

# God is Sovereign in the Affairs of Men

A Study of Daniel

**Sunday Morning Worship**

November 2017 – January 2018



Cornerstone Sunday Morning Worship: November 5, 2017 – January 2018

English Standard Version (ESV) used throughout lessons.

Copyright 2001 by Crossway Bibles

A publishing ministry of Good News Publishers

All Rights Reserved

Unless otherwise noted, all word studies are from Friberg's Lexicon, taken from Logos 7.0 [Friberg, T., Friberg, B., & Miller, N. F. (2000). *Analytical lexicon of the Greek New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.]

# Table of Contents

1. My Convictions in Light of God's Sovereignty (1:1-21).....	4
2. Trusting God's Sovereignty in the Midst of Injustice (2:1-28) .....	10
3. Nebuchadnezzar's Counseling Session (2:1-28).....	18
4. A Fiery Trial (3:1-30) .....	24
5. Pride to Humility (4:1-37).....	32
6. The Fall of Babylon (5:1-31) .....	39
7. Daniel's Character Reveals God's Glory (6:1-28) .....	46
8. Our Devastating Sin, God's Breathtaking Grace (9:1-19).....	53

# My Convictions in Light of God's Sovereignty

Message 1 | Daniel 1:1-21 | November 5, 2017

---

## Introduction

**Daniel offers moral examples.** The book of Daniel is a good example of a book in which readers may often focus on the human characters in the book while potentially missing the emphasis on God in the book. To some degree it is good and appropriate to draw life lessons from these characters. In fact, Paul tells the Corinthians to observe their heritage and learn from them.

Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did.  
<sup>7</sup> Do not be idolaters as some of them were . . . <sup>8</sup> We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. <sup>9</sup> We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, <sup>10</sup> nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. <sup>11</sup> Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. <sup>12</sup> Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. (1 Cor 10:6-12 ESV)

In Daniel, we could learn from the faith displayed in the lives of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, avoid the pride of Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar, mirror Daniel's prayer life, and be challenged to stay true through times of difficulty like Daniel. But if we limit our study to just the moral lessons drawn from the characters in the story, we will miss what is the primary focus, and that primary focus should be the character of God that is revealed in the passage.

**God's sovereignty the primary theme.** It is God's sovereignty that is the primary attribute that is revealed. Therefore, God's sovereignty in the affairs of men is the predominant theme throughout the book. Israel is beaten. The temple is in ruins. There are no sacrifices. There are no rituals. There are no offerings. There are no functioning priest. The people are in exile – outside of the promise land, outside of the place of blessing. The king is in prison. What is it that God desired to communicate to his people at this point in their history? They needed to hear that they were the faithful remnant. This fact is the major theme in Ezekiel and a minor theme here in Daniel. They as well needed to hear that God was still in control. This is the major theme of Daniel. God is sovereign in the affairs of men.

Everywhere we look, God is sovereignly designing and controlling the plans of men. (1) God directs the destruction of Jerusalem due their disobedience to Him. (2) God controls nature by allowing Daniel to remain healthy when he does not eat the king's meat. (3) God gives Nebuchadnezzar a vision and Daniel the interpretation. (4) God humbles Nebuchadnezzar. (5) God writes on a wall and tells Belshazzar he is about to be overrun. (6) God controls nations as he provides a prophetic account of the upcoming world powers and then works it out accordingly. (7) God controls circumstances as he protects Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace and Daniel in the lion's den. What can be clearly seen in the book of Daniel is that God controls and directs the future, and we can have a relationship with the sovereign of the universe.

**Overview of Daniel.** The first 6 chapters of Daniel are in the form of a narrative or biographical stories. We do find in chapter 2 Nebuchadnezzar's dream about a statue and it is prophetic, but otherwise all 6 chapters are stories. It is in these chapters that we read of Daniel's exile, the fiery furnace, Nebuchadnezzar going mad, the fall of Babylon, and Daniel in the lion's den.

The second half of the book, the last 6 chapters, are primarily prophecy or eschatology. They consist of three visions by Daniel and in the middle is a beautiful prayer by Daniel which is then dramatically answered in person by the angel Gabriel.

Over the course of the next 2-3 months, we are going to do a short series through Daniel, primarily focusing on the first chapters of the book and the prayer of Daniel in chapter 9.

**Historical setting of Daniel.** As we step into the story line of Daniel, the date is 605 BC. The Northern Kingdom of Israel has already been conquered 117 years earlier (722 BC). All that was left were the two remaining southern tribes of Judah. In 605 Nebuchadnezzar, crown prince and general of the Babylonian army, defeated Egypt (who had too late joined Assyria for assistance) at the battle of Carchemish. It must have been around this time that Nebuchadnezzar went through Israel and took some of the elite Israelite young men and some of the Temple vessels. Three times Babylon came through Judah and took captives, but it was in this first exile that Daniel and his three friends were taken, and in chapter one of Daniel they begin their Babylonian Captivity.

**Purpose statement for chapter 1.** God's sovereignty is both the foundation for and the source of our strong convictions. It is the foundation in that I can only have confidence in any conviction I may hold because I truly believe that God is in control and will accomplish his purpose and will work out his revealed will. God's sovereignty is as well the source for our convictions because it is God who gives the

will and desire to hold to our convictions and is the source of truth for which our convictions are grounded.

## Characteristics of healthy conviction (1:1-16)

**Healthy convictions are ideally rooted at a young age.** Daniel was between the age of 13-15 when he was taken into captivity.<sup>1</sup> We can probably safely assume that Daniel's friends were as well around this age. It seems that at this age they had enough training that would keep them true to God throughout their life in captivity. In contrast, remember that Daniel and his friends were not the only ones taken into captivity, but they were the only ones (apparently) that remained true to God's commands, at least of those taken to the city of Babylon. At another place and surrounded by different temptations and circumstances, Ezekiel remained true to God as well.

Take a moment to acknowledge two realities. (1) At his young age, Daniel clearly was able to retain and follow the truths that he had been taught as a young child. I think this ought to challenge us to never underestimate what our children are capable of learning and putting into practice. (2) If Daniel possessed enough knowledge of Jewish law to refrain from those things which would have been displeasing to God, apparently people invested in him through teaching him the truth. His parents (and probably others) invested in him while he was young and taught him the truth.

**Healthy convictions are not altered due to circumstances.** Daniel was immersed in a new culture and world view, and yet he did not bend to the ungodly cultural practices. These men were away from their home and family. They were very young, and were in a country where they were regularly pressured to change. They were put into a three year program which was intended to train them to become Babylonian leaders. In this program they were taught all the literature and language of the Chaldeans which included: language, science, history, and philosophy. As well, their names were changed, which was a common practice in the Ancient Near East. Changing someone's name was (1) part of changing them entirely and (2) a way of displaying subjection to their captor.

Daniel (God is my Judge) -- Belte-shazzar (Protect his life)

Hananiah (YHWY is gracious) -- Shadrach (Meaning is uncertain)

---

<sup>1</sup> A number of qualifications were necessary before young men were eligible for training in Babylon. The trainees had to be a certain age. "Young men" is the translation of the Hebrew word yeladim, which may refer to children, boys, or young men. Young points out that according to Plato, "the education of Persian youths began in their 14th year," and it is reasonable to assume that the Babylonians commenced the training of young people at about the same age as the Persians. (Stephen R. Miller, Daniel, page 60)

Mishael (Who is as God) -- Meshach (I am of no account)

Azariah (YHWH has helped) -- Abed-nego (Servant of Nego)

It would have been very easy for these young men to cave into the pressure of their new surroundings. In fact most people would probably expect it, and it appears that the vast majority of other young people taken did give into the pressure.

**Healthy convictions are in harmony with our actions.** Not only did Daniel hold internally to his convictions, he practiced them outside of his comfort zone. He was surrounded by the ungodly and actively encouraged to give up his beliefs and change his practices, but he did not. Daniel and his three friends (1) disobeyed the king rather than God and (2) chose to reject the best of the menu.

Eating this meat would have been wrong for them for a number of reasons. (1) Much of the meat would have been meat disallowed for their consumption under the law of Moses (Deuteronomy 14:3-20). (2) The meat had most likely already been offered to idols, and their eating of the meat would have been unacceptable. It was common for the meat offered to idols to be taken to the king because the meat was deemed to be blessed by the idols. Most often the meat offered to idols was only for the consumption of the king. (3) This act would have implied loyalty to Nebuchadnezzar.<sup>2</sup>

**Holding to convictions is deemed more important than the potential consequences.** The consequences were broad and potentially severe. While not terribly severe, one consequence was as simple as rejecting the best food available to them. Minimal but probably a little hard to pass up at times. A little more severe would be that they were likely sacrificing their chances for any kind of promotion. After all who wants to promote the stubborn young man who doesn't do what he's told? But even that was not as severe as it could have been because his actions were directly disobedient to the king of the greatest world power at the time. Obviously there could be severe consequences. Ashpenaz indicates that he fears for his life if Daniel's plan were to fail. It's probably safe to assume serious

---

<sup>2</sup> "The reasons for defilement, which they saw, would have been basically two: first, that the food would likely include at times meat declared unclean by the law of Moses; and, second, that it would regularly be food first offered to the Babylonian gods. . . it would have been to give recognition, though in an indirect manner, to the existence of Babylon's false deities. Food first dedicated to gods was thought to insure to the eaters the favor of those gods . . . Everyone eating it, then, would have been considered as also desiring favor and thus giving recognition and obeisance to the Babylonian deities. (Leon Wood)

"From several extant descriptions of divine repasts, the following sequence can be reconstructed. First . . . water for washing was offered in a bowl. A number of liquid and semi liquid dishes . . . and containers with beverages . . . Next, specific cuts of meat were served as a main dish. Finally, fruit . . . Having been presented to the image, the dishes from the god's meal were sent to the king for his consumption. Clearly, the food offered to the deity was considered blessed by contact with the divine and capable of transferring that blessing to the person who was to eat it. This person was always the king." (A.L. Oppenheim, pg. 188-189)

negative consequences would as well befall Daniel and his three friends if they were complicit in some failed plot. And yet, the potential consequences, severe as they may have potentially been, were not more pressing than their desire to obey God.

## Foundation for Healthy Conviction

**God's Word.** They must have known the law of God to know that they could not eat the meat. Their knowledge of God's Word was strong enough to combat all error taught them in three years of education. They daily chose to follow God's word, and not be swayed by their peers. (i.e. Ashpenaz in vs. 10, the other youth in vs. 13)

**Godly fellowship.** It is common throughout the book of Daniel to see these four men finding counsel and strength in each other. Faithfully walking with the Lord is not an easy thing to do, and is not meant to be done alone. God has given us great gifts in godly friends and counselors. We need to take advantage of them and also avoid ungodly friendships and ungodly counsel.

**Faith in God's Power.** Throughout this book these four men show a belief in the Power of God. Here they suggest a ten day trial period in which they are sure that God will prove Himself powerful.

## Rewards for Healthy Conviction (1:17-20)

The blessings that these young men received fell into three categories. (1) They received physical blessings. We read in Daniel 1:15 that "At the end of ten days it was seen that they were better in appearance and fatter in flesh than all the youths who ate the king's food." (2) They as well received political blessings. "And the king spoke with them, and among all of them none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishaël, and Azariah. Therefore they stood before the king" (Dan 1:19 ESV). (3) They received intellectual blessings. "And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanterers that were in all his kingdom" (Dan 1:20 ESV). To such a degree did Daniel receive wisdom that Ezekiel uses Daniel's wisdom as the premier measure of wisdom.<sup>3</sup>

The rewards that we find in this chapter were the unique ways in which God chose to reward these four young men. His rewards in our lives will most likely look extremely different. We will probably

---

<sup>3</sup> Ezekiel 28:3 you are indeed wiser than Daniel; no secret is hidden from you



never rise to such positions of power and authority. Nonetheless, when we serve God faithfully, He rewards us and positions us where He sees fit.

## Our Security Found in God's Sovereignty.

**God's justice was displayed through God's sovereignty.** "The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into" the hands of the Babylonians. Consider how at times God's justice may result in our discomfort. God's justice displayed in the life of Israel resulted in Daniel's dramatic discomfort. While Judah was being judged for their disobedience, Daniel was not at fault personally, but he was deeply affected by the sin of others. God's justice was the perfect plan for Daniel. I can imagine he might have struggled accepting that on his trip to Babylon.

**God's benevolence was displayed through God's sovereignty.** "God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs" (Dan 1:9). Note the sovereignty of God displayed in this passage. For the benefit of one of His children (and for His ultimate glory) he providentially worked in the life and mind of the "chief of the eunuchs".

"God gave" Daniel and his friends "learning and skill in all literature and wisdom" (Dan 1:17). The necessary tools that Daniel and his friends needed for God to work out His plan were given to them. While Daniel benefited, there was nothing of which Daniel could boast. The sole purpose of giving the gifts was so that God would be glorified through them. As believers we are abundantly blessed by God, let us not forget that those blessings are for His glory, not our own. As well, understanding that He was gracious in the giving of the gifts, we should be gracious in using and ministering with those gifts.

## Conclusion

God's sovereignty is both the foundation for and the source of our strong convictions. It is the foundation in that I can only have confidence in any conviction I may hold because I truly believe that God is in control and will accomplish his purpose and will work out his revealed will. God's sovereignty is as well the source for our convictions because it is God who gives the will and desire to hold to our convictions and is the source of truth for which our convictions are grounded.

# Trusting God's Sovereignty in the Midst of Injustice

Message 2 | Daniel 2:1-28 | November 12, 2017

---

## Introduction

What do little kids do when someone pushes them? Don't they usually respond back with an equal or more dramatic response? When they are confronted by an authority figure usually their response is, "they pushed me first!" They justify their actions because the treatment dealt to them was unfair.

