In the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams. His spirit was troubled and he could not sleep. So the king summoned the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and the Chaldean [astrologers] to tell him what he had dreamed. So they came in and stood before the king. Then the king said to them, I have dreamed a dream and my spirit is troubled to know the meaning of the dream. Then the Chaldean [astrologers] answered the king in the Syrian language, O king, live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will give the interpretation. The king replied to the Chaldean [astrologers], I have issued this decree: If you do not tell me what I dreamed and its interpretation, you shall be cut into pieces and your houses shall be turned into a pile of rubble. But if you tell me the dream and its interpretation, you will receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor. Therefore, tell me the dream and its interpretation. Once more they replied, Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will give the interpretation. Then the king answered, I know for certain that you are seeking to gain time, because you know that I have issued the decree. But if you do not tell me the dream, there is only one verdict for you; because you have conspired to tell me misleading and wicked things until the [astrological] time has changed. Therefore, tell me the dream, and [then] I will know that you can give me the [true] interpretation. The Chaldean [astrologers] answered the king, There is not a man on earth who can do what the king asks. No king, lord, or ruler has [ever] made such a request of any magician or enchanter or Chaldean [astrologer]. It is an extraordinary thing that the king requests, and no one can fulfill it for the king except the gods, but they do not dwell with men. For this reason the king became angry, indeed, very furious, and he gave the command to put all the wise men of Babylon to death. So the decree was issued; consequently, the wise men were to be put to death. And they searched for Daniel and his companions in order to put them to death.

Then Daniel replied with wisdom and tact to Arioch, the commander of the king’s guard, the one who had been sent to put to death the wise men of Babylon. Daniel asked Arioch, the king’s officer, Why is the decree [issued] by the king so urgent? Then Arioch informed Daniel about the matter. So Daniel went in and requested the king for an appointment, [at which time] he would give the king the interpretation. Then Daniel returned to his house and explained the matter to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions, so that they might request mercies from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his companions might not be executed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.

Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel during the night in a vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven. Daniel said, Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, because wisdom and might belong to him. He changes the [astrological] times and the seasons; he deposes kings and establishes kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to men of understanding; he reveals the deep and hidden things; he knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with him. I thank you and praise you, O God of my fathers, you have given me wisdom and might. Indeed, you have now made known to me what we requested of you; you have made known to us the king’s dream and its interpretation.
Therefore Daniel went to Arioch, the one whom the king had appointed to execute the wise men of Babylon, and said to him, Do not execute the wise men of Babylon. Take me to the king and I will give the king the interpretation [of his dream].

Arioch immediately brought Daniel before the king and reported to him, I have found a man from among the captives of Judah who will make known to the king the interpretation [of the dream].

The king asked Daniel (who was called Belteshazzar), Are you able to tell me what I saw in the dream and its interpretation? Daniel answered the king, Neither wise men, enchanters, magicians, nor soothsayers are able to explain to the king the mystery the king has demanded [be made known to him]; but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to the [great] king Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in the days to come. This is your dream and the visions that passed through your mind [as you lay] upon your bed. As you lay upon your bed, O king, your mind turned to events that will take place in the future; and the one who reveals mysteries made known to you what is going to happen. This mystery was not revealed to me because I have more wisdom than any other living man, but only that the interpretation might be made known to the king and that you might know [the meaning of] the thoughts of your mind.

