

PENTECOST 11 - AUGUST 4, 2024
Daniel 2:24-49 - Dream Interpreted

The Bible is unlike all other religious books in that it bases its authenticity, authority and inspiration on Prophecy. Prophecy is ‘history written in Advance’ and proves the foreknowledge of God. This, the Prophet Daniel opened to the heathen king, Nebuchadnezzar, in his interpretation of the king’s “Dream”.

Prophecy is two-fold, “descriptive” and “predictive”. The prophets were both “forth-tellers” and “foretellers”. They had both “insight” and “foresight”. Their prophetic utterances were not deduction or reason, but were imparted to them by the “Holy Spirit”. The study of the “Prophetic Scriptures” is important as two-thirds of the Scriptures are prophetic, either in type, symbol, or direct statement and more than one-half of them are as yet unfulfilled. The prophecies are not meant to be “allegorized” or “spiritualized”.

The book of Daniel is an anthology of narratives and apocalypses that centre on the life and experiences of Daniel and his three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. As postexilic stories, they reflect on a reality in which Judah has been militarily defeated, significant portions of its population have been deported, and its political and economic power has been significantly diminished. This historical context is crucial for understanding the themes and messages of the book of Daniel.

The spotlight for this sermon series is on five texts: three “court tales” and two “apocalypses”. The court tales are narratives that feature Daniel and his friends navigating the challenges of serving in the courts of foreign kings.

These stories showcase their unwavering faith in God and their ability to overcome significant challenges.

Linking both the court tales and the apocalypses is the God of Israel, who is portrayed as sovereign over all earthly and heavenly affairs. In the book of Daniel, God is described as the one who: changes times and seasons; deposes kings and sets up kings; gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding. He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what is in the darkness, and light dwells with him.

Throughout the book, Daniel is depicted as having a unique relationship with God and a special ability to discern and interpret the mysteries that God reveals. He is uniquely gifted in understanding and explaining the divine visions and messages that are central to the apocalyptic sections of the book.

In this captivating story, Daniel and his fellow courtiers face an absurd challenge from King Nebuchadnezzar. The king demands that they not only interpret his dream but also reveal its contents without any prior knowledge. The king in this story is unreasonable, fickle, and prone to radical mood swings.

This is the first story in which the reader is introduced to God as the revealer of mysteries, and as the one who establishes and deposes kings. These two themes will mark the rest of the book going forward.

In 605 BC, Nebuchadnezzar conquered Egypt and besieged Jerusalem.

King Jehoiakim was carried as a prisoner to Babylon. Upon hearing of the death of his father, Nebuchadnezzar released and returned to power, king Jehoiakim of Judah. Nebuchadnezzar did not return empty handed. He plundered the Temple in Jerusalem, took away some of its golden vessels, and ordered Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, to select from among the princes of royal and noble blood the most comely and intellectual of the Hebrew youths, and send them to Babylon, that they might be instructed in the language and culture of the Chaldeans.

Three years later, Jehoiakim rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. The Lord sent neighbouring bands of Chaldeans, Syrians, Moabites and Ammonites to destroy Judah. This continued for five years until Jehoiakim died and his son Jehoiachin reigned in his place. But he only reigned for three months, when Nebuchadnezzar in 598 BC, for the second time, came and besieged the city of Jerusalem, took it and carried away Jehoiachin, along with the princes and all the men of valour: 10,000 captives and 1000 craftsmen and smiths were rounded up, leaving only the poorest sort of people behind.

The “Seventy Year” captivity finally ended with the fall of Babylon. In the ninth year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar again besieged Jerusalem and, after two years, took it, destroying the Temple and the city. From that time on, the Jewish Nation ceased to exist. This was called “The Desolation”, because of the desolate condition in which it left the city and the land for seventy years. This was foretold by Jeremiah. When Nebuchadnezzar became king in 606 BC, the “Times of the Gentiles” began. His Kingdom was the first “Worldwide Empire” that the world had ever seen.

The king ordered the Master of his Eunuchs to bring the children of the Israelites; princes, children with no blemishes, skilful in all wisdom, cunning in knowledge, and understanding science and could be taught the language and culture of the Chaldeans. Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. The Prince of the Eunuchs renamed them: Daniel became Beltshazzar; Hannaniah became Shadrach; Mishael became Meshach, and Azaiah became Abed-nego.

The four Hebrew captives were of royal blood, and descendants of King Hezekiah. They were made Eunuchs and turned over to the “Prince of the Eunuchs” who had changed their names to wean them away from their land and religion, and get them to adopt the religion and habits of the heathen nation where their future was to be spent. These young men had been too deeply rooted in the religion and faith of their own nation to adopt the practices of a heathen nation.

They were offered meat and wine from the king’s table along with the comforts, luxuries, and pleasures of Babylon. They refused the food. If it was not prepared in the required Jewish way as outlined in their Scriptures, that would cause them to be ceremonially defiled. Daniel requested of the “Prince of Eunuchs” that he might not defile himself. God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the Prince of the Eunuchs. To make sure that the king did not notice that the young men were starting to look emaciated by refusing the king’s meat, they asked to be fed pulse and water which would put on weight and keep them from being defiled.

