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THE FAILURE OF THE MAGICIANS AND THE SUCCESS OF DANIEL

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF DANIEL
NUMBER 3
DANIEL 2:1-19

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Historical Background

Nebuchadnezzar, the son of Nabopolassar, defeated the Assyrians and the Egyptians at the Battle of Carchemish on the banks of the upper Euphrates in 606 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar followed the Egyptians in hot pursuit as they tried to escape back to Egypt, but when he went by Jerusalem he called his chariots to a rude halt and inquired from his soldiers the name of the city. Jerusalem was so beautiful in the gleaming sunlight, Nebuchadnezzar decided he would stop and conquer it. But when he came to the city, he found that Jehoiakim had been put on the throne by Pharaoh Neco, after good King Josiah had been killed at Megiddo. Jehoiakim had sworn allegiance to Egypt, and when Nebuchadnezzar came to take Jerusalem, Jehoiakim closed the gates and refused to let him in. But Nebuchadnezzar easily took Jerusalem. He told Jehoiakim that he liked loyalty and asked him if he would be loyal to him like he had been loyal to Egypt. Jehoiakim assured him that he would, so Nebuchadnezzar left him on the throne, but he took as hostages some of the teenagers he found in Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar was amazed and charmed at the beauty of these young Hebrews. He wanted through a brain-washing process to prepare these young men to work in his state department so he took them back to Babylon with him. Also, right at the time Nebuchadnezzar was besieging Jerusalem his father, Nabopolassar, died, and it was necessary for him to rush back to Babylon to shore up his hold on the new empire.

Daniel and his associates believed in the teachings of Holy Scripture and they ordered their lives by the teaching of Scripture. In the three-year test in Babylon, Daniel proved that his beliefs could be lived out. Daniel proved that the Christian way is superior to any pagan way of life. He and his associates graduated with highest honors at the end of the three-year crash program through which they received training for work in the Babylonian state department.

Look At This Principle

When you finally decide that you are going to live out and out for God, then everything will be easy for you and you will always be successful. Is that true? Just the opposite is true. When once you decide that you are going to follow the Lord in obedience, you will be tested from every side. You will be the object of criticism and pressure and in a thousand ways the Devil and the world will try to pull you away from your Christian convictions.

In this passage before us now we find that Nebuchadnezzar had a dream and the dreams troubled him deeply because he could not figure out their meaning.

DANIEL 2:1 "And in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar dreamed dreams, wherewith his spirit was troubled, and his sleep brake from him." Here we read that Nebuchadnezzar was troubled. He was so deeply disturbed that he developed insomnia. The dreams upset his whole way of life. Now remember, Nebuchadnezzar was at that time the most powerful man in the world. He was wealthy, he had power, and for quite some time he ruled the world of his day. Now that brings to us this question--When does greatness and power ever provide happiness? Stability and poise and happiness is found in knowing and obeying the Living God. But at this time Nebuchadnezzar didn't know the Lord and his dreams made him a nervous wreck.

(Illustration--We have multitudes of mothers who shove their little daughters out to date so they will get married and be as miserable as they are. Now not all mothers are like that, but most of them are. They contend that if you are not popular and if you do not have boys calling you all the time and if you do not date two or three times a week, then you may not get married and life will be a failure. The age for serious dating is being lowered all the time and today in this country, children jump right from the cradle into adult dating and they are not prepared for it.

If her daughter is not popular then the mother works herself up into a frenzy and goes to bed and takes sleeping pills and gets herself ready for a nervous breakdown. And many fathers push their sons just like Nabopolassar pushed Nebuchadnezzar, and no wonder confusion and insomnia developed. And we keep moving in this vicious circle, and you would think one generation would learn from another. We don't have any Tom Sawyers or Huckleberry Finns anymore. So today we find ourselves trying to keep up with the crowd and the herd instinct pushes us on and the country is filled with ravaging idiots.)

So here we have before us Nebuchadnezzar, the most powerful man of his day, yet he was alarmed and troubled and couldn't sleep. Security doesn't depend on success, money or power. It rather depends on how much of the Word of God you have in your mind and how much of it you use in daily living. Daniel wasn't anything but a young officer in the Babylonian state department but he had the Word of God in his mind and he was at peace with himself. So we have before us the picture of a frustrated man who had a few dreams and he immediately fell apart.

DANIEL 2:2 "Then the king commanded to call the magicians, and the astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans, for to shew the king his dreams. So they came and stood before the king." Nebuchadnezzar called in all his leading officials to get help in the interpretation of these dreams. To us the word "Magician" means someone who can work magic and make things appear and disappear. This Hebrew word here means someone who could write the Chaldean language--Hieroglyphics. These are the men who kept the records. They had the files and they knew the history of their people. "Astrologers" were the second group he called in, and this Hebrew word means to whisper, to blow, to breathe. These are the mumble-jumble boys. These are the front boys in every state department who can explain everything so clearly that you don't ever know what they are talking about. These were the ones who met the public and tried to straighten out every problem that arose. The Hebrew word translated "Sorcerers" here is the horoscope reading group and they were the ones who were suppose to be able to interpret the future. These were the planners, the ones who would suggest to Nebuchadnezzar the direction he ought to go. The "Chaldeans" were the executives who were supposed to carry forward the plans made by the Sorcerers. Over in Daniel 2:27 we find another group called "Soothsayers" and these were the highest officials of all. These were the ones who actually determined what was to be done.

Now these were the men who were called in to tell Nebuchadnezzar what he should do about his dreams. Please notice that he didn't tell them the content of his dreams. He knew them too well, and he knew if he told them the content of the dreams they would fake some kind of an answer. He asked them for two things. He wanted them to tell him the content of the dreams and the interpretation of the content. He was wise enough to know that they could not interpret the dreams unless they could tell him the content of the dreams also. (A corollary to this--The King of Yemen asked his wise men to do the same thing and he said, "He that knows not the dream unless I tell it to him, does not know the interpretation either.)

