

“Wisdom from God”
Daniel 2:1-49
February 7, 2016

INTRODUCTION:

The first issue we face as we come to Daniel 2 is how to read this chapter. Should we read it as God’s revelation to us of future events or does its theme lie elsewhere? Back in the 1970’s and 80’s, Daniel 2 was often read by evangelicals like us as a description of future events, not just events future to Daniel but future to twentieth century Christians as well. Every detail of this statue was carefully scrutinized to unlock some secret message about the future. Meaning was found in the ten toes of the statue, with the toes presumably referring to some alliance of ten nations at the end of time.

While Daniel 2 clearly does predict the future, at least things future to Daniel, I don’t think that is the main theme of this chapter. I agree with the Old Testament scholar Tremper Longman, who says that the theme of Daniel 2 is that *“Only God’s wisdom can reveal the mysteries of life.* In other words, it is not the content of the revelation of the future that is primary; what is most important here is the fact that it is only Daniel’s God that knows that future.” All the dramatic tension is focused on this theme of wisdom. The most learned men of Babylon are completely at a loss to know the content of this mystery about the king’s dreams and the future revealed in the dream, even under threat of death. But God’s people know such things, not because they are smarter than anyone else, but because they have a God who knows and controls the future, and who chooses to reveal these things to his people.

As exiles in a land that is not our home, we too need wisdom. I don’t have to tell you that we live in a confusing and chaotic world. I can’t tell you how many times my wife has looked at me and asked me about some difficult situation we might be facing, “What should we do?” and I don’t have a clue. Wisdom is just as available to us as it was for Daniel. And when God gives it to us, it is of benefit not only to us, but to our Babylon as well. So let’s look further at the wisdom God gives to his people in exile.

I. The Need for Wisdom

Nebuchadnezzar was a troubled man. He started having these dreams that greatly disturbed him. I think we can conclude from the combination of singular and plural nouns that he had one dream that kept occurring night after night. Verse 1 says that **“Nebuchadnezzar had dreams”** while throughout most of the rest of the paragraph we read of **“the dream.”** This dream was so frightening to him that **“his sleep left him.”** Perhaps he was too

afraid to go to sleep at night, forcing himself to stay awake as much as possible. But no one can stay awake forever, and whenever the king fell asleep, the dream would return.

It is ironic that Nebuchadnezzar should be so insecure. He was the most powerful man of the most powerful kingdom of his day. But all he had available to him was the power human resources could provide. He seemed to know this instinctively, and I think that's why he demanded that his wise men tell him not only the interpretation of the dream, but its content as well. If the wise men limited themselves to the interpretation, how could the king know that they weren't just making up something to flatter him? But if they could tell him the dream as well as its interpretation, then he could have confidence in the interpretation.

Insomnia can do strange things to a person. It made Nebuchadnezzar a little paranoid. Notice verse 9 where he accuses his wise men of conspiracy. It also made him desperate. When a powerful man gets desperate, he uses all the resources available to him to get what he wants. So Nebuchadnezzar used the stick and the carrot. The stick was a very big one. **“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”** (v. 5). I don't know if he meant the tearing limb from limb literally or metaphorically, but I would imagine none of his wise men wanted to find out exactly what he had in mind. The carrot was pretty big too. **“But if you show the dream and its interpretation, you shall receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor”** (v. 6). We learn at the end of the chapter that part of these honors included being made ruler over the whole province of Babylon and being put in charge of all the wise men.

The wise men were unable to tell the king his dream. They were half right in telling him that **“no one can show it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh”** (v. 11). They were right in saying that God alone can know what a man dreams at night. But they were wrong in assuming that such knowledge was unavailable to mankind. If God were to choose to reveal such things, then they could be known. Daniel didn't seem to know any of this until Arioch, the king's chief of police, showed up at his door to take him to his death. I think it shows something of the respect with which Daniel was viewed that Arioch gave him some time by setting up an appointment between Daniel and the king in which Daniel promised to reveal to the king what he was asking for, both the content and interpretation of the dream.

Put yourself in Daniel's place. Though you still don't know the dream or its interpretation, you have an appointment with Nebuchadnezzar at which time he will be expecting you to reveal and interpret the dream that has troubled him so much. You can't exactly show up and say, “Well, I was hoping to know by now about your dream, but I've got nothing.” You would have a great need

for wisdom from God. There is no book you can look in to find out what you need to know. You need wisdom from God. Daniel did not give up when human resources reached their limit, because he believed that God gives wisdom to his children.

How about you? Are you aware of your need for God's wisdom? He alone can reveal the mysteries of life. There are times in life when it is clear that we need God's wisdom. Perhaps you are facing a life-altering decision like marriage or a big job change. Or maybe the bottom has fallen out like it had for Daniel here, and you need God's wisdom to know what you should do, what next step you should take. Your husband of 25 years comes to you one day and announces that he doesn't love you and wants a divorce. The bottom has dropped out of your life and you don't know what to do. Our need for God's wisdom at such times is obvious. But we also need wisdom in the little areas of life. We are often most in trouble spiritually at precisely those times when we think we know what is best. We don't look to God's wisdom because we think we don't need it. A friend of mine by the name of Dave McCarty says that Christians are happiest when they are most clueless, clueless about what is best for them. When that is their mindset, they will look to God for wisdom, and that is what gives them happiness. Do you start your day and continue your day with a dependence on God for wisdom?

