



Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

Keith Chuvala, Keith@BackToTheBibleCatechism.com

Chapter 2: Daniel Recounts and Interprets Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

2:1-13 Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

In the second year: In Chapter 1 we talked about the different ways in which Chaldeans and Hebrews counted years of Kingly reign. Even so, does this mean that this dream came to the King during the second year *after* Daniel and the others were taken captive, or in the actual 2nd/3rd year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign? Depending on which way you take this phrase, the dream may have first come during Daniel's three years of instruction, or just after his Babylonian education was completed.

His spirit was so troubled that his sleep left him: Nebuchadnezzar knew that there was something important – even unusually important – about this dream. Whether he'd ever had trouble with dreams or nightmares before, we do not know. What's significant about this particular dream is that we can infer from the text that God gave it to him, and caused it to recur or otherwise to trouble him. So much so that he gave the command that all his astrologers, sorcerers, and magicians were put to the task of helping him decipher it!

Make known the dream to me: This is interesting in that Nebuchadnezzar apparently *does not tell them what the dream was!* Is it because he had trouble remembering it, but had a lingering sense of trouble or doom because of it? Or is it the litmus test it appears to be on its face? Perhaps this is a wise way for the king to know that any interpretation offered is true, and not merely a contrived explanation to assuage him. After all, these men, mostly appointed by his father, earned their position on their alleged ability to contact the Babylonian gods and gain access to secrets from spiritual realms. If they were really what

they claimed to be, they should be able to tell Nebuchadnezzar both the dream and its interpretation.

There is not a man on earth who can tell the king's matter: So these Chaldeans "wise men" admit that true revelation – revelation of the content of the dream – can only come from a god down to man. Against their own rational self-interest they had to that concede that even they were not wise enough to answer the king's demand of their own power.

No king, lord, or ruler has ever asked such things: They turn their strategy to pointing out that the king was being unreasonable. Surely the problem was not that they were incompetent to serve him! And here we see that they don't really have access to spiritual secrets that contain truth, or can reveal facets of reality normally hidden from mortal man. Their fraud -- and their reason for drawing a paycheck! -- is exposed.

The king was angry and very furious... [He] Gave a command to destroy all the wise men of Babylon: As a relatively new king, Nebuchadnezzar may have decided to take advantage of this situation to test the suitability of his father's old advisors, and perhaps to clean house and install those of his own choosing.

You shall be cut in pieces: This is not a particularly harsh threat for an ancient king. Nebuchadnezzar's threat is likely very believable because it was known to be a common method of execution for those who failed or opposed ancient eastern monarchs, especially those from within their inner circles! Daniel and his friends, having been sufficiently trained at this point to be considered counselors to the King, are numbered among those who are to be killed.

One commentator (Archer, cited by Guzik) described one method of dismemberment: *"Four trees were bent inwards and tied together at the top. The victim was tied to these four trees with a rope at each limb. Then the top rope was cut and the body snapped into four pieces."*

2:14-18, Daniel Makes Another Deal

With counsel and wisdom Daniel answered Arioch: Daniel and his friends were obviously innocent in all this, yet Daniel calmly and discretely dealt with the crisis, showing what kind of man he was, and the strength of his faith in God.

Asked the king to give him time: At this point Daniel had no revelation regarding the dream, but he also knew that it takes time to listen to and wait upon the Lord. Daniel expressed that he was willing to take that time, if the king would grant it.

That they might seek mercies from the God of heaven: This was a situation where only God could meet the need of Daniel and his companions. Therefore, he knew how important it was for them to all take the best action they could: to pray. Daniel had confidence that God could deliver a miracle, *this specific miracle, and more*. He knew the history of Joseph, who had interpreted dreams with God's help, even though Joseph had not reconstructed the dreams.

2:19-23 God Reveals the Dream and its Interpretation to Daniel

The secret was revealed to Daniel: This was not sorcery or magic, but revelation. Daniel did not find it out, God revealed it to him. The same is true for us today. We seek out God and His will, but we receive what He has chosen to reveal. Our job isn't to figure out God, but to discover and seek to understand those things that He has revealed to us!

In a night vision: We don't know exactly what this is. It may have been a dream, or a supernatural vision that happened at night.

Daniel answered and said: It's easy to understand Daniel's reaction to the revelation; God has saved him, his companions, and many others.

He changes... He removes... He knows: Daniel praised God for His power and might. Daniel thought of how God is in command of all things, and how God is mightier than even a mighty king like Nebuchadnezzar.

He gives... He reveals: Daniel praised God for His revelation to those who believe in Him. Daniel was grateful that God revealed His great knowledge at the right time (though I can't blame Daniel if he was *really* impatient regarding this!)

