

Bible Study - April 1, 2020

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[0 : 0 0] Good evening, everybody. Welcome to Wednesday Night Bible Study. It's good to be with you again. And I look forward to the day that we can do this in person together. Today, we're going to be looking at the book of Daniel, chapter 1.

The book of Daniel, it's in the Old Testament. We're looking at what I'm referring to as stories from the exile. However, before we actually look at the book of Daniel, we had a request from Mary to take a short look at the 26th chapter of the book of Isaiah, because evidently it came up in another Bible study last week.

And so I wanted to share a couple of thoughts from it. First of all, chapter 26 of Isaiah is similar to the stories we've read the last two weeks. The nation of Israel was actually feeling like nothing could hurt them.

It starts out by saying we have a strong city. God makes its salvation, its walls and its ramparts. Or in other words, our country is so strong and cannot be conquered because God is protecting us.

And so God has to let us always be successful and victorious. Because if not, it'll embarrass God. Well, so they started to think they could do anything they wanted to.

[1 : 2 4] And eventually they got to the point where they weren't even trying to do what God wanted. And so God reluctantly felt he had to teach the nation of Israel a lesson.

And what happened was their sin and their brokenness created so much destruction that they ended up falling apart as a nation. And being carried off into Babylon in exile.

And I noticed in the end of this chapter, it speaks right in some ways to what we feel like right now. So I liked these verses and I want to share them particularly with everybody.

So Mary, the reason we're not particularly focusing too much on this chapter is because we've done that in the last couple of weeks. And it's about the nation of Israel becoming so filled with pride and so filled with sin that eventually God ended up having to punish them.

But it ends by saying, go my people, enter your rooms. Shut the doors behind you. Hide yourselves for a little while.

[2 : 3 3] Until his wrath has passed by. See, the Lord is coming out of his dwelling. To punish the people of the earth for their sins, The earth will disclose the blood shed on it.

And the earth will conceal its slain no longer. When you read a passage, it says, Go into your room, shut your doors, hide yourself for a little while.

It feels like right now, doesn't it? Shelter in place. Don't go anywhere. Stay inside. Don't touch each other. Then we wonder, and people have even asked, Is this virus somehow God's punishment of us?

The virus is the natural way our world works. Like hurricanes or earthquakes or any of these natural occurrences.

Viruses were designed to make species stronger. They look for the weakness. And they teach a species how to overcome that weakness and become stronger.

[3 : 43] And we, as a species, will be stronger when this is over. Unfortunately, we don't like that idea. And of course we wouldn't. Because in the process, we see people that are hurt, that suffer, that even die.

So sometimes people think, well, God is actually maybe punishing us for something we've done. And there could be an argument that we have become arrogant. There could be an argument that we've gotten away from God. There could be a question of whether we've relied on the wrong things.

And I'll probably preach on that a little bit this Sunday. But the virus in and of itself is a natural occurrence. The way in which we respond to it might determine what we believe about our faith in God and our willingness to care for one another.

Why should you shelter in place? Because we do that out of love for the other. Maybe you're not worried about getting hurt. Maybe you don't think it's going to affect you.

Maybe you think you're healthy enough. But that doesn't mean we want this disease to continue to spread until we see like what they had, where people were literally dying everywhere.

[4 : 52] So Isaiah chapter 26 is not a very positive chapter. And I apologize for those of you who are coming to get a piece of uplifting scripture.

But Mary asked us to look at it. And the passage speaks to the implications of what happens when we walk away from God and we live a life of brokenness.

The virus, on the other hand, is what happens naturally and occurs in nature. And it has for thousands of years. The fact that we've been fortunate not to face something like this for a hundred years is our good fortune and God's blessing.

We need to remember that. But we will come through this. And we will be stronger when we're on the other side. And God will continue to bless us if we continue to look to Him.

Now looking at Daniel. Daniel is a fun little book in the Old Testament. It's about the children of Israel when they were actually taken into captivity.

[5 : 58] It says in chapter 1, In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem and besieged it.

Or in other words, he attacked the city. And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim, king of Judah, into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, along with some of the articles from the temple of God.

These he carried off to the temple of his God in Babylonia, and put in the treasure house of his God. So what happened was, Nebuchadnezzar decided that he was not happy with Jerusalem.

Now for those of you who have been with me before, we've done a little bit of drawing on the board, so excuse my poor penmanship. But in the Middle East, you have the Mediterranean Sea. Down here is Egypt.

And for those of you who have been to my Bible study, Egypt is the place where they have all the, right, food. They have the food in Egypt.

[7 : 07] Jerusalem is about here. Babylon is over here. Okay? If you're interested, Greece is here, and Italy is there. Okay?

And Italy is where Rome is. So anyways, this is all desert. So nobody can cross this. This is all desert. So what would happen is that people would travel a highway that went like this.

And it was a competition between Egypt, where all the food was, and these other nations over here, whether it be Babylon or Persia or any of the other northern kingdoms.

And they would come through the region where Jerusalem was to conquer Egypt, or Egypt will come through to conquer Babylon. Jerusalem, at this point in time, aligned itself with Egypt.

They're allies with Egypt. They're not very strong right now. The northern kingdom has already been destroyed. So it's just a small little kingdom. It's not the empire that David and Solomon built, which stretched throughout this region.

[8 : 05] It's a little tiny kingdom. And so they needed to align themselves with a bigger country, like little countries aligning with the United States or something like that.

