



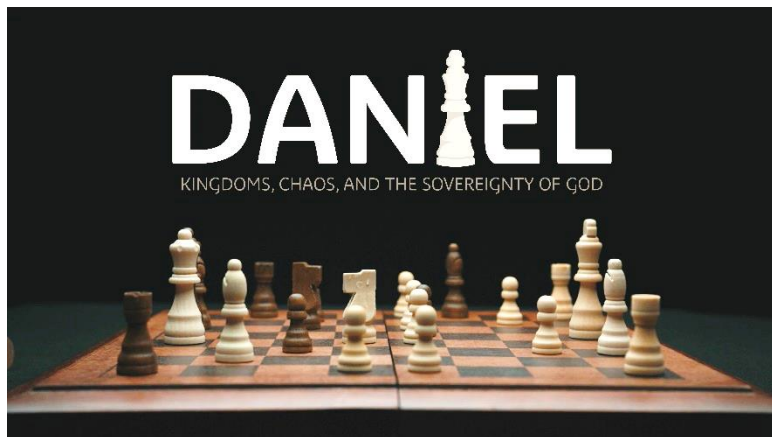
VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

The Man Who Can Do What No Man Can

DANIEL: Kingdoms, Chaos and the Sovereignty of God

Daniel 1

Cisco Cotto | January 21, 2024



I'm one of the shepherding elders at our Naperville campus and always love to come out to Village Bible Church Sugar Grove to see the church family here and share the Word with you.

The king was scared, and if the king was scared, everyone around him was scared. He was a fly-off-the-handle kind of king. He was irrational, unpredictable, cruel. If the king was upset, there was no telling what he was going to do. The king was scared and that meant the people around him were scared. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had had a dream, really a nightmare. He woke up out of a dead sleep and couldn't get back to sleep. He was scared to death. I imagine his knees were quaking and the hair on the back of his neck was standing up. The king was scared by his nightmare and wanted to know what it meant.

Now, I find this a little funny because Nebuchadnezzar was sort of an egomaniac. He was a tough guy, self-absorbed. He was powerful, rich and in charge of all the land of Babylon. He had sent his troops parading into Jerusalem, where they took God's people captive and brought them back to Babylon. He then paraded God's people through the streets of Babylon, put them into slavery, planned to keep them there to serve him for the rest of their lives. Yet here, because of a dream, Nebuchadnezzar was scared to death.

Now, among those people who were brought to Babylon from Jerusalem was a guy named Daniel and three of his friends, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. They were young and passionate about the Lord. They loved God, so He had given them favor, blessing and wisdom. Daniel especially was gifted by the Lord to understand and interpret visions and dreams. That seems appropriate, given the fact that this crazy king had the dream and wanted to know what it meant.

The king called in all his wise men. Remember, he was scared and upset. He wanted the wise men to interpret the dream for him. But surprisingly, Daniel and his friends were not there. Scripture tells us the king often relied on Daniel, yet in this instance, Daniel and his buddies were not in the king's court when the king hauled in all the wise men and made his demand.

What did the king say to these guys? The wise men were gathered around. They looked up at the king; he looked down at them. The wise men said, "King Nebuchadnezzar, tell us what your dream was, then we will tell you what it means. We will give you the interpretation."

This may seem a little weird to us. I have dreams, you have dreams. Do you ever walk up to somebody and say, "Tell me what this means." You probably wouldn't trust whatever they would say anyway. Yet in the ancient world, this was something that happened regularly. Wise men like this were employed to listen to the king's dreams and tell him what they meant. They had a whole book that was all about dreams and their interpretations. Archeologists, about a hundred years ago in Babylon, found an entire stash of clay tablets that had dreams and their interpretations written on them. They were called the "Dream Books." Here are some of these dreams and their interpretations. Listen to these examples:

- If the king goes to a vegetable garden, then his work is going to be more challenging. Well, that's insightful.
- If he goes and sets a pile of wood on fire, he's going to see some sad days.
- If he goes to plant a field, then his life will be carefree. He won't have any hardship.
- If he goes to hunt in the desert, he will become sad.
- If in the dream he ascends to the heavens, he will live a short life, but if in the dream he descends to the netherworld, his days will be long.

