

NOVEMBER 26

Daniel 2:24-3:30

Now, when I preach this, I don't spend much time with the dream itself; but I discuss the dream along with the vision in chapter 7. The reason I do this is that if you get too wrapped up in all of the apocalyptic detail of the dream, you can miss the utterly amazing thing God is doing here. God is showing His steadfast love and is saving the Jews. Hold on to your hats.

Daniel 2:24-49

Vs. 24-26 This little introduction has some interesting detail.

V. 24 Notice that the wise men hadn't yet been killed. Arioch rounded them up to be killed together. It wasn't a house to house assassination action. Now, this means, that these men will owe Daniel their lives. Hmmmm.

V. 25 I like Arioch: "Oh king, look what I found." The fact that they were designated as exiles from Judah is important. We'll see in the next chapter, that this was a major cause for conflict and hatred toward these four men, but therein will hide a blessing.

The king addresses Daniel, but from v. 36, we know that all four were standing together. You need to see those little details to paint an accurate picture.

Vs. 27-30 The humility and honesty of Daniel is amazing. This would have been the place you might have wanted to let the king know how cool you were so he'd keep you around. These guys are too secure in God to do this. Jesus told His disciples to pray, "Hallowed be your name." These guys were in a real crisis and praying that prayer. Daniel is honoring God and telling Neb that God is, in a sense, honoring him in that God is revealing some very important stuff to Neb.

Vs. 31-35 In this section, human rule up to the Millennial Kingdom is being condensed into a few words. Notice that the stone in v. 34 and the stone in v. 35 are Christ and His everlasting kingdom.

Vs. 36-45 Let me suggest what we are viewing here. These are world dominating empires. All of these empires ruled many nations of the known world. Since the Roman Empire, there has not been one single empire that has claimed dominant world ruling authority. Even the British Empire, as vast as it was, didn't rule Europe. In the last days, there will be a final human empire that will claim world dominance and there will be some similarity to the Roman Empire, but with a strange twist to it. All of these empires also ruled over Israel.

Vs. 36-38 This is the Babylonian Empire, represented by Nebuchadnezzar. In God's eyes, Nebuchadnezzar is the finest king of any who will claim dominance over the known world. Look at what God says about him. This is pretty good stuff for God to say about a pagan king. I think you will see how God's opinion of him is borne out by what happens in the next two chapters.

V. 39 When we get to chapter 7, we'll see who these two kingdoms are. That's another reason why I preach this section of chapter 2 together with chapter 7. The next empire is Persia and the third is Greece.

V. 40-42 Here we actually have two different empires, but the one flows into the other in this image. Verse 33 tells us the legs are iron, but the feet are a mixture of iron and clay. This is a little foggy here, but when we get to chapter 7 it will make sense. The mention of the toes might not mean anything until we understand in chapter 7 that when the antichrist arises, there will be ten kings; and he will take out three of them, bringing the remaining seven in submission to him.

Vs. 44-45 Another tip-off as to the ten kings is that it will be *in the days of those kings* that Christ will come to set up His Millennial Kingdom. So we know the event is still future and we know there will be many kings.

The reason it mentions the stone destroying all of the metals (or empires) is not because all the empires will be in existence at that time, but that Christ's kingdom on earth is so superior, it will overwhelm and end all human domination. Notice too that the kingdom will only come at the end of those kings and it will immediately grow large. That is all to say that the kingdom is not on earth today.

Among other purposes for this vision, I'm sure this was a huge encouragement to the faithfulness of Daniel & Co. So, now shake your head and forget the dream until we get to chapter 7. Buckle up, because now we get to the reason God created this crisis in Babylon.

Vs. 46-47 When is the last time you saw a Gentile king on his face worshiping Yahweh? Although he paid homage to Daniel as the representative of the god who humans can't contact, Daniel understood that Neb was really worshiping God. Look at Neb's words to be clear on this. God just took Nebuchadnezzar to school. To Neb's credit, and unlike Pharaoh in Exodus, Nebuchadnezzar humbled himself. This, I think, is why Neb didn't destroy Jerusalem the next time they rebelled, but showed the city mercy. Nebuchadnezzar was overwhelmed by Yahweh of Israel. But this is just the first lesson. There are still two to go.

Vs. 48-49 You need to think slowly through this to appreciate the impact both for the Jews and for Babylon, the city, the province and the empire.

Daniel just became the ruler of the province of Babylon, the showcase province of the entire empire. A world wonder was there. This is exactly what had happened to Joseph by explaining a dream. Think of all of the Babylonians who would be appalled and jealous that a 19-year-old Jewish prisoner was now the ruler of this province. So much for seniority in office. Not only that, Daniel was now the head wise guy of the entire nation: a Jewish boy. (And remember, we are talking about what is now modern-day Iraq.) I'm sure this didn't sit well with all the other wise men; but hey, Daniel, actually Yahweh, just saved their lives.

