

The Frightened, The Frauds and The Fearless

Daniel 2

Introduction

I invite you to turn in your Bible to the wonderful Old Testament book of Daniel. We will study chapter 2 today.

I am sure we are similar in the fact that we enjoy reading a book that has a good plot that seems, with the passing of each chapter, to thicken. I also enjoy watching plays in which the drama develops from scene to scene. If you enjoy developing drama and thickening plots, with a little bit of mystery and some urgency, then you are going to enjoy the very challenging chapter 2 of Daniel. We will take it as a one act play and I will divide it into four scenes for our study today.

Scene I – The Frightened

The first scene opens in Daniel 2:1-2 with the king in a crisis. This scene opens in the king's bedroom.

Now in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; and his spirit was troubled and his sleep left him.

Then the king gave orders to call in the magicians, the conjurers, the sorcerers and the Chaldeans to tell the king his dreams. So they came in and stood before the king.

This little one act play begins with a man – the king – who has just had a dream.

Now for the purpose of your own study, I will give the difference between dreams and visions. Scattered throughout the Old Testament are the mention of many dreams. King Nebuchadnezzar's dream is one of many dreams that are mentioned. This was the way God would communicate with man. He would frequently give His revelation by dreams or by visions. This dream was given to a man who did not know God, yet was God's instrument.

A dream occurs when one is, of course, asleep, while a vision takes place when one is awake. A dream consists of revelation given to the subconscious mind, while a vision is given to a person's conscious mind.

You may remember that John wrote the book of Revelation and that it consisted largely of the vision revealed to him in which his conscious mind saw things in the unconscious world. God, in a way, pulled back the curtain and revealed to John what it was like in the immaterial world.

God also pulled back the curtain for Nebuchadnezzar and gave him a dream. We are going to look at this dream in our next discussion, but I want to look at the life of Daniel today, as portrayed in this unfolding drama.

Scene II – The Frauds

In scene two, the king calls all of the magicians. Look at Daniel 2:3-5.

The king said to them, "I had a dream and my spirit is anxious to understand the dream."

Then the Chaldeans spoke to the king in Aramaic: "O king, live forever! Tell the dream to your servants and we will declare the interpretation."

The king replied to the Chaldeans, "The command from me is firm: if you do not make known to me the dream and its interpretation, you will be torn limb from limb and your houses will be made a rubbish heap."

In other words, "If you will make known to me the dream and its interpretation, then I will know you are genuine."

Now this is a tough thing to ask his magicians to do, but I think the king knew that they were frauds. I think he knew in his heart that these magicians were fakes, so when it came to a point where he had to know the truth, he put them to the test. He said, "If you can tell me what the dream was, then I'll have confidence in your interpretation."

These magicians were master deceivers. They would be given a little content and they would work it around to tell what it meant. However, if they were not given the content and had nothing with which to work, they would not get off first base.

The king was calling all of the big shots in the kingdom together. I would imagine, among these Chaldeans and magicians and astrologers, were the men who had written the books, “How to Interpret Dreams,” “How to Know Mysteries”. They knew it all, or so it seemed.

In the margin of your Bible, over Daniel chapter 2, write four words, “Revelation Triumphs Over Superstition”. The king called all the superstitious men together and asked, “Can you give me an answer?”

They answered, “No.”

However, God gave the revelation to Daniel and it made a difference.

The response of these superstitious men is typical. In fact, if you or I were part of this crowd, we would do the same thing. It is called stalling for time. Look at Daniel 2:6-7.

“But if you declare the dream and its interpretation, you will receive from me gifts and a reward and great honor; therefore declare to me the dream and its interpretation.”

They answered a second time and said, “Let the king tell the dream to his servants, and we will declare the interpretation.”

These men were just repeating themselves. They were stalling for time.

If someone asks you a tough question, you say, “That’s a good question.”

However, you did not even hear yourself say this because your mind is racing, thinking, “What’s the answer?”

These men keep saying this.

The king speaks to them again. They are playing a game – going back and forth. Look at Daniel 2:8-9.

The king replied, “I know for certain that you are bargaining for time, inasmuch as you have seen that the command from me is firm,

“that if you do not make the dream known to me, there is only one decree for you. For you have agreed together to speak lying and corrupt words before me until the situation is changed; therefore tell me the dream, that I may know that you can declare to me its interpretation.”

The king saw through these men; he knew what they were doing.

The Chaldeans come back with the same response, only this time, it is as if God puts the words into their mouths to lay the groundwork for Daniel. Notice what they say in Daniel 2:10-11.

The Chaldeans answered the king and said, “There is not a man on earth who could declare the matter for the king, inasmuch as no great king or ruler has ever asked anything like this of any magician, conjurer or Chaldean.

