

Daniel 2 • Hearing, But Not Doing

Introduction

Within each of the first six chapters of Daniel is an example of a different kind of situation in which Believers will find their selves as witnesses of God's Word and ways. In the second chapter of Daniel we have the example of a sincere spiritual seeker. Ultimately the seeker's thirst for knowledge is quenched, but does not meet the biblical criteria by which hearing God is proved: actually **DOING** what God said and, putting it into practice. But as so often is the case, the issue isn't solely about whether or not the message is received, but how the messenger conducts themselves in the process. The most powerful lesson contained herein may be that maintaining personal faithfulness has a greater range of impact on those about us than we might imagine.

¹Now in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; and his spirit was troubled and his sleep left him. ²Then the king gave orders to call in the magicians, the conjurers, the sorcerers and the Chaldeans to tell the king his dreams. So they came in and stood before the king. ³The king said to them, "I had a dream and my spirit is anxious to understand the dream."

[Read v.1-3]

Q: What is probably the chief source of Nebuchadnezzar's anxiousness? How is this revealed by the seeming contradiction of Daniel having been in Babylon a number of years to this point but it here states it was "the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar"?

A: The secular historical record shows that Nebuchadnezzar's early public actions, such as invading Judah, were undertaken by him personally although he was not yet officially the king of Babylon; he was acting for his father, Nabopolassar. So there isn't actually any contradiction since this refers to the 2nd year of his reign proper.

It's most likely, therefore, that Nebuchadnezzar is anxious about his future and whether or not the Babylonian kingdom under his direct authority would last.

Q: How is Nebuchadnezzar's problem exacerbated? Why does it become the number one issue in his life?

A: God gave Nebuchadnezzar a dream which answered his questions concerning the future, but he could not understand it. He knew the answer was available, but he lacked the ability to grasp it.

Point: There are non-believers who know they need a spiritual answer to their most pressing problems, but because they lack the Holy Spirit, cannot figure it out on their own. They become spiritual seekers in search of the answer they're confident exists yet eludes.

⁴Then the Chaldeans spoke to the king in Aramaic: "O king, live forever! Tell the dream to your servants, and we will declare the interpretation."

⁵The king replied to the Chaldeans, "The command from me is firm: if you do not make known to me the dream and its interpretation, you will be torn limb from limb and your houses will be made a rubbish heap. ⁶But if you declare the dream and its interpretation, you will receive from me gifts and a reward and great honor; therefore declare to me the dream and its interpretation."

⁷They answered a second time and said, "Let the king tell the dream to his servants, and we will declare the interpretation."

[Read v.4-13]

Q: What is Nebuchadnezzar revealing about the spiritual advisors in how he treats them?

1. In the past, where it concerned issues in which he had a lot less personal interest vested than this one, he probably did not take them seriously; he probably only consulted them as a courtesy or to give the appearance of his concern for the spiritual meaning of things.
2. In the present, he is clearly exercising his doubt as to their authenticity. Nebuchadnezzar is seeking the truth without regard for political correctness or the traditions of the institutions of his day.
3. He clearly sees their chief behavior as rooted in deception as they bargain for more time and seek to change the king's mind, another affirmation that his chief concern is obtaining the truth.

[Continued on the next page.]

⁸The king replied, “I know for certain that you are bargaining for time, inasmuch as you have seen that the command from me is firm,⁹ that if you do not make the dream known to me, there is only one decree for you. For you have agreed together to speak lying and corrupt words before me until the situation is changed; therefore tell me the dream, that I may know that you can declare to me its interpretation.”

¹⁰The Chaldeans answered the king and said, “There is not a man on earth who could declare the matter for the king, inasmuch as no great king or ruler has ever asked anything like this of any magician, conjurer or Chaldean.¹¹ Moreover, the thing which the king demands is difficult, and there is no one else who could declare it to the king except gods, whose dwelling place is not with mortal flesh.”

¹²Because of this the king became indignant and very furious and gave orders to destroy all the wise men of Babylon.¹³ So the decree went forth that the wise men should be slain; and they looked for Daniel and his friends to kill them.

¹⁴Then Daniel replied with discretion and discernment to Arioch, the captain of the king’s bodyguard, who had gone forth to slay the wise men of Babylon;¹⁵ he said to Arioch, the king’s commander, “For what reason is the decree from the king so urgent? Then Arioch informed Daniel about the matter.¹⁶ So Daniel went in and requested of the king that he would give him time, in order that he might declare the interpretation to the king.

