

The telephone rings. You answer it and realize it's your daughter. She is crying uncontrollably, and you can't make heads or tails out of what she's saying. Finally, you help her to calm down enough to speak clearly and you hear the shattering news that her husband has run off, and she's alone with the kids. You don't know what to say.

Another scenario. You're reading the newspaper while sitting in your easy chair, and are startled by an unexpected knock at your door. You peer through the curtains, and see two men in uniform. You quickly open the door, and one of the deputies informs you that your wife was in a serious automobile accident and is being transported to the hospital at that moment.

Those are crunch times. Crunch times are those painful occasions when you feel like your world is about to cave in, when you're not sure which way to turn. We all face crunch times. It's in the crunch times of life that you discover whether God is real in your life or not.

Such was the case with Daniel.

This morning our focus is on a crunch-time-event in Daniel's life described in Daniel chapter two. Daniel 2 records the story of King Nebuchadnezzar's dream, yet it's more than a simple story. It teaches us about life, about God, and about how to respond in the crunch times.

Furthermore, Daniel 2 is what Lehman Strauss describes as "a mountain peak of Bible prophecy" (p. 51). He suggests that it is possibly one of the most famous chapters in the Bible because it contains one of the most amazing prophecies in the Bible. Dr. Ironside observed (in Strauss, 51), "I suppose it contains the most complete, and yet the most simple prophetic picture that we have in all the Word of God."

Daniel 2 gives us a snapshot of world history, past, present, and future. John Walvoord suggests (p. 44), "Nowhere else in Scripture, except in Daniel 7, is a more comprehensive picture given of world history as it stretched from the time of Daniel, 600 years before Christ, to the consummation at the second advent of Christ."

What's significant is to realize that this valuable account came as the result of a crunch time. Before going further, I want to give you the main point of today's study, a point which we will develop in our examination of Daniel 2.

Main Point: What is a crunch time to us is an opportunity for God.

An opportunity for God to do what?

Proposition: From Daniel 2:1-12, we learn that crunch times are opportunities for God to teach us about two things.

I. Crunch times teach us about people.

A. In crunch times, the ungodly squirm (1-13).

1. Nebuchadnezzar was bothered by a dream (1-3).
2. The wise men were bothered by a demand (4-13).

B. In crunch times, the godly stand (14-18).

***Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

1. He asked for information.
2. He asked for time.
3. He asked for prayer.

II. Crunch times teach us about God.

- A. We learn who God is (19-20).
 1. His name is great.
 2. His wisdom is great.
- B. We learn what God does (21-22).
 1. He controls history.
 2. He gives wisdom.
 3. He reveals hidden things.
- C. We learn what God did (23).
 1. He gave Daniel wisdom.
 2. He answered prayer.

Implications: Crunch times are opportunities for God to...

1. Get the attention of the ungodly.
2. Strengthen the godly.

I. Crunch times teach us about people.

According to the Bible, there are two categories of people in the world: the godly (those who know God through a personal relationship with His Son, Jesus Christ) and the ungodly (those who do not know God, and therefore don't live for God). There are several differences between the godly and the ungodly, but one chief difference illustrated in Daniel 2 is how they respond to crunch times. First consider the ungodly...

A. In crunch times, the ungodly squirm (1-13).

The person who lives life without knowing God is like a ship in a storm without an anchor. In the crunch times, he begins to discover that he is not nearly as strong, nor as clever, nor as self-sufficient as he once thought. When things out of his control start bombarding his life, he starts to squirm as his self-built foundation begins to crumble.

That's exactly what we see in Daniel two with two ungodly parties.

1. Nebuchadnezzar was bothered by a dream (1-3).

V 1 begins, "And in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar dreamed dreams, and his spirit was troubled, and his sleep went from him." The most powerful man in the world was bothered by a dream (actually "dreams"). We'll see why next week as we investigate the dream itself and learn that in the dream, God was disclosing His plan for world history from that day until the final triumph of Christ. It was a dream that brought this great world leader down to size. No wonder he was troubled.

Before going further, let's pull together some details. V 1 says Nebuchadnezzar's dreams occurred in his second year as king (between April 603 and March 602 B.C.). How does this relate to Daniel's training period which 1:5 says lasted three years? John Walvoord gives an excellent, detailed explanation of what at first seems to be a discrepancy, the summary being that Hebrew writers counted a part of year as a whole.

Before becoming king, Nebuchadnezzar was a powerful general who was responsible for defeating Jerusalem in the summer of 605 B.C. When his father,

Nabopolassar died in September of the same year, Nebuchadnezzar was made king over Babylon. Daniel was captured in 605 B.C., and his training actually began before Nebuchadnezzar became king. So Daniel's third year in training would have been Nebuchadnezzar's second official year as king. There is no contradiction.

Nebuchadnezzar was a powerful ruler. Someone has suggested that he did what we are prone to do--he took his problems to bed with him. His cares of the day became his cares of the night (Walvoord, 47). He dreamed and became troubled.

But this was no ordinary dream. It was ordered by God.

