

The sermon

Intro

Daniel, likely a teenager, and his three friends are exiles in Babylon who've become the king's wise men. King Nebuchadnezzar's had a distressing dream. He wants someone to tell him what his dream means. He doesn't trust his wise men, so he demands they tell him what he dreamed before they provide an interpretation. He thinks they're a sham.

The wise men will be executed if the dream isn't revealed. Eventually they admit that's impossible. They concede only their gods can do this, but their gods are distant and don't communicate with men. Daniel finds out he's going to be executed. He requests time to discover the dream. Daniel prays. God reveals the dream and its interpretation.

What's the dream all about?

Body

Point 1: God has answers for the distressed (2:24-30)

READ 2:24-30

Daniel goes to Arioch, the one tasked with executing the wise men, with news that the dream has been revealed (2:24-25). Daniel's brought to the king.

When asked by the king if he's able, Daniel gives an interesting answer:

"No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked, ²⁸ 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." – 2:27-28

Daniel highlights the futility of the magic arts and the ability of God. And says nothing about himself.

Wise men (2:27)

The wise men include enchanters, magicians, and astrologers.

Enchanters contacted the dead and performed exorcisms. Magicians transformed objects from one thing to another. Astrologers determined a person's fate. Think fortune tellers and tarot cards.

They're supposed to be able to interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream. He assumed they were a sham. So he required them to prove themselves by telling him the dream first.

Suspicious confirmed (2:28-30)

Nebuchadnezzar suspected his dream corresponded to reality and was a bad omen, so he was distressed and sleepless (2:1, 3). Daniel confirms the dream speaks to future realities.

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. – 2:29

Meaning God interrupted the dreams of the sleeping King and showed him future events. Meaning God can access the mind while we're sleeping. Meaning God knows what will be long before it happens.

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. – 2:30

Daniel absolves himself of any credit. All credit belongs to Daniel's God, our God, Father, Son, and Spirit, the one and only Creator of the heavens and the earth.

Why did God reveal this? God wanted the king to know. Yes, God wanted to save Daniel too.

Application: draw attention to God

Daniel informs our evangelism here. He speaks well of God. He gives the credit to God. He talks about what God does. He verbally praises God in public.

When God acts for us we can share it with the world. When God is the answer to a person's troubles we can say it.

A good spiritual discipline is to speak well of God in public. We do this because of our trust and gratitude and joy in God. It shouldn't be something we awkwardly have to force into conversations. Just the natural outflow of our relationship with God.

Application: God has answers for distressed people

Nebuchadnezzar was distressed. He was powerless to help himself. God had answers. So it is with us.

There is a God who has answers. There is a God who helps people with mental health issues, depression, suicidal thoughts, panic attacks. There is a God who helps people overcome addictions like alcohol, cigarettes, drugs, gambling, pornography, food, shopping. There is a God who helps parents navigate the teenage years.

We feel helpless, broken, enslaved, confused. There is a God with wisdom to navigate our broken lives.

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. ⁶ But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. – James 1:5-6

God made us. God knows us. God knows what we need. God has answers. God says trust me. To receive God's wisdom, we need to believe truths like God communicates, God knows best, God cares. If we don't believe God communicates, we won't ask. If we don't believe God knows best, we won't want his guidance. If we don't believe God cares, we won't turn to him.

God says trust me, and I'll help you navigate life by communicating truth to you. This happens through reading our Bible, hearing sermons, Sunday school, a good Christian book, conversation with a Christian friend, God bringing a thought to mind that agrees with Scripture.

God has answers for the distressed in that he helps us to see life as we ought.

God also helps by his Holy Spirit, who indwells all who believe. The Spirit does an internal work, helping us to desire the right things so that we aren't ruled by destructive desires. The Spirit does an internal work, replacing dread and despair with joy in God.

God has answers for the distressed in that he changes our passions within.

Point 2: Dream revealed (2:31-35)

READ 2:31-35

This is what Nebuchadnezzar dreamed.

What here would have distressed Nebuchadnezzar? Let's remember these were superstitious people. They were into fortune telling, preoccupied with their future. They thought everything was an omen of the future. Is doom or fortune on the way?

These people didn't believe in a good, wise, almighty God who worked all things for their good (Rom 8:28). Living each day in fear of what the future might bring isn't the way to do life (Matt 6:25-34)!

Somewhere in the dream Nebuchadnezzar detected a bad omen. The only negative picture was the gold, silver, bronze, and iron image being struck and broken in pieces by the stone. Nebuchadnezzar likely thought the stone was going to strike him. His kingdom was mighty and frightening (2:31), so he saw himself being broken in pieces.

Application

Superstition and obsession with the future or fear of the future has no place in the church. Rather, we obey what God's revealed to us while confidently trusting that God is directing our paths (Prov 3:5-6). Faith trusts *"surely goodness and mercy follow me all the days of my life"* (Ps 23:6). Faith isn't looking for signs.

Don't treat your Bible like it's a tarot card, turning to a pages at random seeking guidance. Read in context. Figure out how what's said before and after informs the verse you're looking at. Read systematically. Read through whole books. Read your whole Bible. Get the big picture.

Point 3: The stone that ends earthly kingdoms (2:36-45)

READ 2:36-45

Explanation

This is the dream interpretation God gave to Daniel.

Here I can't cover every last detail. Just some key themes.

