

Daniel 2:1-49 // Far From Home

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Preacher: Jack Strain

[0:00] Good morning. Our reading is in Daniel. We're going to read God's holy word.

! And in the Bibles, if you like to have your Bible, or at home, it's Daniel chapter 2, page 885 in the Bible, or 884 in the Bible, page 884, Daniel chapter 2.

And I'm reading from verse 1 to verse 6, and then there's a gap, and then I'm reading from verse 19 to the end of the chapter. Daniel chapter 2, 1 to 6, and 19 to the end of the chapter.

In the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams. His mind was troubled, and he could not sleep.

So the king summoned the magicians, the enchanters, sorcerers, and astrologers to tell him what he had dreamed. When they came in and stood before the king, he said to them, I have had a dream that troubles me, and I want to know what it means.

[1:43] Then the astrologers answered the king, May the king live forever. Tell your servants the dream, and we will interpret it. The king replied to the astrologers, This is what I have firmly decided.

If you do not tell me what my dream was, and interpret it, I will have you cut into pieces, and your house is turned into piles of rubble.

But if you tell me the dream, and explain it, you will receive from me gifts, and rewards, and great honour. So tell me the dream, and interpret it for me.

And verse 19, During the night, the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision. Then Daniel praised the God of heaven, and said, Praise be to the name of God forever and ever.

Wisdom and power are his. He changes times and seasons. He deposes kings and raises them up others. He gives wisdom to the wise, and knowledge to the discerning.

[2:59] He reveals deep and hidden things. He knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with him. I thank and praise you, God of my ancestors.

You have given me wisdom and power. You have made known to me what we asked of you. You have made known to us the dream of the king.

Then Daniel went to Ariok, whom the king had appointed to execute the wise men of Babylon. And he said to him, Do not execute the wise men of Babylon.

Take me to the king, and I will interpret his dream for him. Ariok took Daniel to the king at once, and said, I have found a man amongst the exiles from Judah who can tell the king what his dreams mean.

The king asked Daniel, also called Belshazzar, Are you able to tell me what I saw in my dreams and interpret it? Daniel replied, No wise man, enchanter, magician, or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about it.

[4:23] But there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come. Your dream and the visions that pass through your mind as you were lying in bed are these.

As your majesty was lying there, your mind turned to things to come, and the revealer of mysteries show you what is going to happen.

As for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because I have greater wisdom than anyone else alive, but so that your majesty may know the interpretation and that you may understand what went through your mind.

Your majesty looked, and therefore before you stood, a large statue, an enormous, dazzling statue, awesome in appearance.

The head of the statue, the head of the statue was made of pure gold, its chest and arms of silver, and its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay. [5:38] While you were watching, a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them.

Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were all broken to pieces and became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer.

The wind swept them away without leaving a trace, but the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth.

This was the dream, and now we will interpret it to the king. Your majesty, you are king of kings. The God of heaven has given you dominion and power and might and glory.

In your hands he has placed all mankind and the beasts of the field and the birds of the air. Wherever they live, he has made you ruler over them all.

[6:46] You are that head of gold. After you, another kingdom will arise, inferior to yours. Next, a third kingdom, one of bronze, will rule over the whole earth.

Finally, there will be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron, for iron breaks and smashes everything. And as iron breaks things to pieces, so it will crush and break all of the others.

Just as you saw that the feet and the toes were partly of baked clay and partly of iron. So this will be a divided kingdom. It will have some of the strength of iron in it, even as you saw iron mixed with clay.

As the toes were partly iron and partly clay, so this kingdom will be partly strong and partly brittle. And just as you saw the iron mixed with baked clay, so the people will be a mixture and will not remain united any more than iron mixes with clay.

in the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people.

[8:09] It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. this is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands, a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold to pieces.

The great God has shown the king what will take place in the future. The dream is true and its interpretation is trustworthy. Then, King Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and paid him honour and ordered that an offering and incense be presented to him.

The king said to Daniel, Surely, your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and the revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery.

Then the king placed Daniel in a high position and lavished many gifts on him. He made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men.

Moreover, at Daniel's request, the king appointed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego chief ministers over the province of Babylon while Daniel himself remained at the royal court.

[9:47] This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Good morning, everyone.

May I add my welcome to Martin's. My name is Jack and I'm a member of the congregation here. Please keep your Bibles open at page 884, Daniel chapter 2 to help you to follow along with what we're going to be seeing.

But before we come to God's words, I'm going to pray. Father God, we know that your spirit makes things known to us in your word.

So we ask that as we read your spirit taught words that you would open up our minds to understand what you have to say to us. Please equip us to live as your disciples in this world through what we learn.

Amen. This morning we're thinking about what the Bible and therefore what God has to say to us about knowledge and wisdom. I don't know if you noticed in the reading as we went through the words know and wisdom came up time after time throughout the whole chapter.

[10:56] And knowledge and wisdom are things that we all want and that lots of people would claim to have. And we have a world that is full of knowledge. Knowledge has never been more accessible perhaps at any point

in history than it is for us now.

