

Daniel 2:1-18

Today we start Daniel 2. This is the longest chapter in the book and can be divided as follows:

- a. The Challenge and Failure of the Wise Men, vs 1-13.
- b. Daniel's Plea, vs 14-16.
- c. Daniel's Prayer, vs 17-18.
- d. Daniel's Praise, vs 19-23.
- e. Daniel's Testimony, vs 24-30.
- f. The Dream, vs 31-35.
- g. The Interpretation, vs 36-45.
- h. Daniel's Rewards, vs 46-49.

The Challenge and Failure of the Wise Men, vs 1-13.

In the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his mind was troubled and he could not sleep. ² So the king summoned the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers^[a] to tell him what he had dreamed. When they came in and stood before the king, ³ he said to them, "I have had a dream that troubles me and I want to know what it means."^[b] ⁴ Then the astrologers answered the king, ^[c] "May the king live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will interpret it." ⁵ The king replied to the astrologers, "This is what I have firmly decided: If you do not tell me what my dream was and interpret it, I will have you cut into pieces and your houses turned into piles of rubble. ⁶ But if you tell me the dream and explain it, you will receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor. So tell me the dream and interpret it for me." ⁷ Once more they replied, "Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will interpret it." ⁸ Then the king answered, "I am certain that you are trying to gain time, because you realize that this is what I have firmly decided: ⁹ If you do not tell me the dream, there is only one penalty for you. You have conspired to tell me misleading and wicked things, hoping the situation will change. So then, tell me the dream, and I will know that you can interpret it for me." ¹⁰ The astrologers answered the king, "There is no one on earth who can do what the king asks! No king, however great and mighty, has ever asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or astrologer. ¹¹ What the king asks is too difficult. No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among humans." ¹² This made the king so angry and furious that he ordered the execution of all the wise men of Babylon. ¹³ So the decree was issued to put the wise men to death, and men were sent to look for Daniel and his friends to put them to death.

The Wise men's Challenge, vs 1-3.

Vs 1, In the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his mind was troubled and he could not sleep.

These few verses present the challenge Neb gave to his wise men. In verse 1 we see Neb's concern. *In the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; Neb defeated the*

Assyrians and Egyptians at the battle of Carchemish in May/June 605 BC. He then laid siege to Jerusalem in July/ August 605 BC. His father, Nabopolassar died in Babylon at this time. Neb returned to Babylon in Sept 605 BC with the first wave of deportees and was crowned the new King. Daniel would have been selected for service soon after he arrived so most likely Sept to Oct 605 BC. The Babylonians did not count the reign of a king until the first full year after ascension. So, the second year of Neb's reign would be the third year of Daniels training. Neb began to have dreams either towards the end of Daniel's training or just after it had been completed. The text says *his mind was troubled and could not sleep*. Mind means consciousness or thinking. The Hebrew word for troubled is paam, which means to thrust, impel, or beat. In other words, his dreams were beating him up. Note he had more than one dream, and the thoughts they provoked were preventing him from sleep.

Vs 2, So the king summoned the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers^[a] to tell him what he had dreamed. When they came in and stood before the king,

Neb was so disturbed by these dreams, so he summoned all his wise men to tell him what he had dreamed and more importantly what they meant. Note the division of the wise men. Who were these people? We see four categories:

- a. Magicians: from chapter one we learned the word magician was an astrologer and engraver. These people were those who tried to read the times (through the stars) and were responsible for the sacred writings.
- b. Enchanters. This was the conjurer or necromancer who tried to communicate with the dead to discern future events. They also practiced astrology.
- c. Sorcerers. The Hebrew word is kasap (kaw-sahf) and means to practice witchcraft. These people would cast spells, enchantments, etc.
- d. Astrologers. Some translations have "Chaldeans." The reason is the Hebrew word is kasdima, which has as its root Chaldea. Chaldea was a small country in the lower Tigris-Euphrates valley which was assimilated into the Babylonian Empire. The idea here is the Chaldeans were a special priesthood consisting of people from this country who practiced astrology.

