

Faith in a World of Uncertainty

Daniel 2:1-30

We live in a world of uncertainty. People today look around and see potential disaster at every turn. With layoffs at work, economics slow-downs, climate change and terrorism, our world seems out of control. There is uncertainty in the job market...uncertainty in the housing market...uncertainty in the stock market. In uncertain times people seem to slip into a mode of fear. We fear failing at our jobs, or losing our families, or getting cancer. We fear going broke and getting older. People try to cope with their fears by financial investment plans or sophisticated military defense systems or by escaping into substance abuse. Our generation is addicted to more mood-altering drugs than any generation in the history of the world. (See Max Lucado, *Fearless: Faith in Christ Through the Storm*).

But I want to make a bold statement, which will serve as kind of the premise of our study today. Faith can thrive in times of uncertainty. Consider for a second the biblical definition of faith given in Hebrews 11:1. **“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”** It is in times of uncertainty that faith proves to be the real substance and evidence that God is in control. Faith rests on the certainty that God really exists and that He is sovereign over everything in life.

Today we are in Daniel 2. Let's do a little review of our main characters. Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were taken captive to serve in the Babylonian King's court. These three men received three years of training in the Babylonian culture which was an attempt to re-indoctrinate them to the Babylonian lifestyle. But as we saw in chapter 1, these men stood strong with faith in God. They chose to stand strong on what they believed. They chose to follow God and walk in faith. But it did not take long for their faith to be tested.

Their first test came while in training. These men were challenged to fit in with the behavior and specifically the eating rituals of all Babylonians. But the dietary plan was against God's law for the Jews. So they stepped out on faith and ask for a different food plan. It worked and God blessed these brave men who stood up for what He had designed for them.

Now when we get to chapter 2 these godly young men will face another trial. In this passage, Daniel has now been in captivity for about 3 years. It is around 603 B.C. or in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel's time of training is just about up or has recently been completed. He is not yet considered one of the king's magicians or wise men because he is not a part of the original group that the king calls forward. Daniel only hears about the king's decree after it has been written v.13-14. Here we see Daniel, who is in a desperate situation with his life at risk rely upon the Lord. As a result his life is not only spared, but he and his friends are exalted to new positions of authority.

The King Dreams – Daniel 2:1-3

Chapter 2 of Daniel starts out by saying that King Nebuchadnezzar had disturbing dreams.

- 1 Now in the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; and his spirit was so troubled that his sleep left him.**
- 2 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.**
- 3 And the king said to them, "I have had a dream, and my spirit is anxious to know the dream."**

Babylon was a culture in which dreams were considered very important. Part of the training of the wise men was to interpret dreams. They kept charts on people's dreams and what happened afterward and used these to make educated guesses at the meaning of the dream. Nebuchadnezzar may have had this same dream for several nights for verse 1 says that the king was so troubled he was not sleeping. Verse 3 says he was anxious to know the meaning of the dream, so he called in the various groups that made up the wise men who were his counselors.

Verse 2 lists four groups that make up the wise men. Magicians comes from a word that refers to a stylus or pen. These then would be the scribes and keepers of sacred writings and incantations. Astrologers refers to those who read the stars believing that they determined events on earth. Sorcerers refers to those who use incantations and cast spells. The Chaldeans was a general term referring to advisors of the king. It also referred to a priestly cast in their religious system.

After these wise men assemble before him, Nebuchadnezzar tells them he had a dream about which his spirit is anxious to understand. It was his hope that among all these wise men that someone would be able to explain his dream to him.

The King's Challenge – Daniel 2:4-9

Here we see the restlessness of a heart that knows no peace with God. Nebuchadnezzar, though the most powerful king on earth, though he may have been a king among kings, in his heart he was nothing but a lost child in the darkness. And his actions show it. Nebuchadnezzar either can't remember the dream or he can't remember it clearly or he can't trust his own advisors not to hoodwink him in the interpretation. Now whichever the answer is, it's a pretty pitiful condition for the man who was the most powerful monarch on earth at his time. And so befuddled, he calls for his wise men and he asks them not just to tell him the interpretation, but first to tell him the dream and all its details and then tell him the interpretation. This is how he seems to want to safeguard being duped by those who are his own counselors and wise men.

- 4 Then the Chaldeans spoke to the king in Aramaic, through Daniel 7:28 is Aramaic. "O king, live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will give the interpretation."**
- 5 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."**

6 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."

