Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Forgotten Dream and the Unforgettable Daniel
Scripture: Daniel 2:1-30
Code: 27-06

INTRODUCTION

George Washington once said, "Few men have the virtue to withstand the highest bidder." He was right. Most people have a price. A truly uncompromising man or woman is a very rare commodity. But that's exactly the kind of person God looks for to do His work. He wants choice servants for choice ministries.

Daniel was such a person--he wouldn't compromise (Dan. 1). So God used him to reveal His redemptive plan for Israel and the nations of the world. In Daniel 2 we find the most comprehensive prophetic picture of human history in the Old Testament. God chose Daniel because his uncompromising virtue and character put him in a position to influence the world through his prophecy.

The first 30 verses of chapter 2 divide into two simple thoughts: the forgotten dream (vv. 1-13) and the unforgettable Daniel (vv. 14-30). Daniel received a divine commission to reveal God's plan in the midst of a crisis.

LESSON

I. THE FORGOTTEN DREAM (vv. 1-13)

A. The Dream (vv. 1-3)

1. The king's response (v. 1)

"In the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar dreamed dreams, and his spirit was troubled, and his sleep went from him."

In Daniel 2:28-29 Daniel says to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, "Thy dream, and the visions of thy head upon thy bed, are these: As for thee, O king, thy thoughts came into thy mind upon thy bed, what should come to pass hereafter." Lying in his bed one night, Nebuchadnezzar wondered what would happen to the world after he died.

Cataclysmic things had already taken place. The Babylonians had recently supplanted the Assyrian Empire and decisively defeated Egypt, which would never fully rise from its ashes. Israel had been taken captive, and Judah was in the process of dissolution.

Apparently God gave Nebuchadnezzar several dreams because the Hebrew word translated "dreams" is plural. But I believe one particular dream gave him the most anxiety. The Hebrew word translated "troubled" refers to a deep disturbance. Ordinary dreams can trouble a person, but not with the intensity indicated here. Nebuchadnezzar's dream troubled him because it was God ordained.

Dreams Ordained to Reveal the Truth

It was not that unusual for God to reveal His plans in dreams to people in the past. Numbers 12:6 says that the Lord spoke to the prophets in visions and dreams. In Genesis 28:10-15 Jacob had a dream that promised him the land of Palestine. God spoke in dreams to Joseph (Gen. 37:5-10), Abimelech (Gen. 20:3), and Solomon (1 Kings 3:5-15). God revealed to Pharaoh in a dream that Egypt would experience seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine (Gen. 41:1-8). Through a dream God indirectly provided encouragement to Gideon and his men (Judg. 7:13-15). God no longer speaks through dreams because He has completed His revelation. Hebrews 1:2 says He "hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son." But in former days, God chose to speak through dreams.

Nebuchadnezzar's dream panicked him. To make matters worse he couldn't remember much of the details. (I believe God removed most of it from his memory.) Since only the fear of the dream remained, the king probably spent the remainder of the night in sleepless anxiety. By morning he was an emotional wreck.

2. The king's request (vv. 2-3)

"Then the king commanded to summon the magicians, and the astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans, to show the king his dreams. So they came and stood before the king. And the king said unto them, I have dreamed a dream, and my spirit was troubled to know the dream."

a) Gathering the experts

Nebuchadnezzar appealed to the brain trust of the Babylonian Empire to help him figure out his dream.

(1) Magicians--The Hebrew term translated "magicians" refers to fortune-tellers. It can also refer to scholars. In ancient societies it wasn't unusual to see the two roles combined.

(2) Astrologers--These stargazers charted the positions of the stars and tried to determine peoples' destinies on the basis of how they were arranged, much like those who make up horoscopes claim to do today.

(3) Sorcerers--These spiritualists and enchanters were mediums who attempted to talk with the dead.

(4) Chaldeans--Originally from southern Babylonia, the Chaldeans eventually rose to a place of prominence in the courts of Babylon after Nabopolassar, Nebuchadnezzar's father, himself a Chaldean, became king. Supposedly they were the wisest and most knowledgeable in the arts and sciences of Chaldea (Babylon).

