

Reformation Fellowship Notes • May 10, 2020

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Handout #4

Daniel 2

I. Introduction

- A. Daniel found a way of discretely changing his diet so that he did not have to perform an action that would indicate that he recognized the authority of the Babylonian gods.
 - 1. Daniel ran a great risk.
 - 2. God had paved the way for this exception to be made.
 - 3. Daniel was not forced to fail to act in solidarity with God and his people.
- B. That served as an introduction to the whole book.
 - 1. What does it mean to live in a culture that does not value God and what God values?
 - 2. Clash of empire vs. God

II. Daniel 2:1-3

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 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."

- A. Nebuchadnezzar became king at about the same time Daniel was taken to Babylon.
 - 1. The events of chapter 2 occur in the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign.
 - a) Daniel is about 15 years old.
 - b) The date is about 604 BC.
 - c) Daniel is about 1 year into his training program.
 - d) Notice that the comments at the end of chapter 1 probably refer to the time when the training program was over.
 - (1) They finished their program about 2 years after the events of chapter 2.
- B. Nebuchadnezzar had dreams.
 - 1. Babylonians put great value in omens and dreams.
 - a) A class of people devoted their lives to interpreting them.
- C. Nebuchadnezzar was worried; he had trouble sleeping.
 - 1. Nebuchadnezzar had reason to be worried.
 - a) New kings had to establish their authority.
 - b) There had been some recent rebellions out west.
 - 2. He appears to have had more than one dream.
 - a) Was a god trying to tell him something important?
 - 3. It was considered a bad sign to have a dream that you did not remember.

- a) Did he forget the dream, or is he not telling it as a test?
- 4. If there was any divine guidance being provided, Nebuchadnezzar needed to have it.
- D. Nebuchadnezzar calls in an army of experts.
 - 1. They were all specialists in the divine arts.
 - 2. Rather than use the term “wise men” or some other term, the author gives a list.
 - a) This technic is used elsewhere in Daniel (cf. chapter 3).
 - b) Nebuchadnezzar pulled out all the stops.
 - c) This army of wise men is pitted against Daniel alone.

III. Daniel 2:4-13

Then the astrologers answered the king in Aramaic, “O 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 just 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 not a man 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 men.”*

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.*

- A. At this point the text switches from Hebrew to Aramaic.
 - 1. The author found a natural place at which to switch into Aramaic.
 - 2. Aramaic was the lingua franca of the ancient world.
 - a) Aramaic was the language of the whole world.
 - 3. The portion of Daniel written in Aramaic is primarily addressed to gentiles.
 - a) The Aramaic section focuses on the nature of Empire and the conflict between Empire and the things of God.
 - b) It switches back to Hebrew when the focus is on the fate of Israel.
- B. “Oh king, live forever!”
 - 1. The vision says that he will not live forever.
- C. They ask Nebuchadnezzar to tell them the dream.
 - 1. A reasonable request

2. Probably standard procedure
- D. He wants them to tell him the dream.
1. An approach that Nebuchadnezzar has “firmly decided”
 - a) He won’t budge.
 2. They must both tell him what he dreamed and what it means.
 3. If they don’t do this, he will punish them; if they do, they will be rewarded.
 - a) Reward: gifts and honor
 - b) Punishment: all chopped up and their houses destroyed
 - (1) This is so over the top it is almost comic.
 - c) It appears that Nebuchadnezzar wants to know for certain that the mystery of the dream is correctly conveyed to him.
 - (1) Any interpreter who can tell him his dream has access to god.
 - (2) This becomes a test of their legitimacy.
 - d) It is possible that Nebuchadnezzar is suspicious of his “wise men.”
 - (1) Part of the insecurity he is feeling
- E. The magicians repeat their request for Nebuchadnezzar to tell them the dream.
1. They are trained to interpret dreams, not tell dreams.
 2. They are incredulous because he is asking the impossible.
- F. Nebuchadnezzar accuses them of stalling.
1. He is thinking they either have special access to the thoughts of the gods or they don’t.
 - a) If they have this special access, they should be able to tell the dream.
 - (1) If they can tell him the dream, they do know something.
 2. Why does he accuse them of lying and corrupt words?
 - a) He seems to suspect ill-intent.
 - b) Does he fear that they might be using their position to undermine his power?
 3. Nebuchadnezzar appears to be both arbitrary and unreasonable, even paranoid.
 - a) We will talk about this more later.
- G. Chaldeans respond.
1. No one on earth could do this.
 2. This is an unprecedented request.
 3. Only the gods, who don’t live among men, could do this.
- H. The king became even more angry. He issued a decree to kill all the wise men.
1. This included Daniel and his friends.