The amount of upheaval in these events and in this decision would have been beyond our comprehension, and though there was no internet or TV, it would have slowly become world news. Nebuchadnezzar married a Persian princess, so you can imagine that this news also made it to Susa and to Assyria, the capital of the Median kings. The grandfather of Cyrus would have heard about this. Darius the Mede, a young prince at the time, would have known about this. All the rulers and people of the surrounding nations would eventually have heard this story. Certainly they would have wanted to know why four Jews were in power and why a nineteen-year-old Jew was the head of the wise men.

Daniel's first decision in office was to ask Neb to have Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego work under him, overseeing the affairs of the province of Babylon. Daniel was now so valuable to the king that his office was just a few doors down from Nebuchadnezzar's. Daniel was now Nebuchadnezzar's closest and most important advisor.

So, let's talk about God's grace. Jerusalem and Judah haven't yet fallen, been destroyed or been taken into captivity. At first, Neb only took a few people. In about five years, he would again humble the city and take Ezekiel and 12,000 skilled laborers into captivity. Before this second wave of captives arrives in Babylon, God has installed four godly Jewish young men into the top leadership of Babylonian government. Before God has fully unleashed His wrath and judgment on Israel, God is already bending the nations to show grace to His people so that they can survive as a people and return to Israel after the exile. I don't know what you call that, but I'd call it grace and mercy and love.

Daniel 3

V. 1 Where do you think Nebuchadnezzar got the idea for this statue? I think God was setting him up, knowing he was a proud man and was impressed by the image in that dream. It might have been that the statue was this size. Neb had already built one world wonder, why not a

second? But I've seen statues like this in Germany that stand on a very high monument base. If so, the combined height would have been ninety feet. Who knows? It was tall.

The plain of Dura is a couple of miles southwest of the city of Babylon.

Vs. 2-6 So Nebuchadnezzar sent for and gathered all of his officials from every county of every corner of the entire Babylonian Empire. Some people think that King Zedekiah might have been there, but I don't know.

Notice that these are people of every nation and language. Notice too that this was a test of their loyalty. It wasn't just the dedication of a statue, it was a test of loyalty and submission. In those days people were highly lost, but highly religious. You broke the will by making people submit to your god. You didn't break their minds, you compromised their souls. I believe that this was the final exam of Nebuchadnezzar's educational program. Everyone he had taught and fed and compromised had been sent out to their own countries to rule and carry out his affairs and bring their people into submission to Babylon. Now they were all called back for a big party, but also to bow to him and to his gods.

Now think with me. If you were organizing an event for several thousand people, in the showcase province of the empire, in the capital city of the empire, what would you have to do? Think of the lodging. You couldn't just put them in a Motel 6. You might have to actually build accommodations. That would take time. What about the food, the kitchens, the cooks, all the service? Also, how would you get all those people out to the plain of Dura, make them walk? No way. You'd have to make "stretch" coaches. You'd import Clydesdales from the Bud plant in St. Louis to draw the coaches. Nebuchadnezzar used the Jews for building projects in Babylon, and the preparation for this event might have been one of the jobs they worked on. Actually, it is interesting that when Neb took Jerusalem the second time, he showed the city mercy, but he took 12,000 people captive. They were all skilled craftsmen.

Also, how do you make a statue that big? They had to make a smelting furnace near the site and the heavy pieces would have been finished and polished and put in place. A foundation for the statue had to be made. That would require a lot of work and time.

So, if you were organizing this kind of a national party, who would be in charge? I would probably tell the rulers of the province of Babylon to do it. I think that Daniel, but especially Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, were overseeing, organizing and responsible for the entire dedication event. How could you be the ruler of that showcase province (Daniel) and be the three top men over the affairs of the province (S, M, & A) and not be responsible for all of this? At least this way, S, M, & A got to see the crisis approaching them.

So, picture the event on the plain of Dura. Imagine it looked like a huge football field. At one end is the statue. All of the governmental officials, Neb's trainees, are standing on the field in rows, facing the statue. Over to the left are very nice, raised booths for Nebuchadnezzar and his true-blue Babylonian officials. Because he is not mentioned, Daniel's loyalty was not in question. Neb didn't want to mess with Daniel and his God, so he probably left him in the city to attend to other business. Somewhere, probably between Neb and the field is the orchestra. Somewhere, back to the right or left of the statue, smoke rises gently from the smelting/foundry furnace used to make the statue - a gentle reminder of what will happen to anyone who does not submit and compromise his beliefs to worship the image.

Now, since you usually put the important people forward, I would think that S, M, & A were up on the one-yard line, with an ocean of people behind them. The music played and I'll bet they could hear all of the bending going on behind them, the wrinkling robes, the cracking knees. But they didn't bow.

