

DANIEL — WEEK 2

GOD SPEAKS THROUGH DANIEL



F. Michael Slay
A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The cover image is Daniel in the Lions' Den by Peter Paul Rubens

Nebuchadnezzar totally loses it with all his so-called wise men and starts exterminating them. Daniels jumps in and asks for a time out so he can pray and see what God says. God gives Daniel the interpretation and Daniel relays it to the king, along with some complementary spin.

Daniel really lays it on thick.

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T. M. Moore, Principal
tmmoore@ailbe.org

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1 Daniel 2:12–16

For this reason the king was angry and very furious, and gave the command to destroy all the wise men of Babylon. So the decree went out, and they began killing the wise men; and they sought Daniel and his companions, to kill them.

Then with counsel and wisdom Daniel answered Arioch, the captain of the king's guard, who had gone out to kill the wise men of Babylon; he answered and said to Arioch the king's captain, "Why is the decree from the king so urgent?" Then Arioch made the decision known to Daniel.

So Daniel went in and asked the king to give him time, that he might tell the king the interpretation.

It really says, "*angry and very furious.*" Modern translation, "he totally lost it."

Recall how ticked the king was with the psychics' stalling tactics. *The king answered and said, "I know for certain that you would gain time, because you see that my decision is firm."* — Daniel 2:8

So Daniel shows up and what's the first thing he does? Ask for time! Prophet got chutzpah, no?

Actually, because it's a sincere request instead of a stall, the king's response is not *angry and very furious*. Still, the king's (or his captain's) perception is commendable. As we've seen with other prophets, Daniel has that signature fearless honesty. He almost seems disconnected.

He is, *literally*, hearing a different drummer.

It's easier to memorize the right thing to do than it is to do the right thing. We're expected to be willing to be martyrs for the Lord. No one expects that to be easy, but Daniel almost makes it look easy. How can anyone be that brave? Is it really bravery that Daniel and the great martyrs exhibited? Or something else?

It depends on the definition of bravery. Here's how Merriam-Webster.com defines it:

the quality or state of having or showing mental or moral strength to face danger, fear, or difficulty

Moral strength? What's moral strength? How did that get into the dictionary?

This gets back to the opening line above about doing the right thing. Moral strength is what Daniel and the great martyrs had. (So it was bravery after all.)

Faith is the difference between just memorizing the right thing to do and actually doing it. If you are absolutely certain that something is the right thing to do, then you won't decide to do something else. The decision is sure.

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. — Hebrews 11:1 (NIV)

Doubt is the enemy of courage.

2 Daniel 2:17–23

Then Daniel went to his house, and made the decision known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions, that they might seek mercies from the God of heaven concerning this secret, so that Daniel and his companions might not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. Then the secret was revealed to Daniel in a night vision. So Daniel blessed the God of heaven.

Daniel answered and said:

*“Blessed be the name of God forever and ever,
For wisdom and might are His.
And He changes the times and the seasons;
He removes kings and raises up kings;
He gives wisdom to the wise
And knowledge to those who have understanding.
He reveals deep and secret things;
He knows what is in the darkness,
And light dwells with Him.*

*“I thank You and praise You,
O God of my fathers;
You have given me wisdom and might,
And have now made known to me what we asked of You,
For You have made known to us the king’s demand.”*

So, what does Daniel do the minute he finds out about this?

Round up all his prayer buds to *seek mercies from the God of heaven concerning this secret.*

Next comes a magnificent plot twist—the king’s high-pressure management tactic actually works. It does shake the one true apple out of the tree. It’s fair to say that without the extreme decree by the king, Daniel wouldn’t have gotten involved.

Remember, Nebuchadnezzar is desperate. He needs to understand his nightmares. They’re terrifying him to the point of insomnia. So he takes an outrageous action, which dooms his entire cadre of psychics—unless there’s a real one.

He needs one thing, and one thing only, and he’s going all out to get it.

Now he will.

The *wise men* catch a break too. They get to live.

They just need to find a job.

3 Daniel 2:24–30

Therefore Daniel went to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to destroy the wise men of Babylon. He went and said thus to him: “Do not destroy the wise men of Babylon; take me before the king, and I will tell the king the interpretation.”

Then Arioch quickly brought Daniel before the king, and said thus to him, “I have found a man of the captives of Judah, who will make known to the king the interpretation.”

The king answered and said to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, “Are you able to make known to me the dream which I have seen, and its interpretation?”

Daniel answered in the presence of the king, and said, “The secret which the king has demanded, the wise men the astrologers, the magicians, and the soothsayers cannot declare to the king. But there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. Your dream, and the visions of your head upon your bed, were these: As for you, O king, thoughts came to your mind while on your bed, about what would come to pass after this; and He who reveals secrets has made known to you what will be. But as for me, this secret has not been revealed to me because I have more wisdom than anyone living, but for our sakes who make known the interpretation to the king, and that you may know the thoughts of your heart.

