
Speaking God's Word to the Nations

Daniel 2:1-49

Introduction Everyone is interpreting their world...

The television shows South Park and the Office are showing how people interpret their world...

Philosophy and psychology are attempts to explain life and people...

Because we are made in God's image, we are meaning makers and interpreters...

People often respond to their interpretations, not to the way the world really is.

You cannot keep on doing the same thing and get a different result...

The long list of "If only..." statements serve as rear-view mirrors on life...

The "I just don't understand..." complaints where false interpretations get run over by the tractor trailers carrying brutal realities...

What is our role as Christians with the Word living among the nations? We have the Word of God. We have God's interpretation of the world. We have Divine answers for the problems and perplexities of this world. What are we to do with them?

This chapter in Daniel highlights the great opportunity and responsibility exiles among the nations have to speak God's Word.

The Problem that Threatened**(v.1-16)**

The threatening troubles and problems of life are unexpected and undeserved.

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.

A Troubling Experience**(v.1-5)**

Nebuchadnezzar has nightmares. Not a good thing when someone with so much power is so troubled he can't sleep. He has this dream, this nightmare. It keeps him awake at night. You know how that can be – monsters greet you in your sleep.

He wants to know what his dream means. He wants his experience interpreted. We are not sure if he remembers the whole dream. But it disturbed him greatly. He senses that the dream means something. But he has no idea what it means. He needs to have it interpreted.

Many people are going through troubling experiences that they want to understand. Here is our opportunity...

An Unreasonable Demand**(v.6-11)**

We have all heard the joke about calling a psychic hotline and being asked, "What is your name?" I mean, I thought you were a psychic?

Though Nebuchadnezzar has had these magicians, fortune-tellers and wizards trained, he does not trust them. The folly of his leadership and the poverty of his advisors are put on public display.

He summons them and explains his trouble. They are no fools. So, they need to know what the dream is so that they can put together their interpretation. They are going to give a “natural” explanation. They will get their version of Dream’s Interpreted or DSM IV on nightmare syndromes. They will be looking into goats guts or throwing dice. Somehow they have words, books, “I believe’s” that make up an interpretive grid for understanding old Nebu’s experience.

Now comes the unreasonable demand. Let them live up to their claims. If you are truly able to supernaturally interpret the dream, then you can supernaturally learn what the dream is. Imagine the shock to these guys.

And here is some additional incentive. “If you can’t do this, then you are fakes and I will tear you apart and destroy your homes.” This is not just some guy on the other end of a phone. This is not some poor struggler sitting across from a desk. This is not some co-worker wrestling with a terrible dilemma. This is the king with absolute power.

Their response is certainly understandable. “This is impossible. No one has ever done it. No one has ever been asked to do it.”

A Dire Threat

(v.12-13)

Well, it isn’t nice to fool with King Nebu. He doesn’t even give them the chance to carry out his demand. He simply decrees that all of them in the kingdom be destroyed.

We might say this is a good thing. Relying on wizards and witchdoctors for explanations of life and troubles is not a good thing.

Except, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah are also targeted. They are in this group. We do not know why they were absent from the court. But, one dark afternoon, they are together and hear a knock at the door. There standing with swords and spears are the King’s guards. “Time to die,” they say.

A Calm Wisdom

(v.14-16)

When confronted with the possibility of death due to an unreasonable demand, Daniel’s faith in God steadies his heart. He inquires into why the decree has gone out. The captain of the guard tells him what has happened.

Daniel makes an appointment to meet with Nebuchadnezzar. At that time, he will tell the king what the dream means. He is expecting God to show him what has been troubling Nebuchadnezzar and what it means.

The Response in Prayer**(v.17-24)**

In the midst of trouble and in the need for help, prayer is our primary resource.

¹⁷ 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 in to 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.”

Its Joint Petition**(v.17-19)**

The four gather to rehearse what is going on and to pray together in a joint petition. They are companions in exile. They are partners in prayer. They will all die together if God does not answer.

Their prayer is not one of demand for what is owed. It is a prayer for God to show mercy. Even in the face of certain death and impossible need, they approach God with confident humility.

God is pleased to answer them. During the night, in a vision, God shows Daniel what king Nebuchadnezzar dreamed.

Its Thankful Praise**(v20-23)**

Praise and thanksgiving should follow prayer. When God moves in power, our hearts should move in praise.

We give thanks for the greatness of our God (v.20-21a). God is sovereign over all our situations. His divine power directs the great movements of history. His providence places us where we are in that story.

