

Daniel 2

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[0 : 00] ...the Bible, because it's a combination of stories, many of which have made their way into popular culture. Daniel the Lion's Den, the phrase, the writing on the wall, or feet of clay, all those come from Luke and Daniel.

And yet, it also contains these prophetic visions that have both fascinated and puzzled people ever since the book was written. Now, before we jump into chapter 2, I want to give you a little bit of a big picture of where we're going in this book.

So if you turn in your bulletin, there is an outline of the book of Daniel. I think it's toward the middle or back of your bulletin. And so, let me point out a few things as you look at that.

We take about five minutes to sort of view a big picture of the book of Daniel as a whole, and then we'll jump into chapter 2. Because chapter 2 is a mix, not the summary, but the vision in the middle of it. So that's sort of the most common way that most of us think about how Daniel is organized.

Right? We have these stories, especially in the first half of the book, that focus on what it looks like for God's people to be faithful in exile as we live in this world. And then we have the visions, which sort of remind us that the world we're living in is not the only world there will be.

[1 : 20] And that God is going to do something in the future. That is, for one day, come on in and God is establishing His kingdom on earth.

So that's sort of the most obvious way that the book is organized when you just read it in English. It is stories and visions. But there's an important detail that we can easily miss.

But that's quite significant is that the book of Daniel is written in two different languages. So the first chapter, which we read last week, up to chapter 2, verse 4, is written in Hebrew.

Which is what most of the Old Testament is written in. But at chapter 2, verse 4, and if you look down at the Bibles, chapter 2, verse 4, page 737 in the two Bibles, there's a little note that we're at verse 4, then the Chaldeans said to the king in Aramaic.

And there's a note, up to the book number 2, and then if you look down at the bottom, it says, the text from this point to the end of chapter 7 is in Aramaic. You might say, what's Aramaic? Well, Aramaic was the international trade language of the day.

[2 : 27] It was the official language of the Persian Empire. It was sort of broadly spoken throughout the Middle East at that point. Hebrew was the local language that was spoken in Judea, in Jerusalem, where Daniel was from.

And then chapter 1, Hebrew, 2-7, Aramaic, 8-12, the end of the book in Hebrew. So the middle is that Aramaic, the intro, and the conclusion is in Hebrew. Now you might think, why would that be, right?

Well, I have to get rid of the book in two different languages. That could be confusing, right? Because some people can only understand one language. Some people can only understand the other. Why would you do that? Not many books are written that way.

Now there are a few books written that way. One of them is War and Peace by Tolstoy. It's written mostly in Russian, and it's set in Russia, but it has some of the dialogues in French. Because part of the theme of the book is the connection between Russian cultural identity and Western European, and particularly French influence.

Right? And that's one of the themes that Tolstoy is dealing with in his book. And so with Daniel. Right? It's a book about faithful Jews, Hebrew speakers, living in a foreign culture, speaking Aramaic.

[3 : 45] Okay? So here's what I think is the best explanation for why we have this two-language book. If you look at chapters 2 through 7, I think this is the message that the author of Daniel wanted to send to the whole world.

That's why he wrote it in the international trade language. He wasn't just writing a message to help faithful Jews who knew the Bible, who already believed in God, who were in exile, know how to live.

He was also broadcasting a message to the whole world, wanting to introduce the whole world to the one true God of the Bible. The intro and the conclusion speak more specifically to the concerns of God's people, the Hebrews.

Now, why this matters today? Two things. The book has an important message for Christians, first of all.

Just as it has an important message for the Jews, for God's people who are in exile, and that's why we see some of it written in Hebrew. Right? Specifically addressing their concerns. But it's also, it has a message for people who aren't already Christians.

[4 : 58] Right? To introduce the whole world to the ones from God. So whether you're here today, if you've been a Christian for your whole life, and you were born and raised in the church, or whether you're totally new to Christianity, and you're just coming to listen and learn and see what Christians really believe, I think particularly these middle chapters of the book of day will have a message from all of us.

So one more analogy might be, if you were a Haitian, someone from Haiti, who was living in Paris, during the time that the French colonized Haiti, and you write a book, and the middle part is in French, and that's the message you want to send to everybody in the French Empire, but you also write some stuff in pre-all, at the beginning and the end, to give particular messages to your fellow Haitians who understand that.

So just an analogy, maybe that helps. So how do these chapters do that? Again, I've tried to outline that on the insert of the bulletin, the Aramaic connection of Daniel.

It has a very intentional structure. These chapters hang together. So it begins and ends, chapter 2 and chapter 7, with a vision of four kingdoms. We'll look at one of those today, and one of those in a few weeks.

