

The Book of Daniel¹⁵

Lesson 2

Daniel Chapter 2

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream of a Statue 604 BC

In Daniel 1:17-21, the unknown author of this book summarizes the ultimate favor of the Lord on the four Hebrew boys living in Babylon after entering the three-year training course of Nebuchadnezzar, and, specifically Daniel's favor from and service to the kings down to 536 BC, when the kingdom falls under the control of Cyrus the Great. With the beginning of chapter 2, the author returns to the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's rule that coincides with the second years of training for all the "Sons of Israel," including Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

Nebuchadnezzar's Call

Daniel ^{2:1} Now in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; and his spirit was troubled and his sleep left him. ^{2:2} Then the king gave orders to call in the magicians, the conjurers, the sorcerers and the Chaldeans, to tell the king his dreams. So they came in and stood before the king.

Nebuchadnezzar's dream occurs during his second year as king in Babylon in 604 BC.¹⁶ Daniel, his friends and all the "Sons of Israel" have just started their second year of the three-year training course for serving in the king's court.

Nebuchadnezzar's dream is disturbing and deeply troubling, robbing him of his sleep. He orders four groups of people to his court and demands that they reveal to him his dream. What are the regular duties of these four groups of men summoned to the court?

The **Magicians** devise horoscopes for the kingdom.

The **Conjurors** practice enchantments.

The **Sorcerers** whisper spells and practice witchcraft.

The **Chaldeans**, in this context, are the professional teachers of the magicians, conjurers and sorcerers.

The assembly of these four groups represents the wisest men of the Babylonian Empire.

¹⁵ All Scriptures in this lesson entitled "The Book of Daniel" are taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE, Copyright (C) 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1988, by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

¹⁶ Nebuchadnezzar becomes the King of Babylon in the middle of 606 BC when his father dies. Nebuchadnezzar has swept through Assyria in 612 BC, capturing it for his father. He has captured Syria/Aram by 609 BC and Egypt that same year. Because Egypt has taken control of the Southern Kingdom with the death of Josiah in 609 BC, upon conquering Egypt in that same year, the Southern Kingdom comes under Babylonian rule at the same time. In 606 BC, with the death of his father, Nebuchadnezzar becomes king and travels to the Southern Kingdom to remove Jehoiakim from the throne and take the best of the "Sons of Israel" to Babylon to put in his service. (Daniel Chapter 1) Therefore, Nebuchadnezzar's second year will start sometime during 604 BC.

Nebuchadnezzar's Announcement

Daniel ^{2:3} And the king said to them, "I had a dream, and my spirit is anxious to understand the dream."

These four groups are assembled and Nebuchadnezzar announces that he has had a dream that he wants interpreted. He is anxious about the dream. He is worried, fearful, concerned, uneasy, fretful, apprehensive, and fearful, all rolled into one word, anxious.

Chaldean's First Answer

Daniel ^{2:4} Then the Chaldeans spoke to the king in Aramaic: " O king, live forever! Tell the dream to your servants, and we will declare the interpretation."

"O king, live forever!" is another way of saying "Long live the King!" It is the oath pledged to a god by the people at the king's coronation. They reply, "tell the dream to your servant," and we will declare the interpretation."

King's Command

Daniel ^{2:5} The king answered and said 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. ^{2:6} "But if you declare the dream and its interpretation, you will receive from me gifts and a reward and great honor; therefore declare to me the dream and its interpretation."

Nebuchadnezzar then says, "declare to me the dream and the interpretation," and his command is firm. What is the penalty if they do not tell him his dream? Nebuchadnezzar will have them "torn limb from limb" and all their families will be destroyed. What will be the result if they do tell him his dream? Nebuchadnezzar will lavish them with gifts and great honor.

Chaldean's Second Answer

Daniel ^{2:7} They answered a second time and said, "Let the king tell the dream to his servants, and we will declare the interpretation."

The Chaldeans need to know the dream in order to devise an interpretation. Once again, the Chaldeans request that the king tell them the dream.

King's Firm Command

Daniel ^{2:8} The king answered and said, "I know for certain that you are bargaining for time, inasmuch as you have seen that the command from me is firm, ^{2:9} that 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."

The king knows his Chaldeans are stalling. They hope he will throw some part of the dream out into the conversation so they will have a starting point for the interpretation. Nebuchadnezzar wants to know if his men can do the miraculous; after all, they claim to be able to see the future, write the horoscopes and divine all sorts of wonders with their sorcery. The king knows that they are trying to buy time

until they gather enough information to put together the pieces of the puzzle. The king is firm in his resolve. The Chaldeans must tell him the dream and the interpretation and he will not reveal one single fact from his dream.

Chaldean's Third Answer

Daniel ^{2:10} The Chaldeans answered the king and said, "There is not a man on earth who could declare the matter for the king, inasmuch as no great king or ruler has ever asked anything like this of any magician, conjurer or Chaldean. ^{2:11} Moreover, 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."