We give thanks for the wisdom from our God (v.21b-22). God had given them wisdom in their response to the situation. God had given supernatural insight into what was going on.

We give thanks for the grace from our God (v.23). God had answered their prayers. He had revealed Himself by granting wisdom and knowledge.

Is your heart trained to be grateful? Do you know the songs of thanksgiving by heart?

Its Obedient Action (v.24)

God's grace and mercy to Daniel requires an obedient action. He cannot sit on this knowledge. He must take the risk of meeting with the king and rehearsing what God has shown him. So, he asks the captain of the guard to take him into Nebuchadnezzar's presence. There he will fulfill the king's demand and save the lives of all.

The Telling of the Dream (v.25-35)

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 said 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.

We must be sure that we have the details of the vision as Nebuchadnezzar dreamed and as Daniel related it.

In Humble Recognition of God (v.25-30)

Daniel appears before the king to tell what God has revealed.

He exalts God instead of himself. He praises God, he does not promote himself. This would be a great temptation – to speak as though this were your own discovery, wisdom or ability.

Here is God's man humbly speaking before the king on earth aware of the King in heaven.

It is God's purpose that is being served. King Nebuchadnezzar is being put on notice that the world he lives in needs God's revelation to make sense of it.

With Clear Words in Speech**(v.31-35)**

Simply and vividly, Daniel relates what the dream was. The king had seen an image, large, bright and frightening. It was like a statute of a man. It was made from different metals. Beginning with the head, each was of lesser value. Its head was made of gold, chest of silver, thighs of bronze, legs of iron and feet of iron mixed with clay. In the dream, an unquarried stone, one uncut by human hands, struck the image so that it shattered. The slivers cascaded down and like chaff were blown away in the wind. Then that stone grew into an earth-filling mountain.

Either in its image or in its import, this vision caused deep dread and sleep-stealing fear in Nebuchadnezzar's heart.

The Interpretation of the Dream**(v.36-45)**

So what does this awful dream mean? What does the image represent?

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."

The First Great Kingdom**(v.36-37)**

The interpretation of the dream is sure because the God of history is sovereign. Daniel opens by asserting that Babylon is great and Nebuchadnezzar is king because of God. It is Yahweh that has given to the king his vast and victorious rule. Daniel is connecting the Word of God he will declare with the will of God that has been decreed. Because God has created and ordered the world, then God has the right and authority to interpret it.

God reveals through Daniel that the head of gold is the kingdom Nebuchadnezzar ruled. He is the first of the great Gentile kingdoms that will rule after the fall of the nation of Israel. Now remember that we are looking at redemptive history. We are seeing the order of nations and kingdoms according to God's plan. Yes there were other great Gentile kingdoms. One of them had destroyed the northern tribes. But Babylon has a unique place and role in the flow of redemptive history,

The Succession of Kingdoms

(v.38-43)

Babylon will be followed by a succession of kingdoms, each inferior in some significant way. Daniel does not name these kingdoms. We know now that they are the kingdoms known to us as the Medo-Persian, Greek and Roman Empires. The arms and chest of silver is the Medo-Persian Empire which overthrew Babylon and ruled from 539BC until 330BC. The belly and thighs of bronze are the Greek Empire, founded by Alexander the Great, which ruled from 334BC to 63BC. The Iron is the Roman Empire which defeated the Greeks in 63BC and ruled as a united kingdom till sometime after the death of Christ. What is represented by the toes as a mix of clay and iron is the subject of much debate. Certainly, the idea is that the Roman kingdom continues but as diverse, divided, and weakened by a succession of kings.

This period of history, from the fall of Israel till the coming of Christ as King is known in the Bible as the Times of the Gentiles. We will talk more about this later in our studies in Daniel. Listen though to 2 important texts which give shape to this idea.

LUKE 21:20-28 – Jesus speaking of the future destruction of Jerusalem (70AD) and the coming of the Son of Man (Daniel 7:13).

²⁰ "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. ²¹ Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let those who are inside the city depart, and let not those who are out in the country enter it, ²² for these are days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written. ²³ Alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! For there will be great distress upon the earth and wrath against this people. ²⁴ They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. ²⁵ "And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, ²⁶ people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷ And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. ²⁸ Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

ROMANS 11:25-27 – Paul speaking of the salvation of all the Jewish remnant through the New Covenant.

²⁵ Lest you be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. ²⁶ And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, "The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob"; ²⁷ "and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins."