And in both cases, there's a succession of four kingdoms who are eventually replaced by the kingdom of God, which will be everlasting. Chapter 3 and chapter 6, probably the most popular chapters of Daniel, are two examples of faithfulness amidst suffering.

[6 : 30] Daniel's friends in the fiery furnace and Daniel in the lion's den. And then chapter 4 and 5, in both of those chapters, we see God disciplining a proud ruler.

In chapter 4, Nebuchadnezzar is humbled, and he's later restored. In chapter 5, Nebuchadnezzar exalts himself, he doesn't humble himself, and he's judged.

So what do we take away from these chapters? I think we can take away three things. Chapter 2 and 7 teaches that God alone will reign forever, while all earthly kingdoms will eventually pass away.

Chapter 3 and 6, focus on the theme of deliverance. God delivers his faithful servants, who entrust themselves completely to him. And chapter 5, focus on the theme of God exalting the humble, and bringing down the crowd.

So that's where we're going in the next six weeks, especially these Aramaic chapters of Daniel. You can also put it as the God reveals, rescues, and rules. And I've noted again, all those verse numbers that are quoted there contain one of those birds or a related idea.

[7 : 37] So that's been a big picture of where we're going in Daniel. Right? These chapters that are showing up the character of the one true God, and also showing us what it means to live for him as his people.

So turn to chapter 2. Chapter 2 is a long chapter, so I'm going to walk through it step by step. I'm going to summarize some parts as we go along. So I'm going to begin by reading verses 1 through 12.

So read with me here. 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've had a dream, and my spirit is troubled to know the dream. And 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 for me is firm. If you do not make known to me the dream and its interpretation, you shall be torn limb for limb, and your houses shall be laid in ruins.

[8 : 43] 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 the 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. 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 until the times change. Therefore tell me the dream. And I shall know that you can show me the interpretation. Chaldeans answered the king and said, There is not a man on earth who can beat 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 destroy. Over the last several years, the city of New Haven has come to advertise itself as an increasingly attractive place for people to come and live and settle.

[9 : 58] Perhaps 20 years ago, New Haven had a reputation for high crime rates, boarded up houses, and absentee landlords. Over the last 10 years, the downtown area in particular has seen all kinds of new developments, from bike lanes to biotech companies, restaurants and rental properties.

In a couple of years, if the developers have their way, we'll have another neighborhood right in our backyard, where there's a big parking lot now. According to a recent survey, the population of New Haven has grown by 5% in the last decade, and is projected to grow even more than that in the next decade.

Now, if you were born and raised here, you know the story is a little more complicated than that. Gentrification always has pros and cons. It hasn't affected all neighborhoods in the same way. But in many ways, New Haven is seen, and I think in some ways rightly so, as an up-and-coming city.

And similarly, Babylon, in the time of Nebuchadnezzar, was also an up-and-coming city. It was prospering economically, as the capital of a large and rapidly expanding empire.

It was becoming a center of science and education, where the brightest minds from all over the ancient world were brought to study and learn. It was undergoing a renaissance of art and architecture.

[11 : 16] Precious words of art were being restored. The lost Acadian language was being recovered. Ancient temples were being reconstructed. We went from verse 1, that Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, was in his second year of his reign.

Now, actually, as we count, it was probably the third year of his reign, because the Babylonians counted the first year as what they called the accession year, and then the second year they called the first year, and the third year they called the second year.

But anyway, he was about 30 years old at the time, and he was on top of the world. His military campaigns were moving forward with great success. He already controlled Syria, and Palestine.

He was receiving annual tribute payments from four major cities in the region. But what we see at the beginning of this passage is that in the heart of Babylon, in the privileged center of the powerful empire, all was not well.

There was unrest in the up-and-coming city. Nebuchadnezzar had dreams. And these dreams troubled him to the point of sleeplessness. And we don't know how long this lasted, but if you've ever experienced insomnia, you know that it can start to mess with you pretty quickly.

[12 : 31] Most people, if you go two or three days without any sleep, most people will start hallucinating. And after that, it goes downhill pretty fast. Even if you're getting some sleep every night, a sustained lack of peaceful sleep can make you feel frazzled, or even desperate.

As a Babylonian, as well, Nebuchadnezzar would have seen dreams not just as a disturbance or a projection of his own imagination, but as potentially a mode of divine communication.

Part of the Babylonian training that his advisors had gone through included training in the interpretation of dreams, concerning which ones might be divine messages.

And so, Nebuchadnezzar calls together his advisors, those who are supposed to have insight into dreams and wisdom of human and divine. But here's the problem.

He doesn't just ask them to interpret his dream. He asks them to tell them what he dreamed. And you might ask, why would Nebuchadnezzar make such an unreasonable request?

[13 : 36] Of course you can't tell somebody what they dreamed if they can't tell you what they dreamed. Perhaps, had he forgotten his dream? Maybe he was so troubled by it he couldn't stop obsessing over it until he figured out what it was.