“Moreover, the thing which the king demands is difficult, and there is no one else who could declare it to the king except gods, whose dwelling place is not with mortal flesh.”

Notice the last sentence. There is no way that man could ever give an interpretation of a dream they have never been given. What an answer this is to the astrologists; to the mystics; to the superstitious ones.

My blood kind of chills when a Christian tells me they read the astrological horoscopes every morning. The newspapers frequently put that beside the funnies. Kids read the funnies and right beside it is the horoscope. The Ouija board and other such things are taking a place in our own ranks. It makes me shutter.

Daniel 2:11 is an answer to this. These types of things do not have it. No man can tell what he has never heard. Only God, who gives revelation, can reveal the unknown.

Scene III – The Father

Scene three introduces Daniel and displays God’s intervention. Look at Daniel 2:14-16.

Then Daniel replied with discretion and discernment to Arioch, the captain of the king’s bodyguard, who had gone forth to slay the wise men of Babylon;

He said to Arioch, the king’s commander, “For what reason is the decree from the king so urgent?” Then Arioch informed Daniel about the matter.

So Daniel went in and requested of the king that he would give him time, in order that he might declare the interpretation to the king.

Notice that Daniel said he would show the king the interpretation. This displayed his confidence.

Continue to Daniel 2:17.

Then Daniel went to his house and informed his friends, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, about the matter,

These were Daniel's three friends, or your translation may call them companions. This word is from the Hebrew word that literally means "to tie a knot".

These young Hebrew boys, freshly taken from their homeland, had tied a knot, and they were going to strengthen the knot in prayer. Scene three then, finds these Hebrews in a private place.

Let us stop at this point for me to give a practical formula. What has happened is that the king has decreed that all of the wise men are to be killed (Daniel 2:12-13). He had not called Daniel; he had not called the three friends, he just makes a decree which includes Daniel and his three friends, who are among the wise men.

As a result, Arioch, the king's guard, has set out to do the job and take these men to the gallows. He comes and it seems as if he almost grabs Daniel by the arm and says, "Come, you're going with me."

Daniel says, "Wait a second! What's going on?"

Arioch then relays the message, "The king has ordered your death."

Put yourself in this position. Someone just nabs you by the arm and says, "Hey, you're going to get your head sliced from your body."

"Why?"

"Because the astrologers over there can't answer the dream."

I think we would have a panic attack, and say, "Wait a second! Don't you know who I am? I graduated at the top of the royal academy. I'm ten times smarter than all of those guys. You didn't ask me."

Daniel, however, never does this. In fact, with confidence, Daniel simply says, "Just let me ask the king if he'll allow me to interpret the dream."

Arioch does and Daniel and his friends begin to pray.

Note the words of their prayer, in Daniel 2:18.

So that they might request compassion from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his friends

would not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.

This is the first time we will see the phrase "the God of heaven".

I think we have in this, all the ingredients of a miracle: human impossibility + urgency = divine intervention for a miracle.

There was only one thing that could save these young men – divine intervention.

Many times in our lives, we have all of the ingredients of the same kind of divine intervention; we have all the parts of this formula: urgency and human impossibility – we cannot do it. Yet, this is what God specializes in – our impossibilities.

A favorite phrase in our day is, "When you come to the end of your rope, tie a knot on the end of it and hang on."

This is false. When we come to the end of our rope, we let go.

I think God is trying to get us to leave our futile attempt behind. It seems as if He, many times, brings us to the end of the rope, but we say, "God, I'm still going to try it my way. I'm going to hang on."

God wants us to let go so that He can intervene in a supernatural way.

Now, as I studied this passage, I noticed there is something missing from this prayer meeting. It is something that I think many would wish had been included. It is the amount of time Daniel and his friends spent in prayer. Was it five minutes? Was it two hours? Was it a day? Were they fasting? What are the details?

I am glad, however, that God left this information out. If they had spent three hours in prayer, we would go to this passage and say, "That's the formula – three hours. Okay, I've got five more minutes to go, so I'll keep praying."

We think following the formula will mean God must answer and then, we are disappointed when He does not.

God does not put in all the details because we would try to make it a formula and follow it.

I will never forget hearing a true story that illustrates this. It was a story of young men on a Christian college campus who were studying for the ministry. It seemed that the fad on the campus was to see which guy could get up the earliest to pray. Guys were getting up a six o'clock, five forty-five, and five

thirty. It was as if the guy who could get up the earliest to pray was the spiritual giant of the student body.

This practice was actually causing some problems. Guys were going to class bleary-eyed, having been up for three hours praying, and grades were falling. As a result, the faculty decided it was time to do something about this rise of pietism; this thought that, “If I get up at five o’ clock in the morning, then I must be spiritual.”

