Daniel 2: 1-16

1. Read Daniel 2: 1-3 - Nebuchadnezzar's Dream - God Can Reach Anyone

Nebuchadnezzar was a pagan king who stood at the head of the greatest empire of his day. Yet Scripture presents him as a man of remarkable ability, intelligence, and administrative competence. He was sufficiently knowledgeable to personally examine the young men who had completed their education in Babylon and assess their level of wisdom and understanding. After questioning Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, he found them "ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm" (Daniel 1:18–20). He was also an exceptionally capable military leader. Under his command Babylon became the dominant power of the ancient Near East, while his ambitious building projects testified to his vision for the greatness and permanence of his kingdom. Indeed, as he surveyed Babylon, humanly speaking, he could declare, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built…by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?" (Daniel 4:30). His great weakness was pride, but beneath that pride was a mind capable of recognizing evidence and acknowledging truth when it was convincingly demonstrated before him.

Nebuchadnezzar also appears to have possessed a measure of sincerity and fairness in his dealings with people. Although Daniel and his companions were Hebrew captives from a conquered nation, the king was prepared to elevate them when their character and abilities demonstrated their worth. Daniel was made "ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon" (Daniel 2:48), while Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were placed "over the affairs of the province of Babylon" (verse 49). Their ethnicity, nationality, and status as captives did not prevent their advancement. Nebuchadnezzar could recognize excellence wherever he found it. When confronted with convincing evidence of the superiority of Daniel's God, he was also willing, at least for a time, to acknowledge it, declaring, "Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings" (Daniel 2:47). Later, after witnessing the deliverance of the three Hebrews from the fiery furnace, he again openly acknowledged the power of their God (Daniel 3:28–29).

Nevertheless, Nebuchadnezzar was a product of Babylon. He had been trained within its philosophy, sciences, culture, and religion, and naturally viewed the supernatural world through that framework. He believed that there were mysteries beyond the ability of ordinary human observation to explain and that Babylon's magicians, astrologers, sorcerers, and Chaldeans possessed access to supernatural knowledge (Daniel 2:2). Therefore, when confronted with the troubling dream of Daniel 2, he instinctively turned to the men in whom his culture, education, and experience had taught him to place confidence. He was not initially seeking the God of Israel; he was seeking an answer. Yet in His providence, God allowed every human and pagan resource upon which the king depended to fail. The wise men themselves were forced to confess, "There is none other that can shew it before the king, except the gods" (Daniel 2:11). At precisely that point, God brought Daniel forward and revealed that "there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets" (Daniel 2:28). God met Nebuchadnezzar where he was and began leading him from the limited light he possessed toward greater truth.

In like manner, there are honest-hearted and sincere individuals serving in governments today who genuinely desire to do what they believe is best for their countries and their people. They may not understand the Scriptures as we do; they may operate from political, philosophical, religious, or even secular worldviews very different from our own. Yet God alone knows the heart and sees motives that human beings cannot see. Rather than assuming that everyone in political authority is corrupt or beyond the reach of divine influence, Christians are specifically instructed to pray for them. Paul writes, "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority" (1 Timothy 2:1–2). Our responsibility, therefore, is not merely to criticize those who govern, but to lift them before God continually, praying that He will give them wisdom, restrain evil, surround them with godly influences, and bring honest-hearted leaders into contact with

truth. The God who reached the throne room of pagan Babylon and patiently worked upon the heart of Nebuchadnezzar is still able to reach the hearts of presidents, prime ministers, kings, governors, legislators, and rulers today, for “the king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD” (Prov. 21:1).

2. Daniel 2: 4-9 - Wise Men are Tested - Human wisdom has limitations

What is wisdom? Wisdom is rightly applying knowledge to power to produce that which is good and beneficial to ourselves and those around us. Knowledge tells us what can be done; power gives us the ability to do it; but wisdom determines how knowledge and power should be applied and toward what end.

Interestingly, the wisdom from beneath and the wisdom from above may sometimes appear to function in similar ways. Both may employ intelligence, knowledge, planning, strategy, influence, and available resources to accomplish an objective. Yet there is one fundamental element that distinguishes them, the motive or intent of the heart. The wisdom from beneath is ultimately driven by self-interest: What will preserve me? What will advance my interests? What will secure my position? By contrast, the wisdom from above is governed by selfless love: What is right? What will glorify God? What will truly benefit others? James draws this distinction clearly: “If ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not… This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish” (James 3:14, 15). But “the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits” (verse 17).

The wisdom from beneath therefore has tremendous limitations. Because it begins with a defective motive, it can never consistently produce the fruit of righteousness. The great danger is that we may employ this earthly wisdom while sincerely believing that we are being directed by the God of heaven. We may pray over our plans, attach God's name to our decisions, and even experience apparent success, while still operating according to human reasoning and self-interest. But Jesus declared, “Wisdom is justified of her children” (Matthew 11:19). Eventually, the fruit reveals the nature of the wisdom that produced it. Sometimes the consequences appear immediately; at other times they may be separated from the original decision by months or even years. The connection may become so distant that we fail to recognize the harvest as the consequence of the seed we planted. Nevertheless, the principle remains: “Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Galatians 6:7).

In His mercy, God sometimes permits circumstances to develop until we are brought face-to-face with the inadequacy of our own wisdom. Plans fail, trusted methods disappoint us, human resources prove insufficient, and the very things upon which we depended can no longer provide the answers we need. God does not permit these experiences merely to frustrate us, but to teach us the limitations of our own way: “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Proverbs 14:12). When our wisdom reaches its limit, an opportunity is created for us to seek another kind of wisdom, the wisdom that comes from above.

