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UNRAVELING THE FUTURE STUDIES IN THE BOOK OF DANIEL

Your Kingdom or God's Kingdom? Daniel 2:1-49

I. OBSERVATION & INTERPRETATION

A. Nebuchadnezzar Conceals His Dream 2:1-13

1 In the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his mind was troubled and he could not sleep. 2 So the king summoned the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers to tell him what he had dreamed. When they came in and stood before the king, 3 he said to them, "I have had a dream that troubles me and I want to know what it means." 4 Then the astrologers answered the king in Aramaic, "O king, live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will interpret it." 5 The king replied to the astrologers, "This is what I have firmly decided: If you do not tell me what my dream was and interpret it, I will have you cut into pieces and your houses turned into piles of rubble. 6 But if you tell me the dream and explain it, you will receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor. So tell me the dream and interpret it for me." 7 Once more they replied, "Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will interpret it." 8 Then the king answered, "I am certain that you are trying to gain time, because you realize that this is what I have firmly decided: 9 If you do not tell me the dream, there is just one penalty for you. You have conspired to tell me misleading and wicked things, hoping the situation will change. So then, tell me the dream, and I will know that you can interpret it for me." 10 The astrologers answered the king, "There is not a man on earth who can do what the king asks! No king, however great and mighty, has ever asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or astrologer. 11 What the king asks is too difficult. No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among men." 12 This made the king so angry and furious that he ordered the execution of all the wise men of Babylon. 13 So the decree was issued to put the wise men to death, and men were sent to look for Daniel and his friends to put them to death.

Dreams are not uncommon as vehicles in God's revelation to men. We must admit that very little is known about the way the brain functions during the time a person is asleep. Dreams seem to be part of the process by which the human mind sorts out impressions and emotions that accumulated, sometimes over a period of years. Dreams can take us back into our childhood and make people appear who have long since died or disappeared from our life. In our dreams we tend to mix scenes and persons in a way that defies logic. A common concept about dreams is that they cannot be relied upon and that they are not supposed to make sense.

In western culture, dreams are seldom considered to have any concrete value, except perhaps for psychiatrists or psychologists who try to help their patients sort out their warped emotions. In other cultures, dreams are often considered to be meaningful and much value is placed upon

them. We have heard various stories about non-Christians who saw the person of Jesus Christ in a dream and were told to investigate the claims of Christianity.

God can enter a person's mind and reveal certain events in a dream or a vision.

Nebuchadnezzar considered his dream to be important and when he woke up, we read: "his mind was troubled and he could not sleep." "His mind was troubled" is a strong expression in Hebrew; it conveys the meaning of hammering on an anvil. This reaction put him in the same company with the king of Egypt in the days of Joseph. We read: "In the morning his mind was troubled, so he sent for all the magicians and wise men of Egypt. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but no one could interpret them for him."

The Hebrew word translated "magicians" means "someone who uses horoscopes." Their dabbling in the occult brought them in direct contact with the world of evil spirits. God used their inability by making it into a confrontation with "the gods of Babylon." In the same way, He had confronted and embarrassed the gods of Egypt at the time of the Exodus. God had said to Moses: "I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt." The text does not explain why Daniel and his friends were not summoned in the king's presence together with the others. It could be that only the Babylonians were sent for and the Hebrews were left out at this point. They were, however, automatically included in the group that was marked for execution.

The expression "O king, live forever!" was probably part of court etiquette. We do not read that Daniel ever used these words before Nebuchadnezzar although he addressed King Darius once in that manner when he had survived the night in the lions' den.

The magicians requested naturally that the king would tell them the dream, so they could interpret it. The KJV gives the king's answer: "The thing is gone from me." The NIV renders this: "This is what I have firmly decided." The KJV's reading could be interpreted to mean that Nebuchadnezzar had forgotten the dream. For reasons, not explained in the text, the king linked the reliability of the interpretation of the dream to the description of it. It could be that the king could not remember what he had dreamed or he wanted to test their ability so that they would not just be giving fanciful interpretations.