¹⁷Then Daniel went to his house and informed his friends, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, about the matter,¹⁸ so that they might request compassion from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his friends would not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.

¹⁹Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a night vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven;²⁰ Daniel said,

“Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever,

For wisdom and power belong to Him.

²¹It is He who changes the times and the epochs;

Q: How is it that the magicians and Chaldeans actually had the right answer?

A: In v.11 they admit in desperation that “*there is no one else who could declare it to the king except gods*”. They ironically stumble onto the correct answer that with man it’s futile, but with God nothing is impossible. They’re essentially admitting that their own claims of power and wisdom have no heavenly origin and that they’re limited to the resources of men.

Point: *Spiritual seekers need someone who can be a conduit to God, not a counterfeit replacement of Him. They may not be able to know the absolute truth, but often recognize spiritual counterfeits.*

Q: What can be inferred from the fact that Daniel and company were NOT among these spiritual charlatans and had to be located separately?

A: They were living **IN** the world, but not **OF** the world, keeping themselves as separated as possible from those spiritual influences recognized to be bad. Among other things, this ensured that they could not be mistaken as a member of the wrong crowd by constant affiliation with them.

Point: *Taking the stage with known, false believers not only transfers your credibility to them, but makes you a target because of them as well.*

[Read v.14-23]

Q: What is different in the way the king treated Daniel versus all his other spiritual advisors?

A: The king denied the wise men’s request for more time because he saw that it was an insincere attempt to avoid solving a problem they could not solve in the first place. But those about the king risked acceding to Daniel’s request, indicating that they saw something visibly different about Daniel’s demeanor and character.

Q: Why do you suppose God did not immediately provide the answer through Daniel the first time he went to the king?

A: This is most likely a test of faith not just for the king, but for Daniel and his companions as well.

Q: How did they go about seeking the answer?

A: They immediately approached God in prayer.

But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

James 1:5

Q: But what exactly was their prayer based on? What is the chief attribute of God’s character to which they appealed?

A: They did not merely ask for knowledge, for they knew that God not only obviously knew the answer but was also purposely keeping it from being revealed. The approach was “*that they might request **compassion***”

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He removes kings and establishes kings;
He gives wisdom to wise men
And knowledge to men of understanding.
²²It is He who reveals the profound and
hidden things;
He knows what is in the darkness,
And the light dwells with Him.
²³To You, O God of my fathers, I give
thanks and praise,
For You have given me wisdom and
power;
Even now You have made known to me
what we requested of You,
For You have made known to us the
king's matter."

from God", that is they appealed to His grace.

Q: What did they do in the course of seeking God's grace that proved they are true hearers of God's Word who put it into practice and actually live by it?

A: They didn't merely ask for their own lives, but included a plea for the lives of their enemies. They themselves had compassion and love for others.

Point: *Through the other major prophets, God often established that the lack of love for Him was proved by people's mistreatment, and therefore lack of love, for others. The proof of obedience to the "first tablet" is obedience to the "second tablet".*

Q: What can we learn from Daniel's initial response to receiving the answer to his prayer?

A: He did not rush off to employ it, but paused to render God the proper praise and worship due Him. It's yet another indication of his right heart.

*The secret of the LORD is for those who fear Him,
And He will make them know His covenant.
Proverbs 25:14*

Point: *There is no limit to what God will do for believers who allow God all the glory.*

Q: What are the action verbs listed in v.21-22 which indicate God's sovereignty over history and all things prophetic?

A: "Changes", "removes", "gives", "reveals", and "knows".

Q: What are the things over which He exercises complete control listed in those same verses?

A: "Times and epochs", "kings", "wise men", "profound and hidden things", and "what is in the darkness".

Point: *God is the answer for BOTH the spiritual as represented by Daniel, and the unspiritual as represented by Nebuchadnezzar. The largest difference between the two is seeking and being transformed by the Source of all knowledge rather than merely coming into contact with it.*

[Read v.24-30]

Q: When Daniel returns to the king with the answer, what is the first thing he does?

A: Although "the wise men of Babylon" were worthy of death, Daniel intercedes on their behalf. God's Word had transformed Daniel's basic behavior to the point that he did not hate his enemies. His personal witness therefore was not just limited to the king alone, but to the wise men, the guards, and all who were aware of the situation.

Q: What does Nebuchadnezzar affirm to Daniel as his utmost desire?

A: To know the truth. (v.26)

Q: How does Daniel begin his response? How does it actually fit in with what the spiritual advisors originally told the king?