What do teenagers do when someone treats them mean or unfairly? While the reaction might be a little more "mature," usually the teenager responds in a similar fashion – a dramatic and often larger response.

What about adults . . . they quit work and join the other union workers on the picket line.

Is it not true that we all hate being treated unfairly . . . is it not also true that when we are treated unfairly we usually react with anger and overdramatized reactions . . . and to take it a step further, do we not often justify our actions by pointing at the wrong actions of the other person?

There is a great deal of information in this chapter. Through its verses we can find much communicating to us the beauty of God's attributes, especially His sovereignty. We can also find Daniel in the midst of unfair circumstances, and it is through these circumstances that we see a wonderful model of how to approach other people and God in the midst of difficult situations.

**Purpose Statement.** Peace and contentment amidst adversity only comes on the heels of complete trust in God's sovereignty.

**Fallen Condition Focus.** Too often, amidst adversity, we depend on our own logic and choose to right all wrongs done to us, and dependence and rest on God's sovereignty nowhere come into play.

## Nebuchadnezzar, King of the world, in self-sufficiency is distressed.

**Nebuchadnezzar's distress.** We are told that Nebuchadnezzar "was troubled, and his sleep left him" (Dan 2:1). Why was he troubled? The simple answer is that he had a disturbing dream. But, why exactly did this dream distress him?

There is some debate as to whether or not Nebuchadnezzar remembered his dream. This is most likely due to the KJV's rendering of verse 5, "The thing is gone from me" (Dan 2:5 KJV). Some think this tells us that Nebuchadnezzar had forgotten the dream. What is meant instead, is that the command had gone out from him. We see this more clearly in all the other versions. "The word from me is firm" (ESV). "This is what I have firmly decided" (NIV). "My decision is firm" (NET). As well, if he had forgotten the dream, the wise men could have made up a dream and offered an interpretation. They aren't able to do that though because he still remembered the content of the dream. Assuming then that he did remember his dream, let's consider quickly what he saw.

"You saw, O king, and behold, a great image. This image, mighty and of exceeding brightness, stood before you, and its appearance was frightening.<sup>32</sup> The head of this image was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its middle and thighs of bronze,<sup>33</sup> its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay.<sup>34</sup> As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces.<sup>35</sup> Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. (Daniel 2:31–35 ESV).

Clearly he didn't understand the interpretation of the dream, but maybe his distress was due the fact that he saw this great and magnificent statue and it was destroyed by a rock, and the entire statue became chaff that was carried away by the wind. Neb may not have been certain but it seems likely that he foresaw some kind of destruction. While the interpretation of the dream required God's intervention, I don't think it took divine intervention for Nebuchadnezzar to wonder if he was tied to the image or if he was connected to the stone. He was concerned that he was in some way connected to the image, and he feared what it meant for the stone to destroy the image. He feared that he was going to lose everything he had. This is what brought on his great distress.

We're the same way. Our anxiety is most often the result of one of two things. We are anxious because we fear losing something we presently possess, or we are anxious because we fear not getting something we desire to have. Take a moment to consider a personal example for each of those areas. What do you presently possess that you fear losing?

- Kids: forms of entertainment, screen time, friendships, sports or a hobby.
- Teens: relationships, popularity or particular people's favor, a spot on a team.
- Adults: job, spouse, friendships, other's favorable opinion, comfort, retirement.

We can as well fear not getting something we are looking forward to getting – a child looking forward to a phone at a particular age, a teenager looking forward to a vehicle, an adult looking forward to a job they think they've secured.

Nebuchadnezzar was afraid that something he possessed was going to be taken from him. He was a powerful and wealthy king, and feared losing that power and wealth – and all that went along with it. So then, what happens when we don't get what we want or lose what we already have? Consider Nebuchadnezzar's response, and in so doing observe a typical response to frustration. You may wonder how I can term Nebuchadnezzar's response as typical. In many ways his response is off the charts and unlike any response you've likely ever seen, but in some ways it follows the same pattern that you've probably experienced in your own life. Nebuchadnezzar was either in the process of or was about to kill all the wise men and their families along with destroying their homes. That is not normal and you probably can't relate to it. But, let me point out how you can relate. Nebuchadnezzar was afraid of losing something precious to him, he wasn't getting what he wanted, and so he responded with anger towards those he blamed in some way. All of us can relate to those steps. Is it not true that our anger towards others is usually (if not almost always) due to our blaming them for taking something away from us or keeping something from us? If we don't get what we want, we find someone to blame and we lash out at them. This is why James writes in chapter 4 of his epistle.

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? <sup>2</sup> You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. . . . <sup>3</sup> You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. (James 4:1–3 ESV).

**Nebuchadnezzar's overly dramatic response.** Nebuchadnezzar called in the wise men to tell him both (1) the content of his dream and (2) the meaning of the dream. We've already established that Neb likely remembered his dream. He wanted the wise men to prove to him their divine abilities by not only producing an interpretation but rehearsing for him his very own dream.

We can only speculate to the reason for his demand. Maybe he wanted to get rid of the wise men that worked for his father and bring in his own people. Maybe he was annoyed by all the clear manipulation and façade of the wise men and wanted to really see if they could work their magic. Whatever the reason, his demand was extraordinary and his response was even more dramatic.

The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, "The word from me is firm: if you do not make known to me the dream and its interpretation, you shall be torn limb from limb, and

your houses shall be laid in ruins. <sup>6</sup> But if you show the dream and its interpretation, you shall receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor. Therefore show me the dream and its interpretation.” (Daniel 2:5–6 ESV).

Some have wondered why Neb did this. It was not uncommon for a king to ask his wise men for an interpretation of a dream. In fact there is evidence of large books that were used to interpret dreams. Likely these wise men would have taken Neb’s dream and offered him an interpretation, but that isn’t what Neb was requiring. He was requiring both the dream and the interpretation. This was unprecedented, and they acknowledge that fact to him in verse 10 and 11.

The Chaldeans answered the king and said, “There is not a man on earth who can meet the king’s demand, for no great and powerful king has asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or Chaldean. <sup>11</sup> The thing that the king asks is difficult, and no one can show it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh.” (Daniel 2:10–11 ESV).

They acknowledged three realities that are going to beautifully set up God’s divine work through Daniel. First, no man on earth who could do this. Secondly, no king on earth has ever made this kind of demand. And finally, only the gods could meet the king’s requirements. It is this last statement that is key. Only God could tell Nebuchadnezzar his dream.

The wise men failed. They were unable to produce both the dream and the interpretation. “Because of this the king was angry and very furious, and commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be destroyed. <sup>13</sup> So the decree went out, and the wise men were about to be killed; and they sought Daniel and his companions, to kill them” (Daniel 2:12–13 ESV).

## Daniel, obscure teen, in faith is calm.

Before we consider Daniel’s response to this grievous injustice, let’s remember where Daniel is at in life. We are told in the first verse that it is “the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar.” Therefore Daniel was most likely near the completion of his three years of training (cf. 1:5). He is likely around 15–16 years old. The passage appears to indicate that these four men were not present during the interaction with the king. This may indicate that they had not yet been fully acknowledged as wise men. On the other hand, 2:13 tells us that the guards went to kill Daniel and his friends which would signify that they were considered part of the group known as “wise men.”

**Daniel’s injustice.** I would imagine it would be hard for any of us to relate to the emotion and potential anxiety that Daniel may have felt as Arioch knocked at his door. The captain of the king’s guard comes to Daniel’s residence with the purpose of killing him. Daniel, apparently, had not been at this

meeting with Nebuchadnezzar and had no idea why Arioch was going around killing the wise men. We are told he responded with “prudence and discretion.”

“Why is the decree of the king so urgent?” Then Arioch made the matter known to Daniel.

<sup>16</sup> And Daniel went in and requested the king to appoint him a time, that he might show the interpretation to the king. (Daniel 2:15–16 ESV).

Daniel was in no way guilty of anything worthy of a death sentence. This was injustice. This was unfair. Unlike Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel was being treated unfairly and had every right to cry for justice. Humanly speaking, he had every right to complain and to feel an intense sense of anxiety.

Can you relate to that, being treated unfairly and desiring justice, being treated poorly and feeling anxious? We can often feel those emotions even when our circumstances are due to our own poor decisions and actions. Even when we are at fault, we often attempt to find someone else to blame. We don’t usually cry out for justice in those moments. How much more are these emotions felt when we didn’t do anything and are still treated poorly or go through a difficult times. In those moments, we demand justice. We feel the need to communicate in whatever possible way that we were innocent.

**Daniel’s prudent response.** But this isn’t what Daniel does. He doesn’t cry for injustice. He doesn’t even appear to carry any kind of anxiety. Instead, he calmly approaches Arioch and ultimately has a conversation with the King. With a great deal of confidence, he proclaims that if he is given time, he will provide not only the interpretation but a well the dream. His confidence and peace were rooted in God.

Let’s pause for a moment to acknowledge this reality. Others sins will often produce injustice in our lives. At the moment of injustice we are offered an opportunity. We can rest in God’s sovereignty and approach the problem calmly with faith, or we can seek out our own justice and condemn and punish those we find responsible.

**Daniel’s precious trust.** Daniel approached God in faith. (2:17-23) (1) Immediately Daniel approached God in prayer. (2) He received the interpretation in a dream, which means that he prayed and then went to bed. (3) Daniel thanked God for giving “them” the interpretation. Daniel came to his three friends and requested that they pray with him. God answered all their prayers and Daniel praises God.

Daniel answered and said: “Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might. <sup>21</sup> 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;

<sup>22</sup> he reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with him. <sup>23</sup> 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." (Daniel 2:20–23 ESV).

## Conclusion

The contrast between Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel in this passage couldn't be more clear. In the midst of adversity Nebuchadnezzar felt the emotion of great anxiety. He was anxious because he feared something was going to be taken away from him. As a result of this demanding and anxious heart, he couldn't sleep and he went to those who had the best shot at helping him. They failed him. He then lashed out in anger at them and demanded all of their gruesome deaths.

On the other hand, Daniel is thrown into great adversity as well but to no fault of his own. Instead of anxiety and fear over losing his own life, he has a sense of calm and peace that is founded in his trust in God. Instead of being demanding he calmly requests time. Instead of his fear keeping him from sleep, he prays to God and goes to bed. Instead of lashing out at those who are threatening him, he respectfully approaches them.

This is not because Daniel is so much less of a sinner than Nebuchadnezzar – although there most certainly were notable differences. The primary difference is that Daniel trusted in the sovereign control of his God, and Nebuchadnezzar was entirely self-reliant. Which brings us to our purpose statement this morning.

**Purpose Statement.** Peace and contentment amidst adversity only comes on the heels of complete trust in God's sovereignty.

We are often like Nebuchadnezzar. We become anxious when we fear losing something we presently possess or fear not getting something we desire to have. Take a moment to consider an example for each of those in your life. What do you presently possess that you fear losing?

- Kids: forms of entertainment, screen time, friendships, sports or a hobby.
- Teens: relationships, popularity or particular people's favor, a spot on a team.
- Adults: job, spouse, friendships, other's favorable opinion, comfort, retirement.

We can as well fear not getting something we are looking forward to getting – a child looking forward to a phone at a particular age, a teenager looking forward to a vehicle, an adult looking forward to a job they think they've secured.

When you don't get something you want or lose something you have, how do you respond? Do you lash out at those you've deemed responsible. This is why James writes in chapter 4

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? <sup>2</sup> You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. . . . <sup>3</sup> You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. (James 4:1–3 ESV).

In contrast, do you believe that God's sovereign plan for you is what is best? God has promised that "for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose" (Rom 8:28). If everything happens for God's glory and our good, then there is no reason for us to be anxious about anything. It's only when we take our view off of God's sovereign and loving plan and focus on what we want that we become anxious and demanding.

But what if God's sovereignty results in my difficulty or hardship? God's sovereignty involved Daniel's difficulty and hardship. We often struggle thinking or wondering whether or not God forgot about us when we go through difficult times. It is not natural for us to look at really difficult challenges as an opportunity to be molded by God or be used by God to bring glory to Himself. And yet, that is exactly what happens in this story with Daniel. It is because of events like this and Daniel's appropriate response in the midst of them that God raised him up to a significant position in the government. More importantly, God was magnificently glorified through it all.

It is true that Nebuchadnezzar is the polar opposite of Daniel in this particular chapter, but wonderfully this does not always remain the case. A few chapters and a few more years pass and we see a very different Nebuchadnezzar.

King Nebuchadnezzar to all peoples, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you! <sup>2</sup> It has seemed good to me to show the signs and wonders that the Most High God has done for me. <sup>3</sup> How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion endures from generation to generation. (Daniel 4:1–3 ESV).

Nebuchadnezzar then unfolds for the reader a vision he had, Daniel's interpretation of the vision, and his following 7 years of humiliating boanthropy where he lived in the fields like an animal and grew out nails like bird claws and grew hair like eagle's feathers. At the end of these seven years, he writes.

At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever, for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation; <sup>35</sup> all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and



he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, "What have you done?" (Daniel 4:34–35 ESV).

Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble. (Daniel 4:37 ESV).

---

And is this all? Can reason do no more Than bid me shun the deep and dread the shore?  
Sweet moralist! Afloat on life's rough sea, The Christian has an art unknown to thee: He  
holds no parley with unmanly fears; Where Duty bids he confidently steers, Faces a  
thousand dangers at her call, And, trusting in his God, surmounts them all.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Ambassador. *John Wycliffe: Man of Courage* (Great By Faith Biography) (Kindle Locations 790-795). Ambassador International.

