

Sunday, August 12, 2018

Daniel 5:1-12, 17-30

Daniel 7:1-14

Daniel's Vision-For the 21st Century?

We continue in our "At Your Request" series for the summer with today's focus being on Daniel's dream interpretation and his visions. Daniel is one of several young men who were taken from Jerusalem in Israel to Babylon when King Nebuchadnezzar besieged Israel. The book of Daniel tells the story of a faithful man of God who spent most of his life in captivity in Babylon. He is devoted to serving God as he had done in Israel. Daniel was one of the young men who were without physical defect, handsome and had an aptitude to learning. He was taught in the language and literature of the Babylonians and lived according to the teachings of his Hebrew faith. Daniel's convictions led him from captivity to government leader, from the lions' den to wealth and royalty, and who lived by faith and told the people what they had dreamt just as he prophesied of the kingdoms and eras which would come to earth. The book of Daniel is not fully chronological in its chapter by chapter reading—but one can follow Daniel's story because of what occurs under each of the king's leadership and the role that Daniel plays. This is Daniel's story which is often connected with the visions of John as recorded in Revelation in order to predict what the future of the world or even its end will be like.

In Babylon, King Nebuchadnezzar had dreams and he was troubled. He summoned the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, astrologers to interpret his dreams. But they could not so the king ordered the execution of all the learned men. Daniel was one who was to carry out this task. When he asked why this was to occur, Daniel went to the king and asked if he could hear the dream and interpret. The king told him and Daniel learned of the trials which would become a part of King N's life. Daniel gained the respect of the king and he received many gifts and of course was lifted up in rank of the king's court. Those who heard this plotted against Daniel because they were jealous.

Yet the King's dreams were not good for his future. He had become a very great leader but the dream which Daniel interpreted was not so great. The King would be driven away and made to live like a wild animal because he had sinned against God and was not kind to the oppressed. For more than a year this king lived away from his kingdom and it wasn't until he repented that he could return.

During that time, his son King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for 1000 of his nobles who drank wine from stolen goblets which belonged in the temple of God in Jerusalem. While

this banquet occurred, suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall in the palace. The words MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN/PERES were written but the king did not understand.. He called for the wise and learned men to tell him what it meant. But they could not. The queen (the king's mother) remembered Daniel who had interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dreams. He was called to the king and was offered many gifts if he could interpret the writing on the wall.

Daniel told him that he acted against God by praising the gods of silver and gold, bronze, iron, wood and stone. He had not honoured God who holds his life in his hand and so he sent the hand that wrote the inscription. The writings meant—*mene*- God has numbered the days for you to reign as king and your reign will end. *Teke*l- Your life has been weighed in balances and found wanting; you have not done as you should have; *Peres*- your kingdom is divided and you will not see it reunited. All of these words reflect the foolish choices the king made and with these words on the wall, all present knew of the poor choices he had made and that something serious was to occur. Daniel was rewarded for his interpretation and then raised to the third highest ruler in the kingdom. But that night, the king was slain and a new King, Darius took over.

The writing on the wall. God had seen how King Belshazzar had turned so far away from God that he drank out of sacred vessels while partying. His kingdom was not functioning as it should and as a leader he had not measured up. The kingdom had become divided with no clear purpose or leader.

Can you imagine the king in this situation? He's hosting a big feast with all the noteworthy people of the kingdom: people from the elite crowds who he tried to impress with his wealth and with food and drink. And to further impress them, he had the vessels which had been stolen from sacred places in Israel brought in for the occasion. Everyone would be drinking out of them and doing so against God's ways. Then while this was occurring, suddenly, a human like hand writes on the wall and although it was great entertainment—the words written were not funny. The king should have been embarrassed and humiliated! But the worst part was that he did not know what the words meant! Daniel had to tell them the meaning of the writing on the wall and that he would soon end his time as king because he had messed up as a leader.

Today we might use this same expression or idiom "writing on the wall" to indicate a premonition, portent, or clear indication of pending failure or disaster. For this is what occurred

with King Belshazzar. That night the king was killed and his reign ended for he had not followed God's ways. The writing on the wall was the teaching that led the king to know that his reign was over.

But what happened to Daniel? He was lifted up and made a governor of the state. Daniel also dreamed and had visions in his mind as he lay down in bed. Daniel's vision as recorded in Chapter 7 has been interpreted time and again as world history continues to unfold. Because of the various images in his dream, Daniel is often seen as a visionary for not only the Pre-Christian era-Jesus' time on earth, and the Christian era. Now in the post Christian era when world leaders are discussing global matters and how history continues to evolve many people are turning to these visions and wondering if the writing on the wall will soon appear!

Daniel's vision of the four winds of heaven churning up the great sea and out of the waves came four great beasts each different from the other. 1) like a lion, with wings of an eagle, wings were torn off, lifted from the ground and then it stood on two feet like a man, then given a heart of a man.

