

The Book Of Daniel

*And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom.
(Daniel 1:20 ESV)*

*but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days.
(Daniel 2:28 ESV)*

*And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.
(Daniel 12:2–3 ESV)*

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

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Daniel 2

Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Good morning church! I'd like to invite you to open your Bibles this morning to Daniel 2; that's on page 737 in your pew Bibles. We're going to read a large chunk of Scripture this morning, so I want to get right into it. Like chapter 1, Daniel 2 gives us a self-contained story that illustrates God's control over everything that was happening to his people in their exile in Babylon. Babylon was not a mistake – it was an engineered experience. God is still God. He is still Sovereign, and he is working – marvellously – to refine and redeem his people in this story – as we shall soon see.

Because it is a long story, I've divided it up into three major sections: an impossible request, an inspired interpretation and an important promotion. Hear now the Word of the Lord, beginning at verse 1.

An Impossible Request

In the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his spirit was troubled, and his sleep left him.² Then the king commanded that the magicians, the enchanters, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans be summoned to tell the

king his dreams. So they came in and stood before the king.³ And the king said to them, “I had a dream, and my spirit is troubled to know the dream.”⁴ Then the Chaldeans said to the king in Aramaic, “O king, live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation.”⁵ The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, “The word from me is firm: if you do not make known to me the dream and its interpretation, you shall be torn limb from limb, and your houses shall be laid in ruins.⁶ But if you show the dream and its interpretation, you shall receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor. Therefore show me the dream and its interpretation.”⁷ They answered a second time and said, “Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will show its interpretation.”⁸ The king answered and said, “I know with certainty that you are trying to gain time, because you see that the word from me is firm—⁹ if you do not make the dream known to me, there is but one sentence for you. You have agreed to speak lying and corrupt words before me till the times change. Therefore tell me the dream, and I shall know that you can show me its interpretation.”¹⁰ 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.¹¹ 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.”

¹² Because of this the king was angry and very furious, and commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be destroyed.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.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶ And Daniel went in and requested the king to appoint him a time, that he might show the interpretation to the king. (Daniel 2:1–16 ESV)

The situation here is that the King has had a dream that he cannot quite recall. He knows that it disturbed him and he suspects that it is significant and so he summons his wisemen to give him the dream AND its interpretation – which of course they cannot do. It is an impossible request. They say that very thing in verse 10:

“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.”
(Daniel 2:10 ESV)

Now dreams were very important in Babylonian culture and dream interpretation was one of the main things that wisemen were made to study in that culture. So the issue wasn’t that the dream

was hard to interpret – the issue was that no one could be expected to interpret a dream that the King could not recall.

That was impossible!

That is more than a matter of education and intelligence – such a thing would require direct contact with the gods. That's what the wise men say in verse 11.

“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 2:11 ESV)

So the King's request was impossible – but Daniel recognizes in that a unique opportunity. Daniel, by the way, would have been in his final year of study as a wise man. In chapter 1 we were told that he was put into a 3-year course of study – this crisis occurs in the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign. The Babylonians counted the years of a monarch in a slightly unusual way. There was the year of accession – year 0 basically – year 1 and year 2. And Daniel went into exile in the year of accession so year 2 of Nebuchadnezzar's reign was year 3 of his training – meaning that this was the perfect time for Daniel to position himself as the wisest of the wise men operating in Babylon. So he went to the King and asked if he could take a crack at the challenge.

So we have an impossible request and now in verse 17 we begin to hear about an inspired interpretation.

An Inspired Interpretation

Then Daniel went to his house and made the matter known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions,¹⁸ and told them to seek mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his companions might not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.¹⁹ Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven.²⁰ Daniel answered and said: “Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might.

²¹ He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding;

²² he reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with him.

²³ To you, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, for you have given me wisdom and might, and have now made known to me what we asked of you, for you have made known to us the king's matter."

²⁴ Therefore Daniel went into Arioch, whom the king had appointed to destroy the wise men of Babylon. He went and said thus to him: "Do not destroy the wise men of Babylon; bring me in before the king, and I will show the king the interpretation."

²⁵ Then Arioch brought in Daniel before the king in haste and said thus to him: "I have found among the exiles from Judah a man who will make known to the king the interpretation."

²⁶ The king declared to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, "Are you able to make known to me the dream that I have seen and its interpretation?" ²⁷ Daniel answered the king and said, "No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked,²⁸ **but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries**, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. Your dream and the visions of your head as you lay in bed are these:²⁹ To you, O king, as you lay in bed came thoughts of what would be after this, and he who reveals mysteries made known to you what is to be.³⁰ But as for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because of any wisdom that I have more than all the living, but in order that the interpretation may be made known to the king, and that you may know the thoughts of your mind.

