

# LESSON 8

## CHAPTER 2

The second chapter of Daniel is one of the most remarkable and important chapters in the Bible. Before this chapter ends, the most powerful pagan in the world will lie prostrate before an exiled Jew. And before that happens, he will hear one of the most remarkable prophecies in the Bible — one that begins with his own kingdom and ends with God’s eternal and indestructible kingdom.

When it comes to understanding God’s plan for the church, Daniel 2 is one of the most important chapters in the Bible. Few chapters in the Bible (Old or New!) tell us more about the church than Daniel 2. Daniel 2 is one of the “Church Chapter Two’s” — Psalm 2, Isaiah 2, Daniel 2, Joel 2, Acts 2, and Ephesians 2.

Daniel 2 covers world history from Babylon to Rome, and it provides the foundation for understanding the apocalyptic sections of Daniel that will follow. Daniel 7 will expand upon Daniel 2, especially with regard to the second and third kingdoms. Daniel 11 and 12 will expand upon Daniel 2, especially with regard to the second, third, and fourth kingdoms. These later chapters of Daniel will supply many details that are not mentioned here in Daniel 2.

**What is the message of Daniel 2?** One of the primary messages of Daniel (and especially of Daniel 2) is that God’s promises to Israel had not been forgotten. The

Gentiles (those outside of the covenant) were in charge, but one day (under the Messiah) the kingdom would be restored to the faithful remnant.

That was a message that Daniel and his fellow exiles needed to hear. If our understanding of this book would have had no meaning to its original readers, then our understanding is wrong!

### **Daniel 2:1-2**

**1 And in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar Nebuchadnezzar dreamed dreams, wherewith his spirit was troubled, and his sleep brake from him. 2 Then the king commanded to call the magicians, and the astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans, for to shew the king his dreams. So they came and stood before the king.**

The world's most powerful ruler has just assumed the throne — and almost immediately he is troubled by his dreams and can't sleep. God was trying to tell him something, and like most people, he found that troubling.

He calls all of his wise men to come and interpret the dream. Note that the term "Chaldean" is used here to denote a special class of wise men. Nebuchadnezzar was himself a Chaldean in the ethnic sense, but he was not a Chaldean in this more restrictive sense.

The Babylonians believed that indications of future events could be found in the skies, in bizarre births, in the shape of animal livers, and—as here—in dreams. The Jews agreed with only the last of those. God had spoken through dreams in the

past. He did so with Jacob, Abimelech, Laban, Joseph, Pharaoh, the baker and the butler, and Solomon. Numbers 12:6 and Jeremiah 23:28 suggest he spoke to all the prophets in dreams (but not to Moses that way).

Was Daniel already a wise man in the king's court or was he still in training? In 2:48, Daniel is made the chief wise man by the king, which may indicate that he had finished his training and was already classified as part of this group. But if this was the second year of the king's reign and if the training lasted three years, then doesn't that mean Daniel was still in training? Not necessarily. First, the first year of the king's reign was called the Year of Accession, with the first year of his reign actually being the second year. Also, according to Hebrew usage, a part of a year was reckoned as a whole. This would mean that the "three year" program could have lasted less than two years if it consisted of a full year and parts of two others.

However long the training lasted, Daniel was still very young when all of this occurred. He would have been only seventeen or eighteen, and possibly younger. He was not the old prophet with the long white beard that many people imagine when reading this chapter.

Sorcery and witchcraft were widespread in the ancient world and are severely condemned in the Old Testament.

**Exodus 22:18** — *Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.*

But they were still listening to them.

**Jeremiah 27:9-10** — *Therefore hearken not ye to your prophets, nor to your diviners, nor to your dreamers, nor to your enchanter, nor to your sorcerers, which speak unto you, saying, Ye shall not serve the king of Babylon: For they prophesy a lie unto you.*

It remained a problem through the days of Malachi.

**Malachi 3:5** — *And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the **sorcerers**, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the LORD of hosts.*

Witchcraft is also condemned in the New Testament.

**Galatians 5:20** — *Idolatry, **witchcraft**, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies.*

**Revelation 21:8** — *But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and **sorcerers**, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.*

That witchcraft is mentioned in the closing books of both Testaments tells us that it is a problem that never went away. In fact, witchcraft remains a problem to this day, not only with astrology and horoscopes, but with some environmental groups that have veered into the worship of nature. When I was teaching engineering at SMU, the theology school invited a witch to be a guest speaker at one of their seminars! I regret not having attended her lecture so I could ask for her thoughts on Exodus 22:18!

Ancient Babylonian “dream manuals” have been found that list historical dreams and the events that followed them. These wise men would have been very familiar with these very long volumes. But without the content of the dream, the experts had no way to interpret the dream. Their plan would have been to listen to the dream and then look its meaning up in their book — but Nebuchadnezzar has other ideas!

