

Series Daniel

Scripture Daniel 2:1-30

The first chapter of Daniel is the introduction to the book. That chapter provided important background information about the exile of the Judean Jews to Babylon, and introduced us to four of those exiles, Daniel and his three friends, Hanaiah, Mishael, and Azariah. They were young men who were very genuine and strong in their faith.

Last week we learned about the unwillingness of these four Jewish young men to defile themselves by eating food which, according to the Old Testament law, was unclean. Because of the determination of these young men, and the way in which they handled the situation, God honored them by giving them knowledge and understanding which exceeded the abilities of all others in their peer group. In fact, Scripture states, “in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.”

Today we will learn about one of the ways in which Daniel proved himself to be “ten times better” than all the counselors and advisers in the kingdom.

Read Daniel 2:1-13

The book of Daniel has several very long chapters. Chapter 2 is one of the long ones, so we will cover just the first half today.

Verse 1 states that the events in this chapter occurred “in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar.” We know from historical records that Nebuchadnezzar was crowned king in the fall of 605 BC, shortly after the death of his father. We also know that Daniel probably arrived in Babylon during the summer or fall of 605 BC, and that his three year training program probably began later that year or early in 604 BC. Thus we conclude that Daniel was in the midst of the three year long training program when Nebuchadnezzar had his dream. Keep in mind that Daniel was still a teenager!

Nebuchadnezzar had dreams which troubled him and prevented his sleep. Verses later in the chapter indicate that he had been laying on his bed and pondering the future. The dream and visions which followed were God's response to his thoughts. The dream described "things to come."

Nebuchadnezzar recognized that the dream contained information of great importance, and so he speedily assembled his counselors and advisers in the hopes that they could explain to him the meaning. The "wise men" of Babylonia functioned as both the religious leaders and secular counselors of the empire. They were divided into several distinct groups. Verse 2 mentions four of these groups.

Each group followed its own methods and looked for its own signs and omens, and collectively their objective was to "divine" or determine the course of future events and to interpret the meanings of signs, dreams, and visions. According to Babylonian beliefs, their gods lived in the heavens, so that is where one of the groups, the astrologers, looked in order to discern the will of the gods.

Many Babylonians sought out these "wise men" for guidance and help. It was assumed that they could provide advantageous direction to individuals who sought their help because they had the ability to understand and explain the supernatural. As you might imagine, the "wise men" held a kind of authority over the lives of people.

It was customary for the Babylonian kings to consult frequently with these advisors for guidance in matters of policy and timing. The wise men considered themselves to be especially skilled in the interpretation of dreams. Therefore, they were eager to help the king with his troubling dream if only he would tell them what the dream was.

The Bible does not explain why Nebuchadnezzar refused to describe his dream. Some of the older translations suggest that he had forgotten the contents of the dream, but this conclusion was the result of poor translation work, and also it wasn't logical because the king was later able to confirm the correctness of Daniel's reconstruction of it.

Some commentators suggest that Nebuchadnezzar had his doubts about the claims of his counselors. Most Babylonians would have accepted the advice of the wise men without question, for fear of some kind of supernatural reprisal if they did not. Nebuchadnezzar, however, was a brash, young leader who may not have had a lot of respect for the counselors who had been associated with his father's generation. In spite of his age, Nebuchadnezzar had been extraordinarily successful in his military conquests, completing what his father had not been able to accomplish. He was more secular in his thinking than previous leaders. Later chapters in this book indicate that He had an inflated opinion of himself and his capabilities, and was extremely proud.

And so it seems that Nebuchadnezzar used his dream as an opportunity to validate the interpretations and advice of his advisors. He had no way to evaluate their interpretations, but their ability to describe the dream would prove their authenticity. The king apparently reasoned that if his advisors had the powers of divination they claimed, they would be so in touch with their gods that they would be able to describe his dream as well as give the meaning.

Nebuchadnezzar backed up his demand for a description of his dream with a gruesome threat. Failure to reconstruct his dream would lead to the deaths of the wise men and the destruction of their homes. On the other hand, success in divining the dream would lead to wealth and honor.