2) bear- raised up on one of its sides and it had 3 ribs in its mouth between its teeth, It was told "get up and eat your fill of flesh;"

3) looked like a leopard with four wings like a bird, four heads and given authority to rule

4) different than the others- terrifying, frightening and powerful—large iron teeth- which crushed and devoured its victims and had 10 horns; a little horn came up amongst the others-3 horns were then uprooted ; the horn had eyes like a human and spoke; The Ancient of Days (another name for God) sat down- white clothing, white hair, throne flaming fire, wheels ablaze, river of fire and many attending. Court was seated, books opened/

Then one like a son of man- came in clouds of heaven, approached the Ancient of Days—son of man as given authority, glory and sovereign power—all peoples, nations and people of every language worshiped him.

Many interpretations of these visions have existed in time but the symbolism associated with current nations in the world is difficult to ignore. 1) lion— Babylon under King Nebuchadnezzar or today Great Britain and commonwealth nations; the wings of an eagle breaking away—US; 2) bear— King Darius and Silas with the Medo-Persian states or modern Russia; 3) leopard- Greece under Alexander the great or the continents of Africa and Asia which is home for various kinds of leopards; the four heads—ruling from and on alert to all directions

But it is the 4th beast which needs further explanation—nothing like it anywhere yet where does it come from? It is the Roman Empire which during Daniel's time—was in control of everything. Modern interpretation leads us to think that this beast is an adversary for God and Christ Jesus and the Spirit even though Daniel does not name 'son of man' as Jesus.

. Daniel's vision involves 10 kings and their kingdoms which will rise and fall in time. The 11th king will try to bring about further changes and oppressions but then his power will be taken away. The saints, the people of God and God Himself will reign and everyone will worship God the creator. This is an amazing view of world history, possible current political events and for the future but what does this mean for Daniel? In vs. 28 we read—this is the end of the matter, I Daniel was deeply troubled by my thoughts, and my face turned pale but I kept the matter to myself. Daniel was unsure of the dream and its potential help and hinder future matters. He kept the matters to himself and even though he continued to have visions where kingdoms would rise and fall and his reaction was often being appalled and uncertain, Daniel lived by his convictions and faith.

Daniel studied the scriptures further watching and waiting for the times and leadership to change. Because he had learned that at some point the king of Babylon would free the people from Israel and they would return home. What could Daniel do? He prayed. And he prayed without fear and filled his prayers with hope that one day they would be set free to go home.

Anne Graham Lotz writes the following in [The Daniel Prayer: Prayer that Moves Heaven and Changes Nations](#) :

What kind of prayer was it that when offered by one person on behalf of a people who were under God's judgment, Heaven was moved and a nation was changed?7 What was the secret to the spiritual restoration, renewal, and revival of Judah?

Eventually and in time, we learn that God moved King Cyrus to issue the decree that after 70 years of captivity every Jew living in Babylon could go home. What had Daniel stated to move heaven and changed the nation? Wouldn't what he prayed be important for us to ask God now? When we think about our world right now—filled with division, disaster, diplomacy in tatters and even destruction,- what do we need to pray to God in order to change the world as we see it? Is it even possible? Do we dare to pray like Daniel in order to bring about change?

God knew Daniel to be faithful and throughout his life lived in captivity Daniel did not disappoint God. He lived faithfully as a Jew in a foreign land. He interpreted the dreams of

others and told them what they meant- whether good or bad for their sakes or not. Daniel was tested and even put into a lions den because he would not give up his faith in God. What an example of faithfulness he is for us!. How faithful to God are you? Do you continue to practise and live out your faith in action every day? Daniel's faithfulness came in how often he prayed and in having dreams which needed interpretation he let them be just as they were—dreams not fully certain of their meaning but knew that God had placed them in his heart and mind.

Daniel also had faith that one day his people would return home and prayed for this. We need to do what he did throughout his life- pray. In Daniel ch.9, we read Daniel's prayer which he offered to God as he pleaded for God to bring about change for the future. Daniel knew that the people were not living as they ought; and he prayed for God's mercy upon them, for forgiveness of sins and for the ability to begin anew.

Maybe we need to offer Daniel's prayer to God in order that we will have faith and not worry what the future holds. For if we truly believe in God, and in His Son Christ Jesus, we need not fear the visions, the dreams or the interpretations from the past. We need only to move forward in faith to love God under all circumstances that we are living in and to grow stronger in faith through the teachings of Jesus as we learn about God's faithful people in the Bible.

Let us offer to God a portion of Daniel's prayer as we each seek to be moved from sin to forgiveness to hope. (From ch,9) let us pray

O Lord, you are a great and awesome God! You always fulfill your covenant and keep your promises of unfailing love to those who love you and obey your commands. But we have sinned and done wrong. We have rebelled against you and scorned your commands and regulations. We have refused to listen to your servants, the prophets, who spoke on your authority to our kings and princes and ancestors and to all the people of the land... Lord you are in the right; but as you see, our faces are covered with shame...

O Lord our God, you brought lasting honour to your name by rescuing your people from Egypt in a great display of power. But we have sinned and are full of wickedness. Hear your servants' prayer. Lean down and listen to us. Open your eyes and see our despair. See how we lie in ruin in this nation and around the world. Through your mercy we pray. Forgive us God. Lord listen and act for we are your children in faith.(NLT) Amen.