Kingdoms

Four earthly kingdoms rule in succession. The kingdom of God arrives on the scene in the days of these kingdoms. These four kingdoms are temporary whereas the kingdom of God is permanent, indestructible, eternal. One day the kingdom of God will bring these four kingdoms, and every earthly kingdom, to an end.

The first kingdom is Babylon. The second kingdom is Medo-Persia. The third kingdom is Greece. The fourth kingdom is the Roman Empire. I'll prove this as we work through Daniel. The stone that crushes the earthly kingdoms is Jesus Christ.

Babylon (2:37-38)

"You, O king...you are the head of gold." (2:37-38). Babylon is the first kingdom. Note what's said about Nebuchadnezzar:

to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, and the might, and the glory, (2:37)

God gives is a theme in Daniel. God gave Jehoiakim to Nebuchadnezzar (1:2). *"God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs"* (1:9). *"God gave them [Daniel and his three friends] learning and skill in all literature and wisdom"* (1:17). *"I will give thanks and praise, for you have given me wisdom and might"* (2:23).

God is the source behind everything that Nebuchadnezzar presently enjoys: power, might, and glory (honor, renown).

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 (2:38)

God has also given Nebuchadnezzar subjects to rule over: the people who dwell in his kingdom, the land animals, the bird of the sky. God has delegated authority to Nebuchadnezzar. Rule is God's to give and to take. "*He changes time and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings*" (2:21). The point is God's in control of history!

Nebuchadnezzar's rule won't last forever.

"*Another kingdom inferior to you shall arise after you*" (2:39) = after Nebuchadnezzar's death, in 539 BC, Medo-Persia defeated Babylon. Greece (2:39) and Rome (2:40) will follow in that order.

The picture is earthly rule is given by God. Earthly rule is temporary. Earthly rule will come to an end. Earthly rule will be ended by Jesus.

The stone and the kingdom

Jesus is the stone that breaks the kingdoms of men (2:35, 44-45). **Psalm 118:22** says, "*The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.*"

In Luke 20, Jesus was challenged by the religious authorities. So he told a parable. The parable ended like this.

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?"¹⁸ Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him." – **Luke 20:17-18**

Here Jesus links Psalm 118:22 with Daniel 2:44-45. Peter said Jesus is that stone.

This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. – **Acts 4:11**

So the stone that puts an end to the kingdoms of the earth is Jesus Christ.

The kingdom of God arrived (Matt 12:28; Mark 1:15; Luke 17:20-21) at Jesus' 1st coming, but not in its fullness. So we still pray "*Your kingdom come, your will be done*" (Matt 6:10). The kingdom was present in demons cast out and miraculous healings, but sickness and sin and death remain. Having been born of the Spirit we've "*tasted...the powers of the age to come*" (Heb 6:5), but that age hasn't come yet. "*The stone...became a great mountain*" (2:35) indicates the kingdom starts small and increases massively = a small group of Jewish believers resulted in local churches throughout the globe.

When Jesus comes a 2nd time, he will say to his people, "*Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world*" (Matt 25:34).

Gospel connection

This is the good news of the gospel. The end of fallen, broken human kingdoms that ruin their subjects through unwise rule. The end of a world where righteousness is odd and offensive and sin is normalized and celebrated. The end of sickness and suffering and sin and death. A kingdom where rule is no longer delegated to fallen humans.

The gospel tells us, "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life*" (**John 3:16**). Eternal life means the life to come. Life under Jesus' rule. Jesus rescues his subjects by dying in their place, taking the punishment we deserve. If we turn from our sin by trusting in Jesus' death and resurrection, we'll rule with Jesus.

History ends with the rule of Jesus! Turn to him.

God's knowledge

"*A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this*" – 2:45

That's speaking well of God again. God's greatness is demonstrated in his omniscience. He knew what Nebuchadnezzar dreamt. He knew beforehand which kingdom would overcome which kingdom. In Daniel, God reveals international events 500 years in advance. Things get more specific as we go!

God knows everything. Past, present, future. What you dream. What you're thinking about right now. Where our world is headed. When every earthly kingdom will come to an end.

If God knows all, he's a trustworthy source of truth. He knows how we ought to do life. If God knows all, his promises are sure. Trust him.

Point 4: Death averted, honor bestowed (2:46-49)

With the dream revealed, Nebuchadnezzar knows the interpretation isn't a sham. And he recognizes the ability of Daniel's God.

"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." – 2:47

God is able to do what the magic arts can't do. God is willing and able to relieve distress whereas the false gods are not. Babylon's gods don't exist!

The king keeps his word and Daniel is honored (2:6). That's public praise, material and financial gifts, authority given. .

Note that Daniel's willing to supervise an ungodly, superstitious, idol-worshipping administration. His conscience wasn't so sensitive that he couldn't serve in that capacity. God has given him wisdom and favor to thrive in that challenging capacity (Dan 1:9, 17).

Application/Conclusion

God put Daniel in a hard place. God continually helps Daniel in that place. This is God's answer to Daniel's plea for mercy.

This is how God deals with us. He puts us in places for a given period of time, whether hard or mild or ideal. And he helps us in those places.

The God who will one day put an end to all opposition is able to turn things in our favor. If he doesn't chose to, we can rest in his empowering grace (1 Cor 15:10; 2 Cor 12:9-10; Phil 4:13) as we look forward to the return of Christ and the end of every fallen kingdom.