

May 27, 2018

# The God Who Sees And Shapes The Darkness

Daniel 2

My plan in the book in the book of Daniel has been to preach a chapter at a time. In this chapter there are 49 verses, and if we were to speak on every single one of them, we would be here for some time, so my plan is to try and hit the main and plain things that God was using to put courage into the heart of His exiled people. That's what we need *because* we are God's current exiled people. **1 Peter 2:11** says "Beloved, I urge you as *sojourners* and *exiles*..." God intended that the same truths that gave Daniel and his people the grace they needed to persevere would likewise be shared by us. There are three parts to our message this morning.

- ☆ The Man In Need Of Mercy (v.1-18)
- ☆ The God Worthy Of All Worship (v.19-30)
- ☆ The King Over All Kingdoms (v.31-49)

## *The Big Idea...*

God sees and shapes all your future, so take heart for you belong to a kingdom that can never be destroyed

### I. The Man In Need of Mercy

**The second year is the third year**

First, let's remove a difficulty. In **v.1** we read that these events take place "...in the *second* year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar." This is problematic

because this chapter shows that Daniel was already counted among the wise man of Babylon. But we know he was educated for three years before this took place. So how is it that v.1 says that this was only the second year of Neb's reign? The answer is that the Babylonians counted the king's reign differently. Neb's first year on the throne was his accession year. They didn't count that as part of his reign. Therefore his first reigning year is Daniel's second, and Neb's second reigning year is Daniel's third. So v.1 begins exactly where chapter one leaves off, at the end of the three years of Daniel's training.

### **Nebuchadnezzar's nightmare**

Picking up in v.1 "Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his spirit was troubled, and his sleep left him." These were no ordinary dreams. God was channeling future events to him in his sleep.<sup>1</sup> The king was so disturbed by what he saw that he couldn't sleep. These dreams were different than anything he had ever dreamed before. He knew they were divine. Which is why he calls all his wise men to come and interpret them. The Babylonian god Bel—whom Daniel was named after Belteshazzar (1:7)—was the god of order and destiny.<sup>2</sup> The Chaldeans and these other three groups—the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers—claimed that they could predict the future or uncover hidden events<sup>3</sup> through Bel's power. The king believed this interpretation was important so that he could take the whatever steps necessary to counteract the events the dream anticipated or at least be ready to face them.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Nebuchadnezzar was being drawn by secret chains. John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries Vol. XII*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: BakerBooks 2009), pg. 120

<sup>2</sup> Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marduk#Bel> accessed May 26, 2018

<sup>3</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries Vol. XII*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: BakerBooks 2009), pg. 122

<sup>4</sup> Iain M. Duguid, *Reformed Expository Commentary: Daniel*, (Phillipsburg, NJ.: P & R Publishing, 2008), pg. 19

### **‘Tell me the dream or die’**

So the wise men arrive. v.4 says Then the Chaldeans said to the king in Aramaic, “O king, live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation.”<sup>5</sup> v.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. “ This is a bizarre response to say the least. Neb required not only that they interpret the dream, but to tell him what the dream *was*. And he added a curse “I’ll dismember your body if you don’t.” They couldn’t opt out. Nebuchadnezzar reasoned that ‘if the gods speak to you regarding the interpretation of the dream—which you boast—then surely they can speak to you regarding the dream itself.’ He believed that if they couldn’t produce the dream itself, they proved themselves to be liars. He says halfway through v.9 “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.”

### **‘Only God can reveal such things!’**

The first eleven verses emphasize this struggle back and forth between the king and his wise men. This is a rule of interpreting the Scripture. Whatever is repeated and emphasized is what the Biblical authors want you to focus on. Twice they plead with the king to tell them the dream (v.4, 7) Then they say in v. 10 “There is not a man on earth who can meet the king’s demand” But the key verse in this first section v.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.” So ask yourself “Why does the biblical writer want you to hear [v.11]?”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Notice two things here. First, look at the flattery of the Chaldeans. They flatter him by saying “O king, live forever!” Daniel, the Jewish teenager, takes a different approach later by humbly reminding king Neb that he is going to die, and another kingdom will replace his. Secondly, look at the boasting of the Chaldeans. ‘If you tell us the dream, we will most certainly—not probably—but certainly show you the interpretation.’