# Nebuchadnezzar's Counseling Session

Message 2.2 | Daniel 2:1-28 | November 12, 2017 (option 2)

---

[I ended up writing this message the 11<sup>th</sup>. I wrote the outline above, but thought it might be more impactful to do it in this format. Therefore, I didn't entirely finish the conclusion of the message above. I'm keeping it in case I find it helpful in the future.]

**Preface:** The year is around 603 BC. It's "in the second year of the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar" (Dan 2:1). Daniel is about 15 or 16 years old. It's possible that he is done with his three years of training but we're not certain. The following conversation is obviously fictional and takes some liberties to accomplish its' task but is rooted in the text of Daniel 2. Nebuchadnezzar is distraught and decides to go to his counselor.

**COUNSELOR:** Good morning Your Imminence.

**NEBUCHADNEZZAR:** Good morning.

**COUNSELOR:** What brought you in this morning?

**NEBUCHADNEZZAR:** I haven't been able to sleep for a while and I'm feeling a lot of anxiety.

**COUNSELOR:** Tell me what's going on.

**NEBUCHADNEZZAR:** Well, I've got this recurring dream that I just can't shake. It's really bothering me, and I'm feeling a little regret about how I'm handling it. Have you seen all the dung heaps outside? Yea, that was my handiwork.

**COUNSELOR:** Wow! Yea, I have, but let's start at the beginning. What's the deal with your dream. Tell me about it.

**NEBUCHADNEZZAR:** Well, there is this rather magnificent statue. It's head is made of gold. It's spectacular. It's chest and arms were made of silver. It's middle and thighs looked like bronze, and its legs were probably iron. Oddly enough, its feet were both iron and something else mixed with them, maybe some sort of clay (Dan 2:31-33)

**COUNSELOR:** That really is pretty amazing your imminence, but what is so distressing about that. It sounds pretty interesting.

**NEBUCHADNEZZAR:** Well it was. And at first I figured it was me or something but then this stone flew out of the sky and "struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces" and just wait it gets even worse. "Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found" (Dan 2:34-35).

**COUNSELOR:** Wow. I could see how that could be distressing if you thought you were tied to the image.

**NEBUCHADNEZZAR:** For sure, but it gets worse. "The stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth" (Dan 2:35b). Here's my struggle. I get it. It's just a dream, but I kept having it. It kept waking me up. I wasn't sleeping well, and what worried me the most was that I wasn't sure which part of the dream I was connected to. Was I the image, or part of the image, or was I the stone?

**COUNSELOR:** Let me ask you a question. What if you were the image? What would most distress you about that? I can understand not liking the idea of a stone destroying you, but what exactly brought on all the anxiety?

**NEBUCHADNEZZAR:** I've got a pretty amazing kingdom. I'm a pretty amazing king. Everyone does what I tell them to do. I have everything I want. I'm the emperor of the greatest kingdom ever. I don't like the idea of someone else coming in and taking that all away from me.

**COUNSELOR:** That's understandable. None of us really enjoy having our comforts, possessions, prestige, or power taken away from us. We can get pretty testy when that happens, can't we?

**NEBUCHADNEZZAR:** I sure did.

**COUNSELOR:** Let's back up for just a moment. You said that you *weren't* sure which part of the dream was referring to you. Have you figured it out since then?

**NEBUCHADNEZZAR:** I did, but not until after a bit of drama.

**COUNSELOR:** Oh I see. What happened?

**NEBUCHADNEZZAR:** Well. Of course I was wanting to understand what my dream meant, so like any other king I was thinking that I would go talk to the wise men about it. I had them all come in and I told them that I wanted them to tell me the dream and the interpretation to the dream (2:2-3).

**COUNSELOR:** Well that's unusual. You asked them to tell you the dream itself?

**NEBUCHADNEZZAR:** Yea. That was where the rub came in.

**COUNSELOR:** I would imagine so. Has any king ever expected his wise men to tell him the dream? I mean, I know they do a good job of interpreting their dream books and coming up with plausible interpretations, but I've never heard of any king demanding that they tell him the dream itself.

**NEBUCHADNEZZAR:** You're right. That was their complaint too. I don't know of any king that has required that. But, to be honest, I don't really want my father's wise men around anymore. I'd prefer to bring in my own guys. I'm not very confident that they are quite as divine as they all act. I thought this would be a good test of their divine abilities. If they could tell me my dream, I would be pretty confident that their interpretation would be right.

**COUNSELOR:** Well, what if they couldn't?

**NEBUCHADNEZZAR:** Well, that's where the dung heaps come in.

**COUNSELOR:** Oh please tell.

**NEBUCHADNEZZAR:** I told them that if they couldn't provide both my dream and the interpretation that I would kill all of them . . . by tearing them limb from limb . . . okay, I know that's pretty dramatic . . . but it gets worse . . . I would destroy their families and make their homes a dung heap (2:5) . . .

**COUNSELOR:** Yikes! That seems a little over the top.

**NEBUCHADNEZZAR:** Before you get all judgmental and psychoanalyze me, I also told them that if they did show me the dream and its interpretation that I would give them great gifts, rewards, and honor (2:6).

**COUNSELOR:** How gracious of you 😊 . I'm guessing that the reward idea got a little lost in the idea of being torn limb from limb along with their families and having their homes destroyed.

**NEBUCHADNEZZAR:** Yea, at first they tried to finagle their way out of it. I knew they were just trying to get some time to think up some creative and imaginary story (2:9). I reminded them that my decision was firm (2:5a). Of course they pushed back and reminded me that no man on earth could do what I was demanding . . . and that no king had ever asked his wise men to do such an outrageous thing . . . and that only the gods could do what I was asking (2:10-11) . . . that was kind of the point. I wanted to know that the gods were interpreting my dream and not just some creative and well experienced wise men.

**COUNSELOR:** So were any of them able to tell you anything.

**NEBUCHADNEZZAR:** Not at first, but eventually . . . yes.

**COUNSELOR:** Oh, I'd love to hear more about that, but before we do let me back up just a moment . . . again. Is it fair to say that you had an unreasonable demand and when you didn't get what you wanted you found people to blame and then judged and condemned them for not giving you what you wanted?

**NEBUCHADNEZZAR:** I suppose, but doesn't everyone do that.

**COUNSELOR:** Yes. In fact most people do that exact same thing. I don't know too many people that have torn people from limb to limb when they didn't get their way, but it is true that everyone struggles blaming and punishing people when they don't get their way. We tend to get upset when others either take away something from us that we already have or keep something from us that we want. We can be very demanding and when our demands are not met we become upset with those that we think are to blame and we punish them in some way. . . . but let's go back to what happened. You mentioned that someone was able to eventually tell you both your dream and the interpretation.

**NEBUCHADNEZZAR:** Right, but not until after I had already sent out Arioch to kill everyone (2:12-13). You know how when we conquer a group of people, we often take some of their best youth and train them here in Babylon. . . . well, there's this young group of Israelites that we took a couple of years ago. They weren't at my initial "meeting" with the wise men, but they are part of the wise men group. Anyway, Arioch went to their home to get them and kill them . . . Belteshazzar, who had been Daniel, responded with "prudence and discretion." This young man and his friends have been pretty impressive. From what Arioch tells me, Belteshazzar was really calm and asked if he could talk with me. . . . Of course, at this point, I was all ears. I would love for someone to do what no man has ever done and what only the gods can do. Yea, he came in and talked with me . . . and he simply asked for some time and that he would tell me both the dream and the interpretation.

**COUNSELOR:** Wow! That's amazing. And, did he?

**NEBUCHADNEZZAR:** He did and that's one of the things that got me so distressed.

**COUNSELOR:** One of the things? Are there a couple of things?

**NEBUCHADNEZZAR:** Yea. First, the way this kid responded to all this made me see how overly dramatic I had been and also the meaning of the dream ended up not really going in my favor.

**COUNSELOR:** Tell me about how he responded.

**NEBUCHADNEZZAR:** I already told you how calm he was when Arioch came to kill him and how he came in and respectfully asked me for a little time. Like I said, I granted him a little time . . . and then apparently he went back to his house and got his three friends and all four of them prayed to their God together. I asked him the next day how he had acquired the dream and the interpretation, and he told me that he had gotten it in a vision at night. That means he went back and prayed to his God and then went to sleep

. . . that really irritates me . . . I can't get any sleep because I've got this crazy dream going on in my head . . . Belteshazzar's about to be killed and he trusts that his God is going to take care of him to such a degree that he can go to sleep (2:17-19).

The next day, Arioch brought Belteshazzar back to me. Arioch is so irritating. He comes in as if he's done all the work and says, "I have found among the exiles from Judah a man who will make known to the king the interpretation" (2:25). Anyway what was most irritating was while Arioch takes all the credit, and I'm killing people who don't do what I want . . . this kid who can actually know the mind of his God doesn't take any of the credit, but instead redirects all the applause to his God . . . he said something like . . .

"No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked, <sup>28</sup> 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: <sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> 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 made known to the king, and that you may know the thoughts of your mind. (Daniel 2:27–30 ESV).

**COUNSELOR:** So then, let me draw a quick comparison. You want stuff, right? You want to keep your power, prestige . . . all your stuff . . . right? You also want the wise men to do something that even you've admitted is unprecedented and can only be accomplished by the gods. When you don't get your way, you begin to kill a bunch of people and destroy their families and homes.

On the other hand, this young Belteshazzar is about to have his very life taken from him and instead of reacting out of anger he calmly responds to those threatening his life and then has such trust in his God that he prays, goes to sleep, and gets the dream and interpretation in his sleep. And then instead of taking all the glory, he proclaims how amazing his God is. That really is commendable.

**NEBUCHADNEZZAR:** Yea, and really annoying as well.

**COUNSELOR:** Well, your imminence. Our time is up for today. Next week I would like you to come in and tell me more about the interpretation to your vision and why it was so distressing to you.

## Conclusion

The contrast between Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel in this passage couldn't be more clear. In the midst of adversity Nebuchadnezzar felt the emotion of great anxiety. He was anxious because he feared something was going to be taken away from him. As a result of this demanding and anxious heart, he couldn't sleep and he went to those who had the best shot at helping him. They failed him. He then lashed out in anger at them and demanded all of their gruesome deaths.

On the other hand, Daniel is thrown into great adversity as well but to no fault of his own. Instead of anxiety and fear over losing his own life, he has a sense of calm and peace that is founded in his trust in God. Instead of being demanding he calmly requests time. Instead of his fear keeping him from sleep, he prays to God and goes to bed. Instead of lashing out at those who are threatening him, he respectfully approaches them.

This is not because Daniel is so much less of a sinner than Nebuchadnezzar – although there most certainly were notable differences. The primary difference is that Daniel trusted in the sovereign control of his God, and Nebuchadnezzar was entirely self-reliant. Which brings us to our purpose statement this morning.

**Purpose Statement.** Peace and contentment amidst adversity only comes on the heels of complete trust in God's sovereignty.

We are often like Nebuchadnezzar. We become anxious when we fear losing something we presently possess or fear not getting something we desire to have. Take a moment to consider an example for each of those in your life. What do you presently possess that you fear losing?

- Kids: forms of entertainment, screen time, friendships, sports or a hobby.
- Teens: relationships, popularity or particular people's favor, a spot on a team.
- Adults: job, spouse, friendships, other's favorable opinion, comfort, retirement.

We can as well fear not getting something we are looking forward to getting – a child looking forward to a phone at a particular age, a teenager looking forward to a vehicle, an adult looking forward to a job they think they've secured.

When you don't get something you want or lose something you have, how do you respond? Do you lash out at those you've deemed responsible. This is why James writes in chapter 4

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? <sup>2</sup> You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. . . . <sup>3</sup> You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. (James 4:1–3 ESV).

In contrast, do you believe that God's sovereign plan for you is what is best? God has promised that "for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose" (Rom 8:28). If everything happens for God's glory and our good, then there is no reason for us to be anxious about anything. It's only when we take our view off of God's sovereign and loving plan and focus on what we want that we become anxious and demanding.

But what if God's sovereignty results in my difficulty or hardship? God's sovereignty involved Daniel's difficulty and hardship. We often struggle thinking or wondering whether or not God forgot about us when we go through difficult times. It is not natural for us to look at really difficult challenges as an opportunity to be molded by God or be used by God to bring glory to Himself. And yet, that is exactly what happens in this story with Daniel. It is because of events like this and Daniel's appropriate response in the midst of them that God raised him up to a significant position in the government. More importantly, God was magnificently glorified through it all.

It is true that Nebuchadnezzar is the polar opposite of Daniel in this particular chapter, but wonderfully this does not always remain the case. A few chapters and a few more years pass and we see a very different Nebuchadnezzar.

King Nebuchadnezzar to all peoples, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you! <sup>2</sup> It has seemed good to me to show the signs and wonders that the Most High God has done for me. <sup>3</sup> How great are his signs, how mighty his

wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion endures from generation to generation. (Daniel 4:1–3 ESV).

Nebuchadnezzar then unfolds for the reader a vision he had, Daniel's interpretation of the vision, and his following 7 years of humiliating boanthropy where he lived in the fields like an animal and grew out nails like bird claws and grew hair like eagle's feathers. At the end of these seven years, he writes.

At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever, for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation; <sup>35</sup> all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, "What have you done?" (Daniel 4:34–35 ESV).

Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble. (Daniel 4:37 ESV).

# A Fiery Trial

Message 3 | Daniel 3:1-30 | November 19, 2017

---

## Introduction

A sad reality of which most of us would probably concur is that we too often cave to external pressure. As we consider Daniel 3, we will quickly see that the vast majority of people (including most, if not all, of the other Jews) yielded to the intense pressure placed upon them. This same pressure is as well present today. The pressure doesn't have to be nearly as intense and still most people will cave to the pressure. Standing for truth is challenging in and of itself and it is often intensified by having to stand alone.