Watch what the king did in verse 2, "Then the king commanded to summon the magicians, and the astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans, to show the king his dreams." I find it interesting that when Nebuchadnezzar was in trouble, he didn't turn for help to the ones he classified (in 1:20) as "ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers," that being Daniel and his godly friends. It's hard for the ungodly to forsake their old ways.

Please don't miss something. Power and wealth do not produce peace of mind. Nor do fame and influence. Nebuchadnezzar had it all, until God sent a dream, and then he started to squirm.

2. The wise men were bothered by a demand (4-13).

In v 3, the king shared his predicament with his "cabinet members," and in v 4, they replied to him, "O king, live forever; tell thy servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation."

Note: V 4 reveals the advisors spoke to the king in Aramaic. Actually, at this point the book switches from Hebrew to Aramaic, and continues in Aramaic until the end of chapter 7. God gave the Old Testament in Hebrew, except for this passage, Ezra 4:8-6:18; 7:12-26, and a gloss in Jeremiah 10:11. Why the switch to Aramaic? Possibly because Aramaic was the language used all over the Middle and Near East for international business and diplomacy. Daniel 2-7 deals with prophecy which would be of primary interest to Gentiles, so Aramaic would be the natural language to utilize, whereas since Daniel 8-12 deals with the future destiny of the Jews, the Hebrew language is fitting.

Nebuchadnezzar made an interesting request in v 5. Here's how the LB puts it, "But the king replied, 'I tell you, the dream is gone--I can't remember it. And if you don't tell me what it was and what it means, I'll have you torn limb from limb and your houses made into heaps of rubble!'"

First, Nebuchadnezzar was bothered by a dream, and how his wise men are bothered by a demand--"Tell me what I dreamed!"

Watch how they respond in v 7, "Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation of it." To which the king replied in vv 8-9 (my paraphrase), "You're stalling! You know the terms. You tell me the dream, and then I'll know you're not trying to trick me in the interpretation!" Nebuchadnezzar sounds like a paranoid, self-obsessed tyrant, doesn't he?

The wise men did the sensible thing next. They started to plead for mercy in vv 10-11, "There is not a man upon the earth that can reveal the king's matter...It is a rare thing that the king has required, and there is no other that can reveal it before the king, except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh."

Don't miss this. The wise men condemned themselves with their own words. They are frauds. Listen to v 11 again (in the LB), "This is an impossible thing the king requires. No one except the gods can tell you your dream, and they are not here to help."

Didn't these astrologers, magicians, and sorcerers claim to have spiritual power? Yes. Didn't they claim to have special access to the spirit world? Yes. That was their job. Yet what did they admit about their "gods" here? "They are not here to help." Was that true? Yes.

I find it amazing that God used a crunch time to send a dictator into turmoil, and to reveal the futility of all false gods! You see, the test for the value of a person's "god" is whether that "god" has the power to do the impossible. If you are making money your god, realize this. Your money can't do the impossible. It can't save a marriage. It can't put love back into a home that has been scarred by the past. There is only one God that can do the impossible. The ungodly don't know him, so in the crunch times, they squirm.

B. In crunch times, the godly stand (14-18).

When the wise men stalled in v 11, the king went into a tirade. In v 12 two things happened to him. First he became exceedingly angry, and second, he made the outlandish decision to execute all the wise men of Babylon! Just think of the irrationality of that decree. If he killed all the wise men, who would be left to give him counsel? Untrained, unwise men. No doubt a decision he'd live to regret.

Several years ago, when one of our children was about two years old, a situation came up in which I had to say "no" to her request. Do you know what she did? She started hitting her own head on the floor, as if to say, "Well, I'll show you!" Question-- who was she hurting, me or herself?

Did you ever notice how people who don't seek God's guidance do irrational things to try to solve their problems in life? For instance, I've known spouses (and so have you) who were left high and dry by an unfaithful mate. They had been wronged and were in great pain, yet what did they do? They quickly got involved in another relationship in order to get back at the unfaithful spouse. "I'm going to make HIM hurt like he hurt me." But in the end, she hurts herself and her kids, for two wrongs never make a right.

What do the godly do in the crunch times? They do what Daniel did--they stand. They stand for God. What does that mean? For Daniel, it meant taking three steps.

1. He asked for information.

V 13 informs us that the king's decision included Daniel and his Hebrew colleagues. But they were innocent! They hadn't done anything wrong, yet were liable by association. They didn't even know until the knock came at their door.

Notice vv 14-15, "Then Daniel answered with counsel and wisdom to Arioch, the captain of the king's guard...He answered and said to Arioch, Why is the decree so hasty from the king? Then Arioch made the thing known to Daniel."

What did Daniel do in the crunch time, when his neck was on the line? He asked for information. And Arioch gave it to him. Why? The text says Daniel answered with "counsel and wisdom" (NIV "with wisdom and tact"). He kept his head. He didn't react emotionally. He assessed the situation with the wisdom God had given him (remember that Proverbs says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom").

2. He asked for time.

In obtaining information, Daniel didn't stop with Arioch. There was no use convincing Arioch--he wasn't the problem. So Daniel went to the source of the problem--Nebuchadnezzar. V 16 reads, "Then Daniel went in, and desired of the king that he would give him time..."