³¹ "You saw, O king, and behold, a great image. This image, mighty and of exceeding brightness, stood before you, and its appearance was frightening. ³² The head of this image was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its middle and thighs of bronze,³³ its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay.³⁴ As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces.³⁵ Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

³⁶ "This was the dream. Now we will tell the king its interpretation.³⁷ You, O king, the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, and the might, and the glory,³⁸ and into whose hand he has given, wherever they dwell, the children of man, the beasts of the field, and the birds of the heavens, making you rule over them all—you are the head of gold.³⁹ Another kingdom inferior to you shall arise after you, and yet a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth.⁴⁰ And there shall be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron, because iron breaks to pieces and shatters all things. And like iron that crushes, it shall break and crush all these.⁴¹ And as you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, it shall be a divided kingdom, but some of the firmness of iron shall

be in it, just as you saw iron mixed with the soft clay.⁴² And as the toes of the feet were partly iron and partly clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly brittle.⁴³ As you saw the iron mixed with soft clay, so they will mix with one another in marriage, but they will not hold together, just as iron does not mix with clay.⁴⁴ And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever,⁴⁵ just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure.” (Daniel 2:17–45 ESV)

So Daniel was given a repeat performance of the King’s dream in a vision of the night AND he was given the correct interpretation through the inspiration and revelation of the LORD. The dream was about a great statue that was made of 4 different types of metal. There was a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, waist of bronze, legs of iron and feet made of iron mixed with clay.

The statue was then struck in the feet of clay by a rock that came from heaven. The statue crumbled into dust and the rock from heaven became a great mountain that grew and filled the world.

That was the dream.

And this is its interpretation.

The dream is about the future. A future dominated by a succession of inter-related Empires. Babylon itself is the head of gold – Daniel states that explicitly. Babylon will be followed by another Empire – slightly less glorious – most scholars understand that as a reference to Medo-Persia. The Medo-Persian Empire in turn will be succeeded by the Greeks – the waist and thighs of bronze. And then Greece will give way to the Romans – the legs of iron with feet made of iron and clay.

All of these empires are really one – they are as St. Augustine referred to them “The City Of Man”. They are EARTHLY POWERS and they will be utterly shattered and supplanted by the coming Kingdom of God. The Kingdom will come during the latter days of the 4th Empire – which

obviously can be identified as Rome. A ROCK will come and like a mustard seed, his Kingdom will grow and grow and grow.

That is the vision of the future that Daniel – by the grace and revelation of God – is able to provide to King Nebuchadnezzar.

That leads us to the final part of the story in verses 46-49. We've heard about the King's impossible request; we've listened to Daniel's inspired interpretation and now we are made privy to a very important promotion.

An Important Promotion

Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face and paid homage to Daniel, and commanded that an offering and incense be offered up to him.⁴⁷ The king answered and said to Daniel, “Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery.”⁴⁸ Then the king gave Daniel high honors and many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon.⁴⁹ Daniel made a request of the king, and he appointed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego over the affairs of the province of Babylon. But Daniel remained at the king's court. (Daniel 2:46–49 ESV)

This is, of course, really similar to the story of Joseph in the Book of Genesis. Tremper Longman III for example says here:

“We thus see that Daniel is like Joseph, perhaps even better than Joseph, since he not only interprets the dream but, with God’s help, actually tells the king the contents of the dream.”¹

So it's the story of Joseph – only better! You recall that God sent Joseph down to Egypt EARLY in order to prepare a place of safety and privilege for the people of Israel. He used a very disturbing dream given to the king in order to provide an opportunity for Joseph to ingratiate himself and earn a significant promotion. That promotion became the means by which God protected and provided for his people during a very difficult season.

¹ Tremper Longman III, *Daniel* in the NIV Application Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 74.

Well – that is exactly what is going on here – only more and bigger! The situation of God's people is quite a bit worse in this story and therefor the grace given to Daniel is quite a bit more spectacular. But the end result is exactly the same: A representative of the people is promoted to an important position and is thereby able to create a space of safety and influence for the nation as a whole.

Now the effect of these events on the people of Israel must have been tremendous. It made them realize that God had not abandoned them. Just as he was with them in Egypt – so will he be with them in Babylon. God is ALIVE! God is watching! God is moving! And God is working a plan!

That's what this story is about – thanks be to God!

