

GOD REVEALS THE MEANING OF THE DREAM TO DANIEL

DANIEL 2:17-23

SCRIPTURE READING AND INSIGHTS

Begin by reading Daniel 2:17-23 in your favorite Bible. As you read, remember that the Word of God teaches us, trains us, and corrects us (2 Timothy 3:15-17).

In yesterday's reading, Nebuchadnezzar demanded an interpretation of his dream. In today's lesson, God reveals the dream and its meaning to Daniel. With your Bible still accessible, consider the following insights on the biblical text, verse by verse.

Daniel 2:17-18

Daniel went to his house (2:17): Daniel was deliberately calm in this crisis. Though his life and his companions' lives were at stake, he remained tranquil and steady as he trusted in God.

Told them to seek mercy from the God of heaven (2:18): Upon arriving home, Daniel immediately asked his friends to pray to God for mercy. Notice that in this context of intercessory prayer to God, Daniel's associates were addressed not by their Babylonian names but by their Hebrew names—Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. They were praying not to the false gods of Babylon but to the God of the Hebrews—the true God.

Daniel knew that their only hope rested with God and His mercy. If God

did not intervene, they would all be dead men. Daniel knew that in himself he was just as ignorant of the dream and its meaning as the occultists were. From Daniel's perspective, God *had* to intervene. Notice that in their prayer, Daniel and his friends were trusting God to give them a definite answer within definite time parameters. They were stepping out on a limb, and if God did not intervene, they were history.

We again note the contrast between earth and heaven. Earlier in Daniel 2, the occultists informed the king that no man on *earth* could reveal the dream (verse 10). They were right about that. Now, we find Daniel appealing to the God of *heaven* for answers. The ascription "God of heaven" is used four times in this chapter (verses 18-19, 37, 44). "Lord of heaven" is used in 5:23, and we read, "There is a God in heaven" in 2:28.

Throughout this entire ordeal, we see no sense of panic in Daniel or his associates. They prayed to God, they trusted in God, and they were at peace. One is reminded of the apostle Paul's teaching on prayer in Philippians 4:6-7: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (see also Isaiah 26:3).

Concerning this mystery (2:18): Daniel and his friends asked God to enable them to unravel the mystery. In the Bible, a mystery is a truth that cannot be discerned simply by human investigation but requires special revelation from God. They desperately needed a special revelation from God regarding Nebuchadnezzar's dream and its meaning.

Daniel 2:19

The mystery was revealed (2:19): God answered their prayers. He showed them the mercy they requested.

Vision of the night (2:19): On the very night that Daniel and his friends prayed, God communicated Nebuchadnezzar's dream to Daniel in a vision (compare Numbers 12:6; 2 Kings 6:8-12; Job 33:15-16). What was hidden from Babylon's occultists was now revealed to Daniel. The former were impotent to accomplish their task, but God showed Himself strong on Daniel's behalf, thereby rescuing him and his associates from execution.

Daniel 2:20-23

Blessed be the name of God forever and ever (2:20): Notice that Daniel did not immediately rush off to Arioch to tell him the good news. Daniel's highest priority was God. The first thing he did after receiving the vision was to give thanks and praise to God for His mighty deliverance. God, not Daniel, was to get all the credit in this episode. Daniel was truly grateful to God!

This opening statement is significant. God's name represents all that He is (see Major Themes). To bless someone is to pronounce goodness or favor upon them.

Examples of God blessing people abound in Scripture (for example, Genesis 1:22, 28; 12:2; 22:17; 24:35; 32:29; Exodus 20:24; Job 42:12; Psalm 45:2). Examples of people blessing people are well illustrated in several famous biblical personalities, including Isaac (Genesis 27:26-40), Jacob (Genesis 49:1-27), Moses (Deuteronomy 33), Joshua (Joshua 22:6-7), and Jesus (Luke 24:50). Scripture indicates that human beings bless God when they recognize and give thanks to Him for His wonderful acts of mercy and grace in their lives (see Psalms 63:4; 104:1; 145:1-2). This is what Daniel was doing in our present context.

Daniel's blessing of God brings to mind Psalm 103:1-2: "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." Daniel was definitely a Psalm 103 kind of person.

To whom belong wisdom and might (2:20): Daniel recognized that God was both wise and mighty, for only a wise and mighty God could have intervened in his life through a vision to rescue Daniel and his friends from certain death.

He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings (2:21): In verses 21-22, Daniel provides illustrations of God's wisdom and might. For example, God is so mighty that He can control history (changing times and seasons) and determine the destiny of nations (removing kings and setting up kings). This means Nebuchadnezzar was king of Babylon for only one reason—God sovereignly determined to use him for His providential purposes.

He gives wisdom to the wise (2:21): As the God of wisdom, God is the source of wisdom for those who follow Him (see Proverbs 1:2-5). Daniel and his friends acted wisely in Babylon because God gave them wisdom. Daniel

1:17 says of the four youths, "God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams."

