

Nebuchadnezzar's Image



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Daniel 2.*

Memory Text: “He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding.” (*Daniel 2:21, NKJV*).

Years ago, a psychic named Cheiro warned editor W. T. Stead not to travel by water during April 1912. Stead lost his life, in April 1912, on the *Titanic*. In the summer of 1961, psychic Jeane Dixon foretold that United Nations Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld would be killed in a “plane crash in mid-September.” On September 18, 1961, the secretary-general was killed in a plane crash.

What does this prove? Only that Satan certainly can make predictions and then bring about their fulfillment, nothing more (if even that).

Nevertheless, prophecies dealing with the future of nations hundreds and thousands of years in advance—such as Nebuchadnezzar’s dream as depicted in Daniel 2—are found in the writings of the Bible, not in the prognostications of psychics. This dream and Daniel’s inspired explanation are part of the primary evidence for the inspiration of Scripture.

This week we’ll take another look at this faith-affirming prophecy.

The Week at a Glance: What kind of test did the king put to the wise men in order to be sure of their interpretation? How is God’s power revealed in this chapter? What does Daniel 2 teach us about God? In what ways does this chapter expose our basic human helplessness and dependence upon God?

**Please study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 9.*

Nebuchadnezzar's Dilemma (*Dan. 2:1-13*).

One night King Nebuchadnezzar had an impressive dream. When he awoke, he called his wise men and asked them to tell him what he had dreamed. Did Nebuchadnezzar really forget his dream, or did he just want to test the wise men of Babylon to see if they were as clever as they claimed? *Dan. 2:5.*

The King James Version, following the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament), translates the first words of the king (*vs. 5*) as “the thing is gone from me”—generally understood to mean that the king had forgotten the dream. Modern translations, following the Aramaic text, render the phrase as “ ‘my decision is firm’ ” (*NKJV*). Both translations may be true. Having forgotten part of the dream, the king used this fact to test the wise men. If he had forgotten the dream completely, he would not have been troubled by it.

“The Lord in His providence had a wise purpose in view in giving Nebuchadnezzar this dream, and then causing him to forget the particulars, but to retain the fearful impression made upon his mind. The Lord desired to expose the pretensions of the wise men of Babylon.”—Ellen G. White, in *The Youth's Instructor*, Sept. 1, 1903.

Nebuchadnezzar probably was afraid of the meaning of the dream. Angry that the wisest men of Babylon were unable to help him, he ordered them all killed. This was no idle threat: Cutting up the bodies of enemies and burning their houses were common practices in ancient Mesopotamia.

In response to the king's threat, what truth were the wise men forced to admit? *Dan. 2:11.*

Unable to tell the king his dream, the wise men of Babylon had to admit that only the gods, “whose dwelling is not with flesh,” could tell the king his dream. The Babylonians did not think that the gods would come and dwell in human flesh, but Christians know that God indeed “became flesh and dwelt among us” (*John 1:14, NKJV*). This confession of failure provided a remarkable opportunity for Daniel to reveal something of the God whom he served.

The wise men are admitting their helplessness. Martin Heidegger once said that “Only a God can save us.” This seems to be the confession of the wise men, as well. Look at your situation. Are you able to admit your own helplessness? How, then, is the knowledge that there not only is a God but that He's the God revealed to us in Jesus able to comfort you no matter your own situation?

Daniel's Prayer Meetings (*Dan. 2:14-23*).

What can we learn from the response of Daniel and his friends to the king's death decree? *Dan. 2:17, 18.*

Throughout the book of Daniel, God's people are threatened by death. This is of special relevance to the believers living at the end of time, for they will have to face the threat of death, as well (*see Rev. 13:13-18*).

The prayer meeting Daniel and his friends had that day must have been intense. Their lives hung in the balance, but they could approach God with confidence, because, to the best of their knowledge and ability, they had served Him thus far. After God had revealed to Daniel in a night vision what Nebuchadnezzar had dreamed, they still prayed, this time giving Him praise and thanksgiving.

What are some of the key phrases of Daniel's prayer of thanksgiving in **Daniel 2:20-23**?

Dan. 2:20 _____

Dan. 2:21 _____

Dan. 2:22 _____

Dan. 2:23 _____

Note how Daniel begins his prayer with "Blessed be the name of God." In the Old Testament, people frequently bless the Lord (*Judg. 5:9, Neh. 9:5, Pss. 103:1, 134:1*). The Aramaic and Hebrew words for "bless" also can be translated as "praise," and this is the meaning in Daniel 2:19 and 20.

Daniel's hymn of praise emphasizes that there is a divine Power who controls history. He's also a God who communicates intimately with those who are open to hear His voice. Through the dream of the image, God conveyed to Nebuchadnezzar the truth that He exercises His power not only in heaven but right here on earth.

What do you say to someone who, after having read this part of Daniel 2, asks, But why haven't my prayers been answered in such a powerful and precise manner?

