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Sermon Notes

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Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

Daniel 2:1-23

I. The Future is Bright?

A. Constant preoccupation with the future

1. "Futurists"

a. Nostradamus

b. Alvin Toffler's *Future Shock*

c. "Psychics" for *National Enquirer*: Jeanne Dixon

d. *The People's Almanac* (1978): "Around the Corner: Predicting the Future" (1979-2000)

Fredrick Davies, Jeanne Dixon, Joseph DeLouise, others

- A Palestinian nation would be established north of Israel
- President Carter would be re-elected in 1980
- Electric cars would come into their own in 1982
- There would be a manned landing on Mars between 1983-1985, and clear evidence will be found that life once existed there
- The papacy would cease to exist
- The United States would be torn by a massive civil war in the 1980's
- Texas would secede from the Union by 1982
- By 1986, ocean farming would provide a major source of the world's food
- By 2000, guns which use bullets would cease to exist, replaced by stun guns which use electrical discharge

2. Financial prognostications
3. Entertainment
 - a. science fiction: movies & books
 - i) Stanley Kubrick's *2001*
 - ii) Star Trek
 - iii) Sci-Fi books
 - b. literature: Jules Verne
 - c. cartoons: the "Jetsons"
 - d. Bill Gates: *The Road Ahead*
4. Scientific advances
 - a. NOVA: "expanding universe"... ever-accelerating, what will the end be?
 - b. "Popular Science": The future of travel, appliances, electronics, etc.
 - c. molecular computers: using the spin direction of electrons to store data, computers can be made incredibly tiny and amazingly powerful
5. The end of the world: *Left Behind*... sold over 20 million copies
6. Personal future:
 - a. what will happen to me?
 - b. what will happen to those I love?

B. Yearning for a "bright future"

1. Bright future = one in which good things happen
2. Confidence about the future fuels optimism on a daily basis

C. BUT the future is actually DARK... meaning unknown

James 4:13-15 Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." ¹⁴ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for

a little while and then vanishes. ¹⁵ *Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."*

vs. 22 *He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with him.*

D. YET the future is bright to God

1. Bright = clear, open, containing no mysteries
2. Bright = full of gloriously good things

II. Nebuchadnezzar's Terrifying Dream and Terrible Decree (vs. 1-12)

A. The circumstances of the dream (vs. 1, 28-29)

1. A number of dreams... not just one; perhaps the same dream several times
2. Time of the dream: troubles with the critics
 - a. time stated: "the second year of his reign"... sometime between April 603 and March 602 B.C.
 - b. BUT Daniel's training lasted three years; brought in and questioned by King (1:20)
 - c. modern higher critics of the Bible "hopeless contradiction" between 1:20 & 2:1
 - d. Resolution: Babylonian reckoning of reign only begins in first FULL YEAR... Nabopolassar died September 7, 605 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar's reign only began to be counted the following March of 604 B.C. By then, Daniel and his friends had already had their first year of training and were into their second year

No "errors" in the Bible... all these criticisms can be answered!

3. Reason for the dream: Nebuchadnezzar's thoughts

vs. 29 *As you were lying there, O king, your mind turned to things to come*

Nebuchadnezzar thought about the future... the future of his own kingdom, and what would happen in the years to come... God graciously responded by sending an awesome dream

4. Result of the dream: terror and sleeplessness

- a. Nebuchadnezzar's mind was troubled... Hebrew = deep disturbance, apprehension
- b. sleep "broke away" from him... he was so filled with terror that he couldn't sleep

B. The counselor's summoned and tested (vs. 2-9)

1. First order of business: WHAT DID THE DREAM MEAN??
2. "Experts" called in: (many such lists in Daniel... this is the complete group!)
 - a. magicians: related to Hebrew word for stylus/pen... perhaps simply scholars
 - b. enchanters: powers of communication with the dead
 - c. sorcerers: practice sorcery, use incantations
 - d. astrologers (Chaldeans): highest of all of them... made a careful study of position of stars to predict the future
 - i) "Chaldean" originally referred to group of people in Southern Babylonia
 - ii) Nebopolassar was their greatest king; under his leadership, they conquered the Assyrians to the north
 - iii) these wise men were of the pure blood of Chaldea... the wisest of the wise
 - iv) furthermore... they specialized in dreams

Babylonian dream interpretation: kept careful record of as many dreams as they could; who dreamed the dream, what the dream contained, what happened after the dream... their libraries held an astounding data base of dream information; they interpreted new dreams by the precedent of old dreams, similar to law offices which have volumes and volumes of past cases and their outcomes so lawyers can handle each new case based upon precedent of old cases

For this reason, the Chaldeans were extremely confident they could interpret the dream accurately if the King simply told them what it was

3. The problem stated, the assurance given (vs. 3-4)
 - a. the king relates his problem to these "wise men"... almost certainly with great agitation
 - b. the Chaldeans speak for the whole group

c. amazing greeting... it strikes right to the heart of the matter

vs. 4 “O King, live forever!”