You, O king, saw and observed a huge statue. This statue, which was enormous and whose brightness was brilliant, stood before you. Its appearance was awesome. The head of this statue was made of fine gold, its chest and arms were made of silver, its stomach and its thighs were of bronze, its legs were made of iron, its feet were made partly of iron and partly of clay. You continued observing [this statue] until a rock was cut out [of a mountain] but not by hands. [The rock] struck the statue’s feet, which were made of iron and clay, and broke them to pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were [all] broken into pieces together and became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. Then the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth. This was the dream. Now we will make known to the king the interpretation. You, O king, are king of kings, the one on whom the God of heaven has bestowed the dominion, the power, and the strength and the glory. Into your hands he has placed mankind, as well as the beasts of the field and the birds of the air—wherever they live, he has made you ruler over them all. You are the head of gold. After you, another kingdom will rise, [one that is] inferior to you. Next, a third kingdom, one of bronze, will rule over all the earth. And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron. Just as iron breaks and smashes everything, so like iron that breaks things to pieces, this kingdom will crush and break all [the others] to pieces. Just as you saw that the feet and toes were made partly of baked clay and partly of iron, so this will be a divided kingdom; yet it will have some of the strength of iron in it, just as you saw iron mixed with clay. Just 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 the baked clay, the people [of this kingdom] will be a mixture of [nationalities]; but they will not be united, just as iron does not mix with clay. In the days of those kings, the God of heaven will establish a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall its sovereignty be passed on to another people. It will break all those kingdoms into pieces and consume them, and it will stand forever. This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of the mountain, but not by hands—the rock that broke the...
iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold to pieces. The great God has shown the king what will take place in the future. The dream is true and the interpretation is trustworthy.

46 Then the [great] king Nebuchadnezzar prostrated himself before Daniel and paid him homage, and he ordered that an offering and incense be presented to him. 47 The king said to Daniel, Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were enabled to reveal this mystery. 48 Then the king placed Daniel in a high position and gave him many great gifts; he made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and put him in charge of all the wise men of Babylon. 49 Moreover, at Daniel’s request the king appointed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego as administrators over the province of Babylon, but Daniel [himself] was at the king’s court. (Dan. 2:1-49)

Introduction

Do you ever get frustrated? Do you ever get perplexed? Do you ever get confused? Do you ever find yourself confronted with an “impossible” situation?

A Christian businessman tells of his frustrations in trying to locate a rural address. A farmer gave him directions to reach his apple orchard some twenty miles out of town. The crossroads he named were not located on any signpost. The businessman found himself without cash, and so was unable to use the pay phone at a service station along the road (this was prior to the use of cell phones.) To top it off, the day was so overcast and foggy he couldn’t even tell what direction he was traveling.

The frustration experienced by that Christian businessman was minor when compared to that encountered by King Nebuchadnezzar as described in the second chapter of Daniel.

But the testimony of that Christian businessman, made in response to his experience of frustration and perplexity—and God’s timely provision for him (the LORD graciously sent a “Good Samaritan” to help him)—is a very good statement of the lesson we find here in Daniel chapter 2:

Do expect God to provide when you’re unable to help yourself—and expect that provision to point out that He, not you, is on top of the circumstances of your life [and of the world]. (POWER, 8/5/90,p.5)

Whenever we are confronted with a perplexing, “impossible” situation, let us remember the two-fold biblical directive presented to us in the second chapter of Daniel.

I. Look to Christ for Guidance (Dan. 2:1-20)

One night the king had a dream. It was a terribly frightening and perplexing dream; his spirit was troubled and his sleep went from him (vs. 1.) It appears that
the king was so troubled by his dream that he immediately summoned the Chaldean astrologers to appear before him in the middle of the night. When they had assembled, the king related his problem and called upon them to provide the solution (vs. 3).

The astrologers request further information: let the king relate the content of his dream, and they will provide the interpretation (vs. 4). Now the king may be perplexed, but he is not stupid; he insists that the Chaldeans tell him the dream (vs. 5-6.) The king has not forgotten what he dreamed. The Hebrew phrase sometimes translated, “the thing is gone from me” (vs. 5), is referring to the royal decree the king is about to proclaim, not to the content of the dream, hence we have rendered it: “I have issued this decree.” The king is putting the Chaldean astrologers to the test: if they can correctly relate the content of his dream, then he knows that he can rely upon their interpretation. But if he must relate his dream to them, they are liable to give it any favorable interpretation they desire so as to save their lives and gain the promised reward.

