

SESSION THREE

DANIEL 2:1-30

"Dream A Little Dream For Me"

INTRODUCTION

1. This chapter initiates the major section running from 2:1 to 7:28 dealing with the Gentile powers that will dominate over Israel from Daniel's day (when Judah is disciplined by exile) until the time when she enters her greatest blessing at the Second Coming of Christ.

Notice how this unit begins and ends:

Compare ch. 2 & 7. Both have a discussion of the successive Gentile powers that are given authority over Israel and Messiah's kingdom that eventually replaces them.

2. Contrast of Chapters 2 & 7

- a. Observation

Although both chapters 2 & 7 discuss the successive Gentile empires, the first does so by the vehicle of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, whereas the latter is a direct revelation to Daniel himself.

- b. Question

Why is Nebuchadnezzar utilized at all? Why does the dream and its interpretation not go directly to Daniel?

- c. Suggestion

In this manner, not only is the truth revealed, but God is clearly seen as the victor. He is supreme to the Babylonian religious system, and this clarifies that the deportation of ch 1 is not His defeat.

3. Basic Divisions to the Chapter:

- a. Dan 2:1-30 Nebuchadnezzar's Dream and the Revelation to Daniel [this session]
- b. Dan 2:31-49 Daniel Reveals the Dream and Its Interpretation [next session]

A. THE INABILITY OF THE BABYLONIAN "WISE MEN" TO INTERPRET THE KING'S DREAM (2:1-13)

1. The Babylonian "Wise Men" (v 2; cf. v 12)

These were not rulers *per se* but important court officials (a priestly class) who relied upon the occult for supernatural power and obtaining information. One of their primary tactics was through astrology by which they interpreted the celestial bodies and thereby

gave their “advice” to the king. They also utilized magic and sorcery. These practices were forbidden to Israel (Deut 18:10-11).

2. Dreams and Interpretations in the Ancient Middle East

The request by a king for an interpretation of a dream was not unusual. In fact, the interpretation of dreams had become a highly developed discipline. Dream manuals had even been composed with elaborate instructions on proper interpretations.¹ Baldwin writes,

These experts in dreams worked on the principle that dreams and their sequel followed an empirical law which, given sufficient data, could be established. The dream manuals, of which several examples have come to light, consist accordingly of historical dreams and the events that followed them, arranged systematically for easy reference. Since these books had to try to cover every possible eventuality they became inordinately long; only the expert could find his way through them, and even he had to know the dream to begin with before he could search for the nearest possible parallel. The unreasonable demands of the king and the protests of the interpreters in verses 3-11 are in keeping with his character and the known facts concerning dream books.²

3. Lessons

a. The limitations of human wisdom and knowledge (v 10)

In every stage of history, man is insufficient to understand the universe around him (much less the spiritual realm). No matter how advanced in science man becomes, there is a limit to his knowledge. Man needs “special revelation” from God, and if he is willing to listen to God he can have the answers to life’s most significant questions. Dr. Donald Campbell writes,

. . . there *are* absolute answers because God has revealed them. If men persist in rejecting God’s revelation, they have only themselves to blame if they continue in uncertainty and confusion.³

Principle: As we respond positively to the light that has been given to us, more light will be given.

References: Matt 13:10-12 and vv 16-17

Heb 5:12-14

Reminder: If we do not respond positively to the light God gives us, and if we do not apply the Word to our lives and mature, then we have no right to expect God to show us more spiritual truth!

¹A. L. Oppenheim, “The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East,” *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, vol 46, Part 3 (1956):203ff.

²Joyce G. Baldwin, *Daniel*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, 87.

³Donald Campbell, *Daniel; God’s Man in a Secular Society*, 25-26.

- b. The anger of man when it is not under the control of the Spirit of God (v 12)

Notice the contrast between Nebuchadnezzar as anger takes over and Daniel who trusts in God! See Galatians 5:20 which lists “outbursts of anger” as one of the deeds of the flesh. No one wins with anger! Nebuchadnezzar not only had disregard for human life, but he was destroying his own reputation. A wise leader (even among unbelievers) has respect.

B. DANIEL’S INTERCESSION AND PRAYER (2:14-23)

1. Observations and Insights

- a. Daniel’s response to Arioch (v 14)

Daniel is said to have replied “with discretion and discernment.” This has the idea of responding with wise and discrete words. Daniel knew that as long as God had a purpose for his life, no one could take it from him.

- b. The reference to the king’s decree (v 15)

The *NASB* refers to the decree as being “urgent” whereas the *NIV* refers to it as being “harsh.” The first stresses the temporal aspect, while the latter the severity of it. The Aramaic word (ܐܘܪܝܢܐ) can incorporate the idea of both. Perhaps the translation “decisive” would fit, as this could include both ideas. The request for time in the following verse may suggest that the temporal aspect is dominant.⁴

- c. The night vision (v 19)

This was not simply a dream but imagery that arose out of God’s direct intervention.

- d. Daniel blessed the “God of heaven” (v 19)

In contrast to the Babylonian wise men who worshipped the starry heaven and sought to determine the future and supernatural knowledge through astrological means, Daniel’s God is the Creator of heaven and the One who holds them all in place.

