



Message Guide

FOR AUGUST 17, 2025

STORYTELLER- 2: STORY OF WHEN YOUR BACK IS AGAINST THE WALL (DANIEL 2:1-49)



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No one really knows with certainty the origin of the phrase, “back against the wall,” but it appears to have come from the military, where you are forced into a position where the only way out is to face your enemy and fight. We are in week two of “Storyteller,” where we’re looking at the stories of those in Jesus’ family tree from Matthew 1. We’re in the third part of Jesus’ genealogical record which starts with the period of time when the Jews were in exile in Babylon, and this has led us to the story of Daniel.

Daniel and his friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were part of that deportation to Babylon, and, as we saw last week in Daniel 1, they remained faithful to God in a godless land.

Now, we pick up the story in Daniel 2 where the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, has dreams, “his spirit was troubled, and his sleep left him” (v. 1). So, he calls his magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and the Chaldeans (who were considered to be a learned class of astrologers), and he demands that they interpret his dreams. If they do, they will receive great reward, but if they don’t, the king will have the torn limb from limb, and their houses will be laid in ruins (v. 5).

The Chaldeans respond in vv.10-11:

The Chaldeans answered the king and said, “There is not a man on earth who can meet the king's demand, for no great and powerful king has asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or Chaldean. The thing that the king asks is difficult, and no one can show it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh.” **(Daniel 2:10-11, ESV)**

Nebuchadnezzar responds by commanding that all the wise men of Babylon were to be destroyed—which included Daniel and his friends (vv. 12-13).

So, the decree went out, and the wise men were about to be killed; and they sought Daniel and his companions, to kill them (Daniel 2:13, ESV). Daniel had his back against the wall. What did he do? Did he give up and die? Was he fatalistic where he just acknowledged that there’s no way out, there’s nothing left to do, there are no other options?



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1. What's a time in your life when your "back was against the wall"? It could be a job situation, family crisis, financial pressure, or even a personal decision. How did you handle it—and how do you wish you would have?

Here's what Daniel did. There are three, what we could call moves, in vv. 14-25, and they're all punctuated with the words Then (When)—verse 14, Then (Then)—verse 17, Therefore (Then)—verse 24. It's like the author is giving us a roadmap to follow of exactly what Daniel did when his back was against the wall. Let's take a look, beginning with verse 14, the first "then" or "when"—NIV.

Then Daniel replied with prudence and discretion to Arioch, the captain of the king's guard, who had gone out to kill the wise men of Babylon. He declared to Arioch, the king's captain, "Why is the decree of the king so urgent?" Then Arioch made the matter known to Daniel. And Daniel went in and requested the king to appoint him a time, that he might show the interpretation to the king.

(Daniel 2:14-16, ESV)

Notice Daniel had prudence and discretion. I like the way the NIV translates it: "wisdom and tact." He goes right to the boss—Arioch—who is the one responsible for going and carrying out the king's orders to kill all the wise men of Babylon. He engages Arioch—the enemy—in dialogue. And he requested the king to give him some time to fulfill what the king ultimately wanted. Wisdom and tact.

When we find our back against the wall— a problem we can't seem to solve, a conflict we can't avoid, a relationship that has been fractured, we often become defensive and go into attack mode. This may be because whatever the situation is that we face, we initially feel that panic welling up inside of us, and we don't know what to do.

2. What's your natural response when you feel overwhelmed or threatened—fight, flight, freeze, or something else? How does Daniel's example challenge or encourage you?



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So, what's the lesson for us?

Before you rush in and make a rash decision...

- Pause and don't panic
- Seek to dialogue
- Ask questions

In the wonderful book, *The Contrarian's Guide to Leadership*, author Steven Sample wrote that one key principle of leadership is that sometimes the best decision is not to be forced to make a decision. That in and of itself is a decision. Don't be rushed. Be patient.

Scripture says:

- Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. (Romans 12:12, NIV)
- Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools. (Ecclesiastes 7:9, NIV)
- Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. (Galatians 6:9, NIV)

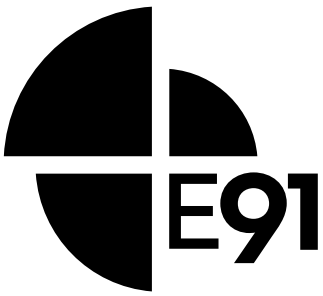
So, the first "then"—back in Daniel 2:14—Pause, don't panic.

The second "then" is verse 17: Then Daniel returned to his house and explained the matter to his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. He urged them to plead for mercy from the 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.

(Daniel 2:17-18, NIV)

Daniel turned to his friends, and together they turned to God. We "know" that this is what we should do, but too often we don't do it. Maybe it's because of pride, or a sense of self-sufficiency, but whatever it is, we often fail to take the next step and Turn to others and turn to God.

"Seek mercy from the God of heaven!" Why didn't Daniel just do that on his own? He could have. But he didn't. He reached out to his trusted friends, whose names are listed as their Hebrew names, not their Babylonian names. Hananiah (Shadrach), Mishael (Meshach), and Azariah (Abednego). Daniel goes to his deep friends, his Hebrew friends, the ones he was with when they were taken, stripped from their families in Israel and deported as slaves to Babylon. These were his band of brothers. He could have sought mercy from the God of heaven without them, but he didn't. He needed them. And they needed him.



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3. When your back is against the wall, who are the people you turn to—or who could you begin including in your spiritual life in times of crisis?

This is not a prescription that every time we're faced with a dilemma, and we gather our friends and seek mercy from the God of heaven that that problem automatically goes away. But it does remind us that when we face our dilemmas, and our backs are against the wall, we don't have to go through them alone.

Here is the next "therefore/then" in our text: Then Daniel went to Arioch, 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 interpret his dream for him." **(Daniel 2:24, NIV)**

Arioch brings Daniel before Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel interprets the dream—pointing out that it is God who interprets dreams, not Daniel. And the story concludes with one final "then."

Then the king placed Daniel in a high position and 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. Moreover, at Daniel's request the king appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego administrators over the province of Babylon, while Daniel himself remained at the royal court. **(Daniel 2:48-49, NIV)**

So, what does the third "then" teach us? Just do it.

Nike may not get a lot of things right, but they got this one right. You can plan, pray, and prepare all you want, but at some point, you have to get out there and *just do it*. Daniel just did it. He got up and went to Arioch and made his bold move. He didn't ... stay ... stuck.

Don't stay stuck. When your back is against the wall—with whatever you're facing right now—pause, don't panic; turn to others and most importantly to God; and then just do it—and let's come together as a band of brothers and sisters and not try to go through it alone.

4. What's one intentional step you can take this week to follow Daniel's pattern—whether it's seeking wise counsel, slowing down your response, praying with others, or praising God before acting?