

Group Study Outline

Daniel 2 Theme Sentence

Only the God of history can reveal the future that his everlasting kingdom will crush all other kingdoms.

Launching Question

What do we know about the future?

Can we trust God with the future? Why or why not?

ONLY THE GOD OF HISTORY CAN REVEAL THE FUTURE

READ Daniel 2:1-23

What does this story reveal about Nebuchadnezzar?

What is the problem for the magicians/enchanters/sorcerers of verse 2?

What is the theological significance of v12? (cf 1:1-2)

Where does the explanation of the dream come from? how does this fit with v11?

Why are we told Daniel's prayer (before we're told the dream)?

What does Daniel's prayer reveal about God?

Thinking it through

How does this story answer the question about whether God rules over everything that happens in the world?

GOD'S EVERLASTING KINGDOM WILL CRUSH ALL OTHER KINGDOMS

READ Daniel 2:24-47

What is the surprise in v28? (*eg what would you feel if you were a faithful Jew?*)

What is the surprise in v37-38? (*Consider both the title and authority given to Nebuchadnezzar, and also the man to whom 'the God of heaven' gives it.*)

Why is v34-35 and 44-45 shocking for Nebuchadnezzar, 'the king of kings'?

How and when is this fulfilled?

Why is v34-35 and 44-45 enormously reassuring to God's people (inc Daniel)?

How and when is this fulfilled for God's people?

So how does verse 48-49 fit in: why do so many of the stories end like this?

Thinking it through

What kind of a God has revealed himself to Nebuchadnezzar?

Why is it important to think of God with this kind of international sway over all peoples and all powerful rulers (as opposed to him just being the Christians' God)?

How does this powerful dream make you feel about 'the God of heaven'?

Wrapping it up

How does this story affect the way that you might now read newspapers?

How does this story affect the way that you might feel about anything that happens in your life (whether good stuff or bad stuff)?

Daniel 2



Introduction

Daniel is a book about God. So, in these studies, we want to ask first what it is that we learn about him, and the lessons for us come from 'the big picture' of what is going on historically with the nation of Israel and why, and what God reveals about his overall purposes for the world.

The book tells a tale of two cities:

- **Jerusalem** is God's holy city. If we want to see it, we need to look up (cf Revelation 21: 2) ... it's not here yet, but it is coming.
- **Babylon** is where God's people live until the new Jerusalem comes. God's people are in exile, living in a city that represents human depravity (cf Genesis 11:1-9). We are 'aliens and strangers' (1 Peter 2:11-12).

A good subtitle for the book would be 'Kingdoms in conflict': God's people belong in God's kingdom, but currently are exiled in Babylon. This poses a question: does the defeat of Israel amount to a defeat of Israel's God? Is God finished too? Here is a contest over which kingdom is stronger. This comes out most clearly in chapter 2 (which pairs with chapter 7) where we discover that...

- only the God of history can reveal the future (verses 1-23);
- God's everlasting kingdom will crush all other kingdoms (verses 24-47).

[NS & NB]

Daniel 2 Theme Sentence

Only the God of history can reveal the future that his everlasting kingdom will crush all other kingdoms.

Application

- Remember that these events are not normative so the application isn't about dream interpretation! That specific situation shows us that God knows all mysteries and holds the future securely, not that we can get insider info on the details of our lives. We don't need to because...
- ...we can trust God! Even in hard times. He has it all planned out and will act to preserve His people. We see that in the way God protects Daniel and his friends, but also in the dream which shows God's kingdom winning in the end.
- God is all-knowing and wise, so when He speaks on a matter, we need to treat that as the wisest thing. His wisdom is far better than the world's.
- Praise God for His wisdom! Daniel wants no praise for himself (v30) and the punch-line of the story is a pagan king praising God too (v47).