- e. Notice the contrast of Daniel’s reaction to that of Nebuchadnezzar

- 1) Nebuchadnezzar - responds to a troubling dream by unreasonable demands and a rash decision in anger to kill others.
- 2) Daniel - responds to the king’s decree without panicking

A Lesson For Our Lives

The true character of a person is revealed in a time of crisis!

⁴Cf. Dan 3:22 where the notion of “urgent” is contextually better. Even the *NIV* translates it that way in 3:22.

Baldwin notes, “The ability to keep calm under severe shock and pressure, to think quickly and exercise faith in a moment of crisis, these are aspects of *prudence* and *discretion* seen in Daniel here (14; cf. Phil. 4:7).”⁵

2. Admirable qualities displayed by Daniel

- a. He had the grace to guard his speech and refrain from making any unwise and inappropriate comments (vv 14-15).
- b. He demonstrated great boldness and faith (v 16).
He had the boldness to seek an audience with the king and the faith to believe that God would do the “impossible.”
- c. He faced the crisis with fellowship and prayer with other believers (vv 17-18).
- d. Once God revealed the dream to him, he took time aside to worship God and thank Him, rather than immediately taking care of the business (vv 19ff).

3. Daniel’s Prayer (2:20-23)

- a. The structure of the prayer

A	Praise for God who possesses <u>wisdom</u> and <u>power</u> (20)
B	God's <u>power</u> : He controls human thrones (21a)
B'	God's <u>wisdom</u> : He has all understanding and reveals hidden knowledge to men (21b-22)
A'	Praise for God who dispenses His <u>wisdom</u> and <u>power</u> (23)

- b. Comments

- 1) The focus of the prayer is God’s power and wisdom

He did this in light of the meaning of the dream and its revelation about the future kingdoms.

- (a) His power

This is illustrated by His complete control over the events of history, particularly in bringing about the reversals of fortune that give history its unpredictability.

“changes the times and the epochs”

This looks at:

- i) appointed times - when events will occur
- ii) periods - stages & duration of things

⁵Joyce G. Baldwin, 89.

Archer states, “God determines when in history events are to take place and how long each process or phase in history is to endure.”⁶

Illustration: Jeremiah 25:11-12 and the 70 years of captivity decreed for Judah.

(b) His wisdom

This looks in particular at God’s omniscience and His complete awareness of all that can happen and will happen. He knows the end from the beginning! What would otherwise remain unknowable and hidden (i.e., the darkness), God has been willing to reveal to Daniel.

“the light dwells with him”⁷

There is not anything which God is not fully knowledgeable of. Nothing is hidden from His sight.

- 2) “He gives wisdom to wise men” (v 21) - note the irony!

C. DANIEL’S PRESENTATION TO THE KING (2:24-30)

1. Notice the contrast of Arioch and Daniel
 - a. Arioch (v 25) - A glory-grabber! With the words “I have found a man,” Arioch attempts to gain the credit for himself as though the king should be indebted to him. He wants to enhance his standing through Daniel’s success (perhaps even to get some of the reward the king had spoken of). As Christians, we must always be careful to let God have the glory, for whatever God does through us is by His grace not solely for our credit (1 Cor 15:10).
 - b. Daniel (v 30) - Notice the humility and the care which Daniel takes to make sure that the applause does not go to him, but to the One to whom it is due. Though Daniel was wise, he does not put the credit there. God did this because he sovereignly wanted to reveal this vision to Nebuchadnezzar.
2. “He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will take place in ‘the latter days’” (v 28) [*NIV* = “days to come”]
 - a. The expression (used some 14 times in the OT) may refer to the near or remote future of the prophet.
 - b. No matter how much intervening reference is in view, the viewpoint of the future includes a Messianic aspect, and ultimately looks to the establishment of the Messianic kingdom on earth.

⁶Gleason Archer, *Daniel*, Expositor’s Bible Commentary, 7:43.

⁷Wood remarks, “To say that light thus dwells with God means that He has it constantly. The overall thought of the verse is suggested to Daniel by God’s revelation, just given, bringing ‘light’ on the ‘darkness’ of the ‘deep and hidden’ dream of the king” (Leon Wood, *A Commentary on Daniel*, 61).

- c. In the context of Dan 2, this expression looks at the future from Nebuchadnezzar's day onward to the Second Coming of Christ.
3. Daniel's Testimony to the King (vv 27-28)
- Although Daniel's primary reason to appear before the King to explain the dream, notice that he takes advantage of the opportunity to witness to Nebuchadnezzar.
- a. Verse 27 - He denounces the polytheistic religion of the Babylonians
 - b. Verse 28 - He declares that the true God who can reveal mysteries is the God of heaven. Hence He is unique (28). Notice, however, that Daniel stops short of saying that Yahweh is the only God who exists. He first must get Nebuchadnezzar to consider Yahweh as being superior to the pagan gods of Babylon (comp. 2:47).

A Lesson For Our Lives

Nebuchadnezzar was the most powerful person on earth at that time in history, and yet Daniel had the faith and courage to bring a testimony to him. Sometimes we are timid to approach an important person in our society with the truth. However, two things need to be kept in mind:

- 1. No matter how important they might be in our culture, they are only human and subject to God just like anyone else.
- 2. Their eternal destiny depends upon the decision they make about Jesus Christ. Often people overlook them, but they need the truth and gospel.