Being themselves totally frustrated and perplexed, these wise men protest that the king’s request is impossible:

*The Chaldean [astrologers] answered the king, “There is not a man on earth who can do what the king asks. No king, lord, or ruler has [ever] made such a request of any magician or enchanter or Chaldean [astrologer]. 11 It is an extraordinary thing that the king requests, and no one can fulfill it for the king except the gods, but they do not dwell with men.”* (Dan. 2:10-11)

Thus the opening verses of this passage record the frustration and utter helplessness that descended upon the courts of the great empire of Babylon. The king is so frustrated in his efforts to know the interpretation of his dream that he loses control and becomes enraged. The Chaldean astrologers are panic-stricken at what will happen to them because they cannot tell the king the content or the meaning of his dream.

How does Daniel handle this dilemma? He shares the problem with his companions, so that together they might ask the Lord for wisdom (vs.17-18.) Not only is it the Christian’s privilege, it is our obligation, to look to Christ our Lord for guidance; Psalm 50:15 is both an invitation as well as a command: “Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you and you will glorify me” (Psl. 50:15.) In answer to prayer the Lord reveals the content and interpretation of the dream to Daniel; as verse 19a indicates, “Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel during the night in a vision.”

Note that in response to answered prayer Daniel is faithful to thank and praise God: “Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven” (vs. 19b.) Contrast Daniel’s thanksgiving with the ingratitude shown by the nine lepers whom the Lord Jesus cleansed:
Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” When he saw them, he said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were cleansed. One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except his foreigner?” (Lk. 17:11-18)

The following is a contemporary example of ingratitude: One day a lady called the local pastor, requesting prayer for her friend who was in dire need. The Lord wonderfully answered their prayers on her behalf. Some time later the pastor happened to encounter the lady who had called him and solicited his prayers for her friend. When he inquired about her friend and discovered how God had answered prayer, he was very disturbed to find that the woman expressed no gratitude to God for what He had done—none whatsoever.

When confronted with a perplexing, “impossible” situation, the first directive of Scripture is this: Look to the Lord for guidance. The Apostle James gives this counsel: “If any one of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without harshly criticizing, and it will be given to him” (Jas. 1:5.) The Lord Himself declares, “Call to me and I will answer you and show you great and difficult things you do not know” (Jer. 33:3.) Consider the following example of Christ’s guidance in a perplexing and “impossible” situation:

After his Christian conversion at Oxford in the late 1940’s, Michael Alison initially planned to go into the ministry. But his keen interest in politics—and a desire to serve his nation—led him to change vocational directions. Elected to Parliament in 1964, he quietly earned his way from the backbench to leadership.

In 1979 Michael Alison was named minister of state for Northern Ireland, a responsibility that included administration of Ulster’s notorious prisons. Then, in the late fall of 1980, young Catholic terrorists in Belfast’s Maze prison began to starve themselves to death in protest of British rule in Northern Ireland. By Christmas the first prisoner had gone nearly two months without food and was near death. Worldwide attention focused on Belfast. Would the British government allow this young inmate to die, or would they force-feed him once he slipped into a final coma?

The prison doctor came to Michael Alison for the decision ... To force-feed the protester would cause riots among the Irish Republican Army faithful; to let him die would be callous.
Michael had been praying for weeks for wisdom in the horrible situation. “Go to the prisoner's fellow hunger strikers,” he told the doctor. “Ask them to make the decision.” The other protesters could not have their brother’s death on their consciences, but in the process of putting him on life-support equipment, they saw the inconsistency of their own position. The hunger strike ended, the crisis was averted. (Charles Colson, Kingdoms in Conflict, pp.282-283)

II. Trust in Christ as the Sovereign LORD (Dan. 2:21-49)

Daniel reports to Nebuchadnezzar the content of his dream (vs. 31-35.) In his dream the king had seen a great statue—it was huge; it was brilliant and blindingly bright (like the sun reflecting off the glass wall of a skyscraper); and it was overwhelmingly awesome (like standing at the base of the Empire State Building and looking up.)

