

Daniel

Only One Sovereign King

Reading: **Daniel 2**

INTRODUCTION – Reasons

Good Morning/Evening, I'm Pastor /Father Geoff.

Last week Canada went to the polls.

In the lead up, then during the election, and certainly afterwards all kinds of analysts and pundits scrutinized and evaluated every word, every candidate, every voting block, every event and every result.

All kinds of reasons were given as to why the results are what they are.

However, one reason that is most certainly not offered is "God made it so."

No-one, not even most Christians, consider the answer, "Because it was God's will," to be a meaningful or helpful answer.

We want to know trends, statistics, surveys and all that they show, not some glib, superstitious, childish answer about God.

Think how the book of Daniel starts:

Daniel 1:1–2 (ESV) In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. ² **And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand**, with some of the vessels of the house of God. And he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god.

If this story was being reported today, we would want to know about the generals who were involved, what strategies they used, what weapons they had, the morale of the troops and so on.

Just look at Afghanistan and its collapse.

Every answer on the planet is plausible, except one that says, “*And the Lord gave Afghanistan into the hands of the Taliban.*”

In fact, we consider such an answer to be really problematic, because the Taliban are so cruel in general and so oppressive of women.

How could we even suggest that God wanted them to be in control of that country.

We’re quite happy to say that about Bible stories from long ago, but to suggest such a thing today is just silly.

“*And the Lord gave Canada into the hands of a minority Liberal government.*”

That’s just unhelpful.

Or is it?

Let us look at our passage today, keeping in mind just how much we really don’t think God is particularly involved in our world.

We have to begin with the mentality of the people.

1. Which god is Greater?

In the ancient world, each people and nation had their own god or gods.

When things went well – it rained, crops grew, babies were born, herds flourished – it was because the god or gods of the particular people were happy with them.

When things went badly – drought, crops were diseased, locusts came, foreign armies invaded – it was because the god or gods were displeased with them.

In the particular matter of war, the honour of the gods was as much at stake as the honour of the army.

If one nation conquered another it was also because their god was greater and more powerful than the god of the conquered nation.

So in our story, the phrase “the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand” was specifically a perspective from Judah.

From a **Babylonian perspective** the phrase was “**Marduk [their supreme god] gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand**”, and Judah’s god was not powerful enough to stop him”

In minds on both sides there was a sense in which Marduk had overpowered YHWH the God of Judah.

In fact, it is quite remarkable that as we saw last week, Daniel and his three compatriots were so earnestly faithful to YHWH that they did not even want to eat Babylonian food.

Their God had been defeated.

Maybe Marduk was more powerful than YHWH?

This is a question that must be answered.

2. An Impossible Request

God (YHWH) gives Nebuchadnezzar a dream.

Daniel 2:45 (ESV) just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure.”

It greatly disturbs him and **he demands to know the interpretation.**

But he is suspicious of his magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and wise men so he demands that they first tell him what he dreamt and then give the interpretation.

They reply:

Daniel 2:11 (ESV) The thing that the king asks is difficult, and no one can show it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh.”

So, he commands that all sorcerers, magicians and advisors be executed.

Daniel and his three companions are about to be rounded up with the rest for execution, but Daniel asks for a time to bring the king an answer.

Daniel 2:17–18 (ESV) Then Daniel went to his house and made the matter known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions, ¹⁸ and told them to seek mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his companions might not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.

Don't lose sight of the dynamics at work here.

Their lives are on the line.

This is not a theoretical issue.

If they don't give Nebuchadnezzar an answer – telling him what he actually dreamed – then they will be executed, not cleanly either: they will be torn limb from limb (v 5).

So they pray desperately and earnestly for God to intervene and reveal the dream.

There are **a few points of interest** in the story so far:

- We are not told **how Daniel and his companions had developed such a profound faith in God** (YHWH). It must have been in their formative years in Judah before the Babylonian conquest. They certainly did not learn it in their Babylonian study courses. Nonetheless they have deep faith in God.
- **They are in a desperate situation** and unless God answers them, they will die.
- **If God does answer them**, he will reveal himself as **a God of great power** and therefore provide an answer to the question about which God is greater.
- The Chaldeans had been very clear that gods' dwelling was "not with men." The point being that there was no way for them to access the gods to get the king his answer. Daniel and his companions believe in a **God who is near and who is accessible**.

So, no doubt, they earnestly fast and pray.

God answers their prayer: revealing the dream and its interpretation.

3. A Definitive Answer – YHWH is Greatest!

There are a **number of levels in which God's greatness is revealed.**

The first and least significant level is that God YHWH **could reveal the dream and its interpretation** to Daniel.

