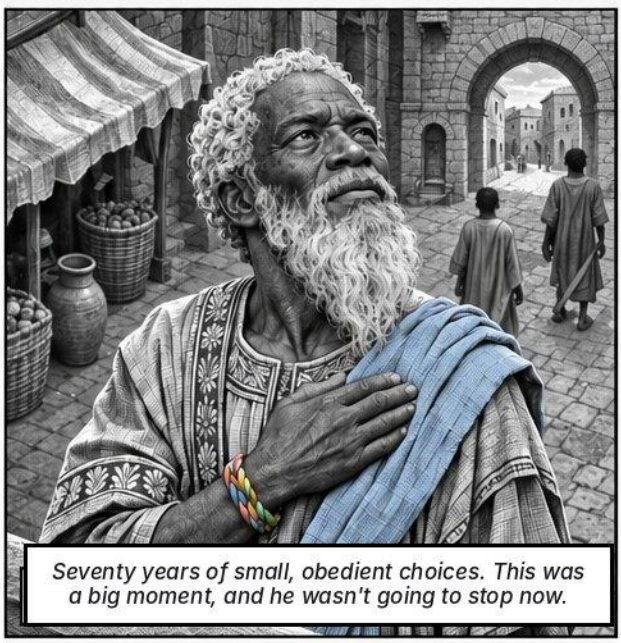


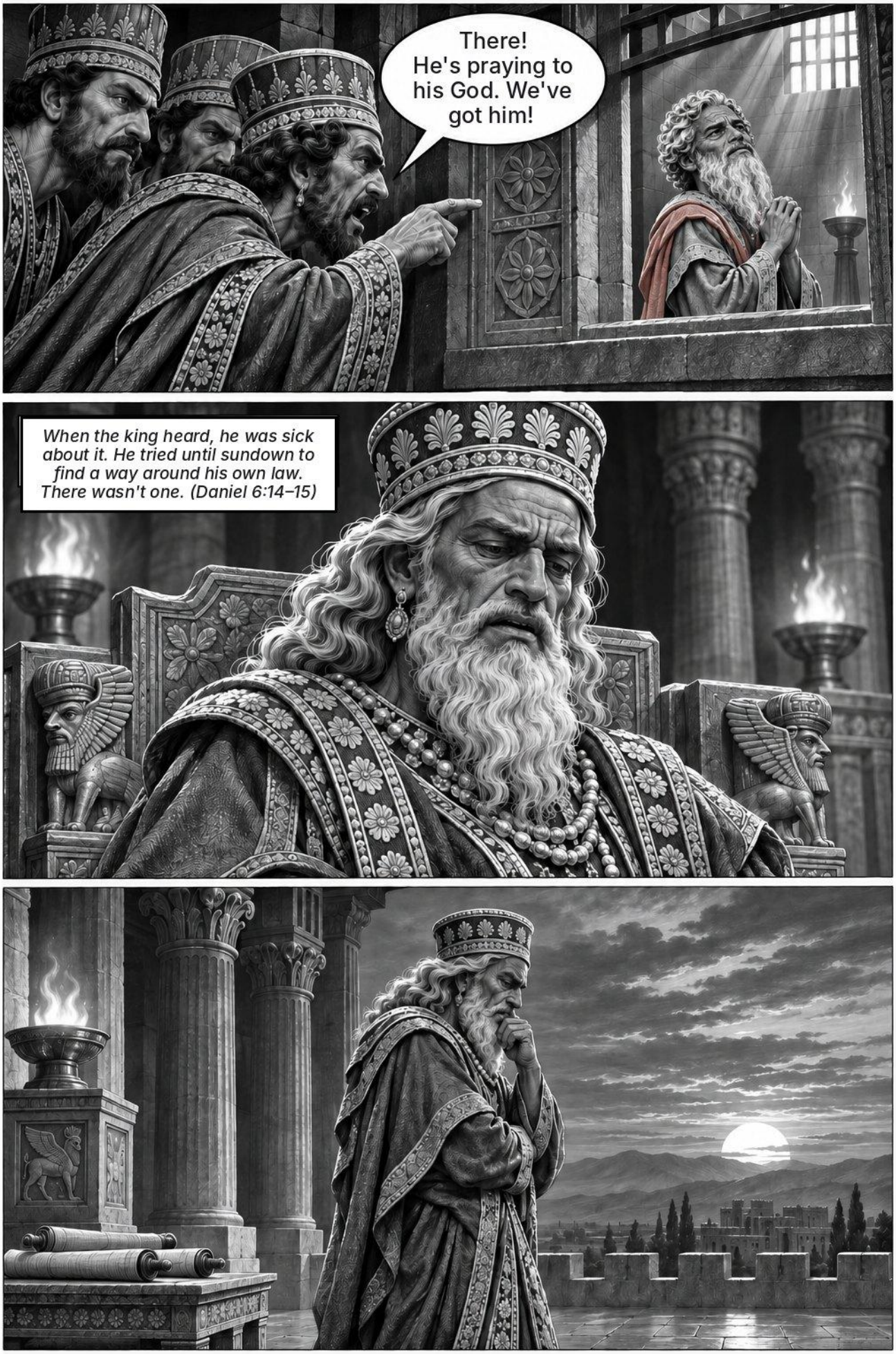
I read the law, and I started to panic. It was a trap, set for Daniel. I knew he would never stop praying to God.