For our phones and our pockets we can look up anything on any topic that we desire. Knowledge matters to us. It helps us to live well. But there can be other times when knowledge or claims to knowledge can actually be very unsettling.

This sermon series in Daniel with the title for it is Strangers in a Strange Land. Because Daniel is in part about the experience of four Israelites living in a world that they do not belong to and that raises questions for them.

Last week we saw that they live in Babylon not in Jerusalem which was their home because we see that they were taken Daniel and his four companions Shadrach Meshach and Abednego and have been taken from their home country been taken to Babylon when Babylon conquers Israel and taken to be educated to serve in the court of a foreign king to be educated to serve King Nebuchadnezzar and that was true of Daniel's situation Daniel was a stranger in a strange land and it is also true of the readers of this book and it is true of us as well.

Christians live in a world that we do not belong to and we live in an equivalent of Babylon and it is a world and it is a strange place that claims to know things knowledge that says that we know things about this world and about where it came from and its origins and how to live in this world.

[12:40] Knowledge for instance that there is no gods that there is no such thing as heaven or hell. Knowledge that says that the Bible is just made up stories and so if those things are true if there is no God no heaven or hell and no Bible.

The Bible is made up. If those things are true then I can live how I want within what society deems as acceptable because there is no ultimate outcome. I can choose any path I want to take.

Any path is mine as long as it doesn't seem to hurt anyone else. As long as I avoid any negative consequences now that's okay. And the world seems very confident in those ideas and very secure in that knowledge.

But for us as Christians those claims would call into question the very foundations upon which we seek to live and the ultimate realities that shape our day to day lives.

And this confident knowledge of the world can make us feel very insecure and then very timid in living for Jesus. Particularly when the pressure is on and there might be costs to speaking and living for Jesus.

[13:51] So in being a Christian or choosing to become a Christian we need to have knowledge that means that that decision makes sense. Why should we be strangers in a strange land?

Why not assimilate? Why not join in? Well we can see how God helps us here. What God says to us about knowledge and wisdom. And there's a little outline on the handout which might be helpful in following along.

And just from the first point of that now there are things that we cannot know. There are things we don't know. And the first thing we see about this encounter with Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar is that there are things we cannot and do not know.

There are things as people no matter how well informed or how clever we are that are completely beyond us. We'll just kind of go into a story. So Nebuchadnezzar the Babylonian emperor who Daniel is serving.

He wants the brightest brains in his empire to play a very high stakes game of guess what's in my head. Chapter 2 verse 1 Nebuchadnezzar had dreams.

[14:54] His mind was troubled and he could not sleep. Nebuchadnezzar is scared. It's not something you typically think of emperor as being but Nebuchadnezzar is scared.

He's had a dream that's kept him up all night and you imagine him waking up sweating and shouting. You'd think that the most powerful emperor in the world would not be scared by a dream. But he thinks a dream represents something important and something that he must know.

So chapter 2 verse 2 So the king summoned the magicians, enchanter, sorcerers and astrologers to tell him what he had dreamed and he wants to know what it means.

He turns to his brain trust, his advisors. Just as today when the government wants to answer important questions about how to run their country might turn to economists or scientists and so on.

So he turns to the people that he thinks had the best chance of making this known to him. Verse 4
So tell us the dream, they say. May the king live forever.

[16:01] Tell the servants a dream and we will interpret it. But perhaps they didn't get the answer they were quite hoping for there. Verse 5 The king replied to the astrologers, this is what I have firmly decided.

If you do not tell me what my dream was and interpret it, I will have you cut into pieces and your houses turned into piles of rubble. But if you tell me the dream and explain it, you will receive from me gifts and rewards and great honour.

Guess my dream. Tell me what it means. If you do, I'll give you riches and power and status. And if you don't, you're dead. I think it's actually really clever from Nebuchadnezzar.

It's quite foolproof. Because if you told them the dream, they'd just be able to make up a wise-sounding interpretation. They'd be able to tell him what he wants to hear. They'd be able to look wise.

They'd be able to look clever. And they get out of this situation all okay. But if they have the sort of knowledge, the sort of wisdom that means that they can tell him what the dream is, then they'll definitely be able to tell him what it means.

[17:07] But they don't. So look at their conclusion in verse 10. We didn't have read out to us. But verse 10, the astrologers answered the king, there is no one on earth who can do what the king asks.

No king, however great or mighty, has ever asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or astrologer. What the king asks is too difficult.

No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among humans. There are things that we simply cannot know. And even Babylon, with all of its wealth and power, all of its armies, all of its ability to conquer, to rule, to subdue, its art, its music, its literature, its science. Here is a chance, an amazing chance to show just how good it is, to show how brilliant it is, with massive reward on offer, and they just can't figure it out. Their very best can't do it.

And I think we're really kidding ourselves if we think that we're much different now. And we think, I guess, as people living in 21st century Britain, that science basically tells us everything that there is to know.

[18:19] Or it could tell us everything that there is to know. That by observing and testing the world, we can forecast and predict the future and shape our own destinies and understand the world that we live in.

But if there is something that we are particularly bad at, actually, it is predicting the future. At best, we can only deal in probabilities and not certainties.