But they picked Egypt, and Babylon got upset about that. So they came, and they attacked Jerusalem. When they attacked Jerusalem, what they did was they took some money and wealth and articles, particularly out of the temple in Jerusalem.

Now, what people today, we think differently than they did. What people today think about God, is we think of God as being the God of the universe. The Babylonians believed that they had their God, and that Israel had its God, and Egypt had its God, and Greece had its gods, and Rome had its gods.

And so why they took some articles from the temple of the God here to the temple of the God there, it was their way of saying, our God's bigger than your God.

Our God's bigger, more powerful, than your God. This was an incredible embarrassment.

[9 : 18] It was a humiliation to the Jewish people. And it was done on purpose for them to understand who's the boss.

Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of the court officials, to bring into the king's service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility.

So, they want some of the more promising young leaders of Israel. And it says that they found 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.

And he was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. Now, this is what they call a brain drain. Babylon had a philosophy that the way to make a strong country, a strong empire, I should say, was to draw in people from all the nations that they conquered and make Babylon a powerful city where all the smart and wise and intelligent and powerful and successful people live.

We do the same thing. You might not think so, but we do. In World War II, after the war, we took the brightest people from Germany and we brought them to our country to work for us.

[10 : 52] Now, what we do is we have these incredible, amazing universities that draw on the wisest, smartest people from around the world. And then, we try our best to figure out a way to coax them into staying.

Because we know if the smartest, wisest, best, most accomplished, most successful, most promising people live here, we'll be a successful nation. So, Babylon did it.

We do it too. So, they took these people. The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years.

After that, they were to enter the king's service. Among those who were chosen were some from Judah. Daniel, Hananiah, Michelle, and Azria.

The chief official gave them new names. Because, you see, if you give them new names, that shows a new allegiance. Whether they actually have a line in their heart or not, it gives a sense they belong to us.

[11 : 59] God gives us new names. Saul became Paul. Abraham became Abraham. Sarai became Sarah. God gives us a new name.

Simon became Peter. We become followers of Christ. The chief officials gave them new names. To Daniel, the name Belshazzar.

To Hananiah, Shadrach. To Mishael. Meshach. And to Azariah. Abednego. So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and Daniel.

Now, they gave them food from the king's table. This would normally be seen as an incredible honor. Because most people had very modest food.

Some grains, some bread. It was really more of a survival diet. And if you look at people as little as a couple hundred years ago, they were much smaller than us, much weaker than us, much poorer health, because they didn't have a very good diet.

[13 : 08] Kings lived a long time. The common people lived to about 40, maybe 45. Kings might live to 80 or 90. Because they were fed better, they were treated better, they were given the opportunity to have health, which, by the way, gave them the ability to fight off viruses, sicknesses, all those things we were talking about earlier.

So this was an honor that they gave to Daniel and to the other young people that were being trained, that for three years they'd be fed from the king's table and they'd be trained and taught, or if you will, acculturated and brainwashed, you can look at it either way, right?

How to think as Babylonians. But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine. And he asked the chief officials for permission not to defile himself this way.

Now, why would it be defiling himself to eat the king's food? Well, it was very simple. Most of the food, most of the food that was served at a king's table was the best food and particularly the meat in any kingdom, including Israel, almost all the best cuts of meat were offered in sacrifice at the local temple.

So Daniel would be defiling himself by eating meat that was sacrificed to a different god. Plus, by the way, it wasn't kosher.

[14 : 45] They didn't follow the Jewish dietary laws. So he would be breaking the laws of Moses and he would be implying that he goes along with serving another god.

So it says that in verse 9, now, well, excuse me, I didn't finish verse 8. In verse 8, Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way.

So he asked, he asked, he didn't demand, he didn't say, I won't do it, he didn't, he wasn't obnoxious, he wasn't a jerk. He just said, hey, could you make consideration for me?

The old saying, you get more flies with honey than vinegar. Now, I don't know why you want to catch a bunch of flies, but the idea is people like it when you're kind. Sometimes people are pushy, bossy, yell and scream and they think that the squeaky wheel gets the oil, but the squeaky wheel also is something people don't want around for the most part.

So they might give you what you want to make you go away, but they won't give you what you want for very long. People that are helpful, that are nice, that are kind, that are courteous, that are people that are trying to give us respect are more apt to give us respect in return.

[16 : 07] God, in verse 9, God caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel. Isn't that nice? I'd like God to show me compassion by working on the people that, you know, take care of my car or the people that help me to get a permit or the people that I go to at the DMV or the people, you know what I'm talking about?

I want God to have them show me compassion. They're usually pretty good if I'm nice to them. The official told Daniel, I'm afraid of my lord the king who has assigned your food and drink.

Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men of your age? The king would then have my head because of you. So, first of all, it's an insult to the king not to eat his food.

And, how would the king know? Well, because he's going to look at Daniel, he's going to look at Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and he's going to say, these guys, obviously, you're not taking care of them.

They're not very healthy. What's going on? And then when he said, well, they didn't want to eat the food that you sent them, well, he'd probably kill all of them. Kings did that back then, especially these eastern kings.

[17 : 21] Daniel said to the guard, whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. It's interesting how they keep going back and forth between their Jewish names and their Babylonian names, right?

Please test your servants for ten days. Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food and treat your servants in accordance with what you see.