The Chaldean's third answer reveals the truth about their abilities. "Not a man on earth ... could declare the matter" is the truth of their position. To the Chaldeans, Nebuchadnezzar's command is an impossible request, one that no other great king of the earth had ever made of his servants. His request is beyond the extent of their conjuring abilities and as far as they know, absolutely no man on earth can tell the king his dream. Additionally, the Chaldeans declare that only the gods can fulfill his request because it is too difficult.

Nebuchadnezzar's Decree

Daniel ^{2:12} Because of this the king became indignant and very furious, and gave orders to destroy all the wise men of Babylon. ^{2:13} So the decree went forth that the wise men should be slain; and they looked for Daniel and his friends to kill *them*.

The Chaldean's third answer makes the king furious. He "gave orders to destroy all the wise men." The king wants nothing to do with these lying and corrupt so-called "wise" men of Babylon. They speak of dreams and visions, tell the future and proclaim magical powers, but they cannot fulfill Nebuchadnezzar's request. To kill them is his resolve. Therefore, the King's bodyguard begins to search for all the wise men of Babylon in order to kill them. The king's guards even gather the "Sons of Israel" in Nebuchadnezzar's training program and kill them because their training to be wise men is under the direction of the Chaldeans who cannot fulfill Nebuchadnezzar's request. Why are they specifically searching for Daniel and his three friends? Where are the four Hebrews? For whatever reason, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are among those hunted down for slaughter with the rest of the Chaldeans of the Babylonian Empire.

Daniel's Reply

Daniel ^{2:14} Then Daniel replied with discretion and discernment to Arioch, the captain of the king's bodyguard, who had gone forth to slay the wise men of Babylon; ^{2:15} he answered and said to Arioch, the king's commander, "For what reason is the decree from the king so urgent?" Then Arioch informed Daniel about the matter.

Arioch, the captain of Nebuchadnezzar's bodyguard, has been assigned the task of going through Babylon to gather and kill the wise men. When he comes to the students of the school, Daniel very carefully, "with discretion and discernment" asks Arioch the reason for the urgency in killing the wise men. For whatever reason, Arioch takes the time to explain the matter to Daniel.

Daniel's Request

Daniel ^{2:16} So Daniel went in and requested of the king that he would give him time, in order that he might declare the interpretation to the king.

As a student of Nebuchadnezzar's school, Daniel convinces Arioch to take him to the king to request a little time before he kills all the Chaldeans and he will declare the dream to the king. Once again, we see the integrity of Daniel. He does not attempt to stall the king; rather, he directly asks for time before he reveals the dream and its interpretation. We can only assume that the king's response was positive to Daniel's request because Daniel is allowed to leave the presence of the king to determine the dream and its interpretation. However, the Scripture does not tell us how Nebuchadnezzar replied to Daniel.

One other thing should be noted at this point in the story. Although Daniel has been in Nebuchadnezzar's school for just over a year and perhaps the king has seen Daniel among the "Sons of Israel" in the school, Daniel's conversation with Nebuchadnezzar in verse 2:16 is the first recorded conversation between the two men. Daniel 1:17-20 summarizes Nebuchadnezzar's favor upon Daniel in the future, but the context of Daniel's story in 1:1-17 reveals no contact with the king. Only in the second year of Daniel's training does he interact with the king for the first time.

Daniel's Prayer

Daniel ^{2:17} Then Daniel went to his house and informed his friends, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, about the matter, ^{2:18} in order that they might request compassion from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his friends might not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.

Leaving Nebuchadnezzar's presence, Daniel finds his three friends in his own house. This passage does not mean that Daniel possesses the means to purchase a house in Babylon; rather, it simply means that Daniel finds his friends in the living quarters provided by the king for all the "Sons of Israel" in the three-year training course.

Daniel's prayer includes two parts: first, that the Lord will reveal the dream and the interpretation to Daniel and second, that they will not die with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. Has the bodyguard already killed the rest of the wise men that they have found? We do not know. However, if Daniel can reveal the mystery to the king, the killings will surely stop. Certainly, not all have met their deaths because the Chaldeans are involved in the plot against Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the next chapter involving the fiery furnace.

Daniel's Blessing

Daniel ^{2:19} Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a night vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven; ^{2:20} Daniel answered and said, "Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever, For wisdom and power belong to Him. ^{2:21} "And it is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings; He gives wisdom to wise men, And knowledge to men of understanding. ^{2:22} "It is He who reveals the profound and hidden things; He knows what is in the darkness, And the light dwells with Him. ^{2:23} "To Thee, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, For Thou hast given me wisdom and power; Even now Thou hast made known to me what we requested of Thee, For Thou hast made known to us the king's matter."