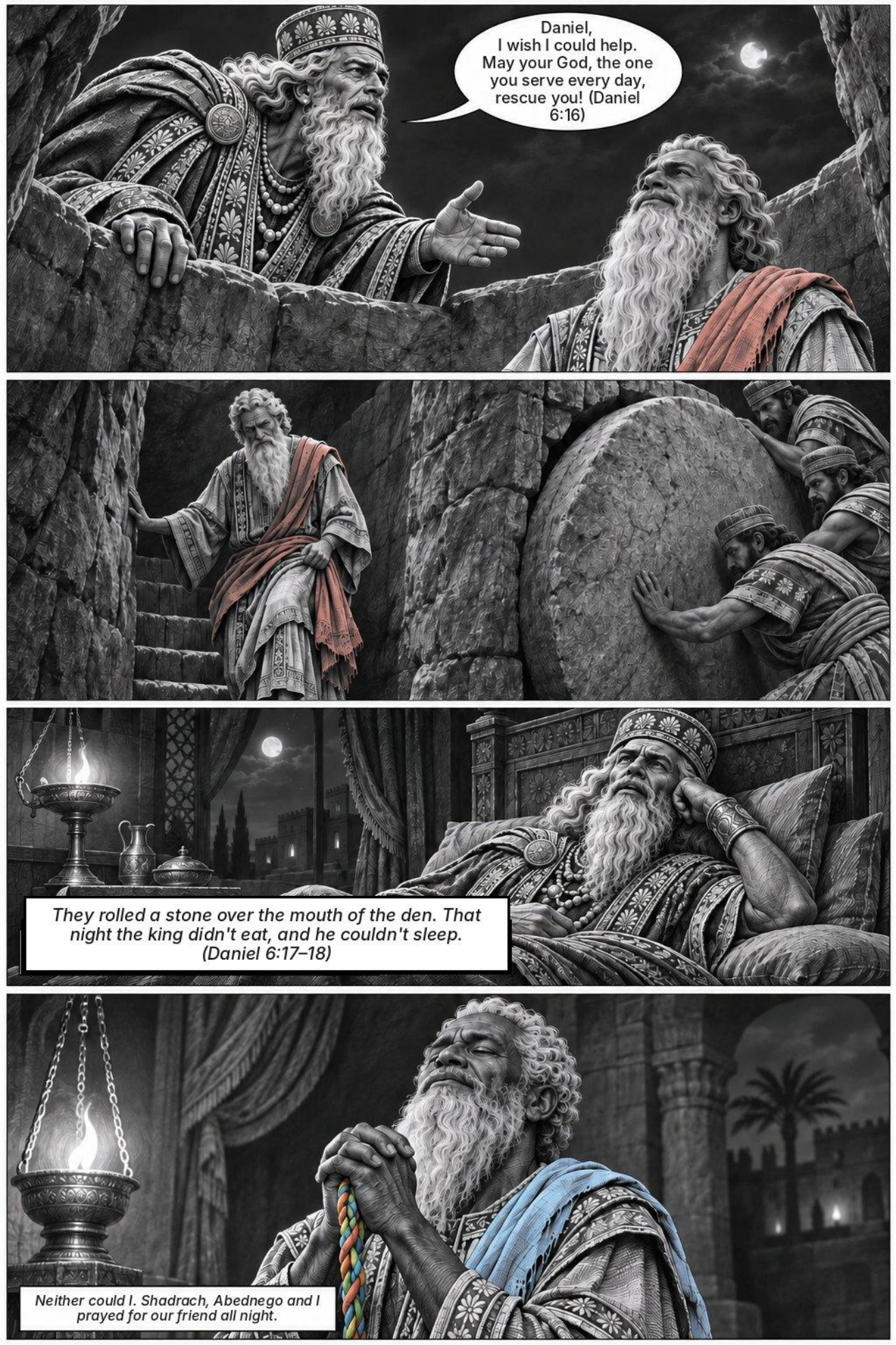

Daniel heard about the law. Then he went home to his upstairs room, where the windows opened toward Jerusalem.