Some scholars say that the execution of some soothsayers had already been carried out before Arioch came to fetch Daniel and his friends. Others believe that all were to be brought together before the mass execution occurred.

B. God Reveals the Dream 2:14-23

14 When Arioch, the commander of the king's guard, had gone out to put to death the wise men of Babylon, Daniel spoke to him with wisdom and tact. 15 He asked the king's officer, "Why did the king issue such a harsh decree?" Arioch then explained the matter to Daniel. 16 At this, Daniel went in to the king and asked for time, so that he might interpret the dream for him. 17 Then Daniel returned to his house and explained the matter to his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. 18 He urged them to plead for mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that he and his friends might not be executed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. 19 During the night the mystery was revealed to

Daniel in a vision. Then Daniel praised the God of heaven 20 and said: "Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are his. 21 He changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. 22 He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with him. 23 I thank and praise you, O God of my fathers: You have given me wisdom and power, you have made known to me what we asked of you, you have made known to us the dream of the king."

Evidently, Daniel and his friends had been completely unaware of what went on at the court. This proves how fragile the string was that connected them to the king's favor. They could have been killed because of something that happened to someone else and simply because of the king's whim and fancy.

The Septuagint calls Arioch "The chief butcher." To address such a person "with wisdom and tact" as Daniel did shows a great deal of moral courage. When Daniel hears the reason for the order and asks for a stay of execution, Arioch tries to take credit for himself by introducing Daniel to the king as the person who could satisfy his demand. But later, when Daniel goes before the king with the contents of the dream and its explanation, he makes sure to give full credit to God. At this point it must have become clear to this young man that God had things in mind for him and for the Babylonian empire that went well beyond imagination.

When a stay of execution is secured, Daniel goes to his friends to organize a prayer meeting for the purpose of saving their own lives and the lives of all the others in their guild. The names of Daniel's friends in verse 17 are given again in Hebrew. Evidently, they kept on using Hebrew with each other when alone. The use of the Hebrew names gives a touch of intimacy to the relationship these young men enjoyed.

Daniel must have been aware at this point of the spiritual gift God had given him, even before he had the opportunity to exercise it before Nebuchadnezzar. The Lord heard the unanimous prayer of the four young men and the king's dream was revealed to Daniel. Our text states that Nebuchadnezzar's dream was revealed to Daniel "in a vision." The word used is not Hebrew but Aramaic, *chezev*, which is derived from a word, meaning: "sight." The KJV renders it "vision." There has been a good deal of discussion among theologians about the way Nebuchadnezzar's dream was revealed to Daniel. Some believe that Daniel dreamed the same dream and that the Lord subsequently revealed the meaning to him; others think that it came to him as a direct revelation.

Daniel's prayer of thanksgiving has been called "a timeless model." The first and immediate reason for Daniel's outbreak of praise is, of course, the fact that the vision of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, as God gave it to him, saved his life and that of others. The manifestation of God's wisdom is placed in opposition to the wisdom of the magicians and soothsayers who failed to reveal Nebuchadnezzar's dream and explain it. His power is contrasted to the power of this monarch, who was, at that time, considered to be the most powerful man on earth. What Daniel learned as a result of his prayer meeting that night, the king would eventually learn the hard way, namely that his power was delegated and that the glory of his kingdom, however dazzling it may have seemed, was transitory and did not measure up to the glory of God. Verse

21 states: "He changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them." The rise and fall of the empires, which is what the dream is about, is compared to the change of seasons of the year. Even some kingdoms that ruled the earth for several centuries are, in God's eyes, not more than transient seasons.

