

DANIEL

Part 2: “The Power of Spiritual Vision”

Daniel 2

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Summary

Join us for part two of our study of the book of Daniel, in which we explore the theme of the fleeting nature of earthly kingdoms and the enduring glory of God’s kingdom. Dive into the prophetic interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream as a revelation of God’s divine plan for history. Titled “The Power of Spiritual Vision,” this sermon is aimed to help listeners see our lives in light of God’s coming kingdom.

Note: the image of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream is titled “The Divine Timeline” by Caleb Jasper Lumingkit. To see this image and more of the artist’s work, please visit the artist’s website at https://caleb_jsper.artstation.com/.

Scripture Reading

“In the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; 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.’ 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’” (Daniel 2:1–11, ESV).

Exposition

As you drive north on Interstate 27, just before you enter the city limits of Amarillo, Texas, you will see the horizon of the West Texas plains interrupted by a strange site [show **Ozymandias on the Plains**]. At the junction of the east side of the highway and Sundown Lanes stands a colossal statue of two legs standing on a pedestal. The structure is quite massive, standing twenty-four feet in height. The weighty base is twenty in width and ten feet in depth.

The earthen tones of the statue's natural color blend in with the colors of the West Texas wilderness. But more often than not, the sculpture wears the painted colors of those who pass by. In fact, the figure has even been known to adorn painted tube socks from time to time [show **Ozymandias on the Plains in Tube Socks**].

So, what's the story behind this bizarre West Texas monument? And why would anyone intentionally put an intentionally broken statue in the middle of a forgotten field?

Well, the sculpture's name is "Ozymandias on the Plains." It was commissioned by the eccentric Amarillo villain Stanley Marsh 3, and it was inspired by a poem by the British Romantic poet Percy Shelley. That poem's name is "Ozymandias," and I believe it is very connected to the passage of Daniel that we will study this morning.

The poem reads:

*I met a traveller from an antique land,
Who said—"Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. . . . Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed;
And on the pedestal, these words appear:
My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;
Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away."*

The poem is about a traveler who comes upon an ancient statue, enormous in size. Two legs without a trunk (or torso) are all that stand. Beneath stone legs, is a half-sunken head that wears a proud and arrogant sneer of someone who has only known success and power. The inscription on the sculpture bear the engraved taunt of a king named Ozymandias.¹ The king's words boast of Ozymandias's power and mighty; he challenges those who would read these words to look on his works and despair!

¹ Ozymandias is the Greek name for the Egyptian Pharaoh Rameses II.

But there is great irony in this image and in these words. This massive statue was designed to be a monument to Ozymandias's power and pride. It was to be a symbol to commemorate his eternal glory and the unending extent of his dominion. However, the stone colossus now lies broken and shattered in a vast and empty desert. The mighty works and kingdom of Ozymandias have been swallowed by the sands of time.

What was originally designed to be an imposing image of human power and eternal glory has now become a symbol of human weakness and the fleetingness of the kingdoms of man.

You see, from the time of Ancient Egypt to the Babylon of Daniel's day to the British Empire of Percy Shelley to our own day of geo-global superpowers, the kingdoms of this world have always thumped their chests and bragged of what they thought was uncontested power and unending glory. But beneath their boasts, the power of earthly kingdoms is far, far more frail and fleeting than they would realize.

But sometimes we forget this. Sometimes, we buy into the hype that the powers of this world would have us believe. It is here that we need to heed the words of poets and prophets that help us see beneath the veil and beyond the horizon into the things of the spirit. And that is exactly what Daniel Chapter 2 is designed to do.

As we dive deeper into this passage, we will learn how to seek "The Power of Spiritual Vision." Daniel chapter 2 is quite a lengthy chapter, so we have a lot to cover. But we will divide our discussion into three sections: 1.) Nebuchadnezzar's Dream, 2.) Daniel's Vision, and 3.) History's Unveiling.

Exposition

1.) Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

The scene of Daniel chapter 2 begins with King Nebuchadnezzar. History remembers this man as Nebuchadnezzar II [show [Image of Nebuchadnezzar II](#)]*—*the greatest and most famous of all kings from the Neo-Babylonian Empire. During his lifetime, Nebuchadnezzar was likely the most prosperous and the most powerful person on the planet.

However, for all of his wealth and might, the king cannot buy or command a good night's rest. He is visited by a recurring dream that fills him with dread and fear, until, as the words of Scripture say, "*...his sleep left him*" (Dan 2:1).

