

Declaring God's Kingdom to Earth's Conquerors

Daniel 2:1-49

Studies in Daniel #3

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IMAGINE the scene: the Reformation preacher Hugh Latimer has just ascended the pulpit only to realize that King Henry VIII is below him.

He thinks, “Latimer! Latimer! Do you remember that you are speaking before the high and mighty King Henry VIII; who has power to command you to be sent to prison, and who can have your head cut off, if it please him? Will you not take care to say nothing that will offend royal ears?” Another thought came to him: “Latimer! Latimer! Do you not remember that you are speaking before the King of kings and Lord of lords; before Him, at whose throne Henry VIII will stand; before Him, to whom one day you will have to give account yourself? Latimer! Latimer! Be faithful to your Master, and declare all of God’s Word.” Preachers must be bold! Preachers must tell the truth no matter the cost! We need this bold preaching today, amen?

We see that here in Daniel 2. Its message is that kings and their kingdoms, dictators and their domains, tyrants and their territories rise and fall at God’s desire, but his kingdom alone remains.

Nebuchadnezzar's Problem (vv. 1–13)

We begin where we left off in chapter 1 as the Hebrew text says **and in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar** (v. 1). “But I thought chapter 1 said Daniel and his friends would be trained for three years first?” So how can it be the **second year**? The Babylonians dated things differently. Year one of the training was Nebuchadnezzar's accession year; year two was Nebuchadnezzar's first year, and year three of training was his second year.

The story begins with the one known as **the king of kings** (v. 37). He had it all. But he had a *problem*. Not because of an attempted coup d'état or invading enemy, but because of something ethereal: a nightmare. He couldn't sleep (v. 1). God oftentimes in Scripture and in our experience uses the night and uses our dreams to wake us up spiritually! Nebuchadnezzar was on top of the world; but a mere dream brought him to his knees!

He **summoned** all his PhD **magicians...enchanters...sorcerers** and **Chaldeans** (v. 2) and gave them his “**I had a dream**” speech. The problem was not that he forgot it (as the KJV makes it sound; but how could he check the accuracy of their revelation?), but that it **troubled** him! (v. 3) His theologians asked him to “**tell [them] the dream, and we will show the interpretation**” (v. 4). But there's a second problem here; not only is

Nebuchadnezzar troubled, but now his religious elite are about to be in trouble. Why? **The king** gave a certain decree: **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** (v. 5). They could interpret dreams, as their textbooks were famous for dream interpretation; but how would *they* tell him his own dream! Sometimes in the car we'll play "guess who." Normally we'll be told, "I'm thinking of a basketball player," then we get like three hints before having to guess. But sometimes Cyprian will just say, "Tell me who I'm thinking of." Hello, can you say impossible? So Nebuchadnezzar's brain trust **answered a second time...** "**Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will show its interpretation**" (v. 7). But Nebuchadnezzar was onto their Jedi mind tricks: "**I know with certainty that you are trying to gain time, because you see that the word from me is firm**" (v. 8). And for some reason he was also leery of their interpretive abilities: "**You have agreed to speak lying and corrupt words before me till the times change**" (v. 9).

Then came some of the most honest and truthful words about man's limitations and God's ability every uttered: "**There is not a man on earth who can meet the king's demand...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” (vv. 10–11). These were the greatest spiritual leaders in the world! But they were impotent; only true divine power could provide what the king answered. (Of course this foreshadows what we’re about to see!) Nebuchadnezzar went postal: he **commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be destroyed**—including Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (vv. 12–13). What drama! Where’s Scorsese when you need him! Nebuchadnezzar had a problem, his scholars had a problem, and now the problem is squarely in the lap of the men we are supposed to identify with.

Daniel’s Prayer (vv. 14–24)

Cue Daniel! As Nebuchadnezzar’s Seal Team 6 led by **Arioach**...[went] **out to kill the wise men of Babylon**, just like with Ashpenaz and his assistant in chapter 1, Daniel knew exactly what to do, whom to speak with, and what to say **with prudence and discretion** (v. 14). I asked you last Sunday to think of what act of heroism do you normally associate with Daniel. And what did you say? The lion’s den. But again, here is another act of heroism. Right in the middle of this drama with a tyrant who’s gone off the rails, his chief executioner going down his hit list, and the lives of so many in the balance, what does Daniel do? He goes right to the very person

who has power to kill him! **Daniel went in and requested the king to appoint him a time that he might show the interpretation to the king** (v. 16). It reminds us of Jesus' words: "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28). Why is Arioch and now Nebuchadnezzar listening to Daniel? Remember chapter 1: God gave him favor in their eyes! It's all of God's power and grace.