This is the second time, in Daniel, God revealed His power in the midst of a situation where men acknowledged the inability of any man or god to do the specific task. In chapter 2 the wise men say that no man on earth could know and interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream, and yet God reveals the dream and the interpretation through Daniel. Here in chapter 3, verse 15, Nebuchadnezzar says "and who is the God who will deliver you out of my hands." Obviously he is implying that there is no god that can deliver them out of his powerful hands. And yet by the end of the chapter (3:28-29) Nebuchadnezzar admits, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego . . . there is no other God who is able to rescue in this way."

**Two test.** This chapter is a test of allegiance on two fronts. While the story of a fiery furnace involves Nebuchadnezzar's test of loyalty or allegiance to his rule, the true test of allegiance ends up being Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's allegiance and devotion to God. While they may have failed Nebuchadnezzar's test, they did not fail God's test which was far more important.

**Two perspectives.** We will as well look at two different perspectives in these tests. We will learn of and benefit from SMA's perspective and observe a wonderful example of commitment and faithfulness to God, but we will as well consider an even more important perspective – that being God's perspective in this story.



## Nebuchadnezzar's Test of Allegiance

"King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold." It's dimensions seem a bit off. The image was 9 feet wide by 90 feet tall which probably included a base which the image sat on. The image itself was most likely a wooden or earthen structure that was covered in gold. It's not likely that they would have had enough gold to make an entirely golden image.

**His Purpose.** Nebuchadnezzar desired to test his people's loyalty to his rule. While we can only speculate as to why he felt the need to do this, there are some ancient text that may offer a reason. The Babylonian Chronicles<sup>5</sup> indicate that there was a revolt in the Babylonian Empire between 595 and 594, nearly 10 years after the beginning of Judah's Babylonian Captivity. Potentially due to this uprising, Nebuchadnezzar sensed the need to confirm his subjects' commitment to his rule. Whether or not his decision to build an image was dependent on this insurrection is subjective and somewhat irrelevant.

As well it is likely that Nebuchadnezzar's dream from chapter 2 in which he was the head of gold was the framework for his building of a gigantic golden statue. We as well can't know that for certain. We can know with certainty that he did in fact build an image and then demand that everyone "fall down and worship the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up." Any awe Nebuchadnezzar may have had of Daniel's God following the events of Daniel 2 seems to be lost.

**His Motivation.** Nebuchadnezzar was driven by pride. It is this pride that God is going to directly confront in Daniel 4. His pride is displayed through a number of means. First, the statement "that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up" seems to point to some kind of infatuation.

Have you ever accomplished a significant task and wanted other people to take note of it – usually with the hope that you'll get a few, "Wow! That's amazing." Kids do this with their drawings that you end up hanging on the fridge. Adults do it with the antlers they hang on the wall following hunting season or the presentation they nailed at work and have to show all their fellow employees and maybe even their spouse at home. At these moments we all desire the response to be some kind of amazement or at least positive acknowledgement. We hate indifference – whatever, meh.

---

<sup>5</sup> ABC 5. Jerusalem Chronicle. Accessed November 15, 2017. <http://www.livius.org/sources/content/mesopotamian-chronicles-content/abc-5-jerusalem-chronicle/> [Rev.11'] In the seventh year [598/597], the month of Kislimu, the king of Akkad mustered his troops, marched to the Hatti-land, [Rev.12'] and besieged the city of Judah and on the second day of the month of Addaru he seized the city and captured the king. . . . [Rev.21'] In the tenth year [595/594] the king of Akkad was in his own land; from the month of Kislimu to the month of Tebetu there was rebellion in Akkad. [Rev.22'] With arms he slew many of his own army. His own hand captured his enemy.

Nebuchadnezzar comes off as an incredibly insecure artist needing everyone's affirmation. Nine times in the first 18 verses the point that Nebuchadnezzar set up this image is stated. Everyone is commanded to come to the dedication of "the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up." All the officials of the land gather for the dedication of "the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up." The herald proclaims that everyone must fall down and worship "the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up." The Chaldeans are irate that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego didn't bow to "the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up" and they go tell on them. Nebuchadnezzar is enraged and asked them why they didn't bow down to the "image that I have set up." He then offers them one more opportunity to fall down and worship "the image that I have made." Their response is nothing short of "whatever." He offers them one more chance and they tell him they don't need any time to think about it. They aren't going to fall down and worship "the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up." An already enraged Nebuchadnezzar becomes even more enraged and is "filled with fury" (3:19). He demands that the burning fiery furnace be heated up seven times hotter and that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be thrown in.

His pride is potentially even more clearly seen in his taunt to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. "If you do not worship you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace and who is the God who will deliver you out of *my* hands [emphasis mine]" (Dan 3:15).

**The Chaldeans Pass Neb's Test.** Some Chaldeans came forward and brought charges against the Jews. (vs 8-12). They as well implied disloyalty to the king. It's possible that these Chaldeans were responsible for watching out for anyone who may be stupid enough to not fall down and worship. Maybe they were just doing their job, but the way the passage reads seems to indicate that there was bitterness and prejudice in their actions. The fact that they were Chaldeans probably means that such a menial task as looking out for offenders was below them. Instead they were probably racists. This comes out in their statement, "there are certain Jews," as if it mattered whether they were Jews or not. Their bias probably goes even a little deeper. They were Jews "who you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon," almost as if to throw the responsibility back on to Nebuchadnezzar. These are the guys *you* foolishly placed in positions of power. They go on. "These men, O King, pay no attention to *you*. They do not serve *your* gods or worship the golden image that *you* have set up" (Dan 3:12).

They're the kids on the playground that tell on everyone who does anything to bother them. They're the adults who at work feel compelled to inform management of any infraction. They're the

sibling who is constantly telling her parents on the mean, older sibling. They're probably the people nearly everyone else didn't really care for and only tolerated. What's important here is that from their perspective they were loyal to the King and they passed his test.

**Other Jews passed Neb's test.** It is quite safe to say that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were not the only Jews present during this test of loyalty. Both the Jerusalem Chronicle and Jeremiah 51:59-64 inform us that King Zedekiah was in Babylon during this time and likely present for this event. As well, due to nearly 10,000 Jews being sent into Babylonian captivity during 597 BC, it is most probable that there were a great number of other Jews in attendance at this event. We can't say definitively that there were other Jews present or that those Jews, if present, fell down and worshiped the image. But, it seems incredibly likely. It appears highly probable that there were other Jews present and by the fact that the story doesn't mention any of them being brought forward, the safe implication is that they all bowed. I'm quite certain that there were a host of Jews that while they bowed low and worshiped the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had built were offering creative justifications for doing so. After all, they weren't being told to give up their worship of YHWH. They just had to bow to show allegiance this one time to Nebuchadnezzar. After all, they had been given a fairly decent life in captivity. Why not just play along? Couldn't they just take care of it later? Couldn't they just ask for forgiveness later? They passed Nebuchadnezzar's test. They lived through that day! Shoo!

## God's Test of Allegiance

The test that is not implicitly mentioned in the passage but is the more significant test and the test that is often overlooked is God's testing of his people. Will his people remain committed to Him? These other Jews may have passed Nebuchadnezzar's test of allegiance they failed to pass God's test of allegiance. Their creative justifications allowed them to "save their skin" on that particular day. In contrast, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego apparently didn't succumb to any of the justifications. They stood their ground and endured one of the most significant test of allegiance to God in all of Scripture.

First, their refusal to bow results in being confronted by the King of the world. And, the King of the world was enraged. Nebuchadnezzar seems to calm himself just long enough to offer them one more opportunity to bow down and worship his image. If they don't he'll have them thrown into the burning fiery furnace, and then Nebuchadnezzar asked a question even though it was more of a declaration. "Who is the God who will deliver you out of my hands?" (Dan 3:15). His implicit point is that there is not

a god who can deliver them from him. This intimidating confrontation is quickly dealt with. They respond.

O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. [We don't need to take time to carefully think through our response.] <sup>17</sup> If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. <sup>18</sup> But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up. (Dan 3:16–18 ESV).

There is no hesitancy in these three young men. They didn't need to take time to think through how to best respond. They didn't need to take time to try to craft some kind of creative exception for themselves. They were certain of who God was, what he could do, and what they were going to do. They knew that God had the power to save them from both the fiery furnace and from Nebuchadnezzar. But even if their powerful God chose not to save them, they had no intention of worshiping that image. So then, they failed Nebuchadnezzar's test in a big and public way, but they passed God's test of allegiance.

## SMA'S Perspective

As we consider SMA's allegiance on that memorable day, there are a couple of perspectives from which we can view the story. Of course, the natural perspective would be to view the story through the lens of SMA. We're going to do that, and we'll be appropriately challenged by their perspective. But, we're going to push a little deeper into the story and consider as well God's perspective in this story, a perspective of which I would argue is more important for us to grab hold.

**Practical example of Philippians 2:12-13.** In viewing these two perspectives we will find a practical example of the principle found in Philippians 2.

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, <sup>13</sup> for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. (Phil 2:12–13 ESV).

There are two perspectives in this verse. From our perspective we are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling – as if our salvation depended upon our work; but we are to as well realize that “it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure,” and in this realization rest and trust in the fact that God is doing the work in and through us. As we consider SMA in this story, we come to realize (from our perspective) that *our commitment to God is contingent upon our knowledge of God and His will as revealed in His word.*

**Knowledge of His Word.** SMA are aware of God's expectations. The clear command in the law to not bow down to any graven image and the command to have only one God was permanently impressed upon their hearts. They knew what God expected of them at that point. Their actions displayed both an awareness of God's laws or expectations and also a willingness to actually obey God's laws.

**Awareness of God's Attributes.** Not only were they aware of God's expectations, but they were as well aware of God's character. There are a number of different character qualities that God displays in this story. (1) God was present with them. They knew that God was aware of what they were going through and was present with them. The New Testament truth that "I will never leave you or forsake you" (Heb 13:5) was as well imprinted on their hearts. (2) They had a personal God and that personal God cared about them. (3) They also were full well aware of his power. I'm certain they sat and listened to the stories of the cloud and pillar of fire that led their people. I'm sure they were told about the dry path through the Red Sea that their people fled through to escape the Egyptian army. They were told about how manna came and fed their people. How water came from the rock to care for them. How God won battle after battle for his people as they came into the promised land. They knew God was powerful and they knew God could save them from this burning fiery furnace – if he so chose.

**Great examples, but the story doesn't stop here.** Too often this is where the moral of the story stops. We see SMA as great examples of commitment and faithfulness. Due to their knowledge of God's Word and their awareness and trust in God's character they are able to stand firm through adversity and testing. That is a great moral challenge to draw. In fact we are encouraged to draw a similar conclusion in Hebrews.

And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets— <sup>33</sup> who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, <sup>34</sup> quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. <sup>35</sup> Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. <sup>36</sup> Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. <sup>37</sup> They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— <sup>38</sup> of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. <sup>39</sup> And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, <sup>40</sup> since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect. <sup>12:1</sup> Therefore, since we are surrounded by

so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup> looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. (Heb 11:32–12:2 ESV).

The author of Hebrews desires for us to view these wonderful and memorable examples of saints who followed God, and then as a result of observing them, fight against sin and pursue Christ and his sacrificial example. So then, we are to appropriately draw moral conclusions from the life and actions of SMA, but it's not enough to stop with their wonderful moral example, we must look further and see God.

## God's Perspective

What we will find as we consider God's perspective is that he orchestrates everything for His glory, and more pertinent to the message of today is that *our commitment to God is contingent upon His continued grace*.

**God desired to be glorified by displaying his character.** *His power.* I can only imagine what God was thinking when Nebuchadnezzar said "no god can save you from me," and of course my imagination at that point would be flowing from my sinful and fleshly frame. Therefore it's highly unlikely that this is what God was thinking, but I would imagine as Nebuchadnezzar taunted, God looked forward to the moment in which he would humble Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar was the most powerful king in the world at that time, and yet God, with very little effort, displayed himself to be much more powerful than Nebuchadnezzar. It would still take at least one more significant moment of humbling Nebuchadnezzar for him to finally accept God is all powerful.

*His faithfulness* in keeping his promises. God didn't have to spare SMA. In fact there were plenty of martyrs that would later burn to death for standing up for Christ. But in saving them, God reinforced a few important truths. (1) He promised to always preserve a remnant of his people. This incident is tangible evidence of that important reality. (2) He rewards those who obey him. Throughout the OT, God promises to reward those who obey his law. This is tangible evidence of him fulfilling that promise.

*His care.* He not only saved them but he came to them in their time of need. We can't be sure, but either God himself or an angel came to them in the fiery furnace. Imagine the conversation that took place at that point! God could have simply spared them. His saving of them didn't require his presence or some angelic presence. But, I believe that it was God that came to them, and in so doing beautifully

displays the reality that God is a caring God. He is not only aware of our trials but is present with us through them.

**God desired to be glorified by drawing Nebuchadnezzar to himself.** Remember, God is the one who gave Nebuchadnezzar the dream that ended up being the blueprints for this monstrosity out in the dessert. God is the one who allowed Daniel to interpret the dream for Nebuchadnezzar so that he would see God's amazing power. God is the one who spared SMA so that Nebuchadnezzar would once again see His immense power. We find that it takes quite a bit of doing, but God will, in his timing, effectually draw Neb to the point of brokenness and repentance – but that story comes a little later.

**The Final Result.** (1) SMA is spared and their reassurance in their God is bolstered. (2) Nebuchadnezzar glorifies the one true God. He does so in his own way – by threatening to dismember anyone who speaks against SMA's God. He has a way to go, but he'll eventually get there. (3) God is ultimately glorified. His attributes are displayed and he is seen to be glorious. His sovereign power is clearly seen. His care for his children is seen, his presence among his people, his faithfulness to his covenant promises – all are experienced and displayed.

