

# ULTIMATUM FOR A DREAM

DANIEL 2:1-13 SEPTEMBER 19, 2018

In the last few years the political world has seen a shift away from relying on so-called policy “experts.” This has been a theme in both the Trump campaign and administration and notably in the Brexit. In 2016, then High Chancellor Michael Gove, a leader in the charge to leave the European Union, said: “I think the people of this country have had enough of experts with organizations with acronyms saying that they know what is best and getting it consistently wrong.”<sup>1</sup>

There has been a lot of talk and study done on *why* people seem to trust so-called experts less and less. Some suggest it has to do with crowdsourcing and the success of social media. We reach for *Yelp* rather than *Zagat’s* when we’re restaurant hunting these days.<sup>2</sup> One piece of research was looking into why trust in experts has eroded and here’s what they found:

*“The authors argue that for an expert to be [trustworthy] they need three characteristics: expertise, integrity and benevolence. In other words, knowing stuff isn’t enough. For us to rate a person as a trustworthy expert they need to know their information, to be honest and to be good-hearted.”<sup>3</sup>*

The problem is, on average we have a growing suspicion that the expert talking to us from the TV lacks integrity and is, perhaps, not as interested in *our* well-being as their own wealth-building.

Here in Daniel 2, Nebuchadnezzar is going to find that his own experts could not be trusted. And it couldn’t come at a worse time for him. He’s got a question that *must* be answered. He’s had a recurring dream and he is so disturbed by it, he can no longer sleep. He can’t get it out of his mind. So, he calls the very best experts Babylon has to offer, hoping they can make some sense of it.

Now, if you were a Babylonian wise man, this was a tricky situation. Because, when you go to talk to Nebuchadnezzar, you don’t really want him to be exhausted, on edge and wiggled out. But even *more* than that, these guys would have a real reason to fear because they didn’t actually know what they were talking about. They didn’t have *real* insight into the things they claimed to know about. But the king brought them in that day and gave them a do-or-die challenge.

As students of this story, we’ll see once again a wonderful comparison between the Babylonian king and our own King Jesus. And we can think about some principles of truth and our part to play as ministers of the truth when desperate men come looking for answers.

Daniel 2 is a very significant portion of Scripture for a number of reasons. First of all, it is often called the ABCs of prophecy. Charles Feinberg writes:

*“Whoever wishes to understand the prophetic Scriptures must come to this chapter for the broad outline of God’s future program for the nations, for Israel and for the glorious kingdom of the Messiah.”<sup>4</sup>* We’ll see that in the later part of the chapter as Nebuchadnezzar’s dream is explained.

But this chapter is also significant because, if we were reading in the original or ancient manuscripts, we’d see that, beginning in verse 4, Daniel switches from writing in *Hebrew* to writing in *Aramaic*.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.london.edu/faculty-and-research/lbsr/who-needs-experts>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ft.com/content/24035fc2-3e45-11e6-9f2c-36b487ebd80a>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/the-real-reason-that-we-don-t-trust-experts-a7126536.html>

<sup>4</sup> Feinberg, Charles *Daniel: The Kingdom of the Lord*

From the quote in verse 4 all the way through the end of chapter 7 the book is written in Aramaic. Dr. Charles Ryrie points out that “*Aramaic was the common language of the Assyrian Empire and was used in both the neo-Babylonian and Persian empires as a diplomatic and commercial language.*”<sup>5</sup> And so, this revelation *for the Gentile world* was written in their own language, that they might understand it. If a Gentile read these texts, they would see a message about God intervening and His plan to *continue* intervening throughout the flow of history, culminating in the establishment of a heavenly Kingdom on the earth.

This revelation from God starts *not* with a directive being given to a Jewish prophet, but with a *dream* being given to a pagan king.

**Daniel 2:1 - Now in the second year of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; and his spirit was so troubled that his sleep left him.**

Scholars argue over when exactly this took place. It has to do with how Babylonians marked the years of kings and that sort of thing. But our text begins either toward the end of Daniel’s training or soon after graduation.

Linguists point out the strength of the words used. When it says that his sleep left him it can be translated as, “his sleep was *done for!*” He would find no rest until this issue was dealt with.

I don’t know if any of you have had recurring nightmares, but (as bad as they are) their effect usually dissipates as soon as you wake up. “Oh, it was just a bad dream!” But, for Nebuchadnezzar, this was different. We’ll see later that there’s nothing particularly *scary* about what he saw, but he couldn’t shake the feeling that this dream really mattered, it really meant something.