<sup>6</sup> Dale Ralph Davis, *The Bible Speaks Today: The Message of Daniel, His Kingdom Cannot Fail*, (Downers Grove, IL.: IVP Academic, 2013), pg. 42

Because these pagans are confessing to the failure of paganism. Against their own wishes they are confessing that in spite of all their conjuring and superstition, they don't have the answers. The wisest men in the city of man cannot help the king.

Dear congregation, it's *not* that the city of man—the unbelieving world—can't help you in many important ways. We benefit from farmers, doctors, scientists, journalists, artists, soldiers, politicians, etc. We depend on the city of man in many *important ways*. However the city of man cannot help you in *ultimate questions* about reality. For that we need a revelation from God outside of ourselves. That's the dominant emphasis of Daniel 2. Over 30 times, the words reveal, or show, or declare, or make known are used in this chapter to describe what God does.<sup>7</sup> We need a God who *reveals* himself.

### **The sentence of death**

So what happens next? In v.12 Nebuchadnezzar in a rage, orders that all the wise men be put to death. The executioner, Arioch, starts to gather them up. And then we are reminded in v.13 all of the sudden like that Daniel and his three companions were among the wise men. They were going to be executed as well. Where have they been all this time? The text doesn't tell us. Clearly, God wanted the crisis to come to this boiling point. So the easiest solution is that God didn't want Daniel there in the beginning so that His rescue could be seen to be all the more glorious.

### **God's modus operandi: placing man face to face with his weakness**

Daniel, then asks the king for time in order to discover the dream and it's interpretation (v.16). And then we read in v.17-18 "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." **This is the most perilous point in our story.**

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<sup>7</sup> *ibid*, pg. 41

This is where all the great stories of Scripture begin. Not from a place of human strength but of human weakness. As Dale Davis has said “God’s tendency is to make our total inability his starting point...When his people are without strength, without resources, without hope, without human gimmicks—then he loves to stretch forth his hand from heaven...Indeed our utter incapacity is often the prop he delights to use for his next act.”<sup>8</sup> This is God’s *modus operandi*.

This is the crisis of Daniel 2: human inability—the bankruptcy of human effort. Death has been pronounced. What is required by the king is humanly impossible. There is no earthly solution. Even the pagans have confessed that Daniel is a man in need of mercy. God is the only one who can rescue Him. So he prays. And He asks his friends to pray. This is the backdrop for beholding the God who sees and shapes the darkness.

## II. The God Worthy of All Worship

### The theological center of Daniel 2 and all existence

Look at v.9 “Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night.” The Babylonian god Bel who was the god of order and destiny could not help the Chaldeans. But the God of Heavens, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ easily revealed this dream to Daniel. The purpose of this chapter is to show the superiority of the one true God above all other so-called gods.

There are two critical things to catch next. **First**, Daniel prayed and received what he prayed for. But he does not immediately rush off to tell Nebuchadnezzar the dream and its interpretation. This should surprise us. There was an extreme urgency in the king’s decree (v.15). Death was on the line, and this king has proved himself unstable and cruel. The most natural thing to do would be to immediately go to the palace. But something was more urgent. Praise. The theological center of Daniel 2 is not the king’s dream. The theological center is Daniel’s praise of God. It’s his worship over the king who

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<sup>8</sup> Dale Ralph Davis, *Focus on the Bible: 1 Samuel, Looking On The Heart*, (Great Britain, : Christian Focus, 2012), pg. 16

has done something no one else on earth could do. That's the first critical thing to catch when God reveals this mystery to Daniel—that Daniel praise God before anything else. Praise is primary not the dream. That's where this story is pushing us—to praise.

The second critical thing to catch is the *content* of Daniel's worship. It is not some generic worship. It is very specific. Daniel is praising God for His absolute sovereignty.

### God sees and shapes the darkness

Let's look at his worship. Listen carefully to all the verbs that God does in these verses. v. 20 "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." Consider the two main things that Daniel is praising God for: God's seeing of all things and God's shaping of all things.

