

# The Sovereignty of God in Babylon (2)

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Date: 05 July 2026

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[0:00] We're going to read now Daniel chapter 2. Daniel chapter 2. You'll find us on page 737 of your pew Bible. Daniel chapter 2.

! In the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams. His spirit was troubled in his sleep. He left them. 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 you the interpretation.

The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, The word for 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.

They answered a second time and said, Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will show its interpretation. The king answered and said, I know with certainty that you are trying to gain time, because you see that the word for me is firm.

[1:40] 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.

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. Because of this, the king was angry and very furious and commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be destroyed.

The word for wise men is the word there, magi. Remember the magi? He visited Jesus when he was born. So the decree went out, and the wise men were about to be killed, and they sought Daniel and his companions to kill them.

Then Daniel replied with prudence and discretion to Ariach, the captain of the king's guard, who had gone out to kill the wise men of Babylon. He declared to Ariach, the king's captain, Why is the decree of the king so urgent?

[2:55] Then Ariach made the matter known to Daniel, and Daniel went in and requested the king to appoint him a time that he might show the interpretation to the king. Then Daniel went to his house and made the matter known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions, remember Shaddach, Meshach, and Abednego, 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.

Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven. Daniel answered and said, Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might.

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. He reveals deep and hidden things.

He knows what's in the darkness, and the light dwells with him. 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.

Therefore, Daniel went into Ariach, 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.

[4 : 20] Bring me in before the king, and I will show the king the interpretation. Then Ariach brought in Daniel before the king in haste, and said thus to him, I have found among the exiles from Judah a man who will make known to the king the interpretation.

The king declared to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, Are you able to make known to me the dream that I have seen in its interpretation? 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.

To you, O king, as you lay in bed came thoughts of what would be after this, and he who reveals mysteries made known to you what is to be. But as for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because of any wisdom that I have more than all the living, but in order that the interpretation may be made known to the king, and that you may know the thoughts of your mind.

You saw, O king, and behold a great image. This image, mighty and of exceeding brightness, stood before you, and its appearance was frightening or terrifying.

[5 : 40] 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, and 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, whatever they dwell, the children of man, the beast 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, 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.

[7 : 14] 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, that 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 is sure. Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face and paid homage to Daniel and commanded that an offering, an 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.

[8 : 46] But Daniel remained at the king's court. Amen and may God bless that reading of his word.

For all that we may despair at our politicians and leaders, we should be thankful that we aren't governed by Nebuchadnezzar.

Imagine being set a problem like he set for his magicians and wise men. He set a strange dream. It's left him deeply troubled.

So he calls these magicians and wise men to him and commands them to tell him what the dream is and what it means. He attaches two conditions.

First, he's not going to tell them what that dream was. And secondly, if they don't tell him what the dream was and what the dream means, he's going to kill them and he's going to kill their families.

[9:46] Now, we might think, I suppose, that at times Donald Trump can be a bit unpredictable. But Nebuchadnezzar, he takes unpredictability to new and alarming levels.

Like a child being asked by a bully, tell me what I'm thinking or I'm going to beat you up. Or like a homeowner being asked by a robber, tell me what I had for breakfast or I'm going to steal everything in your house.

It's an impossible ask with the harshest of consequences. Some people often say to me that they wish they'd lived in Bible times.

Personally, I'm glad I don't. Not just because they neither had paracetamol or antibiotics, but because these were really violent times where people were led by tyrants worse than anything we see in our world today.

Well, into this most impossible situation appears the most improbable of people. God often uses improbable people to do impossible things.

[10:54] He used a fanatic like Saul of Tarsus to spread the gospel all over the world. He uses us as His church to defeat the kingdom of Satan. Into this seemingly intractable situation, God introduces an improbable man called Daniel, who in his interactions with the king in Daniel 2, shows himself capable of doing something impossible, interpreting a dream of which he does not even know the content and interpreting it.

Daniel does something amazing. But as with every passage in the book of Daniel we're going to look at, Daniel's not the hero of this story. Jesus is the hero of this story.

And it's what this passage tells us about Jesus which is the most amazing thing. We're not interested in interpretations of the book of Daniel which leave Jesus out of the story.

It doesn't honor Daniel. It doesn't honor the Bible. And it doesn't honor Jesus Himself. The mistake expositors often make when preaching Daniel is they're not reading it in the context of the whole Bible.

The great North African, St. Augustine, famously said, the new is in the old concealed, the old is in the new revealed.

[12:19] The new is in the old concealed, the old is in the new revealed. In other words, these mistaken expositors aren't reading Daniel in the context of the fullness of Jesus.

They're failing to show how the New Testament reveals the true intent of the Old Testament which is to point to Jesus in all the glory of His world-changing person and work.

As we saw last Sunday evening, the storyline of Daniel 1 points to Jesus. And as we'll see this week from Daniel 2, in an even greater way, the storyline points to Jesus.