Gathering his three friends together, Daniel prays with them for compassion from God. God answers their prayers and the men give praise and honor to Him. Perhaps the author's statement in Daniel 1:17 is intended to point to this first face-to-face interaction with Nebuchadnezzar when he says, "And as for these four youths, God gave them knowledge and intelligence in every branch of literature and wisdom; Daniel even understood all kinds of visions and dreams."

Arioch's Introduction

Daniel ^{2:24} Therefore, Daniel went in to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to destroy the wise men of Babylon; he went and spoke to him as follows: "Do not destroy the wise men of Babylon! Take me into the king's presence, and I will declare the interpretation to the king." ^{2:25} Then Arioch hurriedly brought Daniel into the king's presence and spoke to him as follows: "I have found a man among the exiles from Judah who can make the interpretation known to the king!"

Daniel returns to Arioch and pleads with him not to destroy the wise men of Babylon because he knows the dream and the interpretation and promises to tell the kings if Arioch will take him to Nebuchadnezzar.

Arioch knows the urgency of taking Daniel to the king. Nebuchadnezzar has allowed Daniel the time to discover the dream and its interpretation, but Arioch does not want to tarry too long or Nebuchadnezzar might give orders for someone else to destroy the wise men. Arioch presents Daniel to the king once again.

Nebuchadnezzar's Question

Daniel ^{2:26} The king answered and said to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, "Are you able to make known to me the dream which I have seen and its interpretation?"

Nebuchadnezzar inquires of Daniel whether or not he knows the dream and the interpretation.

Daniel's Answer

Daniel ^{2:27} Daniel answered before the king and said, "As for the mystery about which the king has inquired, neither wise men, conjurers, magicians, nor diviners are able to declare *it* to the king. ^{2:28} "However, there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will take place in the latter days. This was your dream and the visions in your mind *while* on your bed."

Daniel knows the dream and the interpretation but he gives Nebuchadnezzar a witness of the true God before he reveals the dream, giving praise to God. Daniel then explains to the king the reason for his dream. The dream allows Nebuchadnezzar to know the future.

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

Daniel ^{2:29} "As for you, O king, *while* on your bed your thoughts turned to what would take place in the future; and He who reveals mysteries has made known to you what will take place. ^{2:30} "But as for me, this mystery has not been revealed to me for any wisdom residing in me more than *in* any other living man, but for the purpose of making the interpretation known to the

king, and that you may understand the thoughts of your mind. ^{2:31} "You, O king, were looking and behold, there was a single great statue; that statue, which was large and of extraordinary splendor, was standing in front of you, and its appearance was awesome. ^{2:32} "The head of that statue was made of fine gold, its breast and its arms of silver, its belly and its thighs of bronze, ^{2:33} its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. ^{2:34} "You continued looking until a stone was cut out without hands, and it struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay, and crushed them. ^{2:35} "Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were crushed all at the same time, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away so that not a trace of them was found. But the stone that struck the statue became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. ^{2:36} "This was the dream; now we shall tell its interpretation before the king.

Verses 29 through 36 record Nebuchadnezzar's dream as God has revealed it to Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar has not shared the dream with anyone and he must be astounded as he hears Daniel tell the dream in detailed order. More important than the dream is the interpretation of the dream for students today, yet, Nebuchadnezzar must be more astounded that Daniel knows the dream.

Daniel's Interpretation

Head of Gold

Daniel ^{2:37} "You, O king, are the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, the strength, and the glory; ^{2:38} and wherever the sons of men dwell, or the beasts of the field, or the birds of the sky, He has given them into your hand and has caused you to rule over them all. You are the head of gold.

Nebuchadnezzar is the head of gold and the kingdom is a gift to him from God, a kingdom prepared and erected for him by God. Everything in the kingdom, both man and beast, is under the Nebuchadnezzar rule because God has given him the Babylonian Empire.

The Babylonian Empire lasts from 606 BC until 536 BC. The creation and placement of the head of gold is fulfilled.

Kingdoms of Silver and Bronze

Daniel ^{2:39} "And after you there will arise another kingdom inferior to you, then another third kingdom of bronze, which will rule over all the earth.

Daniel does not say that the second kingdom is made of silver, but that information is in verse 2:32 in the description of the dream. Just as silver is inferior to gold, the second kingdom will be inferior to Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom. In the dream, Daniel also states that the second kingdom will have two arms. History has proven Daniel's interpretation to be correct. Cyrus' kingdom of silver which has two arms, the Medes and the Persians, swallows up the Babylonian Empire in 536 BC and lasts until 333 BC. The prophecy of the chest of silver is fulfilled.

A third kingdom comprising the belly and thighs is of bronze. Alexander the Great conquers the Persian Empire and creates the Greek Empire beginning in 333 BC, swallowing up the Persian Empire and lasting until 63 BC. The prophecy of the belly and thighs of bronze is fulfilled.