#### 1. God sees everything

First God sees. Meaning, God sees everything that is hidden from man. v.22 "he *knows* what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with him." The darkness here refers to those things that are hidden from us. So primarily in this context—all future events—since Nebuchadnezzar's dream deals with the future. Nothing is hidden from God. He sees it all. Now this is glorious! God's foreknowledge of all events is a necessary part of His glory. Over and over again in the book of Isaiah, God puts forward foreknowledge of future events as a litmus test for godhood. He says in **Isaiah 41:21-23** "Set forth your case, says the Lord; bring your proofs, says the King of Jacob. [22] Let them bring them, and tell us what is to happen...declare to us the things to come. [23] Tell us what

is to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods;” Most evangelicals today will not deny God’s foreknowledge of all events. However if we reduce His sovereignty to *mere* foreknowledge, we make God to be no better than the Greek god Apollo. The Greeks believed Apollo knew future events. They would go to his temple—the shrine of Delphi in Central Greece. It was built over this crack in the earth that leaked out methane gas. Those who wanted to know the future would ask the resident priest, who would go down into the basement and breath in this gas and come back with an answer. They believed this how Apollo communicated the future to his followers.<sup>9</sup> We hear that and think it’s ridiculous. But it’s equally ridiculous to believe that God *only* sees future events but doesn’t shape them.

## 2. God shapes everything

That’s the second thing we see in Daniel’s worship: God not only sees what is in the darkness, he shapes what is in the darkness. There are two categories of things that Daniel says God shapes. 1) God shapes all planetary events. 2) God shapes all persons.

**First, God shapes all planetary events.** v.21 tells us that God “*changes times.*” Time does not pass by as an automatic process.<sup>10</sup> God called time into existence. Before Genesis 1, there was no *before*. The word “before” is a word that refers to a passing of moments. The moment that precedes this moment was *before*. God has no before, no after. He stands outside them. And Daniel here is telling us that the reason things have a before and an after is *solely* because of God. Just as you change the tires on your car, God changes the hour, the month, the year.

v.21 also tells us that God *changes the seasons*. This truth was how the Apostle Paul witnessed to the people in Lystra in Acts 14:17 “Yet [God] did not

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<sup>9</sup> Source: <https://quatr.us/greeks/delphi-oracle-predicting-future.htm> accessed May 26, 2018

<sup>10</sup> “A law of nature is a positive statute as much so as the statute of circumcision or the law of the Sabbath. Physical laws have not a priori necessity. They might have been otherwise than they are had the Creator of them so determined.” W.G.T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology 3rd Edition*, Ed. Alan W. Gomes, (Phillipsburg, NJ.,: P & R Publishing, 2003), pg. 414

leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.” The Psalmist declares in **Psalm 135:7** “He it is who makes the clouds rise at the end of the earth, who makes lightnings for the rain and brings forth the wind from his storehouses.” So whether Americans endured rainstorms or sunshine this Memorial Day weekend is solely cause God is in control of the seasons.

**v.21** also tells us that God “...removes kings and sets up kings;” I like to imagine Daniel here in the darkness of his room. His teenage mind reflecting on this brutal Babylonian king, and he is smiling and confidently saying to Yahweh “God you are the One who put him in power. And You are the One who eventually remove Him from power.” When disaster eventually befell Babylon in Daniel 5, it was because God brought the disaster. **Amos 3:6** “Does disaster come to a city, unless the Lord has done it?” Later in Daniel 6, when King Darius showed Daniel favor, it was because God held Darius’s heart in his hand. **Proverbs 21:1** “The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will.” When King Cyrus decreed the Jews to go back to Jerusalem, it wasn’t because Cyrus converted. It was because this king was God’s servant. **Ezra 1:2** “Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. History is not a sequence of random events. History is His-Story. And the future which is simply history that is yet to come is His-Story as well. There are no such things as accidents in God’s world. He doesn’t simply see future events, He shapes them, He governs them, He calls them into existence.<sup>11</sup> That’s the first thing that God shapes— God shapes all planetary things.

**Second, God shapes all persons.** **v.21c** “He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding;” God determines who gets wisdom and knowledge. This idea is offensive to modern man. Either because we like

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<sup>11</sup> Q. 11. What are God's works of providence?

