

Daniel 2 - Large and in Charge

December 16, 2012

Good morning! I am Pastor Kurt. I want to say a special “Hello” to those connecting live through the Internet. It is good to have you. Two weeks ago, we began a new series that will bring us through Christmas and into the new year. It is a series on the book of Daniel. Today we study Daniel 2.

I want to begin with a question. Last week, how many of you had a dream that you still remember? Most of us forget our dreams. It is a rare occurrence when we remember them. Dreams can be important.

In the Bible, God occasionally spoke to people through their dreams. He did this to Pharaoh, and it was interpreted by Joseph in the book of Genesis. He warned Joseph, the husband of Mary, in a dream to flee to Egypt. God spoke to Solomon in a dream.

God can still speak to people through dreams today, though I don’t believe it is a common occurrence. When you read the stories of missionaries trying to break into cultures hardened against the gospel, you occasionally find stories of God supporting their work of evangelism through dreams.

One example I read took place in Africa. A Christian was giving away gospel tracts. A young Muslim man took one. After reading it, he tore it up and threatened to kill Christian that gave it to him. The next day there was a knock on the Christian’s door. It was the same young man. He wanted another tract. The stunned Christian wanted to know why. After destroying the first tract, the young man had a dream. Two hands woke him in the middle of the night. He

heard a voice say, “You tore up the truth.” The next day, he went to the Christian’s home to get another tract. After reading it, he trusted Christ to forgive his sin and became a Christian. As a result, he was expelled from his Muslim family.¹ These kinds of stories are common in the Muslim world. God still works through dreams.

This morning, we are looking at a God-inspired dream. This dream was given to a man that, like many Muslims, was hard toward the things of God. This man was a true pagan that was deeply involved in the occult. He is known as one of the most barbaric men in history. His name is Nebuchadnezzar, the ruler of Babylon. Before we jump in, let’s take a few moments to set the stage with some review.

What are the two main lessons of Daniel?

When we began this series, we learned the book of Daniel has two big lessons.

1. **God is large and in charge.** The book of Daniel pounds home that God is in complete control of everything. That is extremely important when life feels like it is spinning out of control. This is what holds us together when life falls apart.
2. **Faithfulness to God matters, especially with small choices.** God knows what we think. God knows what we watch on television when nobody is home. God knows what we look at on in the Internet. When we choose to sin

¹ <http://www.epm.org/resources/2010/Jan/12/dreams-visions-move-muslims-christ/>

in little areas, Jesus forgives us, but we suffocate the blessing of God upon our lives.

This morning, in Daniel 2, we are focusing on the first big lesson of Daniel. God is large and in charge of everything.

When was the book of Daniel written?

By way of review, the book of Daniel was written in the sixth century. When Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem, Daniel was one of the captives he took to Babylon for re-education. Daniel was around age 16 when he left as a POW. He never returned to Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar's goal was to immerse Daniel, his friends, and the other captives, in the Babylonian culture with hopes that over time they would adopt it. Nebuchadnezzar even gave a full-ride scholarship to the most prestigious university in the land to Daniel and his friends. In that university, Daniel and his friends were given an anti-god education. Their courses included magic and the occult. Amazingly, Daniel and his friends became bi-cultural. They became learned the Babylonian culture, but they didn't let it become their world view. They stayed faithful to God. That is exactly what God wanted.

God's plan was for Daniel to be a missionary to the highest levels of the pagan world that he lived in. That was God's calling for his life, to be bi-cultural. He was to be deeply immersed in Babylonian culture, but his heart stayed faithful to the one true God.

If you go to a liberal seminary, they will tell you a different story about the book of Daniel and the date it was written. They will tell you the book of Daniel

wasn't written in the sixth century. They claim it was written around 150 B.C. Why do they have a date hundreds of years after Daniel lived? Portions of the book, like chapter two, give detailed prophecy about world history. If Daniel was written in 600 B.C., the book of Daniel is an amazing portrayal of God detailing how world history will unfold. That means God is in control of history. How do you get God out of the book? Change the date of when it was written. If the book of Daniel was written in 150 B.C., the book isn't special at all. All it is doing is reporting the facts of history *after* they happened. Any one of us can do that. If Daniel was written in 150 B.C., it would mean that Daniel was not the author. It would mean somebody pretending to be Daniel wrote it hundreds of years later.