So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days. Now, ten days isn't very long because the king has assigned them three years. so, you know, if it's not working, he's got plenty of time to make it up.

So ten days, they're going to be veg heads for ten days. Now, typically, people who eat a vegetarian diet in those days would be deficient in some sort of nutrients and so it would be very likely they wouldn't be as healthy as the other young men.

That's why the king was giving them this particular diet, was to help them to be stronger and healthier and in better shape so that they could serve the king better and longer. That doesn't mean that you have to eat vegetables.

[18 : 37] In fact, in the kind of an interesting little thing, if you look back in Genesis, the very first people were vegetarians from Adam to Noah. It wasn't until after the flood that God gave people permission to eat animals.

Before that, everybody was a vegetarian. My daughter's been a vegetarian for like twenty-some years. You can live a healthy life as a vegetarian, but you have to know what you're doing.

Again, just eat whatever. You can't eat all french fries. I know that's vegetarian, but it's not healthy. Right? But somehow, God guided Daniel to the right thing, and at the end of ten days, they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food.

So they actually looked better. They looked healthier. They looked more nourished. They probably had a little belly on them. until verse 16, the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.

And by the way, the wine, it's the same thing. The good wines, the best wines, in that day were often used as part of the religious rituals for the false gods.

[19 : 48] To these four young men, God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.

Now, there's two different ways to understand things that are listed there, both of which are important. One we're doing right now, which is to study together, to read and learn and learn from one another and expand our mind and to have the ability to comprehend and understand, not just to take in knowledge.

When I was young, the most important thing was to learn a bunch of knowledge, a bunch of facts. In 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue. You probably remember that forever, right?

And there's a whole lot of those miscellaneous facts we have that are just in our mind. We go on Jeopardy and we could answer all kinds of questions that have to do with knowing a plethora of basic information.

Nowadays, that doesn't matter. All I have to do is pull this phone out and ask Google when did Columbus sail to America. It'll tell me. I don't need to know knowledge up here.

[21 : 02] I need to know how to make that knowledge work. I need to know how to put that knowledge together in ways that will be of value beyond just an accumulation of knowledge.

So we actually have three different types of intellectual pursuit here. One is knowledge to be able to collect and absorb a lot of information.

Some of us are good at that. Some of us are not. Daniel was gifted at that. But Daniel also could understand visions. Now vision is a whole different thing.

Vision is an ability to take all that knowledge and put it together in a way in which it makes sense. And not only does it make sense, it's useful.

For those of you who are younger, the people who will be most successful in the culture we live in today are not the people that have a lot of knowledge. It's the people that can take the knowledge and use it, put it together in such a way that it becomes useful.

[22 : 06] It becomes valuable. Where they start to see things other people don't see. The very idea of being able to see that you would someday be able to walk around with a huge, massive, incredibly powerful computer in your hand.

Who thought of that? Where did that come up from? We thought Dick Tracy was cool because he had a watch on his wrist. Now they're putting watches back on people's wrists. But those watches are powerful computers.

This computer is more powerful than the big, giant computer I used to have. Unbelievable. Who thought of this? Simple things.

Who thought of the idea of Uber? Or who thought of the idea of Grubhub? Who thought of any of these things? They take ideas, they take knowledge, facts, and they put them together in a different way because they have vision.

They have vision. It's listed in the New Testament as a gift from God to have vision, to be able to see what others don't see. And then he could understand dreams of all kinds.

[23 : 18] Now we're going to get to that and that's the third one which we're going to talk a lot more about in a minute and that's about the thing, the understanding that comes to us through revelation.

So there's knowledge and there's wisdom or vision and then there's revelation. We'll talk about that in just a minute. At the end of the time set by the king to bring them into his service, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar.

The king talked to him or interviewed him and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Michelle, and Ezra. So they entered the king's service.

So these three were, these four were chosen as the best of the best. Of all the people they pulled out of Jerusalem, these four were the best of the best.

In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.

[24 : 25] And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus. So Daniel remained working for Nebuchadnezzar. Now, we have in our culture what we call magicians, which are illusionists.

They talk about magicians and enchanters and in many ways they're the same thing. The only difference is that magic is the belief that somehow we can control the environment around us with some idea that we can do that through the power of evil, of evil spirits.

We can control the divine powers. Some people think they can use magic on God. So, there are people that believe, you know, we pray often because the Bible says, when you pray, pray in my name.

Okay? And what he means, what Jesus means when he says, pray in my name, he means, pray for what I want. Pray for what I'm looking to have happen. Or in other words, we've been talking about kingdom living on Sundays.

Pray that his kingdom will be done, not ours. Okay? That God's will will be done. So, anyway, some people think that, no, it's just, it's just, it's like a magic spell.

[25 : 43] If you use Jesus' name somehow, that makes it so that God has to do whatever you ask. Some people particularly think that if you use more syllables, it makes it more powerful.

So, I need to pray in Jesus' name. I'm just joking. We don't have control over God. God is supposed to have control over us. Do you follow?

But magicians believe that they can control the culture and the world by certain types of actions. Now, the truth is, in some ways, that's what we try to do with knowledge and wisdom through science and technology.

I'm not saying it's of the same nature because we're not trying to control God. We're just trying to control God's creation, which he said that we should subdue it. So, it's not as if it's wrong for us to try and work with creation so it's better for us.