A. God's works of providence are his most holy, wise and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions.

to think of ourselves as self-made men and self-made women. “I’m wise because I study hard, they’re not wise because they don’t study hard.” Or it’s offensive because we are radically egalitarian, believing that can anyone attain to whatever intellectual heights they desire. No. That’s not how it works.<sup>12</sup> Your IQ, your ability to understand truth, your ability to exercise wisdom is totally in the hands of God. God posed the rhetorical question to Job in **Job 38:36** “Who has put wisdom in the inward parts or given understanding to the mind?”

But Daniel goes further in **v.22** “He *reveals* deep and hidden things;” Meaning, God determines who sees the invisible realm. When Jesus taught in parables to His disciples, they asked him what they meant. He answered in **Mark 4:10-12** “To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables, [12] so that “they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven.” Nobody has the power in themselves to understand and believe the Scriptures, or who God is, or what the gospel means. If someone understands these things, it is because God has made it known to them. You know only what God allows you to know.

### **Sovereignty is the ground of worship in this passage**

This is why Daniel praises God: God *sees all* future things—everything hidden in the darkness; and God *shapes all* planetary events *and all* persons. Here’s the problem, is we allow God his foreknowledge but strip Him of His control then we can’t make any sense of Daniel 2. The very thing that distinguishes God from all other gods in this chapter is His absolute sovereignty over all human affairs. Bare foreknowledge is not sovereignty. In fact Daniel spends the least amount of time on foreknowledge (**v.22b**). The weight of Daniel’s worship is found in the 7 verbs that He praises God for working in the world:

**v.21** God changes, removes and gives

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<sup>12</sup> When God finally showed up in Job’s calamity, one of the first questions he asked him was

v.22 God reveals

v.23 God gives, makes known (x2)

Calvin says here “When Scripture wishes to assert what is peculiar to God, it joins these two things inseparably; first, God foresees all thing, since nothing is hidden from his eyes; and next, he appoints future events, and governs the world by his will, allowing nothing to happen by chance or without his direction...We must remember how God is defrauded of his just praise, when we do not connect these two attributes together.”<sup>13</sup> Calvin nails it. This is not worship. That’s what’s happening here in Daniel’s heart. That’s what’s happening at the center of this chapter. Worship. God’s sovereignty is something to be worshipped over and delighted in. Half-way notions of sovereignty rob God of his glory. As A.W. Pink says it so clearly “Two alternatives confront us, and between them we are obliged to choose: either God governs, or He is governed; either God rules, or He is ruled; either God has His way or men have theirs.”<sup>14</sup>

### **Daniel would not take the credit**

Daniel tackles this dilemma head on. After he finishes praising God, Daniel heads to the palace. Picking up in v.25 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.” [26] The king declared to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, “Are you able to make known to me the dream that I have seen and its interpretation?” [27] 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, [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.” Notice that Arioch takes credit for finding Daniel (which was false—Daniel came to him). But Daniel refuses

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<sup>13</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries Vol. XII*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: BakerBooks 2009), pg. 142

<sup>14</sup> A.W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Baker Books, 1984), pg. 41

to take the smallest amount of credit for anything that has taken place. This was his chance to really make it big in the king's eyes. He could be the hero. But instead Daniel, this 17ish year old young man, publicly exalted God to most powerful man on earth.

Dear congregation, this is the honor of the church. The church serves as prophet to the world. The richness of our theology is not meant to be confined to Sunday mornings. I have heard many people accuse Calvin of locking himself in his theological tower, cutting himself off from the world. But the opposite is true. In addition to the countless letters he wrote to leaders all over Europe, when he wrote his magnum opus—The Institutes of the Christian Religion—he dedicated it to King Francis I, the ruler of France, pleading with him to open his eyes to the true God of Heaven, and to the abuses of Christians in his country.

