

## **Nightmare in Babylon**

Daniel 2:1-28

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*Purpose statement: The true God of history is also the God of the future.*

**Attention Getter:** Ever have a nightmare or troubling dream? We all have. Sometimes we awake startled and have trouble falling back to sleep. Other times we just think about what we dreamt the following day. Dreams originate in the subconscious mind. As we sleep our mind is still at work and sometimes spark dreams that puzzle or even frighten us.

Occasionally, we tell others about the dream and seek to find meaning. We wonder if the dream is from God, perhaps giving us direction or prompting us to action. While God, in the past, and certainly still can, use dreams, that would be the exception, not the rule. The writer of Hebrews begins his book, *“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son”* (Heb. 1:1-2a). And the words of Jesus are recorded for us in the Bible. If you want to know what God is saying to you, read the book he wrote to you.

**Introduction:** However, today’s passage is about a king whose disturbing and reoccurring God-given dream caused him to lose sleep.

**Read: Daniel 2:1-11** *“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”* (Dan. 2:11).

**Background:** The book of Daniel covers about 80 years of Daniel's life, from the time young Daniel was taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar in 605 BC and beyond the 70 years of Babylonian captivity. Although containing history (chapters 1-6) and prophecy (chapters 7-12), the theme of the book is "*God is sovereign,*" (4:17b). Four times in Daniel the Lord is called "*the Most High God*" and ten times simply, "*the Most High.*"

Chapter one begins the historical section, and records the capture of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. It also records Nebuchadnezzar's three-step plan to brainwash the Hebrew young men to become true Chaldeans. His threefold plan was to entice them with material wealth, to change their thinking by reeducating them, and to change their identity by renaming them.

Eating the food and drinking the wine prepared for the king violated the OT Jewish law and obedience to God. In a courageous act of faith, the four young captives refused to defile themselves and requested a diet consistent with God's commands. Their request was granted, and God blessed them. Subsequently, they were commissioned to stand before the king as advisors, **Dan. 1:19**. They finished their training and were busy going about the tasks given them when we pick up the narrative in chapter two.

Chapter two opens with a disturbed king who couldn't sleep.

### I. **Sleepless nights (2:1-3)**

It was the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, **Dan. 2:1a**. His second year was from the spring of 603 BC to the spring of 602 BC;<sup>1</sup> ample time for Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah to complete their training.

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<sup>1</sup> (Miller, 1994, p. 76)

Nebuchadnezzar had it all. He was at the top of the world. Born in 634 BC,<sup>2</sup> he became king at age 29, and at 32 he ruled the known world. He was the first Gentile world ruler. Yet with all that, he suffered from insomnia fueled by a troubling and reoccurring dream, **2:1b**.

What did he dream about? Let's take a quick peek ahead and see, **2:29a**. Like many of us, he was worried about the future. Would he be able to hold on to his power? Would his wealth increase? Would some army overthrow him? Would someone from the inside try to assassinate him? What about after he died, what would become of his kingdom?

In the NT, Jesus tells us not to focus on temporal things: material wealth or even our basic needs, but on the Kingdom of God and his righteousness. He then tells us, "...do not be anxious about **tomorrow**."<sup>3</sup> We need not ponder the end times or worry about what will come in the future—God has revealed them to us in his word. We only need to study and search it out—what a comfort!

But not so for Nebuchadnezzar. One scholar says the king couldn't understand his dreams because they were from God and he was unregenerate. Only men and women of God can truly understand and comprehend his word.<sup>4</sup> But this wasn't the only time God gave dreams to pagan kings. In Genesis, we find God gave dreams to Abimelech (20:3) and Pharaoh (41:1-8). Later, in Esther, we find God used the sleeplessness of King Ahasuerus to accomplish his will (Ch. 6).

