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Daniel—And Abraham, Renewals

By Dr. J. Robert Clinton

Few leaders finish well.¹ Of those that finish well, comparative study has identified some factors² that enhance their ability to persevere and finish well. High on that list is the notion of repeated renewals. Note the following observation carefully.

Leaders who finish well will experience several renewal times over their lifetimes.

Abraham and Daniel, two O.T. leaders who finished well exemplify the notion of renewal experiences. A study of the repeated renewals they experienced sheds light on renewals in general and more specifically sets expectations for leaders today.

Renewal Defined

definition **Renewal** is a specially meaningful encounter with God in which He communicates with *freshness* various kinds of things needed by a leader such as:

- insights about Himself,
- affirmation—both personal and ministry,
- inspiration to continue,
- breakthrough concepts which inspire one to try them in ministry,
- a sense of His personal presence and/or power,
- an unusual sense of intimacy—can be tied to some symbolic thing (like a place, physical object, etc).,
- perspective on time, now and/or the future so that ones faith is increased to see God in what is happening and will happen,

¹ Of the Biblical leaders for whom there is evidence about finishing well, about 1 in 3 finish well. What do I mean by finish well? I have identified six characteristics of finishing well from a comparative study of leaders who finished well. A given leader will not necessarily demonstrate all six but at least several. These six characteristics include the following: (1) They maintain a personal vibrant relationship with God right up to the end. (2) They maintain a learning posture and can learn from various kinds of sources—life especially. (3) They manifest godliness (especially Christ-like attitudes and behavior) in character as evidenced by the fruit of the Spirit in their lives. (4) Truth is lived out in their lives so that convictions and promises of God are seen to be real. (5) They leave behind one or more ultimate contributions. (6) They walk with a growing awareness of a sense of destiny and see some or all of it fulfilled.

² Five enhancements include: (1) *perspective*—These leaders have the ability to see present ministry in light of a lifetime perspective and the broader perspective of God's working. (2) *Renewal*—the enhancement discussed in this article. (3) Truth is lived out in their lives so that convictions and promises of God are seen to be real. (4) They leave behind one or more ultimate contributions. (5) *Disciplines*—These leaders practice various disciplines of abstinence (solitude, silence, fasting, frugality, chastity, secrecy, sacrifice), disciplines of engagement (Study Disciplines, Prayer Disciplines, Corporate Disciplines, Celebration, fellowship, confession, submission, worship), and other miscellaneous disciplines. (4) *Learning Posture*—They maintain a learning posture all their lives. (5) *Mentoring*—They have significant mentoring experiences over their lifetime.

so as to give the leader another anchor upon which to build a sense of a new start, a beginning again, and a desire to rededicate and continue on in following God.

Abraham's Renewal Experiences

Table 1 lists several renewal experiences that helped shape Abraham's leadership over his lifetime.

Table 1. Abraham's Renewal Experiences

Reference Genesis	Label	Explanation/ Response
12:1	The Promise	God promises Abram that the world will be blessed through his descendents. A Type I Sense of Destiny Experience./Abraham obediently left his country and followed God to go to a land that God would show him.
12:7	Shechem	God appears to Abram and promises the land to his descendents (this land now inhabited by Canaanites). Type I destiny experience./ Abraham makes an altar and worshiped the Lord.
13:14-17	Promise Renewed	Abraham has just given the best of the land to Lot. God appears and promises to give more land to Abraham. And he promises that Abraham will have many descendants. God challenged Abraham to walk all over the land he would receive. Type I destiny experience./ Abraham obeyed and built an altar to the Lord in Hebron.
15	Unilateral Covenant	God renews his promise to Abram though Abram is older now and has not seen any real proof of the promise. God promises his descendants will be numerous. God then gives a unilateral covenant is a cultural form known to Abram. Abram sees this awe inspiring revelation in a vision. God also symbolically promises redemption in the future. God also promises a time table when the land will be given and the nations now in it removed. Type I destiny experience./ Abram's response is not given in this renewal experience.
17:1,2	Holiness Renewal	God challenges Abram to walk in holiness. He promises to enable this. He renews the covenant about many descendants and in fact broadens it; Abram will be the progenitor of many nations. To symbolize this further God changes his name from Abram to Abraham (father of many). Circumcision is given as a sign of Abraham's obedient response to this promise. Sarai's name is changed to Sarah (princess—stressing mother of many nations). Type I destiny experience./ Abram at first can't believe this but finally accedes and circumcises all the males in his household.
22	Sacrifice of Obedience	God speaks audibly to Abraham and tests him. He asks Abraham to give up his only son, Isaac, through whom the fulfillment all of the promises depend./ Abraham obediently responds and offers Isaac but God stops the sacrifice after validating Abraham's obedient heart. Type I destiny experience. The promise is reaffirmed about descendants and land./ Abraham and Isaac build an altar and worship God.

