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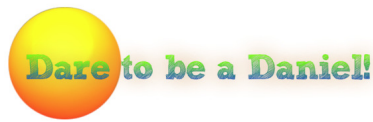
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Why Was Daniel So Special? (Part II)

Daniel 2:47: (NASB) *The king answered Daniel and said, surely your God is a God of gods and a Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, since you have been able to reveal this mystery.*



A few weeks ago we began looking at the life of Daniel the prophet beginning at the time he was about 17 years old and taken prisoner by the Babylonian Empire. What we saw was a boy who displayed solid integrity, faith and focus as he navigated his way through the muddy waters of captivity and idolatry to shine out as a light of God in a very dark place. Stay with us as we observe him grow up and grow into a man, a leader of uncompromising strength and passion for his God.

Please refer to "Why Was Daniel So Special? (Part I)" from our program broadcast on April 6, 2014.

A quick review: Daniel was from the tribe of Judah. He was favored of God and blessed with a heart for God. He was taken captive around 17 years old to a foreign land to live, work and serve with no apparent hope of freedom. He was only physically in the lion's den once, but all of his recorded experiences were really "Lion's Den Experiences" in terms of lessons learned.

The "Lion's Den LESSON" of CAPTIVITY: Once we are engulfed in captivity (and we all are), our first decision must be to set our intention on fidelity to our spiritual heritage.

They are captives, yet they are to receive royal rations of food and wine and an education! What was this really? It was the subtle indoctrination of idolatry for the purpose of creating loyal subjects to the idolatrous King himself! It was the removal of your identity and heritage and replacing it with a new name, a new language, a new belief system - a new life. Would they simply blend in or stand for the principles they believed in?

The "Lion's Den LESSON" of CONSCIENCE: We, like Daniel, are strangers. Do we meld into the "foreign country" and draw our nourishment from it, or do we draw our strength from the will of our Father based on principle and promise?

This would have been the fourth year that Daniel was in Babylon. For the first two years, King Nebuchadnezzar reigned alongside his father, Nabopolassar, who was an invalid at the time and died after the second year of Daniel's presence in Babylon. The King dreamed a dream and demanded to know the answer, but would not tell his wise men what it was.

The "Lion's Den LESSON" of FAITH: To speak of faith and to live in faith when all things are in order is one thing - to publicly speak of faith in a hostile environment and to live in that faith in such an environment is faith in action.

So, Daniel dramatically revealed the dream, its source and its interpretation, which was more than asked for. He basically told the King: You are being given a look into the future, beginning with your kingdom and ending with the kingdom of God overspreading the earth forever and ever!

The "Lion's Den LESSON" of PUBLICITY: Because deep and abiding faith stands on principle, publicity does not stroke the ego. It merely becomes a tool to draw all eyes to the source of its strength - the Almighty God and His plan.

This is a short test - like the "five minutes of fame test" that we all at one time may experience.

Here is where our first program left off: Notice how at this point each of these lessons become bigger, as the tests of Daniel's character progress.

How did Daniel react once he "hit the big time?" How would you react?

The "Lion's Den Test" of FAME AND FORTUNE: Daniel 2:46-49: (NRSV) ⁴⁶Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell on his face, worshiped Daniel, and commanded that a grain offering and incense be offered to him. ⁴⁷The king said to Daniel, truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery! ⁴⁸Then the king promoted Daniel, gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon. ⁴⁹Daniel made a request of the king, and he appointed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego over the affairs of the province of Babylon. But Daniel remained at the king's court.



So, Daniel is rewarded as the King recognizes that the God of Daniel is the God of all gods. It is important to remember that *the King is here expressing a great appreciation of the Almighty and His power*, for over time he is destined to forget.

Daniel's heritage rings true! "Daniel" means "judge of God." His Babylonian name, Belteshazzar, means "Bel's prince," meaning "whom Bel (the Babylonian god) favors." Daniel truly was the judge of God and NOT Bel's prince!

Daniel would now spend many years in a lofty position of responsibility, power and even glory in Babylon. The gift of this elevation was received into a heart that was only motivated by devotion to Jehovah God.

The "Lion's Den LESSON" of FAME AND FORTUNE: Such recognition as this only comes as a result of bold and decisive action. So often our initial response to such praise and honor will reveal the truest fabric of our heart. Prepare from the inside out so that fame and fortune, should they come, will merely be reflected in your life as a changed outward circumstance and not a change of heart!

Are we prepared "from the inside out" when fame and fortune may come our way?