In verse 29 we learn that the king would spend time thinking about what was going to come to pass in the future. What was going to happen to this empire of his? To this world? And he knew this dream he kept having had some connection to those thoughts.

**Daniel 2:2 - <sup>2</sup> Then the king gave the command to call the magicians, the astrologers, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans to tell the king his dreams. So they came and stood before the king.**

This is quite a meeting. Daniel lists 4 classes of experts here. These are smart guys. Powerful guys. They each claimed to have secret knowledge or abilities. Whether it was knowing the past or divining the future, conjuring spells or making potions, reading the stars or contacting the dead.

This meeting was what they lived for. They should be *all over* this. The king *needs* them and they get to do their hocus-pocus and enlarge their mystique. This is starting off as a good day for these guys. Now, it’s not *all* the wise men in the realm, just some representatives. Daniel, we’ll find out, isn’t here.

**Daniel 2:3-4 - <sup>3</sup> And the king said to them, “I have had a dream, and my spirit is anxious to know the dream.” <sup>4</sup> Then the Chaldeans spoke to the king in Aramaic, “O king, live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will give the interpretation.”**

---

<sup>5</sup> Ryrie Study Bible

This is a pretty normal situation for the time and place. We recall in Genesis when Pharaoh had an unusual dream and called his guys in, which is what ended up getting Joseph out of prison. The wise men here figure they'll get the dream, run it through their regular system and churn out a palatable message to the king. They don't know what we've already been told: That this is *not* just business as usual for Nebuchadnezzar. In his mind, this is a critical situation.

**Daniel 2:5-6 - <sup>5</sup>The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, “My decision is firm: if you do not make known the dream to me, and its interpretation, you shall be cut in pieces, and your houses shall be made an ash heap. <sup>6</sup>However, if you tell the dream and its interpretation, you shall receive from me gifts, rewards, and great honor. Therefore tell me the dream and its interpretation.”**

There is some disagreement about the translation in verse 5. The King James says that Nebuchadnezzar had *forgotten* his dream. If you're reading the NASB, the section title is “The King's Forgotten Dream.” But most versions will favor what we read, not that the king had *forgotten* the dream, but he was *firmly decided* concerning his plan. From the context it seems clear that he obviously *knew* what it was that was in his mind, which is how he was able to test whether these wise men knew what they were talking about.

What had started off as a normal day for these guys had suddenly become a life-and-death situation. But, in reality, this is the balance every human being finds themselves in all the time. At some point there will be a moment when we will be called before the throne and, at that throne, there are only 2 options: Life or death. The difference is, King Jesus is a King of *grace*, not a king of savage rage like Nebuchadnezzar. Jesus Christ doesn't make us *work* to save ourselves, rather He offers *life* and salvation and the forgiveness of sins as a free gift. But the point is, whether a person realizes it or not, they are in a life-and-death situation when it comes to their eternity. The wise men of Babylon were facing destruction for being *unable* to perform for the king. Those who die and go to hell aren't sent there because they were *unable* to do something for Jesus, but because they were *unwilling* to receive Him as Savior. If you're unsaved here tonight, you need to know that you *will* stand before God one day and you will have to give an account.

**Daniel 2:7 - <sup>7</sup>They answered again and said, “Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will give its interpretation.”**

The Chaldeans were between a rock and a hard place. They had no answers, but needed to say something. They stalled for time, hoping the king's mood might improve.

But, when we think about it, what Nebuchadnezzar was asking for really wasn't *that* crazy. *If* these men really did have the power to see the future, manipulate reality, conjure magic and all that they claimed, *why shouldn't* they be able to tell him the dream? I mean, when you hire a chef to cook a dinner, they don't come in and say, “Ok, *you* do all the prep and the cooking of the food, then I'll plate it up so you can eat it.” So, in a strange way, we understand Nebuchadnezzar's logic.

**Daniel 2:8-9 - <sup>8</sup>The king answered and said, “I know for certain that you would gain time, because you see that my decision is firm: <sup>9</sup>if you do not make known the dream to me, *there is only one decree for you!* For you have agreed to speak lying and corrupt words before me till the time has changed. Therefore tell me the dream, and I shall know that you can give me its interpretation.”**

It's hard to live under a tyrant. But, it's also hard to be the guy at the top too. Some of you are familiar with the story of the Sword of Damocles. It could've been written about Nebuchadnezzar. He's got all this power, but he also knows that these wise men of his aren't *really* as concerned with his well being as their are their own wealth, their own success, their own position. After all, most of them had served under Nebuchadnezzar's father, and, theoretically, they'd still be around when the next man was on the throne.

