

The Book of Daniel

Week 2: Chapter 2

Introduction: As we transition to chapter 2, remember that we enter the Aramaic part of Daniel. Notice how the first part, written only to the Israelites, dealt with Israelite laws and faith. As soon as Daniel begins writing to the general public, he doesn't attempt to force Jewish laws upon them. Instead he offers up historical stories with Gospel interventions. This is why the Lutheran church is so keen on law/gospel distinctions. They're found throughout Scripture.

Chapter 2

Verses 1-11:

Chapter 2 begins by telling the reader that Nebuchadnezzar had troubling dreams that often woke him and kept him awake for the rest of the night. What kinds of anxieties might Nebuchadnezzar have and why? (Hint: what do we know about Nebuchadnezzar based on how Daniel introduced him in verse 1?)

Nebuchadnezzar had just taken over as king. Daniel says that these dreams began in just his second year as king. As a young king taking over a global power, anxiety could easily arise from thoughts of inadequacy, fear for life, failure, no confidence from support staff, etc. And when anxiety starts ramping up, dreams often follow suit. So it's no surprise that this is happening to Nebuchadnezzar.

Nebuchadnezzar called in his wise men to interpret the dream. That seems like a pretty easy task, even if they were faking it, for they could just make up whatever sounded right and pleased the king. But unfortunately the king asked for one other thing that made them fearful, for it was something they could not do. What was it?

Verses 2 and 6 both tell us that the king requested the wise men not only interpret the dream, but tell it to him. He was asking them to tell him what his dreams were without him revealing them. This was a way to test whether they were truly able to interpret or not. If they did have some mystic power behind them, then that mystic power should also be able to show them the dream, not just interpret it.

What made the wise men so fearful to fulfill the king's request? What was promised if they succeeded? What was promised if they failed?

If they answered him correctly, they would be rewarded with gifts and honored by the king. However, if they turned out to be deceivers, not only would they be killed, but their families would be punished as well. The wise men were therefore fearful because they knew they had not the power or wisdom to actually do what the king employed them to do.

King Nebuchadnezzar sees their hesitancy as he responds a second time. What does he say in verse 9 that tells us that he doesn't fully trust the wise men?

He says that they have spoken lying and corrupt words. The king seems to know when they are telling the truth and when they are flattering him. He doesn't seem to care as long as things go his way. This time, however, is different. Flattery isn't good enough because he's losing sleep over these dreams.

Knowing that the jig is up, the wise men admit that they cannot tell and interpret the king's dream. Who do they say *could* actually interpret it?

They say only a god, whose is not of the flesh, could do such a thing.

Despite the situation being tense, the theme of humility in the book of Daniel still shows in these verses. Where do we see the humility of King Nebuchadnezzar? The wise men?

The king shows humility by admitting that he cannot overcome his anxiety by himself and searches for wisdom from someone else. The wise men show humility by understanding their limitations and not trying to fake their way through the dreams. Understand that Daniel is not trying to show that humility means a person is good, but teach that humility is what helps people grow, even if they are wicked people. He's both building upon what he and his companions did in chapter 1 and preparing the reader for the contrasting theme of chapter 3. But we'll get there.

Verses 12-16:

Daniel was not present when the king demanded his dreams be interpreted. However, Daniel's life was still in danger. Why? What was the king's response to the wise men's failure and what do we know about Daniel and his companions from chapter 1?

Daniel and his companions were lauded as being the best of the servants, especially when it came to wisdom. So naturally they were considered wise men of the kingdom as well. This was troubling because the king demanded all wise men be killed for the failure of the ones who were in his court.

When the king's guard appeared at Daniel's door, what words are used to describe Daniel's response to the captain of the guard? What does Daniel's calm response tell us about him?

Daniel responded with prudence and discretion. He was cautious, knowing that a wrong answer could turn sideways very fast. He was able to remain calm because he trusted in God. Like we saw in chapter 1, Daniel's faith was not misplaced. He knew who his God was and what his God would do.

Whether Arioch had previous rapport with Daniel or perhaps God was again working in the heart of one of the king's officials, Daniel was given the opportunity to come to a compromise. What did Daniel request of the king and for what purpose?

Daniel asked for a time to go before the king so that he might interpret the dream. Notice that Daniel responds with confidence before he even takes time to talk to God. He trusts God so much that he's willing to bet his life on it.

Verses 17-23:

After Nebuchadnezzar agreed to Daniel's request for time, what help did Daniel enlist from his friends?

He asked them to pray for him so that God would be merciful. He asked to be spared from the fate of the other wise men and to be given insight.

How did God answer their prayers? What was Daniel's response to God?

God responded by sending Daniel a vision, most likely showing him the dream of Nebuchadnezzar and telling Daniel what it meant. To this, Daniel responded with praise and thanksgiving. He blessed God, knowing exactly who it was that provided for him in this time of trouble.

Notice all the things that Daniel praises God for after the vision. He doesn't just thank Him for being able to interpret dreams, but recognizes Him as the Lord of creation: He changes times and seasons, removes and sets up kings, give wisdom and knowledge, reveals things, knows what is in the darkness, etc. When Daniel thanks God he doesn't just thank Him for the one thing that God gave him, but for being the very God who created all things. This shows the depth of Daniel's faith to not just do as little as possible, but fully invest in God in all things.

Verses 24-30:

Now, despite the king's wise men being fakes, what was Daniel's response to Arioch concerning them and why might Daniel have chosen such an outcome?

He asked Arioch to not kill all the wise men of Babylon. Besides this being a clear example of loving someone who is your enemy, perhaps Daniel also saw this as an opportunity to share the Gospel. Saving someone's life often buys you at least one exchange where they'll listen to you.

