

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

📖 Daniel 2:1-23

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In Daniel 1 we have a narrative section depicting how Daniel and his friends were taken into exile by the king of Babylon in 605BC. After evaluation they were selected to be trained for three years in the Babylonian worldview. During the training they were provided with room and board and the King's choice food and wine. However, Daniel and his friends had the Mosaic Law hidden in their hearts and did not want to defile themselves with the unclean food and therefore they requested to opt out. When this failed they requested an empirical test be done where they ate only vegetables for ten days. Because of their obedience God blessed them. They proved to be ten times wiser than all the Babylonian academics and were promoted to the highest governmental positions in the kingdom, the king's royal court.

Now we come now to Daniel 2 and if you have chart 2 please pull that out so it's handy. This chapter reports Nebuchadnezzar and his dream of the four metal statue and the stone which outlines the four Gentile kingdoms and the subsequent kingdom of God. This is a structural dream that guides our interpretation of later prophecy. It is parallel to Dan 7, the four beasts and the Son of Man. It's the exact same structure and I'll explain the differences in imagery when we get there. But the important thing at this point is to start laying out the structure of four kingdoms of man which are all Gentile followed by one kingdom of God which is Jewish. That's a major structure for interpreting history and prophecy correctly.

Now sometimes Nebuchadnezzar's dream is called the forgotten dream, but Nebuchadnezzar didn't forget the dream, he just realized the importance of the dream and he didn't understand the meaning and he was skeptical of the dream interpretations of the wise men of Babylon. So he was looking for someone who was a legitimate interpreter of dreams. It's interesting who that turns out to be and that's what we'll be getting into.

In verse 1 notice, **Now in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar.** On chart 2 how old was Daniel in chapter 2? ~17 years old. In truth this chapter occurred before 1:18. 1:18 is when Daniel went in before the king for his final examination. This dream and its interpretation occurred sometime before that examination. So Daniel was still in the school. He hadn't graduated yet and that's why 1:17 says "Daniel even understood all kinds of visions and dreams." It's talking primarily about this dream. And there are a number of other evidences for this

but we don't have time to go into them. Suffice it to say, 2:1 is the year 603BC, Daniel is about 17 years old and he was near the end of his schooling. So verse 1, **Now in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar**, that's more evidence, 605 accession year, 604 first year, 603 **second year**. And what happened that year? **Nebuchadnezzar had dreams**; notice **dreams** plural not singular. Yet we know he had a single dream because of the metal image we see later. So the point of the plural is to emphasize that Nebuchadnezzar was having this same dream over and over and that's how he knew it was important. And you see that it agitated him; the text says **his spirit was troubled and his sleep left him**. So he was agitated and he became an insomniac because of this recurring dream.

Verse 2, **Then the king gave orders to call in the magicians, the conjurers, the sorcerers and the Chaldeans to tell the king his dreams**. The emphasis is on the **then**, at that time, whatever time it was, sometime in the middle of the night when he couldn't sleep because he was bothered by the dream and he couldn't sleep so he called in all the wise men of Babylon. Now we'll go through these four professions in verse 2, there are actually six in all used of this class of men in the Book of Daniel, only four are listed here. The point is not to give details about each of the professions but to say that all the wise men of Babylon were summoned by the king; all the greatest minds. I call them all the wise men because the text does that often, and if you're thinking of the wise men that came to find baby Jesus in Matt 2 I'd say you're thinking along the right lines. They were a class of scholars or advisors to the king of Babylon that came looking for the King of the Jews centuries later.

First, **the magicians** were "those with the stylus," they were sacred writers, they would copy Babylonian texts. So they would be very knowledgeable of the books in Babylonian libraries, at least the ones they copied. Second, the **conjurers** were priests of the Babylonian texts. They presided over the Babylonian libraries and were obviously knowledgeable of these books as well. Third, the **sorcerers** were into witchcraft, they used herbs and charms and various potions to communicate with demons. Fourth, the **Chaldeans** are a class of priests. They may have been the elite of the four because they are going to take the lead in responding to the king. The main idea of this list is to say that all the wise men of Babylon were brought before the king.