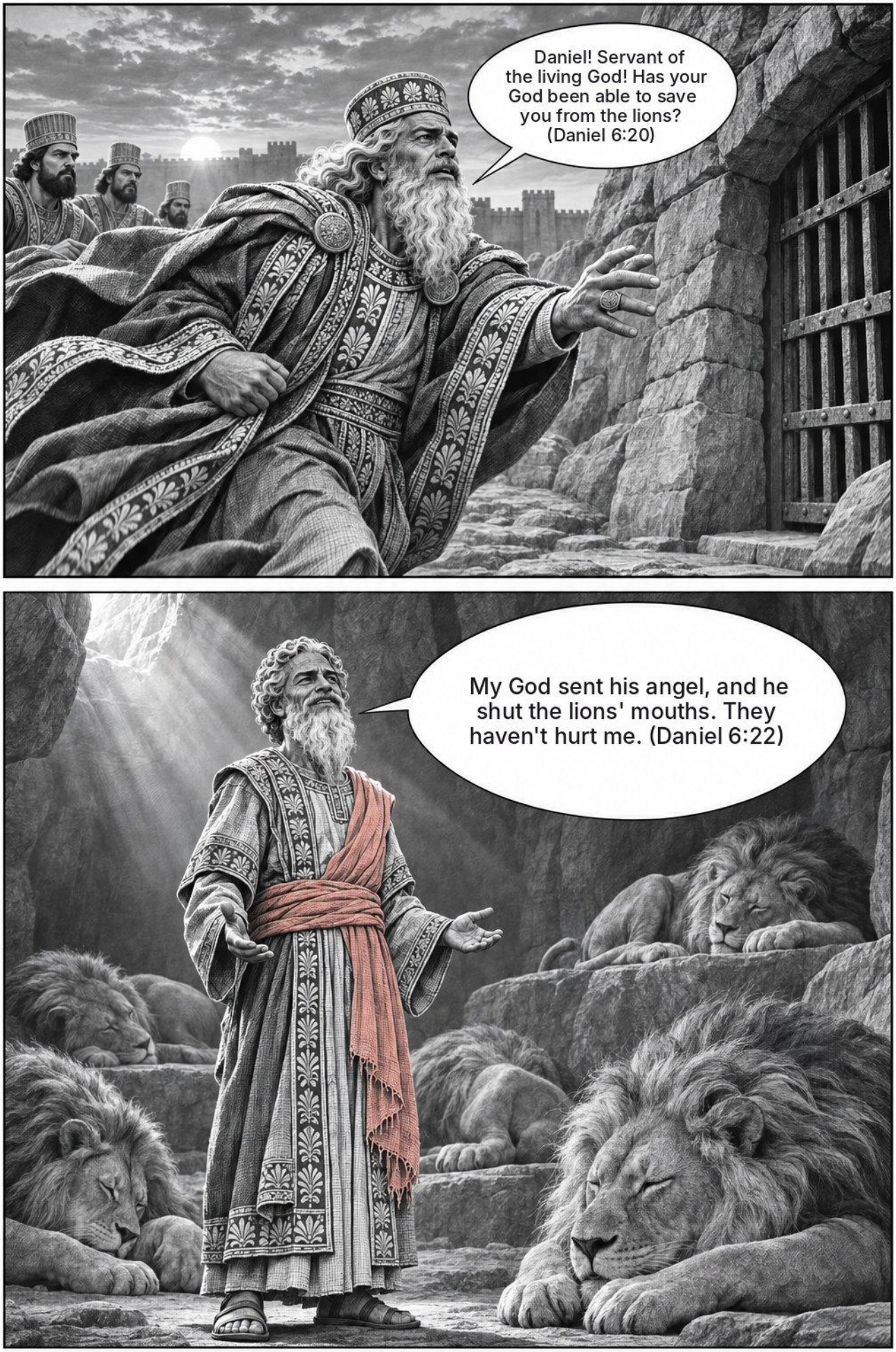

Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, thanking God...

