

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 Hammar-skjöld 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?

**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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Key Text: *Daniel 2:21.*

Teachers Aims:

1. To behold how God works through His faithful people to bless and to save others.
2. To understand where we are in Bible prophecy and the need to be faithful to God.
3. To recognize that God may call us to stand before rulers as His mouthpiece.

Lesson Outline:

I. God Reveals the Future to Nebuchadnezzar (*Dan. 2:1-13*).

- A. God alone knows the future.
- B. Nebuchadnezzar's dream, though forgotten, leaves him feeling disturbed.

II. Daniel's Prayer and Testimony (*Dan. 2:14-20*).

- A. Daniel and his friends pray to God to reveal the king's dream and to spare their lives.
- B. Daniel praises and thanks God for revealing the meaning of the dream.
- C. Daniel publicly acknowledges God before the king.

III. The Interpretation of the Dream (*Dan. 2:28-45*).

- A. Daniel gives sole credit to God for the wisdom to understand the dream.
- B. The time period represented by the image spans from Babylon to earth's latter days.
- C. The stone that destroys the image symbolizes that God will destroy all other kingdoms and establish an everlasting kingdom.

Summary: "The power exercised by every ruler on the earth is Heaven-imparted. . . . In the word of God only is this clearly set forth. Here it is shown that the strength of nations, as of individuals, is not found in the opportunities or facilities that appear to make them invincible; it is not found in their boasted greatness. It is measured by the fidelity with which they fulfill God's purpose." —Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 502.

COMMENTARY

I. Prophecy and Prophets in the Bible.

Prophecy is commonly regarded as being about the foretelling of future events. Indeed, the prophets of the Bible almost always predicted what was and is to come as a result of certain patterns of behavior.

The Bible states that fulfilled predictions are one of the criteria by which we may judge the truth and accuracy of a prophet's claim to speak for God (*Deut. 18:21, 22; Jer. 28:5-9*).

However, a close look at biblical prophecy reveals that its primary focus is not on future events but on the God who inspired the prophets and who is ultimately determining the course of the world. One is still

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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

a false prophet even if one predicts with startling accuracy but fails to direct the hearer's attention to the source of true prophecy, God Himself. As *The Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* states: "True prophecy consists of a revelation from God and the proclamation of what has been revealed. Counterfeit prophecy always will include proclamation, but there will be no revelation that it has its origin with God" (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald, 2000), p. 621. It is informative to know the meaning of the word *prophecy*. Its Greek roots mean literally to "speak out" on behalf of God, or in the case of false prophets, gods. In ancient times, prophets made predictions to establish the superior knowledge or omniscience of their deities.

From this we can see that the accuracy of a particular prophecy is necessary, but not sufficient, for it to be considered of divine origin. Daniel and other Old Testament prophets can be relied upon not only because their predictions can be verified but also because of the harmonious picture of God's character they present.

II. Useful Quotes About Prophecy and Prophets.

"Prophets stood before the people as representatives of the Lord. Their very presence showed the people that God was sufficiently interested in them and close enough to them to choose men from among them to represent Him. They were men 'subject to like passions' as their neighbors; not visitors from another world, but men among men. While the plan was subject to dangers because of the weakness of humanity in the person selected, yet it possessed inherent possibilities for success not present in any other method."—T. Housel Jemison, *A Prophet Among You* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press®, 1955), p. 24.

"The chief function of Old Testament prophecy was to prepare a race and a world for the coming of Christ. In the fullness of Christ there was gathered and united all the virtues and efficacy [capabilities; usefulness] of divine prophecy. In His ministry on earth there was presented the highest service and benediction of the prophetic gift."—Paul E. Quimby, *Messages of the Prophets* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press®, 1946), p. 21.

"The idea that every prophecy uttered by a true prophet will come to pass, and that unfulfilled prophecy shows a prophet is false, will not stand in the presence of Scripture. The very fact that predictions made by prophets who have proved to be true have not come to pass forces the consideration of at least two categories of prophecy: conditional and unconditional."—*The Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, p. 626.

"The word [*nabi*, the Hebrew word usually translated as 'prophet'] can be traced to an Akkadian root, and the choice is between the prophet as one who is called, or one who calls, *i.e.* [that is], to men in the name of God. Either of these will admirably suit the

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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

nature of the prophet as found in the Old Testament. The possibility that the prophet is one who calls to God, in prayer, has not been canvassed, but that too, and apparently from the start (Gen. 20:7), was a mark of a prophetic man.”—*The Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Leicester, Eng.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980), part 3, p. 1278.