Standard fare... but it is the crux of the matter... he wouldn't live forever, and what would happen to his empire after he was gone.

NOTE: from this verse until the end of Chapter 7, the text is in Aramaic... perhaps in that it deals with issues related directly to the “times of the Gentiles”

d. highly confident of success: just tell us the dream, and we'll crank out the interp.

4. Nebuchadnezzar's skepticism, test, and decree

a. deep desire to be absolutely certain of dream's interpretation

b. also skeptical of the whole system of dream interp.

c. all along, these “wise men” claim special contact with supernatural information

d. “PROVE IT NOW”

e. test: “Tell me the dream, then I will know you can interpret it accurately”

f. stakes: immeasurably high

vs. 5-6 *The king replied to the astrologers, "This is what I have firmly decided: If you do not tell me what my dream was and interpret it, I will have you cut into pieces and your houses turned into piles of rubble. ⁶ But if you tell me the dream and explain it, you will receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor. So tell me the dream and interpret it for me."*

NOTE: KJV implies the King had forgotten his dream; the Aramaic is inconclusive, but the context makes far more sense if he did not forget the dream and was merely testing them to see if they could interpret it accurately; if he had truly forgotten the dream and said so in vss. 5 & 8, then the Chaldeans could simply fake their way through telling the dream and its interp.

Nebuchadnezzar was testing them because he wanted absolute assurance of the accuracy of the interpretation

Threat: torn limb from limb... perhaps four mighty trees bent inward and tied together with ropes; and their limbs tied one to each tree... when the trees were cut

apart, their bodies would be ripped to shreds; also, homes deStroyed and made into a public latrine

Promise: wealth, riches, power and honor... ALL OR NOTHING

5. The second try: "Please tell us the dream"... they are desperate now (vs. 7)

6. Nebuchadnezzar's unshakable will (vs. 8-9)

vs. 8-9 *Then the king answered, "I am certain that you are trying to gain time, because you realize that this is what I have firmly decided: 9 If you do not tell me the dream, there is just one penalty for you. You have conspired to tell me misleading and wicked things, hoping the situation will change. So then, tell me the dream, and I will know that you can interpret it for me."*

C. The counselor's pathetic failure (vs. 10-11)

1. Clear revelation of the limitations of human wisdom

2. They are terror-stricken, pleading for their lives using flattery

vs. 10-11 *The astrologers answered the king, "There is not a man on earth who can do what the king asks! No king, however great and mighty, has ever asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or astrologer. 11 What the king asks is too difficult. No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among men."*

3. The stage set for God to reveal Himself gloriously... God is VERY active among men!

D. The King's enraged decree (vs. 12)

vs. 12 *This made the king so angry and furious that he ordered the execution of all the wise men of Babylon.*

1. Common among Ancient Near Eastern despots... immediate death for the counselors

2. Also: Nebuchadnezzar was a young ruler, perhaps threatened by these older government officials... good chance to be rid of them

3. Deepest issue: Nebuchadnezzar wanted an answer to the problem!!

III. Daniel's Astounding Courage: It's Fruits and Roots (vs. 13-19)

A. Daniel's Serenity in the Maelstrom (vs. 13-15)

1. Character shown by contrast... Daniel vs. the Chaldeans
2. Character also shown in terrifying circumstances

“When you can keep your head when all around you are losing theirs...”

3. Daniel perfectly at peace, not afraid to die
 - a. supernatural serenity, clear thinking in a crisis
 - b. roots were his strong faith in the sovereign power of God
4. God orchestrates meeting with Arioch... chief executioner
 - a. not some underling... the head man himself
 - b. had it been an underling, Daniel would never have made it in to Nebuchadnezzar
 - c. Arioch a tough, tough man... cold-hearted killer
5. Daniel’s approach: measured, courageous... “with wisdom and tact”
 - a. Daniel’s winsome personality comes out
 - b. Daniel’s question

vs. 15 “Why did the king issue such a harsh [or hasty] decree?”

- c. The esteem of Arioch clear in that he takes time to talk to Daniel

“Arioch then explained the matter to Daniel.”

B. Daniel’s Audacious Request: Courageously Asked, Amazingly Granted (vs. 16)

1. Access right to the King!! (Undoubtedly because Arioch brought him)
2. Amazing request: the very thing the Chaldeans had asked for

vs. 16 “At this, Daniel went in to the king and asked for time, so that he might interpret the dream for him.”

3. Amazing response: the very thing the King had refused the Chaldeans, he grants to Daniel
4. Why? Three reasons
 - a. Daniel’s past record: (1:20... the king found him ten times better than the other counselors)

- b. Daniel's calm demeanor and clear plan... time in order to interpret, not to hatch some scheme
- c. God's sovereignty

Proverbs 21:1 The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases.