Neb summoned all four categories of these wise men to tell him what he had dreamed. He had them stand before him so he could address them all.

Vs 3, he said to them, "I have had a dream that troubles me and I want to know what it means.

In verse 1, Neb states he has had *dreams*, but now there is *a dream* that has him troubled. He explains to the gathered wise men he *wants to know what it means*.

The Wise men's Failure, vs 4-13.

Vs 4, *Then the astrologers answered the king,^[c] “May the king live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will interpret it.*

In this verse Daniel switches from Hebrew to Aramaic. It will continue in Aramaic until the end of chapter 7. If we divide the book linguistically, this next section can be read as being primarily addressed to a Gentile audience as most of the material describes and outlines the times of the Gentiles.

Vs 4 starts with the astrologers (or Chaldeans) who answer the King. As these men were Babylonian “nationals” they were most likely viewed as the pre-eminent category of wise men, hence the others take deference to them. The wise men make the request of the king to tell them his dream and they will interpret it.

Vs 5, *The king replied to the astrologers, “This is what I have firmly decided: If you do not tell me what my dream was and interpret it, I will have you cut into pieces and your houses turned into piles of rubble.*

Reading this verse, I sense Neb is rather skeptical of these men’s skill. Instead of telling the wise men his dream and waiting for their interpretation, Neb concludes a true wise man would be one who could tell him his dream. In other words, he will not trust the interpretation unless someone can tell him the dream. He is *firmly decided*. No amount of negotiation will sway him from his decision. He seems impetuous and harsh as he will have them all *cut into pieces* and *turn their houses into piles of rubble*, but perhaps he had been deceived or given wrong interpretations in the past.

Vs 6, *But if you tell me the dream and explain it, you will receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor. So tell me the dream and interpret it for me.*

Neb promises gifts, rewards, and great honor, to the one who can both tell him the dream and explain it.

Vs 7, *Once more they replied, “Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will interpret it.*

The wise men try again to get the King to tell them his dream. It is if they never heard his first reply.

Vs 8, *Then the king answered, “I am certain that you are trying to gain time, because you realize that this is what I have firmly decided.*

Neb sees the ploy of the wise men. They are *trying to gain time*. But he tells them he is firmly decided. He will not change his intention.

Vs 9, ⁹ If you do not tell me the dream, there is only one penalty for you. You have conspired to tell me misleading and wicked things, hoping the situation will change. So then, tell me the dream, and I will know that you can interpret it for me.

Neb knows that if he tells them his dream the wise men can interpret it in any way that is advantageous to them. He therefore accuses them of conspiring against him. He will know they are telling him the truth if they can tell the dream and the interpretation.

Vs 10, The astrologers answered the king, "There is no one on earth who can do what the king asks! No king, however great and mighty, has ever asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or astrologer.

The wise men now admit that no one can do what the king asks. No one can read minds or know dreams, and no king has ever demanded this of his wise men before.

Vs 11, What the king asks is too difficult. No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among humans.

The wise men now admit the question is impossible to answer. Only the gods can know such things and they do not live among men to tell men what such things are and mean. And here is an irony; these four categories of wise men, who made their living discerning the unknown through astrology, necromancy, sorcery, and such, admit that discerning the meaning of spiritual things such as dreams, visions, and the like is impossible. It is only possible for the gods!! These men had no answer for Neb for only God could bring an answer to the king. In his commentary on Daniel, David Guzik quotes mark Strauss, "They were like some modern ministers of our own day who spend their time studying philosophy, psychiatry, psychology, social science, political science, and then continue under the pretense of being God's messengers to men."

This revelation to Neb makes him furious for he sees them all as frauds hence verse 12 and 13.

Vs 12-13, This made the king so angry and furious that he ordered the execution of all the wise men of Babylon. ¹³ So the decree was issued to put the wise men to death, and men were sent to look for Daniel and his friends to put them to death.

Neb becomes angry and furious. The Aramaic words here convey rage, wrath, intense anger. So then, Neb orders the execution of all the wise men. In ancient times the order of a King had to be written down, so Neb's decree is written, and men were sent to seek out the wise men for execution. We now come to the next section, Daniel's plea in verses 14-16.

