

NOVEMBER 25

Daniel 1-2:23

The book of Daniel has been an unexpected blessing in my life. The Lord surprised me with it one day. Back in 1979 or 1980 as I was studying in an empty college classroom, I opened my Bible for my quiet time and began to read Daniel. It was one of those things where the Spirit just “opened my eyes” to some things. I saw connections. In the week that followed, my desire for reading the Word, and pursuing God in it, received a huge shot of adrenaline that has carried me through to today. I remember taking a walk on one of those days thinking my life would never be the same. In a way it hasn’t been. Though some of the emotion and thrill of discovery has faded, I received a lasting sense of expectation and a desire to search the Word and ask the Lord to draw near to me. Even this morning as I was reading through Isaiah 55, I felt that privilege again, of having the Lord show me something in the Word and of Himself that will stay with me as I follow Jesus in the harvest.

I’m going to try to make observations here to help you discover stuff, but I know I won’t be able to restrain myself and I’ll probably say too much. Almost all of what I’m sharing with you I’ve gotten out of my quiet time and personal study, not from books or seminary classes. I want to encourage you to spend time in the Word, asking questions, looking for clues and connections. It will not only mark you for life with a sense of desire and joy in the Word, but when you share what you’ve learned, it will have a sense of life to it. You will become a contagious teacher.

Daniel was a special man and God used him in an incredible way. You’ve heard me hint at things about him. Yet, as we’ve learned from examining great men, there are some very normal things that we can learn from Daniel. In Ezekiel 14:14, Daniel is mentioned with Noah and Job. I remember asking myself why Daniel is mentioned with them, and it hit me that both of those men were the most righteous men on earth at their particular times in history. So was Daniel. He is the only man I know of other than Jesus where God refers to him as “beloved.” We’ll see that.

So where did this “superman” come from? As we have seen with other men in the Bible, Daniel paid his dues in following God; and the background and foundation of his faith were the result of a string of failures.

King Manasseh repented of his great sins, but could not reverse the damage he’d done, or get his son to follow the Lord. Yet, Manasseh spent the last six years of his life with his grandson Josiah. After his father’s short, two-year reign, Josiah became king at age eight and was immediately known as a godly king. That had to have come from Grandpa Manasseh, the failure. But there was no Bible until ten years later when they were repairing the temple and found a copy of the law. When the first five books were read to him, the 18-year old King Josiah was moved to tears and was emotionally alarmed by the judgments God had spoken in Deuteronomy. God commended Josiah for his passion and tears, but He would not withhold the fury of His judgment against Judah. As if hard of hearing and against all hope, Josiah launched a revival in the land that was the greatest Israel had ever known. In fact, I think Josiah was the godliest king Israel ever knew. But in the end, it was a “failure.” His sons, who became kings after him, were ungodly men. In fact, not only did Pharaoh Neco take his first son captive, but Nebuchadnezzar walked into the city, looted the temple and took some of Judah’s finest sons as captives to Babylon. Israel was no longer a sovereign state. The times of the Gentiles had begun.

So, who is Daniel? I’m going to suggest that Daniel was about 16 when Neb took him to Babylon. If Daniel was 16, it means he would have grown up during the end of Josiah’s reign, but his parents would have been born and raised during Josiah’s revival. Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah were four very godly teenagers who came out of four very godly families. Their dads and moms were products of Josiah’s revival. Josiah’s hopeless effort to save the nation failed, or did it? Wait until you see what God does with Daniel and his friends to save

Israel. Faithfully bearing witness against all hope, like kings Manasseh and Josiah did, is all God wants. He does the rest. For us, this is following in the harvest, reaching out to the lost and making disciples.

God has a funny way of working under the radar. Two failed kings hoped against hope, working, knowing that God's wrath would come. Manasseh influenced Josiah; Josiah influenced a generation of men and women. Four families had godly boys, and God used them to save the nation. Never give up. Make disciples, who make disciples, and leave the rest to God. I think that's pretty cool.

Daniel 1

Vs. 1-3 This is God humbling Israel. To walk into the temple of a people's god meant your god was bigger than their god. To take that god's stuff and lock it in the treasury of your god showed superiority.

Vs. 4-7 We will get an idea in chapter 3 of Neb's plan in educating these boys. He apparently took young men from every country to train them and send them back as loyal servants, governing their land for the Babylonian Empire. It was a brilliant plan. Alexander the Great's idea was to encourage his men to intermarry in their conquered kingdoms, and therefore the Greeks I grew up with used to say that the original Greeks were all blond-haired and blue-eyed until Alexander conquered Persia. Anyway, you'll see the "loyalty test" for Nebuchadnezzar's educational plan in Daniel 3.

The food had all been offered or blessed in worship to Babylonian gods. Yet, who could blame anyone under those circumstances for eating his first pork chop?

