

Message #4
Daniel

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A KING'S DREAM:
NIGHTMARE, OR HISTORY IN THE MAKING
DANIEL 2:1-30, 46-49

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

The story is told in several sources about a bricklayer working in the French West Indies. He was hurt on the job and supposedly sent the following letter to his boss, requesting sick leave: **“I arrived at the job after the storm, checked the building out and saw that the top needed repairs. I rigged a hoist and a boom, attached the rope to a barrel and pulled bricks to the top. When I pulled the barrel to the top, I secured the rope at the bottom. After repairing the building, I went back to fill the barrel with the leftover bricks. I went down and released the rope to lower the bricks, and the barrel was heavier than I and jerked me off the ground. I decided to hang on.**

“Halfway up, I met the barrel coming down and received a blow to the shoulder. I hung on and went to the top, where I hit my head on the boom and caught my fingers in the pulley. In the meantime, the barrel hit the ground and burst open, throwing bricks all over. This made the barrel lighter than I, and I started down at high speed. Halfway down, I met the barrel coming up and received a blow to my shins. I continued down and fell upon the bricks, receiving cuts and bruises. At this time I must have lost my presence of mind, because I let go of the rope and the barrel came down and hit me on the head. I respectfully request sick leave.”

Sometimes life can seem like the experience which this bricklayer had. We make a mistake, and we experience trials and tribulations. We do the right thing, and we still experience trials and tribulations. Perhaps life has been that kind of challenge for some of you.

Daniel and his three friends may have felt like that bricklayer at times. These four teenagers were godly young men. (PROJECTOR ON--- BABYLONIAN EMPIRE) Yet the Babylonians had dragged them away from their family and friends in Jerusalem and taken them away to a foreign country where they were forced to participate in a training program for government service. Their faith was threatened by some of the elements in this program.

When they found out that they were to eat food offered to idols, they decided that they had to refuse. So they tactfully resisted, and God blessed their faithfulness. Now in #2, probably shortly after they have graduated, they find themselves threatened with execution, even though they have done nothing wrong.

But as Daniel and his friends were to discover many times, and as we need to learn, difficult situations are not just problems, they are often cleverly disguised opportunities for God to be glorified and for us to grow in faith. We shall see that today in #2.

I.

Initially, however, in vv. 1-13, it seems that A DREAM BECOMES A NIGHTMARE. (I. A DREAM BECOMES A NIGHTMARE) Verse 1 says, **“In the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his spirit was troubled, and his sleep left him.”**

Some suggest that these dreams and the events that follow happened while Daniel and friends were still in their training program. You might remember that the young Jewish men were taken captive at the same time that Nebuchadnezzar’s father died, and that Nebuchadnezzar returned to Babylon to claim the throne. You might also remember that #1 v. 5 said that the training program for the Jewish boys would be three years long. Now in #2 v. 1 it says that it is only the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. So it would initially seem that Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego have not graduated yet.

I suspect that they had graduated, however. The first year in which a king came to the throne in Babylonian culture was known as the accession year. The first twelve months of his reign were known as the year in which the king acceded to the throne. The second twelve months of his reign were called the first year of the king’s rule. It is similar to the way in which we figure birthdays. A child is not considered to be one year old until he begins his second year of life. So in v. 1 when it says that it was the second year of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign, it was actually what we would call the third year of his reign. It was in this third year that he began having these dreams.

At the end of this story we find that Daniel and his three friends are given high positions in government by King Nebuchadnezzar. At the end of #1 Nebuchadnezzar gives them an oral exam to test how well they have done in completing their three year educational program. This testing at the end of their educational program would not make sense if the story in #2 had already taken place and they had been given high positions in government.

Also in #2 v. 16 the king allows Daniel to come in and talk to him. Such easy access to the king seems more likely if Nebuchadnezzar had already tested Daniel and been impressed with him, and if Daniel had already entered government service. So the events of #2 do come after #1, and the text is giving us a true, chronological account.