IV. Daniel 2:14-16

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.

- A. Daniel spoke to the official who was to carry out this decree.
 - 1. Daniel addressed him with discretion and discernment.
 - a) Not outrage or fear
 - 2. Daniel asks why there is such a big rush.
 - 3. Daniel was brought up to speed.
 - a) Arioch appears to be somewhat sympathetic.
 - (1) He takes the time to explain the situation to Daniel.
 - 4. Daniel asked the king for more time.
 - a) Daniel seems to have some kind of confidence that God will reveal this to him.
 - b) After refusing to give the astrologers extra time, he gives Daniel extra time.
 - (1) Daniel is young and a Jew; this is remarkable.
 - (a) Daniel would not have been embroiled in Babylonian politics.

V. Daniel 2:17-18

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.

- A. Daniel went and told his friends—
 - 1. So that they would pray;
 - a) Maybe God will grant mercy.
 - 2. So that they would not be put to death along with the other wise men.

VI. Daniel 2:19-24

During the night the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision. Then Daniel praised the God of heaven ²⁰ and said:

*“Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever;
 wisdom and power are his.
 He changes times and seasons;
 he sets up kings and deposes them.
 He gives wisdom to the wise
 and knowledge to the discerning.
 He reveals deep and hidden things;
 he knows what lies in darkness,
 and light dwells with him.
 I thank and praise you, O God of my fathers:
 You have given me wisdom and power,
 you have made known to me what we asked of you,
 you have made known to us the dream of the king.”*

Then Daniel went to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to execute the wise men of Babylon, and said to him, “Do not execute the wise men of Babylon. Take me to the king, and I will interpret his dream for him.”

- A. God responds.
 1. The mystery was revealed in a night vision.
 2. Daniel was ecstatic; he blessed God.
 3. Daniel prayed to God.
 - a) May God be blessed forever.
 - (1) Wisdom and power are His.
 - b) God controls the march of history.
 - (1) He controls who rules and how long they rule.
 - (2) He allots wisdom.
 - c) He reveals his purposes and themes in history.
 - (1) He understands the darkness.
 - (2) The light is where he lives.
 - d) Thanks and praise to God—
 - (1) Because God gave Daniel some of his wisdom and power.
 - (2) God revealed to *them* the King’s dream.
 - (a) Daniel uses the plural.
 - (3) He can now answer the king’s questions.
- B. Daniel informs Arioch.
 1. Don’t kill the wise men of Babylon.
 - a) He asks for mercy on the other wise men.
 - (1) He didn’t have to do this.
 - (a) This is a great good-will gesture.
 - (b) But the wise men did not respond in kind (as we see this in next chapter).
 2. Daniel asks to see the king.

VII. Daniel 2:25-30

Arioch took Daniel to the king at once and said, “I have found a man among the exiles from Judah who can tell the king what his dream means.”

²⁶ *The king asked Daniel (also called Belteshazzar), “Are you able to tell me what I saw in my dream and interpret it?”*

²⁷ *Daniel replied, “No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about, ²⁸ but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come. Your dream and the visions that passed through your mind as you lay on your bed are these:*

²⁹ *“As you were lying there, O king, your mind turned to things to come, and the revealer of mysteries showed you what is going to happen. ³⁰ As for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because I have greater wisdom than other living men, but so that you, O king, may know the interpretation and that you may understand what went through your mind.*

- A. Arioch introduces Daniel to the king.
 - 1. Exile from Judah
 - 2. Can interpret the dream
 - 3. Arioch is running some risk but seems to have faith in Daniel.
 - a) Daniel has to tell king what he dreamed.
- B. King asks, “Can you tell me what I dreamed and what it means?”
- C. Daniel responds.
 - 1. None of your wise men could do this.
 - 2. But there is a God who knows and can reveal the mysteries.
 - 3. Your dream was about the latter days.
 - a) You were thinking about what would happen in the future.
 - (1) He may have been worrying about Babylon’s future and his future.
 - b) God revealed this to the king to understand what he was thinking about.
 - (1) Not to make Daniel smarter

VIII. Daniel 2:31-35

“You looked, O king, and there before you stood a large statue—an enormous, dazzling statue, awesome in appearance. ³² The head of the statue was made of pure gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, ³³ its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay. ³⁴ While you were watching, a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them. ³⁵ Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were broken to pieces at the same time and became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth.