Vs. 8-12 Notice that their ethnicity is mentioned immediately. This is what leads me to believe that there were lots of hard feelings among the true-blue Babylonians who thought they should have been in line for the jobs that Daniel, S, M, & A were “unjustly” given.

Their accusation in v. 12 is the key verse in understanding the amazing thing God is going to do here. What right did they have not to worship the gods of Babylon?

Vs. 13-15 Nebuchadnezzar was not only mad, but humiliated. He hadn’t expected a fly in the ointment or anyone to ruin his event. The smoking furnace should have been enough to curb any rebellious person. Here were three non-Babylonians whom he had “blessed” with great privilege. Now, if nothing else, Nebuchadnezzar would make an example of them; and every official in the entire empire was there to witness it. Now everyone would be given “the fear of God.”

Notice the eerie words of arrogance that Neb spews out. God was setting him up. As mentioned in Jeremiah 29:22, Nebuchadnezzar had already roasted two false prophets of Judah. Now, Neb didn’t know they were false prophets. He thought they were the real deal, so when he threw them in the furnace, and they lit up, it proved for him again that his gods were more powerful than Yahweh. Also, I’m thinking that there weren’t furnaces all over the place and that roasting wasn’t the normal way to kill people. I wonder, just speculation, if those prophets were not prophesying against this event, or during the time the statue was being made and were thrown in this very furnace. I think Neb was utterly arrogant because he had burned these two false prophets; and, in his mind, God was powerless to help them, so he said, *And who is the God who will deliver you out of my hands?* Watch out! Fire in the hole!

Vs. 16-18 Think of the spiritual presence and attitudes of these young men. They are probably now 10 years older, in their late twenties. Granted, they would have had time to prepare for this moment, but their devotion to God and their willingness to die rather than dishonor Him is remarkable. These guys were disciples.

V. 16 Since Neb asked, *and who is the God...*, they were telling Neb that he already knew who that God was. Nebuchadnezzar had already worshiped Him.

V. 17 Notice, they had no illusions. God could save them, and He would rescue them, if by no other way than by death. God’s will is God’s business. We simply serve. (Look at 2 Tim. 4:18 where Paul, knowing he will die, says God will rescue him.)

V. 18 No one talked to Neb like this.

Vs. 19-23 Nebuchadnezzar’s face became contorted in anger. All of the hype, the hotter fire and the stronger men were done to make a point to all of the foreign officials and government leaders in his empire who were standing there shaking in their sandals.

Vs. 24-25 Looking in the observation hole, Neb was amazed, not just by the fact that S, M, & A were unharmed, but that a fourth person was in there. He was either an angel, or, some think, the pre-incarnate Christ.

Vs. 26-27 Neb’s voice was now more humble and controlled. Notice what Nebuchadnezzar called S, M, & A. In the back of his mind, Neb knew.

V. 27 This is a huge verse. Everyone witnessed and many got close enough to really observe that they were fully OK.

V. 28 Nebuchadnezzar worshiped and gave honor to Yahweh. Notice that he blesses God.

V. 29 This decree was binding on the entire empire. All the governmental officials witnessed the event and heard the decree. No one could dare compel the Jews to worship any god but Yahweh. This gave the Jews a status of favor above any other people in the Babylonian Empire. It saved them by allowing them to remain a distinct people, worshiping their God only.

V. 30 S, M, & A got a raise. This might seem insignificant, but the status and wealth of Daniel, S, M, & A had ramifications. At this time, the Jews in Babylon may have numbered around 20,000. In seven or eight years the bulk of the people would arrive. The community of Jews was now free to organize around the worship of Yahweh. Many good things came out of the Babylonian captivity. The synagogue system came out of Babylon. A school of scholarship and study of the OT came out of Babylon. One of the Hebrew versions of the Bible came out of Babylon. It was a very fruitful time. But who financed it? Who bought the buildings? Who paid the salaries for the teachers or for the education of the students? You'd need some men with deep pockets to oversee this, but everyone was broke. The First National of Jerusalem was shut down, and no funds were transferred to Babylon. The exiles were broke and, if they were paid, they received a slave's wages. I'm willing to bet when S, M, & A got their promotions, they didn't buy flat screen TVs and iPads. These four men were devoted to their God and to their nation, and they had been reared in the revival of Josiah. I'll bet they financed and continued Josiah's revival among the exiles. Maybe that revival didn't die; it was just carried on by some disciples.

So, after three chapters of Daniel, what are the recurring themes or events?

A disaster and crisis lead to blessing in all three chapters.

A pagan king worships God in each of the last two chapters.

God is glorified in all chapters.

Notice the sphere of the testimony of the events. In chapter 2 the events were mainly in the city and province of Babylon. In chapter 3, the events were broadcast, through the eyewitnesses, to all parts of the empire.