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<sup>2</sup> (Ancient History Encyclopedia, [www.ancient.eu.com/Nebuchadnezzar\\_III/](http://www.ancient.eu.com/Nebuchadnezzar_III/), accessed September 2, 2013)

<sup>3</sup> (Matt. 6:25-34)

<sup>4</sup> (Cambron, 1963, p. 11)

As was the custom of kings, Nebuchadnezzar called in the heavyweights to explain the dream, **2:2**. Greatly troubled, he was desperate to know what the dream meant, **2:3**. Nebuchadnezzar wanted to know what lay in store for him? What would become of him and his kingdom? Nebuchadnezzar wanted to know what the **future** held. The strange dream only confused him and caused more anxiety.

The Bible says that God “*has put eternity in man’s heart*” (Ecc. 3:11). It’s no wonder from the beginning of time man has pondered the future and what lie in store, even after this life. As Nebuchadnezzar considered these things God answered, in a reoccurring dream, but he couldn’t figure it out. So, he turned to the highly educated. He turned to the wisest and most religious men in his kingdom.

## II. **Wise guys** (2:4-13)

Before reading the wisemen’s response, I want to point out that it is in this verse where Daniel switched and wrote in Aramaic, **Dan. 2:4a**. The words “*in Aramaic*” are best read in parentheses. It’s not that the king spoke in Hebrew and the wisemen responded in Aramaic, it’s that Daniel began writing in Aramaic. Aramaic was the common international language used in the Gentile world, and from this point to the end of chapter seven Daniel wrote in Aramaic. His primary audience in this section was not the Hebrews held captive by Babylon, but the Gentile world—and especially the Babylonians themselves.

The wisemen listened intently to the troubled king who was desperate for answers. When he finished, they confidently responded. All they needed was to know the dream and they’d tell him what it meant, **Dan. 2:4b**.

Their response is what we'd expect, "Tell us the dream and we'll tell you what it means." This was consistent with the tradition of their day. Ancient "dream manuals" that assisted wisemen in interpreting dreams have been discovered which affirm the practice.<sup>5</sup> But Nebuchadnezzar wanted more than an interpretation; he wanted more from them than what the dream meant. He first wanted them to tell him what he dreamed! Look closely back at v.2, **2:2a**.

Did they hear what he said? Perhaps they thought he misspoke, or maybe they simply ignored his unreasonable request. But Nebuchadnezzar knew good and well they heard and understood what he asked, and he wasn't happy with them.

He repeated the order with certainty, clarity, and consequences, **2:5-6**. Wow! A bit touchy wasn't he! Why was he doing this? The logic is simple, if they could not recall the **past** how could they tell the **future**? These men claimed to be the wisest, most educated, and most in touch with the gods. A god who knows the future can easily reveal the past. The God of the Bible says as much, "*I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning*" (Isa. 46:9b-10a).

Nonetheless, they again asked what he dreamt, **2:7**. Nebuchadnezzar saw this as a delay tactic to buy more time. He refused to tell them the dream and demanded an answer, **2:8-9**. Remember Nebuchadnezzar was deeply disturbed by the dream. We'll come to find out that he dreamt of a statute of a man who was crushed by a rock. Was he the man? What or who was the rock? Was it an invading army? A

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<sup>5</sup> (Baldwin, 1978, p. 97)

terminal disease? An assassin? Perhaps it was one of these wisemen plotting against him.

To this they respond with a self-indictment; all their wisdom, knowledge, sorcery, astrology, and religion were useless in recalling something of which they were unaware. Their answer is true, **2:10-11**. This truth remains today; there exists no knowledge or learning that is equal to or greater than knowledge and wisdom given by God. The writer of Hebrews put it this way, “*And no creature is **hidden** from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account*” (Heb. 4:13).

When they revealed the truth of their limitations the king became livid and vowed to execute the lot of them, **2:12**. Why shouldn't he be mad? Had he not trusted these men? Had not his father trusted their wisdom?

Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah weren't present for the exchange. Nevertheless, they were rounded up because they were wisemen, **2:13**. Daniel and his three friends had done nothing wrong. They were obedient to the Lord, yet they too were marked for execution like all their peers.

What was Daniel's knee-jerk reaction to his “pink-slip”? Did he demand his rights? Did he claim ignorance because he's new to the job? Did he lash out and fight back, or perhaps devise a plan of escape? It was time to pray.

