

THE STORY

STUDY 18

CHAPTER 18

Summary of Chapter:

At the beginning of the chapter we are introduced to Daniel and his 3 friends who were part of the first deportation of Israelites into captivity in Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar had commanded that from this group of Israelites, 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, were to be taught the language and literature of the Babylonians. Daniel and his 3 friends were chosen and given new names, to Daniel the name, Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego.

During their training, Daniel and his three friends decided to honour God by not defiling themselves by eating the royal food which was given to them. Instead they asked the chief official for only vegetables and water. After fearing that the King would see the four men not as well nourished as the others and would have his head for that, Daniel convinced him to a trial period for ten days. After the ten days, Daniel and his friends looked healthier and better nourished than any of the other young men and so the chief official agreed to give them only vegetables and water.

God honoured Daniel and his three friends for their faithfulness to Him and He gave them knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. To Daniel he gave understanding of visions and dreams of all kinds. At the end of their training, the king found none equal to Daniel and his three friends not only among the young men but among all the wise men of his kingdom, and so they entered the king's service.

In the second year of King Nebuchadnezzar, the king had a dream, and he summoned all his wise men to not only tell him the interpretation of the dream but the dream he had as well. He required they do this so that he could be convinced they were not misleading him. Well the wise men of Babylon responded by telling the king that no man could do what the king was asking for, no great and mighty king would ever ask this of his wise men and only the gods could reveal such a thing but that the gods did not live among humans. This angered the king and he ordered all the wise men to be put to death.

When Daniel, who had been unaware of the king's dream and request, heard about his execution because no wise man in Babylon could give it, he asked for time to pray with his friends for the dream and its interpretation. God answered their prayers and gave Daniel the dream and its interpretation. Daniel was then taken to the King, where the king asked Daniel if he was able to tell him the dream and its meaning.

Daniel again honoured God by telling the king that he was unable to but his God was able to reveal mysteries and has revealed this mystery of the king's dream to him.

Daniel went on to tell the king what his dream was and how it pointed to the future. How the strong and glorious Babylonian empire would not last forever but another inferior but momentarily stronger empire would reign. This inferior empire would also not last and also fall to another and they would also fall to another and so on as global power shifts bases as history moves forward. The message of the dream was made clear to Nebuchadnezzar that Daniel's God is the one who directs history and his empire was only a small chapter in the story of Daniel's God. King Nebuchadnezzar then worshipped the God of Daniel and made Daniel in charge of the entire province of Babylon, as well as giving his friends prominent positions.

Later on when Nebuchadnezzar had probably forgotten about this moment when he had acknowledged the God of Daniel as the only true God, he built himself an image and he ordered the leaders of the land to come to its dedication. When they were all there, they were commanded to bow down and worship the image of God that had been made. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to bow down to the image for they worshiped God alone. (Where was Daniel? We don't really know but some reasons maybe for his absence was that he was appointed to a higher office than those requested to be there on this occasion or maybe it is thought that Daniel was out of town on Empire duties, whatever the reason for him not being mentioned here should not question Daniel's devotion solely to God, we have already read about this and should believe if he was there he would have stood and refused to bow and worship this image with the other 3)

For their devotion to God and refusal to bow and worship this image, these three men were brought before the King and questioned. The king ordered them to bow and worship this image and he threatened them with a blazing furnace if they refused because what god would be able to save them from that. Well the men refused and placed their trust in God and said to the king that their God was able to save them, but even if he did not they would never bow and worship any other god but the Lord their God.

Well the King was furious at Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and he had the furnace heated seven times and threw them into it. The King was bemused at what happened next for he saw four men, not three walking around in the furnace. He even said to his officials that the fourth man looked like a son of the gods. He ordered the men to come out and they noticed that the fire had not harmed them, their hair was not singed, their robes were not scorched and there was no smell of fire on them. King Nebuchadnezzar again worshiped God and issued a decree that nothing must be said against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and he promoted these men in the province of Babylon.

King Nebuchadnezzar again had a dream that Daniel was to interpret, this time it was about his own downfall with a mental/behavioural disorder after which he would be restored to his throne in which indeed happened and he credited his restoration to Daniel's God.

After King Nebuchadnezzar, King Belshazzar ignored and dishonoured Daniel's God, and ridiculed him by drinking from the chalices which were from God's temple in Jerusalem. A hand appeared and wrote Mene, Mene, Tekel, Parsin, no one could understand the writing. Daniel was called to read it and he gave the King its message "you have been weighed on the scales and found wanting". That very night invading Persians attacked and killed the king of Babylon.

The Persian king, King Darius, now ruled and Daniel served that empire with honour and distinction. However, Daniel's relationship with his God came under the spotlight once again as King Darius's administrators became jealous of Daniel's high position and his respect from the King. And so to get rid of Daniel they tricked King Darius in issuing a decree that forbid the praying to any other gods except to the king over the next thirty days, and anybody who did not obey this decree would be thrown into the lions den.

Daniel took no notice of the decree and continued to faithfully pray to his God three times a day. Of course the administrators were waiting for this and they reported the breach of the decree to the King. And being bound by Persian law the King had to throw Daniel into the Lion's den. In the morning though, the king went to see if Daniel's God had been able to save Daniel from the mouths of the lions and to his surprise Daniel was still alive and attributed his life to the protection God had sent for him.