Note what they were summoned to do...**tell the king his dreams**. Is the king asking for the interpretation of the **dream**? No, he's asking for the dream itself. If he'd asked for the interpretation of the dream, then that was something these wise men could do. They had developed various techniques for interpreting dreams. These techniques were known only to them. The technique was to turn to source books that stated what symbols in a dream might signify what. So all they had to know was the dream and then they could go to these books and apply the rules and give an interpretation that satisfied people ignorant of the rules. And what they told others was that they could contact the gods and get the interpretation from the gods.

But now Nebuchadnezzar is the king of Babylon. He was a rather new king and so these men had served under his father's administration. And it seems he was skeptical of their interpretations. He had heard their interpretations of his father's dreams and perhaps even some of his own. The bottom line is he wasn't buying it.

So verse 3, The king said to them, **"I had a dream and my spirit is anxious to understand the dream."** Actually it doesn't say **understand the dream** it says **know the dream**, I want to **know the dream**, tell me **the dream**. It's obviously a very troubling dream, he can't sleep, he's had all the wise men in the city of Babylon woken up and brought before him, **tell me the dream**.

Verse 4, **Then the Chaldeans spoke to the king in Aramaic**. This group steps forward, they're a subset of all the wise men of Babylon, they take the lead and they **spoke in Aramaic**. Now this is where the book shifts from Hebrew to Aramaic. Remember I told you Daniel is a strange book because it's unlike any other book in the OT except Ezra, it's written in two languages; Hebrew and Aramaic. From 1:1-2:4a it's written in Hebrew, but from 2:4b-7:28 it's written in Aramaic, and then in 8:1 it's going to switch back to Hebrew all the way to the end of the book in 12:13. So there are two languages in the book and why did we say there are two languages in the book? Two separate audiences. The Hebrew portions are obviously written in the language of the Jews, it's to teach them how to live during the times of the Gentiles and that's what chapter 1 was all about, Daniel and his friends teaching later generations of Jews how to live among Gentiles under discipline and yet be blessed. The Aramaic section is to address Gentiles, it's their language, it's to explain to them the times of the Gentiles, when they are given sovereignty over Israel and how to treat Israel. That's what verse 4 is introducing.

So here come the **Chaldeans**, they speak **to the king in Aramaic: O king, live forever!** This is a customary greeting. **O king**, let your dynasty endure forever! It was 4am mind you, so they were yawning when they said this. **Tell the dream to your servants, and we will declare the interpretation!** It was real easy, just put the dream through their rules of interpretation and bingo, out pops the interpretation.

But they've got a problem in verse 5, The king replied to the Chaldeans, **"The command from me is firm: if you do not make known to me the dream and its interpretation, you will be torn limb from limb and your houses will be made a rubbish heap."** You might think this is radical but there are two things underlying; one, he's obviously very agitated by the dream and two, Nebuchadnezzar is a typical Middle East tyrant. If you don't give him the answer he wants, you're dead. And this description, **you'll be torn limb from limb**, was a very literal way of execution. They tied each limb to horses facing the four points of the compass and all four limbs separated from the torso. And not only that, but also, **your houses will be made a rubbish heap; houses** referring to families, their entire families would be destroyed. So the king is agitated, the king is skeptical of their abilities and the king wants to know the meaning of the dream because he senses its importance. And it is important. Gentiles hardly ever receive dreams from God. Only at the beginning of Israel history did Pharaoh have dreams and a Jew named Joseph interpreted those dreams and now Nebuchadnezzar and a Jew named Daniel will interpret his dreams. Both times the Jews were going to be living within these Gentile kingdoms and so these are important dreams to Gentiles about how to treat the Jews. Nowhere else do you see Gentiles get dreams from God.

