

# NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DREAMS

DANIEL 2:1-6

## SCRIPTURE READING AND INSIGHTS

Begin by reading Daniel 2:1-6 in your favorite Bible. As you read, keep in mind that just as we eat food for physical nourishment, so we need the Word of God for spiritual nourishment (1 Corinthians 3:2; Hebrews 5:12; 1 Peter 2:2). Seek to feed upon God's Word today.

Yesterday we focused attention on Daniel's rise in favor with the king. Now let's shift our attention to Nebuchadnezzar's dreams. With your Bible still accessible, consider the following insights on the biblical text, verse by verse.

### *Daniel 2:1*

*The second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar (2:1):* In Babylonian reckoning, Nebuchadnezzar's accession year would have been the first year of the four youths' training (605–604 BC). Nebuchadnezzar's first full year of reigning would have been the second year of the youths' training (604–603 BC). His second full year of reigning would have been their third year of training (603–602 BC). So Nebuchadnezzar must have had the dreams immediately following the youths' third year of training, toward the end of his second full year of reigning (602 BC).

*Nebuchadnezzar had dreams (2:1):* The plural reference to dreams apparently means that Nebuchadnezzar was experiencing a recurring dream night after night. This must have been the case since Daniel recalled and interpreted only one dream, not several different dreams (Daniel 2:24-26).

*His spirit was troubled (2:1):* Nebuchadnezzar's troubled heart is an indication that he considered the dream and its meaning significant. He couldn't rest until he found out what it meant.

*His sleep left him (2:1):* Sleep often eludes people with troubled hearts.

### **Daniel 2:2-3**

*The king commanded (2:2):* The appearance of the various occultists before the king was not a mere invitation. They were given a direct order to appear before Nebuchadnezzar.

*The magicians, the enchanters, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans (2:2):* The Babylonians believed that dreams were messages from the gods. The various occultists in Babylon were expected to be able to interpret them. If one group of occultists couldn't accomplish the task, perhaps another group could. In the present case, they were all summoned to appear before Nebuchadnezzar because the king wanted answers!

The Chaldeans mentioned in this verse were priests who served as astrologers or soothsayers.

*Summoned to tell the king his dreams (2:2):* Here is where the problem begins for these occultists. If the king told them his dream, they could take a stab at interpreting it. But here Nebuchadnezzar instructs them to tell him his dream before giving him the interpretation. This would prove to be an impossible task for these occultists because God was the One who gave this dream to Nebuchadnezzar. Only a man of God would be able to reveal it and interpret it. The false gods of Babylon would prove impotent in this task.

*I had a dream (2:3):* Nebuchadnezzar's statement, "I had a dream" (singular), qualifies the statement in verse 1, "Nebuchadnezzar had dreams." As noted previously, the king must have had a single dream that recurred over a number of nights. The recurrence of the dream demonstrated its importance.

*My spirit is troubled to know the dream (2:3):* Nebuchadnezzar may have been troubled that the dream somehow indicated that he would fall from power as king. He wondered, *What does this dream say about me and my future?*

### **Daniel 2:4**

*Aramaic (2:4):* Daniel's narrative switches from Hebrew to Aramaic in this

verse and continues through chapter 7, where the narrative then switches back to Hebrew. Aramaic was a common language among the Babylonians, Assyrians, and Persians. The language was often used in diplomacy, commerce, and trade. Aramaic was truly an international language in that part of the world.

One might wonder why the Chaldeans chose to speak in Aramaic. The answer is that the various occultists who appeared before the king came from different provinces and used various dialects, but they all understood Aramaic.

In addition, Daniel 1:1–2:4a and 8:1–12:13 were written in Hebrew, likely because the scriptural text deals with Hebrew issues. In contrast, Daniel 2:4b–7:28 was written in Aramaic, apparently because the scriptural text deals with issues of interest to the Gentile nations.

*O king, live forever! (2:4):* The Chaldeans were quite eager to please King Nebuchadnezzar. They accordingly addressed the king with an expression of common courtesy in that part of the world. We see this courtesy elsewhere in Scripture. For example, recall that “Bathsheba bowed with her face to the ground and paid homage to the king and said, ‘May my lord King David live forever’” (1 Kings 1:31; see also Nehemiah 2:3; Daniel 3:9; 5:10; 6:21).

*Tell your servants the dream (2:4):* Notice that no one said, “Tell me the dream.” No one wanted to try to interpret the dream alone. Rather, they were confident that with their combined efforts they’d be able to come up with something that would satisfy the king.

### **Daniel 2:5-6**

*The word from me is firm (2:5):* Negotiation was not an option. Things would be done the king’s way, or people would lose their lives. The king was resolved to ensure that the interpretation of his dream would be without deception.

Some have asked whether the king may have forgotten his dream. After all, people today have dreams that are disturbing, but upon awakening, they sometimes forget their dreams. Moreover, some have tried to argue that the clause “the word from me is firm” could be translated “the thing is gone from me,” implying that the king forgot the dream.