The Chaldeans speak for the rest of the wise men and ask the king to tell them the dream so they can interpret it. That is way dream interpretation was normally done, but Nebuchadnezzar demands that they tell him the dream before they interpret it.

Not only that, being a despotic king who put a low value on the lives of others, he made it clear that if they did not do what he asked they would be killed in a horrible manner. This was not an idle threat for Nebuchadnezzar's cruelty was well documented.

On the other hand, if they did tell him the dream and the interpretation they would receive great rewards and honor which was another practice common in the ancient world. This was part of the danger of serving a despotic king. If he likes you and your work you are rewarded well, but if his favor turns against you it could become very, very bad. They were frightened and knew this was an impossible request for them. So they ask again,

7 They answered again and said, "Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will give its interpretation."

8 The king answered and said, "I know for certain that you would gain time, because you see that my decision is firm:

9 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."

The king's response to their second request that he tell them the dream is even worse for he reveals that he does not trust them. It would appear that at least a little time had lapsed from the first request to the second since the king accused them of bargaining for more time and of making an agreement with one another to lie and speak corrupt words to him. That could only have happened if they had at least a little time to confer with one another. The only way they could prove themselves to be truthful would be to tell the king both the dream and the interpretation, but they knew they did not have that ability. They are in deep trouble and so they make a third appeal to the king.

The Limitations of the Wise Men – Daniel 2:10-11

10 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.

11 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."

The Chaldeans again speak for the whole group and point out that no one could do what the king was asking. In addition they point out that no great king or ruler

had ever asked for such a thing in the past. This was an attempt to get the king to identify with the great kings and rulers of the past and change his mind to be like them. They finally point out that only a god could do what the king requested, and the gods do not dwell with mortals so it was an impossible request. This was the admission of human impotence that the Lord wanted them to make. It would later force them to acknowledge the superiority of the God of Israel.

This is one of the things that sets apart the true God of the Bible from any other supposed deity. Our God is not only the God of all wisdom and all knowledge. He is not only the God who reveals mysteries, but He is the God who came to dwell among us. Verse 11 reminds me of John 1:14 where speaking about Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, the Word who was with God and was God, John writes, **“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”**

God did come to dwell among men. Jesus Christ is God in human flesh. Hebrews 1:3 speaks about the relationship of the Father God to Jesus, **“who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person.”**

All the false gods of this world, the gods of Babylon and the gods of our present day offer no hope and cannot reveal truth to us because they are not the glorious God of the universe who has come to dwell with us and to save us. They are as limited as the men who devise them and worship them—powerless to help.

The King's Decree – Daniel 2:12-13

12 For this reason the king was angry and very furious, and gave a command to destroy all the wise men of Babylon.

13 So the decree went out, and they began killing the wise men; and they sought Daniel and his companions, to kill them.

Typical of what happens when a dictator gets angry it was a very rash and drastic decision. It caused widespread fear and panic. The king's response could not have been worse except for executing them all on the spot. Nebuchadnezzar gives orders that all the wise men will be destroyed, but first it seems they must be gathered together. Daniel and his friends are considered to be among those considered “wise men” because of their training so the guards went looking for them as well.

Daniel's Request – Daniel 2:14-16

It is Arioch, the captain of the king's body guard, that finds and informs Daniel of the king's decree to execute the wise men, but Daniel answers him calmly with wisdom.

14 Then with counsel and wisdom Daniel answered Arioch, the captain of the king's guard, who had gone out to kill the wise men of Babylon;

15 he answered and said to Arioch the king's captain, "Why is the decree from the king so urgent?" Then Arioch made the decision known to Daniel.

16 So Daniel went in and asked the king to give him time, that he might tell the king the interpretation.

Remember that Daniel is still a young man at this point probably between the ages of 17 and 21. He remains calm in a situation that would make even most older men anxious. Daniel asks about the reason for the urgency of the decree. To execute men who had not even been given an opportunity to talk with the king much less make an effort to satisfy his demands would be harsh. Arioch then takes the time to explain everything.

In moments of crisis or sudden danger do we keep calm and trusting in the Lord? Or do we panic? How do you speak and act? How often do we speak and act rashly and foolishly? When we are not tactful in the way we speak we are a bad testimony. We can cause others to stumble. We can offend even non-believers. When we are not gracious, non-believers get the feeling we are proud, insensitive, bigoted and narrow-minded. Daniel answered wisely and humbly.

