

KING NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DREAM

TEXT: DANIEL 2:1-35

INTRODUCTION:

1. Daniel chapter 2 deals with King Nebuchadnezzar's unusual dream, and Daniel's interpretation of it.
2. John Walvoord said, "Nowhere else in Scripture, except in Daniel 7, is a more comprehensive picture given of world history as it stretched from the time of Daniel, 600 years before Christ, to the consummation at the second advent of Christ. It is most remarkable that Daniel was not only given this broad revelation of the course of what Christ called 'the times of the Gentiles' (Luke 21:24), but also the chronological prophecy of Israel's history stretching from the rebuilding of Jerusalem to the second advent of Christ. These two major foci of the book of Daniel justify the general description of the book as world history in outline with special reference to the nation of Israel" (*Daniel, The Key to Prophetic Revelation*).

I. KING NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DREAM

1. When Nebuchadnezzar first invaded Judah, he was not yet king, but ruled as a subordinate of his father, King Nabopolassar. While Nebuchadnezzar was in Judah his father died, and then he became the king of Babylon.
2. As the book of Daniel begins, Nebuchadnezzar has been king for two years. He united several tribes, took over the Assyrian empire, then the Syrian empire, overcame the Egyptians, and built the first great world empire.
3. God revealed Himself to King Nebuchadnezzar in his dreams (*dreams* is plural) one night, but the king did not understand the meaning of these unusual dreams. This sort of communication was common in Bible times but it isn't today.
4. The LORD said in Numbers 12:6, "Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream."
5. But we do not see this taught in the New Testament epistles.
6. Job 33:14, 15 says, "For God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed."
7. Unfortunately there are many "dreamers" around today but they are not to be taken seriously, and their dreams are foolish.

8. In the Bible, God gave dreams to Abimelech (Gen. 20:3), Joseph (Gen. 37:5), Pharaoh (Gen. 41:1, 25), Solomon (I Kings 3:5), the wise men from the east (Matt. 2:12), and Joseph (Matt. 2:19, 22).
9. And here in Daniel 2 we read about King Nebuchadnezzar's fantastic dream. The king forgot his dream, perhaps out of fright (2:1-5). He was "troubled" (2:1).
10. Daniel 2:1 says King Nebuchadnezzar dreamed dreams, "wherewith his spirit was troubled, and his sleep brake from him." The Bible teaches that sleeplessness often has its purpose in divine providence.
11. That certainly was the case of King Ahasuerus in Esther 6, which started the chain of events leading to Haman's execution and Israel's deliverance (cf. Esther 2:21-23; 6:1-3).
12. In a similar way, King Nebuchadnezzar's experience was obviously ordered by God. When King Nebuchadnezzar awoke, all the wise men of Babylon were summoned (2:2, 3). The term, "wise men," is used in verses 12, 13, 14, 18, 24, 27, 48, and throughout the book.
13. Verse 1 says King Nebuchadnezzar "dreamed dreams," but to the wise men the king said he had "dreamed a dream" (2:3), referring only to one particular dream, indicating that it was only this one particular dream that made an important impression.
14. The Chaldeans, acting as spokesmen for the group, then address the king. The phrase "in Syriack" (2:4) introduces an extended section written in Aramaic instead of Hebrew, beginning with verse 4 and continuing through chapter 7.
15. The *Scofield Study Bible* says, "From Dan. 2:4 to 7:28 the Book of Daniel is written in Aramaic, the ancient language of Syria, and substantially identical with Chaldaic, the language of ancient Babylonia. Upon this fact, together with the occurrence of fifteen Persian, and three Greek words has been based an argument against the historicity of Daniel, and in favour of a date after the conquest of Palestine by Alexander (B.C. 332). It has, however, seemed, with some modern exceptions, to the Hebrew and Christian scholarship of the ages an unanswerable proof rather of the Danielic authorship of the book that, living from boyhood in a land the language of which was Chaldaic, a great part of his writing should be in that tongue. It has often been pointed out that the Chaldaic of Daniel is of high antiquity, as is shown by comparison with that of the Targums. The few words of Persian and Greek in like manner confirm the writer's residence at a court constantly visited by emissaries from those peoples. It is noteworthy that the Aramaic section is precisely that part