Dreams and interpretations. Those are really vague, aren't they? I mean, that's like fortune cookie kind of stuff. Yet these guys were employed. That was their job. They went into the king's court, he told them the dream, then everybody went on their way. They went back to their offices. They searched their tablets. They found a similar dream, then they went back to the king to tell him what it meant. "Here's what your dream means!" So this was not out of the ordinary. The scared Nebuchadnezzar was sitting on his throne. He was talking to his wise men. They said, "Tell us your dream, king. You know how this goes. Tell us your dream and we'll tell you what it means."

But Nebuchadnezzar said, "It's not going to work that way this time. You're going to tell me what the dream is *and* what it means. You're going to give me the details *and* the interpretation. If you don't give me the dream and what it means, I am going to have you torn limb from limb. We're going to ransack your house. It's going to be all over for you if you don't tell me the details of the dream and the interpretation. If you do, you're going to get gifts. You're going to get rewards. You're going to get honor and praise. It's going to be fantastic for you. So here's your choice, guys. Tell me what I dreamed, tell me what it means, then you get rewarded—or else you get torn limb to limb." It's like, "Your choices are die or win the Babylonian lottery. Those are your options."

The men, I imagine, looked at each other, thinking, "Did we mishear this guy? Does he really want us to tell him what his dream was? That's crazy." So they said to him, "King, tell us what the dream was, then we'll tell you what it means. You know how this goes, right? That's the way it always goes."

Nebuchadnezzar was getting angry. Not only was he scared, but his anger was rising. He said to the guys, "I know you're stalling. You just want more time. I stand by what I said. You either tell me what my dream was and what it means, or you are going to be put to death. Tell me what it was, tell me what it means, then you're going to be rewarded. You're going to get all kinds of prizes. Go ahead, guys. So, what is it?"

Now, we have a scared king and I think we probably have some scared wise men. They knew that he was irrational. They knew he was impulsive. They knew he was cruel. They knew he could easily fly off the handle. And now the scared king was telling them to do the impossible. "Tell me what I dreamed and tell me what it means." I imagine these guys were looking at each other, their eyes were darting around. They were starting to shake, foreheads sweating. "What are we going to do? Apparently we heard him right and he is serious."

So they said to him, very reasonably, "King, no man could do what you're asking us to do. In fact no one has ever asked anyone to do that before. The only ones who have that sort of wisdom and knowledge are the gods. We can't do this, Nebuchadnezzar. Only the gods can." These wise men had it so right—and so wrong—in that one statement. Man can't do it, but the gods can? So right, yet so wrong.

At this point Nebuchadnezzar's anger boiled over. He was done playing around with these guys. He said, "That's it. Limb to limb. Tear these guys apart." He called in the captain of his guard, Arioch, and said, "Go around all the kingdom, round up all the wise men, tear them limb to limb, ransack their houses. I am done with these guys."

So Arioch went around, rounded up the wise men, then he found Daniel and his three friends. He told Daniel what was going on. "Well, you know, the king had a dream. He's scared. The guys couldn't tell him what it was, so now I've got to kill you." Daniel and his buddies weren't even there. They didn't even get a chance to interpret the dream, yet they had to pay the penalty for the wise men being unable to do what no one could do.

Daniel had a choice. What was he going to do? Remember, he was the one who was gifted by God to know visions and dreams. Daniel had a decision to make right there on the spot. "What am I going to do? Am I going to go in and tell the king the interpretation? Am I going to give him all the details ahead of time." How was Daniel going to handle this?

You know what Daniel did? He called a prayer meeting with his friends. He said, "Tell the king I'd like to meet with him. Let's set up an appointment. I'll give him the details and the interpretation. I'll give him all of that. Let's set up this appointment." Then

Daniel went to his three buddies and said, “Fellas, it’s time for some prayer. We need to get on our faces before the Lord. We need to ask Him to reveal this to us. We need to ask Him to be merciful to us, so that we can live.”