Daniel is allowed to speak with the king and he makes a simple request for some time so that he could satisfy the king's demand. We don't have the specific of what Daniel said, but it was enough to gain the request and Nebuchadnezzar gave him the time. Perhaps the king had calmed down by then and recognized that it was a reasonable request.

Petitioning God – Daniel 2:17-18

Daniel knew what must happen if the request of the king was to be fulfilled.

17 Then Daniel went to his house, and made the decision known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions,

18 that they might seek mercies from the God of heaven concerning this secret, so that Daniel and his companions might not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.

Daniel knew that only God could provide the answer. So Daniel's strategy was to pray. So Daniel gathered his friends together to petition the God of heaven. Their request is for nothing less than a miracle, but it is a request that is in keeping with God's character. They desired God to be compassionate toward them so they would not be included in the decree to destroy the wise men of Babylon. The only means of preventing that was for God to reveal to one of them the mystery of Nebuchadnezzar's dreams and their interpretation. I am sure they prayed with great fervency, but they were not panicked. They were putting their future in God's hands.

In the moment of crisis they turned to God. They prayed for His deliverance. Prayer is not something optional, it is essential. As a church we need to realise that praying together is vital. As we face all the challenges before us we must come to God in prayer. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth about the deadly perils and dangers they had faced in their work for God. He and his colleagues even despaired of life at one time. Paul wrote, **"Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, 10 who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us, 11 you also**

helping together in prayer for us.” (2 Corinthians 1:9-11). So Paul, like Daniel hundreds of years earlier, urged fellow believers to support him in prayer. We all need such friends, don't we - those who will pray for us. In times of crisis and uncertainty, prayer reaches out to the God who knows all things and who is in control of everything.

The God Who Reveals Mysteries – Daniel 2:19-23

God was merciful toward them and granted their request.

19 Then the secret was revealed to Daniel in a night vision. So Daniel blessed the God of heaven.

What a relief this must have been to Daniel. God had spoken. He had shown Daniel not only the king's dream but also what it meant. The crisis was far from over, but Daniel knew God was with him and would give him all the wisdom and grace he was going to need. No matter what problems or issues remain to be sorted or overcome, when we know God has spoken, we can go forward in faith.

Daniel's response is to worship:

20 Daniel answered and said: "Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, For wisdom and might are His.

21 And 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.

22 He reveals deep and secret things; He knows what is in the darkness, And light dwells with Him.

23 "I thank You and praise You, O God of my fathers; You have given me wisdom and might, And have now made known to me what we asked of You, For You have made known to us the king's demand."

Daniel's immediate response is a hymn of praise to the Lord. Give God praise. Daniel lists four reasons:

1. God deserves all praise because all wisdom and power belong to God. He knows everything. He knows all things well, He knows what to do in every circumstance. He is all powerful. He can do anything to accomplish His purposes on the earth, and to deliver His people in every crises of life.
2. God deserves all praise because He controls all events (v.21a). He controls the times, the seasons, the events, exactly when they should take place and how long they should last. God alone raises up rulers and deposes rulers; although the rulers may think they have obtained power and control through their own efforts; it is the Lord who has given the ability and right to rule and lead people.
3. God deserves praise because He gives "wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning" (NIV). He alone reveals deep and mysterious things and knows what is in the darkness. He alone dwells in perfect light. It is the Lord alone who revealed both the dream and its interpretation to Daniel. Note how Daniel is claiming that ultimate truth can be found only in the LORD himself; in His Holy Word that He alone reveals.

4. God deserves praise because He had given Daniel superhuman wisdom and power (v.23); the Lord had revealed and interpreted the king's dream for his dear servant. The Lord had given Daniel the wisdom and power to understand what no human power could reveal; the Lord had revealed the actual content and meaning of another person's dream. Note Daniel takes time, significant time, to praise God, to worship God, filled with love and appreciation for God's mercy; before the King removes the decree for execution.

Daniel Informs the King – Daniel 2:24-30

Daniel next goes to Arioch.

24 Therefore Daniel went to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to destroy the wise men of Babylon. He went and said thus to him: "Do not destroy the wise men of Babylon; take me before the king, and I will tell the king the interpretation."