As so many people do today, the king sought out the so- called experts. The king's advisors believed in the importance of dreams, so they were anxious to help out the king.

The Chaldean Dream-Reading System

The Chaldean "experts in dreams worked on the principle that dreams and their sequel followed an empirical law which, given sufficient data, could be established.... Dream manuals, of which several examples have come to light [see A.L. Oppenheim, "The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East," Transactions of the American Philosophical Society 46.3 (1956): 203ff] consist accordingly of historical dreams and the events that followed them, arranged systematically for easy reference. Since these books had to try to cover every possible eventuality they became inordinately long; only the expert could find his way through them, and even he had to know the dream to begin with before he could search for the nearest possible parallel" (Joyce G. Baldwin, Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1978], pp. 86-87).

b) Presenting the problem

The king presented a challenging problem for his advisors: he had a dream, but had forgotten it (v. 3). The text in verse 1 indicates the king dreamed many dreams, but the use of the singular in verse 3 indicates that only one made a lasting impression. The king's problem was about to become his advisor's problem.

B. The Dilemma (vv. 4-9)

1. The Chaldeans' confidence (v. 4)

"Then spoke the Chaldeans to the king in Aramaic, O king, live forever; tell thy servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation."

This verse begins a lengthy section written in Aramaic instead of Hebrew (Dan. 2:4;7:28). Aramaic was the main language used in the courts, and later in all southwest Asia. The wise men began, "O king, live forever" which is to say, "Long live the king." That phrase was standard court etiquette. Then, with great confidence, they asked the king to recount his dream so they could interpret it for him. But the king couldn't do so.

2. The king's challenge (vv. 5-6)

"The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, The thing is gone from me. If ye will not make known unto me the dream, with the interpretation of it, ye shall be cut in pieces, and your houses shall be made a refuse heap [dung hill]. But if ye show the dream, and its interpretation, ye shall receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor; therefore, show me the dream, and the interpretation of it."

Nebuchadnezzar put his advisors on the spot. If they couldn't reveal and interpret his dream they faced ruin. But if they were successful they would receive great reward and honor.

I believe Nebuchadnezzar was cynical of his advisors' system of interpreting dreams. He may have believed the lot of them were nothing more than charlatans. So he put his court wise men to the test to determine if they had been telling the truth in the past, and if they were worth his confidence in the the future. And He had to know, because forgetting a dream was considered an ominous sign in the Orient: it meant the gods were angry.

Commentators translate the phrase "the thing is gone from me" (v. 5) differently. Some believe the king said, "I am sure of it," implying he did know the dream but was holding it back from his advisors. However I believe he had forgotten the dream--it is the only solution that makes sense to me given the context. I believe God wanted the king to forget the dream to expose the impotence and deception of Babylonian wisdom. At the same time it established Daniel as the mouthpiece of God unequaled by any of the Babylonian wise men. As the king gave his wise men the ultimate test to determine their integrity and true abilities, he appeared tyrannical and unreasonable. Commentator H.C. Leupold said, "We venture to say that, if the Chaldeans had not made pretense of having access to the deepest and most completely hidden things, the king would never have made this unreasonable request of them" (Exposition of Daniel [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1969], p. 89).

The king promised a devastating punishment if he discovered they couldn't interpret his dream: he would cut them to pieces and turn their houses into manure piles. Such a punishment was not uncommon in ancient middle-eastern cultures when someone had severely dishonored himself or defamed an exalted person. The victim was executed and his house torn down and replaced by a

public outhouse (e.g., 2 Kings 10:27). But if the Chaldeans did what the king asked, they were to be greatly rewarded.

3. The Chaldean's claim (v. 7)

"They answered again and said, Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation of it."

Not having any other choice, the wise men held their ground. They realized they faced a serious dilemma. They knew they couldn't recount the dream--they didn't have access to divine truth; they couldn't ascend into the supernatural realm. Their pretentious claims would be exposed unless they knew the dream.

4. The king's cynicism (vv. 8-9)

"The king answered and said, I know of certainty that ye would gain the time, because ye see the thing is gone from me. But if ye will not make known unto me the dream, there is but one decree for you; for ye have prepared lying and corrupt words to speak before me, till the time is changed; therefore tell me the dream, and I shall know that ye can show me its interpretation."