However, neither the threat of death nor the inducements of reward were able to change the situation: the wise men were powerless to do what the king demanded. They had no methods or techniques to find out what information had been given to Nebuchadnezzar in his dream. They could only beg the king to change his mind and divulge to them the contents of the dream. Verses 8 and 9 are an indication of the opinion the king had about his counselors. He accused them of delaying tactics and of their conspiracy to tell him "misleading and wicked things."

This is a good time to point out that the book of Daniel was written in two different languages and that the information in the book was for two different groups of people. Verse 4 states that the wise men spoke to the king in the Aramaic language. This was the common language of business and government throughout the Babylonian empire. Chapters 2 through 7 were especially for the benefit of the citizens of the Babylonian and Persian empires. Therefore these chapters were written in Aramaic. Chapters 1 and 8 through 12 were written in Hebrew because those portions of the book had information that was of interest primarily to Jews.

As I stated previously, God wanted to reveal Himself to all the people in the Babylonian empire. The Babylonian people needed to know that their gods were not more powerful than Yahweh, the God of the Jews, even though Babylon had won a great military victory over the people of Judah. Daniel chapters 2 through 7 describe several episodes which all clearly teach that the Lord God of Israel was in charge of the tide of human history.

In regard to the Jewish people, they needed to acknowledge the purposes and the guiding hand of Yahweh in their punishment. They needed to know that Yahweh was not going to abandon them but had actually purposed a long, significant future for them. They needed to be encouraged to press on in their faith, even in their difficult circumstances.

It was essential at this time in history for Yahweh to display His power in such a way that both Babylonians and Jews alike would understand that He was the one true God and the sovereign Lord of history. Through the series of miracles in the first half of the book, Yahweh demonstrated his sovereign power to both the pagan rulers of Babylon and Persia and the Jewish exiles. Daniel was the individual through whom Yahweh revealed Himself to the residents of Babylon — pagan Gentile and Jew alike. The stories of what Yahweh did are enlightening and important, but we must keep in mind that the overall theme of the book is the revelation of the ultimate authority and control of Yahweh.

Now let's get back to the circumstances in chapter 2. The wise men explained, in verses 10 through 13, that the request of the king was humanly impossible. Furthermore, they said, no king had ever asked for such a thing. The Babylonian wise men were partially correct when they stated that no human could tell the king the contents of the dream, and that only the gods could provide that kind of information, and, based on their experiences, the gods were not in close enough proximity to people to reveal such information.

These statements set up the incredible miracle of the revelation provided to Daniel, but first, the tension in the story was raised considerably by the anger of the king. Nebuchadnezzar had numerous virtues, but self-control was not one of them. Upon hearing the accusations of the wise men, he issued the order for the arrest and execution of all of them, including those who were not present, including Daniel and his friends. They were associated with the wise men even though they were still in training. Now let's read the next part of the story.

Read Daniel 2:14-23

Daniel and others outside the court were apparently unaware of what had taken place in the meeting between the king and the wise men. When Arioch, the captain of the royal bodyguard, came to the quarters to take Daniel, Daniel asked why all the wise men had been condemned, and why the command of the king was so harsh.

After Arioch explained the matter, Daniel went to the king and asked for time so that he might interpret the dream. This was a bold move. Daniel was announcing that he, as young as he was, would be able to do what none of the older, more experienced wise men could do. The Bible doesn't explain the basis of Daniel's confidence. Perhaps he recognized that this was a grand opportunity for the reputation and glory of Yahweh to be advanced. It was indeed an opportunity for the one true God to reveal His wisdom and power. The decree against the hundreds of the wise men of Babylonia would certainly grab and focus everyone's attention and stir up emotions throughout the empire. This was the perfect opportunity for God to reveal His sovereignty to Gentiles and Jews alike.