- A. One large statue
 - 1. Full of splendor
 - 2. Five bands
 - a) Head—gold
 - b) Breast—silver
 - c) Belly and thighs—bronze
 - d) Legs—iron
 - e) Feet—iron and clay
- B. Uncut stone hits statue
 - 1. Hit the statue in the feet
 - 2. The rest of the statue came crashing down.
 - 3. Reduced to dust
 - 4. Blows away

C. Stone became a mountain and filled the whole earth.

IX. Daniel 2:36-43

“This was the dream, and now we will interpret it to the king. ³⁷ You, O king, are the king of kings. The God of heaven has given you dominion and power and might and glory; ³⁸ in your hands he has placed mankind and the beasts of the field and the birds of the air. Wherever they live, he has made you ruler over them all. You are that head of gold.

³⁹ “After you, another kingdom will rise, inferior to yours. Next, a third kingdom, one of bronze, will rule over the whole earth. ⁴⁰ Finally, there will be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron—for iron breaks and smashes everything—and as iron breaks things to pieces, so it will crush and break all the others. ⁴¹ Just as you saw that the feet and toes were partly of baked clay and partly of iron, so this will be a divided kingdom; yet it will have some of the strength of iron in it, even as you saw iron mixed with clay. ⁴² As the toes were partly iron and partly clay, so this kingdom will be partly strong and partly brittle. ⁴³ And just as you saw the iron mixed with baked clay, so the people will be a mixture and will not remain united, any more than iron mixes with clay.

A. Interpretation of the dream

1. Nebuchadnezzar is the king of kings.
 - a) God has given him power.
 - (1) Whole world
 - (2) Man and beast
 - b) The head of gold represents him.
2. The silver represents the next kingdom.
 - a) Inferior to the first
3. Then the bronze
4. The iron
 - a) Strong
 - (1) Crushes and breaks in pieces
 - b) Incohesive kingdom
 - (1) Iron mixed with clay
 - (a) Some strong and some brittle
 - (b) Not cohesive
 - (2) People will be mixed together.
 - (3) But it will lack in social cohesion.
 - (a) This will be its Achilles heel.

X. Daniel 2:44-45

“In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. ⁴⁵ This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands—a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces.

“The great God has shown the king what will take place in the future. The dream is true and the interpretation is trustworthy.”

- A. At the end, God will set up an eternal kingdom.
 - 1. It will stop the evolution.
 - 2. This kingdom will not be the work of human hands.
 - 3. Empire will come to an end.
 - a) The whole effort will all be destroyed.
- B. The sovereign God has revealed all of this.
 - 1. It is true and trustworthy.

XI. Daniel 2:46-49

Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and paid him honor and ordered that an offering and incense be presented to him.⁴⁷ The king said to Daniel, “Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery.”

⁴⁸ *Then the king placed Daniel in a high position and lavished many gifts on him. He made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men.*

⁴⁹ *Moreover, at Daniel’s request the king appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego administrators over the province of Babylon, while Daniel himself remained at the royal court.*

- A. Nebuchadnezzar bowed down to Daniel.
 - 1. Ordered for offerings and incense to be given to Daniel—
 - a) As representative of YHWH.
 - 2. He recognized that YHWH was the true God.
 - a) God of gods
 - b) Lord of kings
 - c) Revealer of mysteries
 - 3. He gave Daniel a promotion—
 - a) In charge of the province of Babylon;
 - b) Over the wise men of Babylon.
- B. Daniel requested that his friends get placed in positions in the administration of the province of Babylon.
 - 1. The timing of this is not clear.
 - a) Did they get these positions before they finished their training?
- C. Nebuchadnezzar shows no enduring interest in this God.
 - 1. His response is, “Cool”, and goes no deeper.

- a) He shows no serious interest in this God (YHWH).
- b) Next chapter shows that he did think about some of the implications of the nature of Empire.

