



*The Most High
God rules over
the kingdoms of
the world and
appoints anyone
he desires to
rule over them.*

(Dan 5:21b NLT)

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Nebuchadnezzar's Troubling Dream and Hasty Decree (2:1-13)

2:1 In the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his mind was troubled and he could not sleep. 2 So the king summoned the magicians, enchanter, sorcerer and astrologers to tell him what he had dreamed. When they came in and stood before the king, 3 he said to them, "I have had a dream that troubles me and I want to know what it means." 4 Then the astrologers answered the king in Aramaic, "O king, live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will interpret it." 5 The king replied to the astrologers, "This is what I have firmly decided: If you do not tell me what my dream was and interpret it, I will have you cut into pieces and your houses turned into piles of rubble. 6 But if you tell me the dream and explain it, you will receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor. So tell me the dream and interpret it for me."

Nebuchadnezzar's Troubling Dream and Hasty Decree (2:1-13)

2:7 Once more they replied, "Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will interpret it." ⁸ Then the king answered, "I am certain that you are trying to gain time, because you realize that this is what I have firmly decided: ⁹ If you do not tell me the dream, there is just one penalty for you. You have conspired to tell me misleading and wicked things, hoping the situation will change. So then, tell me the dream, and I will know that you can interpret it for me." ¹⁰ The astrologers answered the king, "There is not a man on earth who can do what the king asks! No king, however great and mighty, has ever asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or astrologer. ¹¹ What the king asks is too difficult. No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among men." ¹² This made the king so angry and furious that he ordered the execution of all the wise men of Babylon. ¹³ So the decree was issued to put the wise men to death, and men were sent to look for Daniel and his friends to put them to death.

^{2:1} In the *second year* of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his spirit was troubled, and his sleep left him. (ESV)

- We are told that Nebuchadnezzar had this dream in his “*second year*,” which according to the Babylonian calendar would have extended from Nisan (Mar.–Apr.) 603 to Nisan 602 B.C.
- Some commentaries argue that the reason Daniel and his friends were not called before the king with along with the other wise men is that they had not finished their training at this point.
- But the most *natural* reading of the text is to understand that the events of chapter 2 *follow* the events of chapter 1 *chronologically* and therefore Daniel and his friends *have* already finished their three years of training at this point (see 1:18).
- This seems to be *confirmed* by the fact that, as we will see when we get to verse 13, Daniel will come under the same *sentence of death* as the other wise men because he was *one* of them.

^{2:1} In the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar *had dreams*; his spirit was troubled, and his sleep left him. (ESV)

- As I pointed out in the introduction to this series, Daniel was probably about fourteen or fifteen years old when he was taken captive, therefore he still would have been quite young at this point, probably about seventeen or eighteen years of age.
- He was not the old prophet with the long white beard that many people imagine when reading this story.
- The phrase “*had dreams*” here should probably be understood to indicate that the king was in a **state** of dreaming rather than that he dreamed several dreams, since the text only reports **one** dream.

^{2:1} *In the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; **his spirit was troubled**, and his **sleep left him**.* (ESV)

- Nebuchadnezzar was **deeply disturbed** by what he saw in the dream.
- “*his spirit was troubled*” could literally be translated “his spirit was struck.”
- The use of this Hebrew word in this context could indicate that Nebuchadnezzar’s heart was beating rapidly due to extreme agitation.
- Because he was so disturbed, the king’s “*sleep left him*” meaning the king was **not able to sleep** as a result of his concern about the dream.
- Nebuchadnezzar recognized that this dream was important.
- The ancient Babylonians believed that dreams were messages from the gods; and that a right understanding of a dream like this might be critical for their future.
- In this case Nebuchadnezzar apparently feared that the strange revelation contained an **ominous** message for him.