The Final Kingdom of God

(v.44-45)

The stone that is hewn without hands shatters the kingdoms of men and becomes the mountain that rules the universe represents the kingdom of God. While there may be varying opinions about what it is exactly, that should not keep us from understanding what it is. This sentence makes it clear (v.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." The

power of the God of heaven which will set up His kingdom starting in the days of the iron legs and iron and clay feet will have already destroyed Babylon, Medo-Persia and Rome. In other words, even those empires are the tools of God.

This is an amazing claim to be making in the court of the king of Babylon. If Nebuchadnezzar is going to understand his dream and his world, he must know that God is sovereign. What is going on and will happen in the affairs of men is the invisible hand of God moving as He has determined and decreed. Luke 1:33 and 20:18 are allusions to this text and others like it.

So we have a very general outline of history from God's view. The fall of Israel as a nation launches the times of the Gentiles. Over a long succession of empires, God is working to bring about the establishment of His kingdom. It will begin with a stone not hewn by human hands and will grow into a mighty mountain ruling over all the world. The rest of the book of Daniel will help flesh this out some. But the presence of the future King and kingdom is not the main thing here. The ever present sovereign rule of God over all the events of history is the main point. Exiles among the nations teach and declare the sovereign authority of God. He rules in providence. He must be bowed to in salvation.

The Results in Blessing

(v.46-49)

⁴⁶ 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.

The King's Honor

(v.46-47)

What a stunning response to the message from God's servant. The king falls from his throne to his face. He bows, face down in Babylonian fashion, and honors Daniel. He begins what will be a long road. He acknowledges Daniel's God as the God of gods, the true, the revealer of mysteries.

This is the right response to hearing God's Word. Is this your response? What do you do under the Word? How is your heart moving at this moment?

The King's Appointments

(v.48-49)

Daniel is honored with gifts and wealth and position. He is appointed to two prestigious positions: ruler over the state of Babylon and overseer over all the wise men of Babylon. Do you not think that in this oversight, Daniel taught and thus left a legacy of truth that later, by the Spirit of God, illuminated the minds of the wise men who came from the east, almost certainly, Babylon.

Daniel is a man of both humility and wisdom. So he requests that his three friends also be given significant appointments. They are made his deputies. They would travel throughout the province of Babylon on Daniel's behalf while he would remain in the king's court.

Conclusion What an amazing story. What an amazing man. But, best of all, what an amazing God.

So the kingdoms of this world are subject to the kingdom of heaven. They will all eventually be crushed by the mighty kingdom of God. What we speak then is truth, warning and call. Listen to that as sung by Psalm 2:

Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?
The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers take counsel together,
against the LORD and against his anointed, saying,
"Let us burst their bonds apart
and cast away their cords from us."

He who sits in the heavens laughs;
the Lord holds them in derision.
Then he will speak to them in his wrath,
and terrify them in his fury, saying,
"As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill."

I will tell of the decree:
The LORD said to me, "You are my Son;
today I have begotten you.
Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage,
and the ends of the earth your possession.
You shall break them with a rod of iron
and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."

Now therefore, O kings, be wise;
be warned, O rulers of the earth.
Serve the LORD with fear,
and rejoice with trembling.
Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way,
for his wrath is quickly kindled.
Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

Jesus clarified that this great, world dominating kingdom began with His coming. His kingdom established begins within people's hearts. *"Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, 'The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed, nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.' [Luke 17:20-21].* At His second coming, Jesus will smash all the kingdoms of this world and He will rule and reign forever.

So what about us? Are we dream revealers and interpreters? No, we are Scripture learners and interpreters. But our role in relation to the people we live among is much the same.

They will be baffled, troubled and sometimes even devastated by the experiences of their lives.

They will try to interpret life by myths, lies and deceits which lead them ever deeper into difficulty, defeat and despair.

With the Word of God, we come with God's interpretation of the world they live in. We are here to reveal God and interpret their experiences. We are the Daniel's in the courts, in the businesses, in the homes, in the coffee shops.

How about you?

Does your world seem to be crashing in and making no sense?

Are you as a Christian just as baffled by what seems to go on?

Do you know, understand, and believe God in His Word well enough to help others make sense of their lives?

Like king Nebuchadnezzar, have you, fallen on your face, humbled your heart and bowed to the true God who rules over all and has brought a sure redemption? If you have not and do not know what to do, see one of the spiritual helpers who will be available to speak with you after the service.