But verse 6, if you declare the dream and its interpretation, you will receive from me gifts and a reward and great honor; so on the opposite side of it, if you can do this, material wealth and great public recognition. **Therefore declare to me the dream and its interpretation.** I want both and you say you can contact the gods and through the gods discover the interpretation but I say that if you can contact the gods to get the interpretation then you can just as easily contact the gods and get the dream itself. And if they could do this it would prove the legitimacy of the interpretation. Nebuchadnezzar was a very unusual king in the ancient world because the kings usually accepted the interpretations for fear of displeasing the gods. But not Nebuchadnezzar, he is firm, **declare to me the dream and its interpretation.**

Verse 7, **They answered a second time and said, "Let the king tell the dream to his servants, and we will declare the interpretation."** They can't do what the king is asking. So they make another request, **tell us the dream.**

Verse 8, **The king replied, "I know for certain that you are bargaining for time, inasmuch as you have seen that the command from me is firm, 9that if you do not make the dream known to me, there is only one decree for you. For you have agreed together to speak lying and corrupt words before me until the situation is changed; therefore tell me the dream, that I may know that you can declare to me its interpretation."** Alright, the king is making several accusations here. First, in verse 8, you're **bargaining for time.** Why do they need time? To come up with a solution to their problem, a way to get out of the situation. **Inasmuch as you have seen that the command from me is firm.** They could tell by Nebuchadnezzar's demeanor they were in trouble. His face wasn't too friendly. Secondly, in verse 9 he accuses them of agreeing **together to speak lying and corrupting words before him until the situation is changed.** So now he's saying they're all in it together, they'd all made a secret pact to protect one another. But he's found a way to trap them and that's the logic at the end of verse 9, if you can tell me the dream then I know you can tell me the interpretation. So again, these men underestimated Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar's daddy was not this smart, but Nebuchadnezzar was this smart and so in verse 10 they confess.

The Chaldeans answered the king and said, "There is not a man on earth who could declare the matter for the king," and they're right about that, nobody can read anybody else's mind, you can't read mine and I can't read yours. So this is quite an admission. Then they add, **inasmuch as no great king or ruler has ever asked anything like this of any magician, conjurer or Chaldean.** See all the pagan kingdoms had these professions, except Israel, Israel had a God who was sovereign over all history and could reveal the future because He planned the future and therefore Israel was to listen to God through Moses and the prophets. But all the pagans had an infatuation with knowing the future by divination, by magical potions, by witchcraft, all kinds of special techniques. And I think these guys overstepped their bounds here because you can hear in their tone they're saying "King Nebuchadnezzar, you're being unreasonable, no great king or ruler ever asked anything like this, you're wrong to demand this of us."

Moreover, verse 11, **the thing which the king demands is difficult, and there is no one else who could declare it to the king except gods, whose dwelling place is not with mortal flesh.** This is another huge admission since they claimed to have contact with the gods. It was the central claim of their profession that they could contact the gods and reveal to the king that knowledge. And yet here they admit they don't have contact with the gods.

So verse 12, the king's suspicions were right, and **Because of this the king became indignant and very furious and gave orders to destroy all the wise men of Babylon.** Now you can see the king wasn't kidding back in verse 4 about tearing them limb from limb. He's extremely angry. Several factors led to his extreme anger. First, he still doesn't know the meaning of the dream. Second, he knows it's important. Third, his suspicions about these men have been confirmed, they don't know anything, they're phonies. Fourth, they've been feeding him a line, all the previous interpretations of dreams they made were dubious. So he's furious. But he still has his logic machine, he already worked this all through in advance. What's he going to do? Kill them all. Why? Why kill them all? Because it's a phony profession. These men claimed to be able to do something they cannot do. It is a phony profession.

Now that explains verse 13. **So the decree went forth that the wise men should be slain; and they looked for Daniel and his friends to kill them.** Why **Daniel and his friends** too? Because Daniel and his friends were in training for that profession. They may not be done with the training yet but hey, Nebuchadnezzar reasoned, I don't need any more of these creeps around. Besides, if I can outsmart all of them why do I need them anyway? That's Nebuchadnezzar's thought. And he's right. These guys are just adding intrigue to the kingdom and making a living off of it. There's no use for them. So the **decree went forth that the wise men should be slain.** Now it may be limited to the **wise men** of the city of **Babylon** at this time because verse 12 just says **Babylon** but in 2:49 and 5:1 it says "province of Babylon" referring to the entire country. So while it's hard to tell, probably it's just the city of Babylon, but still, even then, most of the wise men would be in the city of Babylon. So this is going to be a lot of men and their families being killed, their families because these professions usually stayed in the families.

