

Title: Sealing the Mouths of Lions [Daniel I]

Text: Hebrews 11:33-34

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Greetings for your peace. Today's scripture is from Hebrews 11:33 to 34.

33 who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions,

34 quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies.

Today's topic is "Sealing the Mouths of Lions" (Daniel I).

The individuals mentioned in Hebrews 11:33-34 are not named explicitly. However, most church members know that Daniel was the one who shut the mouths of the lions and emerged unharmed from the den of these hungry beasts. Similarly, most church members are aware that Daniel's friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, are the ones who extinguished the force of fire and came out unscathed from the furnace that was heated seven times more than usual.

However, it seems that most church members are not very interested in the true core message that the Book of Daniel intends to convey through these accounts. Moreover, many seem to have a misunderstanding of the context of these miracles.

Daniel 1:1-2 records, "In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, 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." This indicates that God allowed Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, to take away certain items from the

temple of God in Jerusalem. King Nebuchadnezzar took them to the land of Shinar, to the temple of his gods, and placed them in the treasure house of his gods.

Moreover, Nebuchadnezzar didn't only take objects from God's temple. As seen in verses 3 and 6, "some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility" were also taken. Specifically, verse 6 mentions that "Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah" were among those taken captive. According to verse 3, these young men were from the royal family and the nobility, and verse 4 reveals they were 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.

Nebuchadnezzar changed the names of the captives he took to Babylonian names. Daniel was named Belteshazzar, Hananiah was renamed Shadrach, Mishael became Meshach, and Azariah was called Abednego.. According to verse 4, Nebuchadnezzar also ordered them to be taught the language and literature of the Babylonians. Additionally, as mentioned in verse 5, they were to be given a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. The purpose behind this was to prepare these exceptional Jewish youths for service in the king's palace and the administration of his kingdom.

The core question that arises at the very beginning of the Book of Daniel is why God would allow not only some of the sacred vessels from His temple but also four of the most promising young men from His people to be taken into the hands of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, a foreign power. This is a key point in understanding the Book of Daniel, including the stories of the lions' den and the fiery furnace that was heated seven times more than usual. What could be God's purpose in allowing this to happen?

In Daniel 2:1, it's recorded that one night, King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that was far from ordinary, causing him great anxiety and leaving him unable to sleep. Then, in verse 2, we see that Nebuchadnezzar summoned all the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and astrologers of the land, demanding they

interpret his dream. However, Nebuchadnezzar's request was not simply for the interpretation of the dream. According to verse 5, he demanded something quite extraordinary: he wanted these wise men to not only interpret the dream but to also tell him what he had dreamed, without him revealing the dream's contents to them first.

Verse 5 further mentions that Nebuchadnezzar threatened them with a severe penalty if they failed to meet his demands: "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." This indicates that Nebuchadnezzar considered the dream to be of significant importance, one that he could not simply dismiss or overlook.

In Daniel 2:10, the Babylonian astrologers responded to the king by saying, "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." They continued in verse 11, "What the king asks is too difficult. No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among humans."

However, in verse 19, we see a significant turn of events. Daniel was shown the king's secret dream in a vision. As a result, King Nebuchadnezzar heard not only his dream recounted exactly as he had dreamed it but also received a convincing interpretation from Daniel. This led to a remarkable moment in verse 46, where Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate in homage before Daniel, recognizing him as a servant of the divine. In verse 47, Nebuchadnezzar declared to Daniel, "Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings." This was an acknowledgment of the sovereignty of Daniel's God, who appointed and deposed kings and did as He pleased with them. Thus, Nebuchadnezzar, the ruler of Babylon, a major world power at the time, ended up praising the God of Israel.

The inclusion of these events in the Book of Daniel raises an important question: why were they recorded? From the very opening verses of Daniel, specifically Daniel 1:1-2, we see that God allowed Jehoiakim, king of Judah, to

be delivered into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. In verses 3 and 4, it is revealed that God also allowed Nebuchadnezzar to take some of Israel's finest young men—those without any physical defect, handsome, knowledgeable, wise, and capable of serving in the king's palace.

Why did God do this? Daniel 1:17 provides a clue: God gave Daniel an extraordinary gift, particularly the ability to understand visions and dreams. Without this divine gift, even if God had shown Daniel the dream, he would not have been able to interpret it accurately. God had prepared Daniel in advance to meet Nebuchadnezzar's "extraordinary" request. So then, what do you think was the true reason God did so?

The ultimate reason for God's actions, as suggested in Daniel 2:47, was to demonstrate to all nations and kings, including Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon, that the God of Israel, the God of the heavens, is the "true God of gods and the Lord of kings." This was the primary purpose for which God inspired the writings in the Book of Daniel.

As a result of recognizing who God was, Nebuchadnezzar, in a moment of humility, even bowed down to Daniel, a servant of God. Nebuchadnezzar's acknowledgment of God's sovereignty allowed his reign and kingdom to prosper and expand, despite some moments of pride and its consequences, which are not the focus here due to time constraints.