But, the reason I'm bringing this all up is because the magicians and the enchanters, they weren't, what we think of, they weren't some kind of like wackadoodles that, you know, are just out there making chants or doing hocus pocus and spooky weirdo stuff.

[26 : 59] I'm sure they sometimes engaged the black arts or false gods, but they also were the kind of people that could read tells, they could understand what people were thinking. They could read into things.

They had sharp enough minds that they could think on their feet and they saw patterns so that they could see what was coming, which is another part of vision to be able to see patterns in the world of what is happening.

That's what our leaders are trying to do. They say they're trying to watch the patterns so that they can change the results, right? You've heard about they want to lower the curve because the whole goal is that they're seeing what happened somewhere else and that gives them the vision to understand what could happen here.

And they're trying to change the results. And that's what these guys did. They were smart, in other words. These weren't fools that Daniel was, if you will, in some ways, in an intellectual competition with.

They're very smart men. Daniel just happened to be the smartest of them all. And he wasn't looking to control God or to control even the world around him through nature.

[28 : 15] He was trying to serve God. Well, in chapter 2, it says, in the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams. And his mind was troubled about these dreams and he couldn't sleep.

God speaks to us in dreams. I was talking about this with some other people just the other day. God speaks to us in dreams because it's in dreams that we stop thinking about everything else going on in our life.

And God can speak to a mind that's open. Our eyes are closed. Our senses aren't paying attention to what we see. Our ears are closed up.

Our brains slow down from all the troubles of the day. And we put our soul and our lives at rest.

And God can speak to us. I hope you didn't all fall asleep on me. We can do that ourselves. We can take the time when we're awake and do that with God.

[29 : 21] But a lot of times people don't do it unless they're actually asleep. And so Nebuchadnezzar had dreams. And these dreams troubled him. He didn't understand them. So the king summoned the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and astrologers, or in other words all the wise people of his kingdom, to tell him what he had dreamed.

When they came in and stood before the king he said to them, I have had a dream that troubles me. And I want to know what it means. So the astrologers answered the king, may the king live forever.

It's always good when you're talking to a king to flatter him up. We seem to think that it's somehow wrong to compliment people. It's good to compliment people, just as long as you're complimenting everybody.

But certainly compliment kings. That just makes a lot of sense, right? You get more if you're nice. Remember we talked about that before, if you're kind, if you're complimenting people. When they came and they stood before the king, they said to him, I'm sorry, I'm in the wrong verse.

In verse 4 it says, the astrologers answered the king, may the king live forever, tell your servants the dream and we will interpret it. You know, tell us what the dream is. That's okay. We'll tell you what we see.

[30 : 37] Now, the problem with that, of course, you can understand it, is that almost anybody can make up what the dream was about if you know what it is. You just make it to be whatever you want it to say.

We'll interpret it. In the New Testament, it talks to us about the gifts of speaking in tongues, which is a spiritual gift God gives us to have the ability to actually speak a language that's meant primarily to be between us and God.

Some people have that gift and some don't. The problem with the gift, they say, is when you're with other people and you use that gift and they have no idea what you're talking about. What you need is you need someone there to interpret that for other people.

Or else it should just be a language that's meant between you and God, which is fine. There's nothing wrong with you speaking to God even if no one understands what you're saying. But the interpreter can say whatever they say.

Who knows? So then we have to trust the interpreter. But then again, you have to trust every preacher. You've got to trust somebody, right? Some of you are trusting me. So tell us the dream and we'll interpret it.

[31 : 49] We'll tell you what it means. 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.

Hello. Wait a minute. He said, not only do you have to interpret the dream, you have to tell me what the dream was.

Okay? And if not, it's not you're fired. If not, it's not you take a demotion. If not, it's not like, you know, I won't like you.

If not, I'm going to cut you into pieces and destroy your houses so your family won't have any place to live either. Hello. You're pretty drastic back then.

So you can imagine these guys, I'm the, I'm the, I'm the, I'm the, right? What? What? What if you tell me my dream and explain it? You will receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor.

[32 : 57] So tell me the dream and interpret it for me. So you either know the dream or you don't. once more, they replied, let the king tell his servants the dream and we will interpret it.

Then the king answered, I'm certain that you're trying to gain time because you realize that this is what I have firmly decided. If you do not tell me the dream, there is only one penalty for you.

You have conspired to tell me misleading and wicked things, hoping the situation would change. So then tell me the dream and I will know that you can interpret it for me.

wow. If you can't tell me the dream and you don't have the connections to the spirit world, you say you do.

That's what he's saying to them. You don't really have this ability. You imply you do because you can't tell me what I dreamed. Now, almost all of us would say this is irrational.

[34 : 09] This is ridiculous. This is unfair. How can anybody know what somebody dreamed? Well, we're going to find out. And that's where they are. They're like, we're more than willing to interpret it, but you got to tell me the dream first.

And he says, yeah, I know what you're going to do. You're going to take my dream and you're going to twist it around to say what you want it to say, what's going to help you, what's going to make you come out looking good.

So I don't want to hear your interpretation. I want to hear what an interpretation that is beyond human interpretation. And the only way I can know that you can give that kind of interpretation is you have to be able to have access to something so beyond people that you'd know my dream.

You follow? So he's not just trying to find out the interpretation of his dream. He's trying to find out if these guys really have a connection to something more powerful. Otherwise, why would a king listen to them?