That text tells us that King Nebuchadnezzar had a problem. His problem becomes a problem for his advisors. He has dreams that disturb him. Perhaps it is the same dream that is repeated again and again. So he calls in his advisors to help him understand this dream.

These advisors were learned men who supposedly had ability to foretell, and even control, future events. Some of them were astrologers; some were priests of the Babylonian gods; and many were involved in occult practices. One of the things that these high government advisors typically did was to interpret dreams. In fact we know that they even had manuals which listed various symbols in dreams and what they were thought to represent.

But Nebuchadnezzar gives a new twist to his request. He wants the advisors to tell him what his dream is. According to v. 5 **“The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, ‘The word from me is firm: if you do not make known to me the dream and its interpretation, you shall be torn limb from limb, and your houses shall be laid in ruins.’”** Anyone who is able to tell him what his dream was will get big rewards. The situation has suddenly become very serious for these advisors.

Nebuchadnezzar’s approach to the situation was a bit unusual. Normally rulers didn’t want to offend the priests of the gods, and undoubtedly many of these advisors were priests. To offend the priests was to risk incurring the wrath of the gods. But perhaps Nebuchadnezzar was suspicious of the loyalty of these advisors who may have been inherited from his father. Nebuchadnezzar was a young man, and perhaps he was not yet sold on the value of having all of these bureaucrats hanging around and living off of the government payroll. Perhaps they had more power than he liked. Perhaps he had doubts about the quality of their predictions and advice.

These religious advisors were a staple of the royal court of many governments throughout the Ancient Near East. Sometimes their advice was suspect. Six centuries later the Roman Emperor Claudius, who ruled the empire in the time of the Apostle Paul, was suspicious of the advisors in his cabinet. In 52 AD he kicked out all of the astrologers from the city of Rome and the surrounding area. He did not trust them.

Nebuchadnezzar here lays down the law, and these wise men make an interesting admission in v. 11: **“The thing that the king asks is difficult, and no one can show it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh.”** These wise men were supposed to be in touch with the gods. They claimed to have an “in” with them. But their own spiritual bankruptcy becomes apparent.

This makes Nebuchadnezzar more angry. So he orders all of the wise men of Babylon to be killed. Daniel and his friends fall into the category of wise men. The king’s dream has thus turned into a potential nightmare for all of them.

II .

In vv. 14-18 DANIEL AND HIS FRIENDS SEEK TIME FOR AN ANSWER FROM GOD. (II. DANIEL AND HIS FRIENDS SEEK...) **“Then Daniel replied with prudence and discretion to Arioch, the captain of the king's guard, who had gone out to kill the wise men of Babylon...”** Daniel could have been thinking, “All I get is problems in life. I’m taken away from my family and my home. I try to do what is right. I eat my veggies. Now I’m going to get killed. Woe is me.”

But there doesn't seem to be any despair here--- no panic, no frustration. He finds out what is going on and then goes to the king. Arioch had been sent to kill the wise men, or at least to round them up so that they could be executed, but he allows Daniel to go to the king. Wise men and priests of the gods were regarded with respect by most people in the realm, and Arioch may well have been reluctant to be involved in killing them for fear of earning the wrath of the gods.

So Daniel gets in to see the king. The fact that he not only gets in to see Nebuchadnezzar but also talks him into granting a stay of execution suggests that Daniel had already won a certain degree of respect from the king. Daniel's boldness in asking for more time may have resulted from a supernatural ability that he had already experienced and used to interpret dreams. But now he has to also describe what the dream was.

So Daniel finds out what is going on, he boldly takes action to get a reprieve, and then he gets his friends together for a prayer meeting. Together they ask God for compassion so that they might know the mystery. When God's people are faced with a desperate situation, it is always good to set aside time to pray.

III.

In vv. 19 and following we find that GOD PRODUCES POSITIVE RESULTS. (III GOD PRODUCES POSITIVE RESULTS) Soon after the prayer meeting, perhaps that same night, God reveals the mystery to Daniel. **"Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night."** What is the first thing that he does? He praises God. The Book of Psalms is not the only place in the Bible where we find psalms.