Although not the main intent of the story, Daniel's response here gives us a good model for problem-solving. He shows us what we should do if we have a problem with someone. Go to that person. It doesn't do any good to talk about the problem to others who aren't part of the solution. Daniel's problem was with the king, so to the king he went. He asked for time, and interestingly, the king granted it.

Why did the king grant Daniel his request when he angrily refused to bargain with the wise men? No doubt, part of it had to do with the way he approached the king--with respect and courtesy. The main reason was what he said to the king, for in v 16 Daniel indicates that given time, he would show the dream's interpretation. How in the world would Daniel do that?! Don't miss his third step.

3. *He asked for prayer.*

Read vv 17-18. Daniel called a prayer meeting, with one request at the top of the list--"to plead for mercy from the God of heaven" (NIV, 18). You see, in the crunch times, the godly stand. Or more accurately, they stand before men because they choose to kneel before God. There's the difference between the godly and the ungodly.

The issue is what happens in the crunch times. When the pink slip comes. When the doctor uses the dreaded "C" word. When you face what is humanly impossible. That's when you discover whether what you've *said* and *claimed* is genuine.

One Saturday, a few months ago, a good friend of mine received a terrible phone call. He learned that his parents were dead as the result of a murder/suicide. I talked with him a couple of weeks ago, and asked him how he was doing. We talked about grieving. He told me, "You know, psychologists say you're supposed to go through a grieving process. I've had a person tell me that as part of my grieving process I had to go through certain steps, one of which is being angry towards God. I'm told if I don't have anger towards God, I'm in denial."

The truth is a secular psychologist can't understand the difference that God makes. My friend shared this with me, "I've not been angry with God. I don't understand. I hurt, yes, but I know He is sovereign. It is doctrine that has brought me through this."

Which brings us to a second vital observation from Daniel 2. First, crunch times teach us about ourselves. Second...

II. Crunch times teach us about God.

What do we learn about God in the crunch time of Daniel 2? Three things.

A. We learn who God is (19-20).

During the prayer meeting, God answered. V 19 says, "Then was the secret revealed unto Daniel in a night vision." How did Daniel respond? Instinctively, he "blessed the God of heaven." Often we are quick to ask, but slow to give credit. Not Daniel. The mark of a godly man is that he gives credit to whom it's due.

We learn about two attributes of God from Daniel's prayer in v 20.

1. *His name is great.* "Blessed be the name of God forever and ever."
2. *His wisdom is great.* "For wisdom and might are His."

Daniel had a great problem in v 13, but in v 20, we learn that he had a great God!

B. We learn what God does (21-22).

In the next section of Daniel's prayer, we learn three things God does.

1. *He controls history.* V 21 "And he changes the times and the seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings." What else does God do?

2. *He gives wisdom.* Again v 21, "He gives wisdom to the wise, and knowledge to those who know understanding."

3. *He reveals hidden things.* V 22 "He reveals the deep and secret things..." Notice that God doesn't reveal Himself to just any casual inquirer. The natural man doesn't receive the things of God (1 Cor 2:14).

C. We learn what God did (23).

For Daniel, God did two things.

1. *He gave Daniel wisdom.* V 23 "I thank thee, and praise thee, O thou God of my fathers, who hast given me wisdom and might."

2. *He answered prayer.* V 23b "And hast made known unto me now what we desired of Thee." We can learn some practical lessons about prayer from Daniel's prayer. Prayer should be God-centered, not self-centered; personal, not artificial; and sound in theology, not sentimental.

But perhaps the greatest lesson Daniel models is this. When you face a crunch time, why panic when you can pray? We need not dread crunch times. Crunch times can be teaching times--they can teach us about ourselves, but more importantly, they can teach us about God.

Implications: Crunch times are opportunities for God to...

What is a crunch time for us is an opportunity for God to do two things.

1. *Get the attention of the ungodly.* In the crunch times, God exalts Himself in the eyes of pagans, like Nebuchadnezzar. In crunch times, God sends us a needed warning, "Only one life, it will soon be passed; only what's done for Christ will last."

2. *Strengthen the godly.* This past week, I received a letter from Barry White which illustrates the truth that crunch times are opportunities for God. Barry and his family are no strangers to our church, having been here in the past, and are now serving as medical missionaries in Togo, West Africa.

Several months ago, before leaving for Togo, the White's learned that their fourth child, whom Katherine was carrying in the womb, had severe physical defects, and would not be able to live. The Whites made what the world considers to be two "irrational" choices. One, instead of aborting the baby which had no skull, they chose to continue the pregnancy, believing that whether the baby would live 70 years or 7 minutes, it was still a gift from God. And secondly, they chose to leave for Africa in spite of the uncertainties, trusting God for strength and help.

With that background, listen to the moving letter from Barry, an abiding testimony to God's greatness in the crunch times:

"Dear Loved Ones, Each night before sleep in the weeks leading up to Nathaniel's birth Katherine and I would talk of the upcoming labor and delivery..." (see attached)