

THE KING'S DREAM

Daniel 2:1-28

Please do not read these comments until you have read the Scriptures for this lesson. Begin by letting the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.

Summary and Historical Background

Daniel and his three friends were still young men when Nebuchadnezzar received a dream from God. Nebuchadnezzar knew this was a special dream so he called all of his wise men to tell him what it meant. Daniel and his friends were not called with the wise men because they were still being trained in the three-year program to be wise men. Since young men began their training to be wise men at age 14 or 15, and this vision came in the second full year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, they were not older than 17 years. At that time Daniel learned that none of the wise men could tell what the king dreamed, so he ordered all the wise men to be killed -- this included all of their trainees. How should a believer react to this kind of distressing news? Exactly as Daniel did! The first part of chapter two tells what he did.

I. Perplexity of Nebuchadnezzar – 2:1-13

A. Nebuchadnezzar's Dream – 2:1

2:1 – The time of the dream occurred in Nebuchadnezzar's second year, which would date it between April 603 and March 602 B.C. The part of a year when he ascended to the throne in 605 B.C. was not counted in the years of his reign. That was called the ascension year. The years of his reign did not begin until April 604 B.C. April was the time of their new year.

The importance of the dream is shown by three phrases. (1) He "dreamed dreams." Though Nebuchadnezzar only experienced one dream (cf. v. 3, 4, 6, etc.) it had various segments ("dreams" plural) which compounded its meaning and significance. (2) "His spirit was troubled." The dream was so extraordinary that the king was deeply upset by its content. (3) "His sleep brake from him." Having been awakened by this troubling dream, Nebuchadnezzar could not get it out of his mind.

B. Nebuchadnezzar's Demand – 2:2-13

1. The Specialists Called – 2:2

2:2 – A very common practice of that day was to keep an entourage of wise men and occultists in the king's court in order to advise him and inform him of the will of the gods (cf. Herodotus, "The History" Book I, paragraph 53ff). In fact, the schooling of Daniel and his friends in chapter one was a training program for potential counselors (1:4), though Daniel, of course, would not have involved himself in the occult practices of some of that group.

It seems very probable that Nebuchadnezzar did not wait till morning to call these wise men. The dream which he had just experienced was so troublesome (v. 1) that he was very anxious for someone to "show the king his dreams" (v. 2). Sleepless kings are not concerned about the sleep of others (cf. Esther 6:1)! So when these wise men were called, it may very well have been in the untimely hours of the night. They probably knew before they arrived that the king's call was urgent.

"Magicians" – performed supernatural works by Satan's power.

"Astrologers" – foretold the future by studying the entrails of a slain animal or by other chance happenings.

"Sorcerers" – they were occult leaders.

"Chaldeans" – they were temple priests or religious scholars.

“*Soothsayers*” (cf. 2:27) – stargazers; foretold the future by using the horoscope.

2. The Demand Made – 2:3-6

2:3 – When these counselors had assembled themselves, the king expressed his anxiety to “know” the dream. The word “know” here connotes his desire to have specific and accurate information concerning all of the details of his dream.

2:4 – The wise men, led by the Chaldeans, answered the king in “Syriak” or Aramaic. This was the common language of the empire. It is interesting to note that the Aramaic section of Daniel begins in verse 4 and continues all the way through chapter 7. God employed Aramaic in this section of Daniel probably so that the Gentiles who would read this part of Daniel could better understand these prophecies that directly related to them. Chapters 1, 8-12 are written in Hebrew because the contents found in these chapters primarily concerned the Jews.

The wise men’s answer to the king was the natural answer in this situation. The common custom was for the king to tell the wise men the content of his dream, and they then would interpret it. But this king’s dream was far too extraordinary to follow the common custom!