And just think about Daniel's faith commitment. He promised to deliver on something before he had the essential information he needed. There is in Scripture no previous record of the contents of a dream being revealed, although there are reports of dreams being interpreted. There was no precedent to make Daniel think it was possible. ,

After his request for time was granted, Daniel “returned to his house and explained the matter to his friends.” The four faithful Israelites “pled for mercy from the God of heaven.” It is interesting that they did not pray directly for the information they needed. Their desire was first of all “mercy.” One of the very old definitions of mercy explains the reason: “Mercy is a gift of God’s love which is determined by the state or condition of those who receive it.” Think about the circumstances of Daniel and his friends: their lives were at risk and they were totally dependent on God to provide the description of the dream. By faith, they could only cast themselves on the mercy of Yahweh, the one true God who was sovereign over all the heavens.

The phrase, “God of heaven,” was particularly significant in view of the worship patterns of the Babylonians: they worshipped the sun, moon, and stars, the presumed dwelling places of their gods in the heavens. The four friends had a much higher concept of the nature of God. They knew that Yahweh was over the physical objects in heaven.

In response to their prayers, the mystery of the dream was revealed to Daniel in a vision during the night. The Scripture does not give us information about their actual prayer for mercy. However, Daniel’s prayer of praise and thanksgiving is quoted in verses 20 through 23. This prayer focuses on two of the traits of Yahweh: His wisdom and power. These traits are mentioned at the beginning and the end of the prayer, and are illustrated in between. Evidence of God’s power is in His control of events; He changes the times and seasons. “Times” refers to His control of when events in history will happen, and “seasons” here does not refer to the seasons of the year, but to the duration of each phase of history. Another evidence of God’s power is that He sets up kings and deposes them. In this way He controls history.

Most kings assumed that they were called to their office and given privileges and responsibilities by their gods. Daniel’s assertion that the God of Israel was in fact the originator and granter of human authority was a denial of any perceived role of the pagan gods of the nations.

The second characteristic mentioned is wisdom. Daniel affirmed that God is the Source of all wisdom. He reveals things that would otherwise be unknown to humans. Only God can make known “the deep and hidden things” which “lie in darkness.” God is light; He dispels the darkness. Without divine revelation, there is only conjecture and subjective opinion.

In verse 23 Daniel links himself with his ancestors, and he offers his thanks and praise because God had granted him supernatural wisdom and power, just as God had done in previous generations. Daniel gave credit for the wisdom and resultant power that he had received to its proper source, Yahweh. He and his friends had prayed and Yahweh had answered. Yahweh had “made known to them (*plural*) the dream of the king.” Nebuchadnezzar and all of Babylonia were about to be confronted with irrefutable proof that only Israel’s God was real, sovereign, and unlimited in power.

Read Daniel 2:24-30

Daniel went to Arioch, and he took Daniel to the king. The king’s question in verse 26 was about Daniel’s ability. In response, Daniel directed the king’s attention away from himself and placed it where it belonged — on God. Daniel used to the full his opportunity to witness to Yahweh’s unique power. He pointed out that no wise man, enchanter, magician, or diviner had the ability to describe the hidden mysteries of dreams, but that there was a God in heaven who could reveal the unknown. Implied in Daniel’s words were the worthlessness of the gods in the Babylonian belief system, as well as the worthlessness of the practitioners of that system. Daniel quite boldly pointed out the superiority of his God over those gods in which the Babylonians believed.

In verse 30, Daniel explained his role in the revelation of the dream: he was the communicator, the mouthpiece, of Yahweh’s revelation. Like other prophets, Daniel had received information that only God could know and it was his responsibility to pass on God’s mysteries to the king. God wanted Nebuchadnezzar to have an answer to the concerns which had been running through his mind, and His method had been through the process of the dream.

Next time, we will think about the content and interpretation of the dream, and Nebuchadnezzar’s response to Daniel’s words. Let me give you an advanced summary. Nebuchadnezzar was so impressed by Daniel’s ability to communicate the words of Yahweh, that he said, “Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries” (*Daniel 2:47*). That’s what the Babylonians needed to understand.

Daniel is an example for us. In times of crisis we should plead for God's wisdom and power to be revealed in our lives. He is ready to help with our decision making. There is a verse in the New Testament which states: "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him" (*James 1:5-6*).

We should also be willing to tell others what God is doing in our lives and how He is guiding us. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews instructed us, "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise — the fruit of lips that confess his name" (*Hebrews 13:15*).