In this impossible problem, this interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, we see a Jesus greater than we've seen before. So, as in the context of the whole Bible and from a Christological perspective, we read Daniel 2, we learn two things.

First, the prophet and the son. And secondly, the prophet and the king. And our response to all this should be that of Nebuchadnezzar, who at the end of this chapter bows down to worship the God of Daniel.

[13:45] We begin then, first of all, with the prophet and the son. The prophet and the son. For those of you who were here last week, you know that we compared Daniel to Joseph.

Joseph, exiled by his brothers to Egypt, he interprets the dreams of the Egyptian king, becomes their deliverer from famine in Canaan. But with all respect to Joseph, Daniel is an upgrade.

Here we find him with a bigger problem than Joseph faced. Because at least Pharaoh told Joseph the content of his dream. Whereas Nebuchadnezzar refused to tell Daniel what he had dreamed at all.

And as we saw at the beginning, it was an impossible task with the harshest of consequences.

Unless Daniel revealed the meaning of the dream, the content of which he had not even been told, he and all the other wise men in Babylon and all their families would be ruthlessly executed.

It's a problem Nebuchadnezzar initially set for his own wise men, the magicians, the enchanters, the sorcerers, the Chaldeans. When they learned that the king refused to tell them the content of the dream, they replied, there is not a man on earth who can meet the king's demand.

[15:08] For no great and powerful king has asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or Chaldean. And now comes one of the key verses in this chapter, verse 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 know, in the Old Testament, sometimes even donkeys tell the truth and now the magicians of Babylon tell the truth.

No one can show it to the king except the gods whose dwelling is not with flesh. Well, Daniel and his companions Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were due to be killed along with the wise men of Babylon but rather than run, they prayed.

and they prayed that God would reveal to them both the content and the meaning of the king's dream. And that night, God revealed it to Daniel in a vision.

We might suppose that a heavily relieved Daniel would immediately run to the king to tell him but Daniel's first response isn't to run to the king of Babylon but to run to the king of heaven, the God who had showed him the dream and its meaning.

[16:30] We'll get to the dream a bit later. I want to focus our first point on Daniel's prayer here in verses 20 to 23. Blessed be the name of God forever to whom belong wisdom and might.

He changes times and seasons removing kings and setting up kings giving wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding. He reveals deep unhidden things. He knows what's in the darkness and the light dwells with him.

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.

There is just so much in this prayer. It's just so rich. Not the least of which is this. It reveals to us a God who is an ultimate and sovereign control of all things that are none above him.

It is God who rules over everything and everyone, king and commoner and nation. It is God who set up Nebuchadnezzar as king of Babylon.

[17:38] It is God who will in his own time take Nebuchadnezzar down. It is God who sets up rulers, kings and presidents in our world. and it is God who chooses the time to take them all down.

As my friend says, heaven rules. Be assured of this, the world is in good hands because it is in the hands of God.

God. But what I really want to focus on is there in verse 22, what Daniel says in the middle of this prayer about God. He reveals deep and hidden things.

He reveals deep and hidden things. Daniel didn't cleverly discern what Nebuchadnezzar's dreams were about, nor did he figure out in his own wisdom the interpretation.

God revealed these deep and hidden things to Daniel and Daniel then revealed them to Nebuchadnezzar. And in this context, it would seem plain to say, would it not, Daniel is serving as a prophet.

[18:46] A prophet. There's a reason that the book of Daniel is located as the first among what we call the lesser prophets. It's because Daniel is a book of prophecy prophecy, and Daniel was a prophet.

Daniel the prophet had a secret key, a cheat code to interpreting Nebuchadnezzar's dream none of the other wise men of Babylon had. God was on his side, revealing deep and hidden things to him. What was an insoluble problem for them was a matter of prayer and revelation for Daniel. So, Daniel's a prophet, prophet, and he's being told secret things by God and they're revealing these things to Nebuchadnezzar or whoever.

Daniel was a prophet like Moses, Samuel, and Isaiah. God spoke to them and they revealed what God had said to them to the people.

God revealed hidden things to the prophets and these prophets made known what God had revealed to them to the people. And God revealed these things to them in visions and dreams and other mental impressions.

[20:04] Of course, he allowed them the freedom of their personalities to express in their own words what he had revealed to them, but the Holy Spirit carried them along so that their final product was exactly what God wanted them to say.

So, Daniel's a prophet, a very important prophet in the story of the Old Testament. Jesus talks of Daniel in Matthew 24, verse 15, calling him the prophet Daniel.

So, what is Christ here in Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream? To my knowledge, Jesus didn't interpret anyone's dreams during his earthly ministry.

There's something more fundamental here, and that is the nature of what it means to be a prophet. Daniel and the other prophets of the Old Testament were vital means of God speaking to his people and revealing to them both what he's like and what his will is for them.

