

DANIEL'S COUNSEL TO THE KING: PART 1 (2:1-24)

It's college football season, and when you watch a sporting event like that on TV, there's two people that are doing a lot of talking. First, there's commentators speaking to the audience to give you perspective on what you're seeing on the field. Then there's also coaches speaking to the players to tell them what they should do as they enter the field of play.

And when we read the book of Daniel, we're getting both of those voices as well. It gives us perspective on what God was/is doing in the world, but it also coaches us on how to practically move as we live out our faith in a fallen world.

For example, over the last couple of weeks in Daniel chapter one, the passage was telling us what was happening on the world scene (like a commentator), but it also gave us practical coaching – how to develop biblical convictions *before* the trial/test/temptation comes. And how to stand firm in those convictions while still being courteous and kind.

But tonight, we come to chapter two. And this chapter brings an entirely new life-threatening test for Daniel and the boys! And it starts with...

1. The king's frightening dream.

Daniel 2:1–11 “In the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his spirit was troubled, and his sleep left him.² Then the king commanded that the magicians, the enchanters, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans be summoned to tell the king his dreams. So they came in and stood before the king.³ And the king said to them, “I had a dream, and my spirit is troubled to know the dream.”⁴ Then the Chaldeans said to the king in Aramaic, “O king, live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation.”⁵ “The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, “The word from me is firm: if you do not make known to me the dream and its interpretation, you shall be torn limb from limb, and your houses shall be laid in ruins.⁶ But if you show the dream and its interpretation, you shall receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor. Therefore show me the dream and its interpretation.”⁷ They answered a second time and said, “Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will show its

interpretation.”⁸ The king answered and said, “I know with certainty that you are trying to gain time, because you see that the word from me is firm—⁹ if you do not make the dream known to me, there is but one sentence for you. You have agreed to speak lying and corrupt words before me till the times change. Therefore tell me the dream, and I shall know that you can show me its interpretation.”¹⁰ The Chaldeans answered the king and said, “There is not a man on earth who can meet the king’s demand, for no great and powerful king has asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or Chaldean.¹¹ The thing that the king asks is difficult, and no one can show it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh.”

You may have noticed something that seems like a contradiction: Nebuchadnezzar was already king when Daniel arrived in Babylon, and Daniel has completed his three-year training and is now added to the king’s court as an advisor. Yet verse 1 says we are now in the “second year” of Nebuchadnezzar’s rule. If Daniel has been there three years, how can this be only the second year of Nebuchadnezzar’s rule? That’s because the first year of a Babylonian king’s reign was not counted as a full year; it was the accession year. So even though he was on the throne the entire three years of Daniel’s training, it was only Nebuchadnezzar’s second full year by Babylonian reckoning.¹

So, Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that woke him up in a cold sweat. **Verse 1** says the king is “troubled,” which means his heart was *hammering*. It says his sleep left him. And remember, this is NOT a man who scares easily. This is the warrior who defeated Egypt and then took his father’s place as king. So this is a strong man.²

But the Babylonians believed that dreams were messages from “the gods” so a right understanding of the dream was critical. That’s what scared him.

So, verse 2 says Nebuchadnezzar calls in his advisors – the magicians, enchanters, and sorcerers (wise men) – to help him understand the meaning of the dream. These were people who studied the stars. They studied astronomy but they also studied astrology (like your horoscopes). They tried to read the stars to learn the fate of men. And these men claimed to have a connection with the unseen world.

So, these men say, “King, if you’ll tell us the dream, we’ll consult the stars

¹ *Agents of Babylon* study guide by David Jeremiah; pg. 21
² *The Fate of the Nations*, Ben Stuart, Sept 16, 2024 podcast

and tell you what it means.” But Nebuchadnezzar is no fool. He knows they could make up any interpretation and he wouldn’t know if it was true or not. So, the king devises a test. He says, “If you can tell me exactly what I dreamed, then I’ll know I can trust your interpretation. But, if you can’t even tell me dream then I’ll know you’re just a con-artist.”

You see, if they *couldn’t* tell him the dream, it would prove that they were not really in touch with the “gods” as they claimed. And notice: failure to tell the dream and its interpretation meant the death penalty. In **verse 5** the king says, “You shall be torn limb from limb, and your houses shall be laid in ruins,” which means their homes would be completely destroyed and used for garbage dumps or public bathrooms.³

When the wise men hear this, they say, “King, only “the gods” could possibly know what you dreamed in your own mind.” You see, these wise men are admitting that they’re not really in touch with “the gods” at all.

By the way, God had already exposed these frauds over a hundred years earlier when He challenged other wise men and astrologers to deliver themselves from His power by their sorceries, enchantments, and counsel from the stars...