Daniel's mention of light and darkness indicates that he knew the difference between the source of his own knowledge and that of the other members of his guild. Satan may be able to confuse the human mind with manifestations that resemble the power of God, but the person who knows the Lord and is filled with His Spirit knows the difference. And there is a point at which the devil can no longer compete. Moses and Aaron, at Pharaoh's court, were facing demonic opposition. We read: "So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did just as the LORD commanded. Aaron threw his staff down in front of Pharaoh and his officials, and it became a snake. Pharaoh then summoned wise men and sorcerers, and the Egyptian magicians also did the same things by their secret arts: Each one threw down his staff and it became a snake. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs." But the practitioners of occult power reached their limit at the third plague. We read: "But when the magicians tried to produce gnats by their secret arts, they could not. And the gnats were on men and animals. The magicians said to Pharaoh, 'This is the finger of God.'"

It may be difficult for us to appreciate fully the impact God's revelation to Daniel may have had upon his young soul. He was a man, who had been brought up with the truth that God revealed Himself uniquely in the temple of Jerusalem, above the cover of the Ark of the Covenant. The temple was probably still standing when this first revelation came to Daniel. Later, when he knew the temple had been destroyed and he could only pray in the direction of what had once been, the prospect of fellowship with God must have seemed even bleaker. But during these periods of spiritual uncertainty, God gave ample evidence to this young man that He was very much alive and in control of situations.

The meaning of the phrase 'God of my fathers' is that He had been their protector; had regarded them as his people; and had conferred on them great favors.

The particular ground of thanksgiving here is that the same God who had so often revealed himself to the Hebrew people by the prophets in their own land, had now condescended to do the same thing to one of their nation, though a captive in a strange country. The favor thus bestowed had an increased value, from the fact that it showed that the Hebrew people were not forgotten, though far from the land of their birth, and that, though in captivity, they might still hope for God's intervention.

C. Daniel Interprets the Dream 2:24-45

24 Then Daniel went to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to execute the wise men of Babylon, and said to him, "Do not execute the wise men of Babylon. Take me to the king, and I will interpret his dream for him." 25 Arioch took Daniel to the king at once and said, "I have found a man among the exiles from Judah who can tell the king what his dream means." 26 The king asked Daniel (also called Belteshazzar), "Are you able to tell me what I saw in my dream and interpret it?" 27 Daniel replied,

"No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about, 28 but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come. Your dream and the visions that passed through your mind as you lay on your bed are these: 29 "As you were lying there, O king, your mind turned to things to come, and the revealer of mysteries showed you what is going to happen.

30 As for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because I have greater wisdom than other living men, but so that you, O king, may know the interpretation and that you may understand what went through your mind. 31 "You looked, O king, and there before you stood a large statue-an enormous, dazzling statue, awesome in appearance. 32 The head of the statue was made of pure gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, 33 its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay. 34 While you were watching, a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them. 35 Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were broken to pieces at the same time and became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth. 36 "This was the dream, and now we will interpret it to the king.

37 You, O king, are the king of kings. The God of heaven has given you dominion and power and might and glory; 38 in your hands he has placed mankind and the beasts of the field and the birds of the air. Wherever they live, he has made you ruler over them all. You are that head of gold. 39 "After you, another kingdom will rise, inferior to yours. Next, a third kingdom, one of bronze, will rule over the whole earth. 40 Finally, there will be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron-for iron breaks and smashes everything-and as iron breaks things to pieces, so it will crush and break all the others. 41 Just as you saw that the feet and toes were partly of baked clay and partly of iron, so this will be a divided kingdom; yet it will have some of the strength of iron in it, even as you saw iron mixed with clay. 42 As the toes were partly iron and partly clay, so this kingdom will be partly strong and partly brittle. 43 And just as you saw the iron mixed with baked clay, so the people will be a mixture and will not remain united, any more than iron mixes with clay. 44 "In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. 45 This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands-a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces. "The great God has shown the king what will take place in the future. The dream is true and the interpretation is trustworthy."

Arioch tried to gain some points for himself by presenting it before the king as if he had found Daniel, whilst in reality Daniel had found him. The fact that he calls Daniel "a man among the exiles from Judah" may be an indication that the young Hebrews were not regarded as being on the same level as the native Babylonian magicians. Some racial prejudice could be detected in the wording.