II. The Gift of Wisdom

After setting up his appointment with Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel immediately calls for a prayer meeting. He is like a blind man asking for the gift of sight. So he gathers his three friends, described in verse 17 by their Hebrew names rather than their more well-known Babylonian names, and wants them to pray with him for God's wisdom in this matter. Daniel didn't merely utter one of those quickie prayers asking for God's help. There's nothing wrong with such prayers, and there are times when we don't have the opportunity for anything more. But it is often the case that we are not serious about prayer until we are ready to call upon others to pray with and for us. I love it when people approach me and ask me to pray about something with them. I will normally suggest that we pray right then and there, that we stop for a little prayer meeting just like the one Daniel and his friends had.

The Bible is clear here and elsewhere that the way to get God's wisdom is to ask for it in our lives. I love that famous verse from James 1. **"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach [or without finding fault], and it will be given him."** God loves to give generously because that is the kind of God he is. And he gives without finding fault. Have you ever let that sink into your heart? Whenever someone asks something of me that will cost me something, it is quite easy to look for

some fault that will give me a good reason for declining to help. “I’m not going to help that person, because the only time they ever talk to me is when they want something from me.” God is not like that. He gives generously without finding fault. That means that even if you have not normally gone to him in prayer, he keeps the door open for you to come and ask him for the gift of wisdom. There is never a bad time to pray, only proud people who think that they are not needy enough to require prayer.

God heard their prayers and revealed the mystery to Daniel. I notice that his first response to this answered prayer was that of praise and worship to the God who had answered. Have you ever noticed how our initial response to answered prayer is often different? My response is often to want to call someone and celebrate with them. Quite honestly, it is often the case that I never get around to thanking God. Daniel, on the other hand, was keenly aware that God had been at work to give him this wisdom to know the dream and its interpretation, and his first response was to thank God.

III. The Content of Wisdom

God revealed this mystery to Daniel through Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. It was a dream of a statue of a man made of different materials. The head of the statue was of gold, the chest and arms of silver, the midsection and upper legs of bronze and the lower legs and feet of iron and clay. Then a second character is introduced in the dream. It is a stone not of human origin. The stone strikes the statue and so thoroughly destroys it that no trace of it remains. Daniel reports that it was like chaff that the wind blows away.

That was the content of the dream. Daniel then moves to interpret the dream. The head of gold, he says, represents the glorious kingdom of Babylon. The next kingdom, indicated by the chest and arms of silver, will be inferior to Babylon, just as silver is inferior to gold. Though Daniel doesn’t name that kingdom, we know from history that it represents the Medo-Persian kingdom. Next was the middle portion made of bronze. Daniel says of this kingdom that **“it shall rule over all the earth”** (v. 39). We can’t help but think of the reign of the Greeks and of Alexander the Great, who was said to have wept while still in his twenties because there were no more lands to conquer. Then the final kingdom is that of Rome. This vision is such a clear record of what actually happened over the next four centuries that many have tried to say this book must have written by someone many centuries after Daniel who claimed to be Daniel. There is no evidence for such a position other than the false assumption that such a clear prediction of the future is impossible.

The interpretation continues with the stone, which Daniel says is the arrival of a different kind of kingdom, one that will bring the other to a

permanent end and that will itself endure forever. This durable kingdom will start out small but will grow until it fills the entire earth.

This dream and its interpretation speak of two kingdoms. The kingdom of this world is represented by the statue. It is enormous, dazzling and awesome in appearance. But notice its inherent weakness at a foundational level. Its weakest part is at the bottom in the feet of clay. The kingdom of this world can dazzle, but it cannot endure. The kingdom of God is represented by the stone that was cut out **“by no human hand.”** It would be easy to overlook this stone. There was nothing particularly dazzling about it, unlike the statue. But it was of divine origin, and at the end of the day the impressive statue came to nothing while the stone grew until it filled the whole earth.

The application is that we must choose which of these two kingdoms gets our ultimate loyalty, the kingdom of this world or the kingdom of God. We are to live *in* both kingdoms, but we are to live *for* only one kingdom. It is foolish to choose any kingdom other than God’s, because all other kingdoms will not endure. If you seek first your own kingdom, you have chosen foolishly. If you choose the kingdom of God, you have chosen wisely. And if you choose God’s kingdom, you also become very useful in the kingdom of this world. That was the case with Daniel. Because he chose first God’s kingdom, he was used of God to save all the Babylonian wise men, to save Nebuchadnezzar from his troubling dreams, and to become a powerful and able politician in Babylon.

Let’s be a little more specific. What does it mean to choose the kingdom of God? It means to choose Jesus. The New Testament identifies him as this stone. He is the stone that is often overlooked. Some reject him, with the result that he becomes a stone of stumbling. Others, like stone masons, overlook him and conclude that he can be of no use in the building they want to build. But God chooses him as the cornerstone, the most important, defining stone in the entire building.

It is wise to choose Jesus. There is a future in him. Wisdom is sometimes defined as the skillful use of knowledge. I think that falls short of the biblical idea of wisdom. It doesn’t come by hard work, but by following Jesus.

CONCLUSION:

Do you remember how the book of Proverbs begins? There are two ladies vying for the attention of the son who is being addressed in the book. They are Lady Wisdom and Lady Folly. Lady Wisdom is quiet, while Folly is loud and brazen. Folly promises the sweetness of ill-gotten treasure and of secret sensual pleasure. But those who choose her are choosing death. Those who choose wisdom get life. Jesus is Lady Wisdom. Choose him and live.