Right? Why would a king pay attention to their interpretation? Why wouldn't he just make up his own interpretation? He doesn't need them to get some good ideas.

[35 : 26] He's looking for something much more inspired than that. And of course, they're just thinking this is off the charts, right? The astrologers in verse 10 answered the king, there is no one 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. What the king asked is too difficult.

No one can reveal it to the king except the gods and they don't live among humans. Okay, so now what they're talking now is their answer now was first of all, from a human perspective, trying to understand a divine thing.

The only way they say that we can understand this is if we could talk to the gods or in other words, if those gods were actually here so we could ask them, hey, gods, what was the king's dreams?

Because they're the only ones that would know what you dreamed. But they don't live here so we can't do that. They don't live here so we can't do that.

[36 : 52] Let's put a comma on that and come back to that in a little bit, okay? Because it's important. That's important. In verse 12, this made the king so angry and furious that he ordered the execution of all the wise men of Babylon.

This is what they call an overreaction. These guys couldn't give him the answer he wanted so he's going to kill everybody that's smart. That's smart, right? We'll get rid of all the people that are smart.

Makes no sense. But sometimes people don't make sense. So the decree was issued to put the wise men to death and men were sent to look for Daniel and his friends to put them to death because after all, who's the wisest among them but Daniel?

He's ten times smarter, it says, than everybody else so they should put him to death too. When Ariok, and by the way, I don't know if that's how you pronounce it for some of you might be real Jewish scholars that are listening to this, I have learned about biblical names is that you just say it with authority.

Say it like you know how it's supposed to be pronounced and then everybody else around you, no matter how they pronounce it over the years, will think that's the right way. Sometimes I've heard a liturgist pronounce a name different than what I thought and I think, hmm, I guess it's the way to pronounce it.

[38 : 07] When Ariok, the commander of the king's guard, had gone out to put to death the wise men of Babylon, Daniel spoke to him with wisdom and tact.

I just love that. With wisdom, these were words that he considered with his vision, with his intellect, but he also had tact. He also was charming.

People that are charming are people that are concerned about what the other people think. And if you have something you're trying to get accomplished, it's going to happen much better if you are trying to express to someone how it will help them or you are at least showing consideration for them.

There's an old saying, they won't care what you know until they know that you care. They won't care what you know until they know that you care. If you don't work on the relationship, nobody's going to hear the words.

But quite honestly, people will listen to your words, even if they're foolishness, if they love you. Right? Okay. So he had, he not only had wisdom, but he had tact.

[39 : 23] He asked the king's officer, why did the king issue such a harsh decree? So he doesn't know why they're coming to kill him and the others.

Ariak then explained the matter to Daniel. At this, Daniel went into the king in verse 16 and he asked for time so that he might interpret the dream for him.

Now, that's reasonable. Give me a little time. What are you going to do with that time? Well, let's, we'll get to that, right? Why did he need time?

We'll talk about that. But that's reasonable. And when you express something in a reasonable way, in a kind and understanding way, sometimes you get a little bit of opportunity.

Daniel returned to his house and explained the matter to his friends Hananiah, Michelle, and Ezra. He urged them to plead for mercy from 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.

[40 : 32] plead to God for mercy, or in other words, what we would call prayer. We would call prayer.

Why did Daniel need some time? Because he needed time to talk to God. He needed time to have others to talk to God for him and with him. remember when it said that the different people, the magicians and the astrologers and enchanters said that they couldn't do this because the gods don't live among humans.

One of the primary things that differentiates Christianity from some other religions is that we believe God actually interacts with us. in the Bible we use the word God Emmanuel for Jesus.

Emmanuel, God with us. God with us in the Holy Spirit in our heart and soul. God with us in presence around here. We believe that we are actually connected to the living God.

We don't believe that God is way far away from us and just something we sort of believe in at a distance. We believe that God is right here.

[41 : 53] that we have access to God. The Bible says we can know the mind of God. Think about that. That's all of wisdom.

That's all there is to know. To know the mind of God. We can know that because we have a living God living and dwelling in us. That's what Christianity is about.

If you're listening to this and you haven't heard any of this before and this is your first time, I want to just share briefly with you that you also can have that living God dwelling in your heart. You just have to ask God.

He wants to dwell in your heart. He wants to touch you. He wants to move you. He wants to speak to you. He wants to live with you. This isn't about a religion. This is about having a relationship and a connection to the living God.

And why? Because it changes everything as we're going to see. As we're going to see. Because during the night, in verse 19, the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision.

[42 : 56] Did you hear that? The mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision. So, remember those three different ways in which we have understanding?

We have the knowledge, all the facts. we have vision, which is the ability to put those facts together in a way that has value and understanding, or we could call it wisdom, that ability to see things and patterns.

But then there's revelation. God revealed it to him. I've told many of you this.

Over the years, there were times I thought I was clever. I remember years ago, I read a book called The Purpose Driven Church by Rick Warren. You might have read The Purpose Driven Life, or maybe you read The Purpose Driven Church.

Anyways, as I'm reading through the book, it kind of was a little frustrating because he kept talking about how other people had taken his stuff, his ideas, but he put them down in this book anyways.

[44 : 07] Now, Rick Warren is a very smart man, a very powerful pastor in California, and did a lot of good work. And the reason why I'm mentioning it is because I'm reading his book about two years after he wrote it, and as I'm reading his book and I read it with other people, we are seeing charts and graphs and ideas that we created.

he had my stuff. I was just astonished. He's complaining because somebody stole his stuff, but he has my stuff.

