
Day 220 - August 8

Judah After Israel's Fall (725-585 BCE)

Daniel the Faithful Captive

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

Readings: *Daniel 1:3-20; 2:1-49*

Reflections:

- The story of Daniel and his friends in captivity parallel the time of Jeremiah and his deals with Jehoiakim. Daniel becomes a model of a true Israelite under the pressures and persecution of Israel's enemy. Daniel and his friends are described in the most glowing terms, "young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace." After being identified as excellent candidates for leadership, they are given the best surroundings and put into a three year training program. As a part of the inculcation into the culture, they are given new names. Yet, Daniel and his friends would not simply flow with the culture. They refused to follow the dietary culture and chose a healthier form of diet. Here we see Daniel's wisdom and his vision for pursuing the best even when faced with being held captive by an enemy king.
- "To these four men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds... In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom." Here we see the powerful influence of godly leadership that live counter-culture to society and leads out of a true sense of spiritual discernment and understanding. We should notice that Daniel is not proud or condemning but sees this as an opportunity to serve his enemy. Their intelligence and learning is something God uses.
- Even the three year training appears to be a key part of God using them. Here we see the blending of values: Spiritual discernment and education. Leadership is not just an academic exercise nor is it a magical quality bestowed by God. God gives people gifts that help them be good leaders but they must develop those gifts through study and discipline. Also, when looking at young leaders, we must take the long view rather than demand they be fully developed day one. What if every significant leadership position within community was

supported with a three year training program? How much better equipped would our leadership be to serve effectively?

- Nebuchadnezzar has a dream and puts the highest pressures on his court astrologers to tell him the dream and interpret it under penalty of torture and death if they fail and the greatest rewards if they succeed. Talk about pressure to perform! The astrologers protest declaring that he what he asks is impossible. But God loves to do the impossible to show he is real and he will do whatever he pleases.
- The astrologers make a telling statement: “No one can reveal it to the kings except the gods, and they do not live among men.” This is a set up line to show that God does live among Israel. One day through his son, he will one day even walk among Israel.
- The king in his anger ends up decreeing the death of all the astrologers and magicians. Daniel and his friends pray for God to reveal the dream to them that they and the others may be saved. We see in this story how God’s salvation is larger than just for the Israelites as it spills out to bless even their enemies, even the enemies of God.
- Daniel responds to insight from God, first by worshipping God: “Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are his. He changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what lies in darkness and light dwells in him.” What a powerful depiction of the power, authority, wisdom and truth of God. Notice that there is virtually no mention of God’s mercy and grace. In many ways, the full revelation of God’s mercy awaits the coming Messiah, even though God in this story is showing great mercy and grace.
- Daniel honors God to the king by saying, “...there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries.”
- We gain insights about how God speaks as we look at what David says to the king: 1) God does speak through dreams and visions at night; 2) These are symbolic and require insight and discernment to fully understand them; 3) God uses dreams to help us understand ourselves and how God wants to use us.
- Daniel affirms that God has given Nebuchadnezzar his power. We see this affirmed by the apostle Paul in Romans 13. Even the most oppressive, evil leaders must be respected as people who have been given power by God and will be held accountable by God for their use of that power.
- The vision of the stature reveals the unfolding nature of the kingdoms in that region. This is to set up the revelation that there is a coming kingdom that will be the final great kingdom: the kingdom of God. “God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end but it will itself endure forever.” What an awesome promise of the coming kingdom of Christ – a kingdom for all nations, a refuge for the poor and weak, a citizenship of heaven on earth.

- The king now falls down to worship God because he can't believe Daniel knew what was in his mind. Daniel is exalted and honored because he allowed God to use him. To live by faith is not easy but for those that chose to trust God more than they fear other people, God will bless them abundantly!