25 Then Arioch quickly brought Daniel before the king, and said thus to him, "I have found a man of the captives of Judah, who will make known to the king the interpretation."

Arioch believed Daniel and so carefully chose his words to give himself at least partial credit by claiming that he found a man that could make the interpretation known to the king. Such is the nature of man of trying to gain undeserved glory for himself which is a contrast to Daniel's humility. By mentioning that Daniel was from "among the exiles in Judah" he effectively disassociated him from the previous wise men and therefore made a better case for Daniel to be heard.

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

Daniel's reply is humble in giving all the glory to his God and setting Him apart from the gods of the Babylonian pantheon. Daniel begins by pointing out the fact that the previous wise men were impotent in the matter.

27 Daniel answered in the presence of the king, and said, "The secret which the king has demanded, the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, and the soothsayers cannot declare to the king."

These various wise men claimed to have special abilities and powers through either their own wisdom or their occultic or religious practices. The king's test had proven that their claims were ultimately false. Whatever supernatural powers they gained through demons was limited and so failed the test. Demons cannot read minds otherwise they could have also known Nebuchadnezzar's dreams and revealed the information to one of their followers.

Daniel specifically points out the source of the revelation and its interpretation.

28 But there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. Your dream, and the visions of your head upon your bed, were these:

Daniel again specifically separates the true God from the false gods by referring to Him as the "God in the heavens." The other wise men were incapable because

the Babylonian gods they served were powerless. However, there is a God that controls the heavens and can reveal mysteries. Then to emphasize the point, Daniel tells Nebuchadnezzar what preceded his dreams. He had been thinking about what would occur in the future, and God sovereignly chose to reveal to him the mystery of what would take place.

29 As for you, O king, thoughts came to your mind while on your bed, about what would come to pass after this; and He who reveals secrets has made known to you what will be.

Daniel then demonstrated his own humility and magnified the Lord by pointing Him out as the source of the revelation.

30 But as for me, this secret has not been revealed to me because I have more wisdom than anyone living, but for our sakes who make known the interpretation to the king, and that you may know the thoughts of your heart.

Daniel does not make any claim of being or having anything special. Contrary to Arioch's introduction that emphasized Daniel as the source of revelation, Daniel claims to be no more wise than any other man. The source of Nebuchadnezzar's dreams and the source of Daniel being able to interpret them was the same. All glory is to go to the God of the heavens and not to man.

Conclusions

Next week we will examine the dream and its interpretation, but for this week we are emphasizing that God is the one who reveals mysteries. Throughout Daniel we will see God exalting Himself in this manner. There are many religions and each of them claim their god or gods to be superior in some way or fashion, but there is only one true God, and that is the God of the Bible, the creator of the Heavens and Earth and the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This is the God that reveals the future before it happens with 100% accuracy and He is the only one that can do so.

This is the God that loved sinful man enough to provide a means of redemption by sending the only begotten son, Jesus Christ, to become a man, live a sinless life, then voluntarily die as the sacrificial, substitutionary payment for sin, rise from the dead on the third day, ascend to heaven with the promise to one day return for those who believe in Him. The God who holds time in His hands and controls the future can be trusted to keep His promises. That includes forgiveness of sin and eternity in heaven for those who place their faith in Jesus.

Those in other religions do not have a God like this and neither do those who claim to be Christians of some sort but who deny the revelation God has given of Himself in the scriptures. Their god or gods are limited, subject to other powers and impotent over the future. The God of Daniel, the God of the Bible, is omniscient, omnipotent and sovereign over the future. What is the God like that you serve? What God do you want to serve?

Many years ago, King George VI of England addressed the British commonwealth on New Year's Eve at a moment in history when the whole world stood on the brink of uncertainty. Despondency and uncertainty filled the air. The

king's own body was racked by cancer. Before that year was over, his life ended. Unaware of his own physical maladies, he uttered these memorable words: "I said to the man at the gate of the year, 'Give me a light that I might walk safely into the unknown.' And he said to me, 'Go out into the darkness, and put your hand into the hand of God. It shall be to you safer than the light and better than the known.' "

I am not sure what kind of uncertainty you are facing in your life. It may be an uncertainty of...work...finances...family...a relationship...or it could be the uncertainty of an eternal home in heaven. I want to assure you that God is here, waiting for you to remember the truths the Daniel learned. Why not today, trust in God in your time of uncertainty?