I can’t imagine the fear that Daniel and his friends were facing. I can’t imagine what was going through their minds. As I said earlier, Daniel and his companions were young guys, probably teenagers, away from home for the first time. Here at Village Bible Church, teenagers go away from home to Lake Ann Camp for the first time. That’s a little different experience. Daniel and his buddies were in Babylon, far from home and with no hope of ever getting back there. How did Daniel respond when told, “If you don’t do something, you’re going to die”? Daniel called a prayer meeting.

Then look at Daniel 2, beginning in verse 17:

¹⁷ Then Daniel went to his house and made the matter known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions, ¹⁸ and told them to seek mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his companions might not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.

What did Daniel do when it seemed like there was no other option? What did Daniel do when an irrational demand was being made? What did Daniel do when there was a dead end? The first thing he did was call upon the Lord. That was his impulsive reaction. He didn’t have to sit and think about it. “What do I do? How can I do this?”

What I usually end up doing is try to figure out the whole problem, then, when I realize I don’t have a clue, I talk to the Lord. I’m the only one who does that, right? You try to solve it. You use your wisdom, training, experience, education, trying to figure it out. Then, when you realize you have no answers, you think, “Oh, maybe I’d better pray about this.” Daniel encourages us to pray right off the bat. The very first thing he did was throw it onto the Lord. He asked the Lord for wisdom. That’s what Daniel and his buddies did, and surprise, surprise, the Lord came through. The Lord is faithful to His people. We see that God revealed the mystery in verse 19: *“Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night.”*

So Daniel has gotten this good news, God has come through, He’s been faithful, He’s given Daniel the information he needed. The impulsive, irrational king ordered all the wise men killed, including Daniel and his friends. What did Daniel do, now that he had the information the king needed? Did he immediately run off to the king’s chambers? Did he head straight for the palace? “Hey, king, I’ve got your info. I have what you need. Stop tearing them limb to limb!” Did Daniel do that?

No, the same guy whose first impulse was to lean on the Lord in order to get the wisdom he needed, now had the impulse, when God came through, when God was faithful, when God delivered, to give God praise for what He had done. Daniel paused and offered this beautiful, powerful prayer to the Lord—a prayer of gratitude. There is so much to learn from this prayer. Let’s read it, beginning in verse 20:

²⁰ Daniel answered and said:

“Blessed be the name of God forever and ever,
to whom belong wisdom and might.

²¹ He changes times and seasons;
he removes kings and sets up kings;
he gives wisdom to the wise
and knowledge to those who have understanding;

²² he reveals deep and hidden things;
he knows what is in the darkness,
and the light dwells with him.

²³ To you, O God of my fathers,
I give thanks and praise,
for 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 matter.”

Daniel paused before he did anything else, shouting praises to the Lord. He gave honor and blessing to our God for who He was and what He had done. We can learn a lot from this little passage—just a few verses—full of shouts of praise from Daniel.

God is the One Who holds all wisdom and power.

There are several good reminders, including remembering that God is the One Who holds all wisdom and power. We live in a world that doesn’t believe this. The way we live our lives shows we don’t necessarily believe this either. Daniel tells us very plainly in verse 20, *“Blessed by the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might.”* It is clear: wisdom and power are the Lord’s, yet we live in this ungodly culture. Even in our lives, we often live as if that’s not true, as though we have the wisdom, power and the know-how. We can get it done. We lean on ourselves. “I can do this. I know how to handle it.” We go to a YouTube video. I mean, there’s an answer to just about everything on YouTube, right? We might try a self-help guru. We will go to a bookstore or get on Amazon and buy their books. There are millions of them. We’ll listen to podcasts. Arenas are filled with

people, all looking to learn, “How can I get it done?” That’s what self-help is: how can I get it done? The only thing the gurus get help with is the size of their bank accounts because they make loads of cash off all these people who are looking to find out how to get it done, how to have wisdom, how to have power.

Ultimately, we all need the reminder that God gives us through Daniel, that God and God alone is the One Who holds the wisdom and power. They belong to Him forever and ever and ever. They are His. They are not found in ourselves. They are not found in some guru. They are not found through a Google search. All wisdom and power belong to the Lord. More on that in a moment.

When we’re talking about wisdom and power, we have to understand the glorious revelation that we have of wisdom and power. It’s something Daniel couldn’t see, something he didn’t grasp in the way we now can. It’s the wisdom and power that are seen in Jesus Christ. We see the apostle Paul talk about this in the book of Colossians. He’s talking to several different Christian churches and wants their hearts to *“be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of the full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”* (Colossians 2:2-3).

If we want to know God’s wisdom, if we want to know His knowledge and power, it is all wrapped up and revealed in Jesus Christ. When we look to Jesus Christ, we see the wisdom that was given to Daniel. We see the wisdom that no one else has. We see the knowledge that only God can have. We see it in Jesus Christ. If you want to know the wisdom of the Lord, if you want to know what really matters, look to Jesus. That’s the first reminder in Daniel’s praise-prayer here.

God is the One Who rules the universe.

We’re also reminded that God is the One Who rules the universe. God is in control. It doesn’t always feel like God’s in control, so Daniel needs to remind us that God is in control, even when it feels like He’s not. I imagine in that moment, when Daniel and his buddies heard they were going to be torn limb to limb because of an impulsive dictator, it probably felt like God was not in control. Yet they knew He was. They knew God. They knew what He was like. They knew what He did.

It says in verse 21, *“...He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings...”* God is in control. That means the impulsive, the irrational, the cruel Nebuchadnezzar would not have ruled Babylon if it was not somehow all being used by God. God is not asleep at the switch. God is not a “set it and forget it” God, where He just puts us all here and lets it all work out. God, the sovereign One, the good One, the holy One, the powerful One, is working all of this out for His purposes, including having a man like Nebuchadnezzar on the throne. Do you believe that? That’s a reminder I need. God is in charge of the universe. It’s not me; it’s not my leaders. God is ultimately in charge of the universe. But he says here, *“...He removes kings and sets up kings...”*

You may not know this, but we’re in an election season and people are going to be heading to the polls pretty soon. We’re going to have decisions made about who’s running our country and other areas of government. We’re going to have some people who see their candidate win and some people who don’t see their candidate win. When your candidate doesn’t win, you start doubting. “Is God really in control? If He was, how in the world could my candidate not win?” We need the reminder of Daniel that whether your candidate wins or not, God is the One Who rules the universe. God is the One Who is in charge. He’s sovereign and He’s working all things out. Nothing can happen apart from God’s will.

We don’t have to like it. I think the reason we don’t always like the way these things work out is because we don’t have God’s full wisdom and knowledge. We’re not always seeing things God’s way. If we did, we would say, “Yeah, right again, God. You nailed that one, God. Got it.” Do we need this as we head into a campaign season that’s going to be bitter, tense and divisive? Do we need a reminder that God removes kings and sets up kings, that God is the One Who rules the universe? I need that reminder.

God offers wisdom to His people.

There’s more good stuff here, though; another good reminder. We said that God is the One Who holds wisdom and power, but God also offers that wisdom to His people. He doesn’t keep it all to Himself and leave us on our own. He shares this wisdom with us. As Jesus Christ is revealed wisdom and knowledge, His people can come to Him and ask for wisdom in any of life’s situations, no matter what life brings their way, trusting that Jesus Christ will share that wisdom with them.

James says it this way in his book. James 1:5 talks about lavishing wisdom on God’s people: *“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.”* Do you have a tough decision to make? “Where am I going to go to school? Who am I going to marry? What bills do I pay? How do I invest? When should I retire?” The Bible is very

clear that Jesus Christ has the wisdom. Ask Him and He will give it to you. He is wisdom and He shares it with His people. He doesn't hoard it. He gives it generously. All we have to do is ask.

That's what Daniel and his buddies did. They went before the Lord, praying, "We don't have an answer to this. We don't understand this mystery. Only You, almighty God, know. Please give us the details." Then God shared His wisdom with Daniel. He gave him the knowledge he needed. Daniel's impulse was to pray and honor the Lord by shouting his praises to Him. Daniel understood that wisdom comes from the Lord. James tells us we need to ask God.

When I read through this section of Daniel, I was super convicted by the fact that this is not what my normal existence is like. I don't immediately go to prayer. I don't automatically shout praises to the Lord. I wish I did. When I need wisdom—which is all the time—I need to go to the Lord for it immediately, asking Him, believing He will give it to me. Instead I try everything on my own, only to get to the end of myself and realize I need to do what I should have done at the beginning: bring it to the Lord, ask Him for wisdom, trust in His sovereignty and give Him praise.

This is what Daniel did. Then it was time for Daniel to go to the king. Then it was time for him to reveal this mystery to Nebuchadnezzar that God had revealed to Daniel. He went into the king's courts. I have to believe that the other wise men were kind of happy with Daniel because right off the bat, as soon as he saw the king, he basically said, "These other wise men had it right. No one could answer the question you asked. No one could tell you your dream. No man can do that. The wise men said only the gods could do it."

Daniel corrects them a little bit in verse 27: *"No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked,"*—no human can do this—*"but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days."* Daniel was saying, "King, you've asked for something that no man can do, but there is a God in heaven Who can get it done—and He has."

Then Daniel began telling Nebuchadnezzar what his dream was. Remember, the king irrationally was asking for the details and the interpretation. So Daniel began telling the king what happened in his dream, what scared him so much during that nightmare. He explained that Nebuchadnezzar saw this mighty statue in his dream. That is what scared the king. That is what set his knees quaking.

Here's an artist's rendition of this statue. What? You all don't have one of these little guys in your home? Every time I hold this little statue, I feel like I've won a Babylonian Oscar.

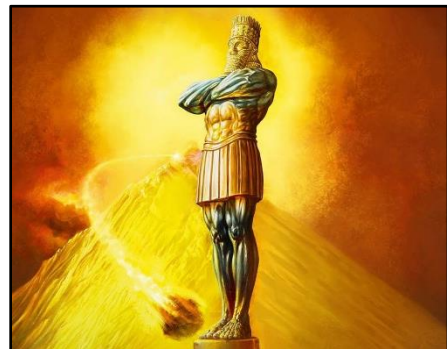
Daniel had been given the vision by God and he understood the dream. He explained this to the king: "There was a head of gold, there were shoulders and arms of silver, there was a midsection of bronze. Then there were these iron legs connected to feet that were a mixture of iron and clay. This is what you saw in your dream, Nebuchadnezzar. There's a little more, though. There was a rock that seemingly came out of nowhere. This rock flies into the picture and crushes the statue. I mean, turns it into dust in the wind. It all just blows away. Only the rock remains."

Daniel continued, "In this dream, King, that rock just kept growing and growing and growing, getting bigger and bigger and bigger, until it became a mighty mountain." I have to believe that Nebuchadnezzar, as this description was going along, was going, "Yeah. Yeah. That's right. You got it. That's right. That's the dream."

Then Daniel moved on to the interpretation. What did it mean, this weird statue and rock and mountain? It was much more than the king was going to be sad, going to have a hard time, or even that the king was going to have a short life, like the other wise men used to say from those old books. No, Daniel was very specific:

"Each of the layers of the statue are different kingdoms. The first one, Nebuchadnezzar, is you. The gold head is you." How do you think the king responded to that? You think the egomaniac loved it? "I'm the head of gold. Everyone else is silver or bronze, iron or clay. I'm the head of gold." I have to believe Nebuchadnezzar loved that.

Here's how Daniel explained it to him. Look at verses 37-38: *"You, O king, the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, and the might, and the glory."* Remember, Daniel is saying, "God is sovereign. He holds the universe in His hands. He's the reason, Nebuchadnezzar, that you're in control." *"...[T]he God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power and the*



might and the glory, and into whose hand he has given, wherever they dwell, the children of man, the beasts of the field, and the birds of the heavens, making you rule over them all—you are the head of gold.” Again, Nebuchadnezzar had to love this. “I’m the guy.”

Then Daniel goes on, talking about each of these other layers. He says they’re other kingdoms that will come after Nebuchadnezzar, after Babylon. Scholars are kind of split on exactly who and what these kingdoms are, at least most of them. Some think it’s Babylon, then it’s the ancient kingdom of Medo-Persia, then Greece then Rome. Some think each of these layers represents different kings who are mentioned in the book of Daniel. You have Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Darius, then Cyrus. We’ll get to those later in our sermon series in Daniel. People who study these things say it could be that, or maybe it’s something else. We don’t quite know.

However, there is one thing that all Bible believing scholars agree on. The only thing that matters in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream is the rock that crushed the other kingdoms. It kept growing and growing and growing, until it became a big mountain. The book of Daniel says that in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and its interpretation, it was understood that this mountain became bigger and bigger and bigger, and that it would never end. It was a kingdom that would never end. Unlike Babylon, unlike any other earthly kingdom, it was never going to end. It will go on and on and on.

⁴⁴ And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever, ⁴⁵ just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold.

That final Kingdom will have no end. It is the only true Kingdom. What is that Kingdom? Who’s the King of that Kingdom? I want to know that—don’t you? The others we can study and debate about. But that fifth Kingdom that destroys all other kingdoms, that outlasts all other kingdoms—who is King of that Kingdom?

By now you should all have that standard Sunday school answer: Jesus! Right? King Jesus is the One Who came to earth 2,000 years ago, the God-Man. He took on human flesh, lived a sinless life and died a death that He didn’t deserve. You and I deserved it. He rose from the dead three days later to save sinners who place their faith in Him, who acknowledge their need for Him because of their sin. He forgives, He saves, He invites people into His family. They become subjects in His Kingdom. That’s the final Kingdom and we’re a part of it. The Bible tells us at the very end that there will come a time when Jesus will return for His people. All of the earthly kingdoms today, all of the superpowers, will be wiped out. America will not be around forever—and that’s a very good thing. King Jesus will make a new heaven and a new earth, then we, His loyal subjects, will reign on that new earth, that new Kingdom, forever and ever and ever.

In the meantime, more and more people are being added. As people hear about Jesus, respond to His message and become part of His family, His Kingdom is getting bigger and bigger and bigger. There will come a time when we will reign with Him forever and ever and ever in this new Kingdom. That’s a promise, sisters and brothers. When we think about what Daniel was saying to the king, and because of what these wise men have said, we must understand the deeper truth, the more powerful truth. Yes, no man can do what the king is asking. No man. Only the gods can do that.

There is only one Man Who can do what the king is asking, the God-Man Himself. Jesus is the Man Who can do what no other man can because He is all wisdom. He is all knowledge. He is all power. He runs the universe, sustaining it moment by moment. He is the One Who parcels out wisdom to His people who ask for it, and He’s generous when we ask for wisdom. He is the eternal King, and we will be in His Kingdom forever and ever and ever. No more fighting. No more tensions. No more divisiveness. No more pain. No more tears. No more grief. No more death. No more impulsive leaders. No more fear. It will all be gone and we will be living with King Jesus forever.

Don’t you long for that? Don’t you want Him to come back now? Some of you are like, “But there’s football we’ve got to watch,” or something else. Seriously, don’t you want Jesus to come back now? Don’t you want to be there now? We don’t know when it will be. We don’t know when He’s coming back. But what we know is that He is coming—we can count on it. In all of the dark times, in all the difficult decisions, in all the times when we just don’t know what to do, we can lean into King Jesus and count on the fact that there is a time coming when He’s going to put all this bad stuff to an end, then we are going to be with Him. Jesus Christ, the God-Man, the Man Who can do what no other man can do—He’s our King! We are His subjects and we get to live with Him in His Kingdom forever and ever. It is going to be glorious!