Lessons from Abraham's Renewal Experiences

What can be learned from Abraham's renewal experiences? Look at these six observations.

1. All his renewal times were destiny experiences of Type I (awe inspiring presence or revelation). See *sense of destiny, destiny processing, Glossary*.
2. All his renewal experiences built on previous ones—that is, they clarified, gave more information. See notion of *progressive revelation, Glossary*.
3. Abraham failed several times in his responses to God's shaping activities; yet God continued to bring renewal and hope to him. In fact, the renewals gave him a fresh start in his pilgrimage. See *process item, Glossary*.
4. There were repeated experiences. He needed each one. He gave up several times. Each renewal experience gave him hope to start again. And frequently there were great lapses of time between renewal experiences.
5. All of the renewal experiences of Abraham were God-initiated rather than initiated by Abraham.
6. In each renewal experience Abraham came to know God in a new way, more deeply. See *intimacy, vertical intimacy, Glossary*.

P.S. Abraham finished well. Repeated renewal experiences certainly were a factor.

Daniel's Renewal Experiences

Daniel, like Abraham encountered God in a number of renewal experiences. However, here are two major differences. Daniel has as a basis for his relationship with God a long tradition, both oral and written, and many previous leaders who have known God. This background testified to God, His purposes, and His ways. Daniel has this solid foundation from which to build his relationship with God. Abraham had only a very few oral experiences with God spaced out over time upon which to build. A second difference for Daniel involved self-initiated renewal. God initiated all the renewal experiences with Abraham. But Daniel sought renewal with God, exercising disciplines that would indicate his deep need and sincerity to meet God.

Table 2. Daniel's Renewal Experiences

Reference Daniel	Label	Explanation/ Response
ch 2	Image Dream	Daniel hears from God in a night vision. He is given Nebuchadnezzar's dream and interpretation. A life crisis preceded the renewal experience and prompted Daniel's seeking it. He enlisted his three friends to pray that God would give him the dream and interpretation. This is a Type I Awe Inspiring destiny experience hard on the heels of a life crisis./ Daniel praised God for revealing the dream and interpretation. He then boldly explained what he knew to Nebuchadnezzar.
Ch 6	Lions Pit	Daniel is delivered from death in the lion's pit. Again this is a life crisis. Here God delivers, in another Type I Awe Inspiring destiny experience showing affirmation of God's hand on his life. This is a God-initiated renewal experience again in terms of a life crisis./ Daniel testifies as to God's delivering power.
Ch 7	4 Beasts Vision	Daniel has a vision, progressive revelation, which builds on the Nebuchadnezzar's Image Dream of ch 2. This was a God-initiated vision. This is a Type I Awe Inspiring destiny experience. Daniel is out of the mainstream of leadership. He is older and probably feels the effects of being set aside. This renewal experience affirms that he is still important to God and will be used by God to give perspective on the future./ Daniel was frightened and kept quiet about this vision.

Table 2. Daniel's Renewal Experiences continued

Reference Daniel	Label	Explanation/ Response
Ch 8	Ram/He-Goat Vision	Daniel has another vision giving progressive revelation about the Image Dream and the Ancient of Days vision. This was a God-initiated vision and again a Type I Awe Inspiring destiny experience. It is two years after the ch 7 dream. Again This renewal experience affirms that he is still important to God and will be used by God to give perspective on the future./ Daniel was overwhelmed by this vision and was sick for several days. He did not understand it completely.
ch 9	70 Weeks Vision	Daniel exercises disciplines (Bible study and prayer) seeking God's mercy and fulfillment of his promises. This was a renewal experience that came as a result of disciplines and Daniel's initiative. This was an awesome Type I Awe Inspiring destiny experience./ Daniel partners with God to intercede and see God's promise come true. And as a result of Daniel's seeking God in prayer he receives further progressive revelation on God's perspective for the future.
Ch 10-12	Kings of the North and South Vision	Again Daniel exercises self-initiative using disciplines of abstinence in order to meet God. And God gives two strong words of personal affirmation (10:11, 19). Again this was a Type I Awe Inspiring destiny experience./ Continues to hunger for God's perspective. Receives the promise of an afterlife.