Verses 20-23 actually comprise a psalm of praise. Daniel praises God, especially for His wisdom and His power: **"Blessed be the name of God forever and ever,/ to whom belong wisdom and might.**

21 He changes times and seasons;

he removes kings and sets up kings;

he gives wisdom to the wise

and knowledge to those who have understanding;

22 he reveals deep and hidden things;

he knows what is in the darkness,

and the light dwells with him.

23 To you, O God of my fathers,/ I give thanks and praise,

for you have given me wisdom and might,

and have now made known to me what we asked of you,

for you have made known to us the king's matter."

Perhaps the next morning Daniel goes to Arioch and asks to see the king. Notice that he also asks that the other wise men be spared. These other guys were pagan priests, diviners, and sorcerers. The Torah, the Old Testament Law, said that such people should be killed. Daniel could have called them all fakes and scoundrels. He might have

allowed them to be killed. His position in government and that of his friends would probably have been improved. Potential rivals and enemies would have been eliminated.

Daniel did not call for the elimination of these other characters. I suspect that Daniel recognized that the demands of the Torah did not directly apply to the Babylonian government. Babylon had a different status before the Lord than did Israel, which had been given special promises by God. Israel was to be a theocracy. Babylon was not.

Some Christians today fail to understand that distinction. There is a group of Christians today who are called Christian Reconstructionists. They seek to have our civil government eventually make Biblical laws the laws of the country. Some would go so far as to require that people be executed for adultery, that church attendance be required, and that political leaders be Christians. These people fail to recognize the distinction that Daniel recognized between Biblical laws that applied to Israel and Biblical principles of justice that apply to any secular government.

Arioch brings Daniel before the king. In so doing he tries to claim credit by implying that he was responsible for finding Daniel. His desire for credit and recognition stands in contrast to Daniel's humility. Daniel could have claimed credit for himself. He could have been tempted to think that the ability to know and understand the king's dream was because of some inherent ability or merit in himself. But he gives God the credit and the glory. Look at v. 30: **"But as for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because of any wisdom that I have more than all the living, but in order that the interpretation may be made known to the king, and that you may know the thoughts of your mind."** Daniel was a humble man.

In vv. 31-45 Daniel describes the dream and interprets it for him. We are going to skip over that dream and the prophecy involved in it. We will come back to it at a later time. Skip, then, to the last four verses of the chapter. Obviously Daniel's description of the dream is accurate. That description and a believable interpretation cause Nebuchadnezzar to fall down before Daniel and pay homage to him. According to v. 46, **"Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face and paid homage to Daniel, and commanded that an offering and incense be offered up to him."** It seems as though he is worshipping Daniel.

The Jewish historian Josephus described a similar kind of incident involving Alexander the Great. When this famous Greek leader captured Jerusalem, he went to the Jewish high priest and bowed down before him. One of his generals asked him why he was doing that when usually people had to bow before him. Alexander supposedly replied, **"It was not before him that I prostrated myself but the God of whom he has the honor to be high priest."**

That seems to be the kind of thing involved here. For in v. 47 the king praises not Daniel but the God of Daniel. In vv. 48 & 49 we see the honor that is given to Daniel and to his friends. Daniel becomes head, or satrap, over the province of Babylon, and he is made

chief over all the wise men of Babylon. His friends are made key administrators over that province.

Earlier I pointed out that in 605 BC, in the first of three invasions of Judah, the Babylonians had taken Daniel and his friends captive. Little damage was done in that invasion, and only a few captives were taken.

Now it is three years later, and Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego find themselves in high positions in the Babylonian government. Five years after the events of #2, in 597 BC, there will be another invasion of Judah. This time the damage and the injuries will be much greater. This time thousands of Jews will be taken into captivity to Babylon. But when they get to Babylon, whom are they going to find in high positions in government? Four Jewish boys by the names of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. The captive Jews will have friends in high places. God is providentially at work to soften the severity of His punishment. God exercises compassion even when He punishes His people.

IV.