Fortunately, about that time, God gave me revelation and vision. I put some things together and I realized something. It's not Rick's stuff.

It's not my stuff. It's not the other people's stuff. God is downloading information to people every day. He is giving us incredible wisdom and vision and understanding.

He is showing us stuff we could never figure out on our own. God is open. We just need to be open to hearing it. Why don't we hear it?

[45 : 17] Because we don't take the time to listen, because we don't take the time to pray, because we don't slow our minds and shut up our ears and close our eyes and shut out the world to hear God.

God, if you took a moment, if you took a few moments and closed your eyes, before you do, just look around.

I'm sorry, look around. Look at all the little things that you see in your house, where you are. That little doodad over on the table, you never paid any attention to it. Do you see the light switch?

Or the lines on the wall? or maybe even just the buttons on the computer, things you weren't even seeing, but your brain's taking that in. This incredible amount of data and information that your brain is just taking in like crazy.

If you close your eyes to that, that's why we sleep at night, because we get all that information stops coming. Oh, thank God, for a short time, we don't have all that information. But then our ears are taking in sound.

[46 : 28] I've been hearing cars go by and a motorcycle. I hear the hum of the boiler system going, even the buzz of a light. We can hear the ruffle of papers.

You hear my voice. I hear my hands rubbing together. And I feel, I feel my body against the chair. I feel my feet against the legs of the chair.

my hands touching each other. That's all data coming into your mind and your taste.

What do you taste in your mouth? Is it a taste of something you ate or is it a taste of something that you had there or just your normal mouth taste? All that data is in your mind.

I hear a clock ticking now. Now imagine if you were to shut all that data out for a short time and just focus on what God had to say.

[47 : 35] Maybe you'd hear God too. That's when we hear God. When we stop paying attention to everything else and start listening to Him. Daniel got it in a dream because sometimes that's the only way we shut out most of the things around us.

But even in our dreams we feel the pillow, we feel the discomfort, we feel the temperature room, we hear noises in our house. If we can just tune all that out we'll hear God and God will give us vision and understanding and wisdom beyond your imagination.

if there's any key to anything I've ever understood in ministry, it's that I listen to God. The stuff I make up myself is just human and it's not really all that spectacular.

But the stuff that God reveals, powerful, powerful stuff for me in my ministry, in my life, in my work, with everything.

You know, in the Bible it even says God will give you words for the situations you need. When you're facing a difficulty. And I've had that happen too. Where the words come out and I'm like, where'd that come from?

[48 : 52] I know where it came from. It came from God. Okay, so let's go through the dream, okay? And he said, praised be to the name of God forever and ever. Wisdom and power are his.

You see, he's given credit to the God of Israel. Remember the discredited God of Israel? Who will eventually, you know, the city of Jerusalem will be destroyed.

And so some people believed that their God was destroyed. And, you know, that's the ancient concept. What's amazing about the Jewish people was that they held on to their God even without a land because back then all gods were located to a land.

They were geographically located. Their gods belonged to a land. They belonged to a nation. nation. The people of Israel kept their God even when they lost their land. They lost their nation. That's because their God wasn't located in a physical place.

It was located in a place that was with them. God with them. Emmanuel. See, God is dwelling with us. Right now, a lot of you haven't been to this building, this church, in now weeks.

[49 : 58] I come here with a handful of people from time to time. We get anxious when there's more than four people here. We're trying to do ministry in a very different way.

But God doesn't live in this building. God lives in this building. God lives in our hearts, our souls, our minds. And we have access to God anywhere.

So praise be to the name of God forever and ever because His wisdom and His power are incredible. And that's what we should be seeking after.

We're looking for the government to fix everything. We're looking for science to fix everything. We're looking for business to fix everything. We're looking for our friends to fix everything. We're looking for the medical world to fix everything. And I think we should do all that.

But the one who has the power to fix everything, everything, who can take us through not only this dark shadowy valley but beyond the valley of the shadow of death.

[51 : 05] They can overcome things science can't even think about overcoming. The one who has that power is God. In verse 21 it says, He changed His times and seasons.

He made the world start to turn. He made the universe set up the way it was. God did that. He deposes kings and raises up others.

God decides who will be the kings. God will affect world leaders. Now that doesn't mean every single leader is godly because some obviously we've seen history are not.

Some are very evil. But God can raise them up and God can tear them down. And He's done it before and He'll do it again. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning.

So people who are seeking wisdom get more wisdom and people who are looking for knowledge will get more knowledge and God will give it to it. But then even more and this is verse 22 very good.

[52 : 11] He reveals deep and hidden things. He knows what lies in darkness and light dwells in Him. God knows everything.

He sees everything and He reveals deep and hidden things. Things that we just didn't get before. You know?

Like this. I should have known that. God. God reveals these things. I thank and praise you God of my ancestors.

You have given me wisdom and power. So God not only has it, He gives it to people. You have made known to me what we asked of you. You have made known to us the dream of the king.

Now we're going to move much faster because I'd like to try and get through this chapter and there's a lot to go and this is just about the dream. Daniel went to Ariok whom the king had appointed to execute the wise men of Babylon and said to them, don't execute the wise men of Babylon.