Lessons From Daniel's Renewal Experiences

Daniel adds to what we have previously learned from Abraham's renewal experiences. Note the following observations.

1. A vibrant personal relationship with God is something that must be cultivated and maintained by a leader through his/her lifetime. Daniel exercises disciplines which enhance this.
2. Renewal Definition—Daniel illustrates almost all of the components of the renewal definition: Note the one's checked (✓✓ indicates clearly seen; ✓ indicates assumed to have happened).

definition

Renewal is a specially meaningful encounter with God in which He communicates with *freshness* various kinds of things needed by a leader such as:

- ✓✓ • insights about Himself,
- ✓✓ • affirmation—both personal and ministry,
- ✓ • inspiration to continue,
- ✓✓ • breakthrough concepts which inspire one to try them in ministry,
- ✓✓ • a sense of His personal presence and/or power,
- ✓✓ • an unusual sense of intimacy—can be tied to some symbolic thing (like a place, physical object, etc).,
- ✓✓ • perspective on time, now and/or the future so that ones faith is increased to see God in what is happening and will happen,

so as to give the leader another anchor upon which to build a sense of a new start, a beginning again, and a desire to rededicate and continue on in following God.

3. Renewal experiences can help rejuvenate a personal relationship with God. Probably both the visions in Belshazzar's time did this for Daniel who was out of leadership at the time.
4. Continual renewal experiences are needed by leaders over their lifetimes. Both Abraham and Daniel illustrate this. Even a tremendous awe inspiring renewal experience is not enough to last a lifetime.
5. Various kinds of renewal experiences should be expected. God communicated in different ways in these renewal experiences: audible voice, a vision in a deep sleep, a dream to a pagan ruler, visions in the night, a daytime vision sensed by others but only seen by Daniel, sending angelic messengers to affirm, give revelation, and explain.
6. Renewal experiences can come as a result of disciplines or as God's special surprises. Abraham mostly saw renewals through God's surprises. Daniel saw both—God's surprises and as a result of his seeking God.

P.S. Daniel finished well.

Conclusion

So then, a leader today should expect special moments of intimacy with God, challenges from God, new vision from God and affirmation from God both for personhood and ministry to repeatedly occur.³ These destiny experiences will be needed, appreciated, and will make the difference in persevering in a ministry. All leaders should expectantly look for these repeated times of renewal. Some can be initiated by the leader (usually extended times of spiritual disciplines). But some come sovereignly from God. A leader can seek them, of course, and be ready for them.

Most leaders who have been effective over a lifetime have needed and welcomed renewal experiences from time to time in their lives. Some times are more crucial in terms of renewal than others. Apparently in western society the mid-thirty's and early forty's and mid-fifty's are crucial times in which renewal is frequently needed in a leader's life. Frequently during these critical periods discipline slacks, there is a tendency to plateau and rely on one's past experience and skills, and a sense of confusion concerning achievement and new direction prevail. Unusual renewal experiences with God can overcome these tendencies and redirect a leader. An openness for them, a willingness to take steps to receive them, and a knowledge of their importance for a whole life can be vital factors in heeding step two for finishing well. Sometimes these renewal experiences are divinely originated by God and we must be sensitive to his invitation. At other times we must initiate the renewal efforts.

Remember,

1. Renewal experiences will often come in terms of our giftedness. (Daniel given wisdom, knowledge, etc.)
2. Renewal experiences can come in the normal course of personal Bible study.
3. Renewal experiences can come as the result of our seeking them through disciplines: fasting, praying, solitude.
4. Renewal experiences can be prompted by crisis experiences in our lives and ministry.
5. Renewal experiences can be prompted by our longing for understanding of God and His ways.
6. Renewal experiences can come simply as God's surprises, maybe even when we are not expecting them.

From observing Abraham and Daniel's renewals, three categories emerge.

³ Not expecting this is one sign of a plateaued leader. See *plateauing*, **Glossary**.

1. **Need Centered.** Crises in life or ministry may engender one's need for renewal. A drive within to know the reality of God may precipitate a renew experience.
2. **Surprises of God.** These may come in the normal course of things—in daily life and simply as a result of our use of gifts in ministry.
3. **Specially Sought.** A leader who seeks intimacy with God, especially using disciplines that God has honored in the past, can expect renewal experiences with God.

A vibrant personal relationship with God in Christ is something that must be cultivated and maintained by a leader throughout one's lifetime. Leaders who finish well will experience repeated renewals with God. All leaders need renewals.

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