2:2 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. (ESV)

- So, Nebuchadnezzar immediately summoned those whom he believed could tell him what he dreamed and give him the proper interpretation.
- “*magicians*” – a word used for dream interpreters. The term was also used of the “magicians” of Egypt to whom Joseph proved superior (Gen 41:8ff).
- “*enchanters*” – was a common Babylonian term for those who claimed to be skilled at interpreting signs for people who were ill and performing rituals to bring about their recovery.
- “*sorcerers*” – those who practice sorcery or witchcraft. Throughout the OT this profession is condemned (cf. Deut 18:10).
- “*Chaldeans*” —a word used to refer to the above groups as a whole; anyone who practiced the magical and astrological arts.

*2:2 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.*
(ESV)

- Babylonian religion taught that the gods would sometimes give omens of the future through the unusual occurrences in everyday life.
- They believed indications of future trends and events could be seen in the skies, bizarre births, the shape of animal livers, and – as we see here – in dreams.
- Unlike **many** of the Babylonian beliefs about how the gods reveal the future, Daniel had **in common** with the Babylonians a belief that God did **sometimes** speak to men through **dreams**.
- Perhaps that is why God chose to speak to Nebuchadnezzar in this way rather than through the birth of a multiheaded ox, for example.
- After all, God had spoken through dreams in the past (e.g., Gen 28:10-22; 1 Kings 3:5), but **not** through other means of divination so popular in Babylon.

^{2:3} And the king said to them, "I had a dream, and my spirit is *troubled* to know the dream."⁴ Then the *Chaldeans* said to the king *in Aramaic*, "O king, live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation." (ESV)

- Nebuchadnezzar was deeply "*troubled*" by the dream and desperately wanted his counselors to explain the meaning of it to him.
- His counselors confidently assured the king that if he would ***tell*** them the dream, they would interpret it.
- Here again, "*Chaldeans*" probably refers to the wise men as a whole.
- In the ESV the impression is given that the wise men spoke to the king in the Aramaic language.¹
- But the phrase "*in Aramaic*" is best taken as a parenthetical notation placed in the text to mark the change in the written language, for at this point in the book until the end of chapter 7 the language changes from Hebrew to Aramaic.¹

^{2:3} And the king said to them, "I had a dream, and my spirit is troubled to know the dream." ⁴ Then the *Chaldeans* said to the king in Aramaic, "*O king, live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation.*" (ESV)

- After offering the customary Babylonian greeting to the king ("*O king, live forever!*"), the wise men invited Nebuchadnezzar to tell them the dream and confidently asserted, "*we will show the interpretation.*"
- This was a well-meant promise because the "*Chaldeans*" were skilled in interpreting dreams and had manuals that explained the various dream symbols.
- Samples of these Babylonian dream manuals have survived to the present day so we can read how they went about interpreting dreams.
- All the wise men needed to know was the nature of the dream so that their rules could be applied and an interpretation given.
- Such explanations would not have been reliable but might have satisfied people who believed the wise men had this ability.

2:5 The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, "*The word from me is firm*: if you do not make known to me the dream and its interpretation, you shall be torn limb from limb, and your houses shall be laid in ruins. (ESV)

- "*The word from me is firm*" is perhaps better translated in the NIV as "*This is what I have firmly decided.*"
- Some commentaries argue based on an **alternate** translation of the Hebrew phrase that the king had **forgotten** the content of the dream.
- This alternate translation can be seen in the KJV: "*The thing* [i.e. the content of the dream] *is gone from me*: if ye will not make known unto me the dream, with the interpretation thereof, ye shall be cut in pieces..."
- But obviously the **wise men** didn't think that Nebuchadnezzar had **forgotten** the content of his dream, because they continued to pleading with him to **reveal** it to them.
- Not only that, but Daniel 2:1 states that the king was "*troubled*" by the dream, and this seems to confirm that he remembered the contents of what he had seen.