DANIEL 2:3 "And the king said unto them, I have dreamed a dream, and my spirit was troubled to know the dream." Here Nebuchadnezzar was bold enough to let his officials know that he was troubled and wanted to know the dream and its interpretation.

DANIEL 2:4 "Then spake the Chaldeans to the king in Syriac, O king, live for ever: tell thy servants the dream, and we will shew the interpretation." There is a change of languages here. They spoke to the king in Syriac. Really it means Chaldean or Aramaic. Beginning in Daniel 2:4 and running through 7:28 they will use Aramaic. The reason? This section deals with the Gentiles and therefore they do not use Hebrew. It is interesting to note that Daniel had mastered this language in three years. So they here requested Nebuchadnezzar to tell them the dream so they could interpret it.

DANIEL 2:5 "The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, The thing is gone from me: if ye will not make known unto me the dream, with the interpretation thereof, ye shall be cut in pieces, and your houses shall be made a dunghill." Here is a very poor translation. The Aramaic here doesn't say, "The dream has gone from me." Rather it says, "The word from me is certain." In other words, Nebuchadnezzar had issued a decree. If you don't tell me the dream and the interpretation of the dream, I will cut you to pieces is actually what he said. He would make a public example of them and their houses would become a public lavatory.

DANIEL 2:6 "But if ye shew the dream, and the interpretation thereof, ye shall receive of me gifts and rewards and great honour: therefore shew me the dream, and the interpretation thereof." Here was the reward Nebuchadnezzar would give them if they could interpret the dream for him. They would get money and gifts and promotions.

DANIEL 2:7 "They answered again and said, Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will shew the interpretation of it." Here they became evasive and they insisted that he tell them the content of the dream.

DANIEL 2:8-9 "The king answered and said, I know of certainty that ye would gain the time, because ye see the thing is gone from me. But if ye will not make known unto me the dream, there is but one decree for you: for ye have prepared lying and corrupt words to speak before me, till the time be changed: therefore tell me the dream, and I shall know that ye can shew me the interpretation thereof." Here Nebuchadnezzar accused them of stalling. He repeats the words, "I have made an official decree." He knew they would give him lying words not built on facts. LYING WORDS FROM THE STATE DEPARTMENT. That sounds very much like governments we have all known in history.

DANIEL 2:10-13 "The Chaldeans answered before the king, and said, There is not a man upon the earth that can shew the king's matter: therefore there is no king, lord, nor ruler, that asked such things at any magician, or astrologer, or Chaldean. And it is a rare thing that the king requireth, and there is none other that can shew it before the king, except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh. For this cause the king was angry and very furious, and commanded to destroy all the wise men of Babylon. And the decree went forth that the wise men should be slain; and they sought Daniel and his fellows to be slain." In these verses we have their defense. They answer with three gimmicks.

1. The no-man gimmick. We can't do it and no one can. It is an impossibility.
2. The precedent gimmick. No one else has ever asked this before and no one else has ever been able to do this kind of thing.
3. The Pantheon gimmick. Only the gods can give the answer.

At this point King Nebuchadnezzar became angry and began to move forward with his plan to slay all in the state department. But his department included Daniel and the other Hebrews.

God's Man For The Crisis

I believe this is a good title for this section. Please notice how Daniel faced this crisis. He thinks. He was calm and cool. Arioch was the chief of police, the head of the FBI and he was the one who was to carry out the decree from Nebuchadnezzar to cut them to pieces and make their houses public lavatories. Daniel knew the answer because he knew God and he was in tune with God. He knew the Word of God. So Daniel came on the scene as the answer to the problem.

DANIEL 2:14 "Then Daniel answered with counsel and wisdom to Arioch the captain of the king's guard, which was gone forth to slay the wise men of Babylon:" Please notice that Daniel answered with facts and information.

DANIEL 2:15 "He answered and said to Arioch the king's captain, Why is the decree so hasty from the king? Then Arioch made the thing known to Daniel." Daniel asked that they slow down and give him a careful detailed account of the situation. It is always very important for us to know all the facts involved in the case.

DANIEL 2:16 "Then Daniel went in, and desired of the king that he would give him time, and that he would shew the king the interpretation." Please notice that Daniel went straight to the head man. He knew Nebuchadnezzar and he was not afraid to face him with the problem. Here Daniel stood quietly and poised before the king. He told him he knew the dream and if he would give him time, he would tell him the answer. Now Daniel at that moment didn't know the answer, but he knew where he could get the answer. He knew the principle of 1 Peter 5:7.

DANIEL 2:17 "Then Daniel went to his house, and made the thing known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions:" Please notice the principle involved in this action. Daniel went to believing friends and shared the problem with them. He can pray with these friends and he can talk with these friends. This is one of the greatest blessings that can come from being in a fellowship called a church.

DANIEL 2:18 "That they would desire mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret; that Daniel and his fellows should not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon." This is where Daniel was superior to all the others. He knew how to go right into the presence of God and get his answers. He knew the meaning of daily prayer. He operated on the basis of the principles given in Mark 11:24 and Matthew 18:19 and 20.

DANIEL 2:19 "Then was the secret revealed unto Daniel in a night vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven." Daniel faced the crisis with Doctrine. We have an advantage over Daniel. Today we have the completed Canon of Scripture and he didn't. That is why God revealed things to him in a night vision. We will see later on in this study that God revealed to Daniel the Panorama of Empires and that is why the Book of Daniel is so important if one is to understand history.