Now **Daniel and his friends** are under a death sentence. In verse 14 you see **Arioch**, he's the king's chief executioner. He's a loyal guy but not a very nice guy. He's commissioned by the king to carry out this decree. He finds Daniel and apparently it's just him and Daniel and he tells Daniel about the death sentence and arrested him. But in verse 14, **Daniel replied with discretion and discernment to Arioch.** And here we come to the heart of the section, with those two words we are given insight into Daniel's character. The first one, translated **discretion** actually means "according to counsel," referring back to the counsel Daniel's parents had given him before the exile. However he **replied to Arioch** it was according to the training his parents had given him. The second word **discernment** means "with good taste," meaning in a suitable manner given the situation, he didn't smart off, he didn't fight the authority, he responded in a suitable manner. This is a tremendous example of

courage under fire! The young man was under a death sentence and the chief executioner is under orders to execute all the wise men of Babylon. There's no discussion, there's execution. But because of Daniel's cool and collected response Arioch isn't going to execute Daniel but inform Daniel of the situation. And so now they are in a discussion and Daniel asks, **"For what reason is the decree from the king so urgent?"** Well, said Arioch, the king has discovered that your profession is a fraud. Of course, Daniel already knew that. Daniel was in training to be a wise man but he knew all this baloney about interpreting dreams was a sham.

Verse 16, **So Daniel went in and requested of the king.** We don't have the whole story, but Daniel went in and requested something **of the king.** This is amazing. You don't do that. You don't just go into the king. That was a very dangerous thing to do. You'd have your head chopped off for that. Can you see that God is sovereign over the situation? Actually God is sovereign over all nations, over all Gentiles rulers. And he survives. I wonder if a hundred years later Esther and Mordecai didn't remember this incident. So he goes in before the king and requests what? **Time.** Yet that's the same thing the wise men requested in verse 8, when Nebuchadnezzar charged them with bargaining for time! So this request for time must be different than the one before or else Nebuchadnezzar would have put him right on the chopping block. So while it simply says **time, in order that he might declare the interpretation to the king,** something is different and we gather, from what Nebuchadnezzar required earlier, that they declare to him the dream, that Daniel requested time in order to be able to declare the interpretation to the king.

Now verse 17 and watch Daniel's immediate action. **Then Daniel went to his house and informed his friends, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, about the matter, 18so that they might request compassion from the God of heaven concerning this mystery,** so he calls his prayer warriors. Now that right there is another tremendous insight into the spiritual character of Daniel. He's got a crisis and he doesn't fall apart, he doesn't lose his bearings, he immediately resorts to prayer, he calls his prayer warriors, hey, we've got a crisis, we're scheduled for execution, let's take it to the Lord in prayer; He rules in **heaven** above over earth beneath. There is a mystery **here,** something unknown to us, inaccessible, but known to God so He's the only one who can reveal this.

Now we're not told what the prayers were like, all we know is they were targeted in v 18 toward God revealing the mystery. O Lord, you are the God of heaven, you rule over all, you know all things, reveal to us the dream that Nebuchadnezzar had in his head that no man on earth can know. So here we have the top four believers in Babylon joining in prayer. And the purpose of the prayer meeting is at the end of verse 18, **so that Daniel and his friends would not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.** So the purpose is that God would distinguish them from the rest of the **wise men of Babylon;** the sacred writers of Babylonian texts, the priests who presided over the Babylonian texts, the sorcerers who utilized various potions and chants and the Chaldeans, the elite class of priests, all of them, along with all the other students in their school, don't forget them because they're in training for this profession. So Daniel and his friends pray to be distinguished.

Now this prayer is going to be answered in a way that is far beyond all that Daniel and his friends could ever ask or think because God is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think. By the end of the chapter you'll see a different answer to the prayer than the one they were asking. And it's an exciting answer to the prayer because it illustrates this great principle that a lot of times our prayers are too short sighted. And if you read ahead you'll discover this great answer to prayer.