As Daniel approaches the king, once again Nebuchadnezzar reminds Daniel of the depth of his request. He must not only interpret the dream, but tell Nebuchadnezzar what it was. However, this doesn't faze Daniel, most likely because of what he saw in the vision. Instead, he calmly responds to the king. How does Daniel show humility twice in his opening sentences to the king? (Hint: think about what separates him from the rest of the wise men)

As Daniel tells the king just how he will interpret the dream, he 1) doesn't take credit for the dream, giving it all to God instead, and 2) says that the dream was not shown to him (Daniel) for his own good, but for the sake of the king. Daniel understands his role as God's mouthpiece in this situation. This is a message from God to Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel is nothing more than a messenger.

Verses 31-45:

Daniel uses verses 31-35 to carefully describe intricate details of Nebuchadnezzar dream. What are some details what stick out to you?

Different materials for different body parts. Stone destroying metal. Stone cut but not by human hand. Stone became mountain.

We see a story starting to form, but without yet interpretation. Because of the clear cut differences in types of metal used for the statue, and because of the stark contrast of the stone that wasn't a part of the statue, we can easily expect to see them all represent different things.

Before we move forward to the interpretation, from Biblical and human history, what might we expect the metals and rock to represent and why?

As humans, we know that history has often classified industrial growth in terms of metals: iron age, bronze age, golden age, silver age, etc. So we should expect the parts of the statue to line up with different stages of humanity or at least different ages of leadership. Now for stone we might be tempted

to think stone age, but the dream clearly had stone separate from the statue. What Biblical history might help us interpret this word/image? The word stone/rock is often used to describe God, the one who is faithful, who never wavers. So we should expect to see the opposition to the metal to be something divine.

Image's Body Part	Material	What it Represented
Head	Fine Gold	King Nebuchadnezzar
Chest and arms	Silver	Inferior Kingdom
Middle and Thighs	Bronze	Third Kingdom, one that will rule over all the earth
Legs and Feet	Iron and Clay	Strong but divided kingdom

What do we know about the strength of the listed materials that will help us understand which material represents which nation?

The materials start with the most valuable and end with the least valuable, but also start with the weakest and end with the strongest in terms of metals. This means we should expect each subsequent nation to get stronger, but also lose other aspects in the process.

The first nation is given to us by default. Daniel says that Nebuchadnezzar, who is the representation of Babylon, is the fine gold head. However, the other three we are left to guess given small clues. Who came after the Babylonians as the world power? (Hint: who was in charge during the time of Esther?)

The silver chest and arms is most likely the Medo-Persians. We know they conquered the Babylonians because they took Babylon as their first capital. However, though they were stronger than the Babylonians, they definitely had less civility. Their lack of rules, regulations, and accountability caused them to very quickly be defeated in turn. Which leads us to our next nation.

Once the silver kingdom had it's turn, they would also be conquered by a stronger nation, but this time one that had a bit more structure. This nation would conquer the vast majority of the known world and spread it's language and culture throughout. Which nation might this be?

Greece. Known for conquering the known world under Alexander the Great, Medo-Persia through Africa would be taken as Greek states. What would become the 10th largest kingdom in the history of the world, the Greek empire was made up of the Ptolemaic, Seleucid, Macedonian, and a couple other kingdoms. They would hold that record until the 700's when Islamic caliphates would take over the entirety of the Middle East.

Despite holding the record for largest kingdom for almost a thousand years, they would only hold the land itself for a few hundred. Soon after conquering, the bronze kingdom would fall to the iron and clay, for the bronze spread itself too thin. Therefore the fourth and final kingdom would be what?

Rome. Known for their military prowess, Rome would easily conquer the spread Greek empire and become the fourth and final kingdom in Nebuchadnezzar's dream. The iron represents the military strength, while the clay represents the Roman's openness to mixing cultures and ethnic groups. Biblically, we see that Rome allows Judah to operate with their own faith and culture while being subsets of their kingdom. This would not happen under Greek or Persian rule, which would allow to divisive beliefs and plans to exist.

So Daniel gives this interpretation of kingdoms that will rise and fall based on their position in the statue, but the dream doesn't end there. The last part of the dream deals with the stone, which destroys the statue. What does Daniel say the stone is?

The stone is God and his kingdom. It smashes the iron/clay feet and the rest of the statue, setting up a kingdom that lasts forever in their place. This only solidifies the belief that the last material is the Romans, because when does God's kingdom start in the Bible? During the time of Jesus, right in the middle of the Roman empire.

Verses 46-49:

Daniel interprets this dream of a four part statue shattered by the stone. As he refers to different nations, it's easy to see how historically this prophetic dream is fulfilled. It's also easy to see how it's spiritually fulfilled as the Christian faith remains strong to this day, a kingdom that hasn't fallen. Knowing what Daniel had told him, how does Nebuchadnezzar react to this interpretation? What does that response indicate?

Nebuchadnezzar immediately fell upon his face and honored Daniel. He knew that Daniel's interpretation was real. He knew that Daniel's God was real.

What is the end result for Daniel and his companions because of this interpretation? Why does Daniel separate himself from their new positions?

Daniel and his companions are given positions of authority throughout Babylon, but Daniel chooses to stay in the king's court. Daniel recognizes that he was given different gifts than his companions, so he chooses to remain in a place where they will best serve him.

Conclusion:

What does Daniel 2 teach us? Daniel was a man placed in an unfortunate position. But the first time he is given an opportunity to move up and self-serve, he doesn't put himself first. Consider how you respond when people give praise and honor to you. Are you like Daniel? Do you see it as an opportunity to point people to God, who gave you your gifts and abilities?