

DANIEL LESSON 5

Daniel's Prayer and God's Revelation

Ch. 2:17-30

2:17-18 Then Daniel went to his house and made the matter known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions, and told them to seek mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his companions might not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.

Daniel had apparently been given an audience with the furious king who was about to execute all the wise men in his kingdom for their failure to tell him his dream and its interpretation. Daniel calmly asked for time, promising with remarkable faith that he would tell the king both his dream and its interpretation. Apparently time was granted to him, and Daniel quickly gathered his companions and explained this extraordinary matter to them, asking them to pray for God's mercy and compassion in revealing this mystery so that they wouldn't be executed along with all the other wise men in Babylon.

Daniel asked them to pray to ***the God of heaven***. J. Dwight Pentecost states that, while this name for God occurs rarely in other places in the OT (Genesis 24:3, 7; Ps. 136:26; and Jonah 1:9), it is used 6 times in Daniel, 9 times in Ezra and 4 times in Nehemiah. H.A. Ironside explains that "the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Daniel all refer, practically, to the same period, when God had scattered His people among the nations, because of their sins. He had forsaken His throne at Jerusalem. The glory had gone up to heaven, and He was no longer called the Lord of the whole earth. He was now the God of heaven, and, so far as the world is concerned, that is still His title. He will never again be owned as the Lord of the whole earth until the Millennium." So Daniel and his friends prayed to the God of Heaven.

John F. Walvoord adds that Daniel's God is the **God of heaven**, not heaven itself, as opposed to the religious superstitions of the Babylonians who worshipped the sun, moon and stars. Yahweh is the God who rules the heavens and controls the sun, moon and stars. The pagan wise men quickly realized that their so-called

gods were unable to answer the king's unprecedented demand. They recognized that this mystery could only be revealed by "gods whose dwelling is not with flesh." (v.10-11) Only Israel's God does exactly what they say is impossible. Israel's God is not only the high and holy God whose glory fills the heavens, but also the God who dwells with those of a humble and contrite spirit. (Isa. 57:15) Thus Daniel and his companions can approach God with confidence, knowing Him as the God who is willing and able to reveal such a mystery. (Isa. 44:7-8, Amos 3:7)

These young men had been well prepared for this hour of crisis, having had their faith previously tested as they sought to maintain their purity as captives in a pagan culture. (Ch. 1) Though their lives were in severe jeopardy, they didn't panic, but prayed. As revealed in Ch. 3, they would have been willing to die if necessary, but they did petition God for their lives, that they would not be included in the decree of death for all the wise men of Babylon. Though verse 18 could be interpreted to mean that all the others had already been executed, Walvoord doesn't believe that is necessarily implied. He states that it is probable that Daniel's eventual deliverance extended to the other wise men as well.

H.D.M. Spence suggests that, since the friends have special diets, they are likely set apart in their own space, which he compares to a dorm room in the captives "college." "It is likely," he adds, "that their accommodations are sparse and simple, but yet it appears that they have privacy for conversation and prayer together... we observe that their names are given here in Hebrew, not in the Babylonian form. Alone with each other, we may imagine they used the old Hebrew names of their childhood."

2:19-23 Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven. Daniel answered and said: "Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might. He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding; He reveals deep and hidden things; He knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with him. To you, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, for you have given me

wisdom and might, and have now made known to me what we asked of you, for you have made known to us the king's matter."

During the night, the dream was revealed to Daniel **in a vision**. Walvoord states that this was apparently not a dream but a supernatural revelation given to Daniel when he was awake. The revelation required both a vision and its interpretation, since the image was a "visual concept. Hence a vision was more proper than a dream, although frequently God revealed secrets to prophets in dreams as well as visions. There is no foundation for the critical claim that this was a low form of divine revelation. Modern criticism tends to regard dreams as a lower form of revelation than a vision and hence depreciates Nebuchadnezzar's dream."(56) What is significant, Walvoord continues, is whether the revelation is from God, not the means through which it was conveyed.

Most significant is that Daniel immediately gave praise to the Lord for graciously granting their request. This psalm of praise is widely acclaimed by commentators. Stephen R. Miller states that "one of the beautiful praise prayers of the Bible is recorded in these verses." Baldwin adds that "This little psalm is a model of thanksgiving. No word is merely repetitive... The symmetry and beauty of the poetry make their own contribution to the praise of God." Walvoord further states that that this hymn "not only reveals the devout thankfulness of Daniel but also the depth and comprehension of his faith. The opening term **blessed** is often also translated "praise." Daniel begins his prayer by encouraging that constant praise should be given **forever and ever**.

Ironside emphasizes the importance of the order here: first prayer for mercies from the God of heaven, then divine ministry, when God reveals the mystery to Daniel, followed by true worship, as with full heart his praise overflows in adoration back to God.