A: In v.11 they declared, "there is no one else who could declare it to the king except gods, whose dwelling place is not with mortal flesh". Here

²⁴Therefore, Daniel went in to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to destroy the wise men of Babylon; he went and spoke to him as follows: "Do not destroy the wise men of Babylon! Take me into the king's presence, and I will declare the interpretation to the king."

²⁵Then Arioch hurriedly brought Daniel into the king's presence and spoke to him as follows: "I have found a man among the exiles from Judah who can make the interpretation known to the king!"

²⁶The king said to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, "Are you able to make known to me the dream which I have seen and its interpretation?"

²⁷Daniel answered before the king and said, "As for the mystery about which the

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king has inquired, neither wise men, conjurers, magicians nor diviners are able to declare it to the king. ²⁸However, there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will take place in the latter days. This was your dream and the visions in your mind while on your bed. ²⁹As for you, O king, while on your bed your thoughts turned to what would take place in the future; and He who reveals mysteries has made known to you what will take place. ³⁰But as for me, this mystery has not been revealed to me for any wisdom residing in me more than in any other living man, but for the purpose of making the interpretation known to the king, and that you may understand the thoughts of your mind.

³¹“You, O king, were looking and behold, there was a single great statue; that statue, which was large and of extraordinary splendor, was standing in front of you, and its appearance was awesome. ³²The head of that statue was made of fine gold, its breast and its arms of silver, its belly and its thighs of bronze, ³³its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. ³⁴You continued looking until a stone was cut out without hands, and it struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and crushed them. ³⁵Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were crushed all at the same time and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away so that not a trace of them was found. But the stone that struck the statue became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

³⁶“This was the dream; now we will tell its interpretation before the king.

³⁷“You, O king, are the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, the strength and the glory; ³⁸and wherever the sons of men dwell, or the beasts of the field, or the birds of the sky, He has given them into your hand and has caused you to rule over them all. You are the head of gold.

³⁹“After you there will arise another kingdom inferior to you, then another third kingdom of bronze, which will rule over all the earth.

⁴⁰“Then there will be a fourth kingdom as strong as iron; inasmuch as iron crushes and shatters all things, so, like

Daniel actually affirms that very assertion, restating a little more forcefully that this is **EXACTLY** the Source of the answer: not man, but the One True God.

Q: What, precisely, is God revealing to Nebuchadnezzar?

A: “The future”. (v.29)

Q: And what is God’s purpose in revealing the future to Nebuchadnezzar?

A: “...for the purpose...that you may understand the thoughts of your mind”. (v.30) Although the information deals with the future, it addresses the more critical needs of the present. It’s an indication that Nebuchadnezzar’s **PRESENT** condition needs to be changed.

Point: All a Believer can do for a non-Believer is allow the voice of God to be heard. Daniel didn’t offer his personal opinion nor assert his own thoughts, but truly acted as a conduit for a non-Believer to clearly hear God’s message.

[Read v.31-45]

[Note: “A Prophetic View of Daniel” can be downloaded from the web site to visualize the meaning of Nebuchadnezzar’s statue.]

Q: What is the mainstream, consensus interpretation of the statue?

1. The Babylonian Empire is the head of gold.
2. The Medo-Persian Empire is the breast and arms of silver.
3. The Greek Empire is the belly and thighs of bronze.
4. The Roman Empire is the legs of iron. (It ultimately split into two major parts represented by the two legs.)
5. A final kingdom yet to come is the feet of partly iron and partly clay, a weaker continuation of the Roman Empire divided into ten kingdoms.
6. Christ is the Stone, suddenly appearing to smite the nations and setting up His own kingdom forever.

Q: What are some of the meanings we can divine from the symbolism of the various materials representing each kingdom and fitting together within the statue overall?

1. The overall image is a representation of world history.
2. The decreasing weight and strength of the materials from top to bottom show it to be top-heavy and therefore easy to topple. Humans think civilization is enduring, but it actually rests on brittle feet of clay.
3. The value of the elements decrease dramatically from the top down. Mankind is not getting better and better, but cheaper and weaker. It is also reflected in the decreasing beauty from the head to the feet.
4. Each of the kingdoms has its own strengths, but each one is weaker than the previous. This explains why the Antichrist will be able to organize and oversee the final kingdom as it will be so intrinsically weak that it demands a dictator to keep it together.
5. Each of these empires had a different form of government.
 - a. Babylon was ruled by an absolute monarch.
 - b. Medo-Persia had a king who worked through his princes and established laws for which even he was accountable to obey.
 - c. Greece operated through a king and an army.
 - d. Rome was supposed to be a republic, but mostly ruled by the military through laws.