I wonder if these patterns will continue in chapter 4.

1 Peter 4:7-5:14

Having seen what God is doing in Daniel, it is interesting to see how Peter is encouraging these disciples to keep following Christ in the harvest during crisis situations.

1 Peter 4:7-19

Vs. 7-11 This section begins with the call for alert, serious mindedness due to the growing crisis in the world. It ends with the glory of God, just like the chapters in Daniel. In the middle, this sure sounds like Romans 12. The church is to strengthen and encourage one another as it serves together.

Vs. 12-18 Suffering is normal and is to be expected. Isn't it interesting that Peter says this is a "fiery" trial. I wonder if Peter and the Spirit were thinking of Daniel, chapter 3.

Vs. 12-13 Suffering and crisis are parts of following Christ in the harvest. (See John 15:18-20.)

Vs. 17-18 Suffering and crisis are what God uses to strengthen our faith and cleanse us from junk.

If someone was forced to throw 50 lb. bags onto trucks, 12 hours a day, "saving him" wouldn't necessarily mean stopping him from doing that task, but rather it might mean strengthening his body and mind as he did the task. "Saving" him the first way would make him comfortable and weak; the other would make him confident and very, very strong. Guess which way God works with us on earth, in the harvest?

V. 19 What does this say to you to see words like, *God's will*, *entrust their souls*, and *faithful Creator*? Doesn't this seem to say that God is the One doing it? Doesn't this sound a little like Job?

1 Peter 5

Vs. 1-4 This is talking about shepherding/leading a group through a crisis. Notice the emphasis on leaders being shepherds.

V. 5 It is hard for younger men to subject themselves to the wisdom of wiser men, especially in times of crisis and stress. Everyone is exhorted to be humble rather than defiant in the situation they are facing. Again, Jesus' trial before the Jews is the example Peter used earlier.

Vs. 6-7 Just like S, M, & A, we are to recognize God in the crisis and humble ourselves under His hand. God is ultimately responsible for each crisis. We are to honor Him, not duck the crisis. Do we really believe He cares for us? S, M, & A are examples of casting all their cares upon Him.

V. 8 Satan works by casting doubt on God's care for us. "If He really loved you He wouldn't let that happen. He'd give you a break, or a job, or better health." Satan's roaring has been likened to lions that encircle sheep in the wilderness that have been enclosed in a tall hedge of thorn bushes. The lions can't get in and the sheep are really safe, but because of the roaring and the circling of the lions, the sheep will freak out. They will run in a circle in their enclosure and eventually a sheep will spring up over the hedge and become lunch. If we stay close to the Lord and to one another we remain safe. Roaring is just roaring.

Vs. 9-11 Now, how do you resist the devil? There is definitely the armor of God. There is the protection of being with others in the harvest. But if you look at Psalm 119, what was it that kept David safe and close to God? It was the Word that gave him the strength and perspective to resist giving into despair and spiritually-inspired fear.

Vs. 12-14 What can you say? What a great letter to encourage the people of God in the harvest. *Peace to all of you who are in Christ.*

Psalm 119:81-96

Vs. 81-84 Notice the longing for God. This kept David safe.

Vs. 85-88 This is the testimony of a man who faced dangers and stress that most of us will never face, yet resisted and remained strong in the Lord. Here is how. Keeping close to the Word and comforting ourselves, secure in the *steadfast love* of God, is our hope.

Vs. 89-91 The evidence of the Word and its power is seen in creation. Creation is a reminder that everything was created by the Word of God. This isn't just flashy power; it is security. If God can do that with His Word, then strengthening us is also within His power. It is also interesting to think that the creation itself testifies to God's power and the power of the Word. David might not have always had his ESV One Year Bible at hand, but he could always see the creation and gaze into the universe at night.

Vs. 92-93 What a great testimony to the power of the Word to save us.

Vs. 94-96 Even in David's crying out for deliverance, he is focused and thinking about the Word. That is not an easy feat. We wonder sometimes what we need to do to take our mind off our problems and guard our minds against the memories of things that have been spoken against us. Filling our minds with the Word and God's thoughts is the idea that is being recommended here.

Proverbs 28:15-16

V. 15 It's interesting to read here of another *roaring lion*. Is this referring to being brutal and inspiring fear? If so, that is just like Satan.

V. 16 A *cruel oppressor* is contrasted to someone *who hates unjust gain*. Is unjust gain what causes the oppressor to be cruel? If so, Satan rebelled against God to take for himself the worship he didn't deserve, and that rightfully belonged to God. In a way, Satan is very much involved in *unjust gain*.

The phrase *prolong his days* is interesting if you think about Isaiah 53:10, *Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.* Jesus is the Ruler *who hates unjust gain*. He gained us "justly" by buying us with His blood.