The first phrase of his psalm, 'Blessed be the name of God forever and ever,' reflects, as does the entire psalm, Daniel's acquaintance with hymns of praise found in the Psalms and other Scriptures of the Old Testament. A parallel to this hymn can be found in Psalm 113:1-2, as well as in Psalm 103:1-2. Daniel attributes

wisdom and might to God, as in Job 12:12-13, 16-22; and 1 Chronicles 29:11-12. Daniel affirms, as David declared, “My times are in thy hand” (Ps. 31:15).

In praising God’s name, Daniel is speaking of God’s very character, and all that is gloriously true of Him. James A. Montgomery comments that Daniel “praises the Name of God, i.e. God in his self-revelation, for his omniscience and omnipotence, attributes revealed in human history.” W. H. Griffith Thomas adds, “The *name* stands in Holy Scripture for the nature or revealed character of God, and is not a mere label or title. It is found very frequently in the Old Testament as synonymous with God himself in relation to man... In the New Testament the same usage is perfectly clear.” This usage is illustrated in Proverbs 18:10, Ps. 74:10, 118:10, Matt. 28:19, John 1:12 to cite just a few.”

As Daniel continues in his hymn of praise, he sets forth the reasons for extolling God. God is honored for his **wisdom**, as demonstrated by his knowledge of the dream, and his great **power**, manifested by sovereignty over the events of human history, the subject of the next verse. In v. 21 God’s power is exhibited in his providence over ‘times and seasons,’ ‘epochs and eras,’ and in his sovereign determination of all political changes. This sovereignty is a direct challenge to the fatalism of the Babylonian religion, which long influenced the Graeco-Roman world. (Walvoord, 56) That God **changes times and seasons** contrasts His great power with the deities of Babylon, who supposedly set the times and seasons by the movements of the sun, moon and stars. Daniel’s God could change this.

Daniel praises His God who is greater than the king’s, and who can therefore remove a king or set up a king. This isn’t Babylonian fatalism, but contemplates a sovereign God with infinite power. Such a God can give wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who are able to receive it. “The wise men of Babylon were not so wise, for they were not recipients of divine wisdom. To those wise enough to trust in the God of Daniel, however, and who had sufficient insight to see through the superstitions of Babylonians, there was the possibility of divine understanding” p. 57. God’s power over kings (Job 12:18; Psalm 75:6-7) and His divine wisdom come together in 1 Kings 3:9-10 ; 4:29, when, in answer to Solomon’s request for an understanding heart, Scripture records that “God gave

Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore”. This was also to be Daniel’s experience as he recognizes his complete dependence on God.

In v. 22, Daniel praises God’s ability to reveal secret things, as Job 12:22 attests. Darkness doesn’t hide anything from God (Ps. 139:12), even though He dwells in light. Ps. 36:9 declares that God’s light is the light by which we see. In the New Testament, this understanding of light is further developed in the Gospel of John, where Jesus is frequently identified as the light of the world. (Jn. 1:9, 3:19...)

Having praised God for His infinite qualities of wisdom, power, sovereignty and knowledge, only then does Daniel directly express his thanks to God for His revelation to him of the secret for which he prayed, along with the wisdom and ability to interpret the dream. Likely his thanksgiving also includes deliverance from death for him and his friends, though that is not mentioned.

In v. 23, Daniel uses the expression “God of my fathers,” a name frequently used in the Old Testament. Walvoord notes that the name *Elohim* used here is the common name for God, as in Gen. 31:42, rather than *Jehovah*, the particular name of the God of Israel. Herbert Leupold adds that the reference to “my Fathers” indicates that his experience mirrors that to which the fathers of old testified in the pages of the Old Testament. Walvoord continues to explain the significance of the wording of the remainder of this hymn of praise. Daniel puts God in the place of emphasis when he says “To you, O God” at the beginning of v. 23. This elevates the true God, in contrast to the fraudulent Babylonian deities. Then David acknowledges that God has given him wisdom and might and has made known the answer for which he prayed, but then he switches to plural pronouns. Though the answer was given to Daniel individually, it was what “**we** desired,” and through Daniel the king’s secret was “made known to **us**,” that is to Daniel’s companions. In keeping with his deep humility, “Daniel does not attribute to his prayers any special efficacy.” (58) As is clear in the following passage, Daniel is quick to give all glory to God.

2:24-28 Therefore Daniel went in to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to destroy the wise men of Babylon. He went and said thus to him: “Do not destroy the wise men of Babylon; bring me in before the king, and I will show the king the interpretation. Then Arioch brought in Daniel before the king in haste and said thus to him: “I have found among the exiles from Judah a man who will make known to the king the interpretation.” The king declared to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, “Are you able to make known to me the dream that I have seen and its interpretation?” Daniel answered the king and said, “No wise men, enchanters, magicians or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. Your dream and the visions of your head as you lay in bed are these.