### **There is a God in Heaven**

That's what Daniel is doing here. He's not using his position for private gain. He's using his position as a means to declare the greatness of God. Look how careful Daniel is this. **v.29** "But as for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because of any wisdom that I have more than all the living." Daniel's point is that it is the God in heaven *alone* who revealed these things (**v.28**). And this claim was just as politically incorrect in his day as it is in ours. Daniel wasn't claiming it was one of the many gods who gave him this revelation. He was claiming that He receive this revelation from the only God that exists. That is the Christian's claim. Our God doesn't share the throne with any other so-called God. The crisis in this chapter is meant to emphasize this one point. God is worthy of all worship, *because* He is the only God to worship. All other gods outside of the one Living God of the Scripture is a false god.

### III. The King Over All Kingdoms

#### **Daniel tells Neb the dream**

Daniel now proceeds to tell King Nebuchadnezzar the dream. To summarize, Daniel told him that dreamed about this great and frightening statute with a head of gold, chest and arms that were silver, it's middle and thighs were bronze, and it's legs were of iron, with it's feet partly of iron and partly of clay. But then something happened to this statute. **v.34-35** "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. [34] 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."

#### **Daniel interprets the dream**

Daniel already told Nebuchadnezzar in **v.28** that God gave him this dream to reveal to him what would happen after his kingdom. In the interpretation, we find out that each of these parts of the statute—the gold, silver, bronze, iron mixed with clay—represents different kingdoms. The bulk of the attention is given to the first and the fourth kingdom. However the only thing that our text explicitly makes plain is that the first kingdom, the head of gold which is Nebuchadnezzar or Babylon itself (**v.37**). Hardly any attention is given to the second and third kingdom. Traditionally these four kingdoms have been identified as Babylon, Medo/Persia, Greece and Rome—the kingdoms leading up to the coming of Christ.<sup>15</sup> But there have been many other interpretations, including trying to identify all the toes of this statue, and it has turned the text on it's head. Although I believe the traditional view of the four kingdoms is

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<sup>15</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries Vol. XII*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: BakerBooks 2009), pg. 164

correct,<sup>16</sup> that's not the point of Daniel 2 otherwise it would be made plain. The main things are always the plain things in Scripture. And the plain things are always the main things. Here are the main things in this interpretation.

**First**, Nebuchadnezzar is a temporary king. You can see this in v.39 "Another kingdom inferior to you shall arise *after you*." Those words would have been massive to the Jewish captives in Babylon. Soon the cruel tyrants of Babylon would be in the landfill of history.<sup>17</sup>

**Second**, the kingdoms which comes after Nebuchadnezzar is also temporary *and* inferior. Human kingdoms are degenerating. They wax from worse to worse. That's what moving from gold to silver to bronze to iron represent.

**Third**, all of these kingdoms ultimately failed because they rebelled against God. These kingdoms didn't fail simply because that's the way history goes. These kingdoms failed and were crushed because they rebelled against God.<sup>18</sup> (**Psalm 2:1-2, 9**)<sup>19</sup>

**Fourth**, this final kingdom is nothing less than the kingdom of Jesus Christ. This kingdom is a stone that becomes a mountain that fills the earth. In **Luke 20:18** Jesus identifies Himself as the stone saying "Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him." Jesus is the stone that crushes all the rebelling kingdoms of this world. Which is

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<sup>16</sup> Calvin does a wonderful job on this in my opinion in his commentary. see John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries Vol. XII*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: BakerBooks 2009), pg. 161ff

<sup>17</sup> Dale Ralph Davis, *The Bible Speaks Today: The Message of Daniel, His Kingdom Cannot Fail*, (Downers Grove, IL.,: IVP Academic, 2013), pg. 46

<sup>18</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries Vol. XII*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: BakerBooks 2009), pg. 178ff

<sup>19</sup> This is what our brothers and sisters in North Korea need to hear. Kim Jon-un is very soon heading for the grave. His small kingdom is temporary. You will outlast him. That's what our brothers and sisters in Somalia need to hear. Al-Shabab is a temporary terrorist group—they will soon be crushed. They will not get the last word.

amazing if you stop to think about it. King Nebuchadnezzar in approximately 602 b.c. had a dream about Jesus Christ 600 years before he was born. The same Jesus Christ that we worship invaded this pagan king's dreams. And this kingdom has four specific qualities I want to draw your attention to.<sup>20</sup>

**Quality #1: Jesus' Kingdom is indestructible.** v.44 says "And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that *shall never be destroyed*."