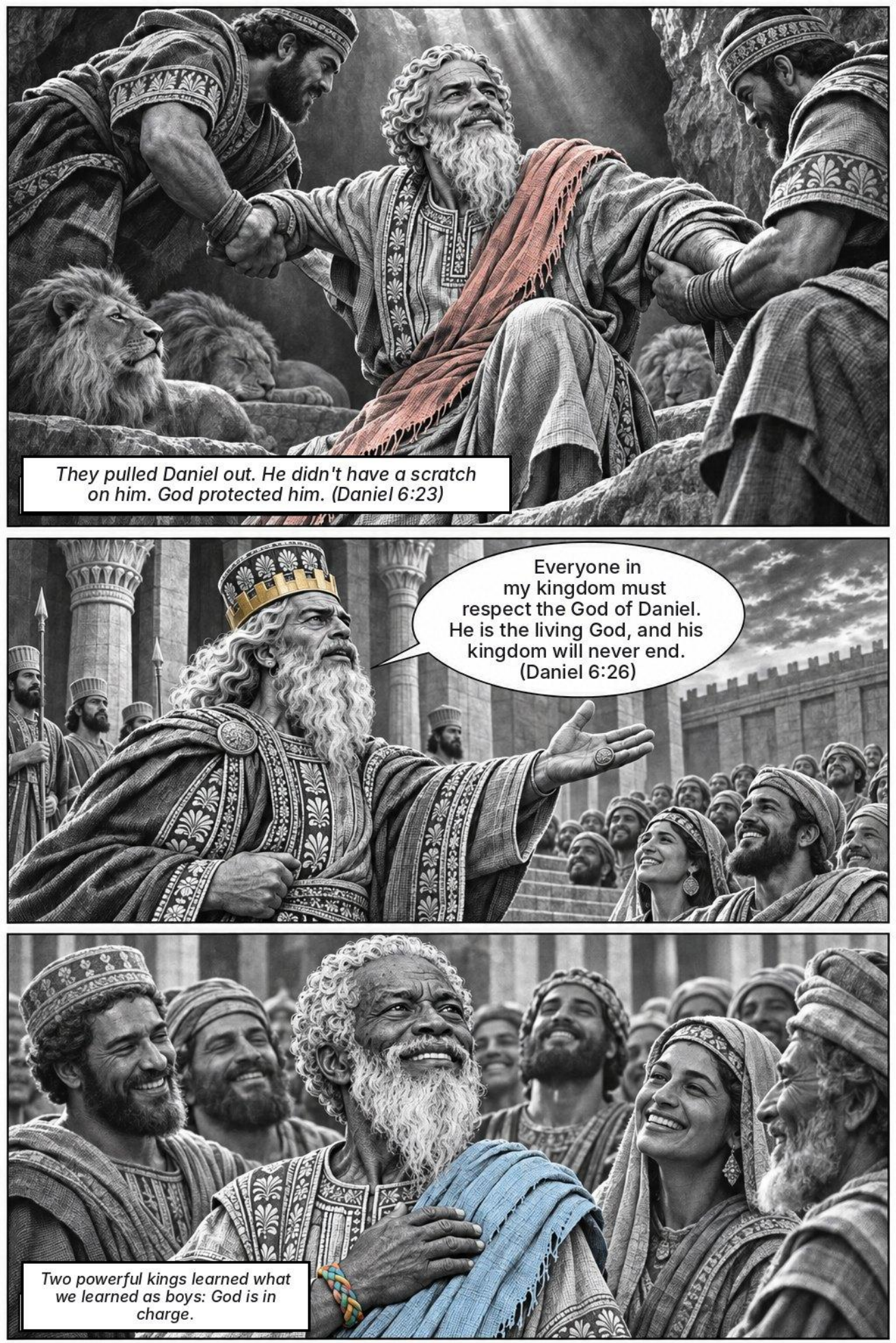

...just as he had always done. (Daniel 6:10)

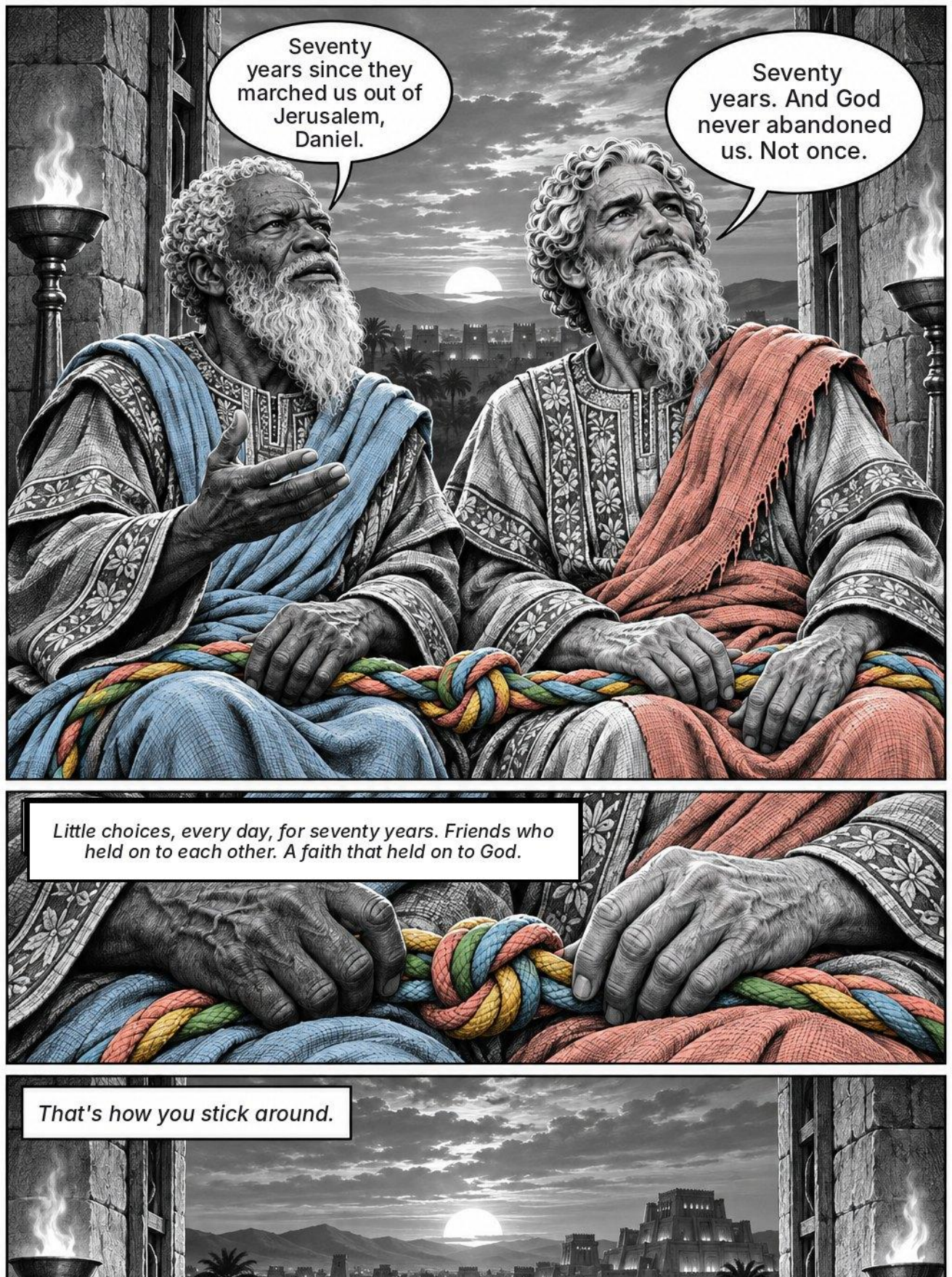

Seventy years of small, obedient choices. This was a big moment, and he wasn't going to stop now.