### III. **Prayer time** (2:14-18)

Daniel learned about the king's decree when the head executioner showed up at his doorstep. Daniel's reply? Again, Daniel remained calm under the threat of death, **Dan. 2:14**. The text says he responded with *prudence and discretion*.

Rather than responding with fear and trembling, Daniel simply requested an explanation for the urgency of the command. Amazingly, Arioch, Nebuchadnezzar's chief executioner, explained the situation to Daniel, **2:15**. It's likely Arioch didn't cherish the idea of killing Daniel. He knew Nebuchadnezzar had a hot temper and made foolish decisions in the heat of anger.

Daniel made a request of the king, **2:16**. After knowing how Nebuchadnezzar responded to the other wisemen, we would think the king wouldn't give Daniel the time of day. But that's not what happened. Daniel was afforded some time.

How was it that Daniel could ask for more time and get it and the other Chaldeans could not (2:7-8)? First, Daniel said he would return with the interpretation. Second, he didn't insist he needed to know the dream. Third, he didn't say the king's request was irrational, illogical, or out-of-bounds. In fact, he said he would reveal it to the king, look again, **2:16**. Nebuchadnezzar perceived the difference between Daniel and the older wisemen.

Although Daniel and his three friends received knowledge and understanding above all the other wisemen, they went directly to the **source** of all wisdom—the Lord, **2:17-18**. That the wisest, most gifted, and talented of God's people went to him first for guidance should be a lesson to us. God answered Daniel's prayer, and he gave God the glory.

#### **IV. **Glory to God** (2:19-28)**

God revealed the dream and its interpretation to Daniel in a vision, **Daniel 2:19**. Visions are understood to come to people while they are awake, dreams during sleep. I don't think

Daniel and the three had a quick time of prayer, departed and went home to sleep. They prayed until they received an answer.

During their prayer meeting, God revealed Nebuchadnezzar's dream and its interpretation to Daniel. *"Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven."* How often do we forget to praise and honor God for answered prayer?

Daniel closed the meeting with a prayer of adoration to the one to whom belongs all *wisdom and might*, **2:20**. Daniel again affirmed that the God of the Bible is **sovereign**. He continued. The next verses affirm God uses his power and wisdom by working and controlling history as he sees fit, **2:21-22**.

Daniel concluded with thanks and praise, **2:23**.

Daniel returned to Arioch and informed him he had the interpretation. Notice both Daniel's concern for the other wise-men and his confidence, **2:24**. Arioch presented Daniel before Nebuchadnezzar and boldly declared that he found a man who can interpret the dream, **2:25**.

Some scholars are critical of Arioch saying he's trying to take some of the credit from Daniel. However, Arioch, for some reason, was quite confident that Daniel had the answer. Arioch would look pretty silly if Daniel didn't.

Nebuchadnezzar got straight to the point and asked if Daniel is able to recount the dream and know its meaning, **2:26**. Daniel reminded the king that all the wisdom, knowledge, and religion the world had to offer could not answer his troubled soul, **2:27**. At first his answer sounds depressing.

But...God, **2:28a** “*But there is a God in heaven....*” Daniel introduced the only **true** and **living** God to Nebuchadnezzar. He is the *Most High* God in whom is all wisdom, power, and might. Only he knows the beginning from the end. He is the Alpha and Omega—the beginning and the end. Our God in Heaven has the resources to meet all our needs.

**Conclusion:** *The Times of the Gentiles* began in 605 BC. God began dealing with Nebuchadnezzar, the ruler of the world in his day. For three years Nebuchadnezzar had Daniel schooled in the wisdom of man. But the tables turned, the school doors opened, and Nebuchadnezzar entered God’s school of theology. Nebuchadnezzar learned there is only one God, the “*Most High*” who rules in heaven and earth. But it took some time for him to get it.

Although God-given dreams guide us to God. God speaks to men through his word, the Bible. All of life’s experiences and all human counsel must be filtered through Scripture. Before Nebuchadnezzar’s time the prophet Isaiah wrote about God’s sovereignty, **Isa. 46:9-11**. But the true and living God doesn’t simply reign over humanity; he provides **salvation**, **46:12-13—SALVATION!**