

The sermon

Intro

Have you ever found yourself in a threatening situation? Have you ever found yourself subject to the whims of a self-centered authority who could care less about your well-being? Have you ever found yourself powerless to solve an impossible problem?

Where do we turn? Daniel gives us a few ideas.

Body

Point 1: An Impossible Assignment (2:1-11)

READ 2:1-11

In the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his spirit was troubled, and his sleep left him. – 2:1

Nebuchadnezzar had troubling dreams such that he's unable to sleep. He's worried. He's afraid this may be a bad omen. He wasn't celebrating.

The powerful king is broken by dreams and powerless to resolve the matter. The mighty suffer along with the rest of us.

Then the king commanded that the magicians, the enchanters, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans be summoned to tell the king his dreams. – 2:2

The king wants answers so he summons the experts. Sounds like a Harry Potter book. Who are these people? I wanted to know.

Magicians

In Joseph's time, Pharaoh's magicians were unable to interpret Pharaoh's dreams (Gen 41:8, 24). In Moses' time, there's magicians described as "*wise men and sorcerers.*" They matched the LORD by turning staffs into serpents "*by their secret arts*" (Exod 7:11-12).

Pharaoh's magicians were also able to turn water to blood (Exod 7:22) and "*made frogs come up on the land of Egypt*" (Exod 8:7). However, they were unable to produce gnats (Exod 8:18). These same magicians were struck with boils by Moses (Exod 9:11), revealing their inability to match God's power.

There's debate over the legitimacy of these magicians. Some take them to be con men. The Egyptians had techniques for keeping snakes stiff as a rod and then awakening the snake. This explains turning staffs into serpents. Others take these to supernatural acts empowered by demonic forces. 2 Thessalonians 2:9 speaks of an end-time antichrist who "*by the activity of Satan*" performs "*false signs and wonders.*"

Sorcerers were a form of magician (Exod 7:11).

Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers, and they, the magicians of Egypt, also did the same by their secret arts. – **Exodus 7:11**

The wise men and sorcerers were magicians. Meaning there's overlap between magicians and sorcerers and enchanters. All three are supposed to be able to reveal and interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

Wise men interpreted the future by a variety of means: position of stars, shaking arrows, consulting idols, examining animal livers (Ezek 21:21), detecting signs/omens, and contacting the dead. In Isaiah 44:25, wise men are equated with

diviners who were liars. Isaiah's diviners were a sham. Diviners contacted the dead (1 Sam 28:7-8, 13-14) and told fortunes (Acts 16:16) among other things.

Enchanters

Also called conjurer or necromancer. They were believed to conjure up the dead through magic spells and incantations. They were witch doctors/exorcists who drove away demons and bad luck that caused illness, etc. They divined the cause of illness.

Sorcerers

Involved witchcraft and the casting of spells. Witchcraft sought to exercise power over nature and individuals. Sorcery is linked with fortune telling in Micah 5:12. When sorcery is removed, fortune tellers will be gone. Sorcerers told the future.

Summary

Whether shams or Satanically inspired, these Chaldeans were supposed to have supernatural powers and supernatural insights, like knowledge of the future. If anyone could help Nebuchadnezzar, it would be these people.

As for differences, magicians transformed objects from one thing to another (rod to a snake). Enchanters contacted the dead and performed exorcisms. Sorcerers cast spells.

If demonic powers were involved, Satan and his demons can observe, but they cannot access what's inside your mind or God's knowledge of the future.

They allegedly accessed the future by examining the position of the stars or examining livers or reading signs/omens or contacting the dead.

Chaldeans' response (2:4)

"Tell your servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation." – 2:4

We need the dream sir.

Nebuchadnezzar's ultimatum (2:5-6)

"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." – 2:5

If you can't perform my request, you and your family will be destroyed.

The picture is a demanding and ruthless tyrant with little regard for human life. They only exist to help him. If they can't help him, they may as well be dead. They're a tool for his well-being. Nothing else.

This is sin because the Chaldeans were created in God's image. Because God created mankind to reflect his perfections, and only mankind, we have value. This isn't the way to treat people created in God's image!

"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." – 2:6

If you give me what I want, I'll be happy and things will go well for you.

Chaldeans appeal again (2:7)

They can't do anything without the dream (2:7).

Nebuchadnezzar's response (2:8-9)

No more stalling tactics (*"I know with certainty that you are trying to gain time"* – 2:8).

Nebuchadnezzar suspects a sham. He wants proof. If they can reveal the dream, their talents are legit. Anyone can suggest an explanation for your dream, but who can actually tell you what you dreamed?

"You have agreed to speak lying and corrupt words before me till the times change" (2:9) indicates he suspects their magic is a sham.

Chaldean admission (2:10-11)

"There is not a man on earth who can meet the king's demand,

They admit their magic is powerless.

for no great and powerful king has asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or Chaldean.

The king's demand is a new one.

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." – 2:11

Only the gods can reveal this to you. And since they don't dwell with us, they don't speak to us. So your request is impossible. Note the assumption that their gods don't communicate with men.

Reflections

The picture is a distressed, mad, and destructive tyrant.

The picture is an impossible assignment.

The picture is the failure of false religion and magic.

The picture is pagan gods with no concern to help these Chaldeans. And no concern to relieve Nebuchadnezzar's troubled spirit. Why would they worship indifferent deities?

The picture is false religion provides no communication, no help.

Your friend who's into the New Age, Oprah, Deepak Chopra or diagnosed with mental health issues has no answers for their weakness. These guides point you to yourself or sham predictions of the future or medications that can merely dull the pain.

Christian, you have an answer to human weakness in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ addresses human weakness!

Point 2: Death Decreed (2:12-16)

READ 2:12-16

The command (2:12-13)

Nebuchadnezzar's patience has run out. No more stalling tactics.