2:5 The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, "The word from me is firm: if you do not make known to me the dream and its interpretation, you *shall be torn limb from limb*, and your houses shall be *laid in ruins*. (ESV)

- Failure to tell the king the dream and its interpretation carried the severest penalty.
- “*shall be torn limb from limb*” means that the wise men would be dismembered either by being hacked to pieces or by being pulled apart.
- Dismemberment of enemies was a practice widespread throughout the ancient Orient.
- In addition, their houses would be “*laid in ruins*”, that is, their homes would be completely destroyed and used for garbage dumps.

2:5 The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, "The word from me is firm: if you do not make known to me the dream and its interpretation, you shall be torn limb from limb, and your houses shall be laid in ruins. (ESV)

- This was no idle threat by Nebuchadnezzar.
- His harsh treatment of King Zedekiah (2 Kgs 25:7), two Jewish rebels named Ahab and Zedekiah (not King Zedekiah; Jer 29:22), and Daniel's three friends (chapter 3) proved that he would have ***no qualms*** about carrying out this cruel threat upon his counselors.
- Herodotus (a Greek historian who lived from 484-425 BC) tells about a similar situation in which Darius I (a Persian king who ruled about one hundred years later) massacred ***his*** wise men (Magi) with the result that the group was almost annihilated.

*2:6 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.”⁷ They answered a second time and said, “Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will show its interpretation.” (ESV)*

- On the other hand, if they **were** to tell Nebuchadnezzar the content of his dream and give him an interpretation, they would receive “*gifts and rewards and great honor*.”
- Why would Nebuchadnezzar **refuse** to make known the **content** of his dream?
- Evidently, he knew that these men would offer some kind of interpretation, but there would be no way to be certain that it was correct.
- However, if the wise men could tell the king the **content** of the dream which he **did** know, then he could have a higher degree of confidence that they could accurately make known to him the **interpretation** he did **not** know.

2:8 The king answered and said, "I know with certainty that you are *trying to gain time*, because you see that the word from me is firm-- ⁹ 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 *till the times change*. Therefore tell me the dream, and I shall know that you can show me its interpretation." (ESV)

- The king felt that the wise men were stalling for time ("*trying to gain time*") because they saw that he was determined to execute them if they did not interpret the dream immediately.
- Again, the threat was repeated; there was only "*one sentence*" for failure, and that sentence was a painful death.
- "*lying and corrupt words*" refers to a false interpretation of the dream.
- "*till the times change*" means until the king's anger would subside.
- Once more the wise men were commanded to reveal the dream so that the king might be certain that their interpretation would be trustworthy.

2:8 The king answered and said, "I know with certainty that you are trying to gain time, because you see that the word from me is firm-- ⁹ 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 till the times change. Therefore tell me the dream, and I shall know that you can show me its interpretation." (ESV)

- Why would Nebuchadnezzar be so willing to dispose of his wise men?
- First, their inability to acquire the necessary information proved that their power was limited and that they were not in touch with the gods as they claimed.
- Second, the king probably felt that the dream foretold some terrible disaster that was going to befall him.
- After all, Nebuchadnezzar had seen a manlike statue destroyed, which he likely associated with himself or his empire.
- He may well have felt insecure about his newly acquired kingdom, and he may have considered the destruction of the statue a divine omen to him that he and his empire were doomed.

2:8 The king answered and said, "I know with certainty that you are trying to gain time, because you see that the word from me is firm-- 9 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 till the times change. Therefore tell me the dream, and I shall know that you can show me its interpretation." (ESV)

- Perhaps this led Nebuchadnezzar to believe that someone was planning to assassinate him and take away his kingdom.
- Such assassination plots by those in the in the king's court were common in that day and were therefore a very real possibility.
- In fact, two out of the next three Babylonian kings **were** assassinated.
- Traitors may have been in his midst planning to overthrow his government at that very moment.
- Since a coup usually was perpetrated by the military or the court, the king may have wondered if some of these very wise men were plotting against him.
- And so, he was not reluctant to rid himself of them.