Isaiah 47:12–13 [God told them] “Stand fast in your enchantments and your many sorceries, with which you have labored from your youth; perhaps you may be able to succeed; perhaps you may inspire terror. ¹³ You are wearied with your many counsels; let them stand forth and save you, those who divide the heavens, who gaze at the stars, who at the new moons make known what shall come upon you.”

God was sarcastically saying, “Trust in all that nonsense and see what it gets you!” The wise men worshipped the stars, but Daniel worshipped the God who made the stars! So, if you’re checking your horoscope to find out about your life or your future, don’t bother. Horoscopes are about as helpful as a fortune cookie!

So, the wise men of Babylon cannot tell the king his dream and this leads us to our second point...

2. Daniel’s life-threatening dilemma.

Daniel 2:12-13 “Because of this the king was angry and very furious,

³ Miller, S. R. (1994). *Daniel* (Vol. 18, p. 81). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

and commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be destroyed.¹³ So the decree went out, and the wise men were about to be killed; and they sought Daniel and his companions, to kill them.

Because Daniel and his friends are part of the king's advisors, they are now caught up in this life-threatening dilemma with the rest of the wise men. In fact, Daniel and the boys are completely surprised by all of this. But notice how Daniel responds to the crisis...

Daniel 2:14–18 “Then Daniel replied with prudence and discretion to Arioch, the captain of the king’s guard, who had gone out to kill the wise men of Babylon.¹⁵ He declared to Arioch, the king’s captain, “Why is the decree of the king so urgent?” Then Arioch made the matter known to Daniel.¹⁶ And Daniel went in and requested the king to appoint him a time, that he might show the interpretation to the king.¹⁷ Then Daniel went to his house and made the matter known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions,¹⁸ and told them to seek mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his companions might not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.”

Daniel was only around 17 or 18 years old at this point, but the *Word of God* and the *favor of God* had made him wise beyond his years. He had the ability to stay calm and work toward a solution – even in the worst of circumstances. And Daniel apparently had already won Arioch's confidence and respect – otherwise he wouldn't have even listened to Daniel's request.⁴

Verse 14 says that “Daniel replied with prudence and discretion to Arioch.” The word “**prudence**” means that Daniel was *careful* and *guarded* with his words.⁵ And the word “**discretion**” literally means *taste*.⁶ In other words, Daniel showed great *tact* and *taste* in the way that he handled himself. He was wise enough to know what to say and how to act in a high-pressure situation.

By the way, Solomon said this is exactly why he wrote the book of Proverbs – to help young people have discretion and prudence:

Proverbs 1:4 “To give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth.”

⁴ *Agents of Babylon* study guide by David Jeremiah; pg. 23

⁵ Swanson, J. (1997). *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Aramaic (Old Testament)* (electronic ed.). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

⁶ Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (1977). *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (p. 1094). Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Proverbs 2:11 *"Discretion will watch over you, understanding will guard you."*

Arioch sees that there's something different about Daniel. And Nebuchadnezzar saw this too because he didn't think Daniel was lying or stalling for time like the others.

And he was right, Daniel wasn't stalling. Daniel and his friends sought "the God of heaven" because the information they needed could only come from heaven, as the wise men of Babylon had already acknowledged (vs. 10–11).

Notice: When the trial/test/temptation comes, Daniel ALREADY has a group of trusted, godly friends to turn to. And as verse 17 says, they sought the mercy of God together. Do you have friends like that? Are YOU a friend like that?

So, Daniel told the king that the "God of heaven" had revealed the dream to him AND it's interpretation, which leads us to our third point...

3. Daniel's miraculous deliverance.

Daniel 2:19–24 *"Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven. ²⁰ Daniel answered and said: 'Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might. ²¹ He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding; ²² he reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with him. ²³ To you, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, for you have given me wisdom and might, and have now made known to me what we asked of you, for you have made known to us the king's matter.' ²⁴ Therefore Daniel went in to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to destroy the wise men of Babylon. He went and said thus to him: 'Do not destroy the wise men of Babylon; bring me in before the king, and I will show the king the interpretation.'"*

In these few verses, Daniel tells us a LOT about God. First, He shows us that God is extremely **POWERFUL**...

- **To Him belongs wisdom, knowledge, and understanding** (in control of what is True).
- **He changes times and seasons** (in control of the physical world).

- **He removes kings and sets up kings** (in control of the political world).
- **He reveals deep and hidden things** (in control of the spiritual world).

But Daniel also tells us that God is **PERSONAL**...

- He says, "To you, O God, I give thanks and praise, for you have given wisdom and might *to ME*, and You have now made known *to ME* what we asked of you."



The God of the universe is all-powerful and yet personal. But is He personal to you? Do you have a personal relationship with Him?

So, we've learned all about the circumstances *surrounding* the king's dream, but we still don't know what the dream was about, or what it meant. But that's what we'll find out next week.

And when Daniel tells the king the interpretation of his dream, it blows the king's mind. I can't wait to share it with you next week!

Small Groups