Thus, God sometimes allows our way to fail so that we can finally become willing to embrace His way. He brings us to the place where we cease asking Him merely to bless what we have decided to do and begin asking Him what He desires to do. Then knowledge, ability, influence, and power are surrendered to divine direction. Instead of attempting to accomplish God's work through our wisdom, we permit God to accomplish His work through us according to His wisdom. “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths” (Proverbs 3:5–6). The great lesson, therefore, is not simply that we need more wisdom, but that we need wisdom from above, God’s purposes accomplished by God's principles, through God's power, in God's way.

3. Daniel 2: 10, 11 - Chaldeans Confess Inability - Humanity Needs Revelation From Above

It does not matter how intelligent, accomplished, or highly educated a person may be; every human being remains desperately dependent upon the guidance of the God of heaven. “O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jeremiah 10:23). In Eden, Satan suggested to Eve, and through her to Adam, that humanity could become “as gods, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:5); in other words, they could determine for themselves what was right and wrong rather than remaining dependent upon and accountable to their Creator. It was a lie, but humanity embraced it, and that same spirit of independence continues today. Education and intellectual achievement are valuable gifts, but when they become substitutes for divine guidance, they can actually strengthen human self-confidence and lead us farther from God. “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Proverbs 14:12). The problem, therefore, is not education itself, but trusting human knowledge as though it were sufficient to navigate life without the wisdom of God.

Paul describes this tragedy when he writes, “When they knew God, they glorified him not as God… but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools”(Romans 1:21–22). This danger confronts rulers, politicians, scholars, and indeed every human being who places ultimate confidence in human wisdom. Yet God, in His mercy, continually seeks avenues through which He can penetrate those barriers of self-sufficiency and bring the human heart back to dependence upon Him. Sometimes He permits circumstances that are uncomfortable, perplexing, and even humiliating, not merely to punish, but to expose the inadequacy of human wisdom and create an opportunity for us to seek His. Nebuchadnezzar learned this lesson when his own greatness was brought low until he finally declared, “I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me” (Daniel 4:34). Sometimes God must allow the machinery of human wisdom to fail so that we may finally recognize the folly of trusting in ourselves and discover that “the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God” (1 Cor. 3:19).

4. Daniel 2: 12, 13 - Death Decree Issued - God’s people are not exempt from Crisis

Death is called “the last enemy that shall be destroyed” (1 Corinthians 15:26); therefore, the threat of death represents one of the ultimate tests of character. The final generation will face precisely such a test, when those who refuse false worship are threatened with death (Revelation 13:15). Yet God's people will stand with the Lamb, having learned complete surrender to Him (Revelation 14:1–5). When we can place even life itself in God's hands, saying with the three Hebrews, “Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us... But if not... we will not serve thy gods” (Daniel 3:17–18), we are developing the faith necessary for the final crisis and preparation for translation.

Significantly, however, victory over the threat of death in Daniel 3 was preceded by victory over appetite in Daniel 1. Before the Hebrews stood before the fiery furnace, they first stood faithfully before the king's table. Daniel “purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself” (Daniel 1:8). Thus Solomon's counsel, “Put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite” (Proverbs 23:2), takes on profound significance. Appetite is one of the earliest schools of self-government. He who, through divine power, learns to say *No* to appetite is being trained to say *No* when obedience to God may cost him his life. Paul therefore declared, “I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection” (1 Cor. 9:27).

This principle reaches directly into the final conflict. Revelation 13 presents a people commanded to conform under threat of economic deprivation and death (Revelation 13:15–17), while Revelation 14 presents those who refuse because they “keep the

commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus" (Revelation 14:12). The issue changes, but the principle remains: Will appetite, convenience, fear, or self-preservation control us, or will God? Daniel's progression is therefore instructive, the table before the furnace; temperance before the death decree; self-government before the ultimate test of loyalty. Nor should it be overlooked that the great prophetic revelations of Daniel were entrusted to a man who had first demonstrated obedience in practical matters, including diet. Daniel's life illustrates that spiritual perception and practical obedience belong together. "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink... do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31). God is preparing a people whose bodies, appetites, minds, and wills are surrendered to Him. The discipline that enables us to deny appetite today is part of the preparation that will enable us, by God's grace, to deny self when obedience may cost everything tomorrow.

Recent Examples of Innocent Individuals Penalized Because of Group Association

After Japan attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, fear and suspicion swept the United States. In 1942, Executive Order 9066 led to the forced removal and incarceration of about 120,000 people of Japanese ancestry, most of whom were U.S. citizens. They were not individually found guilty of espionage or treason; they suffered principally because they belonged to the group regarded as a potential threat. In that limited but important sense, their experience illustrates Daniel's predicament: "the decree went forth that the wise men should be slain; and they sought Daniel and his fellows to be slain" (Daniel 2:13). Daniel had not been consulted by the king and failed to interpret the dream, yet the decree reached him because he was numbered among Babylon's wise men.

A second powerful example is the German-American experience during World War I, though it was less sweeping than Japanese-American incarceration. After the United States entered the war against Germany in 1917, thousands of German nationals living in America were registered as "enemy aliens," with restrictions placed upon their movements and activities, and several thousand were interned. Many people of German ancestry also encountered intense suspicion and hostility simply because of their ethnic connection to the enemy nation. The parallel should therefore be stated carefully: they were not all sentenced to death or incarcerated, but people could find themselves treated as dangerous because of the category into which the government placed them rather than because of individually proven of wrongdoing.

Sometimes the crisis that threatens your life will not be a crisis you created. You may simply wake up one morning and discover that because of the group to which you belong, a decision made somewhere above you has placed your property, liberty, livelihood, or even life in jeopardy. The question then becomes: Have you developed Daniel's character before Daniel's crisis arrives?