It's not just Babylon, this still happens today with yes-men and people with their own agendas. A famous Stanford study found that "most published research findings are false."<sup>6</sup> Sometimes it's because companies fund the research and either suppress negative findings, or it's understood that *only* positive findings will be found. For example, Coca Cola has paid scientists who mysteriously discover that it's *lack of exercise*, not eating habits, that cause obesity.<sup>7</sup>

In First Kings chapter 22 King Ahab and King Jehoshaphat are making some plans for battle and they call in all the experts who all say, "oh yes, you guys are right on." They're clearly just flattering, so Jehoshaphat finally says, "Is there not still a prophet of the Lord here, that we may inquire of Him?" And the servant of God comes in and says, "Yeah, here's what's gonna happen: You're gonna die." And the kings realize *he's* the one speaking the truth, not the others. But they still go to war.

Now, here we can apply a principle to our own hearts. As Christians, we've been given the truth from God through His revelation. We know about heaven and hell, about salvation and judgment. Unlike *these* wise men, we don't have to fake it, we can speak on the authority of God's Word. So, when the lost come to us, looking for answers, we can't just feed them feel good treats. They need the truth. The truth *with love*, but the real truth about life and death.

Sometimes Christians or churches make the mistake of *withholding* certain aspects of the truth, like our responsibility for sin or the coming judgment or the call to repentance, because we want unbelievers to *feel* good and join in and *then, eventually*, we'll let them know the whole truth. But that's not the job. The job is to speak the truth in love, because this is eternal life and death we're dealing with.

Unfortunately for these Chaldeans, they had nothing to say in the situation, so they simply protest.

**Daniel 2:10-11 - <sup>10</sup>The Chaldeans answered the king, and said, "There is not a man on earth who can tell the king's matter; therefore no king, lord, or ruler has ever asked such things of any magician, astrologer, or Chaldean. <sup>11</sup>It is a difficult thing that the king requests, and there is no other who can tell it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh."**

So here they *out* themselves as, essentially, being fakes! They say, "Yeah, people don't know that kind of stuff...we certainly don't know it!" ...Then what about all those *other* dreams you've interpreted?

They say "it is a difficult thing that the king requests." This reminds us as ministers of the truth, ministers of God's wisdom, sometimes we will be called into the business of difficult things. The truth is not always easy to preach or explain, but it is exceedingly precious and *necessary*.

<sup>6</sup> <http://statweb.stanford.edu/~tibs/sta306bfiles/ioan.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.tarbell.org/2018/04/industry-funded-studies-and-the-skewing-of-america/>

At the end of verse 11 we have that great moment where they say, “the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh.” What a sad thing to have to say about your god. And what a difference when we compare it with the God of the Bible. *Emmanuel*, God *with* us! If time allowed we could look at over a dozen verses which *specifically* reference God dwelling *with* flesh, with His people, in the past, in the present and that it is His specific plan for the future to dwell with us forever. It’s so important to Him that Jesus Christ *took on flesh* and will live for all eternity as the GodMan that He might be *with* us. God dwelling with flesh is what our Lord is all about. And so, once again, we see how the remarkable stories of Daniel reveal an extraordinary and marvelous God.

**Daniel 2:12-13 - <sup>12</sup>For this reason the king was angry and very furious, and gave the command to destroy all the wise *men* of Babylon. <sup>13</sup>So the decree went out, and they began killing the wise *men*; and they sought Daniel and his companions, to kill *them*.**

It’s not clear how this worked. He may have killed this representative group where they stood. It seems more likely that he ordered all these guys be rounded up so that they could be *publicly* executed. But we see *this* is the kind of king Nebuchadnezzar was. The kind that would have you torn limb from limb when you were unable to do something that was *impossible* to do!

Compare him to *our* King. What does He do? He’s the King who washed His servants’ feet. The King who makes the impossible *possible* for us. The King who intercedes and loves and never asks us to do something that He won’t then empower us to accomplish. He’s the King who died for His enemies, not one who butchers His servants.

Next time we’re together we’ll see Daniel come on the scene. A theme in the book is how he’s just living life, minding his own business, and trials come knocking. But, whenever they do, as a servant of God, Daniel has power and truth and revelation on his side and God is able to use him in mighty ways.

You and I have power and truth and revelation available to us today as well. We are scattered here to represent and serve a King of *grace* and love and *life*. A King who has *real* answers for all the questions that matter. Serve confidently, speak clearly, and walk in the truth He has revealed.