III. What the Bible Says About Prophets and Prophecy.

“I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. . . . But the prophet, which shall

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Psalm 145, Daniel 2, Amos 3:7.*

- 1 For decades Daniel 2 has been used to kick off the Adventist evangelistic series. It gives a quick outline of historical events from the kingdom of Babylon to the second coming of Christ, proving the credibility of Bible prophecy. Is prophecy still an effective evangelistic “hook”? What other subthemes in this chapter could be used evangelistically to tell people about God’s character and power?
- 2 Daniel and his friends were not initially consulted about the king’s dream, yet they were directly affected by the astrologers’ failure to interpret it. What gave their request to Arioch credibility? What gave Daniel influence in Nebuchadnezzar’s court? What are the implications for us in our spheres of influence?
- 3 In broad terms, list at least three things Daniel and his friends might have prayed for as they faced their imminent execution. Compare the prayer they might have prayed with the example Jesus gave in Matthew 6:9-13.
- 4 God’s answer to Daniel’s prayer saved him, his friends, and other individuals in Nebuchadnezzar’s court. How are our lives a saving influence in our homes, churches, work places, and communities? Read Matthew 5:13-16. List three ways that you, as an individual, are salt and light in your community. List three ways your congregation makes a difference in your town.
- 5 Read Matthew 7:24-27. In what ways is this rock similar to the stone Daniel saw in Nebuchadnezzar’s vision? In what ways is it different? List the things in your life that would survive a rock that breaks “the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces” (*Dan. 2:45, NIV*).

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*.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die” (*Deut. 18:18-20*).

“He [God] sent prophets to them [Israel], to bring them again unto the Lord” (*2 Chron. 24:19*).

“I [God] will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions” (*Joel 2:28*).

“To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to

Witnessing

In his book *Planet in Rebellion*, George Vandeman shares the story of Kaiser Wilhelm, who, at the height of his power and influence, was faced with the formidable task of understanding and accepting the explanation of a certain prophecy. For some time, Wilhelm suffered difficulty in fully grasping the prophecy’s meaning. Finally, after he began to understand the full significance of it, and as he began to see what its fulfillment would mean to him personally, he called out, “I can’t accept it! It doesn’t fit in with my plans!” (Nashville, Tenn.: Southern Publishing Association, 1960), p. 128.

What arrogance, we say; how egotistical and self-serving. Yet, are we not sometimes guilty of the same arrogance? How often do we refuse to accept God’s leading and His counsel simply because it doesn’t meet our expectations, timing, desires, or needs?

For instance, the prophetic light and counsel regarding Christian living practices as revealed by Ellen G. White, whom the Seventh-day Adventist Church believes to have been given the gift of prophecy, have, at times, been ignored or dismissed. Often, this is because her writings are perceived by some to be overly restrictive, out-of-date, or irrelevant. Yet, her revelations on healthful living are consistently echoed by leading secular experts around the world.

Similarly, Daniel received prophetic revelations that have been confirmed by historical events. Biblical prophecy outlines for us specific world events that foretell the closing of earth’s history. Daily news reports and political analysis affirm that these events are taking place at this very time around the globe, all of which confirm the end time is near—very near. Yet, many continue to pretend that the darkening religious, economic, and political climate that swirls around us is temporary, that things will soon *improve*. Quite simply, this is just not going to happen.

Knowing what we know, don’t you feel the urgency to tell *everyone* about Christ’s soon coming? Are you doing *everything* you can to share this message with others you meet?

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?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

this word, it is because there is no light in them” (*Isa. 8:20*).

“Worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (*Rev. 19:10*).

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: In this age of mass communication via cell phones, pagers, instant messaging, and so forth, isn't it comforting to know that communion with our Best Friend, our Lord and Savior, is only a thought away? Electricity, satellites, or microwaves are not required in order to send Him a silent cry for help or to breathe a “Thank You” to Him for His protection. We can whisper His name any time, any place. Gifted neurosurgeon Dr. Ben Carson says that for him, prayer is not only something he needs every day but all through the day.

Do you take full advantage of this open-communication life-line with your heavenly Father? Ask others in your class the same question.

Thought Question:

We are told to “come boldly unto the throne of grace” (*Heb. 4:16*). What exactly does this mean? Describe a personal situation during which you did this very thing—approached God boldly. What was God's response? What does this say about the way God answers prayers? Are our prayers always answered?

Application Questions:

① Daniel was prepared to address his earthly king's questions regarding the king's dream because he had fully communicated first with his heavenly King. How can you apply the same principle to your daily-life activities? We are told we must be completely dependent on God. Does this mean that it is always necessary to counsel with God before we undertake anything in life? God has provided His children with intelligence and the ability to use it, so doesn't He expect us to proceed on that basis? How do we know when to ask for guidance?

② While Nebuchadnezzar's dream was apocalyptic in meaning and heaven sent, most dreams do not fall into that category. So, how are we to discern the difference? What wisdom in the Bible can we turn to for guidance?

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.