The king could see that his advisors were stalling. He knew they had prepared wicked lies for him. That gives us a true indication of how he felt about his advisors. He saw the phoniness of their system. He probably remembered past predictions that had never come to pass. He was cynical about the whole system.

C. The Deficiency (vv. 10-11)

1. Confessed (v. 10)

"The Chaldeans answered before the king, and said, There is not a man upon the earth that can reveal the king's matter; therefore, there is no king, lord, nor ruler that asked such things of any magician, or astrologer, or Chaldean."

The wise men claimed the king was asking them to do the impossible. No one can predict the future. Horoscopes aren't reliable apart from demonic influence and mind control. The only place anyone can read about the future is in the Bible. The wise men concluded that no ruler, no matter how great and powerful he might be, was justified in asking anything like Nebuchadnezzar did.

2. Contrasted (v. 11)

"It is a rare thing that the king requireth, and there is no other that can reveal it before the king, except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh."

The wise men correctly identified the supernatural as the only source from which such information is available. They were trapped in their inability to gain access to that realm.

D. The Decree (vv. 12-13)

"For this cause the king was angry and very furious, and commanded to destroy all the wise men of Babylon. And the decree went forth that the wise men should be slain; and they sought Daniel and his fellows to be slain."

The wrath of a demanding monarch knows no limitations. The king was angry for several reasons: he couldn't remember the details of a dream that had caused him great fear, he couldn't trust his wise men to tell him the truth, he was convinced they had lied to him in the past, and they criticized him, claiming he had no right to demand of them what he had. So he stooped to the depths some dictators will when their desires are crossed: he ordered that they all be executed.

Daniel and his fellows were sought because they were part of the corps of court advisers. Since they were only apprentices, however, I don't believe they were in the group of wise men who had been summoned by the king.

II. THE UNFORGETTABLE DANIEL (vv. 14-30)

The king's wise men had been forced to admit that only a supernatural being could reveal the details of a forgotten dream to anyone. That admission set up the scene for Daniel exactly as God planned. He was God's man commissioned to reveal prophetic truth at a time of crisis.

Certain character qualities make a person useful to God at such a time. Many people are useful to God when life is calm, but when a crisis hits, those with true commitment are separated from the marginal. Daniel was faced with an angry monarch about to slaughter all his wise men, himself included.

A. His Composure (vv. 14-15)

1. A calm attitude (v. 14)

"Then Daniel answered with counsel and wisdom to Arioch, the captain of the king's guard, who was gone forth to slay the wise men of Babylon."

Daniel was calm and composed even though his life was on the line. He never panicked because he had confidence in God. He knew his destiny rested in God's sovereign will. People who respond to a crisis like that are prepared before the crisis ever comes.

The phrase translated "counsel and wisdom" could easily be translated "wisdom and discretion." Daniel spoke appropriately and reasonably. When the king's guard approached Daniel to inform him of the decree and seize him, he responded appropriately with great counsel, wisdom, and discretion to Arioch, the captain of the guard.

Since the Aramaic root translated "captain" comes from a verb that means "to slay," Arioch may have served as the king's executioner. Although other soldiers in the guard were collecting the various wise men, the captain himself went to see Daniel. That enabled Daniel to have direct access to the king through the king's own executioner.

2. A careful question (v. 15)

"He answered and said to Arioch, the king's captain, Why is the decree so hasty from the king? Then Arioch made the thing known to Daniel."

We can see that God controlled Arioch's response since he took the time to explain the situation. Daniel had the ability in the midst of panic to put people at ease. Daniel was fearless because his life was in God's hands. A man without composure will never have an effective long-range ministry because ministry involves meeting one crisis after another.

B. His Courage (v. 16)

"Then Daniel went in, and desired of the king that he would give him time, and that he would show the king the [dream and its] interpretation."

Instead of executing Daniel, Arioch apparently arranged an audience with the king for him. Though only a youthful apprentice, Daniel boldly asked the king to give him time to show the king the whole interpretation. Daniel was not at all presumptuous in his request to the king. He knew God had given him the ability to reveal dreams and visions (Dan. 1:17).