The latter translation seems foreign to the context in the present case. After all, if the king had forgotten the dream, the occultists could simply make up a dream and reveal it to him. The king wouldn’t know any better, and the

occultists' lives would be spared. Contrary to such an idea, the context seems to indicate that the king is putting the occultists to a test that goes something like this: "I know what I've dreamed night after night, and if you can't tell me the details of this recurring dream, you're all dead men." So Nebuchadnezzar withheld the facts of the dream before those present, not because he forgot them but because he wanted to test his "wise men."

Let's not forget that in the Bible, when God gave someone a dream, no one ever forgot the details of it. (See "Notable Dreams" in *Digging Deeper with Cross-References*.) Daniel 2:1 indicates that Nebuchadnezzar awoke because the dream was so troubling, and he wasn't able to go back to sleep precisely because he remembered it.

*If you do not make known to me (2:5)*: In the past, the king had likely had other dreams and received satisfactory interpretations from his occultic advisors. Apparently, however, this dream was so important to the king that he imposed extremely stringent requirements on his occultic advisors. The king seemed to reason that if he was going to trust their interpretation of the future based on his dream, they ought also to be able to reveal the past—that is, they ought to be able to tell the king his dream. If they botched up the past, they would be likely to botch up the future.

Some Bible expositors have pointed out that Nebuchadnezzar was a young king, while these advisors were quite old, having served Nebuchadnezzar's father. Nebuchadnezzar may have thought that these aged men might be trying to pull the wool over his eyes, thinking he was a naive young man. He therefore may have doubted their loyalty to him. Nebuchadnezzar's test may have been engineered to sift out the bad with a view to bringing in people he could really trust.

*Torn limb from limb...houses...laid in ruins (2:5)*: The consequences for failure would be severe: Death and destruction of personal property. These words were probably more severe than these aged men had ever heard from Nebuchadnezzar's father.

*Gifts and rewards and great honor (2:6)*: On the other hand, the reward for success would be great. The stakes were very high.

*Therefore show me the dream and its interpretation (2:6)*: The occultists had their backs against the wall, and they knew it. This was an either-or crisis.

Either they get it right and get rewarded, or they get it wrong and die. There was no middle option.

## MAJOR THEMES

1. *Sorcerers.* Sorcery in ancient times sometimes involved conjuring spells (Deuteronomy 18:11). Other times it might involve interpreting omens (Genesis 30:27; 44:5). Still other times it might involve practicing soothsaying by, for example, examining the liver of a dead animal that had been used for sacrifice. If there were any abnormalities in the liver, they would try to interpret those abnormalities as a possible indication of some aspect of the will of the gods. The Bible condemns all forms of sorcery (Exodus 22:18; Leviticus 19:26, 31; 20:27).
2. *Astrologers.* Astrology can be traced back to the religious practices of ancient Mesopotamia, Assyria, Babylon, and Egypt. It is a form of divination—an attempt to seek paranormal counsel or knowledge by occultic means. It was believed that the study of the arrangement and movement of the stars could enable one to foretell events and determine whether they would be good or bad (see Daniel 2:10, 27; 4:7; 5:7). As well, in Babylon the stars were viewed as being connected to the pagan gods (Daniel 5:11). Astrology is strictly off-limits for Christians (Deuteronomy 18:9-12; Isaiah 47:13-15).

## DIGGING DEEPER WITH CROSS-REFERENCES

*Notable dreams*—Genesis 28:12; 37:5, 9; 40:5, 16; 41:1; Judges 7:13; 1 Kings 3:5, 15; Matthew 1:20; 2:12-13, 19, 22; 27:19

*Magicians*—Genesis 41:8; Exodus 7:11, 22; 8:7, 19; Daniel 1:20; 2:2, 10, 27; 4:7; 5:7

## LIFE LESSONS

1. *Sleeplessness versus sound sleep.* We read about sleeplessness not only in the book of Daniel (2:1; 6:18-19), but elsewhere in Scripture as well (Esther 6:1; Job 7:4-5; 30:17; Psalm 77:4; Ecclesiastes 2:23). Scripture also speaks of those who enjoy good sleep (Psalms 3:5; 4:8; 127:2; Proverbs 3:21-24;

6:20-22). Do you want to sleep soundly? Scripture urges us to always trust God, obey God, and fill our minds with God's Word.

2. *Dealing with threats.* In Daniel 2:5, the various occultists were threatened with death if they didn't tell the king what he wanted to hear. God's people, too, are often threatened. For example, in Acts 4:17-21 the Jewish Sanhedrin threatened the apostles to keep silent about Jesus. The apostles responded by praying, "And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness" (verse 29). We can adopt this prayer as our own as we encounter threats in our increasingly anti-Christian culture.

### **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

1. Can you think of any popular modern occultists who claim to have answers to the mysteries of life? Why might they be so popular?
2. What do the polar opposite consequences in Daniel 2:5-6 reveal about the king's character?
3. We will soon see Daniel clearly explaining that the power to interpret dreams is from God. What source empowered the magicians, the enchanters, and the sorcerers? What does Scripture elsewhere reveal about this source? (See John 8:44; 2 Corinthians 4:4; 11:14; 1 Peter 5:8.)