Remember the years of preparation that the Apostle Paul was given before he actually preached? Acts 14:8-18: There was an immediate and adoring public reaction - what would YOU do? People want what they want - this is a great lesson in staying true to your convictions! Both Daniel and Paul are shining examples of how to behave when things are going really well in our lives.

Life is suddenly great - power, authority and comfort! ...What could possibly go wrong?

The "Lion's Den Test" of POWER AND COMFORT: This is the period between Daniel's elevation to high standing and the fall of King Nebuchadnezzar into madness. This is a period of about 30 years. During this time, the only event recorded is the fiery furnace incident (which was about 20 years into this period) of which Daniel was not a part - remember DANIEL WAS NOT IN THE FURNACE - just his companions - but his influence was certainly there. Let us remember that all four of these Hebrews were in positions of honor and respect. Perhaps being in office some 20 years would tend to make you comfortable and maybe a little sloppy...or would it?

Daniel 3:1-6: (NRSV) ¹King Nebuchadnezzar made a golden statue whose height was sixty cubits and whose width was six cubits; he set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. ²Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent for the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces, to assemble and come to the dedication of the statue that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up....When they were standing before the statue that Nebuchadnezzar had set up, ⁴the herald proclaimed aloud, You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, ⁵that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, drum, and entire musical ensemble, you are to fall down and worship the golden statue that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. ⁶Whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire.

We can only speculate to whom this image was built. Was it built to the King himself or to one of the gods of Babylon? Whatever it was we know the challenge set before Daniel's three companions, Hananiah (Babylonian name Shadrach), Mishael (Babylonian name Meshach) and Azariah (Babylonian name Abednego). They didn't have Daniel with them as they faced the blatant dilemma of idol worship. They had served the King faithfully for 20 years. What a crossroads!

(Source: Biblical commentary by A. O. Hudson) The height was 60 cubits, the breadth 6 cubits. Both numbers are consistent with the sexagesimal number system used by the Babylonians. That is, a base 60 system. (Today a base 10 system is customary, but we still divide an hour into 60 minutes, and a circle into 6 x 60 degrees, from the Babylonian system.) These figures yield a ratio of height to width of 10 to 1, which would be a very narrow image relative to the height. Yet the ancients depicted their gods exactly this way. The figurines of Baal that come mainly from Syria and Palestine are good examples ...so for Nebuchadnezzar to make a statue with these proportions would not have been unusual.

Probably the image was a representation of Marduk, the national god of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar's son and successor was also named for this god.



Daniel 3:8-12: Not only did these Chaldeans report the three Hebrews, they did it by name. They made sure to remind the King of his appointing them and that these Hebrews' worship did NOT include any of the gods of Babylon. Sounds like there was a great resentment built up over the years! Now it was time to stand for truth!

Daniel 3:13-15: The King's respect, fury...and forgetfulness (!) are obvious. There was a time when Nebuchadnezzar exclaimed to Daniel *truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings!*

He gives them a second chance though he does not change the consequences of disobedience. His forgetfulness is obvious as he gives no credit to the Almighty.

So here the three are faced with the temptation of rationality. Can you imagine them thinking something like, “This is no bluff. We are at the center of attention. What good would we be to God or anyone if we were dead? Those who would replace us are surely not motivated by the same standards of right that we hold. So bow down, who is going to care? Is it really that bad? Can't we do more good to others alive?”

Daniel 3:16-18: (NRSV) ¹⁶*Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to present a defense to you in this matter. ¹⁷If our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire and out of your hand, O king, let Him deliver us. ¹⁸But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods and we will not worship the golden statue that you have set up.*

Here is the answer **that has lived within these men all along**, in spite of the power and comfort of their Babylonian lives! “We cannot change. If our God chooses, He can deliver us. If He chooses not, then let it be known, He is God, and we will have followed Him unto death!”

If we are true Christians, are we willing to stand up that firmly because that is what we are made of? Our compromises may be more subtle but just as important.