While there are wonderful moral truths to be drawn from this story, we must never forget that first and foremost the Bible intends to reveal God. In this story God is gloriously revealed to be an all-powerful, present, and personal God.

## Conclusion

As we take into consideration the story of two tests of allegiance and two perspectives, we attempt to draw an appropriate conclusion. To do so, we take the conclusions drawn from each perspective and bring them together. As we viewed SMA's perspective I noted that, from our perspective, our commitment to God is contingent upon our knowledge of God and His will as revealed in His word. As we viewed God's perspective, I noted that our commitment to God is contingent upon His continued grace. Therefore we close with this concluding purpose.

**Purpose Statement.** Work like your salvation depends on your works while trusting and resting in the reality that it doesn't.

# Pride to Humility

Message 4 | Daniel 4:1-37 | November 26, 2017

---

## Introduction

The light of the great cathedral was limited to one candle on the casket of King Louis XIV. This King, who ruled France for 72 years from 1643 to 1715, desired to be referred to as Louis the Great. King Louis had given specific instructions to Massillon for his funeral service. He desired that the entire cathedral be completely dark, lit by only one candle positioned above the coffin so that everyone would be awed by his presence, even in his death. Amidst this cathedral, packed with mourners, and this one lone candle, walked Massillon. Massillon came forward for his funeral sermon, and to the surprise of all, snuffed out the single candle and proclaimed, “Only God is Great.”<sup>6</sup>

Sadly, to many of us learn that truth too late in life. In this fourth chapter of Daniel, we find one additional interaction in which God humbles Nebuchadnezzar. Before we go much further, I think we need to all be honest with ourselves. Pride is an integral part of our flesh. We inherently think too highly of ourselves, and it can affect nearly everything we do and every decision we make.

**Hugh of St. Victor.** Pride is the worst of all vices, because it attacks the soul through its virtues as well as through its evil habits. Pride is hateful to God and men.... It is the first prompting in the committing of sin; it remains the last in the struggle against sin. Indeed when the servant of God has overcome other vices and has reached the heights of virtue, she still has to face the battle against pride, and if she does not engage in the struggle her labor in other directions will be in vain.<sup>7</sup>

**Purpose Statement.** God uses Nebuchadnezzar to show us that no one ought to boast in anything they have accomplished but instead acknowledge and proclaim the power and sovereignty of God.

**Author of Chapter.** There is much conjecture whether or not Nebuchadnezzar wrote this chapter or whether Daniel placed Nebuchadnezzar’s declaration in his writings. The possibilities are that (1) Daniel wrote this on behalf of Nebuchadnezzar, (2) Nebuchadnezzar wrote this as a letter to all the

---

<sup>6</sup> I originally found the story in *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations* by Paul Lee Tan. I then found additional stories online, and rewrote this brief introduction.

<sup>7</sup> Elliot Ritzema and Rebecca Brant, eds., *300 Quotations for Preachers from the Medieval Church*, Pastorum Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2013).



nations and Daniel simply inserted it into his writings, or (3) Nebuchadnezzar wrote this for the purpose of Daniel including it in his writings. To some degree there is little relevance to who wrote it, because we believe, regardless of the human author, it is part of scripture and is therefore inspired by God and worthy of our attention. One note of relevance. If Nebuchadnezzar wrote this himself, and it was inserted into scripture (which we see that it was); there seems to be some indication of Nebuchadnezzar being a believer. I would be hard pressed to imagine an unbeliever writing a portion of scripture. Either way we have a Gentile emperor writing part of scripture.

**Date of Chapter.** Likely the incidents in this chapter begin around 570 BC We have little information concerning Nebuchadnezzar during the years between 569-562 BC Second and Third Century BC historians allude to Nebuchadnezzar’s sickness happening late in his life. It appears that the majority of his building was complete at this point in his life, which would make for a date later in his reign. This chapter happens probably around 25 years after chapter three. If the above dates are correct, Daniel is around 50 years old.

Age	Chapter	Events	Dates
13-15	1	Taken to Babylon	605
16-18	2	Neb’s 1 <sup>st</sup> dream	602
24-26	3	“Loyalty Oath”	594-593
49-51	4	Neb’s 2 <sup>nd</sup> dream	569-562
79-81	5	Fall of Babylon	539
80	6	Lions Den	539-538
80	9	Daniel’s prayer	538

## Storyline

**Nebuchadnezzar request an interpretation.** To some degree we see similarities to chapter 2. Nebuchadnezzar has a vision and desires an explanation. He calls in his wise men for the interpretation. Unlike chapter 2, he does not ask the wise men to tell him the vision, he simply wants the interpretation. They are unable to help him. At this point Daniel is called.

**Daniel interprets the vision.** Nebuchadnezzar’s response to Daniel seems to display a healthy respect for Daniel even though it had likely been 25 years since chapter 2. As well Nebuchadnezzar refers to Daniel as the chief of the magicians. There seems to be enough indication that Daniel was in good standing with Nebuchadnezzar, but did not come immediately for some unknown reason. Maybe

he was gone, or maybe he desired that the inability of the wise men be displayed so that once again, God could be seen as glorious.

Daniel's God was, once again, the only powerful God who was able to reveal and supply the interpretation. This is just one more experience used to draw Nebuchadnezzar to Himself and another opportunity for God to reveal Himself as all powerful and sovereign.

*Content of Dream: The Prosperous Tree (4:10-12).* The Prosperous Tree is in the midst of the earth, focal point of the world. The tree had worldwide power (its strength and height reached to the sky) and worldwide benefit (abundant fruit and food for all).

*Content of Dream: The Fallen Tree (4:13-16).* The tree is cut down per the command of an angelic watcher (4:14). A stump is left which signifies that the tree was not completely destroyed. As well the tree had the ability to be restored (4:15). Not only is it not completely destroyed, but it is as well protected from complete destruction (*a band of iron and bronze around it*). The tree is displayed in human terms, although that human would become like a beast (4:15-16).

*Daniel's Prolonged Answer.* Why was Daniel dismayed or upset (4:19) as his thoughts alarmed him? It appears that his silence was not due to the fact that he could not answer but that the interpretation was not good for Nebuchadnezzar. There could be a number of different reasons why Daniel paused in telling Nebuchadnezzar the bad news. (1) Daniel appreciated Nebuchadnezzar and (2) Nebuchadnezzar was an unbeliever who was going to be judged and Daniel didn't look forward to announcing that judgment.

*The Interpretation: Nebuchadnezzar's Greatness (4:20-22).* Nebuchadnezzar was the great tree. He was near the pinnacle of his greatness. He had built an incredible kingdom that had prospered the whole world.

*The Interpretation: Nebuchadnezzar's Punishment (4:23-26).* His punishment involved him living outside like an animal for 7 years. During this time his kingdom would remain secure until the point he came to realize God's greatness.

**God extends grace (4:27-29a).** *Daniel Implores Nebuchadnezzar to Repent (4:27).* Daniel is not promoting a works based salvation. A common theme throughout the Old Testament was for a believer to show their trust in God by their good works. Daniel first encouraged Nebuchadnezzar to repent or turn away from his sin. Nebuchadnezzar's right actions would display that he had truly repented.

Daniel may very well have been also wanting to help Nebuchadnezzar avoid the impending calamity that was pictured in the vision. Ridding himself of pride and doing good might help Nebuchadnezzar avoid the judgment. Daniel may not have been specifically thinking of eternal salvation as much as he was thinking of temporary salvation from the judgment. If that were the case, the remedy may have been simply good deeds (stop doing bad and start doing good). This would not have reconciled Nebuchadnezzar to God but it may have helped him avoid impending judgment.

*God offers time for Nebuchadnezzar to repent.* Nebuchadnezzar's dream occurred 12 months before its fulfillment. Nebuchadnezzar had many opportunities to repent and acknowledge God. He chose not to.

**Nebuchadnezzar chooses pride (4:29b-30).** "Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built" (Dan 4:6). (1) There were double walls around the city. The outer wall was 25 feet thick and 17 miles long. The two walls were 40 feet apart. The walls had 360 towers along them. One of the walls was wide enough to have two chariots ride on it. (2) *The Ishtar Gate* was 35 feet tall and opened to a 75 foot paved processional leading to the main temple. Each side of the path was a 40 foot wall covered with blue enameled brick. There were 6 foot lions made of red and yellow enamel tiles along the path. The gate was covered with lapis lazuli which would be equivalent in value to gold and silver. (3) *A seven level ziggurat*. It was 288 feet tall and 130 square yards at the base. It is estimated that there were nearly 60,000,000 bricks in the tower. Each of them was 13 x 13 and had imprinted on them "Nebuchadnezzar the builder." The lower half consisted of brown glazed bricks and the top half of blue (resembling heaven and earth). There was a small temple at the top. (4) There were 50 temples inside the walls. (5) *Hanging gardens*. He built the Hanging Gardens, one of the 7 wonders of the world. He built it for one of his wives, Amytis, who was homesick for the mountains of her home in Media. The artificial mountain was watered from the Euphrates using an ingenious pump and well system.

**God Chooses Judgment (4:31-33).** The judgment was in the immediate context of Nebuchadnezzar's pride. A voice from heaven immediately declared the judgment and Nebuchadnezzar's fall.<sup>8</sup>

At the end of twelve months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon,<sup>30</sup> and the king answered and said, "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my

---

<sup>8</sup> Nebuchadnezzar's insanity is assumed by many as the first noted case of boanthropy. Boanthropy is the mental sickness in which one thinks they are a cow or ox and as a result begin to act like these animals. This is similar to lycanthropy which is when someone thinks they are a wolf man.

mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?”<sup>31</sup> While the words were still in the king’s mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, “O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you,<sup>32</sup> and you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. And you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.” (Daniel 4:29–32 ESV).

Everyone who is arrogant in heart is an abomination to the LORD; be assured, he will not go unpunished. (Prov 16:5 ESV).

Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. (Prov 16:18 ESV).

**Nebuchadnezzar Glorifies God (4:34-37).** It is likely that this restoration was short lived. If we are correct in our timing of this in Nebuchadnezzar’s life, he would have died a year or two after his seven years of insanity.

At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever, for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation;<sup>35</sup> all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, “What have you done?”<sup>36</sup> At the same time my reason returned to me, and for the glory of my kingdom, my majesty and splendor returned to me. My counselors and my lords sought me, and I was established in my kingdom, and still more greatness was added to me.<sup>37</sup> Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble. (Daniel 4:34–37 ESV).

## Conclusion

**Purpose Statement.** God uses Nebuchadnezzar to show us that no one should boast in anything they have accomplished but should instead acknowledge and proclaim the power and sovereignty of God.

I would like to draw a few characteristics of a humble person from this chapter, but before I do, let’s be quick to acknowledge up front that humility is not natural to any of us. This simple reality is displayed in the short story about a frog and his two friends, two ducks.

In a certain pond on one of the farms in the East were two ducks and frog. Now these neighbors were the best of friends; all day long they used to play together. But as the hot summer days came, the pond began to dry up and soon there was such a little bit of water that they all realized that they would have to move. Now the ducks could easily fly to another place, but what about their friend the frog? Finally it was decided that they

would put a stick in the bill of each duck, and then the frog would hang onto the stick with his mouth and they would fly him to another pond. And so they did. As they were flying, a farmer out in his field looked up and saw them and said, “Well, isn’t that a clever idea! I wonder who thought of it!” The frog said, “I did ...”<sup>9</sup>

Who wouldn’t have been like the frog? We all desire credit for everything we think we have accomplished – that is good. We all struggle with pride. So then, let’s draw some practical characteristics of the humble by looking at the reverse of Nebuchadnezzar’s pride.

**Characteristics of the Humble.** (1) *Acknowledge God’s power and give him credit.* The humble person will realize that all their accomplishments are due to the empowerment of God. God will alone be exalted for any achievements. No one has accomplished anything in and of themselves of which to be proud. Nebuchadnezzar accomplished much, probably more than most men throughout history, and yet he also came to realize that any man’s success is due to the ability and empowerment given to them by a Sovereign God.

(2) *Realize their own weakness in light of God’s power.* A humble person will consider themselves weak in light of God’s power. John Flavel wrote, “They that know God will be humble. And they that know themselves cannot be proud.”<sup>10</sup>

(3) *Quick to repent.* A humble person will be quick to repent. Due to one’s awareness of the greatness of God and their comparable weakness, a humble man is quick to be aware of his sin and repent of it. Nebuchadnezzar is a bad example of this type of quick repentance, whereas David is a great example for us. When Nathan confronts him with his sin he is quick to repent.

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. <sup>2</sup> Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! <sup>3</sup> For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. <sup>4</sup> Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. (Psalm 51:1–4 ESV).

(4) *Quick to proclaim the excellencies of God.* Nebuchadnezzar does offer us a great example in this passage.

**Thomas Brooks.** Here is a wonder! God is on high; and yet the higher a man lifts himself up, the farther he is from God; and the lower a man humbles himself, the nearer he is to

---

<sup>9</sup> Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc., 1996), 1100.

<sup>10</sup> Elliot Ritzema and Elizabeth Vince, eds., *300 Quotations for Preachers from the Puritans*, Pastorum Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2013).

God. Of all souls, God delights most to dwell with the humble, for they do most prize and best improve his precious presence.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Elliot Ritzema and Elizabeth Vince, eds., *300 Quotations for Preachers from the Puritans*, Pastorum Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2013).

# The Fall of Babylon

Message 5 | Daniel 5:1-31 | December 3, 2017

---

## Introduction

One of the most interesting stories in the Bible is that described in Daniel 5 – Belshazzar’s feast. Let’s take a moment to paint the scene and then, following, we will look a little deeper at some of the details. Belshazzar was not the supreme king of Babylon. Nabonidus, his father, was king. Belshazzar was second ruler in the kingdom. Nabonidus, over the course of his rule, had distanced himself from Babylon and had also experienced quite a bit of defeat. In the vacuum of leadership, Belshazzar had found a certain level of control, and likely had more recently taken full control of the city of Babylon.