There! He's praying to his God. We've got him!
When the king heard, he was sick about it. He tried until sundown to find a way around his own law. There wasn't one. (Daniel 6:14–15)


Daniel, I wish I could help. May your God, the one you serve every day, rescue you! (Daniel 6:16)
They rolled a stone over the mouth of the den. That night the king didn't eat, and he couldn't sleep. (Daniel 6:17–18)
Neither could I. Shadrach, Abednego and I prayed for our friend all night.


Daniel! Servant of the living God! Has your God been able to save you from the lions? (Daniel 6:20)
My God sent his angel, and he shut the lions' mouths. They haven't hurt me. (Daniel 6:22)


They pulled Daniel out. He didn't have a scratch on him. God protected him. (Daniel 6:23)
Everyone in my kingdom must respect the God of Daniel. He is the living God, and his kingdom will never end. (Daniel 6:26)
Two powerful kings learned what we learned as boys: God is in charge.


Seventy years since they marched us out of Jerusalem, Daniel.
Seventy years. And God never abandoned us. Not once.
Little choices, every day, for seventy years. Friends who held on to each other. A faith that held on to God.
That's how you stick around.

TALK IT OVER · CHAPTER 5

Just As Before

Read it: Daniel 4–6

Little things, every day, for a lifetime. That's how faith lasts.

REAL LIFE

Most people who walk away from faith after high school don't leave because of one big argument, disappointment or crisis. They drift. The good habits stop and the bad ones start to take over. Then the friend group changes. Then the faith fades. Daniel was in his eighties and still opening his window to pray three times a day, "just as he had done before." The crisis of the lions' den didn't cause that faithful pattern. Seventy years of ordinary days and right choices did.

TALK IT OVER

1. If someone looked at your screen time for a week, what would they say you care about most?
2. Picture yourself five years from now. Is your faith still standing? What has to happen between now and then for that to be true?
3. Who's someone further along in faith you could learn from? Who's someone younger in their faith who's watching you? How can you take responsibility for helping them grow?

> *"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."* **Galatians 6:9**

TRY IT THIS WEEK

Pick one small thing (praying at the same time every day, reading a chapter of Luke, coffee with a friend who follows Jesus) and do it seven days straight.

Carrying something heavy? Talk to someone you trust. In the U.S. you can call or text 988 any time, day or night.

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FOR GROUP LEADERS

Using this book with a group

Five chapters, five Talk It Over pages

Use one chapter a week alongside the series, or read the whole book in one sitting. Encourage your group to read the matching chapter, or the whole Sticking Around book (free, based on Daniel 1–6), too. Let people answer honestly; don't rush to fix. These stories touch real pain: pressure, loneliness, anxiety, grief, doubt and family breakups. Real life is complicated. Sometimes the solutions are not simple. Keep the conversation going. Be willing to stick around.

A SIMPLE PLAN FOR EACH CHAPTER

1. **Read** the chapter on your own or together (about 15 minutes).
2. **Read the Bible passage** listed on the Talk It Over page.
3. **Talk it over.** Start with question 1. Let silence sit. You don't need every answer.
4. **Try it this week.** Ask about it the next time you meet.

> *You don't have to be an expert. Show up, listen well, and point people back to the God who stays with them in the fire.*

Carrying something heavy? Talk to someone you trust. In the U.S. you can call or text 988 any time, day or night.

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KEEP GOING

The story behind the story

Sticking Around started as a sermon series by Pastor Rick Melick.

Watch the series

All 11 Sticking Around messages on video

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Read the book

Sticking Around: Faithfulness in Babylon, free on phone, tablet or e-book

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