There is a tone of hopeful expectation in the king's question: "Are you able to tell me what I saw in my dream and interpret it?" There is a strong suggestion in these words that Nebuchadnezzar was in fact unable to remember what he had dreamed, but he obviously believed that the dream had great importance.

Nebuchadnezzar does not question Daniel's willingness to tell him what he wishes, but only his ability. With regard to the wise men, he believed, or professed to believe, in their ability to do what he wished, and reckoned their refusal to answer him as due to obstinacy or treason. It certainly must have been strange to Nebuchadnezzar that what the soothsayers, astrologers, and magicians of the court, the highest, and reputed to be the most skilful, could not do, this young Hebrew proclaimed himself able to perform.

In his answer, Daniel, first of all, provides an alibi for the other magicians in claiming that they could not satisfy the king's demand because it fell outside the realm of their expertise. Their claim that "no one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among men" had been basically correct. By stating this as an introduction to the revelation of the dream and its meaning, Daniel directs the king's gaze in a most wholesome way to God in heaven to whom the king would eventually have to give account.

We cannot overstate the importance of Daniel's following explanation to this king. He did much more than retelling what Nebuchadnezzar had dreamed and what it meant, he introduced this man, who thought himself to be all powerful, to the One who is the source of all power. Nebuchadnezzar probably believed in something supernatural, otherwise he would not have engaged magicians and soothsayers in his service. But that is different from discovering that there is a Supreme Being and that He is alive. Daniel's explanation of the dream led this king into experiencing God in a way that must have shattered his self-image.

Daniel explains that it was Nebuchadnezzar's desire to know the future that triggered the dream. At the same time, Daniel disclaims superior knowledge for himself; he merely proves that his sources are superior; he serves a superior God, who is called "the revealer of mysteries."

The statue Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream represented all the human empires on earth, beginning with the Babylonian and ending with the one ruled by the Antichrist. The latter fades away in the distance of this picture, but in the context of the Book of Daniel as a whole it stands out as an important one.

Its form emphasizes the unity of the statue; all the empires are shown as one man, as if one power governs the all. In C. S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia*, he introduces a series of witches of different color. One of the characters remarks that in the different ages of Narnia's history the color of the witches may have differed but their evil center of power was all the same.

The unusual feature of this sculpture is that five different kinds of material are used, each subsequent one inferior to the previous: gold, silver, copper, iron, and clay, or ceramic. While there is a progressive degradation of the metal, there is also progression in degrees of hardness, silver being harder than gold, copper harder than silver, and iron hardest of all; then suddenly the iron is mingled with clay. There is not a new, softer material added to form a new fifth part; but there is a mingling of 'clay' — clay suitable for the potter, or rather that has already been baked in the kiln, and therefore brittle. The idea suggested by the phrase, 'part of iron and part

of clay,' is that there was not a complete mingling, but that portions were seen that were clearly clay, and other portions as clearly still iron. There was therefore the notion of the imperfect union of the parts and hence was weak.

In his explanation of the meaning of the dream, Daniel identifies the head of the statue with the Babylonian empire under the rule of Nebuchadnezzar. The fact that the head is the most splendid part of the statue does not necessarily imply that Babylon's glory outshone all the subsequent empires in splendor. But excavations have unveiled some extraordinary features of the Babylon King Nebuchadnezzar had created.

Daniel describes Nebuchadnezzar as "the king of kings." The expression is evidently a Hebraism to describe a potentate who has subjected kings of conquered countries. The title is in due course used in the Book of Revelation for the Lord Jesus Christ. In God's eyes, however, this glorious king Nebuchadnezzar was ultimately one of Satan's puppets. Isaiah identifies him with Lucifer in his taunting prophecy in Isaiah 14:4 "You will take up this taunt against the king of Babylon: How the oppressor has come to an end! How his fury has ended!" That God also called this king: "My servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon" in Jeremiah 27:6 can only be explained as meaning that at some point God used this man to carry out His plan of punishment for certain sinful nations, including the kingdom of Judah.