The king did not grant the wise men the time they so desperately needed, yet he did to Daniel. Why? Perhaps he remembered when he first examined Daniel and his friends and found them ten times wiser than the wisest men in Babylon (1:20). But also Daniel was courageous. Its hard not to admire a man with strong, confident faith in God, and the willingness to face a frustrated, raging king.

If you don't have composure and courage, you'll never make it through a crisis. But you can be composed and courageous any time when you know you stand on the authority of God's revealed Word.

C. His Prayer (vv. 17-19a)

1. The request (vv. 17-18)

"Then Daniel went to his house, and he made the thing known to Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, his companions; that they would desire mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret; that Daniel and his fellows should not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon."

Daniel went back to tell his friends that he had been granted time to determine the dream and its interpretation. At once they began to "desire mercies of the God of heaven." That's a long way of saying that they began to pray. Daniel's confidence was in God, so he immediately sought communion with the Lord. God's special servants are people of prayer. Daniel could have depended on his righteous character and his gift of interpreting dreams and visions, but he depended on God. He didn't expect to receive what he needed without prayer. He depended on God's mercy. He didn't look to men's wisdom or in dream books; he got on his knees. God's man in a crisis doesn't take his troubles to other people; he takes them to God. He may ask other people to pray with him as Daniel did, but he knows God is the source.

2. The answer (v. 19a)

"Then was the secret revealed unto Daniel in a night vision."

In the middle of that night of prayer, God revealed His secret to Daniel.

D. His Praise (vv. 19b-23)

1. He blessed God (vv. 19b-22)

"Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven. Daniel answered and said, Blessed be the name of God forever and ever; for wisdom and might are his, and he changeth the times and the seasons; he removeth kings, and setteth up kings; he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to those who know understanding; he revealeth the deep and secret things; he knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him."

Daniel blessed God in what amounts to a hymn of praise. His blessing was directed to "the name of God," which is all that God is. He blessed God for His attributes such as His wisdom, power, and omniscience.

2. He thanked God (v. 23)

"I thank thee, and praise thee, O thou God of my fathers, who hast given me wisdom and might, and hast made known unto me now what we desired of thee; for thou hast now made known unto us the king's matter."

Daniel thanked God for His blessings and especially for answering his and his friend's urgent prayer request.

E. His Compassion (vv. 24-26)

1. Daniel's plea (v. 24)

"Therefore, Daniel went in unto Arioch, whom the king had ordained to destroy the wise men of Babylon; he went and said thus unto him, Destroy not the wise men of Babylon. Bring me in before the king, and I will reveal unto the king the interpretation."

Daniel went to Arioch to make sure the executioner didn't carry out his assignment. Here we see Daniel, a Hebrew captive, countermanding an order given by the king! I think Daniel was motivated by compassion for the wise men. He knew they were lost in their idolatry and doomed to hell. He didn't want them to die.

2. Arioch's declaration (v. 25)

"Then Arioch brought in Daniel before the king in haste, and said thus unto him, I have found a man of the captives of Judah, that will make known unto the king the interpretation."

With much excitement, Arioch brought Daniel before the king, taking more credit than he deserved. Actually Daniel had approached him, but when you're a servant of the king there's a tendency to do all you can to impress your master.

3. Nebuchadnezzar's question (v. 26)

"The king answered and said to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, Art thou able to make known unto me the dream which I have seen, and the interpretation of it?"

The king put Daniel on the spot. If Daniel couldn't fulfill his claim, there would be an even greater reason for his execution since he had postponed the king's original command. So he pressed Daniel for a confirmation of his ability.

F. His Humility (vv. 27-30)

In spite of all his gifts, brilliance, and spiritual maturity, Daniel remained humble. Furthermore, he had received extensive training, was ten times wiser than the other wise men, and could interpret visions and dreams. If anyone had anything to be proud of, Daniel did. But he remained humble.

1. The ineffectiveness of the wise men (v. 27)

"Daniel answered in the presence of the king, and said, The secret which the king hath demanded cannot the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, the soothsayers, reveal unto the king."