V. 6 Notice the words *among these*. Daniel & Co. were not the only Jewish boys taken, so, for good or for ill, there was a peer group of Jews. That would have compounded the difficulty of standing alone. Thankfully there were four of them, like a disciple's cell group.

V. 7 All the boys had names that honored the God of Israel. They were renamed in honor of the gods of Babylon.

Now, write out a list of what these boys had lost: parents, home, names, language, etc. Not only that, they were threatened with death should they disobey. Not only that, they were with others they knew from Jerusalem who were "understandably" being compromised. None of this put them in a "secure" situation. Why would God do this to them?

V. 8 The contrast with all they had lost makes the faith of this verse so deep. Daniel & Co. had every excuse to compromise. They could have said they were going "undercover" for God. He'd understand. And after all, "Those of us who run away live to run another day."

Vs. 9-16 Do you notice the words, *God gave*? You've seen this before in v. 2. You've also seen this in Joseph's life in Egypt. This is what Daniel & Co. knew. They understood all of this as God's work. They might have been sad, but they never lost their understanding that the Lord was working. They understood that God was with them and loved them. What had happened to Jerusalem and what was happening to them was from the hand of God. This is why they had the courage to suggest this test. And *God gave*. Think of the things that make you anxious or ready to flip out. These guys had more than enough to stress an elephant to death, but they understood the Lord and knew He was with them. They just didn't know what God would do, but it was more important for them to honor God than to stay alive on earth. We'll see that very clearly in chapter 3.

Vs. 17-20 And *God gave*. Something else happened too. They were so good that Nebuchadnezzar kept them close, in the city, in his personal service. They became notable and memorable and useful to Neb. We'll see how that plays out in chapter 2.

V. 21 This is a significant time marker. What is really interesting is that Daniel 10 happens in the third year of Cyrus. That's two years later. So, why the mention of the first year of Cyrus? Why is that year so important? You should know this. In the first year of Cyrus, Cyrus the Persian king (who had just become the ruler of all that had been the Babylonian Empire) gave the command for the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. The 70-year exile began the day Daniel was taken, and Daniel was still serving in the government the day the exile ended. Daniel will be the story of God preparing the nations for the return of the Jews to Jerusalem and preparing the nations for the return of Christ to establish His everlasting kingdom.

Notice, that even in this crisis, through this crisis and by means of this crisis, God was working for good.

Daniel 2:1-23

V. 1 This was the second full year of Neb being king, but they may not have counted the months before that full year. It seems that this happened after the education of Daniel & Co.

Vs. 2-4 These various men were there especially for Nebuchadnezzar. They were his counselors, his support system, and his access to the gods. He was in a very personal and emotional distress, and now he needed them.

V. 4 Up to this verse everything has been written in Hebrew. From this verse to the end of chapter 7, Daniel is writing in Aramaic, the common language of the empire. Great scholars wonder why. You'll figure it out just by observing the text.

Vs. 5-11 So what do you notice here? Why do you think Neb was so ardent that they tell him the dream too? As things are heating up in this confrontation, God leads the issue to exactly the point He is going to make to Nebuchadnezzar. Actually, God is taking Neb to school. I think vs. 10 & 11 are the key verses here. Is there a man on earth who can talk to the Most High God, who doesn't dwell with men? Nebuchadnezzar is about to find out that there is a man and that the Most High God does talk.

Vs. 12-16 Apparently Neb went nuts. What you need to see here is that this is now a very public event in the city of Babylon. Troops are showing up at the houses of wise men (still wearing their Disney© Sorcerers' Apprentice pajamas and cone-shaped hats with the stars and moons on them) and dragging the wise men out into the street, and taking them to prison to hold them for execution. The city would have been electric as well as the entire government. People in the market places would have been talking. Wolf Blitzer would have been there for CNN.

In a crisis like this, I could have imagined Daniel & Co. trying to escape somehow; but notice Daniel's composure in this life-threatening crisis. They have seen God's blessing, and they know God is with them, so they bring their personal calm into the public chaos.

Arioch listened, and Neb must have remembered that Daniel had made a fantastic impression during his oral exam. Apparently Daniel & Co. hadn't yet been brought fully into service. This might have happened very close to the time of their graduation and presentation to Nebuchadnezzar.

Vs. 17-23 It doesn't say "God gave," but we're seeing that God was with them.

V. 18 Notice that they cried out to God.

V. 20 Notice that God spoke to Daniel and that Daniel spoke back.

Vs. 20-23 Notice the understanding that Daniel and his friends had. At this point, I think Daniel was about 19. I'll explain this "guesstimate" when we get to the end of the chapter.

V. 21 Although this dream was to begin Nebuchadnezzar's education and give the world some interesting information on God's working, imagine what this must have meant to Daniel & Co.