One of the dreams listed in the Babylonian “dream book” is the appearance of a god’s statue.

### **Daniel 2:3-6**

**3 And the king said unto them, I have dreamed a dream, and my spirit was troubled to know the dream. 4 Then spake the Chaldeans to the king in Syriack, O king, live for ever: tell thy servants the dream, and we will shew the interpretation. 5 The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, The thing is gone from me: if ye will not make known unto me the dream, with the interpretation thereof, ye shall be cut in pieces, and your houses shall be made a dunghill. 6 But if ye shew the dream, and the interpretation thereof, ye shall receive of me gifts and rewards and great honour: therefore shew me the dream, and the interpretation thereof.**

Some translations leave the impression that the astrologers spoke to the king in the Aramaic language, but the phrase “in Aramaic” is best taken as a parenthetical notation placed in the text to mark the change in the written language, because beginning in verse 4 and continuing through 7:28, the book of Daniel is written in the Aramaic language rather than the Hebrew language.

Although the diplomatic language of the empire was Aramaic, it seems reasonable to suppose that the wise men who lived in Babylon, regardless of their original nationality, would have addressed the king in the normal language of the city that presumably was Akkadian.

The Dead Sea Scroll copies of Daniel make this switch to Aramaic, which strongly suggests that the original was also written in two languages. Daniel is not unique in this regard. Other Aramaic sections in the Old Testament are Ezra 4:8–6:18, Ezra 7:12–26, and Jeremiah 10:11.

The Hebrew and Aramaic languages both belong to the Semitic language family and use the same alphabet. They look much the same when written down.

Nebuchadnezzar asked his advisors to interpret the dream that he had, and the advisors at first seem eager to do so. They ask him to tell them the dream that he had, and I am sure that they would have come up with any number of interpretations. They expressed no doubt regarding their abilities in verse 4.

Nebuchadnezzar, however, is no fool. He asks them to tell him both his dream and its interpretation. Suddenly their confidence vanishes!

The King James Version translates verse 5 to indicate that the king had forgotten the dream. (“The thing is gone from me.”) Most modern translations have understood this expression to be an adjective derived from a Persian loan word signifying “firm” or “certain,” whereas the KJV translators thought it was a verb derived from the root meaning “to go away.” Most scholars agree with the more modern translation, meaning “sure, firm, or certain.” The Revised Standard Version reads:

*The king answered the Chaldeans, “**The word from me is sure:** 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.”*

Had the king forgotten the dream? He remembers enough later in the story to be able to confirm Daniel’s interpretation. But, of course, the King could have been re-

mind by Daniel, which then caused him to remember the dream. According to an ancient Babylonian omen, if a man could not remember the dream he saw then it meant that his personal god was angry with him.

Although some commentators believe that the king had forgotten the dream, this apparently was not the understanding of the wise men, who continued to plead with him to reveal it. Moreover, Daniel 2:1 states that the king “was troubled” by the dream, and that may suggest that he remembered the contents of what he had seen.

Verses 5 and 6 describe the consequences of their failure and of their success in relating and interpreting the king’s dream. Their failure would mean a horrible death.

The threat in verse 5 is that they would be “made into limbs.” The NIV translation that they would be cut into pieces is not correct — no verb for cutting is used here and no cutting instrument is mentioned. What the king had in mind was that their arms and legs would be tied to four trees that had been temporarily roped together. When the ropes were cut, the victim would be torn into four pieces. (He was going to turn each wise man into four wise pieces!)

This was no idle threat by Nebuchadnezzar, whose harsh treatment of King Zedekiah (2 Kings 25:7), two Jewish rebels named Ahab and Zedekiah (not King Zedekiah; Jeremiah 29:22 says they were roasted in the fire), and Daniel’s three friends (Chapter 3) proved that he would have no qualms about carrying out this cruel threat against his counselors.

### **Daniel 2:7-9**

**7 They answered again and said, Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will shew the interpretation of it. 8 The king answered and said, I**

**know of certainty that ye would gain the time, because ye see the thing is gone from me. 9 But if ye will not make known unto me the dream, there is but one decree for you: for ye have prepared lying and corrupt words to speak before me, till the time be changed: therefore tell me the dream, and I shall know that ye can shew me the interpretation thereof.**

The wise men do not think that the king is serious, so they ask him for the dream one more time. (Do they seem a little nervous to you?)

Compare the first request in verse 4 with the second request in verse 7.

**Verse 4** — *Then spake the Chaldeans to the king in Syriack, O king, live for ever: tell thy servants the dream, and we will shew the interpretation.*

**Verse 7** — *They answered again and said, Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will shew the interpretation of it.*

Notice any difference? In the second request, the wise men don't start off by hoping that the king will live forever!