God gave these four companions knowledge and skill in all learning and

wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. Like Joseph and Moses, Daniel and his companions received their training in the palace of a king. They were chosen from among others to learn the language and literature of the Chaldeans in preparation to act as wise men and councillors at the court.

The fact that Daniel and his companions underwent a three-year course of instruction implies that there was a “Palace School” or “National University” for the instruction and training of youth of noble descent. These students were fed from the King’s table. The Chaldeans were a learned people. They had made great advances in grammar, mathematics, astronomy, and the sciences.

At the end of the three years, the Prince of the Eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. None could compete with the four Hebrew children in matters of wisdom and understanding. The King found them to be ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in his realm. Daniel was made the “Chief of the Governors” over all the wise men of Babylon and the counsellor of Belshazzar, and “Prime Minister” under Darius.

Now why was Nebuchadnezzar chosen to receive the “Revelation”? The “Revelation” could have been opened to Daniel or some other prophet. If there ever was a king who had a “Divine Right” to rule it was Nebuchadnezzar. He did not assume it, but was directly given it by God.

In Jeremiah we read: “Give them this message for their masters: ‘This is what

the Lord of Heaven's Armies, the God of Israel, says: With my great strength and powerful arm I made the earth and all its people and every animal. I can give these things of mine to anyone I choose. Now I will give your countries to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, who is my servant.

I have put everything, even the wild animals, under his control. All the nations will serve him, his son, and his grandson until his time is up. Then many nations and great kings will conquer and rule over Babylon. So you must submit to Babylon's king and serve him; put your neck under Babylon's yoke! I will punish any nation that refuses to be his slave, says the Lord. I will send war, famine, and disease upon that nation until Babylon has conquered it.”

Nebuchadnezzar was Divinely chosen for his work. Early in his reign, as he lay on a sumptuous couch in his palace, thinking about the greatness of his kingdom and wondering what its future would be, he fell into a deep sleep. The impressions of his waking thoughts had not left him, and in his sleeping consciousness they began to visualize themselves.

In his dream he saw a great Image. The image he saw was made of metal, not of stone like those of Egypt. The metallic character of the “Image” and its being composed of more than one kind of metal was significant to the King. As all Orientals, the King put great importance on dreams. It was God's method in Old Testament times of conveying to heathen kings, such as Pharaoh, what he purposed to do. Naturally Nebuchadnezzar wished to know what his dream meant. But it was so awesome and frightful, that the King awoke in terror, troubled and perplexed, and before he could collect himself, the dream had faded from his memory.

The King summoned the Magicians, Astrologers, Sorcerers, and the Chaldeans to explain the dream to him. The Chaldeans were a sect of philosophers who made the sciences their special study. It was the class to which Daniel and his companions belonged. Since the dream slipped from the Kings's memory, he wanted not just a simple interpretation, but to be told of the dream itself.

When the Chaldeans confessed that no one - except the gods, could reproduce the Dream, they acknowledged, that because they could not reproduce it, they had no power with the gods, thus justifying the king's charge that they were imposters. The king was angry and very furious. He commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be destroyed. He decreed that the wise men should be slain; and this included Daniel and his friends.

Since the wise ones of Babylon could not recall or interpret the King's dream, God had a Hebrew captive, Daniel on the scene. Daniel did not know what was going on until Arioch, the king's captain, came to arrest him. Doubtless, God's hand was in all of this. Daniel answered Arioch with counsel and wisdom. Daniel asked that the King give him time, and that he would show the king the interpretation. Daniel is operating from the place of faith. He did not ask the king to describe his dream, he simply asked for time and with sublime confidence promised the king that he would not only reproduce the dream, but give its meaning. His request was granted.

Daniel returned to his companions and explained what had happened and that they would not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. This led to an epoch "Prayer Meeting". Daniel would have been heard if he had gone

off by himself and prayed, but he believed in united prayer. If Daniel could not keep his promise to the King, all four would perish. If Daniel had failed God, the world would have missed that great “Revelation” that was locked up in that Dream and its interpretation, the prophetic and historical outline of the “Times of the Gentiles”.

The Prayer meeting lasted far into the night and did not end until they had the assurance of a favourable answer. Then they finally went to sleep. Whether Daniel fell asleep and the Dream was repeated to him with the interpretation, or whether while lying on his couch he saw the metal Image in a vision, is not clear. The angel Gabriel appeared, as in later visions, and revealed its meaning. Then Daniel blessed the God of Heaven

Daniel went to Arioch and asked the wise men of Babylon not be destroyed and that he be brought to the king. The wise men were saved because there was a “Man of God” among them. Arioch brought Daniel before the king, telling him that a man of the captives of Judah will make the dream and its interpretation known to the King.

Daniel, having a special relationship with the God who reveals mysteries, reports back to the king about the dream. He describes a colossal statue composed of various materials, each representing different human regal eras, with some materials stronger than others. However, Daniel emphasizes that these human kingdoms are finite and serve only as long as God allows them to.