And we are disciples too. When you read about the dream tomorrow the question will be, “what does this information mean to us?”

V. 23 Notice the “us.” God spoke to Daniel, but Daniel understood that this answer was in response to all of them seeking God together.

Does crisis always mean a loss of blessing or a disaster? It depends on what we’re living for, and what we understand about God and this life on earth. As disciples in the harvest there is a lot for us to learn from looking at what God did through Daniel and his friends.

1 Peter 3:8-4:6

And now, we are on to another crisis. Peter is encouraging and strengthening these disciples to thrive in the on-coming persecution Nero will bring against the Christians in the Roman Empire.

1 Peter 3:8-22

V. 8 This sounds like Paul in Romans 12 and is addressed to having a kind heart toward other believers.

Vs. 9-12 It seems that Peter might have gotten some of this from Psalm 34:11-22. Very interesting. Also, this looks again like Romans 12.

Vs. 13-17 We are called to be put to the test so that others can observe Christ in us and ask us why we have this hope. We need to make sure we are honoring God. These are great verses. Just so you know that Peter was listening when Jesus taught, here is Matthew 10:18-19, *and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour.*

Vs. 18-22 And in our suffering, to see the world rescued for Christ, we are following our Savior and His example.

Vs. 19-20 I have always understood that after Christ died, before He was resurrected, He spoke to those who lived before the flood. On what basis could God judge those people as righteous or unrighteous since the law hadn’t been given? Also, this was a very “spiritual” time, with fallen angels having much more contact with humans. Those angels were judged and locked up. Was God just in doing that? I think the issue might have been raised by Satan that it would be impossible for God to righteously save mankind without violating His own righteousness. But, there were some mysteries that God held back, that Satan couldn’t have guessed at. Jesus, by His sinless life and death for the payment of sin, became the basis both for the forgiveness and salvation of all men and for the judgment and damnation of all men and angels. Jesus spoke to all those people. A few were pronounced justified by faith (Methuselah probably died the year the flood began), but most were pronounced guilty. Apparently the people who lived between Adam and Noah were a special case.

So, if Jesus' work brought clarity (the pronouncement of judgment and forgiveness) to that mess, He can certainly rule over this mess.

Vs. 21-22 This salvation brought by baptism is not for salvation (the removal of dirt), but for a clear conscience in that we are committing ourselves to following Christ. We are humbling our lives to His leadership, putting ourselves under His authority. This is meant also to save our faith from damage. This authority was visibly confirmed on Jesus at His resurrection.

Another way to understand this is Paul’s mention to Timothy, in 1 Timothy, about the importance of keeping a clear conscience. By denying conscience, certain persons had shipwrecked their faith. As we’ve seen before, it is possible to damage our faith and walk on earth. God still loves and works with a repentant believer, but once a marriage is destroyed or adultery has been committed, you have to live with the resulting damage. Baptism can save us

from this damage, if baptism and discipleship are understood as swearing total devotion to the authority and Word of our Lord. It is hard to sin or mess up a marriage if we are obeying Him and not our gut.

1 Peter 4:1-6

Vs. 1-2 Jesus is our example of seriousness and suffering. Anyone who has suffered has been tempered to see the true perspective of this life, and will therefore not live for passions and what is temporary, but will live for the eternal. Suffering is what God uses to refine us like gold and silver.

Vs. 3-5 Like Paul, Peter is warning these believers not to drift back to their former lifestyles and with their former friends. The temptation to do this would be to look acceptable and not to be mistreated because they belong to Christ. They needed to keep the eternal perspective before them. This sounds like Daniel & Co.

V. 6 Even though our bodies are judged and dead (and awaiting resurrection), our spirits are alive and will live forever with God in that new spiritual body. This is why we work in the harvest, making disciples, who make disciples, to let people know that there is salvation in our Lord.

Psalm 119:65-80

Vs. 65-66 Exactly how did God deal with David according to His Word to teach him? Through suffering.

Vs. 67-72 Can you see 1 Peter 4:1-2 in these verses? Can you hear Paul and James and Peter saying that the testing of our faith is more precious than gold or silver?

Vs. 73-74 Through the Word and through suffering, God fashioned David in such a way that he would be a walking witness to others.

Vs. 75-76 These verses remind me of Job. God afflicted him in *faithfulness*, and God comforted him in due time with His *steadfast love*.

Vs. 77-78 In addition, David, even in his dismal days, had the promise he had received years earlier, as Samuel anointed him, that he would someday be king. David was pursued by the insolent and his only recourse to control and calm his thoughts was to meditate on God's precepts.

V. 79 Through David's affliction, and having to cling to God's Word, God made David a witness and a model for those who were suffering. In Isaiah 55 it says, *Behold God made him (David) a witness to the peoples...*

V. 80 Amen.

Proverbs 28:14

Amen, again.