

NEBUCHADNEZZAR DEMANDS AN INTERPRETATION

DANIEL 2:7-16

SCRIPTURE READING AND INSIGHTS

Begin by reading Daniel 2:7-16 in your favorite Bible. As you read, remember that storing God's Word in your heart can help you to avoid sinning (Psalm 119:9, 11).

Yesterday we focused on Nebuchadnezzar's recurring dream and his demand for an interpretation. Today we will see him prepare to carry out his threats against his "wise men." With your Bible still accessible, consider the following insights on the biblical text, verse by verse.

Daniel 2:7

Let the king tell his servants the dream (2:7): The occultists knew their backs were against the wall. They therefore implored the king again to reveal the dream to them so they could offer him an interpretation.

As is so often the case in the Bible, the occultists were unable to deliver. The same thing had happened twice in the Egyptian pharaoh's court—once with Joseph (Genesis 41:1-8) and again with Moses (Exodus 8:16-19). The contest between the one true God and the powers of darkness (who energized these occultists) turns out to be no real contest at all.

Daniel 2:8-9

You are trying to gain time (2:8): The king took the second plea from the

occultists as an attempt to stall for time. Perhaps they thought that if they could stall long enough, the king would simply acquiesce and not pursue the matter any further. They hoped their stall tactics would provide sufficient time for the king to cool down and forget about the incident.

The word from me is firm (2:8): The king would not bend. His mind was made up. He seemed intent on exposing their hypocrisy. The occultists claimed to be wise men, but how wise were they really? The king suspected they were bogus—all talk and no substance. Their stall tactics were leading them toward an early grave.

As we have seen, these men had worked for Nebuchadnezzar's father. They may have thought the new king was inexperienced, immature, and naive. Perhaps they thought that given enough time, he might grow up and act more kingly, like his father. If so, this was a gross miscalculation on their part, for they were all close to losing their lives.

There is but one sentence for you (2:9): The king reiterates the penalty for failure in order to emphasize the gravity of the occultists' situation. They would either reveal the dream or forfeit their lives (see verse 5).

Tell me the dream (2:9): The king was convinced he could trust the occultists' interpretation of the dream only if they first revealed the dream to him. If they couldn't do that, the king must conclude they conspired against him and "agreed to speak lying and corrupt words...till the times change."

The truth is that only a person with supernatural insight could meet the king's demands. The failure of the so-called "wise men" sets the stage for Daniel's impressive intervention.

Daniel 2:10-11

There is not a man on earth (2:10): In an attempt to save their lives, the occultists pleaded with the king—he was making an impossible and unreasonable request that no one was capable of fulfilling. Of course, they were correct. No man, not even Daniel, has the intrinsic ability to tell another human being his or her dreams.

No great and powerful king (2:10): No other potentate had ever asked wise men to do what Nebuchadnezzar was now asking.

No one can show it to the king except the gods (2:11): Notice the contrast we

see in verses 10 and 11 between the earthly and the non-earthly. No one on earth could meet the king's demand (verse 10), only the gods, "whose dwelling is not with flesh" (verse 11). In other words, these gods do not dwell on earth with mere mortals. The truth, of course, is that these gods don't live anywhere, for they don't even exist (see 1 Corinthians 8:4-6).

There is another thing worth noting here. When the occultists said that no one but the gods could reveal the dream to the king, they admitted that their previous interpretations of dreams were bogus, since only the gods can give such information. We might paraphrase the point this way: "Even though we've given many interpretations of dreams in the past, the truth is (*ahem*) that only the gods can do it."

Only the one true God in heaven could answer the king's request. God would soon do this through his beloved servant Daniel (Daniel 4). We are again reminded of the Egyptian magicians in Joseph's time who were unable to interpret Pharaoh's dream. With God's help, Joseph did so. Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has shown you all this, there is none so discerning and wise as you are" (Genesis 41:39). Daniel and Joseph were seemingly cut from the same cloth!

Daniel 2:12-13

The king was angry (2:12): The king became angry for several reasons. The occultic "wise men" were in fact not wise because they could not tell the king his dream. They claimed to be in contact with the divine, but obviously they were not. Instead of immediately granting the king's request, they stalled for time, hoping the incident would be forgotten. The king concluded these men were deceivers who considered him gullible enough to fall for their lies.

To make matters worse, the wise men implied that the king's request was inappropriate and, in fact, impossible. The king was to be viewed as divine, and the wise men were to be his servants, so they were out of line saying such a thing to a god.

The decree went out (2:13): The king had had enough and ordered the execution of all the wise men in his kingdom. Biblical scholars have noted several examples of ancient potentates executing an entire class of servants or workers (compare 1 Samuel 22:13-19).

The wise men were about to be killed (2:13): Daniel and his friends were in the class of “wise men” in Babylon even though they were completely unlike any of the occultists. Therefore the king’s instruction to kill all the wise men in the kingdom included them.

Daniel 2:14-16

Daniel replied (2:14): Confronted by the captain of the king’s guard about the death sentence imposed on all wise men, Daniel again showed his wisdom, prudence, and discretion (see Proverbs 15:1).