The golden head represents the Babylonian Empire. The silver arms and

legs represent the Medo-Persian Empire. The abdomen represents the Grecian Empire which followed. The legs are the Roman Empire. The feet and toes are part iron and part clay, indicating that this kingdom will be partly strong, and partly broken. The stone represents the only Kingdom to survive, the millennial Kingdom of Christ.

Daniel's reward was twofold. He was made a "Great Man". There are two things in this world that are supposed to make a man "Great". The first is riches, the second is power. Daniel received both. He was loaded with gifts, and made a ruler over the Province of Babylon, and "Chief of the Governors" over the "Wise Men". But Daniel did not forget his three companions in his exaltation. By their prayers, they helped him to secure the needed information as to the King's Dream. Daniel was determined that they share in his honours, so on their behalf, he asked the King and they were given prominent offices, while Daniel sat in the "Gate of the King", the place where Councils were held, and chief matters decided.

This chapter is one of the most remarkable in the Bible. It gives us a prophetic outline of the history of the Gentile Nations, in their relation to the nation of Israel, from the time of Nebuchadnezzar on down to the Second Coming of Christ. If the statesmen and kings of the earth knew about it and would heed its teaching, they would not be so ambitious to become world rulers, and would see in the rise of lawless organizations that we are nearing the end of the "Times of the Gentiles", and that the Second Coming of the Lord is not so far away.

In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will

never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever.

History is not steered fundamentally by the actions of rulers, armies, and politics but rather by the God of Israel, whose kingdom ultimately prevails over human ambitions and machinations.

Amen.

THE PRAYERS FOR PENTECOST 11 - AUGUST 4, 2024

Holy, holy, holy God, in calling forth creation from the void, revealing yourself in human flesh, and pouring forth your wisdom to guide us, you manifest your concern for your whole universe. You invite us, as your people, to gather the world's needs into our hearts and bring them before you.

For this congregation: that we may recognize our call to be children of God, be united in fellowship through the Holy Spirit and encourage one another as we follow your call in our lives: for a spirit of wonder and awe: that we may behold the marvellous deeds of You in nature, in relationships, and within ourselves and be motivated to serve You with greater commitment and sincerity in our intentions.

For the grace to live in peace and harmony: that You will help us accept the differences in one another, appreciate and welcome the gifts that others bring, and give us patience as we strive to work together: for a new experience of grace and mercy in our lives: that Your love will free us from our past failures, give us courage to ask for forgiveness and make amends, and instill in us hope to begin again in our relationships.

For all who are isolated from You and the human family: that they may experience welcome and acceptance as they encounter the Christian community: for a greater sense of community: that we may appreciate the wonder of each person and work together to address the needs and longings of all who enter our lives.

For your church, O God; that our faith may be strengthened and your love proclaimed. God of grace, bless the leaders of your church; Bishop Kathy, Bishop Susan, Bishop Anna, Anglican Primate Linda Nicolls, all pastors, priests, deacons, lay leaders, musicians, and volunteers with hearts full of your love and mercy. We pray for the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Jordan and the Holy Land, the congregation of San Juan Camino d'Esperanza and Pastor Ana Maria Jara. Today we lift up St. Paul's Lutheran in Maple Ridge, interim Pastor Rev. Nicholas Alexandre and the congregation of Matsqui Lutheran in Matsqui.

For new vision and understanding: For a deeper appreciation of Your enduring covenant of love: that we who were once “no people” have become Your own. May live each day knowing who we are and whose we are as siblings in Christ: for peace: that You will bring new courage to leaders of nations working for peace and ending injustice.

For all who are discouraged, lonely, suffering and ill. Today we pray for healing for Bishop Kathy, and Pastor Kristin Steele, that the Spirit of God’s love will strengthen them in their process of recovery and bring them to wholeness quickly.

For all whose lives are disrupted by violence: For the homeless and jobless, for all who have lost homes and community and become refugees: that You will protect them, guide them to food and shelter and help them develop new supportive relationships.

For those struggling emotionally, mentally or spiritually, those feeling unloved and unwanted, those being bullied and shunned, those suffering from any addictions, and despair, that they find healing, love, and acceptance.

For the hostages that have been released as part of prisoner exchange agreements between a number of countries: Russia, United States, Germany, Slovenia, and Norway. Strengthen and give hope to those still awaiting their turn to be released, especially those in Gaza and Israel.

O God, whose love encircles us, sustain those who respond when wildfires roar, keep them safe from harm and hold them in your sheltering embrace so that they may complete these burdensome tasks, return home to their families, and keep the lives and homes of all they protect safe from harm. Comfort those who will see the devastation of their community in Jasper in the upcoming days and give them hope and resilience as they face the arduous task of rebuilding their homes, their livelihoods and their community. Bring your peace to those anticipating the potential flooding of the Chilcotin River. Provide your support to the fruit growers in the Okanagan who are experiencing hardships and challenges in bringing their harvests to markets. In the loving name of Jesus, who gave his life for all.

Holy, holy, holy God, fill us with strength and courage, with discernment and compassion, that we may be your instruments of justice and love in this world, that it may be on earth as it is in heaven.

Amen

God in Community, Holy in One, make us one Body from many as we pray the prayer that Jesus taught us ...

Our Father ...