Daniel 3:19-22: (NRSV) ¹⁹*Then Nebuchadnezzar was so filled with rage against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego that his face was distorted. He ordered the furnace heated up seven times more than was customary, ²⁰and ordered some of the strongest guards in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and to throw them into the furnace of blazing fire... ²²Because the king's command was urgent and the furnace was so overheated, the raging flames killed the men who lifted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.*

Where does your mind go as you are being hoisted into the “fire” that will consume you?
Isaiah 26:3

Daniel 3:23-30

The King sums up the courageous and active faith he has just witnessed. Does this convert him to full faith in the Almighty? ²⁹*Therefore I make a decree: Any people, nation, or language that utters blasphemy against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins; for there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way. ³⁰Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.* Well, he is astounded but probably not quite converted! Though astounded (again) by the power of the Almighty and in a similar circumstance - both instances surrounded statues that symbolized great power. The first (from the King's dream) was great earthly power, shown by Daniel to be fleeting before the great God of heaven. This second statue was probably a symbol of false spiritual power that ought not to be bowed down to, as it was just an idol. These three companions stood as Daniel would have: firm in faith, sound in resolve, courageous in conflict. They knew what was right and had been with Daniel in a similar dilemma before this and they followed his lead.

The “Lion's Den LESSON” of POWER AND COMFORT: Even in the context and comfort of the greatest powers of the greatest men that rule the kingdoms of this earth, there must only be one place where God's chosen ones find their rest and loyalty. Again, this is a result of an “inside out” faith that has its roots firmly in your heart and is often developed and cultivated through fellowship. Power and comfort are circumstances; faith and actions are characteristics.



In the United States, we live in a time where we have the greatest freedom in the recorded history of mankind. We can essentially do what we want if we follow basic laws. Intellectually we can go in any direction. We can physically travel nearly anywhere. We live as kings! Running water ...refrigeration ...heat ...indoor plumbing... We live in an age of power and comfort. Even in the context of the greatest time in history, we have great trials of rationalizing.

1 Peter 4:12-14: We would not rejoice over fiery trials that come as a result of our own doing. Instead, we want to stand for something higher - for Jesus - as this will crystalize our character.

The three in the furnace built a lifetime of integrity so they could take a stand on that one day.

The “Lion’s Den Test” of INTEGRITY: About ten years after the fiery furnace, Daniel and his friends would be in their 50’s.

(Source: Biblical commentary by A. O. Hudson) King Nebuchadnezzar was now at the zenith of his glory. The “head of gold” had become the conqueror of nations. He had seen three successive pharaohs of Egypt, the rival nation, pass into death - two of them struck down by his own hand... The proud city of Tyre, after a siege of 13 years, had been forced to capitulate. The Assyrians were no more, and their mighty city of Nineveh was a mass of broken down ruins. The Ten Tribes were scattered to the wilds of Armenia, spreading slowly outwards, and the remnants of Judah dwelt in the south of Babylon. The Holy Land laid a desolate waste.

For seven or eight years now the King, having measurably pacified his widely spread empire, had been devoting himself to the erection and adornment of the wonderful buildings for which both he and the city became famous. Temples and palaces, roads and canals, parks and gardens, all grew quickly under the inspiration of his fiery enthusiasm.

Just as Daniel prophesied 30 years earlier, King Nebuchadnezzar is at his zenith of power.

The “Lion’s Den LESSON” of INTEGRITY: True integrity can only be fully appreciated after the fact, for it is in hindsight that we are able to observe all of the moving parts that were affected by the actions of such integrity.

This next chapter begins with the words of the King himself, recounting his experience:

Daniel 4:1-9: This certainly sounds like a different king - a God-honoring king! What happened?

- The King is in peace, has had military success, has power and is surrounded by magnificence.
- He has another dream that is a puzzlement to all the “wise” of his court.

⁸*At last Daniel came in before me—he who was named Belteshazzar after the name of my god, and who is endowed with a spirit of the holy gods—and I told him the dream: ⁹O Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, I know that you are endowed with a spirit of the holy gods and that no mystery is too difficult for you. Hear the dream that I saw; tell me its interpretation.*

- Daniel is then called in and he is introduced as “Daniel” in the retelling of the account.
- Daniel’s other name is used in the account, showing how far down the path of idolatry the King had gone.
- The King credits Daniel with *a spirit of the gods* which confirms the idolatry.

Daniel 4:10 -16: The Lion’s Den Experiences in the Christian’s life are the experiences we are faced with literally each and every day to take a stand and make decisions in accordance with the will of Christ. It is a life and death test for us. We can only pass the test if our Christianity is from the inside out. **Daniel’s response:** **Daniel 4:19:** God had blessed Daniel with instant knowledge of this dream, and it was BAD NEWS! Daniel was troubled by it. We can see his attachment to the King in his distress in his response. So, what will he do? He will do what Daniel always does as we have seen over his 30 years in Babylon - he will act in accordance with faith and integrity, *but that is a story for another day...*

*So, why was Daniel so special?
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!*