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iron that breaks in pieces, it will crush and break all these in pieces. ⁴¹In that you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, it will be a divided kingdom; but it will have in it the toughness of iron, inasmuch as you saw the iron mixed with common clay. ⁴²As the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of pottery, so some of the kingdom will be strong and part of it will be brittle. ⁴³And in that you saw the iron mixed with common clay, they will combine with one another in the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, even as iron does not combine with pottery.

⁴⁴“In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever. ⁴⁵Inasmuch as you saw that a stone was cut out of the mountain without hands and that it crushed the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold, the great God has made known to the king what will take place in the future; so the dream is true and its interpretation is trustworthy.”

⁴⁶Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell on his face and did homage to Daniel, and gave orders to present to him an offering and fragrant incense. ⁴⁷The king answered Daniel and said, “Surely your God is a God of gods and a Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, since you have been able to reveal this mystery.” ⁴⁸Then the king promoted Daniel and gave him many great gifts, and he made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon. ⁴⁹And Daniel made request of the king, and he appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego over the administration of the province of Babylon, while Daniel was at the king's court.

- e. The iron and clay could represent current governments in terms of law and justice (iron) mixed with mankind (clay) to form democracies. The strength of democracy is the law, but its weakness is human nature. Lawlessness results when human nature refuse to be bound by God's laws.

Q: Which part of the statue receives the most attention? Why?

A: The feet of clay and iron. God already sees that it is the empire of the Last Days, the only one yet to come. He knows that history will plainly reveal the identity of all the coming kingdoms except the last one, so it's the one for which we need the most information.

Q: What is revealed about the kingdom of clay and iron?

1. “...like iron that breaks in pieces, it will crush and break all these pieces”. (v.40)
2. “...it will be a divided kingdom” (v.41)
3. “...some of the kingdom will be strong and part of it will be brittle” (v.42)
4. “...they will combine with one another in the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, even as iron does not combine with pottery”. (v.43)

Q: But what is the ultimate application of this revelation? What should be done with it?

A: Knowing that **ALL** of the empires will be destroyed forever by the final kingdom of the Messiah, the proper application is to reject all other empires but the Messiah's alone. The practical application of this information is to seek and embrace God's Word and ways which will be eternally established rather than those of these temporary kingdoms.

Observation: We shall see these same kingdoms again in chapter 7 represented as wild beasts. Not impressed with gold, silver, or bronze, God sees the human heart and knows the world is full of violence and sin. From humanity's point of view earthly kingdoms are like metal, durable and strong; from God's point of view they are ferocious beasts which must be slain. This did not frighten Daniel whose faith was in the final kingdom of the Messiah; neither should we fear.

[Read v.46-49]

Q: How would you characterize Nebuchadnezzar's response? Did he experience a life-changing event in which he gave himself over completely to God?

A: He acknowledges the authenticity of both the message and the messenger, but does not appear to be significantly changed by it. His original concern was to get the truth. But having received it, he fails to fully and properly act on it.

Application: Have you ever known someone who seems to want to be in the proximity of God and His people without giving themselves completely over to Him? What is the difference between knowledge of God's plan of salvation, and actually employing it?

Q: How does Daniel continue to serve as an example of one whose heart and behavior are truly in alignment with God's Word?

A: By the way he continues to treat others.

[Continued on the next page.]

Point: Daniel did not have to compromise the truth in order to achieve victory; nor did he need to resort to tearing down those about him to elevate himself. He was able to balance truth and love. Devotion to God's name and glory gave way to receiving his own. Daniel provides an example of the Believer's responsibility to maintain both the integrity of the truth of God's Word at the same time as God's love in the course of all relationships in order to be a proper witness, regardless of the ultimate response of others.

Epilogue

The definitive proof of how Nebuchadnezzar did not allow the revelation of God's Word to change him comes in the very next verse of the very next chapter:

Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, the height of which was sixty cubits and its width six cubits; he set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon.

Daniel 3:1

God spoke, but Nebuchadnezzar didn't put it into practice. His spiritual decline led to making himself a god. God would speak again and although Nebuchadnezzar would yet again profess the revelation could come from none other than the One True God, his rebellion would result in being given the mind of a beast, the ultimate example of being given over to spiritual deception which came not because he was "tricked" or "duped", but because he steadfastly refused to become more than just a hearer of God's Word.