Daniel's Plea, vs 14-16.

When Arioch, the commander of the king's guard, had gone out to put to death the wise men of Babylon, Daniel spoke to him with wisdom and tact. ¹⁵ He asked the king's officer, "Why did the king issue such a harsh decree?" Arioch then explained the matter to Daniel. ¹⁶ At this, Daniel went in to the king and asked for time, so that he might interpret the dream for him.

Vs 14, When Arioch, the commander of the king's guard, had gone out to put to death the wise men of Babylon, Daniel spoke to him with wisdom and tact.

In verse 14 we are introduced to Arioch, Neb's commander of the guard and the one in charge of executing all the wise men. Some scholars equate Arioch with Nebuzaradan who is mentioned in 2 K 25:20 as Neb's captain of the guard. Note Daniel had access to this man. Why would the chief of Neb's guard take notice of Daniel? God had obviously favored Daniel and had allowed his influence to spread. We are not told the full story, but Arioch listened to Daniel who approached him with wisdom and tact. The word *wisdom* is also translated as prudence, while *tact* is with taste, or discretion. One can never go wrong with this type of approach!

Vs 15, He asked the king's officer, "Why did the king issue such a harsh decree?" Arioch then explained the matter to Daniel.

It is apparent Daniel does not fully yet understand what happened in the interchange between the wise men and Neb. The question arises why wasn't Daniel at the meeting? Again, this event happened at the end of Daniel's training or at the very beginning of his government service, so he may not have been included due to his student or new employee status. It is also evident that Arioch is very disturbed at the execution order as he stops to explain to Daniel (whom he is now to kill) what is going on.

Vs 16, at this, Daniel went in to the king and asked for time, so that he might interpret the dream for him.

Here we have an amazing verse. Daniel *went in to the king and asked for time*. Did Arioch arrange this? Was Daniel that intimate with Neb that he could just knock on the door and enter Neb's presence for a wee chat? We are not told. But again, we see God's hand in preparing people and the events that are to follow. Note that Daniel had some sense that God would reveal to him the meaning of the dream, so he asks for time. He is waiting on the Lord.

Daniel's Prayer, vs 17-18.

Then Daniel returned to his house and explained the matter to his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. ¹⁸ He urged them to plead for mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that he and his friends might not be executed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.

Vs 17, Then Daniel returned to his house and explained the matter to his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah.

Daniel now returns home and explains the situation to his friends. And it is also obvious that Arioch granted him the time he asked for! Arioch did not immediately conduct this command.

Vs 18, He urged them to plead for mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that he and his friends might not be executed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.

In vs 18, Daniels urged them to plead for mercy to God. He asked them to pray with him. Here is a crisis and the first thing these young men do is to pray. The young men referred to God as the “God of heaven.” This phrase is used commonly in the exilic and post exilic period but only twice before the exile (in Gen 24:3 and 7). There are two possible explanations for why the young men used this phrase. In Ex 40:34-38, the Lord’s Presence filled the tabernacle and dwelt with the people. This was known as the Shechinah Glory and was the visible manifestation of God among the people. In Ez 10-11 the Glory leaves the temple and departs from Israel. Some scholars have claimed this occurred prior to the Babylonian captivity so no longer is the visible manifestation of God among Israel. Knowing this, the young men prayed to the *God in heaven* since He was no longer on the earth. The other reason the young men used this name could be related to their Babylonian training. They had extensive education in Babylonian cosmology. The Babylonians worshipped the stars. Knowing this, the young men prayed to the God who is above the stars and hence greater than any Babylonian god as represented by them. In either case, faced with death, they place themselves in God’s hand. We will see a similar test to Daniel’s friends in chapter 3.

Note they specifically ask regarding the mystery of the dream, so they might not be executed. They pray regarding the mystery, and what a mystery it is. First the dream must be discovered (and Neb is unwilling to share it) and then the dream must be interpreted. Note this is a test that only has a divine solution. Some tests we can do things—but not this one. All the four men can do is to wait upon the Lord!