**Quality #2: Jesus' Kingdom is final.** v.44b "nor shall the kingdom be left to another people." Meaning, if you are in Christ, you will reign with him. This vision refers to Christ *and* His people. Christ and His people *are* the final kingdom. What do you have to fear beloved? You belong to a kingdom in which no enemy, no terrorist group, no famine, no stock market crash, no cancer, can ever defeat.

**Quality #3: Jesus' Kingdom is overwhelming.** v.44c "It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever," Dale Davis tells the story of the Roman Emperor Julian who lived 332-363 a.d. He hated Christ and Christians. When he was fighting the Persians, he became mortally wounded. One of his followers came across a Christian in Antioch and defiantly asked him what the carpenter's son was doing. Jesus, remember, was the son of a carpenter. I presume he asked this because his master Julian was dying, and the implication was that Jesus was doing nothing about it. "The Christian replied 'The Maker of the world, whom you call the carpenter's son, is employed in making a coffin for the emperor.' Within days new came to Antioch of Julian's death. That is where Daniel 2 leaves us. Jesus has a coffin for every empire and emperor; the only true security is in the kingdom of the carpenter's Son."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Dale Ralph Davis, *The Bible Speaks Today: The Message of Daniel, His Kingdom Cannot Fail*, (Downers Grove, IL.,: IVP Academic, 2013), pg. 47-48

<sup>21</sup> *ibid*, pg. 48

# Application

Four implications and then we'll look to the gospel.

## **Implication #1: God's sovereignty is the sweetest strength for the soul**

Jonathan Edwards struggled deeply with God's sovereignty as a child. In his journal he wrote this "From my childhood up, my mind has been full of objections against the doctrine of God's sovereignty, in choosing whom he would...and rejecting whom he pleased...It used to appear like a horrible doctrine to me. **But** I remember the time very well, when I seemed to be convinced, and fully satisfied, as to this sovereignty of God, and his justice in thus [dealing with] men, according to his sovereign pleasure...I have often since that first conviction, had quite another kind of sense of God's sovereignty than I had then. I...had not only a conviction, but a **delightful** conviction. The doctrine has very often appeared **exceedingly pleasant, bright, and sweet**. Absolute sovereignty is what I love to ascribe to God."<sup>22</sup>

The centerpiece of Daniel 2 is Daniel's worship over God's sovereignty. His primary goal was not to make an argument, it was not to enter into a debate, it was not to speculate on matters too lofty of him. God's sovereignty—which is to say God's eternal purpose in which He ordains whatsoever comes to pass according to the counsel of His own will (**Eph. 1:11**)—was the comfort of his heart, the strength of his soul, and the blessing of his life. That Daniel understood that God preserved and governed all His creatures and all their actions allowed this teenager to speak to the most powerful king on planet earth with genuine humility and absolute boldness. Dear congregation that's what the sovereignty of God does to you. It turns lambs like Daniel into lions, and lions like Nebuchadnezzar into lambs. [A.W. Pink's *The Sovereignty of God*]

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<sup>22</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol. 1*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2009), pg. xii-xiii

### **Implication 2: God's sovereignty turns God's people into a blessing for the nations**

After Daniel interprets the dream for Nebuchadnezzar, the king rewards him. **v.48-49** says “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. [49] 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.” And we know that Daniel was a man that displayed compassion even for his enemies. After God revealed his dream, Daniel told the executioner in **v.24** “Do not destroy the wise men of Babylon; bring me in before the king, and I will show the king the interpretation.” Daniel became a blessing not only for his own people but also for the pagan nation. God's sovereignty didn't turn him into a jerk, or an escapist, or an elitist, but a compassionate, just, humble man. This doctrine is not for destroying or devouring one another but for blessing and benefiting others. Even if people disagree with us on what God's sovereignty means, or how God's sovereignty is applied, that gives us no cause to be unjust or unkind or rude or proud with them. King Nebuchadnezzar and the rest of Babylon did not agree with Daniel. This didn't deter him from being a blessing. Keep a close watch on how you swing the sword of God's sovereignty. It's not meant to be a sword of death, but one of blessing.