XII. Interpreting the interpretation

- A. The interpretation given is far from complete.
 - 1. Many details go unexplained.
 - a) My assumption is that every detail serves a purpose.
 - 2. They cry out for elucidation.
 - 3. The given interpretation just points us in a direction.
- B. Some important observations
 - 1. Metals are arranged in a specific order—
 - a) And evolution over time, starting from the time of Nebuchadnezzar and progressing into the future as you go down the statue.
 - b) Metals are less precious as you go down.
 - c) Metals are harder as you go down.
 - d) Metals are all produced by human labor.
 - (1) The process of production becomes more complex as you go down.
 - e) The metals are arranged in chronological order—
 - (1) Starts with the time of Nebuchadnezzar at the top and ending with the feet.
 - (2) The feet support the statue.
 - (3) The feet are the natural telos.
 - f) Iron is the hardest material.
 - (1) Crushes and shatters all things
 - g) The feet are not cohesive.
 - (1) For the first time, the materials do not cohere.
 - (2) Different ethnicities? Cultures? are mixed for the first time.
 - (3) But there is no social cohesion.
 - h) This is destroyed by a different kind of kingdom.
 - (1) It did not arise from the evolution.
 - (2) It is not a human construct.
 - (3) It is eternal.
 - (4) It will never be displaced.
 - 2. “*You are that head of gold.*”
 - a) This helps us understand what kind of thing the metals stand for.
 - (1) Distinction between king and kingdom is blurred in OT prophecy.
 - b) From the rest of Daniel, we see that what is being described is Empire.
 - (1) The statue shows the evolution of Empire.
- C. What is the dream saying?
 - 1. It is dealing with the trajectory of Empire.
 - a) It is not telling us what will happen to specific empires.
 - (1) That will be developed in subsequent visions.

2. Over time empires will become:
 - a) Less precious (less humane?)
 - b) More harsh
 - c) More artificial (increasingly the product of human hands)
 - d) Less united
 3. But they will be destroyed in an instant.
 - a) The whole enterprise of uniting people to do God-like things will be destroyed and come to nothing.
 - b) The whole human project is but a flash in the pan.
 4. It will be replaced by an eternal kingdom.
 - a) It will be of divine origin.
 - b) It will be a fundamentally different thing from Empire.
- D. What does Nebuchadnezzar learn?
1. He is ruling over the most precious empire in history.
 - a) The most united empire
 - b) The least artificial
 2. But he would be foolish to be fully invested in his empire.
 - a) It is a fleeting phenomenon.
 - b) It will not last.
 3. He should seek citizenship in the eternal kingdom.
- E. What can we learn?
1. Human political institutions don't evolve, they devolve.
 - a) The notion that things keep progressing is modern.
 - (1) The ancient belief was devolution.
 - (2) But since the Enlightenment, the notion of eternal progress developed.
 - b) The Whiggish view of history is one of constant improvement—progress.
 - c) Empires will become less precious (more brutal?).
 - d) Empires will become less unified.
 - (1) God will repeat the strategy he used with the Tower of Babel.
 2. We should invest in that which is eternal.

XIII. Conclusion

- A. The way this story is presented is like a cartoon.
1. This story resembles the story of Joseph and the Pharaoh.
 - a) But things are bigger.
 - (1) Daniel has to tell the dream and interpret it.
 - (2) The penalty for failure is death.
 2. But this is like a cartoon.

- a) The astrologers are buffoon-like
 - b) Nebuchadnezzar is like the Queen of Hearts in *Alice in Wonderland*.
- B. God is not as negative toward Empire as I would expect.
- 1. He does not really bad-mouth empire here.
 - 2. Nebuchadnezzar is not depicted entirely negatively.
 - a) It is a mixed bag as we will see, but ultimately it is a sympathetic picture.
 - 3. Officials in Empire are sympathetic characters.
 - a) This takes the edge off the brutality of Empire.
- C. Empire is steeped in insecurity and hubris.
- 1. Insecurity
 - a) Empire is born out of insecurity.
 - b) Even the all-powerful ruler is insecure—
 - (1) Because his hold on power is tenuous.
 - (2) This becomes even more true since the demise of monarchies.
 - c) It is held together by force.
 - (1) Any challenge to authority must be stamped out so it does not grow.
 - (2) The solution to any problem is to crank up the force.
 - 2. Hubris
 - a) It seems like one who commands such vast resources should be able to do anything.
 - (1) Rulers with great power tend to believe they should be able to do anything.
- D. We must not be fooled about the power of Empire.
- 1. Empire looks unassailable, but this is an illusion.
 - a) At a point in time, Empire looks invincible, but it isn't.