Here are the options. If Daniel was written in 600 B.C., the book of Daniel gives us a detailed blueprint of how history will unfold before it happens. That means God was behind it. If the book of Daniel was written in 150 B.C., it was just reporting the facts of history that already transpired. It would also mean Daniel was not the author.

Just so you know, there is plenty of evidence the book of Daniel was written around 600 B.C. There is good evidence that the real Daniel of history wrote it, not a man claiming to be Daniel writing hundreds of years later.

One of my favorite pieces of evidence that proves the real Daniel of 600 B.C. wrote the book are the words of Jesus. Who did Jesus say wrote the book of Daniel?

"So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), Matthew 24:15 (ESV)

The book of Daniel talks about the abomination of desolation in chapters 9, 11 and 12. We will study that later in the series. I simply want to point out who Jesus claimed wrote the book. The prophet Daniel. The book was not written by someone else hundreds of years later. If you accept a late date, like the liberals, you have a problem. Jesus got his facts wrong. Once Jesus got his facts wrong, you can throw Jesus, as God, out of the Bible because God wouldn't get his facts wrong.

One of the famous stories in Daniel that shows God's sovereignty over all things is found in chapter two. We are looking at this chapter under two headings. First, God is in charge of my history. Second, God is in charge of world history.

God is in charge of my history.

In the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his spirit was troubled, and his sleep left him. 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. And the king said to them, "I had a dream, and my spirit is troubled to know the dream." Then the Chaldeans said to the king in Aramaic, "O king, live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation." 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. 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." Daniel 2:1–6 (ESV)

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. 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." Daniel 2:10–11 (ESV)

God was in control of Nebuchadnezzar's dreams.

The king was experiencing divinely prompted nightmares. Every time he closed his eyes, he had a recurring nightmare. As we learned last week, the religion of Babylon is the occult. Nebuchadnezzar called in his occult specialists, to help him interpret the dream.

The first thing I want us to notice is that God large and in charge over everything. He had no problem making Nebuchadnezzar dream exactly what he wanted him to dream. God has no problem putting dreams in our heads. God has no problem putting thoughts in our minds. If you have ever experienced someone's name popping into your mind with that intense sense you should pray for them, follow up on that. That may be God bringing somebody to your thought life because they need your prayers. God can place thoughts and dreams into our heads just like he did for Nebuchadnezzar.

In this chapter, God's control of Nebuchadnezzar's dreams is obvious. What is not as obvious, but is just as real, is God's control of deeper parts of Nebuchadnezzar's life.

God was in control of Nebuchadnezzar's grumpy attitude.

As we dig a little deeper, we find God was in full control of Nebuchadnezzar's grumpy attitude. This is not an excuse to have a bad attitude then blame it on God. I am simply pointing out that God is ultimately in control of everything. Think about this.

When we read the Psalms we find God controlled the Egyptian's attitude toward the Israelites.

Then Israel came to Egypt; Jacob sojourned in the land of Ham. And the Lord made his people very fruitful and made them stronger than their foes. He turned their hearts to hate his people, to deal craftily with his servants. Psalm 105:23–25 (ESV)

God gave the Egyptians a crummy attitude towards the Israelites. Why did he do this? It was part of his plan that they would be oppressed. That set the stage for their deliverance. God was sovereign over the hardness of Pharaoh's heart toward the Israelites even when God was beating the pants off his nation. God is so large and in charge that he is even in control of attitudes. God gave Nebuchadnezzar a crummy attitude that morning so he would ask the impossible of his occult priests. He wanted all of his occult specialists to not just interpret the dream but to tell it to him.