Daniel went to his house...made the matter known to his friends, and told them to seek mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that [they] might not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon (vv. 17–18). Notice the urgency.

Nebuchadnezzar was urgent; Arioch was urgent; now Daniel and his friends are urgent! And did they all do in their urgency? Nebuchadnezzar sought men's wisdom; Daniel sought God's—urgently. Their lives were on the line. Their lives of their colleagues were on the line. Do we pray with this kind of urgency? Based on our tepid prayers we don't expect God to do anything. But in this urgency we read **then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night** (v. 19). And what did Daniel do? He **blessed the God of heaven** (v. 19). What does Daniel say?

He praises God for his wisdom in being able to reveal and interpret mysteries (vv. 20, 21, 22). *He praises God for his might* in ruling over all kings and kingdoms of the earth (vv. 20, 21). Turn back with me to Isaiah 40:21–23:

Do you not know? Do you not hear?
Has it not been told you from the beginning?
Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?
It is he who sits above the circle of the earth,
and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers;
who stretches out the heavens like a curtain,
and spreads them like a tent to dwell in;
who brings princes to nothing,
and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness.

Do you see what Daniel’s prayer means? Who is central in this story? We call it the story of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream? Or we call it Daniel interpretation of the dream. But it’s this God who is praised as all wise and almighty who is the center of this story! One king had a nightmare; the King of kings gave it to him and would interpret it for him.

God’s Proclamation (vv. 25–45)

So Daniel went back to Arioch who brought him before Nebuchadnezzar (vv. 24–25), who asked, “**Are you able to make known to me the dream that I have seen and its interpretation?**” (v. 26) Then comes the rebuke: “**No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked**” (v. 27). “Tell

me something I don't know, Daniel! My men just told me that!" Then comes the big reveal: "**but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries**" (v. 28). Then comes the surprise: "**But as for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because of any wisdom that I have more than all the living**" (v. 30).

Nebuchadnezzar's nightmare in verses 31–35 was of a huge, bright, and frightening statue made up of gold, silver, bronze, and iron mixed with clay. Too many focus on this and build entire eschatological schemes on it. But the point of it's being set up in Nebuchadnezzar's mind was so that like a bowling pin it would be knocked down, ground to chaff, and blown away in the wind by "**a stone [that] became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.**" This comes right from Psalms 1 and 2: "The wicked...are like the chaff that the wind drives away" (Ps. 1:4); "You shall break [the nations] with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel" (Ps. 2:9).

In verses 37–45 Daniel proclaims God's interpretation: Nebuchadnezzar is the head of gold but all he has **the God of heaven has given** (vv. 37–38). Then we fill in the blanks from human history with the silver chest and arms being the Medo-Persian Empire, the bronze middle

and thighs that **shall rule over all the earth** is Greece, and the legs of iron and feet partly of iron and clay (notice they're the same Empire) is Rome.

Why this survey of coming human history? They are literary and historical foils for God's kingdom. Kings and kingdoms rise and fall, but God's kingdom remains. That little stone that was cut from the mountain and used like a bowling ball against all the great kingdoms of the earth is the kingdom of God. God says several things about his kingdom:

1. *It would come during the Roman Empire: **And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom.*** What do we read right at the beginning of the Gospels, during this fourth kingdoms' reign: "The Kingdom of heaven is near!"
2. *It is of divine and supernatural origin: **the God of heaven will set up a kingdom...just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand.***
3. *It is indestructible: it **shall never be destroyed.***
4. *It is final: **nor shall the kingdom be left to another people.***
5. *It is conquering: **it shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end.***
6. *It is eternal: it **shall stand forever.***
7. *It is universal: the small stone **filled the whole earth** (v. 35).*

Brothers and sisters, this kingdom has come in Jesus Christ! And we who receive him as our king have received a kingdom that cannot be shaken (Heb. 12:28), have a king who reigns now until his enemies are made his footstool (1 Cor. 15:25), and one day will experience its fullness when the

kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord and Christ
(Rev. 11:15).

Julian the Apostate, a Roman Emperor in the fourth century, who hated Christianity was mortally wounded in battle against the Persians. The story goes that a soldier asked a Christian in Antioch what “the carpenter’s son”—Julian’s designation for Jesus—was doing. The Christian responded: “Making a coffin for the Emperor.” Every dictator, tyranny, King, and President lives and dies, rules and ceases to rule at the will of Jesus Christ. Everyone, like Nebuchadnezzar, will praise him as **God of gods and Lord of kings** (v. 47). All will enter the earth in death. Only Jesus came out of the earth and lives forever!