You have given... You have made known to us: Daniel in faith was certain that God gave him the answer, that it wasn't a concoction of his own mind or desperation.

2:24-30, Daniel is brought to Nebuchadnezzar

I have found a man: Nice. Arioch tries to take some credit here, as if he is responsible for finding Daniel and the possible answer to the king's dream. Notably, Daniel never takes credit, instead confessing that all credit goes to God, the actual Revealer and Interpreter of the dream.

What will be in the latter days: Nebuchadnezzar's dream didn't just concern himself and his kingdom, but the whole span of the future – which was, for Nebuchadnezzar, “the latter days.”

2:31-35, Daniel Describes Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

Behold, a great image: Daniel's description is detailed, clear, and direct. He describes the spectacular image from the dream made of the different materials (fine gold... silver... bronze... iron... partly of iron and partly of clay), and how each was broken into pieces by the “stone made without hands” in a way that would resonate immediately with the King, whether he himself had remembered all the details or not. Daniel's credibility is established immediately.

2:36-45, The Interpretation of the Dream

You are this head of gold: Nebuchadnezzar was the head of gold, an absolute monarch with far-reaching power. After him would come three other kingdoms, each represented by the different materials Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream. After the succession of kingdoms, then would come the final kingdom, set up by God.

The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure: We have the benefit of recorded history to confirm the fulfillment of the prophetic content of the dream.

The empires succeeding Babylon (most likely Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome) were “inferior” to Nebuchadnezzar's head of gold in the sense of their centralization of absolute power. While Nebuchadnezzar was an absolute monarch, the succeeding empires were progressively less so. They were larger and lasted longer than Babylon, but none held as much centralized power as Nebuchadnezzar held during his reign.

There are some disagreements among commentators about exactly which empire is represented in the last three, but it's generally accepted that the Medes and Persians (silver) used a monarchical oligarchy, with the nobles equal to the king in all but office. Greece (brass) was more fractured, and imbued its aristocracy with less political and military influence. Rome (iron) transitioned from a republic to an empire after power shifted away from a representative democracy to a centralized imperial authority, with the emperor holding the most power. The famed Roman Senate lasted as governing body for only a brief time, being dismantled after a strike orchestrated by the plebeians resulted in the establishment of the "Council of the Plebs." This gave the plebeians a voice in the government. As a result, new legislative bodies were formed, called assemblies. Romanticize it all you want (see what I did there?), Rome was an ever-evolving dumpster file when it came to civil governance.

However, the Babylonian Empire stood for 66 years; the Medo-Persian Empire for 208 years; the Grecian Empire for 185 years, and the Roman Empire stood for more than 500 years. So some commentators do not believe that the fourth kingdom is Rome, but they say it is actually Greece, and that the second and third kingdoms are Media and Persia respectively.

In my opinion, it's not really worth arguing over, as the real focus should be on that "stone not made (or cut) of hands" that ends the line of earthly empires, all of which come to an end.

In the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed: This describes the ultimate prophecy of the future. The stone cut without hands shatters all earthly kings, represented by the feet of the image, as God's Kingdom dominates through the spread of the Gospel.

There are some who maintain that this interpretation/prophecy has yet to be fulfilled, and that another empire equal to or greater than Rome must still rise before the end of the age. They also believe that this empire-to-be will be ruled by "The Antichrist", though the Bible speaks clearly of numerous antichrists, not a single one at the end of the age. Indeed, another great power might develop on Earth, even with a powerful ruler, but that has no connection to this prophesy, which is about Jesus Christ, not about the greatness of earthly powers, or of Satan and his minions.

The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ shattered the reign of human kings and Satan himself, as promised in Genesis 3! Psalm 118:22, Isaiah 8:14, Isaiah 28:16, and Zechariah 3:9 all refer to the Messiah, Jesus, as a “stone.”

The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure: Daniel didn't guess at this, or come to it via rational analysis. Through him God revealed it.

2:46-49, Nebuchadnezzar's Reaction to Daniel's Words

Nebuchadnezzar fell on his face: Whoa. Wait, what?! From what we know, this king wasn't in the habit of showing such respect to anyone, and certainly not to a Jewish slave who was just a short time previously to be executed with the rest of the wise men. But Daniel accurately described the dream, and honestly and forthrightly explained its meaning.

Your God is the God of gods: Nebuchadnezzar seems to understand that it wasn't Daniel himself that revealed these things, but Daniel's God revealed it through this young man. Daniel directed all glory to God, and Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged that.

The king promoted Daniel: So not only was Daniel's life spared, but he was promoted to a high office. He in turn ensured that the companions who had prayed so fervently with him were also promoted.