Even more, Nebuchadnezzar seems to know that there is something supernatural and spiritual about his night terrors. So he calls upon anyone that he thinks may be able to help him. He calls upon magicians and enchanters and sorcerers and Chaldeans, who seem to have been skilled in interpreting omens and dreams. Such figures were commonly found in royal courts within the ancient Near East.

But when these mystics stand before their king, Nebuchadnezzar issues an order that causes them to panic. He says, “I need you to interpret my dream. But before you tell me the interpretation of the dream, I need you to tell me what my dream was about. And by the way, if you can’t do this, I’m going to rip your body limb from limb and burn your house down.”

Now, I suppose we can all get a little cranky when we don’t get enough sleep. But Nebuchadnezzar’s sleep deprivation has pushed him to a place where he is just not his best self at the moment.

With that said, there are probably a few reasons that the king would make such an impossible command. It’s possible that Nebuchadnezzar himself does not remember his own dream. Perhaps he has woken up night after night knowing that he has had a dream, knowing that it was supernatural, knowing that was terrifying, but unable to know and remember the details.

Perhaps, he does remember the details, but he cannot deal with professional enchanters and sorcerers who would only twist the dream into empty words of flattery and political pandering. And that’s exactly what a lot of these guys were known for.

In fact, ancient Near East kings would often surround themselves with those who claimed to be prophets. But whereas the prophets of Israel and Judah were commissioned representatives of God, the prophets and soothsayers of other ancient Near East nations were flatterers, propagandists, and charlatans.

The prophets of the nations would tell the king exactly what the king wanted to hear. They would talk about how the king was the wisest and the greatest and could never be defeated in combat. They would talk about how the king was the chosen one of the gods and how his kingdom would never end. Then, the words of such prophets would be published among that king’s kingdom in order to provide a sense of divine sanction and authority to what the king wanted to do.

But that is not what Nebuchadnezzar wants. He doesn’t want flattery—he wants answers. He doesn’t want pretend spirituality—he wants the real thing.

So, too, there are many voices in our own age who would claim to be spiritual and in tune with the divine. There are many self-proclaimed prophets and even pastors who have found their way to the halls of power and platforms of prominence by telling people exactly what they want to hear.

But the story of Daniel shows us that what is fake will be exposed so that what is true will be revealed. There will always be those who have itching ears, those who will seek out voices to confirm their own bias of what they want and desire. However, I believe there are many people in our own culture who, like Nebuchadnezzar, are fed up with religious pretenders. There are many who yearn for a spirituality that is authentic and true.

In such a moment, who will we choose to be? Will we be satisfied with the superficial or will we long to encounter the supernatural? Will we be a people who embody religious pretense or a people who know the true spiritual power that comes from truly knowing and communing with the living God?

2.) Daniel's Vision

The enchanters and sorcerers admit they cannot do what the king has asked of them. The knowledge that the king desires is only known by the gods “...*whose dwelling is not with [human] flesh*” (Dan 2:11).

So, as a result of their failure, the king orders that all the wise men of Babylon be rounded up and executed. This is where we again meet Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. They are Jewish exiles who have been taken from their homeland and trained to serve the royal court of Babylon. Because of the seemingly supernatural skill and knowledge they possess, they are a part of Babylon's wise men—which means they too will be executed.

But as they are being arrested, Daniel asks to understand the reason behind Nebuchadnezzar's order. When he hears the story, Daniel asks for an audience with the king in order to make known both the dream and the interpretation of the dream.

Now, this move shows a lot of confidence. At the point when he asks the king for an audience, he has zero idea what the king's dream is and what it means. But Daniel is confident in his own wisdom and knowledge—his confidence rests in his God, who is the fountain of all wisdom and knowledge. So, Daniel and his friends fast, and they pray. And God, in his mercy and grace, reveals the king's dream to Daniel in a vision.

In response to God's faithfulness, Daniel prays a prayer of thanksgiving and praise: “*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’*” (Dan 2:20–23).

There's quite a lot we can learn from Daniel's response to what looks like an impossible situation. Daniel and his friends are on the verge of destruction. They are about to be punished unjustly just because a pagan king is tired and cranky. But Daniel does not grow resentful to the king or his situation. He does not get mad at God or withdraw from God. Instead, draws near to God. He acknowledges his own absolute weakness and limitation and puts all of his hope in his God, who is mighty and limitless in power.