Commentary

ONLY THE GOD OF HISTORY CAN REVEAL THE FUTURE

- 1 This is early in Nebuchadnezzar's reign. We do not know whether his unmatched strength as conqueror of the known world made him respected, popular and secure. Or whether his many campaigns are driven by anxiety to consolidate his new empire and build up personal prestige; maybe this dream reveals that kind of inner insecurity.
- 2 Presumably this group had been nurtured in all things Chaldean (just as Daniel and the cream of Judah had been in chapter 1). Verse 13 implies that Daniel was somehow lumped together with them (cf 1:20).
- 3 It's not certain why Nebuchadnezzar doesn't divulge the dream: is he testing if they are clever enough to know it anyway, or maybe it's one of those dreams that you can't remember the next day.
- 11 Here is the real problem these astrologers face: an inadequate god. They think their god might know, but he's distant and inaccessible. In making such a comment, they turn the story of this chapter into a theological contest centred on the ability and character of god/God: is there a god/God who can reveal the future?
- 13 This verse heightens the theological problem of the exile (1:1-2): as his people face extinction, as these four face execution, the question is whether God too is defeated. What is God able to do? Is he like the gods of verse 11, too absent to be of any practical use? Of course, for the Jew, God's 'dwelling' on earth is the Jerusalem temple... but this story will show that he's not trapped back there, aloof from his people.
- 16-23 is the answer to that question (in the revelation of 19). But first, Daniel prays, and he asks his friends to pray too (17-18) ... not because there is some inherent 'power in prayer' but because he has confidence in the power of the God to whom he prays. He's so confident that he books the appointment with the king before he's even been told anything (16)!

And then, before the author reveals what the dream was/means, there is something he is eager for us to understand first, about God himself:

- God is the God of history (21a)
- the God of history reveals the future (21b-22)

Of course, if he wasn't the God of history, he couldn't reveal the future. Or to put it another way, God isn't just a celestial tea-leaf reader ... he is also the one who arranges the tea-leaves, for he has power over all that the tea-leaves represent! Here then is the answer to the question posed by verse 13. And, of course, this is part of the answer to the bigger question of the exile: if God is the God of history, then the fact that Israel are in Babylon must be his doing (as indeed it is, for he promised it would be so cf Deut 28:15, 25, 36-37, 43, 48).

GOD'S EVERLASTING KINGDOM WILL CRUSH ALL OTHER KINGDOMS

The second half of the chapter teaches us three important (and surprising) things about God:

- 28 **God reveals the future to a pagan king.** The God of Israel, sovereign over history and nations, chose to make known his plans for world history initially not to Daniel (and his faithful support group busy praying in 18), but to a pagan king who didn't yet acknowledge him. Of course it still needed a man of God to interpret it (which is why God revealed this mystery to Daniel too in 19). Just as with the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8 (to whom God sent Philip as explainer), and Cornelius in Acts 10 (to whom God sent Peter to explain the gospel), God's normal way of explaining his revelation is via a preacher.
- 37-38 **God gives power to pagan kings.** This verse is very like Genesis 1:28. Just as Adam was called by God to exercise the rule of God, so too is Nebuchadnezzar (which again is also very similar to Daniel 7:14 referring to Jesus, the Man). This may not seem surprising, until we remember just how pagan and anti-God this king is. A New Testament control for this would be Romans 13:1-7 ... even a pagan, governing authority is instituted by God, and therefore to be feared and obeyed; they are 'ministers of God' just as Nebuchadnezzar can be described as God's servant (cf Jeremiah 25:9).
- 34-35 explained in 44-45. **God will judge all peoples, powers and authorities.** It turns out that the enormously impressive image has 'feet of clay' ... it looks grand, but it is flawed. Eventually it topples, not because of some inherent weakness or instability but because it is pushed over. Presumably it is not clear to Nebuchadnezzar (after 34-35) which part he is to play in the dream: is he the pulverising rock to smash all his enemies, or the fragile statue to be toppled? Verse 37 seems to exalt him as the former (cf 'king of kings'). But the irony in this verse is that this same 'king of kings' was given all of his rule by the 'Lord of kings' (47), the God of heaven. As the interpretation continues, unsurprisingly, it turns out to be the God of heaven's kingdom, the one from outside (= 'the stone not made by human hands') that will fill the whole earth and last for ever. God's kingdom will finally establish itself without rival and without opposition.
- 48-49 It is important to face reality in a chapter that has taken us to such lofty heights exalting the invincible might of our God. Whilst that is true, it is all being spoken whilst his people are in chains. But, like a repeating drumbeat echoing throughout the stories in the first half of the book (cf 1:21; 2:48-49; 3:30; 5:29; 6:28), in the midst of the degrading exile, the writer hints at what is to come: 'remember, oh you great ones of Babylon, that things will change ... the people who will win eventually is made up of those who continue at court throughout the comings and goings of this world's powerful people. It's not you, but them.'