But today, in verse 19, we're told Daniel got an answer. They may have prayed for hours, they may have been like you and I and falling asleep praying, but that they must have prayed and prayed we can gather because there was a limited time frame to get back to Nebuchadnezzar with the dream. And within that time frame it comes in verse 19, **Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a night vision.** We're not told the **mystery yet**, that's the subject next week.

Notice it came during the **night** and by way of **vision**, not a dream. A vision was given when you were awake, dreams were when you were asleep. Nebuchadnezzar saw it in a dream and you can't interact in a dream but Daniel got it in vision and you can interact in a vision. So in a vision you can learn more because of the interaction. And I envision Daniel praying and God breaking in and giving him a vision, revealing what Nebuchadnezzar had seen in his dream over and over. God had given Nebuchadnezzar this dream on purpose; He wanted to communicate something to this Gentile king, but observe that Gentile kings can never interpret the dreams God gives them apart from a Jew. It always takes a Jew to interpret. When have we seen this before? With Pharaoh and Joseph in Egypt. Pharaoh had dreams too, recurring dreams, and yet Pharaoh didn't know what they meant, so they found Joseph and Joseph as a Jew had this ability to interpret dreams, and he explained to Pharaoh the seven years of plenty and the seven years of famine. And so Joseph was exalted to great status, second only to Pharaoh in all Egypt. Now what do we have here but a repeat scenario: a Gentile king has a dream, he doesn't have a clue what it means, but a Jew again in his kingdom is given the ability to interpret dreams and he's going to explain it to the king and once again, be exalted to great status in the kingdom. What is God saying by all this?

One thing he's saying is that the link to God comes through the Jewish people. Gentiles get linked to God through the Jews, never independent from the Jews. Even you and I are linked to God through the Jews because 1) all the Bible is authored by Jews. As Paul says it in the NT, the oracles of God were committed to who? The Jews. And 2) Jesus is a Jew, salvation is of the Jews. So the only way to understand and know things about God is through who? The Jews.

The second thing this is teaching is that if Jews living under Gentile rules will submit to Him and honor Him then God will elevate them, God will exalt them among the Gentiles. And that's what we see here. When Daniel reveals the dream and the interpretation of the dream, Daniel will be promoted to the highest level of administration in the entire kingdom of Babylon.

Alright, so we come to Daniel's response and we might expect Daniel to say, thanks God for saving my neck, but the response is much more theological, he turns to *berak*, to blessing or praise and the word includes the posture, he's kneeling in verse 19. **Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven; 20 Daniel said, "Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever.** Now **the name of God** focuses on the character of God, the attributes of God, two of which are mentioned; **wisdom and power belong to Him.** **Wisdom** relating to what attribute of God? Omniscience. God knows all things and Daniel is reflecting on the fact that God has made known to him a portion of His knowledge. And **power**, relating to what attribute of God? Omnipotence. That God can do anything that is compatible with His character. So evidently God has made something known to Daniel that is in His plan and He is powerful to bring it to pass. God is in charge!

What is He in charge of? Verse 21, **It is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings.** Two expressions here, the first one is the bigger idea and the second one is the lesser idea, but they go together and can't be separated from one another. First of all, **It is He who changes the times and the epochs.** This refers to changes in kingdoms. It's used in the same way by Paul in 1 Thess 5. It's saying God is in charge of kingdom changes. Most people think that kingdom changes occur because of military defeat. But military defeat is only incidental to the real cause behind it, namely, God's plan for all the kingdoms of the earth. So we can tell that the dream has something to do with kingdom changes in history. And that's what Nebuchadnezzar was agitated about because he was the king. But it didn't agitate Daniel at all, it actually encouraged him and that's one of the purposes of this dream; to agitate Gentiles and encourage Jews. Second, this idea is included, **He removes kings and establishes kings.** Obviously with kingdom changes you have the removal and establishment of kings in those kingdoms. So again, while most people think what governs changes in government is the voting booth or a slick decision in a smoke-filled room but the real cause behind changes in government is God's sovereignty over all the kings of earth, He raises them up and He brings them down. And I hope you see this in America. Whoever ends up in the oval office is there because of the sovereignty of God. And you have to read Rom 13 in this light. You can't understand it apart from this light. So the dream includes revelation about God's changes in kingdoms and kings. So the first half of verse 21 highlights God's omnipotence to bring about changes in kingdoms and kings.