Daniel knows that he literally cannot live if God does not speak to him. So like a deer that pants before streams of water (cf. Ps 42:1), Daniel's soul longs for God's nearness, God's provision, and God's revelation. And God responds to him.

Our God is a God who is found by those who seek him earnestly. You may say, “Well I’ve never heard God’s voice. I’ve never had a spiritual vision or a spiritual interpretation of a dream.”

But today, I want to remind you that you do have a God who hears the prayers of his people. You have a God who still speaks through his Word and his Spirit. You have a God who promised to draw near to those who humbly draw near to him (cf. James 4:8).

The question is, will you place your hope in him? Will you teach your heart to yearn for what only God can give? Will you seek him so that he may be found? And will you worship and praise him in gratitude when he moves in your life?

And so Daniel enters the throne room of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon. The anxious king asks him if it is true that he—a Jewish exile—can do what all the enchanters and astrologers and magicians of Babylon have failed to do. And with fearless faith, Daniel tells the king that he possesses no special wisdom or power, but “...*there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries...*” (Dan 2:28).

From there, Daniel shares the mystery of Nebuchadnezzar's dream that was revealed to him in a vision of the night. Daniel declares, “*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*” (Dan 2:31–35).

This is Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and the cause of his fear and concern. But what does it all mean? That question leads us to our third and final point.

3.) History’s Unveiling

The Book of Daniel belongs to a specific genre (or type of literature) known as apocalyptic literature. Now, when we hear the word “apocalypse,” we tend to think about end-of-times prophecies. And, indeed, apocalyptic literature often deals with the end of time. However, apocalyptic literature is about so much more.

The word “apocalypse” literally means to unveil and reveal. Through symbols and cosmic imagery, apocalyptic literature is designed to draw back the curtain that lies over our material world so that with uncovered eyes we might see the spiritual truths that lie at the true heart of reality. In this way, apocalypse helps us understand our past, our present, and our future from a divine and eternal perspective.

In giving the interpretation that he will give, Daniel shows that Nebuchadnezzar's dream is more than just a dream. It is an apocalypse that unveils the hidden knowledge of God's plan for history.

The dream is of a colossal and terrifying image of exceeding brightness [show [The Divine Timeline by Caleb Jasper Lumingkit](#)]. The head of the image is made of pure gold, the arms and torso are silver, the mid-section and loins are bronze, the legs are iron, and the feet are a mixture of iron and clay. The statue appears to be a literal graven image and idol. In fact, the word for "image" (צִלְמֹן) that is used here is used elsewhere in Scripture in connection to graven images and idols of false gods (cf. Num 33:52; Amos 5:26; Ezek 7:20).²

But Daniel informs Nebuchadnezzar that this vision is no mere statue. The golden head is Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon. The other portions of the statue made of various materials represent various nations that will rise and fall long after Nebuchadnezzar is dead and gone.

Now, lots of ink has been spilt and printed regarding the exact identity of these kingdoms. Perhaps they refer to the Medo-Persian Empire, the Greek Empire, and the Empire of Rome. Perhaps the vision separates the Median Empire from the Persians, while and the Iron Empire represents the conquest of Alexander the Great, and the empire of clay and iron represents how Alexander's empire was divided among his generals. Perhaps the vision speaks to some other kingdom of history or perhaps a kingdom that has not yet been.

Which one is the correct interpretation, you ask? The answer is "yes."

Nebuchadnezzar's dream is of the kings and kingdoms of the world throughout all history and time. The image represents how the kings and kingdoms of this world would fashion themselves into idols that demand our allegiance, our affection, and our worship. And the sad tale of history has shown that this dream is all too true. Nations rise, and nations fall. But the kings and kingdoms of men all have an astonishing tendency to exalt themselves to a place where only God belongs.

Daniel's interpretation helps us see not only the future but also our present moment. We live in a tense and polarized time, and it is easy to take our eyes off our God and fix our hearts on things like political contests for power. But while politics can be a good thing, we must have the eyes to see that our politics cannot become an ultimate thing. Because politics can't save us. Only Jesus saves us.

An idol can never give you the peace, rest, and security that your soul craves. The idols of various nations oppress and enslave and fail us, but there is a kingdom that is coming that is different.