And that is exactly where we see Christ. In Hebrews chapter 1, in the first chapter of this letter written to ethnic Christians, the author writes these words.

[21:16] He says, long ago, at many times, and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers through the prophets. So, the author there in Hebrews 1 is referring to prophets like Daniel, through whom God spoke to the Jewish fathers in Babylon, God's chosen way being through visions and the interpretations of dreams.

God revealed deep and hidden things through these prophets. Then we read on in Hebrews 1, but in these last days, he has spoken to us by his son, his son being the Lord Jesus Christ, the ultimate prophet through whom God speaks to his church.

In other words, the writer of Hebrews is saying, Daniel's prophecies, for all the worth they possessed, are but the babblings of a toddler compared to the clarity finality and ultimacy of the Lord Jesus Christ.

By his life and mission, Jesus has revealed to us everything we need to know about who God is, what God is like, and what God's will is for us. Jesus is God's ultimate prophet because he's a man like Daniel upon whom the Spirit of God descends, but the Spirit of God rests upon Jesus all the time, and unlike Daniel, he is the very Son of God in whom the fullness of God dwells in bodily form. Can you see the biblical typology working here in Daniel chapter 2? Christ is no mere servant of God like Daniel was. He's far more than that he is the Son of God who exists in closer relationship to God than it's possible for any of us to imagine.

[23:16] The Apostle John puts it like this, he says, no one has ever seen God, but God, the one and only who is in the Father's bosom, He has made him known. How much greater a son than a servant, and how much clearer Christ makes God known than Daniel did.

Daniel points to Christ, but Christ does not point to Daniel, and as the Son, Christ knows his Father better than Daniel ever did.

We expect our children to know us better than our work colleagues do, and so if someone wants to know what we're like, the best people to go to aren't our work colleagues, but our children.

In the same way, if we want to know what God is like, we go to the Son. Christ is the greatest, ultimate, and final prophet telling us everything we need to know about God, about ourselves, and about the way of salvation.

Of course, the deeper truth to us, don't want to go into this tonight because it's deep, is that it was Jesus speaking through Daniel in the first place, but our point is, Jesus is the greater prophet.

[24:34] And so, when we read of Daniel discerning and interpreting Nebuchadnezzar's dream, something humanly impossible, we're to look forward from this chapter to the coming of the final and ultimate prophet of God, Jesus Christ, who really does do the impossible.

He reveals who God is and what God is like to us. He reveals to us the infinite, eternal, and unchangeable love of God which reaches out to us in our lostness, in our despair, in our rebellion. He reveals it to us on the cross and proclaims to us that it's not by works we might be saved, it's by simple faith in Him. And He reveals it with an urgency, a simplicity, and a clarity of which the Old Testament prophets had no understanding.

In Daniel's prophetic interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, we are to think of Christ as God's greatest, ultimate, and final prophet.

And whereas Daniel's words were directed to King Nebuchadnezzar, Jesus' prophetic words are directed toward every human being on planet earth. They're directed to me, and they're directed to you.

[25:51] Jesus says, I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me shall never die. And so it resolves down for us into a simple question.

Shall we believe in God's greatest, ultimate, and final prophet, who on the cross reveals God to us? Nebuchadnezzar believed God's word to him through Daniel.

Shall we, who aren't nearly as vicious and irrational as a Babylonian king believe the words of a greater than Daniel, Jesus Christ?

So that's the first point, the prophet and the son. The second is the prophet and the king. The prophet and the king.

From verse 31 onwards, Daniel declares Nebuchadnezzar's dream and gives its interpretation. In his dream, the king of Babylon saw a vast statue, a head of gold, a chest of arms, sorry, a chest and arms of silver, a torso and thighs of bronze, and its legs and feet clay.

[27:14] Out of the statue, iron and clay rather, out of the statue, a small stone is cut, which is then thrown against the legs, and the whole structure comes tumbling down.

But the small stone grows to become a vast mountain which fills the whole earth. It's not a normal dream, the kind of dreams that we have, however weird and vivid they may be.

We might even get some really weird dreams at night, don't we? But this is not like that. It's a God-given dream, and it can only be explained by a God-given interpretation.

So Daniel goes on. The head of gold is Nebuchadnezzar, the king of the Babylonian empire. And Daniel reminds the king that all he has has been given to him by the Lord of heaven and earth.

The chest and the arms of silver are another kingdom which will come after him, which we believe to be the Medo-Persian empire. Think of Xerxes and the power of the Persian army, the immortals.

[28:27] The torso and the thighs of bronze represent the mighty Greek empire. So think of Alexander the Great and how his empire reached to modern-day India.

The legs and feet of iron and clay are the Roman empire, the mightiest empire in the world. It was later divided into two empires, west and east, but both together with the Roman empire.