Consider then THE LESSONS FOR US (IV. THE LESSONS FOR US) in this story. The first general question for which the Book of Daniel provides answers is this: How should we live in an often godless society?

A.

Our lesson today teaches us that WE NEED TO PRAY. (IV. THE LESSONS A. WE NEED TO PRAY) These four young Jewish men were faced with a life threatening situation, and they knew that the only thing that was going to save them from death was God's intervention. So they prayed, and God answered. As a result of the answer that God provided, God was glorified. Their problem became an opportunity--- an opportunity for God to be glorified, for their own people to be helped, and for them to grow in faith.

In the dark days of 1940 it surely seemed as though godlessness was prevailing in Europe. Hitler's forces were driving the British and their allies to the shores of the English Channel. (DUNKIRK 1) Almost a half million soldiers ended up in Dunkirk on the French coast. Destruction appeared to be at hand. On May 23 newspaper editors, King George and various political leaders called for a national day of prayer to be held on Sunday, May 26.

One day later Adolf Hitler strangely ordered his troops to stop their advance, to the dismay of even his own generals. Two days later the British gathered to pray. Church attendance skyrocketed. A huge crowd gathered at Westminster Abbey, during which people prayed that God might spare their husbands, brothers, fathers, and sons.

That evening an order was issued to attempt an evacuation of Dunkirk. (DUNKIRK 2) Every possible vessel was sent across the Channel with orders to rescue as many men as possible before the Germans wiped them out. Inexplicably the enemy seemed to be content to shell and bomb Dunkirk from a distance, although a fog that set in on the Channel and the coast made it difficult for the Nazi planes to see their targets. The waters of the English Channel remained remarkably calm for the next several days. On May 29, 47,000 were rescued; on May 30, 53,000; on May 31, 68,000; on June 1, 64,000. In all 336,000 men found their way safely to the British Isles.

Winston Churchill called what happened a **“miracle of deliverance.”** The *Daily Telegraph* described the thankfulness of **“officers and men who have seen the hand of God... delivering them from the hand of a mighty foe”** (June 8, 1940) The Archbishop of Canterbury declared, **“Why has God preserved us? We may, and we must, believe that He who has preserved our land in a manner so marvelous, has a purpose for us to share in the preparation for His perfect kingdom.”**

In the face of national and world challenges, in the face of individual challenges that come across our path in the midst of an often godless society we need to remember to pray.

Before the pandemic we had as many as twelve people participate in our weekly prayer meetings. We have less than that now. We would love to have more people join us. If you are serious about prayer, let us know, and we will set you up on Zoom. We meet on Wednesdays at 11 AM.

B.1.

The second basic question that the Book of Daniel answers is this: Is God worthy of our trust? There are at least three applications, or lessons, in #2 that relate to this question. The first is that GOD REWARDS THE FAITHFULNESS OF HIS PEOPLE. (IV. THE LESSONS... A. B. 1. GOD REWARDS THE...) Daniel went out on a limb for his God. He boldly went into the presence of the king of Babylon and told him that if he was to be given a little more time, he would tell about the dream and its interpretation. Daniel was faithful to testify about his faith in the God of Israel and the God of heaven. The Lord in turn was faithful to reward Daniel and his friends by having them promoted to high positions in government. As we also learned two weeks ago, we need to be faithful, because God rewards the faithfulness of His people.

2.

Consider a second application. WE NEED TO TRUST GOD. (IV. A. B. 1. 2. WE NEED TO TRUST GOD) King Nebuchadnezzar saw the evidence that Daniel's God was the true God. In v. 47 he even acknowledged Him as a god of gods and a lord of kings. Yet, at this point at least, Nebuchadnezzar fails to trust the Lord God as his God. As a polytheist, he probably just added YHWH, the God of Israel, to the list of gods which he recognized as existing in the universe, although he recognized Him as being pretty powerful. All too often a similar thing happens today.