But there might be another factor involved as well. It's very possible that he was testing his advisors because he didn't trust them. You see, the magicians, the enchanters, the sorcerers, the caldeans, they claim to have special knowledge and insight into things both human and divine.

And perhaps the king had become suspicious. He said, I think they're just making this stuff up. So I'm going to call it a blow. I'm going to ask them to tell me something that only I know.

And there's no way they can just guess it or make something that sounds good. Tell me my dream that I had last night. William of May, verse 3 to 11, we see this escalating conversation that goes back and forth three times between Nebuchadnezzar and his advisors.

Right? First they're calm and respectful. And then, verse 5 and 6, Nebuchadnezzar's tone rapidly escalates, threads of terrible punishment, offers a great reward.

[14 : 59] And then he gets hysterical. He accuses them of lying and corruption, trying to gain time until the times change. Maybe he's suspicious of a plot that undermines authority, or maybe he's just paranoid.

His advisors say, you're making a completely unreasonable request that no human being should be expected to fulfill. And then, verse 12, he commands that they all be destroyed.

So what do we have here in Babylon? We have Nebuchadnezzar, the young, ambitious, successful leader, anxious, restless, suspicious, desperate to be in control and in the know, prone to anger and violence.

And then his advisors. On the one hand, they're the victims of Nebuchadnezzar's unrealistic demand. They're being asked to do something that's clearly beyond their capacities as human beings.

On the other hand, all of their supposed expertise and claim insights keeps home. They admit as much in verse 11. They say, the gods don't live near which us.

[16 : 12] Only they can give you the answer. They're far away. They seem incompetent, they face it, nearly useless. They say, they're not in the center.

You see, both Nebuchadnezzar and his advisors, they live in a universe where the puncher God is not at the center. And even though they're on top of their world, their world is beginning to crack and fall apart.

You see, when God is not at the center, our lives inevitably begin to revolve around something else. maybe our reputation, maybe our confidence, maybe our sense of being in control, our future ambitions.

But however important those pursuits may be, they can't bear the weight we put upon them when they become the center of our universe. And so we live with an underlying anxiety and restlessness because we know that our lives are built on fragile foundations.

Ernest Becker, in his book, *The Denial of Death*, wrote this. He said, I think that taking life seriously means something such as this, that whatever man does on this planet has to be done in the lived truth of the terror of creation, of the rumble of panic underneath everything.

[17 : 38] Otherwise, it is false. Whether you go to ancient Babylon or modern New Haven, there's anxiety, there's restlessness, there's even desperation.

Not just in the hood, among people who are struggling to survive, but in the halls of power, among people who are headed for success. If you go to Yale, and if you've been here more than two or three weeks, I think you know what I'm talking about.

The anxiety and insecurity that's often hidden under the appearance of competency and self-sufficiency is extremely abrasive.

If you're single, there's the restlessness of the day you see. The constant comparison to people's bodies and personality types, or more broadly speaking, the fear of missing out, the leafless longing for intimacy, but deathly afraid of commitment and unable to reconcile those two desires.

Or if you're married, we sometimes experience a desire to be in control of our spouse. Or if we have a feeling that we deserve, we have the right to be fulfilled by our spouse that leads us to make unrealistic and even inhuman demands, like Nebuchadnezzar did of his advisors and then explode in fury or withdraw in silence when our spouse does not meet those demands.

[19 : 21] You see, all these symptoms just point to a deeper reality that something else has displaced God at the center of our lives. something else has taken center stage in our affections and our allegiances.

And deep down, we know that we are building our lives on a fragile web that has been on to one day unravel. So we feel anxious and restless.

That's a problem that this chapter presents. It's a problem we see in verses 1-12, unrest and the up-and-coming city. But then in verse 13-30, we see wisdom from a prayerful exile.

Verse 13, we learn that Daniel and his friends are caught in the middle. They too could be killed along with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. Now most likely they just finished their three-year training program.

They were the newbies among the wise men of Babylon. They were the junior faculty, not the tenured professors. They were the residents, not the attendings. But soon they would be gone.

[20 : 29] Along with everyone else. If the king's decree was carried out. If someone didn't do something. But despite Daniel's use and inexperience of vulnerability, he didn't panic.

He didn't run away. He didn't freeze. Instead, verse 14-18, he did three things. He asked for clarity from Ariok, the captain of the king's prop guard, who was responsible for carrying out the king's decree.

He says, just so I can be clear, what's really going on? And why does this have to happen now? He asked for clarity. Then he asked for time.

Verse 16, he asked for a time to meet with the king. And third, he asked for prayer. Verse 17 and 18, he asked for prayer for prayer.

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