Furious Nebuchadnezzar decrees the death of every last wise man, including Daniel and his friends (2:12-13). Daniel is officially a wise man at this point.

Arioch and the king's guard are on the lookout for Daniel and his friends (2:13). To capture and execute them.

Daniel's response

When Arioch makes his way to Daniel, Daniel responds, *"Why is the decree of the king so urgent?"* (2:15). Daniel appears to be caught off guard (*"Then Arioch made the matter known to Daniel"*). He didn't see it coming. He has to respond on the spot without preparation.

Note Daniel's *"prudence and discretion"* (2:14). That's a well-chosen and tactful response. He used his words well. He asks a question to get the facts.

Request granted

And Daniel went in and requested the king to appoint him a time, that he might show the interpretation to the king. – 2:16

2:24 indicates Arioch gave Daniel opportunity to speak with Nebuchadnezzar by setting up a meeting. Whereas the Chaldeans were denied time, Daniel is granted time. There's divine favor behind the scenes.

Reflections

The picture is calm in the presence of immediate threat. The picture is respectful conversation. The picture is gaining understanding through a wise use of questions. The picture is a wise choice of words. The picture is God moving on Nebuchadnezzar's heart, causing him to respond favorably to Daniel.

Daniel navigated the situation well while God came to his aid.

Several Scriptures come to mind.

A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. – Proverbs 15:1

The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things. – Proverbs 15:28

The wise of heart is called discerning, and sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness. – Proverbs 16:21

Daniel's response to alarming news was respectful (soft), measured (how to answer), and persuasive (sweet).

These Proverbs should season our conversations with one another. And our conversation in the workplace, with family and friends, etc.

Point 3: God Gives Wisdom and Might (2:17-23)

READ 2:17-23

Daniel's response (to time granted)

Daniel's not out of the woods yet so he alerts his friends to the impending threat (2:17; apparently they didn't know either) and he tells them to seek God's mercy to escape destruction (2:18).

Advice: tell your brothers and sisters when you're experiencing horrific physical challenges or financial threats or experiencing depression or experiencing relational challenges or facing a complexing matter than requires wisdom. Tell them to plead to God on your behalf!

God's response

Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night. – 2:19

God responds. Likely while Daniel was sleeping, God interrupted his dreams with Nebuchadnezzar's dream and the interpretation. The vision reveals these unknown/hidden (mysterious) dreams.

Daniel's response

Daniel was moved to praise God's wisdom and might.

"Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might. – 2:20

To bless God is to speak well of him. To praise his perfections. We don't bless God in that we help him out or do for him what he can't do himself. God is the mighty one, not us.

God possesses both wisdom and might. Wisdom meaning God always acts in the best way possible. Whatever God does is good and right. Whatever God commands of us is good and right. God always chooses the best course of action. He never gives bad counsel.

Might meaning God is all-powerful. No one can hinder God's will. No one can thwart his purposes. No one can resist his power. God's eternal power is on display for all to see in this world he created (Rom 1:20).

He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings;

Times and seasons means God changes durations of times and the various eras and epochs in human history. He determined when America would be and how long will be. He determined the duration of the Civil War, etc.

God removes world rulers from power and installs new rulers in their place (Rom 13:1). Yes, God is behind the scenes directing world history!

he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding;

Case in point, he gave Daniel wisdom to navigate the impending threat.

he reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with him. – 2:22

Case in point, God revealed to Daniel the content of Nebuchadnezzar's dreams. This was hidden from all but Nebuchadnezzar. God also revealed the meaning of these dreams. This was hidden from all but God.

The point is God has all knowledge. There is nothing unknown by God. God knows what you're thinking right now. God knows the choices you'll make this Tuesday. God knows when you'll die. God knows who will be president in 2040. If Jesus doesn't return first.

God's wisdom is also on display in creation and in the Bible.

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." – 2:23

God answers prayer. Sometimes God rescues us from hard places by ending the adversity (Daniel 2). Sometimes God sustains us within hard places by providing wisdom and empowering grace (Daniel 1). *"I can do all things through him who strengthens me"* (Phil 4:13) is the cry of those who find themselves trusting God in hard places.

Non-Christian/ Conclusion

The Chaldeans were right. Their gods don't help and don't dwell with mankind. Their gods don't care. Because their gods don't exist.

On the other hand, the God who created the heavens and earth isn't distant. In fact, he came to earth, taking on human flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus came to oppose destructive religious guides. Jesus came to teach heart religion, a helpful spirituality. Jesus came to establish a church that would spread throughout the nations, establishing local churches throughout the globe. His mission succeeded by the way!

Sunday, July 16, 2023

Daniel 2:1-23 (Disturbing Dreams and God's Wisdom and Might)

Pastor Eric Dubois

Jesus came to rescue all those who trust in him by dying on the cross as a substitute. On the cross, God the Father treated Jesus as if he lived our sinful, broken, rebellious life. If we trust Jesus, God treats us as if we lived Jesus' perfect, sinless life. God is merciful! He forgives broken sinners.

The merciful God is mighty. God asserted his power by raising Jesus from the dead, thus vindicating all that Jesus said about himself, all he said about spirituality, all he promised.

God continues to exercise his might in transforming sinners, changing our thought lives so we use our mouths well. Sustaining us with his empowering presence when threat arises. God gives wisdom and strength to weak people through his Son Jesus Christ.

Do you believe these things? Do you find yourself becoming aware of your brokenness and in need of help from the outside? Turn to Jesus for rescue. That is turn from sin by trusting in Jesus' death and resurrection. You can believe right now!

Christian, do you find yourself in hard places that are too much for you to bear? Turn to God in prayer. Trust in God's empowering grace. Tell your brothers and sisters how they can pray for you.