2:10 *The Chaldeans answered the king and said, “There is not a man on earth who can meet the king's demand, for **no great and powerful king has asked such a thing** of any magician or enchanter or Chaldean.* ¹¹ *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.” (ESV)*

- Speaking with authority, these students of the scrolls of Babylon, Egypt, Assyria and other lands tell the king that his demand is **unprecedented** and impossible to fulfil by “*any magician or enchanter or Chaldean*”.
- They claim “*no great and powerful king has asked such a thing*”, and they are almost surely right about that.
- Down through the years, Assyrian and Babylonian monarchs had often used this phrase (“*great and powerful*”) to describe themselves, so the wise men here are trying to get the king to act like his predecessors and thereby let them off the hook.
- As he is the son of the first king to throw off the yoke of Assyrian rule, and one trying very hard to live up to his father's example, however, their comment only angers him further.

2:10 The Chaldeans answered the king and said, “There is not a man on earth who can meet the king's demand, for no great and powerful king has asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or Chaldean. ¹¹ 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.*” (ESV)

- The wise men are doing a poor job of bargaining with the king.
- They conclude by adding a remark that foreshadows 2:14-47: “*no one can show it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh.*” (i.e. “*they do not live among men*” cf. NIV)
- These wise men, who make their living by claiming to reveal information from the gods, are basically saying here, there are some things that the gods just don't tell us.
- And therefore, it isn't reasonable to expect us to know those things.

2:12 Because of this the king was angry and very furious, and commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be destroyed. ¹³ So the decree went out, and the wise men were about to be killed; and they sought Daniel and his companions, to kill them. (ESV)

- Frustrated by his servants and his own fears, Nebuchadnezzar became angry and furious.
- He gives the order to destroy all the wise men of Babylon.
- By now, readers may have let Daniel and his friends slip their minds.
- So far, this story has seemingly had nothing to do with them.
- But now the readers are reminded that Daniel and his friends are ***part*** of the wise men of Babylon and so the executioners sought Daniel and his friends, to kill ***them*** as well.

2:12 Because of this the king was angry and very furious, and commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be destroyed. ¹³ So the decree went out, and the wise men were about to be killed; and they sought Daniel and his companions, to kill them. (ESV)

- The text does not tell us why Daniel and his friends were not part of the group standing before the king when he commanded them to tell him his dream and its interpretation.
- What is clear is that at the time this event takes place in Nebuchadnezzar's second year, Daniel was a very young and untested wise man.
- Perhaps it is for this reason that the veteran Chaldeans didn't choose to have him to stand along side them while standing before the king at such a crucial time.

Class Discussion Time

- We saw today that in Babylonian times, it was commonly believed that indications of future trends and events could be seen in the skies, bizarre births, the shape of animal livers, and in dreams.
- Can you think of examples of where people in our “enlightened” secular age still sometimes believe such things?
- Have you ever known a modern Christian who believed that an unusual event in their life might be “God trying to tell them something”?
- Is such thinking valid?

Class Discussion Time

- The wise men standing before the king ***claimed*** to have divine insight into human events.
- But Nebuchadnezzar realizes that ***anyone*** can ***claim*** to know what “the gods” think. In a critical case such as this, he insisted that they ***prove*** it.
- There are many Christians, even today, who claim that “God told me this or that”.
- Do you think it would be wise for us to put ***their*** claims to the test (as Nebuchadnezzar did with his wise men) rather than just ***assume*** that they have some kind of direct pipeline to God?
- If so, how can we ***test*** the claims of those who claim that God speaks to them?
- The apostle John warns us: “*Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.*” (1 John 4:1)

Class Discussion Time

- The Bible itself tells us how to test so-called prophets who claim to speak for God:
 - *When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him. (Deu 18:22)*
 - *If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, ² and the sign or wonder that he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, 'Let us go after other gods,' which you have not known, 'and let us serve them,' ³ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams. For the LORD your God is testing you, to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. ⁴ You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear him and keep his commandments and obey his voice, and you shall serve him and hold fast to him. ⁵ But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has taught rebellion against the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you out of the house of slavery, to make you leave the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from your midst. (Deut 13:1-5)*