Puffed up by the pride of his newly-gotten power, Belshazzar makes a great banquet. The palace is a blaze of light. The long tables are set for more than a thousand guests. They are brilliant and dazzling with plates and cups and tankards of silver and gold, many-jewelled, reflecting back the light from countless candelabra. Reclining at the tables are the guests, with fingers and arms ringed and jewelled. The air is heavy with perfume and tremulous with the music of harp and dulcimer and sackbut. Between the tables the oriental women weave through the contortions and distortions of the Asiatic dance.<sup>12</sup>

At some point in the midst of this electrifying event, Belshazzar directs his chief steward to bring in the vessels that had been taken from the temple in Jerusalem. “Belshazzar commands that the cups be filled with Babylonian wine, and passed from lip to lip—while he and his guests sing the praises of the gods of gold and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone.”

All of a sudden, in the midst of all the joviality, there appears the fingers of a man writing on the wall. All eyes are turned to this mysterious message. “Suddenly a hush like death falls upon the banqueting hall. . . . Terror freezes Belshazzar to the very soul.” “Then the king’s color changed, and his thoughts alarmed him; his limbs gave way, and his knees knocked together” (Dan 5:6 ESV). Belshazzar pulls himself together and “called loudly to bring in the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the astrologers. The king declared to the wise men of Babylon, “Whoever reads this writing, and shows me its interpretation, shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around his neck and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom” (Dan 5:7 ESV).

---

<sup>12</sup> R. A. Torrey, *Revival Addresses* (Chicago; New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1903), 30–32.

At the point of this chapter, Daniel had been in Babylon for about 60 years and is around 80 years old. About 25 years have passed since chapter 4, fifty since chapter 3. Belshazzar is the co-regent of Babylon, along with His father, Nabonidus. The Medo-Persian army is outside of Babylon. Belshazzar and his thousands of guest are partying.

As we study this chapter we will find many truths. Let's remember throughout this study that without the work of God in our lives we would act just like the two kings of Babylon spoken of in Daniel. We are of course not as powerful as these men and have less with which to be proud. With that in mind, we should be all the more humble with the little that we have. If God can humble the most powerful men in the world, how much more those of us of "little consequence"?

## Background Information

<b>Nebuchadnezzar</b>	605-562
<b>Amel-Marduk</b> , Son of Nebuchadnezzar, Executed by Neriglissar	562-560
<b>Neriglissar</b> , Son in law of Nebuchadnezzar	560-556
<b>Labashi-Marduk</b> , Son of Neri. & grandson of Neb., Executed by Nabonidus' officers	Few months
<b>Nabonidus</b> Babylonian noble who married Nebuchadnezzar's daughter. In 553 he conquered and began to repair Tema, an oasis in the Arabian desert. He was probably in this area and away from Babylon for nearly 14 years of his 17 year reign. It appears that he did not worship the gods of Babylon but instead his own gods. This provided a number of problems with the people in Babylon and their feasts and festivals that required the king present. In his absence he left Belshazzar to rule in Babylon as coregent. He returned to Babylon in the spring of 539 just before Babylon's fall	556-539
<b>Belshazzar</b> , Son of Nabo & grandson of Neb, Co-reigned with Nabonidus	? 549-539

## The Handwriting Explained

**The inability of the wise men.** Once again we see the inability of the wise men to accomplish the task of interpretation. Even though Belshazzar offers ruling power to the one who interprets, no one is able.



**The queen reminds Belshazzar of Daniel.** This queen is probably Amytis, the widow of Nebuchadnezzar. It is possible that this queen was Nitocris, Nabonidus' wife and Belshazzar's mother, but it is more likely that she would have been with Nabonidus and not at this event.

**Daniel is summoned to this feast.** It is likely that Belshazzar was aware of Daniel, but had disregarded him over the last 20 or so years. This is probably due to a number of factors, but it is possible that Daniel was viewed as a rival due to the power that he had in the past and the potential of him having held the throne for Nebuchadnezzar during his insanity.

**Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin.** *Mene*: God has numbered your kingdom and put an end to it. Repetition shows emphasis. *Tekel*: You have been weighed on the scales and found deficient. *Peres*: Your kingdom has been divided and given over to the Medes and Persians.

## The Handwriting Fulfilled

Daniel tells us, "that very night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was killed. And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old" (Dan 5:30-31). While Belshazzar was slain that same night, it appears that no one else died in this defeat. According to ancient historians the city was taken without firing a shot and the only recorded casualty was Belshazzar.

According to historians Cyrus planned the siege of Babylon for some length of time. Cyrus began a campaign of propaganda in 547 BC in which he told people "Marduk has called me to Babylon." The following quote speaks of Marduk guiding Cyrus to defeat Babylon because of Nabonidus' insults to Marduk.

"He (Nabonidus) interrupted in a fiendish way the regular offerings . . . he established within the sacred cities. The worship of Marduk, the king of the gods, he changed into abomination, daily he used to do evil against his city . . . He tormented its inhabitants with corvee-work without relief, he ruined them all.

Upon their complaints the lord of the gods became terribly angry . . . Marduk . . . scanned and looked through all the countries, searching for a righteous ruler willing to lead him (Marduk) in the annual procession. He pronounced the name of Cyrus, king of Anshan, declared him to be the ruler of the world . . . ordered him to march against his city Babylon . . . going at his side like a real friend."<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> James B. Pritchard. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament with Supplement*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 315. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400882762>.

For nearly 14 years Nabonidus had neglected the yearly festivals in honor of Marduk. It was only at the very end that Nabonidus returned to Babylon and participated in the events. He as well gathered all the gods from the surrounding towns into Babylon so as to provide more strength and protection for Babylon.

In September, Ugbaru (who was Nebuchadnezzar's general and died three weeks after Babylon's defeat) defeated Nabonidus' army at Opis. In October the Medo-Persian army conquered Sippar. Sippar was about 30 miles north of Babylon. At this victory there was no battle at all and Nabonidus fled. It appears that, due to Nabonidus' fleeing, Belshazzar assumed full control of Babylon, and likely the feast spoken of in this chapter is an inauguration feast for Belshazzar.

It was that day, October 12<sup>th</sup>, that Ugbaru and the army of Cyrus entered Babylon with no battle. The reason that there was no battle seems to be that the priest of Marduk (in both Sippar and Babylon) opened the gates for the army and let them in. The priest of Marduk hated Nabonidus due his disrespect and disregard for Marduk and the feast and festivals. As well when Nabonidus took the gods from all the surrounding towns, none of those towns wanted to fight without their god.

Nabonidus returned to Babylon later and was arrested. According to an historian, Nabonidus was arrested and exiled to Cormanian which is modern Afghanistan.

Many have wondered why Belshazzar was feasting if the attack on Babylon was so apparent. (1) He had a false sense of security in the fortification of Babylon. (2) He possessed a naïve confidence due to the fact that he was surrounded by all the gods in the area. (3) There is evidence that Babylon possessed 20+ years of food supplies. (4) As stated in the passage, he was arrogant.

## Conclusion

God's sovereignty demands humility.

So then, what do we do with this story and this comparison. Our conclusion could most definitely be the same as last week. God once again humbles a king and displays that he is truly in power. He places whomever he desires, wherever he desires, whenever he desires. We ought to both be humbled by this reality but as well find great confidence and comfort in the fact that our God is in control.

God's sovereignty involves judgment.

Consider the statement, “you have been weighed in the balances and found wanting” (Dan 5:27 ESV). The result of Belshazzar’s being weighed was his immediate destruction. It is a fearful place to stand – being weighed by God. Any one of us, if we were to be weighed in the balances of God’s law, would find ourselves severely wanting. “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23 ESV). The consequences for our failure to meet up to God’s judgment is similar to that of Belshazzar. When we are weighed against God’s law, we are found wanting, and we deserve immediate judgment. It is a good thing, for any man, to pause for a moment and consider the results of being weighed in the scale of God’s law. We are told that we are to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind” (Matt 22:37). How might we do if we were weighed against just that one law – set aside our failure to meet up to all the others? Is it not true that each one of us, with any ability towards objective self-analysis, can conclude that we have fallen far short of what God requires?

And yet, as believers, when we are weighed, we are not weighed in accordance with our adherence to the law, but instead we place on the scales, the perfect righteousness of Christ.

I bring with me the full atonement, the perfect satisfaction of Jesus’ blood, and the perfect righteousness of a divine being, the spotless righteousness of Jesus the Son of God. I can be weighed against the law, and yet sit securely, knowing that now and for ever, I am equal to the law. It hath nought against me since Christ is mine. <sup>14</sup>

### God’s sovereignty is self-determining.

Let me draw your attention to one additional aspect of God’s sovereignty, ironically, a similar characteristic of which Daniel points out about Nebuchadnezzar’s sovereignty as the ruler of Babylon. Daniel writes concerning Nebuchadnezzar’s rule and authority:

O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father kingship and greatness and glory and majesty. <sup>19</sup> And because of the greatness that he gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whom he would, he killed, and whom he would, he kept alive; whom he would, he raised up, and whom he would, he humbled. (Daniel 5:18–19 ESV).

I find it interesting that Daniel describes Nebuchadnezzar’s rule in this way, “whom he would, he raised up, and whom he would, he humbled.” It is that phrase that I want to dwell on for a moment. Nebuchadnezzar raised up “whom he would, and whom he would he humbled.” What we find in the

---

<sup>14</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, “The Scales of Judgment,” in *The New Park Street Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 5 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1859), 259.

comparison between Belshazzar and Nebuchadnezzar is the same reality. God chose to immediately humble and destroy Belshazzar and yet he had chosen to extend times of grace and multiple opportunities for repentance to Nebuchadnezzar.

**Similarities between Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar.** (1) They were both judged for their pride (Neb: 3, 4:30 and Bel: 5:22-23). (2) They both blasphemed God. Nebuchadnezzar said in chapter 3, “what god can deliver you from my hands?” Belshazzar blasphemed God by using the temple vessels to party and worship his gods. (3) Both of them were idolatrous. Nebuchadnezzar built a 90 foot image and demanded everyone to bow down to it at the threat of being burned alive in a burning fiery furnace (Dan 3). Belshazzar was idolatrous in that “they drank and praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone” (Dan 5:4).

**Differences between Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar.** (1) Nebuchadnezzar’s pride results in temporal judgment. Belshazzar’s pride results in his immediate death. (2) Nebuchadnezzar honored the God of the Jews on a number of occasions (probably even coming to believe in Him). Belshazzar blasphemes God in a more direct way when he took the temple vessels and used them for common use. (3) Nebuchadnezzar is given an opportunity to repent. It appears that Belshazzar is not given an opportunity to repent. (4) Daniel treats Nebuchadnezzar with respect even prior to his praise of God. Daniel is short with Belshazzar and offers him no hope. (5) Nebuchadnezzar seems to respond to God’s communication. Belshazzar seems to belittle God’s communication and communicator – Daniel.

**The primary distinction** between Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar is that God sovereignly chose to offer Nebuchadnezzar a chance and sovereignly decided to not offer Belshazzar a chance to repent. There was nothing in either of them that warranted God’s patience with them. God could have chosen to extend a period of time for Belshazzar to repent. He allowed Nebuchadnezzar to have 3 dramatic displays of his power. He could have given Belshazzar more opportunities. Neither of them deserved his grace. Neither of them deserved any opportunity to repent, and yet God’s work was quite different in each of their lives. God humbles whom he will, and he raises up whom he will. This is the similar concept we find in Romans where Paul writes concerning God’s sovereignty.

What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God’s part? By no means! <sup>15</sup> For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” <sup>16</sup> So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. <sup>17</sup> For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” <sup>18</sup> So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he

wills. <sup>19</sup> You will say to me then, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?”

<sup>20</sup> But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me like this?” <sup>21</sup> Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? <sup>22</sup> What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, <sup>23</sup> in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory— (Romans 9:14–23 ESV).

How might we attempt to understand this? Simply put. God is sovereign and he can do whatever he wants. We, as vessels of clay, don’t have the right to question the potter. He does it because, as Romans 9 states, there are vessels of wrath prepared for destruction and there are vessels of mercy prepared for glory – all of this to display his power and mercy.

**Implications to you.** In God’s sovereignty he has chosen to give you what you have and make you what you are. Why did He choose to use you and not someone else? No one can answer that—your primary response should be that of gratitude for His grace.

Should you fear the same judgment that came upon Belshazzar? Not if you are a believer. While it is true that God would find us lacking if He based our merit on our own worth; He instead sees the worth of Christ on us covering us, and it is Christ’s worth which allows us to be found acceptable to God.

# Daniel's Character Reveals God's Glory

Message 6 | Daniel 6:1-28 | December 31, 2017

---

## Introduction

This chapter seems to occur shortly after the events of chapter 5. There is no indication in the chapter that there was a lengthy period of time between the two chapters. Daniel has been in Babylon for nearly 70 years and is likely between 80 to 83 years old.

We live in a day and age when integrity seems to be little cherished. Someone who highly values integrity or uprightness is often viewed as a prude, religious zealot, spiritual elitist, or puritanical – and none of those are meant as a positive quality. And yet it is those same qualities of integrity and uprightness that are so lacking in the world and so cherished by believers. This is no different than during Daniel's time. Many people did not appreciate Daniel's character and integrity. As we consider the storyline of Daniel 6, we will see how the greatness of God is revealed through the consistent and godly character of Daniel.

We will accomplish this by (1) assessing Daniel's extraordinary character, and (2) observing the effects of Daniel's character on those around him.