Here we go again. It’s all about who’s God. The psychics said, “*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.*” (Daniel 2:11)

Now Daniel says the same thing, except it’s God (singular) not the gods (plural).

And Daniel makes sure that he gets none of the credit. It’s all about who’s God. *He who reveals secrets has made known to you what will be.*

Then Daniel says something clever. He says that the secrets aren’t *made known* to Daniel; they’re made known to *you* (the king). Nebuchadnezzar’s dreams are from God. His dreams may be troubling, but Daniel is recasting them as something important and wonderful—that the king is privileged to receive.

He’s got Nebuchadnezzar on the hook. Now all he has to do is reel him in.

He isn’t just teaching Nebuchadnezzar about God; Daniel’s helping him see God. This will ultimately lead to a different kind of faith. Nebuchadnezzar won’t just have memorized that God is real, he’ll have experienced it.

Indoctrination is useful. We should teach our children about God and His plan of salvation. But if they never experience the reality of God in their lives, their faith will be endangered by the normal college experience.

Teach your children to pray.

4 Daniel 2:31–35

“You, O king, were watching; and behold, a great image! This great image, whose splendor was excellent, stood before you; and its form was awesome. This image’s head was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.”

This is the money quote. Daniel tells Nebuchadnezzar his dream. Bang! Instant credibility.

Imagine how you’d feel if someone detailed a dream you’d had, even though you hadn’t told it to anyone.

“Holy cow!” Blink. Blink.

Oh, how I wish I could pull rabbits like this out of my hat. Miracles get people’s attention. That’s the ultimate step toward getting someone to listen to you.

Not long ago, wearing “WWJD” bracelets was all the rage. When faced with a challenging situation, we were supposed to think, “What would Jesus do?”

But Jesus would do things like raise the dead or tell someone he just met their whole life history. That’s good to know but isn’t exactly the ideal guide for what I should do.

So, we get an important lesson from this passage — You’re not Jesus. You’re not even Daniel.

This goes somewhere. If I’m not Jesus (or even Daniel) how should respond to a challenging situation?

Act like them in any way I can but, and this is key, don’t try to act like them in the ways I can’t. That sounds obvious, but it isn’t always so simple. Think back. Who in this book pretended to be like Jesus?

The magicians and astrologers! Ask them a question and they’d never say, “I don’t know.” That’s why Nebuchadnezzar was so strict in his refusal to give them something they could spin a tale around.

We’re all taught in grade school that “I don’t know,” is a wrong answer. Reporters know this, so one of their standard tricks is to ask someone important a silly question like, “What was so-and-so thinking when ...?” If they take the bait, they may say something newsworthy. That’s known in the business as “making news.” Politicians are trained to answer with something like, “I don’t know. Why don’t you ask them?”

But most adults still think the way they were trained to think in grade school. No matter how extreme the question, they’ll “try their best” to reply. That’s a fool’s errand that Christians should learn to avoid.

WWAD. Think, “What would astrologers do?” Then don’t do that.

5 Daniel 2:36–45

“This is the dream. Now we will tell the interpretation of it before the king. You, O king, are a king of kings. For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory; and wherever the children of men dwell, or the beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven, He has given them into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all—you are this head of gold. But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours; then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others. Whereas you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter’s clay and partly of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; yet the strength of the iron shall be in it, just as you saw the iron mixed with ceramic clay. And as the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile. As you saw iron mixed with ceramic clay, they will mingle with the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay. And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold—the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure.”

Boy is Daniel buttering him up. *“You, O king, are a king of kings. For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory; and wherever the children of men dwell, or the beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven, He has given them into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all—you are this head of gold.”*

The interpretation is truth direct from God, but Daniel still gets to choose the adjectives.

The Christian interpretation of this passage is that the gold head is the Babylonian kingdom; the silver chest and arms are the Medes and Persians; the bronze belly and thighs are the Greeks; lastly, the iron and clay legs and feet are the Romans. The *kingdom which shall never be destroyed* is Christianity.

The non-believers don’t like that interpretation, since it doesn’t fit their timeline. They think that Daniel was written after-the-fact, around the second century BC. Since the Roman empire came after that, the Christian interpretation would leave some of this passage’s prophesy in the future. So, they split the Medes and Persians into two kingdoms. The Medes are the second kingdom, the Persians the third, and the Greeks the fourth. That way, all of Daniel is after-the-fact.

I’ll leave the historical debates to the experts. However, as we read through Daniel, we’ll see one thing that makes the non-believer’s interpretation obviously wrong—it’s incompatible with the book itself. Daniel depicts the Medes and the Persians as a single kingdom (e.g., see Daniel 5:28 and 6:8).

So, unless Daniel didn’t understand his own prophesy ...

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. Have you ever overcome fear with faith?
2. Ever had a boss use mega-pressure on you?
3. What strengthens your faith?
4. What trick questions are the worst?
5. When have you heard someone say, "feet of clay"?

Items for prayer: