

# 119

## MINISTRIES

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### **The Exiled Prophet, Part 3: The Kingdoms of This World (Daniel 2)**

Welcome back to our study on the book of Daniel. In our last teaching, we covered Daniel chapter 1. In that chapter, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah arrived in Babylon to be trained for service in the king’s court, and they refused to participate in an idolatrous practice involving the king’s food. However, God gave them favor with their captors, and they were allowed to continue their training without having to participate in idol worship. In this teaching, we’re going to look at Daniel chapter 2. Let’s begin.

In Daniel 2, king Nebuchadnezzar has a troubling dream. He asks his wise men to interpret it, but does not tell them what the dream was. When the wise men are unable to give the king what he wants, the king orders that all of the wise men, including Daniel, are to be killed. Daniel prays for an interpretation of the dream, and God gives him one. Daniel then appears before the king and tells him what his dream was, and how his dream should be interpreted. Then, the king honors Daniel, and the God who gave him the interpretation.

When did the king have this dream? We are told in verse 1:

#### **Daniel 2:1**

[In the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams...](#)

Nebuchadnezzar’s father, the king Nabopolassar, passed away while Nebuchadnezzar was attacking Jerusalem in Daniel 1:1 (Noel, Ted, *A Primer on the Book of Daniel*, [Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2009], pp. 13-14). So, Daniel entered Babylon at the same time that Nebuchadnezzar was being crowned as the new king. As we discussed in the first teaching in this series, Babylonian kings’ reigns were dated from the year after they took the throne. So, when Daniel says, “the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar,” that means that this is two full years after Daniel was taken into captivity. In the first chapter of Daniel, we read that Daniel was to be educated for three years before he would serve as advisor to the king (Daniel 1:5), so at this point, Daniel was probably still in training, and had not yet started to officially serve in the king’s court.

Let's keep reading:

### **Daniel 2:1-4**

...his spirit was troubled, and his sleep left him. 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. And the king said to them, "I had a dream, and my spirit is troubled to know the dream." Then the Chaldeans said to the king in Aramaic, "O king, live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation."

Archaeologists have uncovered records of the methods that the Babylonians used to interpret dreams. Basically, they would ask what the dream was, and then they would associate certain things that were in the dream with certain kinds of future events (A. Leo Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization*, Revised Edition completed by Erica Reiner [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977], p. 302). However, in order to use these methods, the interpreters needed to know what was in the dream first. There was no way for them to figure out exactly what another person had dreamed.

### **Daniel 2:5-13**

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. 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." They answered a second time and said, "Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will show its interpretation." 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— 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." 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. 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." Because of this the king was angry and very furious, and commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be destroyed. So the decree went out, and the wise men were about to be killed; and they sought Daniel and his companions, to kill them.

Nebuchadnezzar's orders here seem very harsh and unreasonable. Was he really going to punish his servants with death because they couldn't do something that was impossible? Clearly, this dream really troubled him, and he knew that its interpretation was very important. Nebuchadnezzar did not want to hear some stock interpretation of his dream from a pretend prophet; he wanted to get a real answer from a real God. He wasn't willing to play games. If someone could tell him what was in his dream, then he could trust that they had experienced real divine revelation, and that their interpretation of the dream would also be correct.

### **Daniel 2:14-19**

Then Daniel replied with prudence and discretion to Arioch, the captain of the king's guard, who had gone out to kill the wise men of Babylon. He declared to Arioch, the king's captain, "Why is the decree of the king so urgent?" Then Arioch made the matter known to Daniel. And Daniel

went in and requested the king to appoint him a time, that he might show the interpretation to the king.

Then Daniel went to his house and made the matter known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions, 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. Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven.

Just like in chapter 1, here we see the value in the way that Daniel has been interacting with the Babylonians. He has kept to his convictions, but has been considerate and reasonable toward those around him. Because of the favor he has gained within the king's palace, Daniel manages to negotiate another deal: before the king kills both him and all the other wise men, Daniel will be provided the opportunity to interpret the king's dream. Of course, it is not just Daniel's social skills that deliver him from this situation; God himself steps in and provides Daniel with both the contents and the interpretation of this dream. Nebuchadnezzar is about to get exactly what he wants.

### **Daniel 2:20-23**

Daniel answered and said: "Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might. 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; he reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with him. 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."

Here, we get to see how Daniel is looking at this entire situation. While he is being respectful and prudent in his interactions with the Babylonians, he knows who is really in charge. God is greater than Babylon, because he "removes kings and sets up kings." God is also greater than Daniel, because Daniel says God has "given me wisdom and might." God is in control of this entire situation, and Daniel is treating God accordingly. God receives all of the credit, all of the honor, and all of the obedience. Daniel goes on to explain God's sovereignty directly to the king.

### **Daniel 2:24-28**

Therefore Daniel went in 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; bring me in before the king, and I will show the king the interpretation."

Then Arioch brought in Daniel before the king in haste and said thus to him: "I have found among the exiles from Judah a man who will make known to the king the interpretation." The king declared to Daniel, whose name was Beltshazzar, "Are you able to make known to me the dream that I have seen and its interpretation?" Daniel answered the king and said, "No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked, 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.

So, Daniel explains to the king that God is the one who deserves the credit. This statement shows that Daniel is properly honoring God, but it also shows that he is not seeking favor from the king. He could easily use this opportunity to take some credit for the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, and

achieve greater power and influence in the king's court. But, instead, he properly acknowledges that God is the source of this wisdom and knowledge, and that God simply wants to share some of that knowledge with Nebuchadnezzar.

Let's keep going.

### **Daniel 2:29-30**

Your dream and the visions of your head as you lay in bed are these: To you, O king, as you lay in bed came thoughts of what would be after this, and he who reveals mysteries made known to you what is to be. But as for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because of any wisdom that I have more than all the living, but in order that the interpretation may be made known to the king, and that you may know the thoughts of your mind.

So, now that Daniel has given proper credit to God, and explained why God has provided the king with an interpretation, he starts describing Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

### **Daniel 2:31-35**

You saw, O king, and behold, a great image. This image, mighty and of exceeding brightness, stood before you, and its appearance was frightening. The head of this image was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its middle and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it 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, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

The imagery in this dream had very specific meaning to a Babylonian like Nebuchadnezzar. The image that is the focal point of this dream is described as "mighty and of exceeding brightness," and also as having an "appearance [that] was frightening." These are all ways that Babylonians described their gods: as images made of precious metals that were bright and frightening (Oppenheim 243). So the appearance of this image was intended to make Nebuchadnezzar think of the gods that he worshiped. It is understandable that he would find this dream troubling, even before he knew its interpretation, because in this dream, the image of this god gets destroyed.

In any case, since Daniel has now accurately described what Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream, the king now knows that his interpretation of the dream will be accurate as well.

And Daniel gives it.

### **Daniel 2:36-38**

This was the dream. Now we will tell the king its interpretation. 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, 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.

There are two things to note about this beginning of the interpretation. First, as we mentioned, this image represents a god. Nebuchadnezzar would find it quite flattering to learn that he was part of this image—and the most valuable part at that. Second, Daniel says that Nebuchadnezzar rules over "the

children of man, the beasts of the field, and the birds of the heavens.” This is something that the prophet Jeremiah said about Nebuchadnezzar as well:

#### **Jeremiah 28:14**

For thus says the LORD [YHWH] of hosts, the God of Israel: I have put upon the neck of all these nations an iron yoke to serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and they shall serve him, for I have given to him even the beasts of the field.

The phrases “beasts of the field” and “birds of the air” are typically used to refer to the death of people in war. These animals are the ones who will consume the carcasses of the people who have been slain in battle. Here are some examples of this kind of phrasing:

#### **Psalms 79:1-3**

O God, the nations have come into your inheritance; they have defiled your holy temple; they have laid Jerusalem in ruins. They have given the bodies of your servants to the birds of the heavens for food, the flesh of your faithful to the beasts of the earth. They have poured out their blood like water all around Jerusalem, and there was no one to bury them.

#### **Ezekiel 39:17-20**

As for you, son of man, thus says the Lord GOD [YHWH]: Speak to the birds of every sort and to all beasts of the field: ‘Assemble and come, gather from all around to the sacrificial feast that I am preparing for you, a great sacrificial feast on the mountains of Israel, and you shall eat flesh and drink blood. You shall eat the flesh of the mighty, and drink the blood of the princes of the earth—of rams, of lambs, and of he-goats, of bulls, all of them fat beasts of Bashan. And you shall eat fat till you are filled, and drink blood till you are drunk, at the sacrificial feast that I am preparing for you. And you shall be filled at my table with horses and charioteers, with mighty men and all kinds of warriors,’ declares the Lord GOD [YHWH].

So, by declaring that these beasts and birds who will consume the dead have been given into Nebuchadnezzar’s hands, the Scriptures are saying that Nebuchadnezzar has the power of life and death over the people under his rule. Along with this power comes the responsibility to keep the people under his rule—especially the Israelites—alive and safe (Noel 25-26). As it turns out, Nebuchadnezzar’s Babylon will do the best job of protecting God’s people, and the kingdoms that follow his will become progressively worse.

#### **Daniel 2:39-45**

Another kingdom inferior to you shall arise after you, and yet a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. And there shall be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron, because iron breaks to pieces and shatters all things. And like iron that crushes, it shall break and crush all these. And as you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter’s clay and partly of iron, it shall be a divided kingdom, but some of the firmness of iron shall be in it, just as you saw iron mixed with the soft clay. And as the toes of the feet were partly iron and partly clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly brittle. As you saw the iron mixed with soft clay, so they will mix with one another in marriage, but they will not hold together, just as iron does not mix with clay. 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, 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. A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure.

The identities of the kingdoms symbolized by the different metals in this image will be explored more when we examine Daniel chapter 7. However, to address them briefly: historically, there were three kingdoms that conquered Israel (and the rest of the Near East) in the centuries following Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon. These kingdoms were Medio-Persia, Greece, and Rome. However, the fourth kingdom, the Roman empire, hasn't existed for hundreds of years, so where is that stone that was supposed to destroy it and "fill the earth"?

To answer this, we have to understand that this image doesn't just represent political kingdoms, but religious ones as well. Remember that this image represents a Babylonian idol; by extension, we could say that it represents Babylonian religion. As history progressed, and the kingdoms that were depicted as different metals rose to power, each one instituted a new religious order along with a new political order. These religious orders were different from each other, but they all shared some common features, which is why they can all be considered part of the same image. Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and Roman religions were all polytheistic systems in which graven images were set up in temples and worshiped as gods.

The worship of Roman gods like Jupiter and Mars hasn't been practiced for hundreds of years, but systems of idol worship that are derived from the Roman system are still very prevalent. Verse 35, speaking about the broken remains of the image, says that, "not a trace of them could be found," but there is clearly much more than a "trace" of this image, this kind of religion, in our modern world. We will address these matters more when we get into some of the prophecies from later chapters, but for now we can say that the image from Nebuchadnezzar's dream still exists; it has not yet been completely broken.

So, then, what is the stone from the dream, that will arrive and destroy the idolatrous image? The Scriptures provide us with several clues. First, we see that it is cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands. There are several Biblical symbols that fit this description. First, unhewn stone is the standard for a Biblical altar:

#### **Exodus 20:25**

If you make me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stones, for if you wield your tool on it you profane it.

Idols were made of carved stone, and God did not want his altar to be worshiped as a graven image. So, this unhewn stone in Daniel represents a proper Biblical altar. God finds worshipping idols to be unacceptable (Exodus 20:4-6), but this unhewn stone represents a way of worshipping God that he finds acceptable. This symbolism of the stone, as a system of proper worship, is expanded further in other verses:

#### **Deuteronomy 27:2-8**

And on the day you cross over the Jordan to the land that the LORD [YHWH] your God is giving you, you shall set up large stones and plaster them with plaster. And you shall write on them all the words of this law, when you cross over to enter the land that the LORD [YHWH] your God is giving you, a land flowing with milk and honey, as the LORD [YHWH], the God of your fathers, has promised you. And when you have crossed over the Jordan, you shall set up these stones, concerning which I command you today, on Mount Ebal, and you shall plaster them

with plaster. And there you shall build an altar to the LORD [YHWH] your God, an altar of stones. You shall wield no iron tool on them; you shall build an altar to the LORD [YHWH] your God of uncut stones. And you shall offer burnt offerings on it to the LORD [YHWH] your God, and you shall sacrifice peace offerings and shall eat there, and you shall rejoice before the LORD [YHWH] your God. And you shall write on the stones all the words of this law very plainly.

Here, unhewn stone is present in both the altar that God commanded to be built, and the law that he commanded to be kept. Again, this stone is symbolizing acceptable and righteous worship of God, and it stands in contrast to the idolatrous and unrighteous religion of the four kingdoms from Nebuchadnezzar's dream. But there is still more we can say about this stone:

### **Psalm 118:22-23**

The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is the LORD's [YHWH] doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.

### **Isaiah 28:16**

...Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: 'Whoever believes will not be in haste.'

### **Luke 20:17-18**

But he looked directly at them and said, "What then is this that is written: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone"? Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him."

These verses describe a stone that is going to crush and destroy, but that also will be used to build. This also sounds a lot like the stone from Nebuchadnezzar's dream. Peter goes further and gives this stone an identity:

### **Acts 4:10-12**

let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ [Messiah Yeshua] of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. This Jesus [Yeshua] is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

### **1 Peter 2:4-9**

As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ [Messiah Yeshua]. For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," and "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

So, in addition to representing God's ways, this stone also represents Yeshua. Just like the stone in Daniel destroys the image that represents the idolatrous religions of the world, the book of Revelation prophesies that Yeshua is going to destroy a symbol of idolatrous religion, which it describes as a woman sitting on a beast (Revelation 17:1-14). 1 Corinthians 15 says that Yeshua will deliver "the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power" (1 Corinthians 15:24). The sum of the symbolism seems to be that the image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream represents the wicked religious systems of the world, and the stone represents the righteous religious system of God, which is under the leadership of the Messiah.

Of course, these details about the distant future were not what Nebuchadnezzar was concerned about. To him, the important part was that he was the head of gold, and that his kingdom was not going to last forever. While calling him the head of gold could be considered complimentary, overall this interpretation of the dream is a negative one for the king. Nebuchadnezzar worked tirelessly to increase the splendor and power of his kingdom (L.W. King, *A History of Babylon: From the Foundation of the Monarchy to the Persian Conquest* [London : Chatto and Windus 1915], pp. 279-280), so for him, the news that it was all going to be destroyed in the end was very bad. However, Nebuchadnezzar's reaction to this interpretation shows that he was looking for the truth, not for words of comfort and flattery.

#### **Daniel 2:46-49**

Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face and paid homage to Daniel, and commanded that an offering and incense be offered up to him. The king answered and said to Daniel, "Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery." Then the king gave Daniel high honors and many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon. Daniel made a request of the king, and he appointed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego over the affairs of the province of Babylon. But Daniel remained at the king's court.

Daniel tells the truth to Nebuchadnezzar, even though the truth exalts God and not the king. However, the king reacts positively to this, and Daniel ends up not just surviving in Babylon, but actually thriving. Daniel's message to the king is that God is sovereign, God is greater than Nebuchadnezzar, and greater than all future kings and kingdoms that will come afterward. God then demonstrates his sovereignty by raising Daniel, a captive from a conquered nation, to the head position in the king's court.

So, what can we learn from this story from the book of Daniel? First, we can learn from Daniel's example of faith and integrity. While Daniel did gain the favor of the other people in the king's court, he did not do so by lies or by flattery. Daniel stayed true to his faith and to his word. He did not lie to the king out of fear of offending him, but he told the truth, because he feared God more. We, today, can do the same. While it is valuable to have friends and allies who are not necessarily followers of God, we do not need to lie to these people to gain their favor. We can be honest about our faith and our convictions, and God will grant us the favor that we need.

Second, we can take comfort in the knowledge that God is in charge. Babylon was the undisputed power in the world when Nebuchadnezzar had his dream. It was almost unthinkable that anyone or anything could overthrow that power, but now Babylon's power is nothing but ancient history. One day, the powers that rule over our current world will meet the same end. They will be just a distant memory, a few sentences in a history book. No matter how powerful or invincible anything in this world may seem,

we know that God will ultimately be victorious, and if we are his people, then we will be victorious also. We can seek God's kingdom and his righteousness first, because we know that God is the true king.

In the next teaching in this series, we are going to examine chapter 3 of the book of Daniel. We hope to see you there.

*We pray you have been blessed by this teaching. Remember, continue to test everything. Shalom! For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at [www.testeverything.net](http://www.testeverything.net)*

**Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.**

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