## Daniel had an excellent spirit.

**Excellent Spirit.** Daniel is characterized, in chapter 6, as having an excellent spirit in him. "This Daniel became distinguished above all the other high officials and satraps, because an *excellent* spirit was in him" (Dan 6:3 ESV). There are two other similar usages in chapter 5. In 5:12, Daniel is considered to have "an *excellent* spirit" and in 5:14 he is characterized as having "light and understanding and *excellent* wisdom."<sup>15</sup> This word, for excellent, is used in a number of other places with some variance in meaning. In chapter two, in regards to the image Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream, "You saw, O king . . . This image, mighty and of *exceeding* brightness, stood before you, and its appearance was frightening" (Dan 2:31). As well in Daniel 3:22, in regards to the burning fiery furnace, "the king's order was urgent and the furnace *overheated* . . ." Let me point you to one additional usage. Following Nebuchadnezzar's

---

<sup>15</sup> After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and *exceedingly* strong (Dan 7:7). Then I desired to know the truth about the fourth beast, which was different from all the rest, *exceedingly* terrifying (Dan 7:19)

seven years of insanity, God returned to him his past glory, and he says, “My counselors and my lords sought me, and I was established in my kingdom, and still *more greatness* was added to me” (Dan 4:26).

This word is used to intensify the nature of something. Daniel didn’t only have average character. It was intense. The fire wasn’t just hot, as any fire would be. It was overheated. Nebuchadnezzar was already great, but after his stint with insanity, he was even greater.

**Excellent Spirit.** In Daniel 4:8, Nebuchadnezzar refers to Daniel as the one “in whom is the *spirit* of the holy gods” and again in 4:18, “for the *spirit* of the holy gods is in you.” It is this same extraordinary spirit that is mentioned by the queen in chapter 5, when she reminds Belshazzar of the man who can interpret the words for him. She reminds him of how her husband<sup>16</sup> placed Daniel in a position of great authority because he had “an excellent spirit” (Dan 5:12). It was this same extraordinary spirit that led Darius to promote Daniel to a place of esteemed leadership.

The word that is translated ‘spirit’ can be translated as smell, wind, or breath. Consider the following scenarios: (1) Someone has bad breath or an unpleasant body odor. What does this do for you? Do we not often avoid close contact with such people? We try not to let them speak directly at us, or we joke about them not lifting their hands in the air. In essence their smell is a repellant. (2) In contrast, consider someone that wears a costly intoxicating perfume or cologne. The smell is present before they are and the smell lingers after they have left. Their presence changes the atmosphere of the room in a positive way. You find yourself wanting them to be around.

This is maybe a simplified line of thought, but let me ask. What do you smell like? I know that may be an odd question. The question is not meant to have you to consider your physical smell but instead your spiritual scent. Consider yourself in light of the two above scenarios. When people see you or think of you do they think of you having extraordinary character and as a result are drawn to be around you? Or, do they see a character or personality that is wrought with bitterness, anger, sinful habits, pride, selfishness, etc? Do people avoid you because you smell bad?

*Godly character may, at times, be repulsive.* Some of you may wonder at times if people avoid you because you strive to live for the Lord. This may as well be true. Consider what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians.

---

<sup>16</sup> This does assume that the queen was Nebuchadnezzar’s wife and not Nabonidus’ wife. We mentioned last week that it was more likely Belshazzar’s grandmother because his mother would likely have been with Nabonidus. This is entirely speculative though.

But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. <sup>15</sup> Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. <sup>16</sup> But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed (2 Cor 3:14–16 ESV).

In our passage we can see that Daniel's character was both a repellant and a positive draw. The other leaders hated Daniel due to what his extraordinary spirit produced, and Cyrus (as well as Nebuchadnezzar) had great respect and admiration for Daniel due to his extraordinary spirit.

*What did Darius notice about Daniel?* What was the extraordinary spirit? Darius saw either the direct work of the Spirit in Daniel's life or what we have come to label "the fruit of the Spirit" (Gal 5:19-26). The fruit of the Spirit is really the character of Christ being revealed in us as we grow.

*The fruit is a product not the goal.* We often want to make the fruit of the Spirit the goal we strive after in our Christian life. We desire to be loving and gentle and good, so we set those as goals and work at being loving and gentle and good. Instead of focusing on the fruit (or making the fruit the goal), we ought to strive to have a relationship with Christ. Christ-likeness ought to be the goal. When that goal is realized, the 'fruit of the Spirit' will be produced.

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. <sup>5</sup> I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing (John 15:4–5 ESV).

Instead of training you how to be loving, I want to encourage you to know Christ. If you come to know Christ, you will be loving, but not only loving; for you will produce all of the parts of the 'fruit of the Spirit.' It is important that as the fruit of the Spirit is produced in us that we do not become boastful. You cannot boast in the fruit produced in you because no one bears fruit apart from Christ in them.

## Daniel was faithful.

We find three concepts in this chapter that fully detail Daniel's faithfulness. We find two of them at the end of verse 4 where Daniel is said to be (1) faithful and, (2) have no error or fault found in him. The third concept is that of consistency and is found in verses 16 and 20. So then, this aspect of Daniel's character is wrapped up in that he is faithful, blameless, and consistent.



**Faithful.** In considering a couple of different Hebrew lexicons, we can find that this idea of faithful carries with it the idea of being reliable and trustworthy.<sup>17</sup> If you are faithful, people can place their confidence in you. This can work itself out in a myriad of ways. As to your speech, when you say something, people can trust that it is true and that you will follow through with whatever it is you promised to do. As to your work, when you are given a task or when you commit to a task, others can rest assured that the task will be done and will be done in an acceptable and timely manner. Of course it is as well true that when you say you are going to do something and you don't follow through, you will be considered untrustworthy or unreliable. People will not be able to depend on you or have confidence that you'll accomplish what you promised.

**Blameless.** In this context, the idea of faithfulness is surrounded by the idea of being without fault or without error. "they could find no ground for complaint or any fault . . . no error or fault was found in him. . . . We shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel" (Dan 6:4–5 ESV).

Without fault or without error. While this is not the word used elsewhere to refer to blameless, it is the same concept. Daniel was blameless. The Greek word for *blameless* is used throughout the New Testament and carries the idea of not stumbling or jarring against anything, void of offense, having a clear conscience, without guilt, or without defect. This word has single handedly caused me to nearly step out of ministry on a number of different occasions. In 1 Timothy 3:2, the qualifications for an elder are offered, and the one that I find the most overwhelming (don't get me wrong, they all seem overwhelming at times) is what the KJV refers to as "blameless." Most of the modern translations use "above reproach." An elder is to be blameless or above reproach. He is to be "without guilt, faultless, without defect."<sup>18</sup> "Who can fit that requirement?" I often think rather despairingly.

Before you think you get a pass on "blameless" because you're not an elder. Consider the following passages. God desires that all of his disciples are found to be blameless.

even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and *blameless* before him. (Eph 1:4 ESV).

---

<sup>17</sup> "(ʿāman) trust, believe in. Used only in the Haphel. The passive participle means "trustworthy." R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 990.

<sup>18</sup> "2 Palm, Syr to entrust with . . . 1 Syr to be believed, 2 Syr to be confirmed, 3 Syr to be reliable" Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon, *Targum Lexicon* (Hebrew Union College, 2004).

<sup>18</sup> Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, and Neva F. Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, Baker's Greek New Testament Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 46.

so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and *without blemish*. (Eph 5:27 ESV).

And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment,<sup>10</sup> so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and *blameless* for the day of Christ,<sup>11</sup> filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. (Phil 1:9–11 ESV).

Do all things without grumbling or disputing,<sup>15</sup> that you may be *blameless* and innocent, children of God *without blemish* in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, (Phil 2:14–15 ESV).

I would assume that any believer, who is aware of his flesh, might be overwhelmed by the expectation and desire that we are to be found blameless. I don't want to too quickly relieve you of that pressure. I want you to feel the full weight of striving to be blameless. In one sense, I don't want to lighten that reality. We ought to feel an appropriate, Holy Spirit motivated desire to live lives that are characterized by faithfulness and godly character. If we are untrustworthy, consistently dishonest, and immoral we ought to find no solace but instead strong conviction. God does still hate sin. Yes, he loves his children, but he still doesn't take lightly their sin. We ought to be terrified if we are living in unrepentant sin.

On the other hand, I do desire that you find great comfort in Christ. In another sense, you will never be truly blameless until you see Christ. On any given day, you can point to my words, thoughts, or actions that are sinful. And on each of those days, you would often be right. You could accuse me of sinning and it would be true. It is at this point that I take great comfort in the fact that my blamelessness is only and ever objectively found in my position in Christ. I am in Christ and Christ is blameless.

**Consistent.** The third concept under Daniel's faithfulness is that he was consistent. Of course inherent in faithfulness is consistency, but note how twice, Darius declares to Daniel, "May your God, whom you serve *continually*, deliver you" (Dan 6:16,20). I love how Darius considers Daniel as always serving God. Some of us at times may feel that the only thing we are consistent at is being inconsistent. We are aware of our weaknesses and failures and might feel anything but consistent in our walk with Christ. Daniel was characterized as someone who was constantly and consistently serving his God.

What might consistency look like in our lives? What must be a reality in someone's life for them to be constantly serving God? Consider the following: a constant awareness of one's need for dependence on Christ, consistent in prayer, not dependent on their own strength and ability.

Daniel habitually prayed.

So as the story proceeds we learn that the other rulers couldn't find any fault in Daniel, so they decided that they had to figure something out in regards to his worship of God. This they found easily. Daniel consistently prayed three times a day, so they used this against him. They manipulated the King into signing an ordinance demanding everyone to pray to Darius alone. If anyone was caught praying to another god, they would be thrown into the lions den. Of course, because Daniel was faithful, "When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously" (Dan 6:10 ESV).

There are a couple simple lessons to learn in Daniel's example. First, and most obvious, is that we are to be consistently praying. Let's take this lesson a bit further. There is value in having set times for prayer. If you're like me, you've probably rationalized at some point not having established and extended periods of prayer in your life because we believe that we are to constantly be in a state of prayer. Maybe you appreciate one believer's statement about prayer in that he never prayed for more than half an hour but never went more than half an hour without praying.<sup>19</sup> There is some truth in this. Afterall, Paul tells us to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess 5:17 ESV). He similarly states in Ephesians, pray "at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication" (Eph 6:18 ESV). So then, we should be in a constant state of prayer, but we ought not conclude that implies that we shouldn't have set times of prayer as well. Daniel offers us a beautiful example of that very practice. Daniel was so committed to this practice that he knowingly offered up his life rather than quit his consistent time of prayer. One of my seminary professors wisely stated, "What can be done at any time and in any manner is apt to be done at no time and in no manner."<sup>20</sup>

## Daniel deflected all glory to God.

Not only did people see the character of Daniel, but they as well acknowledged the greatness of his God due to his character. It would have been easy for Daniel to receive and accept the accolades that came with all that he had done, but it is clear in every instance that Daniel deflects all praise to God.

---

<sup>19</sup> I thought Spurgeon was the one who said this, and you can find some people online citing him as the source, but I couldn't find the original source of this quote. There are a lot of people that reference this quote or something similar, but no one footnoted where they got it from. There seems to be more evidence that the quote is not from Spurgeon but instead Smith Wigglesworth and he used half an hour instead of 5 minutes. There were quite a few books that quoted him, but once again I couldn't find their source either.

<sup>20</sup> Dr. Gordon Lovik. Seminary notes. Calvary Baptist Theological Seminary, Lansdale, PA.

This type of response is not unfamiliar to Daniel. Recall Nebuchadnezzar's response to Daniel's interpretation of his dream in chapter 2.

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, <sup>28</sup> 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: (Daniel 2:27–28 ESV).

Shadrach Meshach and Abednego's deliverance from the fiery furnace in chapter 3 and Nebuchadnezzar's own experience with humility in chapter 4. In each instance Nebuchadnezzar praises God for the display of His power.

Nebuchadnezzar answered and said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him, and set aside the king's command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God. (Daniel 3:28 ESV).

Do people see a consistent testimony in you? Do they know that your consistent testimony is based upon your devotion to God, and not just a set of standards or morality you endorse? Do they see the greatness of God at work in your life? Do you communicate that it is God that works in you and not your own strength and ability?

# Our Devastating Sin, God's Breathtaking Grace

Daniel's Model Prayer | Message 7 | Daniel 9:1-19 | January 7, 2018

---

## Introduction

**Background to the Passage.** This event occurred shortly after chapter 5 and probably near the time of chapter 6 and the lion's den. Daniel was around 80 years old and was reading from the book of Jeremiah.

This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. <sup>12</sup> Then after seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, declares the LORD, making the land an everlasting waste. <sup>13</sup> I will bring upon that land all the words that I have uttered against it, everything written in this book, which Jeremiah prophesied against all the nations. (Jere 25:11–13, Cf 29:10).

Since captivity began in 605 BC, the end of seventy years of captivity would be around 536 BC. If Daniel was 12 or 13 when he went into captivity, and he is now about 80, he would only have a few more years until the seventy years is complete.

Josephus wrote that Cyrus was shown the following passage in Isaiah, and as a result desired to fulfill that prophecy. "Who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd, and he shall fulfill all my purpose'; saying of Jerusalem, 'She shall be built,' and of the temple, 'Your foundation shall be laid'" (Isaiah 44:28). It appears that this passage played a part in Cyrus freeing the Jews from captivity to go back to Jerusalem to rebuild Jerusalem, the walls, and the temple.

**A simple outline of Daniel's prayer.** (1) Daniel humbles himself as he prays (9:3-4). (2) The sins of Israel are acknowledged (9:5-6). (3) God's character is acknowledged (throughout). (4) The divine, just punishment for sins is accepted (9:7-14). (5) Deliverance is requested (9:15-19).