The second half of the verse relates to God's omniscience, in that He revealed this plan to Daniel. **He gives wisdom to wise men And knowledge to men of understanding.** Daniel recognized the principle that to him who is **wise** more wisdom is given and to him who has understanding more knowledge is given. This flies in the face of the postmodern church which rejects knowledge and emphasizes experience. We can write off the postmodern church as idiocy, sheer idiocy. They hate knowledge and so they are without knowledge. And what does God say His people are destroyed for? Lack of what? Lack of knowledge. Well, Daniel did not lack knowledge and he was given more knowledge. He was just 17, but note that he had knowledge at 17 and he was given more knowledge.

Verse 22, **It is He who reveals the profound and hidden things; He knows what is in the darkness And the light dwells with Him.** There are two things I want to point out about verse 22. The first is this is the night Daniel formally became a prophet. God had never spoken to him before this day. But He did this day. And therefore Jesus refers to Daniel as a prophet. He was a recipient of the **profound, hidden** things, things no man could know but God does know and makes known to Jews. And the second thing is this bit about darkness and light. Light here, as in John I and in 1 John 1, is a symbol for knowledge of God. Darkness is ignorance of God. He who walks in the light knows God, but he who walks in the darkness has neither known God nor seen God. So to walk in the light is to walk in the knowledge of God.

Now, after he has focused attention on who God is and what God does, in verse 23 he concludes with thanks and praise. Thanks and praise are always the proper response to revelation. And he says, **To you, O God of my fathers,** linking himself back to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. **To you...I give thanks and praise; For you have given me wisdom and power; Even now You have made known to me what we requested of You.** Notice the significance of the **we**. It wasn't Daniel alone who requested this, it was Daniel and his friends, so he makes mention of their prayers too, they were a team of prayer warriors. **For you have given me wisdom and power.** God was making Daniel's name great. And that is the proper way for someone's name to become great. We can try to make our name great but that's pride. But those who humble themselves God makes their name great. **Even now You have made known to me what we requested of You. For You have made known to us the king's matter.** So the matter was known only by God and the king and he now made it known to Daniel. In verse 24 he's off, he could have gone during the middle of the night. In verse 25 Daniel told Arioch he hurriedly brought Daniel into the king's presence. There was an urgency to the matter, the king wanted to know, people's lives were at stake.

In conclusion, what can we learn? First, stay calm and collected in a crisis situation. Daniel was able to relax when his life was hanging in the balance. This enabled him to respond appropriately and get into a discussion that led to success. Are you able to stay calm and collected in a crisis situation? Second, go immediately to the Lord in prayer. Prayer is not supposed to be a last resort. It is supposed to be the first resort.

Do you immediately go to the Lord in prayer? Third, Jews always mediate between God and Gentiles. There is no access to God apart from the Jews. The Jews were given the Scriptures and Jesus is a Jew, salvation is of the Jews. Fourth, God is the one who changes kingdoms. He is the author of kingdom changes. It is not wars, it is not ideas, it is not men, it is God who is the unseen hand behind, in and through history. Fifth, God is the one who changes kings, rulers, and authorities. It is not voting booths, coup de tat's, men's decisions in smoke-filled back rooms, it is God. The men involved, of course, they mean evil, as does the one behind them, but God is using them like pawns in a chess match to bring about the ultimate checkmate in history. So you can remain calm and collected, you can go to the Lord in prayer, you can accept that He has a kingdom program for history and that

the kings and authorities that come and go are part of that greater program for history. Or you can decide *not* live by faith and freak out every time something happens in this country that you don't like.

Alright, next week we'll get into the dream itself, so go ahead and read through the chapter to get familiar with the four metal image.