He reveals deep and hidden things (2:22): This includes Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

He knows what is in the darkness (2:22): God is both all-knowing (omniscient) and everywhere-present (omnipresent). This means that nothing escapes His notice, even in the darkest places in the universe. Even a person's dreams cannot escape His notice. Nebuchadnezzar's dream was "darkness" to him, but God's light revealed the meaning of it to Daniel.

The light dwells with him (2:22): In context, this carries the idea that even though people may be in the dark about things (just as Daniel had no knowledge of Nebuchadnezzar's dream), all things are clear to God. Psalm 36:9 says of God, "In your light do we see light." Job 12:22 tells us, "He uncovers the deeps out of darkness and brings deep darkness to light." Psalm 139:12 says of God, "Even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you." In Jeremiah 23:24 God Himself affirms, "Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the LORD. Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the LORD."

God of my fathers (2:23): This is the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the other patriarchs (see, for example, Genesis 31:42). He is the one true God of the universe.

I give thanks and praise (2:23): Through the vision God gave Daniel, Daniel and his friends obtained the knowledge that would save their lives. Daniel's appropriate response was thanksgiving and praise to God. Like Daniel, we should always have praise for God on our lips (see Psalm 34:1). We should praise God in the depths of our hearts (Psalm 103:1-5, 20-22) and continually "offer up a sacrifice of praise to God" (Hebrews 13:15). One means of praising God is through spiritual songs (Psalm 69:30).

You have...made known to me what we asked of you (2:23): Daniel and his friends made a specific request of God in prayer. God gave a specific answer. They asked for wisdom, and God gave it (see James 1:5). The Babylonian wise men were unaware of it at the time, but the true wise men—the four Hebrew youths—would bring about even their deliverance.

Through it all, Daniel and his friends discovered the truth of Psalm 50:15,

where God said, "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me."

MAJOR THEMES

1. *The name of God.* Daniel praised God by saying, "Blessed be the name of God forever and ever." In the ancient world, a name was not a mere label as it is today. A name was considered equivalent to whoever or whatever bore it. The sum total of a person's being and his internal and external pattern of behavior was gathered up into his name. Indeed, knowing a person's name amounted to knowing his essence (see 1 Samuel 25:25). So when Daniel praised God's name, he was praising everything about God.
2. *God is omnipotent.* Daniel affirmed that God controls the course of world events (Daniel 2:21). Scripture more broadly reveals that God is omnipotent, or all-powerful (Genesis 18:14; Jeremiah 32:17, 27; Matthew 19:26; Mark 10:27; Luke 1:37). He is abundant in strength (Psalm 147:5) and has incomparably great power (2 Chronicles 20:6; Ephesians 1:19-21). No one can hold back His hand (Daniel 4:35), and no one can thwart Him (Isaiah 14:27). Therefore, He is able to control the course of world events, as Daniel said. The next time life throws you a punch, trust in the all-powerful God of the Bible.

DIGGING DEEPER WITH CROSS-REFERENCES

Seeking God's mercy—Psalms 6:2; 9:13; 25:7, 16; 27:7; 30:10; 31:9; 33:22; 40:11; 41:10; 51:1; 57:1; 85:7; 86:3; 119:58, 77; 123:3

God as light—Matthew 4:16; John 1:9; 8:12; 12:45-46; Ephesians 5:14; James 1:17; 1 Peter 2:9; 1 John 1:5; Revelation 21:23

LIFE LESSONS

1. *Mercy.* The term points to compassion and kindness shown to another. In the New Testament, God shows mercy on the basis of the work of Christ on the cross (Ephesians 2:4-5). Theologically, grace and mercy are closely related. The word "grace" means "unmerited favor." The word

"mercy," as related to our salvation, carries the idea of withholding deserved punishment. Because of what Jesus did for us at the cross, we not only receive God's unmerited favor (grace) with a wondrous salvation, we also escape the judgment we deserve for our sins (mercy). What a wonder is our Jesus! (See 1 Peter 2:10; 2 John 3; Jude 21.)

2. *Intercessory prayer.* Intercession is a common feature of the prayers of God's people in the Bible. Jesus urged His followers, "Pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). He informed Peter, "I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail" (Luke 22:32). Speaking of those who crucified Him, Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Sometime later, the apostle Paul spoke of the importance of "making supplication for all the saints" (Ephesians 6:18). He said, "I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people" (1 Timothy 2:1). Paul urged the Corinthian believers, "Help us by prayer" (2 Corinthians 1:11). James speaks of intercessory prayer for the sick: "Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him" (James 5:14; see also Acts 7:60; Philippians 1:19). Praying for others ought to be our regular practice.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. What do you learn about the attributes of God in Daniel 2:20-23? Why does Daniel see these attributes as praiseworthy?
2. Whom can you intercede for in prayer this week?
3. Do you sufficiently engage in thanksgiving and praise to God? We could probably all do better. Why not make Hebrews 13:15 one of your theme verses?