Daniel's Testimony (*Dan. 2:24-30*).

How did Daniel respond to the fact that God had revealed the dream to him? *Vss. 24-28.*

Notice that Daniel's first concern was for the wise men of Babylon. Although they had done nothing to earn this stay of execution, they were saved because of the presence of a righteous man in their midst. Throughout history such cases have been reported. On his journey to Rome, Paul's presence on the ship saved all those on board (*Acts 27:24*). Therefore, Jesus calls God's people "the salt of the earth" (*Matt. 5:13*)—that is, they have a preserving quality, as illustrated in the life of Daniel. Indeed, just as our bad deeds can have a negative impact on those around us, our good deeds can have a good impact, an important point to remember for all who follow Christ.

Having taken care of the wise men, Daniel stood before the king and explained that neither the wise men of Babylon nor their gods could do what the king demanded but that there was a God in heaven who could reveal secrets. Daniel was neither ashamed nor afraid to confess his God before the king. Yet, he disclaimed any superior wisdom or knowledge for himself as the reason for what he was going to tell the king. He ascribed the revelation and its explanation entirely to God. Daniel seemed to understand clearly that his relationship to his God and Savior was one of complete dependence. Of course, that's how salvation works, as well; we are completely dependent upon the Lord.

Look up these following texts. What do they tell us about the sheer impossibility of our being able to save ourselves? *Rom. 3:23, 8:3, 1 Cor. 15:14-17.*

As sinners we have been irrevocably cut off from God, the Source of all life. But thanks to Jesus, who was both God and man, we have been restored to that Source of life. Only Someone who was God and man and not only man but a sinless man, a man who kept God's eternal and immutable law perfectly, could bridge the gap between heaven and earth, thus solving the one thing that we, of ourselves, can never solve: the problem of death.

Daniel and his friends, under the threat of death, prayed. Of course, most people, even atheists, under such circumstances, would have done the same thing. Why do you think, in the case of these boys, however, that prayer was something they did all the time? In what ways might that fact help explain why their prayer was answered as it was?

The Image and Its Interpretation (*Dan. 2:28-45*).

What is the meaning of Daniel’s reference to “the latter days” in verse 28? (*See also Gen. 49:1, Num. 24:14, Deut. 4:30, 31:29.*)

A study of this phrase in the Old Testament shows that the “latter days,” an idiomatic phrase for “in the future,” can refer to (a) a specific future period in the history of Israel (*Deut. 4:30*); (b) the future history of Israel beginning with the conquest (*Gen. 49:1*) or the monarchy (*Num. 24:14*); and (c) the Messianic age (*Isa. 2:2, Hos. 3:5*) or the time immediately preceding it (*Ezek. 38:16*). Most modern versions, therefore, translate this phrase as “in the days to come” (*Gen. 49:1, NASB*); “in time to come” (*Deut. 31:29, NRSV*); or “in later days” (*Deut. 4:30, NIV*).

Thus we can conclude that “the latter days” in Daniel 2 refers to the future, which began in the time of Daniel and reaches down to the time of the second advent of Christ symbolized by the stone kingdom.

What did God reveal to Nebuchadnezzar? What did these images symbolize? *Dan. 2:30-45.*

The head of the golden image is clearly identified as the kingdom of Babylon (626–539 B.C.) in verse 38. From history we know that the other three kingdoms following Babylon were Media-Persia (539–331 B.C.), Greece (331–168 B.C.), and Rome (168 B.C.–A.D. 476). Although the Roman Empire ruled longer than the other three kingdoms put together, it was not succeeded by a fifth world power but was divided up into many different kingdoms of varied strength, symbolized by the feet of iron and clay—just as the prophecy had predicted. These are the nations that make up modern Europe, nations that, to this day, exist as separate national and political entities.

What is symbolized by the stone cut out without hands and the destruction of the image? *Dan. 2:34, 44.*

The Bible makes it plain that the stone represents Jesus Christ (*see Isa. 28:16; 1 Cor. 10:4; Luke 20:17, 18*), who at His second advent will destroy all the other kingdoms and establish an everlasting kingdom.

Take the symbolism of what Christ does to these other powers at the Second Coming and apply it spiritually to yourself. What needs to happen within us, to the other “powers” within us, in order to truly follow the Lord as we should? (*See also Matt. 16:25, Gal. 2:20.*)

Daniel's Promotion

What was Nebuchadnezzar's reaction to Daniel's explanation of his dream? *Dan. 2:46.*

At the end of Daniel's explanations, the king was convinced that his dream had indeed come from a supernatural force. He acknowledged the God of Daniel as the Ruler of the universe. He saw his own place in world history, and he understood that his authority was under the control of the God who had given it to him (*vss. 46, 47*).