- of Daniel which most concerned the peoples amongst whom he lived, and to whom a prophecy written in Hebrew would have been unintelligible. The language returns to Hebrew in the predictive portions which have to do with the future of Israel. 'The Hebrew of Daniel is closely related to that of Ezekiel.' --Delitzsch" (p. 899).
16. The courteous greeting, "O king, live for ever" (2:4) is found throughout the Old Testament (cf. Dan. 3:9; 5:10; 6:21).
 17. First Kings 1:31 says, "Bathsheba bowed with her face to the earth, and did reverence to the king, and said, Let my lord king David live for ever."
 18. In Nehemiah 2:3, Nehemiah said to King Artaxerxes, "Let the king live for ever."
 19. The Chaldeans declared with confidence that, if the king would just tell them the dream, they would "show (give) the interpretation" (2:4).
 20. But King Nebuchadnezzar told them, "The thing is gone from me," that is, he had forgotten the dream (2:5).
 21. King Nebuchadnezzar demanded that they should not only interpret the dream but also describe the dream itself, and to reinforce his demand for both the dream and its interpretation, Nebuchadnezzar threatened that the wise men "shall be cut in pieces" and their houses "made a dunghill" (2:5).
 22. This was not an idle threat. King Nebuchadnezzar, like most Eastern despots, was known to do such things. John Walvoord said, "It was all too common for victims to be executed by being dismembered, and...their houses...made a dunghill" (*Daniel*).
 23. On the other hand, if the wise men were able to accurately describe and interpret the dream, they were promised "gifts and rewards and great honour" (2:6).
 24. It was customary, when kings were pleased with their servants, to lavish upon them expensive gifts and great honor (e.g., Joseph, Mordecai, and Daniel himself -- cf. 2:48).
 25. Confronted with the king's ultimatum, the wise men repeated their request to be told the dream, and once again they affirmed their ability to interpret it (2:7).
 26. They did not try to fool King Nebuchadnezzar, apparently afraid he would discover their trickery and have them killed. Nevertheless, the king realized they were trying to stall for time and commanded that they all be put to death, including Daniel and his friends (2:8-13).

II. DANIEL ASKED FOR TIME (2:14).

1. King Nebuchadnezzar realized his wise men were incompetent and incapable of helping him. Their incompetence only made him "angry and furious" (2:12).
2. After the wise men of Babylon admitted their helplessness, the stage was set for Daniel's correct interpretation (2:14-18).
3. The first thing Daniel did was ask for time to interpret the king's dream (2:15, 16). That Arioch, the captain of the king's guard (the king's executioner -- margin), would take time to explain the situation to Daniel, a Jewish captive already condemned to death, speaks well both of Daniel's approach and of Arioch's regard for him.
4. The next thing Daniel did was pray for wisdom (2:17, 18). It is a great blessing that he was able to pray with his three companions.
5. "As they shared in the danger, so they could share also in the intercession" (Walvoord). "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16).
6. Someone has called Daniel a man of purpose, a man of prayer, and a man of prophecy. This is one of the several times we see Daniel praying (cf. 6:10; 9:4).
7. Daniel 2:18 shows a vivid contrast -- the "mercies of the God of heaven," and King Nebuchadnezzar's cruel decree to slay all the wise men of Babylon.
8. And there is another important contrast. The reference to "the God of heaven" is an obvious contrast to the idolatry and pagan superstitions of the Babylonians.
9. The Babylonians worshiped the starry heaven, but Daniel and his companions worshipped "the God of heaven."
10. Daniel's prayer was answered very quickly in the form of a night vision (2:19).
11. Daniel's immediate response was to praise "the God of heaven" who had answered his prayers. Daniel said, "Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever" (2:20).
12. The true God of heaven "changes the times and the seasons" (2:21).
13. During the coming tribulation, the antichrist will attempt to "change times and laws" (Daniel 7:25).
14. The true God of heaven also removes kings and sets up kings (2:21).
15. Psalm 75:6, 7 says, "For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another."
16. God is in control of history. Therefore He can reveal the future as He did in King Nebuchadnezzar's dream (2:22).

17. After declaring that God gives wisdom and knowledge unto the wise, Daniel thanked God for revealing to him the interpretation of King Nebuchadnezzar's dream (2:23).
18. In 2:18, 19, 37, 44, God is called "the God of heaven," but in 2:23 Daniel addresses Him as "thou God of my fathers." This is in contrast to the Babylonian deities whom Daniel knew to be false gods.
19. In his prayer of thanks, Daniel switches from the pronoun "me" to "we" and "us," including his three companions (cf. 2:17, 18).
20. Daniel was careful to give God the glory (2:28), just as Joseph did when he said to Pharaoh, "It is not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace" (Gen. 41:16).
21. Daniel refers to God as "a God in heaven that revealeth secrets" (2:28, 29).
22. After Daniel gave thanks to God, he went and reported to Arioch, the king's captain, the good news -- "I will show unto the king the interpretation" (2:24-28).
23. "In stating that the wise men could not be expected to reveal the secret, Daniel is, in effect, defending them somewhat from the king's wrath while at the same time affirming their impotence" (Walvoord).
24. The expression "latter days" (2:28) refers specifically to the closing years of the fourth kingdom, the revived Roman Empire (2:40-43).
25. King Nebuchadnezzar's dream covers the history of Gentile rule from his day all the way to the reign of antichrist and the second coming of Christ (cf. 2:44, 45).
26. Robert Culver, in his book *Daniel and the Latter Days*, says the expression "refers to the future of God's dealings with mankind as to be consummated and concluded historically in the times of the Messiah."