One of the older, godly professors of this college addressed a gathering of all the young men. He said, “Men, I understand that many of you are getting up early in the morning to pray, as if this would were going to produce in you some kind of spirituality. I understand some of you are getting up at five o’ clock in the morning to pray.”

He then paused and said, “Men, I want you to know, I get up at three o’ clock almost every morning.”

The thought that was going through the guys’ minds was almost visible, “Oh no! Three o’ clock! I’m never going to be spiritual. I’ll never make it.

With a smile on his face, the professor wisely continued, saying, “As soon as I let the dog out of the house, I go back to bed.”

The point is not to follow some little formula of prayer. It would be better, I think, for most of us to forego snoozing through the ten minute quiet hour in the morning and instead, spend two hours on Saturday really studying.

We get caught up in all of these little things, thinking, “I’m going to produce so that God must answer.”

God does not work that way. He wants to see human impossibility. He wants to see urgency. And He wants to see abandonment. Then He will intervene.

This is the point at which Daniel and his three friends were.

Now notice Daniel’s response when the answer comes. Look at Daniel 2:19a.

Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a night vision. . . .

A night vision means that Daniel was awake.

What does Daniel do? Does he jump up and run to the king’s bedroom, knock on the door, and say,

“I’ve got the answer! Hey, everyone, God came through!”

No. Daniel takes time to thank the Lord for giving him the answer. Look at Daniel 2:19b-23.

. . . Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven;

Daniel said, “Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever, for wisdom and power belong to Him.

“It is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings; He gives wisdom to wise men and knowledge to men of understanding.

“It is He who reveals the profound and hidden things; He knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with Him.

“To You, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, for You have given me wisdom and power; even now You have made known to me what we requested of You, for You have made known to us the king’s matter.”

The prayer meeting of Daniel and his three friends turned into a praise meeting. They stopped to thank and to realize that it was divine intervention; that God had moved in. It was not them – it was all God.

Scene IV – The Fearless

Scene four reveals Daniel in public. Notice Daniel 2:24.

Therefore, Daniel went in to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to destroy the wise men of Babylon; he went and spoke to him as follows: “Do not destroy the wise men of Babylon! Take me into the king’s presence, and I will declare the interpretation to the king.”

Notice what happens in Daniel 2:25.

Then Arioch hurriedly brought Daniel into the king’s presence and spoke to him as follows: “I have found a man among the exiles from Judah who can make the interpretation known to the king!”

What a liar Arioch is when he says, “I have found a man.” This is a guy who is grasping for the rung.

Arioch did not find Daniel – Daniel went to him. Daniel said, “Arioch, I’ve got the interpretation. Would you take me in to see the king?”

Do you know anyone like this? Arioch walks in and says, “Hey, I’ve been on my job, King. I’m a pretty savvy guy, aren’t I? I’ve been on the look out and I’ve found the answer. How about a raise?!”

I must do a comparison between Arioch and Daniel:

- Arioch was a liar, but Daniel was totally honest.
- Arioch was a self-promoter, but Daniel was a self-denier.
- Arioch was deceitful, but Daniel was totally transparent.

Spirituality, as we see in this young man Daniel, and dishonesty never join hands. Not once in his life is there ever any evidence of deceit. Spirituality and dishonesty never mix company.

I read of a department store that had a major fire one day. The back room of the store, where all the charge slips from credit card purchases were kept, was destroyed. The next morning, every major newspaper in that city put out a full page ad telling the public what had happened and asking them to come in and report the purchases. The clerks remembered thousands of dollars worth of purchases. I know you are thinking, “Fat chance.” However, one man came in and reported buying a pair of gloves. I wonder how many Christians were among the crowd who made unreported purchases.

A woman came out of her house and noticed the back end of her car had been smashed in. She was filled with dismay, but noticed that there was a piece of paper on her windshield. She thought, “Thank goodness the guy was honest.”

She grabbed the piece of paper and read, “Right now about fifty people are watching me. They think I’m giving you my name, address, and phone number, but I’m not.” That was the end of note.

Have you ever been tempted to be dishonest?

When we trace the life of a man like Daniel, who was a very young man, yet will still be as godly at the end of his life, we find different qualities of his character and one of them is honesty. Notice the way this character trait shines through. Look at Daniel 2:26.

The king said to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, “Are you able to make known to me the dream which I have seen and its interpretation?”

Look at Daniel’s answer in Daniel 2:27-28a.

Daniel answered before the king and said, “As for the mystery about which the king has inquired, neither wise men, conjurers, magicians nor diviners are able to declare it to the king.