In verse 8-9, the king makes it very clear that he is serious, and he lets them in on his strategy. He accuses them of stalling and planning to lie to him. (Of course, they are stalling! They are repeating themselves in verse 7.)

He says that they were planning to wait until "the times change." That is, until the crisis has passed and the king has forgotten all about it.

Why would Nebuchadnezzar be so willing to dispose of his wise men?

First, their inability to acquire the necessary information proved that their power was limited and that they were not in touch with the gods as they claimed.

Second, ancient kings did not always trust their “experts.” On at least one occasion Sennacherib separated diviners into groups to reduce collusion and ensure a reliable interpretation of an omen.

Third, the king probably felt that the dream foretold some terrible disaster that was going to befall him. After all, Nebuchadnezzar had seen a manlike statue destroyed, which he likely associated with himself or his empire. He may well have felt insecure about his newly acquired kingdom, and he may have considered the destruction of the statue a divine omen to him that he and his empire were doomed.

Perhaps this led him to believe that someone was planning to assassinate him and take away his kingdom. With intrigue in the courts of that day common, such was a real possibility (two out of the next three Babylonian kings were assassinated).

Traitors may have been in his midst planning to overthrow his government at that very moment. Since a coup usually was perpetrated by the military or the court, the king may have wondered if some of these very wise men were plotting against him. Thus, he was not reluctant to rid himself of them.

### **Daniel 2:10-11**

**10 The Chaldeans answered before the king, and said, There is not a man upon the earth that can shew the king's matter: therefore there is no king, lord, nor ruler, that asked such things at any magician, or astrologer, or Chaldean. 11 And it is a**

**rare thing that the king requireth, and there is none other that can shew it before the king, except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh.**

The wise men complain that no one could do what the king wanted. In fact, they say that no king has ever asked such a thing. (Indeed, not even Joseph before Pharaoh in Egypt was required to do this.)

In verse 10, they admit to the king (whether they know they are admitting it or not) that their profession is a fraud. This is definitely a lesson we need to hear today. Anytime we look for answers to our problems or answers about our future from someone other than God, we need to seriously consider our spiritual health.

The king, they say, isn't being fair. He is asking too much. Imagine, asking a fortune teller to tell someone's fortune! Nebuchadnezzar probably thought, and rightly so, that since these astrologers claimed to be able to communicate with the spirit world, they should be able to discover the dream and its interpretation from the gods.

These magicians make a very profound statement in verse 11: "there is none other that can shew it before the king, **except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh.**" What they were saying was that only the gods could reveal someone's thoughts — and the gods were not here to do that. They did not dwell with men. What will the logical conclusion be when Daniel reveals the dream? (I imagine they later regretted these words!)

The Babylonians were famous for their astrology, but it could not help these "astrologers" in their time of need. Over a hundred years earlier, God had challenged the wise men of Babylon to deliver their nation from his power by their sorceries, spells, and counsel from the stars.

**Isaiah 47:12-13** — *Stand now with thine enchantments, and with the multitude of thy sorceries, wherein thou hast laboured from thy youth; if so be thou shalt be able to profit, if so be thou mayest prevail. Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels. Let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up, and save thee from these things that shall come upon thee.*

Not much had changed since Isaiah's day!

### **Daniel 2:12-13**

**12 For this cause the king was angry and very furious, and commanded to destroy all the wise men of Babylon. 13 And the decree went forth that the wise men should be slain; and they sought Daniel and his fellows to be slain.**

The king becomes upset when he realizes that his “wise men” are suffering from an acute lack of wisdom. In fact, he becomes furious and commands that they all be killed. (You would think that some of these fortune tellers would have seen this coming and have left town!)

Daniel and his friends, unfortunately, are numbered among this group, and their lives are now in danger from the king's edict.

It seems most likely that the wise men were being assembled for a formal execution and that the slaying of these officials was not yet in progress.

As we have said, it is possible that Daniel is still in school. If this were true, then Nebuchadnezzar must have ordered that all of those who were preparing to be wise men be killed as well.

There are partial parallels to this angry outburst and threat by Nebuchadnezzar:

- Saul massacred the priests at Nob (1 Samuel 22:13-19) because they had helped David.
- In secular history, a parallel exists in Darius's massacre of the Magi because one of them had usurped the throne.
- A closer parallel is Xerxes' beheading of the failed engineers who built a bridge that was destroyed in a storm.

### **Daniel 2:14-16**

**14 Then Daniel answered with counsel and wisdom to Arioch the captain of the king's guard, which was gone forth to slay the wise men of Babylon: 15 He answered and said to Arioch the king's captain, Why is the decree so hasty from the king? Then Arioch made the thing known to Daniel. 16 Then Daniel went in, and desired of the king that he would give him time, and that he would shew the king the interpretation.**

Arioch arrives to take Daniel to death row, but Daniel talks him into taking him to the king instead. Daniel sees this death sentence as an opportunity! It sounded like

very bad news, but Daniel saw it as a gift from God and jumped at it. Christians should be eternal optimists!