### **Implication 3: Recognition of God is not the same thing as salvation**

King Nebuchadnezzar was deeply impressed with Daniel's God. He says in **v.47** “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.” And then what does He do in the next chapter? He builds this golden image—an idea sprung from the very dream he received from God—and commanded that all worship it. Believing that God is the one true God as Nebuchadnezzar did is not salvation. Jesus said that “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven,” (**Matthew 7:21**) You can only enter the Kingdom of

Heaven if you've been born again. Jesus said "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." And the new birth is not something you can conjure up. It's like asking the wise men to tell the King what his dream was. They said "There is not a man on earth who can meet the king's demand" (**Daniel 2:10**). They were right. You cannot meet the demand to be born again. "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." (**John 3:8**) Part of the theological plague of our day is that many evangelicals apply God's sovereignty to everything but the new birth. But this chapter should teach us how shortsighted that view is. If Neb couldn't understand his own dream, how in the world could he make himself be born again? The new birth is the greatest change a man can go through in this world. It originates in Heaven, not on earth. It originates with God not with man. Saving faith is not what causes the new birth. The new birth is what causes saving faith. But that means that Nebuchadnezzar wasn't in charge of His own soul. Exactly. That's what Daniel said in **v.22** "God is the one who reveals deep and hidden things." What Nebuchadnezzar needed was mercy from the God who alone could reveal Himself to him.

#### **Implication 4: God wants the world to know about His coming kingdom**

An interesting fact about the book of Daniel is that half of it was written in Hebrew—the language of the Jews and the other half Aramaic—the common language of the world at this time. This chapter through chapter 7 are all written in Aramaic. I agree with Iain Duguid regarding the significance of this "Perhaps the change indicates that these chapters address matters of universal significance rather than those of more specifically Israelite concern."<sup>23</sup> This

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<sup>23</sup> I think the original languages amplify this point. "From this point through the end of chapter 7, the text switches from Hebrew into Aramaic, for reasons that are not entirely clear. Certainly, this underlines the foreignness of Daniel's setting; yet if that is the purpose, why not switch earlier (in 1:10 for example) or write the whole account in Aramaic? Perhaps the change indicates that these chapters address matters of universal significance rather than those of more specifically Israelite concern." Iain M. Duguid, *Reformed Expository Commentary: Daniel*, (Phillipsburg, NJ.: P & R Publishing, 2008), pg. 20

message of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ is for planet earth. This is further seen in who God gave this dream to. He didn't give it to Daniel—one of God's people. He gave it to a pagan King so that he would know it, and so that his entire kingdom would know it. God is both Sovereign King of the universe dispensing mercy on whom He will, and He is the Greatest Evangelist publishing His gospel for all to hear. This chapter was written to encourage God's people to look to their coming King as their one great hope. And it is extended to people who are not yet part of the kingdom. Dear unbelieving friend, Daniel 2 tells us how history is going to end. All the kingdoms who oppose Jesus Christ will be destroyed. If you have not personally trusted Jesus Christ you will be destroyed just like the statute. Because like Nebuchadnezzar you are trying to rule your own life. You are playing God. Turn away from your kingdom of self. Turn to the kingdom of God. Believe the gospel.

### The gospel

Beloved here is the gospel. Here is the story underneath this story. In v. 11 the wisemen of Babylon 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."

- ☞ You need a God who will come to in the flesh. That's what God's only Son did for you. **Galatians 4:4** "when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law,"
- ☞ You need a God who will dwell with you. That's what Jesus Christ did. **John 1:14** "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,"
- ☞ You need mercy like Daniel. Like him you need to be rescued from the coming sentence of death. When Daniel prayed God rescued Him. But God didn't rescue Jesus when He cried out in the garden: "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me;" (**Matthew 26:39**). Why? So that you could be rescued. Jesus wasn't delivered from the King's sentence of death so

that you could be. Jesus became your substitute. His life for yours. "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." (**Romans 10:13**)

- Astonishingly, the way that Jesus—the stone—crushes all the kingdoms of this world is by being crushed Himself. **Isaiah 53:10** “Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief;” Oh exiled church take heart. Your King was crushed for you so that you never have to be crushed. The God who sees and shapes the darkness is the God who swallowed up the darkness of your sin, so that you could be saved.