Why...so urgent? (2:15): Instead of responding in a reactionary way, Daniel simply inquired why the king had made this urgent decree. Arioch then informed Daniel of all that had transpired.

Requested the king to appoint him a time (2:16): Notice three things about this verse. First, notice that Daniel had direct access to the king. This indicates that Daniel was held in high regard. No ordinary person would be granted an urgent appointment with the king.

Second, notice how bold Daniel was. The wise men had previously stalled and delayed in answering the king. Now Daniel asked the king to “appoint him a time”—which, in fact, would also involve a delay. Perhaps the king granted Daniel’s request because Daniel had proved himself trustworthy in the past.

Third, notice Daniel’s faith. He made an appointment to reveal and interpret the dream for the king even though God had not yet revealed the dream to Daniel. He knew that God would come through for him.

MAJOR THEMES

1. *The error of believing in many gods.* The Chaldeans told the king that no one could tell the king his dream “except the gods” (Daniel 2:11). Daniel consistently pointed to the one true God in contrast to the many false gods of Babylon. Scripture consistently testifies that only one true God exists. God himself positively affirmed through Isaiah the prophet, “I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god” (Isaiah 44:6; see also 37:20; 43:10; 45:14, 21-22). He asserted, “I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God” (Isaiah 45:5). He later affirmed, “I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me” (46:9;

see also Deuteronomy 6:4; 32:39; 2 Samuel 7:22). The New Testament also emphasizes the oneness of God (John 5:44; 17:3; Romans 3:29-30; 16:27; Galatians 3:20; Ephesians 4:6; 1 Thessalonians 1:9; 1 Timothy 1:17; 2:5; 1 John 5:20; Jude 25). Belief in one God is known as monotheism. Belief in many gods is called polytheism.

2. *Royal decrees.* Daniel 2:13 informs us, "The decree went out, and the wise men were about to be killed." The decree came from Nebuchadnezzar. A decree is essentially an order, declaration, or edict from a person in high authority that has the force of law. Royal decrees were common in biblical times (for example, see Esther 1:19-22; Acts 17:7). Most often, such decrees were first spoken aloud by a person in high authority and then committed to writing. To disobey the decree amounted to disobeying the one who issued it. In Daniel 2, Arioch, the captain of the king's guard, knew that if he didn't obey the decree, he would likely lose his life.

DIGGING DEEPER WITH CROSS-REFERENCES

The limits of human understanding—Genesis 41:8; Job 8:9; Proverbs 20:24; 27:1; 30:3; Ecclesiastes 3:22; 8:7; 9:12; Daniel 2:10, 27; 4:7, 18; 5:8, 15; 12:8; Matthew 11:25; 1 Corinthians 13:9; James 1:5

The use of time—Ephesians 5:16; Colossians 4:5

The true God outshines the powers of darkness—Exodus 7-11; 1 Kings 18; Jeremiah 28; Acts 13:1-12

LIFE LESSONS

1. *The Christian and prudence.* God desires that His followers be prudent, like Daniel (Daniel 2:14). The prudent person always looks ahead to see what is coming (Proverbs 14:8) and foresees danger (Proverbs 22:3; 27:12). The prudent person always carefully considers his steps (Proverbs 14:15). He is consistently cautious (Proverbs 14:16). He consistently saves money for the future (Proverbs 6:6-11) and guards his mouth and his tongue (Psalm 39:1; Proverbs 21:23). Moreover, he is aware that consulting many counselors is one key to success (Proverbs 15:22). One great way to

increase prudence is to focus studied attention on the book of Proverbs (see Proverbs 1:1-6).

2. *Beware of the deception of occultists.* John 8:44 tells us that Satan is the father of lies. It therefore makes sense that magicians, enchanters, and sorcerers—all of whom are energized by Satan—would be deceptive as well. Satan deceives in many ways. He has his own church—the “synagogue of Satan” (Revelation 2:9). He has his own ministers of darkness who bring false sermons (2 Corinthians 11:4-5). He has formulated his own system of theology, called “teachings of demons” (1 Timothy 4:1; see also Revelation 2:24). His ministers proclaim his gospel—“a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you” (Galatians 1:7-8). He has his own throne (Revelation 13:2) and his own worshipers (Revelation 13:4). He inspires false Christs (Matthew 24:4-5) and employs false teachers who bring in “destructive heresies” (2 Peter 2:1). He sends out false prophets (Matthew 24:11) and sponsors false apostles who imitate the true (2 Corinthians 11:13). Christians beware!

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Daniel made an appointment to tell the king the interpretation of the dream (Daniel 2:16) *before* the interpretation had been revealed to him by God (verse 19). What does this show us about Daniel’s faith?
2. In today’s world, where the tyranny of the urgent rules and distractions confront us at every corner, do you find it difficult to keep God at the forefront of your thinking the way Daniel did? If so, do you want to make any changes today?
3. What are some ways that modern occultists, such as psychics, engage in deception?