It's that succession of empires this great statue represents, and to each, as to name a condenser, the God who rules over them all has given authority and power.

In verse 31, Daniel says that the appearance of that statue was frightening. Now, perhaps we look at all the empires of the world and are frightened by their ambition and their power, but we must remember that heaven rules, and it was God who, for his own perfect wisdom, gave them their position and placed limits on their activities, and all was for the good of his church.

more importantly, in the context of Daniel 2 and what his dreams mean, we read of how, in verse 44, in the last days, in the days of the Roman empire, the God of heaven will, and I quote, set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people.

[30:04] It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it will stand forever. God's going to set up a kingdom in the days of the Roman empire, which shall shatter all the kingdoms of men, and this kingdom alone shall last forever.

Perhaps Nebuchadnezzar thought that his kingdom and dynasty would last forever, but God's telling them here, no, no, no, it's not going to do that. It's going to fade into the dust of history just as surely as will all the other empires of men.

Daniel continues by interpreting what that small stone which brought down the statue is. A stone was cut from a mountain, verse 45, by no human hand, and it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold.

That small stone's not a rock. That small stone's a person. It's a clear reference to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Christ born during the days of the Roman Empire, the king whose kingdom outlasted, outlasts, and will outlast all the empires of men.

And it's such a small stone, such a small stone compared to the magnitude of all the powers of the world, but it will bring them all down. Jesus so humble and unrecognized during his life.

[31:36] Jesus crucified on a Roman cross. Jesus will be the foundation and head of the mightiest of all kingdoms. This is a prophecy about Jesus, and why I've entitled this point, as you'll notice, the prophet and the king.

Not with a reference to Nebuchadnezzar as the king, but a reference to Jesus as the king. Jesus, the king of the kingdom of God.

Daniel bears witness in this interpretation to the kingship of Jesus over all the nations and empires of men. They shall all fade into history, but Jesus shall remain king forever and ever and ever.

Daniel concludes his interpretation in verse 45 by saying, the dream is certain, and its interpretation sure. You can call the whole world a liar, but God is true.

The kingdom of Christ will last forever. The crucified one has been exalted and given a name above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus

Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

[32 : 52] Lord to the Lord. And it's such a small stone. It's a stone marked with the tracks of the cross's thorns and nails, but a stone which grows into a world-sized mountain to whom the nations stream in faith and worship and praise.

It's the stone who is a man, Christ, the Christ who shatters every human empire and brings them all to naught. He's the stone in whose name we are gathered this evening to praise and offer Him our lives in worship and service.

From verse 46 onwards, we might have expected Nebuchadnezzar to be filled with rage. To be told that his empire was doomed was hardly a smart political move from Daniel.

But far from anger, Nebuchadnezzar falls to his face and he worships Daniel and he offers up incense to Daniel and says to him, truly your God is a God of gods and a king of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery.

He had set Daniel an impossible problem, but Daniel and the power and wisdom of God had more than met the challenge with God's help Daniel had overcome and in the spirit of Christ testified to the eternal kingdom of the Lord Jesus.

[34 : 25] Does this response mean that Nebuchadnezzar rather had become a believer in the God of Israel? Well, we can't say that about him at this stage. He was a man who hedged his religious bets, who for political reasons declared loyalty to all the gods of the peoples over whom he ruled.

It may mean that the God of Israel had gone up in his estimation, but it did not mean that Nebuchadnezzar at this stage had been converted, as we might say. What it did lead to was Daniel and his friends being shown favor and promoted further.

An episode which began with a threat against Daniel's life ended with him being favored. Daniel was promoted so that he was in charge of all the wise men of Babylon, verse 48.

He was in charge of all the wise men in Babylon. Remember the word wise men? Magi. Could it be that it was from Daniel that the wise men from the east, the Magi, those wise men who visited the stable in Bethlehem where Jesus was born, received their instructions 500 years before his birth? The point of the whole sermon is this. Everything in this chapter, everything in this book of Daniel, resolves down to Jesus, the Son, the greater prophet than Daniel, and Jesus the Lord, the greater king than Nebuchadnezzar.

[36 : 14] Jesus, the greater prophet than Daniel, the greater king than Nebuchadnezzar. Now, we might despair over the leaders of our world, but heaven rules, and heaven rules for the man, Jesus Christ.

And what's left for us this evening is this and this alone, to put our faith and trust in this greater prophet, this greater king. To go back to an earlier point, if we trust the words of Daniel, how much more should we trust the words of Jesus as he says to us, if anyone believes in the Son, he shall have eternal life.

To live under such a king is to enjoy the security, the peace, and assurance, and joy of his everlasting love and power.

The application for us is clear, is it not? Whether for the first time or the 500th time, believe and trust in Jesus, the greater prophet, the greater king.

Amen. Amen.