² Douglas Mangum, "Idolatry," ed. Douglas Mangum et al., *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

Daniel's vision shows us that as mighty and glorious the kingdoms of this world think they are, they are ultimately weak in the feet. Nebuchadnezzar's image is a representation of human history. But the vision ends with a stone unhewn by human hands that comes from outside of time—outside of history itself—that strikes the statue until it shatters into pieces that are swept away, like dust into the wind.

This uncut rock, according to Daniel, represents the coming the kingdom of God in heaven. It is a kingdom unlike any kingdom of this world. It is a kingdom that shall break in pieces all kingdoms of men, and its rule will never end (see Dan 2:44). It is a rock that will become a mountain that will fill the earth with God's glory.

But how will this kingdom come? What is the true meaning of the rock?

That mystery will not be revealed in the Book of Daniel. It will be reveal until the words of the New Testament—for the rock is Jesus Christ.

The magicians and enchanters lamented that they were unable to give King Nebuchadnezzar the knowledge that would bring understanding and peace to his soul, for no one could ever reveal such knowledge except for the gods whose dwelling is not with human flesh.

But it the God of Daniel is neither silent nor distant. He is a God who spoke to his servants the prophets and he is the God who has spoken through his Son Jesus Christ, who is the radiance of God's eternal glory and the exact imprint of his divine nature (Heb 1:1–2).

Jesus Christ is the word of God who has become human flesh. He is the God who has dwelt among us that we might see his glory. He is the Son of God who has existed from eternity past yet entered into time. He is the king who came to bring a kingdom of heaven that is not of this world. And when he threatened the powers that be, he was crucified on a cross for claiming to be king. For the cross was the ultimate symbol of the power of man—the power of empire.

But when Jesus Christ rose from the grave three days later, he inaugurated a new kingdom, a better kingdom, and a kingdom where life prevails over sin and death. By his resurrection, *"He [has] disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him"* (Col 2:15). One day, Christ will return to make all things new. And on that day, even kings will bow their knees before his glory (cf. Phil 2:10–11) .

Conclusion

When the king hears Daniel's words, he is overwhelmed. He even bows before Daniel and exclaims, *"...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"* (Daniel 2:47).

Daniel is honored and promoted, and his three friends are given increased favor and authority as well. But it would be a mistake to make Daniel's promotion the main point of this passage. The point of Daniel Chapter 2 is the dream and its meaning. It is a universal message of truth for those who are God's people and those who are not God's people.

For Nebuchadnezzar and all the kings of this world who would dare exalt themselves in pride, this apocalyptic dream is a word of warning. God's kingdom is coming and all kingdoms of this world will ultimately crumble and fall.

For God's people, even when they may be weak and in exile, this dream is a reminder the God of Israel is sovereign over all history—and he is bending history toward the ultimate good of his people and the glory of his name. And if the people of God can behold and receive this truth with unveiled eyes, they can live with a hope that will not disappoint even in a time of exile.

So, Redeemer Christian Church, in the midst of our anxious and weary world, may we learn to quiet our hearts, put away the frenetic distractions of life, and hear the words God would have us speak in our time and place. May we learn to discern and interpret the dreams and fears of our neighbors and our world in light of who God has revealed himself to be. When the power of the kings and kingdoms of men are all that our natural eyes can see, may we be a people who know and practice the power of spiritual vision—so that we may behold the hope our eternal king and the enduring promise of his kingdom that is coming. For in Christ, we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken (cf. Heb 12:28).

AMEN.

Discussion Starters for Gospel Community

- 1.) Take some time to read the entirety of Daniel Chapter 2 out loud. It is a rather long passage, so you may want to divide the reading up between several members of your group. When you are finished, take some time to summarize the events of this story in your own words.
- 2.) Early in this passage, through no fault of his own, Daniel and his friends find that their lives are in danger. Daniel's responds to this predicament by fasting and praying to God for provision and direction along with his friends. How should Daniel's response encourage us when we find ourselves in seemingly impossible situations?
- 3.) God reveals Nebuchadnezzar's dream to Daniel in a vision. How does the interpretation of this dream give us a new perspective on human history?
- 4.) According to Daniel's interpretation, what is the end of human history, and how should knowing this end give us hope?
- 5.) How do you think we, as individuals and as a community, can cultivate spiritual vision and discernment in our daily lives to see beyond the surface of earthly circumstances and into God's eternal perspective?