This verse is widely misunderstood. Nebuchadnezzar had not forgotten such a vivid and important dream as many have read the KJV when it reads, “The thing is gone from me.” These people believed the “thing” referred to the king’s dream. A careful reading of the KJV shows that the “thing” is not the dream (2:11, 15, 17), but the king’s command. It would be better translated, “the word has gone from me.” He had decided to test the ability of the Chaldeans in their skills, so he commanded them to reveal his dream as well as interpret it. For some reason he was suspicious of their “wisdom.” (The same phrase is repeated in verse 8.)

2:5-6 – The ultimatum had two parts. The wise men were to: (1) relate the king’s dream; and (2) give its interpretation. Their ability to tell the king his dream would obviously authenticate their ability to interpret it. The first part of the ultimatum was simply a test of the second, for the king wanted to be certain that the interpretation of his dream was true. If they could not do what he asked, they would be cut in pieces and their homes would be made a refuse heap. The wise men were in a dilemma. Either they revealed the dream, which was unknown to them, or they would be killed. However, if they succeeded, they would be rewarded and honored.

3. The Demand Reiterated – 2:7-9

2:7-8 – The wise men again asked the king to follow custom and tell them the dream in order that they might interpret it. But the king knew these men all too well. He knew they were stalling for time with the hope that he would change his mind, but his command was firm.

2:9 - Nebuchadnezzar rebuked them for their delay and sternly repeated his threat: “There is but one decree (sentence) for you” (cf. v. 5). He accused them of preparing “lying and corrupt words” until the “time” might be changed. This may very well have been a rebuke for past actions in how they handled the “signs” from the gods. It was common then (as it is now) to make their predictions so general that a later event might be construed to be a “fulfillment.” Croesus of Lydia once asked the oracles if he should go out and fight the Persians. The answer came that when and if he did go out to fight them “a great nation would be defeated.” Thus encouraged of victory, he fought the Persians, but was utterly defeated. The oracles retorted that they were not to be blamed, for Croesus had failed to ask which “mighty nation” would be destroyed! It was his own nation! (Either way, the oracles were fairly safe.) Nebuchadnezzar was not going to allow any such thing to happen to him. He made it clear to them that their ability to give him the details of his dream was his only guarantee that they were giving him an accurate interpretation.

4. The Demand Ridiculed – 2:10-11

2:10-11 – The wise men had no recourse now but to scoff at the king’s demands. They raised four arguments: (1) no human could possibly show the king’s private dream; (2) no great ruler had ever asked such a thing before; (3) the thing required was “rare” (i.e. “exceeding difficult”); and (4) only the gods, who dwell not with flesh (man), could know the king’s dream and tell it to him. Ironically, all of their arguments were essentially correct, if the true God of heaven is not considered. The wise men’s confession is worth noting – only the gods could know the king’s dream, and they do not dwell with men. Yet the king expected them to know how to contact the gods. That was their job description!

5. The Decree Enforced – 2:12-13

2:12 – Nebuchadnezzar was naturally infuriated at their impudence and immediately decreed the destruction of all his wise men.

2:13 – A possible translation shows the killing may have already begun that night (“the wise men were being slain”) when Daniel and his friends were sought for execution. Daniel and his friends were sentenced to death because they were of the school of these counselors.

II. Perception of Daniel – 2:14-28

A. Daniel’s Poise – 2:14-16

2:14 – When Daniel was confronted by the traveling executioners, he was unshaken. He answered instead with insight (“counsel”) and discretion (“wisdom”).

2:15 – He asked Arioch, the captain of the king’s guard, why the decree was so urgent (“hasty”).

2:16 – When Daniel was told of the circumstances, he did not hesitate, but with faith in God’s ability, he went to the king and asked for some time. Daniel did not beg for time as a stall tactic, like the Chaldeans did. The idea is that he assured the king that, given an opportunity, he could meet both of the king’s demands and asked the king to (literally) “appoint him a time” to return and fulfill the request. His sincere request was granted. Notice how Daniel had reacted to this very disconcerting circumstance. (1) He trusted God’s will. Daniel’s initial reaction to the announcement of his impending execution was not one of fear or even surprise. He apparently did not believe that God could make mistakes, and so he had remained calm and trusted God. (2) He had faith in God’s ability. Having asked for the circumstance of this death decree, Daniel believed that God was able to fulfill the king’s unusual demands, though he had absolutely no idea of the content and nature of the king’s dream. He knew that God knew! (3) He was sensitive to God’s leading. Daniel did not presume upon God and force God to give him the answers to Nebuchadnezzar’s demands. Rather, it seems as though he had simply known that God wanted it to be so. Being consistently sensitive to God’s spirit caused him to react in the proper way at the proper time. Thus, he had approached the king with confidence.