III. THE PURPOSE OF THE DREAM (2:29-35).

1. King Nebuchadnezzar was one of the great conquerors and monarchs of the ancient world. He had begun his brilliant career when his father was still alive, and after his father's death, he had quickly established himself as absolute ruler over the entire Babylonian empire.
2. Daniel emphasized the fact that the secret had not come to him from any natural or accrued wisdom, but because God in His providence had chosen Nebuchadnezzar as the recipient of the dream, and God in His providence had chosen Daniel as the interpreter of the dream.
3. This was all done so that Nebuchadnezzar and others should receive this divine revelation (2:28-30).

3. In verses 31-35, Daniel revealed the forgotten dream, and in verses 36-45 Daniel gave the interpretation.
4. Daniel told King Nebuchadnezzar that the king saw "a great image" (2:31), a statue corresponding to human form. "Great" indicates it was very large and very impressive.
5. In addition to the great size of the statue, it was remarkable for its brilliant appearance -- its "brightness was excellent...and the form thereof was terrible" (2:31). "Terrible" means "terrifying" or "frightening."
6. Daniel proceeded to describe the metallic character of the image. The image was rather top-heavy -- the head was of fine gold, the breast and arms were silver, the belly and thighs were brass, the legs were iron, but the feet were part of iron and part of clay (2:32, 33).
7. The image represents deterioration and decline -- the feet were part of iron and part of clay. And being top-heavy and cumbersome, it was bound to fall.
8. There is a decline in the quality of the metals -- gold is finer than silver, silver is finer than brass, etc.
9. The king in his dream saw the stone described as "cut out without hands" (2:34) smite the image at its feet. The clay feet would be the weakest place in the image -- the stone "brake them to pieces."
10. Then the entire image fell apart in rapid succession (2:35). It quickly broke into small pieces and became "like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors."
11. The wind blew away the chaff until the pieces of the image completely disappeared. Then the stone which destroyed the image grew into a great mountain and filled the whole earth (2:35).
12. This "great mountain" that "filled the whole earth" is a reference to the millennial kingdom of Christ (2:35; cf. 2:44).
13. The Lord Jesus Christ is often represented in the Bible as a "stone" or a "rock." The apostle Paul says in Romans 9:33, "As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumbling stone and rock of offence."
14. Paul says the children of Israel "drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ" (I Cor. 10:4).
15. Ephesians 2:20 says the New Testament church is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone."
16. The Roman Catholic Church says Peter is the rock upon whom their church is built. But Peter himself said Christ is the Rock. In I Peter

- 2:6-8, Peter said Christ is the chief corner stone, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence.
17. There can be no doubt but that this "stone" in King Nebuchadnezzar's dream is the Lord Jesus Christ. He was "cut without hands" (2:34), i.e., He was not created. He is the Creator God.
 18. "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made" (John 1:3).

CONCLUSION:

1. It is interesting to note that Nebuchadnezzar's dream in chapter 2 and Daniel's vision in chapter 7 basically cover the same ground.
2. However, whereas Nebuchadnezzar's vision was of "a great image, whose brightness was excellent," Daniel's vision was of four monstrous beasts.
3. Nebuchadnezzar's dream was from man's perspective, especially a man steeped in Babylonian paganism. Daniel's vision was from God's perspective. Scofield's notes are very helpful (p. 900, 901).
4. The statue "standing before" the king in his dream symbolized Gentile world power as it touches Israel during the times of the Gentiles from 605 BC till the second coming of Christ when He returns to establish His kingdom.
5. All Bible prophecy, whether dealing with Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, Rome, Egypt, Russia, Red China, or any nation, always deals with their relationship with Israel.
6. The form thereof was "terrible" (2:31), i.e. the Gentile powers were ruthless and ferocious. That is why they are pictured as ravenous beasts in Daniel 7.
7. "It is remarkable that the heraldic insignia of the Gentile nations are all beasts or birds of prey" (Scofield, p. 911).