**Balanced view of sin and grace.** Having read through Daniel's prayer, we notice that much of it is an acknowledgment of Israel's sinfulness and a plea for God to be merciful. As we wrestle with the truths concerning our sin and God's mercy, we can error in two ways. First, we can error by focusing singularly on our sinfulness and fail to ever get to the hope that is found in Christ. It is most definitely true that we are sinful, but we must never communicate that without offering hope. Secondly, we can error by ignoring our sinfulness and focusing on just the grace of God and freedom in Christ. There is a problem

with this approach. While it is more pleasant, our immense appreciation for God's grace only comes through an understanding of our sinfulness. Paul wrestled with both these realities in Romans 7 and 8. Paul writes in Romans 7:24, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" We could err and focus our thoughts on how wretched we are, but this would be a travesty, for Paul continues by writing, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1 ESV). Paul desired that we move on from the shame and guilt that come in our failure to meet up to the law and instead look to the hope that is found in Christ. So then, I desire that we get to the hope that we find in Christ, but . . .

**Purpose Statement.** We will only fully appreciate God's grace once we have wrestled with the reality of our sinfulness.

## We are devastatingly sinful (9:4-6).

**Their sin was his sin.** As I consider the following verse, I see a quality in Daniel's prayer that is probably atypical. Daniel includes himself as he admits the guilt of his nation. "We have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules" (Dan 9:5). I am most amazed by the complete selflessness of Daniel in this prayer. He does not attempt to exclude himself from the rest of sinful Israel. He accepts the plight of Israel as his own. He is as concerned if not more concerned for others than he is for himself. Most of us would probably agree that we live in a self-centered culture. Many argue that narcissism is at epidemic highs in this social media and selfie driven culture. We struggle to acknowledge anything negative about ourselves, let alone acknowledging having any part in the weaknesses and sins of others. Added to this, for believers, is our New Testament perception of a more personalized faith and individualized relationship with God. As a result we may at times find ourselves content with our own spiritual strength and be dismissive of Christian brothers and sisters around us. We may hurt for them and pray for them, but we don't necessarily feel any sense of duty or obligation for their sin and brokenness. Daniel prays to God concerning the sinfulness of his entire nation. And even though Daniel would not be characterized by the sin of his nation, he included himself as he says, 'we have sinned.'" Of course we cannot repent for someone else, and we have a different relationship with each other than the Israelites did with one another. Still, we ought to be concerned about the sin we see in each other's lives and claim some responsibility in fighting it with them. "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are

spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal 6:1).

**Our sin is multifaceted.** In verse 5, Daniel uses a number of words to describe sin, and in so doing offers a multifaceted look at our sin. He begins with the generic and all-encompassing term, *sin*.

*We sinned (missed the mark).* Sin is the reverse of accomplishing the task of reflecting the character of God. One aspect of glorifying God is that we reflect His character or communicable attributes. Anything that falls short of accurately reflecting the communicable character of God is sin. In summary, sin is missing the mark of true godliness. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23).

*Done wrong (twisted and distorted truth).* The nuance we find in this word is that in our sin, we twist or distort the truth. There as well seems to be an awareness and purposefulness in this type of sin. The term for "done wrong" seems to deal with the sins of commission. With these sins there is a purposeful or planned affront to the character or laws of God. It is this twisting and distorting of truth that we see in the garden with Satan and Eve. Both of them took God's words and twisted them to mean something slightly different than what he actually said. This kind of distortion is what Peter warns against in 2 Peter 3:16, "There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures."

*Acted wickedly.* As a result of twisting the truth, they have acted wickedly. The term used here intensifies the grip of sin by viewing the sin as a lifestyle or habit. It is not that Israel just struggled and at times they sinned and committed iniquity. They were habitually sinning. Their lifestyle was characterized by outright sin. The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament describes this wickedness as "the negative behavior of evil thoughts, words and deeds, a behavior not only contrary to God's character, but also hostile to the community and which at the same time betrays the inner disharmony and unrest of a man . . ."<sup>21</sup>

*Rebelled.* They were rebellious. They had revolted from the commands of God and they were living consistently in wickedness. "Whether the rebellion is being spoken of positively or negatively, it is, obvious that what is meant by the term is rebellion in the sense of an attempt to nullify or abrogate a

---

<sup>21</sup> G. Herbert Livingston, "רָשָׁע 2222," ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 863.

covenant on the part of the vassal.”<sup>22</sup> In this case, Israel didn’t want to keep up to the expectations God had for them in their covenant relationship. They rejected his law and ignored his commands. We do the same thing. The Word of God directs us as to how we ought to live, and we often don’t really care for those commands and guidelines. We would prefer to do life our own way. In so doing, we rebel against the commands of God.

*Turning aside.* This term summarizes Israel’s incremental departure from God and the truth. Over time, Israel slowly turned from God to the point of completely abandoning the truth. Once we have twisted the truth, resulting in a lifestyle that no longer reflects an appropriate relationship with God, we find ourselves on a different path. We’ve turned away from walking with God and we find ourselves in a different place, on a different course, a different trajectory.

*Rejection of God’s Spokesman.* At these points, God graciously reached out to Israel and called them back to a healthy relationship with him. He sent prophets to direct them and offer steps to restoration. They rejected these prophets. The same can be true of us. When we come to the point of rejecting God, he reaches out to us through His word and through other people. We have a similar opportunity to positively respond to his calls of grace, and sadly, we too often respond like Israel and reject those opportunities.

**Our sin rightly results in our open shame.** In verse 7 and 8, Daniel tells us the result of our sinful descent into rebellion and rejection of God. “To you, O Lord, belongs righteousness, but to us open shame. . . . To us, O LORD, belongs open shame, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against you” (Dan 9:7–8 ESV).

Shame, what a horrid weight. Everyone of us has experienced it and we all concur that we would be happy to live without it. Daniel has already talked about guilt. Guilt is an awareness of failure against a standard.<sup>23</sup> God had clearly communicated his laws and Israel broke them. They were guilty of breaking the law. Guilt is pretty clear and objective. Shame, on the other hand is a little less objective. Ed Welch writes in reference to shame and guilt. “Guilt is black or white. You did wrong or you didn’t. . . . Shame, on the other hand, can be more difficult to trace to a specific act or act done to you. With shame,

---

<sup>22</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, “1240 תַּנְחֵם,” ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 525.

<sup>23</sup> David Powlison, Julie E. Lowe, and Andrew Ray, *What Is the Difference between Guilt and Shame?*, 2012, <http://www.ccef.org/resources/podcast/what-difference-between-guilt-and-shame>.



we feel like we did wrong, but we can't always identify what that wrong was, or we can identify a thousand wrongs, though none of them might be the actual trigger for shame."<sup>24</sup> The Baker Encyclopedia quotes David Ausubel's article in the *Psychological Review* and defines shame as "an unpleasant emotional reaction by an individual to an actual or presumed negative judgment of himself by others resulting in self-depreciation..."<sup>25</sup>

*Shame from ourselves.* We place expectations upon ourselves and when we do not meet those expectations we feel shame. Maybe we don't look a certain way or weigh a certain amount or exercise as much as we think we should. Maybe we get up later or go to bed later than we think we should. Maybe we do not get the grades or the raise that we think we should. In all of these instances we can feel shame.

*Shame from others.* We may feel shame from someone else because they communicate disappointment or criticism<sup>26</sup>, directly or indirectly. We sense shame when we think we may have disappointed someone or did not meet up to their expectations. They may not have even shared their expectations; but as we sense their disappointment, we feel shame. This sense of shame from others is very challenging to deal with because the expectations are often unknown or unclear.

*Shame from God.* We as well feel shame due to the failure of meeting up to the expectations that God has placed upon us. This is the only appropriate place in which shame should be felt. In like fashion to that of Ezra 9:6, we ought to be "ashamed and blush to lift my face to you, my God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has mounted up to the heavens." We ought to feel shame when we fail to meet God's expectations, and yet we complicate shame by placing standards upon ourselves and feeling the weight of other's expectations.

This is why shame is so confusing at times. Even different theologians and authors of the same biblical persuasion write about shame in such drastically different ways. For example, Ed Welch writes, "I hate shame. I know there is a place for it. Utter shamelessness is not what we are after." He goes on to make a distinction between being humbled and humiliated, and then defines shame.

---

<sup>24</sup> Ed Welch, "The Many Faces of Shame," Blog, *Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation*, (January 31, 2011), <http://www.ccef.org/resources/blog/many-faces-shame>.

<sup>25</sup> Benner and Hill, *Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology and Counseling*, 1114.

<sup>26</sup> Powlison, Lowe, and Ray, *What Is the Difference between Guilt and Shame?*.

Shame is the deep sense that you are unacceptable because of something you did, something done to you, or something associated with you. You feel exposed and humiliated. Or, to strengthen the language, You are disgraced because you acted less than human, you were treated as if you were less than human, or you were associated with something less than human, and there are witnesses.<sup>27</sup>

Welch seems to emphasize the feelings of shame and the lasting and negative consequences of shame within the context of shame generated by ourselves and others. On the other hand, Thomas Watson, in his book *The Doctrine of Repentance*, establishes that shame is the main ingredient of repentance. He concludes that sin “breeds shame...[that] in every sin there is much unthankfulness, and that is a matter of shame...[that] our sins have put Christ to shame [and that should put us to shame]...[that] sin...turns men into beast...[and that] in every sin there is folly.”<sup>28</sup> For each and all these reasons we should feel shame. Welch focuses on the shame we feel from ourselves and others. This sense of shame can be debilitating and does not lead to godly repentance. On the other hand, Watson focuses on the shame we feel in not meeting up to God’s expectations. This shame does and should lead us to biblical repentance. There are certain expectations that God has for us. When we break those we ought to feel guilt and shame, guilt for breaking the command and shame that we disappointed God.

## God is breathtakingly gracious.

O my God, incline your ear and hear. Open your eyes and see our desolations, and the city that is called by your name. For we do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness, but because of your great mercy.<sup>19</sup> O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive. O Lord, pay attention and act. Delay not, for your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people are called by your name.” (Daniel 9:18–19 ESV).

**God’s grace is revealed in His forgiveness.** So then, we are sinful. We don’t deserve God’s mercy. We do deserve open shame. And yet, to those who deserve open shame, he removes their shame and extends compassion, love, and forgiveness. “To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him” (Dan 9:9). We have the great gift of mercy extended to us when we are told that we can receive forgiveness of our sins. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

---

<sup>27</sup> Edward T. Welch, *Shame Interrupted: How God Lifts the Pain of Worthlessness and Rejection* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2012), 2.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas Watson, *Doctrine of Repentance* (Edinburgh; Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1988), sec. 353–387. Kindle Edition.

**God's grace is revealed in His promise keeping.** I find it interesting that Daniel establishes that God “keeps his covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments” (Dan 9:4), and then immediately goes into how the people of Israel didn't love him or keep his commandments. This logically leads to the conclusion that Daniel draws. God has every right to rid himself of these rebellious people. And yet God keeps his promise to love the people of Israel. Why? Because God's promise to love Israel wasn't based upon their spiritual value, spiritual fidelity, or robust faith. It was instead rooted in his own character. Daniel doesn't come to God pleading for mercy based on the righteousness of Israel. He must come to God with an entirely different appeal.

**God's grace is rooted in the value of His name.** In one rather crude sense, God preserves and saves his children because if he doesn't he looks bad. It is this same reality that Moses appeals to when God threatened to destroy Israel following their idolatry with the golden calf.

And the LORD said to Moses, “I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. <sup>10</sup> Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great nation of you.” <sup>11</sup> But Moses implored the LORD his God and said, “O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? <sup>12</sup> Why should the Egyptians say, ‘With evil intent did he bring them out, to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth’? Turn from your burning anger and relent from this disaster against your people. <sup>13</sup> Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by your own self, and said to them, ‘I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your offspring, and they shall inherit it forever.’ ” <sup>14</sup> And the LORD relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people. (Ex 32:9–14 ESV).

Here in Daniel 9 we find that same logic. Daniel writes, “O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive. O Lord, pay attention and act. Delay not, for your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people are called by your name.” (Dan 9:19 ESV). What a great deal of confidence can come in the reality that the ongoing certainty of my salvation is not founded upon my ongoing righteousness but instead on the credibility of God to preserve His people.

**Longman.** Though the plea for God's mercy follows the confession and could not proceed without it, it is wrong to think that the confession is the basis of God's restoration. Daniel knows that the people are still sinful and if there is any hope for them, it is in God's

righteousness and not their own (vv. 16, 18). Daniel's appeal is ultimately based not on the people's plight but on the reputation of God himself.<sup>29</sup>

## Conclusion

God extends forgiveness to you as well. What an encouragement it is to know that our eternal state is not resting in our own righteousness. God is going to keep his promise to hold us fast until the end, not because we are inherently deserving or because our righteousness has credited that status, but because God desires to be glorified through our salvation. Even the Corinthians received this assurance from Paul. "who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor 1:8–9 ESV). That reality ought to bring us great comfort.

Never let this assurance lead you to spiritual apathy towards God's expectations towards holiness. We so emphasize God's grace and mercy that it could be logical for someone to conclude that "no matter how much sin [they] committed, and whether or not [they] ever repented of any of it, [they were] completely safe." This is not only complacent but spiritually defiant and not a reflection of a true believer.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Tremper Longman. *Daniel: The NIV Application Commentary*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1999), 225.

<sup>30</sup> Andrew Wilson. "The Relationship between Warnings and Assurance: Don't Fumble It" (The Gospel Coalition, January 3, 2018). Accessed January 5, 2018. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/relationship-warnings-assurance-dont-whiff/>