The prostration of the king before Daniel (*vs. 46*) was according to Oriental custom. He was ready to worship Daniel as some kind of god, similar to the Lycaonians and Miletians, who considered Paul a god (*Acts 14:11, 28:6*). Paul refused to be worshiped, and we can be certain that Daniel responded in a similar way (though we do not have any record of his response). Nevertheless, the king made Daniel governor over the province of Babylon and head of all the wise men. In his elevation, Daniel experienced the divine principle proclaimed by Jesus, "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance" (*Matt. 13:12*).

What does Daniel's petition concerning his friends reveal about his character? *Dan. 2:49.*

The prophet did not want to enjoy his honors alone. In his hour of triumph, he remembered those who had joined in prayer with him. As soon as his position was decided, he requested the king to appoint his three friends to administer the affairs of the province of which he himself was made ruler. On the surface this request seems simple enough, but we must remember that native Babylonians probably had to give up their positions to make room for these unknown Jews. In God's providence the sharers in Daniel's prayer are now made sharers in his promotion. Unlike the chief butler in the story of Joseph (*Gen. 40:23*), Daniel did not forget his friends.

God used Daniel's captivity and Nebuchadnezzar's dream to make Daniel a powerful force in Babylon. Joseph in Egypt had a similar experience (*Gen. 50:20*). Both are examples of the biblical principle that "all things work together for good to those who love God" (*Rom. 8:28, NKJV*).

Review the chapter. One lesson that should come through to us clearly and forcefully is that God is in control of the world's history. Compare this with what we saw in the life of Jesus and His intense personal care for individuals (see *Matt. 10:29-31*). How does what we've seen of God's power, as revealed in Daniel 2, help us to trust Him and His power in our personal lives, as well?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 491–502.

“The king had acknowledged the power of God, saying to Daniel, ‘Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, . . . and a revealer of secrets.’ Verse 47. For a time afterward, Nebuchadnezzar was influenced by the fear of God; but his heart was not yet cleansed from worldly ambition and a desire for self-exaltation. The prosperity attending his reign filled him with pride. In time he ceased to honor God, and resumed his idol worship with increased zeal and bigotry.”—*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 503, 504.

Lessons From Daniel 2

1. The precise fulfillment of the prophecy of Daniel 2 in history is strong evidence for the inspiration of the Bible.
2. The prophecy of Daniel 2 shows clearly that everything and everyone on this earth will eventually perish unless linked with God. We are all on our way to eternal nothingness unless we take hold of the hand of God.
3. Frequently historians will tell us that “history teaches us that history teaches us nothing.” While this may be true for some, Christians know that history is indeed the story of God working out His final plans to end the great controversy. Christ is not an absentee landlord, permitting His house to disintegrate through careless tenants. The correct study of history leads to the understanding and assurance that He who controls the cosmos also guides the atom.

Discussion Questions:

1 In what ways does Daniel 2 provide purely *rational* evidence not only for inspiration of the Bible but for God’s power? Why, if studying with a skeptic, could you find some powerful material in this chapter?

2 In what sense do today’s nations in the territories of ancient Rome resemble the feet of iron and clay?

Summary: Daniel 2 provides the blueprint for apocalyptic prophecy. It is foundational for the rest of the prophecies in this book. Nebuchadnezzar’s dream revealed the ignorance of the wise men but provided opportunity for Daniel to witness to the king about the God of heaven.

The Gift Goes On

Barbara Huff

Like many young people who attend the Adventist seminary in Zaoksky, Russia, Yuri Zakhvataev (ZACH-vah-tah-yev) would never have been there if it had not been for someone he does not know.

Yuri was studying music at a state university when his mother invited him to attend the Adventist church with her. Yuri went, and his heart opened to God's message. He gave his life to Christ. Not long after his conversion he sensed God was calling him into the ministry.

Yuri did not have the money to study for four years at Zaoksky Adventist Seminary in Russia. But in faith Yuri applied to Zaoksky. He learned that God, who had called him to the ministry, was calling others to support students such as him who are called to become leaders in the church. Someone sponsored Yuri, paying his tuition during his four years at Zaoksky. Yuri spent his summer breaks working with experienced evangelists and other students holding evangelistic meetings throughout the Euro-Asia Division.

Yuri completed his theology degree and is working in a church-affiliated media center in Russia. He has a burden to minister to those addicted to alcohol and drugs. Yuri has produced a TV series designed to point men to Jesus, the greatest Man on earth.

While conducting one stop smoking program, he helped Vladimir successfully kick the smoking habit. Vladimir wanted to help others stop. Now Vladimir and Yuri conduct stop-smoking programs together. Vladimir has been baptized.

Yuri knows that while God called him to become a minister, he could not have completed his education without the help of those who were faithful in supporting him. He can minister to others, because someone else answered God's whisper to help a young person, whom he or she might never meet, study in a school this person might never see.

Yuri's message to those faith partners is, "Thank you for your financial support. With the Lord's blessing I will multiply your gift many times in souls won to Him."

Barbara Huff met Yuri when she was administrative assistant in the Euro-Asia Division office in Moscow. She and her husband are now retired in Florida.