(FRED HOYLE) Sir Fred Hoyle, who died in 2001, was a mathematician, astronomer and one of Great Britain's foremost scientists. Chandra Wickramasinghe (CHANDRA WICKRAMASINGHE) was Professor of Applied Mathematics and Astronomy at University College in Cardiff, Wales. Now he teaches at a university in his home country of Sri Lanka. Both of them were professed evolutionists and atheists. Some years ago these colleagues decided to use their scientific backgrounds to calculate the probability of life evolving on earth in five billion years. (PROJECTOR OFF)

They were astounded at the results of their own calculations. They came to the conclusion that the probability was one chance out of 10 to the 40,000 power, which is a 10 followed by 40,000 zeroes. They then calculated the probability of life evolving anywhere in the universe. They assumed that the universe contains 100 billion galaxies of 100 billion stars each, that each star has a planet similar to the earth and that the universe is 20 billion years old. Again, for all practical purposes, the probability of life evolving was nil. Hoyle said that the probability of an evolutionary origin of life is equal to the probability of a tornado sweeping through a junkyard and assembling a Boeing 747.

The *London Daily Express* (August 14, 1981) described the results of these two scientists' study. According to their report the scientists both said that wherever life exists in the universe it was created supernaturally. Not only did Hoyle reject Darwin's idea of the evolution of life, but he also maintained that the Big Bang theory of the origin of the universe was scientifically indefensible.

Both of these men seemed to recognize that there was a god, but they didn't put their trust in Him. They were like Nebuchadnezzar. Perhaps there are some here today who are like that. Perhaps you are convinced that there is a god. Perhaps you even believe that Christ was God and that He died for our sins and rose from the dead. Yet you have not trusted Him for your eternal life. If you were to die today, you would be just as far away from heaven as the worst atheist. Your responsibility is to trust Jesus Christ as your Savior. Your intellectual recognition of God and Jesus will be of no benefit until, and unless, you decide to believe in them.

For us who are already Christians, who are part of the family of God, the challenge is to grow in our trust of Him in the face of the trials of life that come our way. (PROJECTOR ON--- WILFRED GRENFELL) Sir Wilfred Grenfell was a medical missionary to Labrador and Newfoundland at the turn of the 20th century. One day he got word that someone was sick and needed his help. He took his dog team out. They went out across a frozen ocean bay, and, after a while, he found himself stranded on an ocean ice pack. Grenfell decided to kill his dogs and make a coat or a blanket out of the skins. Then he hoisted a distress flag.

When rescuers came, they found him asleep. They asked him why he was sleeping. He replied, **"There was nothing to fear. I had done all I could. Certainly I had done all that was humanly possible. The rest lay in God's hands. What then was there to**

be afraid of?” That is the balanced picture of trusting God. He took what actions he could. He did what seemed wise. Then he trusted God for the rest.

3.

Is God worthy of our trust? Yes, He is. He rewards the faithfulness of His people. As a result of knowing that truth, we are responsible to trust Him. The last application is that WE SHOULD PRAISE GOD. (IV. A. B. 1. 2. 3. WE SHOULD PRAISE GOD) Look again at vv. 20-23. This is Daniel's prayer of praise. Notice his emphasis upon the wisdom and the power of God: **“Blessed be the name of God forever and ever,**

to whom belong wisdom and might.

21 He changes times and seasons;

he removes kings and sets up kings;

he gives wisdom to the wise

and knowledge to those who have understanding;

22 he reveals deep and hidden things;

he knows what is in the darkness,

and the light dwells with him.

23 To you, O God of my fathers,

I give thanks and praise,

for you have given me wisdom and might,

and have now made known to me what we asked of you,

for you have made known to us the king's matter.”

As we close today, I would like to give you an opportunity to praise God in prayer. Praise toward God primarily involves acknowledging the characteristics, or attributes, of God. Especially keep in mind God's wisdom and power. Perhaps you have recently glimpsed in a fresh way something about God's wisdom. Praise Him for that. Perhaps you have recently seen God's power in answering prayer, or in changing someone's life, perhaps your own. Let's have several of you lead out in prayer as we close, praising God for who He is.