In confirmation of the fact that the wise men had not yet been executed, Daniel now reports to Arioch and confidently tells him not to carry out the commanded executions, but rather to take him before the king to tell him the interpretation he has demanded. Daniel’s calm confidence shows his understanding that the hand of God is upon him. Arioch quickly seizes upon the opportunity to get credit for finding a man who could reveal the king’s secret, likely hoping to participate in the rich reward the king has promised. He then introduces Daniel to the king as “one of the exiles,” dissociating him from the wise men whom the king had condemned. When the king asks if Daniel is really able to tell him his dream and its interpretation, Daniel’s answer is a “masterpiece of setting the matter in its proper light and giving God the glory.” (59)

Firstly, Walvoord notes, Daniel is properly identified before the king by his Babylonian name of Belteshazzar. He then repeats all the classes of wise men to indicate that no branch of Babylonian religious superstition could possibly have met the king’s demand. Daniel adds an additional word to describe the wise men, the term “astrologers... with reference to the idea that astrologers study the various parts of the heavens as having particular significance or power. By using this particular word, Daniel is preparing the way to introduce his God as the God of the whole heavens.” 59 He defends the wise men from the king’s wrath by

telling him that they were unable to reveal his secret, at the same time protecting them and affirming their impotence.

Daniel now takes the opportunity to glorify God, while making it clear that the answer stems from no power within him. "But there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days." This again implies that Daniel's God is far superior to the god of the Babylonians, since He alone is the God who is able to know and to reveal secrets.

The term "in the latter days" is studied with great interest by expositors, who debate how far in the future its use indicates, and whether it includes the Messianic Age after the Messiah's return. After considering various interpretations, Walvoord concludes "From the first instance of the use of the phrase in Gen. 49:1 onward, the Messianic future is regularly involved...The Aramaic phrase which is translated 'in the latter days' ... is almost a transliteration of a Hebrew expression which is common in the Old Testament. Daniel is unquestionably using this Aramaic expression in the same sense as its Hebrew counterpart; accordingly, its definition should be based on Hebrew usage. The expression is found as early as Genesis 49:1 where Jacob predicts the future of his sons and is used by Moses in Deut. 4:30 and 31:29 in connection with the future of Israel. An examination of these prophecies indicates that the latter days include much that is now history. But with reference to the consummation in Messianic times, Jeremiah uses the expression a number of times to refer to the climax of the age relating to the second coming of Jesus Christ (Jer. 23:20, 30:24...) as do Ezekiel, Hosea and Micah... On the basis of scriptural usage, it is clear the "the latter days" refers to an extended period of time regarded as the consummation of the prophetic fore view involved in each instance. Robert D. Culver notes that the expression always looks toward the ultimate establishment of the Messianic kingdom on earth, even though it may include events now history, such as the division of Israel in the Promised Land. "It can be concluded that the expression is larger than that of Messianic times specifically, but that it always includes this element in its consummation." 60

Walvoord further notes that the term must always be interpreted contextually, as must be the related terms “the last days” and “last time” in the New Testament. “The latter days for Israel are not precisely the same as the last days for the church, as the Old Testament characteristically spans the present age without including it in consideration. Taking both the Old and New Testament uses together, it is clear that the latter days for Israel begin as early as the division of the land to the twelve tribes in Gen. 49:1, and include the first and the second advent of Christ. The last days for the church culminate at the rapture and resurrection of the church, and are not related to the time of the end for Israel... Daniel doesn’t deal with the age between the two advents except for the time of the end, and the New Testament does not clearly use it of the present church age... In the context of Daniel 2, ‘the latter days’ include all the visions which Nebuchadnezzar received and stretches from 600 B.C. to the second coming of Christ in the earth.”⁶¹ Much more detail will be added to the revelations to Nebuchadnezzar later in Daniel.

Having stated his general purpose, Daniel can now reveal what will happen “in the latter days,” namely “the majestic procession of the four great world empires, and its destruction and replacement by the fifth empire, the kingdom from heaven. “⁶¹

2:29-30 To you, O king, as you lay in bed came thoughts of what would be after this, and He who reveals mysteries made known to you what is to be. But as for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because of any wisdom that I have more than all the living, but in order that the interpretation may be known to the king, and that you may know the thoughts of your mind.

Walvoord explains that Nebuchadnezzar had a “meteoric rise to power as one of the great conquerors and monarchs of the ancient world. “ After the death of his father he established himself absolute ruler over the Babylonian empire. He had no rivals, and it is only natural that he would wonder what would happen next. Lying in bed and pondering this subject was the preparation for the dream which followed in the providence of God. Daniel here refers to God as “He who reveals

mysteries,” which is in effect a new title for God, who here uses the dream as a vehicle to reveal the answer to Nebuchadnezzar’s question. “As Nebuchadnezzar was a remarkable man, so was the dream a remarkable revelation. While Daniel still has the attention of the king eager to learn the secret of his dream, he presses home the fact that the dream was a means of divine revelation in which God had signally honored the Babylonian monarch.” Daniel further emphasizes that God in His providence had selected Nebuchadnezzar to receive this dream, and Daniel as its interpreter so that the king would understand this revelation. Only then will Daniel proceed to the dream itself. 62

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