Nebuchadnezzar may have dreamed himself to be like a head of gold, but he was only part of a whole structure that is doomed at one time to crumble and be crushed. The most important features of his dream are the feet of clay and the rock cut out not by human hands. The most powerful lesson the dream conveyed to the king was that his own glory was doomed and superseded, not only by other empires, but by the kingdom of God. However lofty and awesome this structure of world power is portrayed, a small stone will crush it. The various upper parts of the body of the statue have been unanimously identified as follows: The breast and arms of silver as the kingdom of the Medes and Persians which replaced Babylon in around 539 BC. The belly and thighs of bronze, or rather copper, represent the Macedonian empire under Alexander the Great, established in 334 BC. The part of the legs and feet made of iron stand for the Roman empire as it was founded by Julius Caesar in 60 BC and ended in the sacking of Rome in 476 AD.

The most controversial part of Nebuchadnezzar's dream is the ten toes of the statue. The interpretation of the meaning of the toes has been applied to various states and kingdoms, including the Common Market of Western Europe when it was consisting of 10 nations. Since other countries have been added afterwards, this explanation is difficult to maintain. Others added the former British empire, Hitler's Germany, as well as the former Soviet Union to the list. The weakness of the statue is that it lacked a solid foundation. Foundations are the most important features of any structure; the greater the construction the more important its base. Any power that is not based on righteousness is doomed in principle. The discovery that his head of gold lacked a solid foundation must have been alarming to this powerful king.

The result of the pulverization of the statue points to the vein of evil that runs through all earthly dominion; chaff is the ultimate image of the worthlessness of evil. The First Psalm states:

“Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away.” In that psalm righteousness is depicted as a fruit-bearing tree. “Whatever he does prospers.” Evil always results in an empty hull. The actual crushing of this statue took place at Calvary. There Jesus Christ “disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.” No victory was ever so paradoxical, so anticlimactic, so absolute!

D. Nebuchadnezzar Promotes Daniel 2:46-49

46 Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and paid him honor and ordered that an offering and incense be presented to him. 47 The king said to Daniel, "Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery." 48 Then the king placed Daniel in a high position and lavished many gifts on him. He made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men. 49 Moreover, at Daniel's request the king appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego administrators over the province of Babylon, while Daniel himself remained at the royal court.

Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and exclaimed: “Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery.” The fact that the king treated Daniel as a deity and ordered offerings of incense to be made to him has, understandably, raised the eyebrows of Biblical commentators.

We could, however, excuse Nebuchadnezzar for worshipping Daniel. First of all, this monarch was not in the habit of falling prostrate before other human beings; the fact that he did so indicates that he saw in Daniel the image of God. We do not read that Daniel refused this worship, but we do not read either that he accepted it. Daniel may have had little choice in the matter.

It is neither unusual, nor unhealthy for people who are newly introduced to the reality of the existence of God to see God modeled in the person who introduces them and to model themselves after that person in the early stages of their spiritual experience. Most people need a middleman before they learn to enter into a personal fellowship with God. In worshipping Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar confessed: “Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings.” That is quite a confession for the person who was considered the most powerful man in the world at that time.

The incident propelled Daniel to the highest position in the empire under the king and his friends who had assisted him in his prayer shared in his glory. Daniel recognized that without their backing God would probably not have revealed Himself the way He did. God honors those who honor Him.

APPLICATION

1. We are not _____. Only _____ knows the _____.

This puts _____ in proper perspective.

2. God is not _____ and He wants us to have an _____ with Him.

This puts _____ in proper perspective.

3. Only _____ can reach the _____.

This puts _____ in proper perspective.

4. God speaks to the _____ as well as the _____.

This puts _____ in proper perspective.

5. _____ helps us to live in the _____ in the light of the _____.

This puts _____ in proper perspective.

6. What is revealed is that only _____ will stand forever.

This puts _____ in proper perspective.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How does the "I am God" syndrome show up in these areas of your life?

a. Marriage

b. Parenting

c. Friendships

d. Finances

e. Time

f. Interests

2. What attitudes and actions do you need to develop to let God be God in these areas?