Daniel wanted to affirm the futility of astrology and the like. He set the true God against useless dream manuals.

2. The supremacy of God (vv. 28-29)

"But there is a God in heaven who revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king, Nebuchadnezzar, what shall be in the latter days. Thy dream, and the visions of thy head upon thy bed are these: As for thee, O king, thy thoughts came into thy mind upon thy bed, what should come to pass hereafter; and he who revealeth secrets maketh known to thee what shall come to pass."

God had given the king a dream about the "latter days," which refers to the final portion of a time period. In this case Daniel was referring to the time of the Gentiles, extending to the millennial kingdom.

3. The attitude of Daniel (v. 30)

"But as for me, this secret is not revealed to me for any wisdom that I have more than any living, but for their sakes that shall make known the interpretation to the king, and that thou mightest know the thoughts of thy heart."

Daniel wouldn't take any credit for knowing the king's dream. God is the revealer of secrets. Daniel knew he had been used by God for His purposes.

CONCLUSION

Daniel was a man for a time of crisis. He was composed and courageous. His relationship to God was strong as seen by his communion with Him in prayer. And he had the right attitude toward others, revealed by his compassion and humility. Daniel was a rare man, and that's why God used him the

way He did. He was a choice servant.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What did George Washington mean when he said, "Few men have virtue to withstand the highest bidder"?

2.What virtue of Daniel put him in a position to be greatly used of God?

3.What was the king's response to the dream that he received from God (Dan. 2:1)?

4.When was it normal for God to reveal truth in dreams? Why would it be abnormal today?

5.What action did the king initially take to find answers to his dream (Dan. 2:2-3)?

6.What did the king's advisors believe about dreams? What tools did they use in their analyses?

7.Why did the king decide to put his court wise men to the test?

8.Why didn't God allow Nebuchadnezzar to remember his dream?

9.According to Daniel 2:8-9, what was the king's analysis of his advisors and their dream-reading system?

10.What is the only source that can accurately predict the future (Dan. 2:11)?

11.Explain why the king wanted to destroy the wise men of Babylon (Dan. 2:11-12).

12.Why didn't Daniel panic under the threat of death?

13.What is significant about Arioch's coming to arrest Daniel?

14.What did the king grant to Daniel that he refused to give to the wise men?

15. What gave Daniel boldness to go before Nebuchadnezzar?

16.What did Daniel and his friends do with the time they'd been given to determine the dream and its interpretation (Dan. 2:17-18)?

17.What do we learn about God from Daniel's prayer (Dan. 2:19-23)?

18.How did Daniel reveal his compassion (Dan. 2:24)?

19. Why might Daniel have had reason to be proud? How did he demonstrate his humility (Dan. 2:30)?

Pondering the Principles

1. Do you personally know people who consult mediums and horoscopes to gain direction for their lives? Have you offered them the Word of God as the most trustworthy guide for living? Make a brief study of the following passages to learn what you might share with them to help lead them away from their dependence on the occult to faith in God:

* occultic practices condemned by God (Ex. 22:18; Lev. 19:26, 31; 20:6; Deut. 18:10-12; Gal. 5:19-21; Rev. 22:15)

* the tendency of the occult to overshadow divine truth and authority (1 Sam. 15:23; Isa. 8:19-20)

* demonic influences behind the occult (Acts 16:16-18)

* the impotence of occultic practices before God (Isa. 44:24-25; Acts 16:18)

* the association of the occult with false prophets (Jer. 27:9-10)

* the consequences of occultic practices (1 Chron. 10:13-14; 2 Chron. 33:6, 9-11)

Use these passages to direct your friends toward faith in God: Deuteronomy 29:29; Isaiah 46:9-10; 55:6-8; John 8:12; 16:13.

2.How does your character hold up under crisis? What was the last crisis you faced? How long did it take before you prayed to the Lord for guidance and strength? Do you feel you were fully trusting God for the outcome? Are you spiritually prepared for the next crisis? How do you feel you can best prepare yourself for it? Meditate on the following to increase your confidence in the Lord's protection and deliverance: Psalms 4, 23, 27, and 34.

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