Kingdom of Iron

Daniel ^{2:40} "Then there will be a fourth kingdom as strong as iron; inasmuch as iron crushes and shatters all things, so, like iron that breaks in pieces, it will crush and break all these in pieces.

A fourth kingdom of strong iron, the Roman Empire, engulfs the Greek Empire. It begins in 63 BC, and later, divides into two empires.

Kingdom Divided

Daniel ^{2:41} "And in that you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, it will be a divided kingdom; but it will have in it the toughness of iron, inasmuch as you saw the iron mixed with common clay.

Diocletian divides the Roman Empire into two empires in 286 AD because of threats from the Germanic tribes to the north and the Persians to the east. Diocletian rules the west and Maximian rules the east. In 324 AD, Constantine, the western emperor, reunites the two empires. When Theodosius becomes the emperor, he divides the empire again in 395 AD. Theodosius is the Augustus over both and Honorius is the Caesar in the west and his brother Arcadius is the Caesar in the east. The Roman Empire, which encompassed the previous Babylonian, Persian and Greek Empires, is divided into the two legs of Iron in 395 AD. The west leg falls to the Germanic tribes in 476 AC. The east leg, called the Byzantine Empire, falls to the Muslim Ottoman Turks in 1453 AD. The prophecies of both legs of the divided Roman kingdom as been fulfilled.

Ten Toes

Daniel ^{2:42} "And as the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of pottery, so some of the kingdom will be strong and part of it will be brittle.

^{2:43} "And in that you saw the iron mixed with common clay, they will combine with one another in the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, even as iron does not combine with pottery.

In 476 AD, when the Germanic tribes conquer the Western Empire, they divide the land into five states or countries. Those countries are now Britain, France (Gaul), Spain, Italy and North Africa. With the toes of the Western Empire formed, this prophecy is fulfilled in 476 AD.

In 1453 AD, when the Muslim Ottoman Turks conquer the Eastern Empire, they divide the land into five states or countries. Those countries are Macedonia, Greece, Turkey, Syria and Egypt. With the toes of the Eastern Empire formed, this prophecy is fulfilled in 1453 AD.

Eternal Kingdom

Daniel ^{2:44} "And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and *that* kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever. ^{2:45} "Inasmuch as you saw that a stone was cut out of the mountain without hands and that it crushed the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold, the great God has made known to the king what will take place in the future; so the dream is true, and its interpretation is trustworthy."

In the future, the kingdom of the God of heaven will come to earth and destroy all

the previous kingdoms of the world but it will never be destroyed. The Lord's kingdom has not been formed on earth at this time; therefore, this prophecy has not been fulfilled. Again, once the Kingdom of the Lord is formed, it will never be replaced by another kingdom.

Nebuchadnezzar's Response

Daniel ^{2:46} Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell on his face and did homage to Daniel, and gave orders to present to him an offering and fragrant incense. ^{2:47} The king answered Daniel and said, "Surely your God is a God of gods and a Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, since you have been able to reveal this mystery."

Nebuchadnezzar is astounded that Daniel knows both the dream and the interpretation. Because Nebuchadnezzar has told no one the contents of his dream, it is possible that Nebuchadnezzar's astonishment results more from Daniel's divulging the dream rather than the details of the interpretation. In either case, Nebuchadnezzar falls to the feet of young Daniel and gives him homage and gifts just as he promised in Daniel 2:6. Daniel has introduced Nebuchadnezzar to the almighty power of the God of gods, the Lord of lords and the King of kings. It is the point of reference that Nebuchadnezzar will return to when he "comes to his senses" and "calls upon the Most High God" in Daniel 4:36. Nebuchadnezzar will recognize that same God when the three Hebrew boys escape from the fire in Chapter 3.

Daniel's Promotion

Daniel ^{2:48} Then the king promoted Daniel and gave him many great gifts, and he made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon. ^{2:49} And Daniel made request of the king, and he appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego over the administration of the province of Babylon, while Daniel was at the king's court.

Daniel is now the "prefect over all the wise men of Babylon." A "prefect" is the chief of the superintendents governing Babylon. It is Nebuchadnezzar's second year as king and the second year of the training program. Without finishing the program, Nebuchadnezzar places Daniel, who has not finished his training, as second in command of his kingdom even though it has been only two years since he left his homeland of the Southern Kingdom.

Daniel does not forget his friends. He requests that the king allow them to be over the administration of the Babylonian province. The province is large and Daniel needs the aid of his friends to keep watch over the workings of the empire. Nebuchadnezzar agrees and they leave the three-year training program to serve with Daniel for the entire time that Daniel serves in the king's court. As in chapter 1, the unknown author includes how long they will serve with Daniel, jumping ahead to tell the reader that perhaps they will serve with Daniel for almost 70 years until Daniel retires from the court in 536 BC.