[53 : 16] Take me to the king and I will interpret his dream for him. Notice he didn't say don't execute me. He said don't execute any of them. He's working on behalf of everyone. Ariok took Daniel to the king at once and said, I have found a man among the exiles from Judah who can tell the king what his dream means.

The king asked Daniel, also called Balthazar, are you able to tell me what I saw in my dream and interpret it? Daniel replied, no wise man, enchanter, magician, or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about.

But there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. You say give the credit to God. God is the one who did it. Daniel's not saying see me I know more than everybody. No. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come.

Your dream and the visions that pass through your mind as you were lying in bed are these. As your majesty was lying there, your mind turned to things to come.

The revealer of mysteries showed you what is going to happen. As for me, this mystery has been revealed to me. Not because I have greater wisdom than anyone else alive.

[54 : 24] Not because of me. Not because I'm so smart. But so that your majesty may know the interpretation and that you may understand what went through your mind.

This is the wisdom of God. In verse 31, your majesty looked and there before you stood a large statue, an enormous dazzling statue, awesome in appearance. The head of the statue was made of pure gold.

Its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of browns, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron, and partly of baked clay. Okay?

So, you got a weird statue of a man. I'll do it over here. Head of gold, body of bronze, bronze, bronze, somewhere in here there's iron, or, let me see if I got that right.

Okay. The feet are clay and iron mixed together, the legs are iron, and this is silver, or gold, this is silver, and this is bronze. Okay?

[55 : 29] So it goes down. In other words, it decreases in quality as it goes along. Finally, it's clay and iron mixed together. Okay? Did I get that right?

Yes. Okay. Verse 34. While you were watching, a rock was cut out, but not by human hands.

It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were all broken to pieces because, like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer, the wind swept them away without leaving a trace.

But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth. Okay? So a big rock comes and hits the man. Big rock.

Comes, hits the man, busts it apart. Okay? All right? Starts at defeat and busts it apart. This was the dream, and now we will interpret it to the king.

[56 : 34] Your majesty, you are the king of kings, the god of heaven, has given you dominion and power and might and glory. In your hand he has placed all of mankind, the beasts of the field, the birds of the air.

Wherever they live, he has made you rule over them all. You are the head of gold. So he's telling Nebuchadnezzar he's the top. He's the head of gold. He is the one in charge of everything.

And at that point, Babylon was the most powerful empire on the earth. After you, another kingdom will arise inferior to yours. Okay? Next, a third kingdom, one of browns will rule over the whole earth.

Finally, there will be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron, for iron breaks and smashes everything, and as iron breaks things to pieces, so it will crush and break all the others.

Just as you saw that the feet and toes were partly of bay clay and partly of iron, so this will be a divided kingdom, yet it will have some of the strength of iron in it, even as you saw iron mixed with clay.

[57 : 35] As the toes were partly iron and partly clay, so this kingdom will be partly strong and partly brittle. And just as you saw the iron mixed with bay clay, so the people will be a mixture and will not remain united any more than iron mixes with clay.

Okay? So you get it? So there's going to be four empires, and they're going to come to exist. So let's do this. Let's take our very poorly drawn map, right? And we have the kingdom of Babylon.

We have the empire of Babylon. The Persians came in, and they created an empire like this. That's the empire of silver. These are the Persians, okay? These are the Babylonians.

And then the Greeks came, and they conquered all of that. Alexander the Great, remember? that's the bronze. And then, you want to know what the iron one is?

Rome. Rome came and conquered even more than that, conquered what was at that time considered the known world, and this is Rome. And then you have these feet of clay, which is what came after Rome, which is a mixed-up culture where things went into confusion.

[58 : 50] This is world history that was being told in advance to the king of Nebuchadnezzar thousands of years ago. Now, some people say, it must have been written after it happened. You can believe what you want to believe.

I believe it was revealed to Daniel. All right? We'll talk about that in a minute. The rock comes and destroys all of it. All right? So that's what we're talking about.

Now, I believe that God has the ability to give people a vision and an understanding of what will to come, or what we might say to the tell the future. Tell what will be.

Some people don't believe that that can happen. And so some people believe Daniel must have been written after all of this occurred. That's fine. If your God is that small, then okay, believe that.

I believe in a God that's big enough to give wisdom and knowledge and understanding to Daniel that he didn't have about things he didn't even understand. And I think God can do that for us, too. That's what I think.

[59 : 49] That's what I believe. Okay? Well, anyways, in the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom, in verse 44, that will never be destroyed, nor will be left to another people.

It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. The rock. The kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God. This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands. A rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, the gold to pieces.

The great God has shown the king what will take place in the future. The dream is true, and its interpretation is trustworthy. Then King Nebuchadnezzar, well, let's just, so going back, you see, he predicted each of these empires occurring, and they did.

And then the kingdom of God comes and conquers all, because God is the king of kings. Now, we could probably lay those kind of interpretations on any set of histories if we wanted to, of empire following empire, following empire, following empire.

[61 : 05] Because, you see, when God reveals wisdom, he also sometimes reveals the patterns. I'd be careful not to go too far off, but there are patterns about life that continue.

So the things that have happened in the past will continue in the future, that keep happening. We have had pandemics like this before. We've just been blessed that it's been a hundred years since the last one.

But these kind of viruses that come up have been going on for thousands of years. Even in the book of Revelation, it talks about pestilence and disease.

they'll come again. As some of our leaders have said, the issue is we have not learned enough lessons for the future.