This statue of a human figure was composed of the following parts: the head was of fine gold; the chest and arms were of silver; the stomach and thighs were of bronze; the legs were iron; and the feet were part iron and part clay.

As the perplexed and terrified king observed this great statue, what happened? He saw a stone that was mysteriously and divinely cut out of a mountain. The stone came rolling down the mountainside and smashed into the huge statue (like a bowling ball striking ten pins.) It struck the feet (composed of iron and clay), breaking them into pieces. Consequently, the whole statue came crashing to the ground in a pile of rubble (like a building dynamited by a demolition crew.) The rubble was then ground into powder and blown away by the wind. Following the destruction of this immense statue of a human figure, the stone began to grow, until finally it became a mountain of immense proportion that filled the whole earth.

Daniel immediately proceeds to provide the interpretation of this dream (vs. 36-45.) He informs the king that the head of gold represents Nebuchadnezzar himself and the kingdom of Babylon (vs. 37-38.) The chest and arms of silver represent another kingdom that shall succeed Babylon, namely, the Persian Empire (vs. 39a.) The stomach and thighs of bronze represent a third kingdom that shall rise to power, the Greek Empire (vs. 39b.) The legs of iron and the feet of iron and clay represent a fourth kingdom: a kingdom as strong as iron (vs. 40); a universal kingdom: composed of many nations (vs.43a); but a kingdom lacking any inner unity, as represented by the fact that iron and clay do not mix (vs.43b.)

Daniel explains that in the days of the fourth kingdom the God of heaven shall set up His kingdom (vs. 44-45)—this kingdom being represented by the stone. Indeed, just as Daniel foretold, the kingdom of God was inaugurated on the earth during the days of that fourth kingdom (the Roman Empire—it was during those
days that the incarnation, the atonement, the resurrection, the ascension, and Pentecost all occurred. But just as that stone did not grow to fill the whole earth until after the great statue was totally eliminated; so, too, the kingdom of God shall not be revealed in its full glory and power until the return of the Lord Jesus Christ on the day of final judgment. Note the parables of Jesus recorded in Matthew 13:31-32 and Matthew 13:33 respectively:

The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. 32Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches. (Matt. 13:31-32)

He told them still another parable: The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough. (Matt. 13:33)

Note that the emphasis of the dream—as well as the entire passage—is that the Lord is in charge, and He shall accomplish His good purpose. The Lord gave the mysterious dream to the mighty king of Babylon, and He gave the interpretation to this lowly Hebrew captive, Daniel. Five times in this chapter the Lord is referred to as “the God of heaven” (vs. 18,19,28,37,44.) The Lord reveals that He is in charge of empires, and of history, and He is also sovereignly in charge of the events that occur in the lives of His children. The Lord Jesus inquires, “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny?” He then goes on to assure us, “Yet not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father permitting it. 30Even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. 31So do not be afraid; you are more valuable than many sparrows” (Matt. 10:29-31.)

When confronted with a perplexing, “impossible” situation, the second directive of Scripture is this: Trust in Christ, who is the sovereign Lord.

Conclusion

When you face a frustrating and perplexing problem, an “impossible” situation, Look to Christ for Guidance. Seek the counsel of His Word: “Your word is a lamp for my feet and light for my path” (Psl. 119:105.) Seek the counsel of mature Christian brethren who can counsel you from the Word of God: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom” (Col. 3:16a.)

When you face a situation in which you ponder, “Why is this happening and what will be the outcome of these things?” Trust in Christ as the Sovereign Lord. In Ephesians 1:11 the Lord is defined as the One who “causes all things to work for the sake of his own plan.” That is to say, the Lord causes all things to happen and interact in such a way as to accomplish the fulfillment of His sovereign purpose.