B. Daniel’s Petition – 2:17-18

2:17-18 – Daniel did not sit back and wait for God to act. Instead, he and his companions immediately took their problem to God, believing that He could reveal to them the secret and thereby keep them alive.

C. Daniel’s Praise – 2:19-23

2:19 – Daniel probably did not return to bed and “dream” his answer as some have supposed. Rather, he was given a night “vision,” possibly given as he prayed. (“Dreams” – revelations given while sleeping, cf. Gen. 20:3; 31:10, 11, 24; 37:5, 9, 10, etc. “Visions” – revelations given while one was in a state of consciousness or in a trance-like state (cf. I Sam. 3; Luke 1:22; Acts 11:5). God rewarded the faith of these godly young men, by answering their prayer. The king’s dream and its interpretation were made known to Daniel. However, before he went to the king with the news, he paused to bless and thank God.

2:20-22 – Daniel began his prayer by blessing the name of God. He told Him what he cherished about His person and character. He blessed Him for His wisdom and power. (1) God demonstrates His sovereign power over men by changing the times and seasons and by removing and replacing kings. (2)

He demonstrates His wisdom by making men wise and by revealing secret things to those who ask Him with faith (cf 2:16-18).

2:23 – Then Daniel thanked God for two answers to his prayer. (1) He thanked God for His gracious impartation of “wisdom and might.” Daniel needed that to stand before Nebuchadnezzar. (2) Then he thanked God for His clear revelation that “made known” to him the king’s dream and its interpretation.

D. Daniel’s Presentation – 2:24-28

God’s gifts prepared Daniel to testify of God’s wisdom and power before Nebuchadnezzar.

1. His Requests to Arioch – 2:24

Daniel hastened back to the king’s court and made two requests of the king’s chief guard.

2:24 – *“Destroy not the wise men.”* Daniel graciously interceded for the lives of these godless men, though under the Jewish theocracy they may well have been slain (cf. 1 Kgs. 8:40).

“Bring me in before the king.” God had now prepared Daniel to meet with Nebuchadnezzar.

2. His Introduction to the King – 2:25

2:25 – Nebuchadnezzar was very anxious to hear the interpretation of his dream, for Arioch brought Daniel in to him “in haste.” It is very plausible that all of these events occurred in one action-packed night, and the king had been awake now for many hours waiting this climactic moment.

Arioch, as a normal human being, did not want all of the glory of this moment to bypass him! Notice his introduction of Daniel: “I have found a man...that will make known...the interpretation.”

3. His Credit to God – 2:26-28

Though most men, like Arioch, would try to capitalize on their circumstances and turn God’s dealings into self-acclaim, Daniel focused all of the attention on God. When asked of the king if he were able to make known the dream, Daniel replied honestly:

2:27 – No wise man (including Daniel) could know the king’s dream and its interpretation.

2:28 – But Daniel said there is a God in heaven Who is all-knowing and all-powerful. Daniel attributes to God the ability (1) to reveal secrets as He revealed the king’s secret to Daniel; and (2) to make known the future as He made it known to Nebuchadnezzar. (The term “latter days” seems to refer specifically to God’s dealing with man in the time of the Messiah. “Latter days” is used 14 times in the Old Testament. It refers to both comings of Christ, even though Old Testament people only knew of one coming. “The time of the end” [11:40] refers to the Tribulation and Millennial Kingdom.) Only after he had given God the glory for the interpretation did Daniel introduce what the king had been most anxious to hear.