We usually see the light at the end of the tunnel and think it must be an oncoming train. But if God is on our side, who can be against us? Daniel is a great example of optimism. And what is optimism if not faith? And, if so, what then is pessimism?

Daniel seems awfully confident in his abilities. Where did this teenager get such confidence? He knew the source of all wisdom. His confidence was not in himself but in his God!

The stage is now set to introduce King Nebuchadnezzar to the only true and living God. Also, we are about to see a theme that will last throughout the book: God is still in charge, he is still as powerful as ever, and he still loves and cares for his faithful followers.

This was true even after their temple had been burned, their city destroyed, and they had been dragged away in slavery. (This scene was occurring around 602 BC. The city would be destroyed in 587 BC.)

A clear message throughout Scripture is that things are not always as they seem! We must see things the way that God sees them.

The title used in verse 14 of Arioch is used in 2 Kings 25:8 and Jeremiah 39:9; 52:12 of Nebuzaradan, who carried out the destruction of Jerusalem. It is the title of an important Babylonian official. Its literal meaning is something like “chief butcher.” Hence the “king’s guard” consisted of the “executioners” of the king, and Arioch apparently was the chief executioner.

Did Daniel say the king’s decree was “hasty” in verse 15? The idea that this word meant “hasty” seems to derive from its use in 3:22 (Therefore because the king’s commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceeding hot). The root, however, denotes harshness or stiffness, so “harsh” here and “strict” in 3:22 are better translations than “hasty.”

Why did Daniel and his friends not know about the general order to execute all the wise men of Babylon? The text does not say. Their apparent isolation from the other experts may suggest that this story is set within the period of their three-year training. Jerome has suggested two additional possibilities:

When the king was promising rewards and gifts and great honor, they [Daniel and his friends] did not care to go before him, lest they should appear to be shamelessly grasping after the wealth and honor of the Chaldeans. Or else it was undoubtedly true that the Chaldeans themselves, being envious of the Jews' reputation and learning, entered alone before the king, as if to obtain the rewards by themselves.

Daniel responds calmly and with total confidence in verse 16 despite facing a death sentence! The whole scene reminds me of a favorite song: "When peace, like a river, attendeth my way, When sorrows like sea billows roll; Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say, It is well, it is well, with my soul."

### **Daniel 2:17-19**

**17 Then Daniel went to his house, and made the thing known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions: 18 That they would desire mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret; that Daniel and his fellows should not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. 19 Then was the secret revealed unto Daniel in a night vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven.**

Note that his three companions are referred to here by their less familiar Hebrew names.

The term “God of Heaven” is used almost exclusively in the captivity books. (Daniel uses it nine times, Ezra six times, and Nehemiah four times.) Why? When Judah turned from the Lord, Ezekiel had a vision in which he saw the glory of God depart from the holy of holies in the temple and leave the earth (Ezekiel 10-11).

What did Daniel and his friends do? They did not turn to astrology or crystal balls. Instead, they prayed. Daniel knows that they have only one recourse, prayer. Daniel was in total agreement with the magicians on this point — only God could reveal the thoughts of the king.

While no human being could ever tell the king the contents and interpretation of his dream, God can, and, in contrast to the beliefs of the Babylonians (2:11), there is a God (one God!) who dwells with men: Daniel’s God.

Notice that Daniel doesn’t do it all by himself, either. He asks them all to pray with him. Prayer is a team effort!

Prayer is where the action is. Any church without a well organized and systematic prayer program is simply operating a religious treadmill.

The one concern of the devil is to keep Christians from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, and prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray.

Here is a beautiful picture of four young men, still in their teens, united in prayer. This was a life-and-death crisis, and they pleaded with God to have mercy on them and to preserve their lives.

Some commentators think that Daniel and his friends prayed and then went to sleep (so as to have a dream revealing the king’s dream), but most likely they continued in prayer until God revealed the dream. A vision may be received when

awake (9:20-23) or asleep (7:1), and it is difficult to imagine that the young men had gone to sleep with an imminent death penalty hanging over their heads.

Notice that Daniel has already promised to answer the king — before he started praying for the answer. Again, Daniel knows that God will give him the answer that he needs. What confidence! What utter dependence on God!

The “mystery” or “secret” is revealed to Daniel during the night. The word “secret” occurs nine times in this chapter.

Ezekiel 28:3 using irony against the prince of Tyre told him “Behold thou art wiser than Daniel; there is no secret that is hidden thee.” Who was Ezekiel referring to? Remember that if Ezekiel referred to Daniel then the late date theory falls in ruin.