“However, there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries . . .”

I love this phrase, “There is a God in heaven”. If Daniel ever had an opportunity to strut, it was at this moment. He could have come in like a peacock spreading his feathers with this interpretation in his hip pocket. He could have said, “King, shame on you! You go to all these other guys – these Chaldeans; these losers – when we had already revealed that we’re smarter than them; in fact, ten times smarter. Why didn’t you come to us?”

Daniel never did this. He had every opportunity in the world, but what did he do? He pointed the finger away from himself to the God of heaven. He utilized this promotion to produce praise. What a sterling character Daniel represents before us.

Notice Daniel 2:29-30a, as Daniel continues.

As for you, O king, while on your bed your thoughts turned to what would take place in the future; and He who reveals mysteries has made known to you what will take place.

But as for me, this mystery has not been revealed to me for any wisdom residing in me more than in any other living man . . .

Application

Let me apply this with three thoughts before the curtain drops on this one act play.

1. First, when God intervenes in our lives, the response should be praise, not pride.

A lot of Christians, and I find myself in the same trap at times, pray for something, and when God answers, what do they say? They say something like, “Oh, my prayers finally came through. If I had quit praying, do you realize what might have happened? Oh, the prayers of my life – wow! I’ve got to write a book called, *How to Get God’s Will*.

When God works in our lives, the response should be to point to the God of heaven, who is ultimately, behind the affairs of man.

2. Secondly, ask God, not for opportunities to witness, but for the courage to seize the opportunities that are presented to you to be a witness.

It took a lot of courage for Daniel to do what he did and say what he said to the king. I can hear half of the evangelical community of this century saying, "Daniel, don't be a fanatic. Look, he's going to know you're in touch with the Almighty when you give him the interpretation. He's going to realize you've been in touch with God. This isn't the time. Besides, you haven't even given him the interpretation yet. Where's your credibility?"

Daniel seized the opportunity with this pagan king to say, "Look, King, no astrologer, no magician, no soothsayer could ever do what you asked them to do. You're being a little hard on your magicians. However, there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets."

"The God of heaven" was a special title for the Hebrew people – and Nebuchadnezzar got the message.

3. Number three, God delights in the impossible.

In Daniel 2:28, circle the word "however,"

However, there is a God in heaven . . .

I have a book in my library that kind of spurred a thought along, and I began tracking down some verses that used this word for situations of human impossibility and urgency. You should use your concordance to track down the words "However, God . . ." or "But, God . . .". Let me give several examples.

I am a sinner who deserves hell – without Jesus Christ, there is no hope,

But God demonstrated His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

"Oh but you don't know my life. You don't know my past. You don't know that according to Paul's writings, in Ephesians 2:1-3, I fulfilled all of the works of the flesh and of the mind."

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,

even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), (Ephesians 2:4-5)

"Well, I'm a Christian, but every time I try to take one little tiny step forward and grow in Christ, I fall flat on my back. I just can't seem to pull this sanctification thing off."

Paul planted the seed of the word in the hearts of the early Christians, as he does with you when you listen to the word and study the word. Then, Apollos, who was the teacher in that Corinthian church, came along and watered it,

. . . but God was causing the growth. (I Corinthians 3:6)

Literally, God will grow us up. It is all of God.

Quit trying to grow. Yield to God and allow Him to fulfill in you that process of sanctification, which is His responsibility.

Now if there is an impossible situation, it is death. I can still remember, as a young boy, listening to Dr. B. R. Laken preach. He was a very godly man who is with the Lord now, but was in his eighties when I heard him preach. He referred to death in the poetic sense. I will never forget one time that he was preaching to thousands of students and said, "It's almost like I can stand on my tip-toes and see her coming, but there's no fear."

Paul wrote, in I Corinthians 15:17-20, that if Jesus Christ has not risen from the grave, then of all men, we, as believers, are the most miserable,

But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.

Literally, Christ is the first person and many will follow Him, as they rise, unable to be held by death.

Impossible situations, unsaved, bad background, facing death and trying to grow in Christ,

However, there is a God in heaven . . .

Let me close with a question. If there was a fortune teller or astrologer in our area that was guaranteed to tell the future; that would tell what would happen tomorrow, next week, next month and whose track record was spotless, is there anything you would like to ask him? Would you go to see him? I think I would be tempted. However,

Known unto God are all works . . . (Acts 15:18 KJV)

Behind the life of Daniel, as he was facing a pagan king, we could write the word “sovereignty”. There is a God who is sovereign in heaven. Have you talked to Him? Have you approached Him? His track record is spotless. He is more concerned about your future than you could ever be. But you have to go to Him, let go, and allow God to do what He specializes in; that is, the impossible.