When King Nebuchadnezzar was nearing the end of his life, he made a declaration, as recorded in Daniel 4:34, saying, "I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation." And in verse 37, he further proclaimed, "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble." Such was the extent of Nebuchadnezzar's acknowledgment of God's sovereignty that he passed this understanding along to his son Belshazzar as he handed over the kingship.

Nebuchadnezzar was saying that during the times he recognized and revered God as the supreme deity above all gods, his kingdom and reign remained strong and secure. He imparted this wisdom to his son, highlighting the stability and prosperity that come from acknowledging and honoring the divine authority of God.

Romans 13:1 states, "There is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God." This passage highlights the divine sovereignty over all earthly authorities, regardless of whether a nation acknowledges God or not. God intended for all people, including the nations and their rulers, to understand this truth so that their realms and positions might be firm and enduring. This is one of the central messages of the Book of Daniel.

But we have often put God's true intentions aside, whether knowingly or not, focusing solely on the events where Daniel was unharmed in the lion's den, and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out untouched from the fiery furnace that was heated seven times over. Haven't we believed that by doing as they did, we too could receive the grace and gifts of such miracles? It is a sorrowful misconception.

In Daniel 5, we see a stark contrast with King Belshazzar, who received the testament from his father Nebuchadnezzar but failed to heed its wisdom. During King Nebuchadnezzar's reign, various sacred vessels were taken from the temple in Jerusalem, and among them were vessels used for worship and sacrifices to God. These vessels came into the Babylonians' possession because God had allowed Nebuchadnezzar to conquer Israel. However, in a bold and disrespectful act, King Belshazzar, during a grand feast with thousands of his nobles, along with his wives and concubines, used these sacred vessels from God's temple to drink wine. This act was not only a display of disrespect towards the God of Israel but also an arrogant comparison of himself to God, as if to say, "Am I not just as powerful and sovereign as the God of Israel?" By using these sacred vessels in such a manner, Belshazzar was essentially challenging God's authority and sanctity, demonstrating a profound lack of

reverence and understanding of God's true nature and power.

At that very moment, as described in Daniel 5:5, something extraordinary happened. While King Belshazzar was boasting and drinking from the sacred vessels of God's temple, the fingers of a man's hand appeared and began writing on the plaster wall of the king's palace, directly opposite the lampstand. What was written by those fingers?

Daniel 5:25 records, "MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN." The interpretation of these words is given in verse 26, which is along the lines of: "You have acted as if you were on the same level as God in heaven, thus diminishing God's authority. God has already decreed the end of your reign (Belshazzar) and your kingdom (Babylon)." Indeed, as verse 30 indicates, on that very night Belshazzar was slain, and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom, just as the writing foretold.

Belshazzar and his kingdom did not flourish as his father Nebuchadnezzar's reign had, and instead came to an abrupt end for specific reasons. Daniel points this out in verses 18 and 19, stating, "Your Majesty, the Most High God gave your father Nebuchadnezzar sovereignty, greatness, glory, and splendor. Because of the high position God gave him, all the nations and peoples of every language dreaded and feared him." However, Belshazzar, despite being Nebuchadnezzar's son and being aware of his father's final advice to fear God, failed to honor God, as Daniel continues to explain in verses 22 and 23: "But you, Belshazzar, his son, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this. Instead, you have set yourself up against the Lord of heaven. You had the goblets from his temple brought to you, and you and your nobles, your wives, and your concubines drank wine from them. You praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone, which cannot see or hear or understand. But you did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways."

Belshazzar, knowing he should fear God as the son of Nebuchadnezzar, arrogantly drank from the vessels of God's temple as if they were his to use.

Thus, he met his demise precisely as the writing on the wall, "MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN" in Daniel 5:25, had foretold. Daniel's message to Belshazzar was clear: "Your kingdom has fallen and been taken by another because you knew yet did not fear God, attempting to exalt yourself to His level." This rebuke from Daniel to King Belshazzar encapsulates the core message of the Book of Daniel and the miracles contained within it.

This event recorded in the Book of Daniel reminds me of the passage in Isaiah 14:13-14, where an angel seeking to ascend to a high place and become like God falls and becomes Satan. It also brings to mind the story in Genesis 11, where humanity, united in language and purpose, attempts to build the Tower of Babel to reach the heavens and match God's throne, only to be scattered as a result. Upon encountering the Book of Daniel, those events came to mind.

Let's pray.

**Heavenly Father,**

We have encountered the astonishing miracles in the Book of Daniel, where individuals emerged unharmed from the lion's den and the fiery furnace. It's noteworthy that in the text of Hebrews, the names of these individuals are not mentioned. We understand now that this omission highlights a key message: it is not the individuals themselves but Your power and presence that are to be exalted. The absence of their names in the New Testament underscores that the Old Testament accounts are sufficient to convey their faith and Your glory.

Let us remember that all scripture is meant to reveal Your glory alone. Yet, why have we often exalted figures like Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, believing that their faith alone was the cause of such wonders, and sought to emulate them? Have we sometimes taught that such miracles are attainable by anyone who simply believes strongly enough?

Oh Lord,

We are reminded once again that kingdoms that serve You and those that do not are both under Your sovereign control. You alone are worthy of praise from

all nations, all kings, and all peoples. To You be all glory.

We pray earnestly in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.  
Amen, amen.