The King had Daniel removed from the den and those who falsely accused them, with their wives and children, were ordered to be thrown into the lion's den and they were devoured before their bodies hit the floor. Darius wrote to his entire Kingdom that all must fear and revere the God of Daniel.

Even though God's people were exiled into a foreign country and lived their many years, he continued to keep for himself a remnant who would honour him and whom he would particularly look after. After all he had promised earlier through the prophet Jeremiah that he would one day return his people to the land he gave them and make them into a nation once again.

1. In what ways do you see Daniel exhibit his faith in God?

We see Daniel's faith displayed in the way he remembers to honour God by keeping his law even in a foreign place among a culture and people who do not know or honour God. He did not defile himself with food that was prohibited by God's law when he was taken into the king's service for training and as well as

trusting that the Lord would honour his faith during that trial period he asked for from the chief official.

We also see Daniel's faith displayed when his life was threatened. When the King ordered all the wise men to be killed because they could not give the king his dream and its meaning, Daniel asked for time to pray to God for the king's dream and its interpretation. He knew that God was the one who could only reveal such things. He also was not afraid to share with the king this very truth, that no man was able to do this, but God had revealed it to him and God had shown the king, the future.

We see how in his everyday life his faith was on display, as he was a man known for his faith in God. When Nebuchadnezzar had another dream to be interpreted, he called Daniel, when King Belshazzar needed the writing on the wall interpreted, he called Daniel, and when the administrators of the Persian empire tried to find some dirt on Daniel they had to look at targeting his devotion and faith in God because they found Daniel to be trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. Daniel's faith in his everyday life was also seen in that he was known for his prayers to his God three times a day, everyday.

We also see Daniel's faith in God displayed as he always gives credit to God for what blessings or miracles happen to him. From the interpretation of dreams to the lions mouths being shut up, Daniel is never short of a word giving praise to God for what he has done.

Daniel's faith is displayed in his constant relationship with God in the ever changing circumstances that he found himself in. From being exiled into a foreign land, with foreign culture and language, to the changing kings and empires he lived through, Daniel remained faithful to his God and sort to honour him no matter the situation he found himself in.

2. What enabled Daniel's three friends to stand against the kings orders?

It was their knowledge of who God was and their trust in his faithfulness to those who are faithful to Him. They knew that God has the power and strength to save them from the fiery furnace, and they trusted that if they were faithful to worship him alone, just as he commanded, he would be faithful in blessing them, as he had promised. Whether that blessing was saving them from death by fire or by blessing them with eternal life with him, they would trust in Him because either way God would be faithful to who he is and what he has promised.

3. Why did God choose to punish Nebuchadnezzar the way that he did?

After all the Lord had done and shown to King Nebuchadnezzar through Daniel and Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, King Nebuchadnezzar could not overcome his pride problem. He marvelled at the greatness of his kingdom and the prosperity he had created in the land and gave credit to himself as the one

who had accomplished all that. And so God's punishment was to humble the mighty king and show that he was the only true God who had power and authority to rule the kingdoms of mankind and give it to whom he wills.

What was the result of this punishment?

Well after the Lord struck him down with a mental/behavioural disorder that saw him live in the bush, eating grass and acting like a common animal, the Lord restored him to good health and enabled him to once again sit on the throne of Babylon. God showed King Nebuchadnezzar that just as he gave his kingdom to him he could take it away because he alone was God, the ruler over all things. And the punishment seem to have struck home with the king for we read it resulted in these final words from the King:

³⁴ At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever, for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation;
³⁵ all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, "What have you done?"

³⁶ At the same time my reason returned to me, and for the glory of my kingdom, my majesty and splendor returned to me. My counselors and my lords sought me, and I was established in my kingdom, and still more greatness was added to me. ³⁷ Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble. (Daniel 4:34-37)

4. Why did Daniel prosper under the Kings of Babylon and Persia?

Daniel prospered because his faith in the Lord Most High and his desire to worship the Lord Most high impacted every area of his life. Daniel was renowned for his faith, honesty, trustworthiness, and integrity in the work place and at home, and along with his wisdom and knowledge that the Lord had bless him with because of his faithfulness, the kings of the empires saw in Daniel a valuable asset to them. Daniel was a man of God who prospered in the world because he lived by faith in God.

5. What can you learn about prayer from Daniel?

Prayer is necessary if we are to have a relationship with God.

Prayer is essential if we are to overcome the battles of life and make it in the world in which we live.

Prayer is a commitment and discipline of the believer's life.

Prayer enables faithful living for God.

6. What steps can you take to become more devoted to prayer?

Pray and ask God to help you to see the importance of prayer and to become more devoted to communicating with him.

Set aside one or a few dedicated times for prayer every day. Daniel had 3 dedicated times of prayer.

Start a prayer journal and journal what God is saying to you and what you are asking of God. Maybe you can be encouraged by journaling how God answers those prayers too.

Prayer with others so that you might learn from them how to pray and maybe what to pray for.