That seems unreasonable. It is unreasonable. Remember the Babylonian culture is immersed in the occult. Demons are real. Fallen angels and the demons are powerful beings. There is one thing Satan and his angels cannot do. They cannot read a mind. Only God can give dreams and know the mind. Only God can know the thoughts of our hearts. This is one area even the most powerful magicians and enchanters cannot venture into. Demons cannot read Nebuchadnezzar's dream. Yet, for some reason that morning, this is what Nebuchadnezzar insisted should take place. It is the one thing the wise men of Babylon could not do. Don't you love the way God set this whole thing up?

"I the Lord search the heart and test the mind,..." Jeremiah 17:10 (ESV)

The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will. Proverbs 21:1 (ESV)

Put yourself in the shoes of Daniel and the other exiles. Jerusalem was just conquered by a demonic occult king who is one of the great barbarians in history. You are carried off to exile. Does life feel like it is spinning out of control? The best children of the land are taken away to Babylon to be reeducated in the occult. Does it look like life is out of control? God hasn't lost control. It is just that his plan for how his people would bring him glory is a little different than their plan.

One of the reasons God brought Israelites to Babylon is so they could be a witness to the Babylonians. God gave the most powerful man in the world nightmares and made him insist on his occult priests doing the one thing they couldn't do. Why? God set up Daniel to be his missionary to that pagan culture. That way lost people could know the true God. Life was not out of control. God was just running a game plan that was different than they expected.

What happened next? Daniel heard about the king's proclamation to kill all the wise men. He went to prayer and God revealed the king's dream to him, because God knew the king's dream, he gave it to him.

Daniel answered the king and said, "No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. Your dream and the visions of your head as you lay in bed are these: Daniel 2:27–28 (ESV)

God is in complete control of my history. He knows what he is doing. His plan may be different than my plan but it is a good plan. No matter what God has ordained for his children at the moment, God is trustworthy. God is good. He

knows what he is doing with our lives. He doesn't make a mistake. He has us just where he wants us to bring him glory.

God is in charge of world history.

"You saw, O king, and behold, a great image. This image, mighty and of exceeding brightness, stood before you, and its appearance was frightening. The head of this image was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its middle and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

"This was the dream. Now we will tell the king its interpretation. You, O king, the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, and the might, and the glory, and into whose hand he has given, wherever they dwell, the children of man, the beasts of the field, and the birds of the heavens, making you rule over them all—you are the head of gold. Another kingdom inferior to you shall arise after you, and yet a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. And there shall be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron, because iron breaks to pieces and shatters all things. And like iron that crushes, it shall break and crush all these. And as you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, it shall be a divided kingdom, but some of the firmness of iron shall be in it, just as you saw iron mixed with the soft clay. And as the toes of the feet were partly iron and partly clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly brittle. As you saw the iron mixed with soft clay, so they will mix with one another in marriage, but they will not hold together, just as iron does not mix with clay. And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever, just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure." Daniel 2:31–45 (ESV)



Nebuchadnezzar's dream was of a great statue. The head was of gold, the chest and arms of silver, the belly of bronze, the legs of iron and the feet of

iron mixed with clay. A rock came along and struck the feet. It demolished the statue. The rock grew to become so big it took over the world. That is the dream in a nutshell. That was a weird nightmare but it was the nightmare God wanted him to have.

What does the dream mean?

The statue represents world empires.

Head of gold --- Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon.

We know what part of the statue represented Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian empire because Scripture tells us. He was the head of gold. I am sure Nebuchadnezzar was proud to know he was the head of gold. Nebuchadnezzar did achieve one of the greatest world empires. We know he was successful only because God made him successful. While he hoped his world empire would last forever, that isn't what God decided.

Chest and arms of silver --- Cyrus and the Medo-Persian empire.

It was within Daniel's lifetime that Cyrus, the Medo-Persian ruler, conquered Babylon. That became the new world empire. We will learn more about this later in the book.

Belly and thighs of bronze --- Alexander the Great and the Greek empire.