The request is granted!! Daniel gets the time he needs

C. Daniel's Source of Power: Corporate Prayer (vs. 17-18)

- 1. Daniel doesn't waste the time... he turns to his friends, and they together turn to prayer

vs. 17-18 Then Daniel returned to his house and explained the matter to his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. ¹⁸ He urged them to plead for mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that he and his friends might not be executed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.

- 2. Daniel's secret power source is private prayer...

Daniel 6:10 Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.

- 3. He also uses corporate prayer in this time of emergency
 - a. power and strength in numbers
 - b. fellowship in suffering
- 4. NOTE: their approach to God
 - a. absolute urgency... their very lives were at stake; they PLEADED with God
 - b. total humility before God... they were pleading for mercy
 - c. total faith in God's power... they were pleading to the God of the heavenly host

Clear rebuke to the Chaldean's trust in the stars... they trusted in their scientific knowledge of the stars and in their occultic powers... these four youths trusted in the God who made the stars

IV. God's Astounding Power and Wisdom (vs. 19-23)

A. God's merciful revelation

1. God's grace covers all His dealings with His people
2. Daniel and his friends did not deserve this astounding revelation... God did it for the glory of His own name and for love of His chosen ones
3. The NIGHT REVELATION comes at last to Daniel
4. Daniel saw the King's dream in a vision... God also opened Daniel's mind to understand that vision so he could explain it to the King
5. Daniel's life would be spared, as would those of Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah
6. In vs. 24 Daniel also would work to save the lives of all the other wise men as well

vs. 24 *Then Daniel went to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to execute the wise men of Babylon, and said to him, "Do not execute the wise men of Babylon. Take me to the king, and I will interpret his dream for him."*

B. Daniel's hymn of grateful praise (vs. 20-23)

vs. 20 *"Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are his. ²¹ He changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. ²² He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with him. ²³ I thank and praise you, O God of my fathers: You have given me wisdom and power, you have made known to me what we asked of you, you have made known to us the dream of the king."*

1. God's name:

- a. His character and attributes... all that He's revealed about Himself
- b. His reputation... what He does in order that all nations might know Him

God puts Himself on display, for the praise of His own glory, and that all the ends of the earth might fear Him and believe in Him

God's name is our salvation... "For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Daniel begins His praise to the name of God, for what God is doing in Babylon and in His control of all human history brings great glory to His name!!

2. God's wisdom

- a. God knows all things... nothing is hidden from Him
- b. God knows what's secret, what's in darkness and hidden from human eyes
 - i) He knows the future... the end is as clear to Him as is the beginning
 - ii) He also knows the King's secret thoughts as he lay on His bed

vs. 28-29 Your dream and the visions that passed through your mind as you lay on your bed are these: "As you were lying there, O king, your mind turned to things to come, and the revealer of mysteries showed you what is going to happen."

Psalm 139:4, 11-12 Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD. If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,"¹² even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.

- c. God also knows what's best... His rule is a wise rule... all that He does is good, right, just, and fair... GOD IS WISE!!!

3. God's power

- a. God can do anything... there is nothing too difficult for Him
- b. specifically, God can raise up one ruler and cast him down whenever He chooses
- c. He also decides how long a specific age of history will last... how long an empire will endure, and when it will come crashing down
- d. no one can resist His will or oppose His decisions... our God is almighty in power, even over the most powerful of human rulers

4. God's grace

- a. wisdom given: He gives wisdom to Daniel
- b. power given: He gives power to Daniel
- c. life given: He gives life to Daniel, then protects that life from a despot like Nebuchadnzzar

d. all things done for His people... GOD IS GRACIOUS!!!

V. Applications

A. The Limitations of Human Wisdom and Power

1. All the expertise of the Chaldeans could not reveal the dream... God made the wise look foolish

1 Corinthians 1:20-21 Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.

2. All the power of Nebuchadnezzar could not force the answer upon these counselors
 - a. he could threaten all he wanted
 - b. he could not get the answer
3. Ultimately the limitations of human wisdom and power shown in the GRAVE!!!

B. The Infinitude of God's Wisdom and Power

1. God knows everything that can be known

[Greg Boyd notwithstanding]

2. God controls history by his own power and no one can stop him
3. He raises one king and lowers another!!

C. The Godly Character of Daniel

1. Faith
 - a. trusting in God for his very life
 - b. trusting God to do the impossible... reveal a dream

Have you ever trusted God for anything extraordinary? What are you trusting God for now?

2. Courage
 - a. unafraid for consequences, unmoved by circumstances

- b. willing to stand before a tyrant with courage and dignity

How are you in a crisis? Do you stay composed, trusting in God... or do you fly apart?

3. Humility & Winsomeness

- a. deals gently and wisely with Arioch
- b. humbly calls friends together for prayer
- c. gives credit to both their prayer and to God for the answer

4. Compassion

seeks immediately to save other wise men from execution

This is the kind of man God uses in a time of crisis. Is this the kind of person you are?