Insights, Examples And Instruction:

Now we don't read these stories just to amuse ourselves on Sunday morning. According to the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 10, we read these stories in order to gain insight, in order to observe positive examples and in order to receive helpful and necessary instruction. 1 Corinthians 10 is probably the most important chapter in the New Testament in terms of how we read and make use of the Old Testament. There we hear the Apostle Paul referring to the classic redemption stories in the Old Testament and then he explains why it is helpful for him to do so. He says:

I do not want you to be unaware, brothers (1 Corinthians 10:1 ESV)

These things took place as examples for us (1 Corinthians 10:6 ESV)

Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. (1 Corinthians 10:11 ESV)

So we read these Old Testament stories in order to gain insight, in order to identify positive examples and in order to receive life giving instruction. And we see something from each of those categories in this story in Daniel chapter 2. There is first of all a very important insight for us – we've already touched on it briefly. We see in this story that:

1. God is in control of the present and the future

It's very important for us to understand that – I don't want you to be unaware of that! It must have SEEMED to many of the exiles as if God had somehow lost control over the Israelite experience. It must have SEEMED to many as if the gods of Babylon had in fact overpowered the God of Israel. Why else would Israel have been defeated and why else would they have suffered this tremendous setback?

And that's why in both of these stories we've looked at so far the Bible is so careful to indicate that God has been Sovereign over absolutely everything that has happened thus far.

It was God who brought the armies of Babylon to the gates of Jerusalem – and it was God who determined the outcome of that battle - we saw that in chapter 1 verse 2:

And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God. (Daniel 1:2 ESV)

God ordained this time out – but God had good purposes for his people in this time out – and now, through Daniel – those purposes are beginning to be realized.

God has a plan – and the power to effect it. That's true today – and as the vision makes clear – that's true for tomorrow as well. The Lord is Sovereign over the present and the future – thanks be to God!

Secondly, this passage also provides us with an example to follow. As I said last week, the Book of Daniel was written in large part to provide a template for how God's people should conduct themselves in hostile territory. And what we learn in this story is that, like Daniel:

2. God's people need to make the most of every opportunity that he provides

As I mentioned when we were going through the story, the central tension in this narrative comes from the impossible demand that was made by Nebuchadnezzar. He demanded that his wise men not only interpret his dream – but RECALL IT. He couldn't remember the details of his dream and

he wanted them to provide those details and supply the meaning of them – which of course they could not do. They had been trained to interpret the common symbols in a dream. A horse means power, a tree means life, a bird is an enemy – blah, blah, blah, blah – but no one knew how to SUMMON a dream out of the mists of a man’s memory. Something that like that would require a direct connection with the gods.

And that is exactly the opportunity that Daniel was waiting for!

He didn’t want to be known MERELY as first in his class – he wanted to be known as an agent of the Living God – so he put himself out there. He went to the Captain of the King’s Guard and asked to be inserted into this catastrophe. He asked for an appointment with the King – now generally speaking when the King is threatening to bulldoze houses and tear apart advisors limb from limb – that’s not the day you ask for an appointment. That’s the day you remind everybody that you are still just a student.

But not Daniel.

He sees an opportunity and he seized it. This was a chance to DISPLAY the wisdom and power of Almighty God. And he took full advantage.

Now brothers and sisters listen to me. This is the kind of witnessing we are going to be able to do in this culture if we hold our nerve. Our culture is running headlong into crisis and catastrophe – you know that, how could you not know that if you watch the news? Confusion and chaos are all around. This whole sexual revolution thing is a fast train to depression, disease, loneliness and death. I’m not a biologist but I know that if we all took the advice of the culture the human race would cease to exist in a single generation – so we’re on the fast track to oblivion. Chaos is coming. And it is coming because people don’t know the Lord. It is coming because the wise men in Babylon are a SHAM.

So now is not the time to run for cover – now is the time to put ourselves forward. To say, “we have a connection with God! We know the Lord! If you want a way out of this crisis, you need to talk to us!”

That is what witness will look like for us in 20 years.

So in the next years – we need to go back to school. We need to RELEARN the wisdom and the power of God.

Because confusion is coming – and that represents an opportunity for people who know the Lord.

And thirdly, and finally, there is some very important instruction – some life-giving instruction – in this story as well. We learn in this story that:

3. God's kingdom will shatter and supplant every lesser human power

Daniel is told that a rock will come from heaven – of course living on this side of the New Testament we know that this rock had a name and his name was Jesus Christ! Peter called him:

“A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.” (1 Peter 2:8 ESV)

He is the one who breaks down – and the one who lifts us. And blessed are all those who take refuge in him.

His Kingdom is like a mustard seed. It starts small but it grows and grows and grows.

Nations will come and go.

Empires will rise and fall.

But the Kingdom of Jesus Christ will grow – and ENDURE FOREVER.

So – you better make sure that you are on the right side of history.

You better make sure that you do not put your hope in earthly powers. For they all have feet of clay.

They will all crumble, fade and fall away.

But Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.

His Kingdom will know no end.

He is the Rock who comes from heaven. He is the mountain who fills the entire earth.

This is what was foretold by the prophet Isaiah – many years before Nebuchadnezzar’s dream:

It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it,

³ and many peoples shall come, and say: “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. (Isaiah 2:2–3 ESV)

That is the Kingdom you want to be a part of; that is the future, and I know that because this is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God! Let’s pray together.