The next world empire which swallowed the Medo-Persian empire was the Greek empire led by Alexander the Great. History tells us that he wept while in his 20s because he could find another nation to conquer. He achieved world domination.

Legs of iron and clay --- The Roman empire

The next world empire that conquered the Greek empire was Rome. Rome was known for its military might. Like iron, the Roman legions crushed all opposition. History tells us that toward the end of the Roman empire it began to crumble. It crumbled because of pluralism. The foreign cultures intermarried with the Romans, and there was a loss of national identity. Like the feet of the statue, they became iron mixed with clay.

This statue is a detailed description of the way world history would unfold from the time of Babylon until the time of Rome. In the time of Rome, a stone, not cut out with human hands, would strike the foot of the statue and destroy the whole thing.

Who is the stone?

The first clue to the identity of the stone is that it was not cut out by human hands. All of the other world empires were set up by a man. In this dream, God told people there would be a new world empire that would ultimately destroy all other world empires. This new empire would not be set up by man but it would be set up by God. When would it begin? It began in the days of the Roman empire.

Does anybody think they know where this is heading? It was talking about the birth of Jesus. Jesus is the stone that was not created by human hands. He didn't have an earthly father, he had a heavenly father. Mary was a virgin when Jesus was conceived.

Notice the stone is the least valuable of the materials in this dream. Isn't it true that when Christ came to earth, it looked like he had little value? He was born to poor parents. He lived in poverty. He died one of the most barbaric forms of deaths in history, death on a cross. Yet, this was the way God chose to set up his kingdom. although Christ's kingdom starts out small and insignificant, it grows. It will ultimately destroy all the other man-made kingdoms of the world. It will outlast all other kingdoms. It will never be conquered.

Babylon is gone; Medo-Persia is gone; Greece is gone; Rome is gone, and one day, the United States of America will be gone. There will be a kingdom that will still be growing, and it will never be destroyed because it isn't a kingdom set up by man. It is a kingdom set up by God, with Christ at the head of it.

Who is part of this kingdom? The kingdom consists of all those throughout history that God has supernaturally called and opened their eyes to see Christ's identity and to follow him. Ultimately, Christ's kingdom will be the one world kingdom that will endure forever. Jesus said it is not a kingdom like an earthly kingdom.

Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, "The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you." Luke 17:20–21 (ESV)

Christ's kingdom begins in the hearts of men and women when God opens their eyes to see Jesus for who he is.

Ultimately Christ's kingdom will be a kingdom of this world. It will involve Satan being once and for all thrown into the Lake of Fire. It will involve this world being re-created free of sin. This final great world empire will not be ruled from

the city of Babylon with Nebuchadnezzar at the center; it will be ruled from the New Jerusalem with Christ at the center of all things.

All conversions aren't as good as they look.

Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face and paid homage to Daniel, and commanded that an offering and incense be offered up to him. The king answered and said to Daniel, "Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery." Then the king gave Daniel high honors and many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon. Daniel made a request of the king, and he appointed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego over the affairs of the province of Babylon. But Daniel remained at the king's court. Daniel 2:46–49 (ESV)

Doesn't this sound like a legitimate conversion? It isn't. In the next chapter, Nebuchadnezzar goes from dreaming of a statue to building one and forcing everyone to worship it. As we study this book, we will find God is seeking Nebuchadnezzar. He has to knock Nebuchadnezzar on the side of the head hard a few times before he gets it. He is no different than many of us. God breaks into our lives again and again and we don't listen. Finally, he hits us hard enough that we come to our senses. Thank goodness God is persistent.

Conclusion

1. **God is in control of my history** --- Even when life feels out of control, I can trust God. He is good. He loves me. He knows what he is doing with my life. He has me exactly where he wants me to be to serve him. *I don't need to fear the future. I just need to be faithful in the future.*
1. **God is in control of world history** --- History is moving towards its appointed end where all of man's kingdom's will be crushed and God's

kingdom will be established forever through Christ, God's son. *Am I part of that kingdom?*



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