We need to prepare better for the future. Why? Well, because God blessed us for a hundred years not to have to deal with this, so we sort of forgot. We forgot what it's like for the whole world to get sick. Like when people forgot what war was.

[62 : 04] And so we ended up with World War I. We need to remember that God sets up patterns that continue to occur again and again and again and again.

We could apply that same silver and gold and bronze and iron probably to empires we've seen in our culture in the last thousand years.

Still ends up with the same thing. the rock is the kingdom of God, which is the great kingdom that lasts forever. It crushes all the rest. You see, the messages of God are for his people that day when they're said by the prophets like Daniel.

They're for the people in the future and they're for the people now and they're for what will come. What do we learn? What do we learn? King Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and paid him honor and ordered that an offering and incense be presented to him.

The king, the pagan king, honored the interpretation of God. In verse 47, the king said to Daniel, and hear this, this is really important because it goes back to the beginning of the story.

[63 : 14] Surely your God is the God of gods. Surely your God, the one who I tried to embarrass by taking stuff out of his temple and putting them in the temple of my God, is the real God.

I thought my God was powerful, but now I know who the real God is. The God of gods. Not the God of things that impress us, but the God of gods.

He's come to God. And the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries for you were able to reveal this mystery. I'm going to get there. Then the king placed Daniel in the high position, lavished many gifts on him.

He made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men. And so Daniel becomes even more prominent than he was because he followed what God wanted.

You know, if you want your life to come together, if you want your life to live into the dream that God created you for, live to that purpose.

[64 : 21] Live to what God made you for. Not to what people tell you. Not to what people think. Live to what God created you for. And if you're not sure what God created you for, remember, go back and take some time in prayer.

Maybe even ask people. Maybe try a few things. You'll find it. Because God made you for it. And if God made you to do something, you cannot fail. That's the parable of the talents in the New Testament.

Nobody failed in the parable of the talents. One was given one coin. One was given five. One was given ten. The one with ten came back with ten more. The one with five came back with five more. The one with one, he came back with only the one because he didn't try.

Everybody who tries to do what God wants succeeds. So if you feel like maybe somehow your life is not going the right way, maybe you're not going in the right direction.

Maybe you're following the wrong dream. Follow the dreams of God. Daniel did. He could have ended up in a lot worse shape if he listened to what everybody said.

[65 : 26] Eat the king's food. Run and hide because the king's trying to kill people. But he didn't. He trusted God. He did what God made him for.

Moreover, at Daniel's request, the king appointed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego administrators over the provinces of Babylon while Daniel himself remained at the royal court. So not only did he help himself, he helped his friends.

Not only did his faith help his friends, he saved even the pagan astrologers and all the wise people that failed. God is a dream for you.

And it may feel sometimes like we are under a struggle that might be almost impossible for us to get through. It feels like we're being we're being just crushed by something we don't have any control over. And we don't.

But God does. Because God is still the ruler of the universe. So as we live in exile from this place we call the church, we can take our God with us.

[66 : 36] He's always with you. He's always in your heart. He's always there for prayer. He's always listening to what you say to him. And more importantly, if you're quiet and stop talking to him for a few minutes, maybe you'll hear what he wants to say to you.

We have many concerns that we want to share. I want to particularly raise up a few in our church where we have a couple of people from our congregation who passed away.

Not by the coronavirus, but Ursula Morrison, who was I think 97, passed away. And we have Michael Maciejewski, who passed away as well.

That was unexpected. He had a stroke. So pray for Julie and Michael's sons and pray for Ursula and her family. Irene Tate has been taken to the hospital.

She's got some serious problems. Pray for her. We want to pray for Pat Hahn, who's in intensive care in Buffalo General. We want to pray for Sean Mahalski's father. He's also, as far as I understand, having a lot of difficulties and health issues.

[67 : 47] And we have people in our church that are struggling with coronavirus and some are in different stages or different places. I don't think any of them have been in this building for a month.

And that's just the truth. So I don't want you to feel like there's something going through our congregation because there's not. There seems to be something people caught from some other place. But we don't want it to sweep through our congregation, which is why we're doing our Bible study tonight this way and not the way we normally do when we gather on Wednesday night.

So pray for these and pray for others and pray for all those who you feel are in need of God's love and grace. And even pray for yourself that God will reveal to you his blessings, his hope, his desires.

Let's pray. Dear God in heaven, bless us. Bless the people we've mentioned in their struggles and their great difficulties.

Be with their families and their loved ones. Lord, bless the people who are facing physical difficulties and illnesses and pains and trying to recover from surgeries.

[68 : 57] Pray for Pastor Lisa, whose surgery has been postponed. And for all the others who have had their surgeries postponed this week and next.

Pray for our church, Lord, that we will find a way to serve the people of our congregation and the people of our community and reach out in love and hope. And Lord, speak to your people.

Speak now. We're listening. We're closing our eyes. We're closing our mouths. We're closing our thoughts and our ears and just listening to you.

Amen. Dear God, speak to us. Yeshu. Bless us and take us through this time of exile and bring us back to the joyful presence of you and each other in worship.

We pray this in the name of our Lord Jesus, who taught us to pray, saying, Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come.

[70 : 22] Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen. God bless.

Stay safe. And we'll see you again in the house of the Lord. Go in peace. Amen.