This is something that Daniel makes very clear:

Daniel 2:27–28 (ESV) Daniel answered the king and said, “No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked, ²⁸ but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. Your dream and the visions of your head as you lay in bed are these:

Daniel’s God can do what no human being could do.

But there is more, because secondly, not only could God tell Nebuchadnezzar his dream and its interpretation, but, in fact, **he was the one who had given Nebuchadnezzar the dream** in the first place.

Let us note, as an important aside, that it is **not he first or last time that God would make his will known through a dream.**

In the story of Joseph, the son of Jacob, God had revealed to Joseph a glimpse of his own future (Gen 37:5-11), he guided Joseph in the interpretation of the dreams of Pharaoh’s chief baker and chief cup-bearer (Gen 40), and eventually gave Joseph the interpretation of Pharaoh’s dreams (Gen 41) that allowed Egypt to prepare for famine.

At the time of Jesus’ birth, God revealed his will to another Joseph, Mary’s fiancé, in a dream:

Matthew 1:20 (ESV) But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him *in a dream*, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

God gave dreams and visions to Peter (Ac 10:3) and Paul (Ac 16:9) to reveal his will to them.

Dreams can reveal the will of God, but not all do, and we must be discerning because they can also lead us astray:

Jude 8 (ESV) Yet in like manner these people also, relying on their dreams, defile the flesh, reject authority, and blaspheme the glorious ones.

God may speak to us in dreams and visions, but not every dream is from him.

Back to the story:

- God knows Nebuchadnezzar's dream and its interpretation
- In fact, God gave the dream to Nebuchadnezzar to give insight into the future
- But at the most important level, thirdly, the meaning of the dream reveals that God, **YHWH, is the orchestrator of history** and will himself eventually establish an eternal kingdom over which he is himself king.

This comes from the interpretation of the dream itself, if we **link it to actual history**, it goes like this:

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|--------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------|
| ● Head of Gold | Babylonian Empire (~539BC) | Nebuchadnezzar |
| ● Chest/arms of silver | Medo-Persian Empire (550-330 BC) | Cyrus |
| ● Belly/Thighs of Brass | Greek Empire (330-64BC) | Alexander the Great |
| ● Legs/Feet of Iron/Clay | Roman Empire (31BC -476 AD) | Various Emperors |

But what about subsequent periods of empire (e.g. British Empire in 1800's)?

Well, **after the feet of clay there comes a stone** ...

Daniel 2:34–35 (ESV) As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces.³⁵ Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

This stone was not cut by human hand (i.e. God made it) and although it starts small as just a stone, it eventually becomes a great mountain that fills the whole earth.

Let me read you a few select verses from Scripture and see if you can figure it out:

Isaiah 11:9 (ESV) They shall not hurt or destroy in all my **holy mountain**; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

Micah 4:1 (ESV) It shall come to pass in the latter days that the **mountain of the house of the LORD** shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and it shall be lifted up above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it,

Mark 12:10 (ESV) Have you not read this Scripture: “ ‘The **stone** that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone;

Matthew 9:35 (ESV) And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the **kingdom** and healing every disease and every affliction.

Mark 1:15 (ESV) and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the **kingdom of God** is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

Well done!

Jesus is the stone;

the gospel of salvation is the mountain that grows to fill the whole earth.

The dream of Nebuchadnezzar, charts out the rise and fall of various great kingdoms according to the purpose of God, until the culmination of history when God comes and establishes his own eternal kingdom amongst us.

The dream goes only as far as the coming of Jesus, and then everything is subsumed under the spread of that Kingdom to fill the whole earth.

We are still caught up in the spreading of this kingdom, looking forward to the day it fills the whole earth.

LIVING IT –

You may think that this story and the dream in it are only about ancient history and ancient times, but that is not true.

First, **we are still living in the prophecy of that dream** – the age of the stone that destroys all human kingdoms and establishes the kingdom of God.

Thanks to this dream (amongst many other confirming prophecies) **we already know the end of the story. God wins.** We're on the winning side.

Second is the issue of **how God is relevant today**, what part he is playing in world affairs?

Things are under control. **He is in control.**

It is in this light that we look at our own election results, the situation in Afghanistan, the turmoil in world politics and everything else: **God is building his kingdom.**

Third, it is with this knowledge clear in our heads that we can, like Daniel and his companions, **come before the Lord with all our troubles and concerns** knowing that he is able to intervene for us and/or give us the strength to remain steadfast.

There is absolutely no point and **no value in trying to find solutions or paths that deviate from his purpose.** It is inexorable (inevitable, unstoppable).

It is in that assurance that we live out our days.