As your own poet, Robert Burns, has said, that malsee thou art know thy lane, improving foresight may be vain. And people have studied our ability to predict the future.

There's a guy called Philip Tetlock, and he took political experts, I think nearly 300 of them, people who made a living from predicting political or economic trends.

And he asked them to predict possible future events, both from within their field of expertise and from outside of their field of expertise. And he basically found that their predictions were no better than chance.

[19:20] No better than chance. We, in significant ways, are blind to the future. And I think we find that to be true in our own experience, our own lived experience, day to day.

as well. Everyone can look wise looking backwards, but we are blind to the future. And that's what Nebuchadnezzar sees. So he rages against the failure of his wise men to tell him what he wants to know.

And so he arranges the execution of all of the wise men in Babylon. And Daniel is caught up in it all. So we catch up with him again in verse 17.

He buys himself some time, and he goes and finds his fellow exiles, for they pray to God that they might not be destroyed. He gets Hananiah and Mishael and Azariah, and he urges them, we must pray, we must pray for mercy from the God of heaven.

Otherwise, we will die. And then the second thing that I want us to see, we see that Daniel has completely got the right idea. God knows.

[20:26] God knows way more than the Babylonian wise men. And more than that, he doesn't just know, he reveals. So you've got it there on the handout. God shows. God knows and reveals deep mysteries and hidden things.

Verse 19, during the night, the mystery is revealed to Daniel in a vision. And we get to see Daniel's response to this. He praises God. Now, I think if you are in that situation, the primary focus of our praise might be that we just hadn't been torn limb from limb and our house knocked down.

But his praise of God doesn't focus on that. We're going to zoom in for a couple of minutes on verses 20 to 23, which I think is a really key verses for understanding this chapter.

So we're just going to look at those for a couple of minutes. So chapter 2, verse 20 to 23. So firstly, we see that he praises God for his control of human history. Verse 20, praise be to the name of God forever and ever, with wisdom and power are his.

He changes times and seasons. He deposes kings and raises up others. Every king and every emperor, every liberal democracy and every dictator, their rise to power and their fall from power is in the hands of God.

[21:43] He decides who wins each election. He decides what agreements are signed at climate change conferences. He decides what wars are fought and who wins. God is in no doubt about where human history is going because he decided it.

He made it happen. Then secondly, we see because of that, because he knows, he can then give that wisdom and knowledge. Verse 21, he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning.

He reveals deep and hidden things. He knows what lies in darkness and light dwells with him. If anyone knows something, if anyone is wise, it is because God gave them that wisdom.

If anyone has knowledge, it is because God gave them that knowledge. And he praises God most of all, that's the big thing that he does, what he has done specifically.

Verse 23, I thank and praise you, God of my ancestors, that you have given me wisdom and power. You have made known to me what we asked of you.

[22:47] You have made known to us the dream of the king. God has made it known to Daniel. He has revealed something to Daniel. He knows what the magicians and the enchanters and the sorcerers and the astrologers cannot know, what it is impossible for them to know by themselves.

And that means God also knows what it is impossible for scientists and sociologists and psychologists and philosophers and economists to know. God makes things known.

I love Daniel's response to this in verse 27 when he goes to the king to tell him what his dream means. And the king asks him, are you able to interpret it? And Daniel says, no wise man can explain to the king the mystery he has asked, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. And he's so humble before. It's not that I'm wise, it's that there is a God who reveals mysteries, a God way above human wisdom. It would be possible, wouldn't it, to imagine God as the great secret keeper, the one who knows things but never tells.

And the God who knows things but keeps everything to himself and stays aloof and absent. I think verse 11 that we saw a bit earlier is the fundamental assumption of the Babylonian wise men and it's a very modern assumption as well.

[24:10] No one can reveal it to the king except the gods. They do not live among humans. If there is a God, he could reveal things but he does not live among humans.

He's absent. He does not speak to us and there is no way of contacting him. God is completely mute. That's the assumption of the world that we live in. I read a book a couple of years back recommended to me by someone here and the book talks about the God of Thomas Hardy. I'm referring to a line where Thomas Hardy refers to God as a dreaming, dark, dumb thing that turns the hands of this idol show. There is a God who is dumb. He cannot speak.

So when we go out looking for answers all we can expect is silence. We can ask questions but there are no answers. But God is not like that at all. When we are in the dark fumbling, looking around for the truth, God is able to show us what we cannot figure out for ourselves.

He does not tell us everything but he does speak. He does reveal. But what is it that God reveals? And that's the third thing we see. We see that God reveals the future.

[25:21] God reveals the future and that future is his rule. So we get just over the page and we get Daniel explaining to Nebuchadnezzar what his dream was.

I'll just recap it again. Nebuchadnezzar dreamt of a huge statue, enormous, dazzling, awesome in appearance, a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, and legs of iron and feet partly of iron and partly of clay.

And then, while he's watching, a rock was cut out not by human hands. It strikes a statue and smashes it. And all of it's broken into pieces and become like chaff on the threshing floor in the summer.

And the wind swept them away without leaving a trace. And this rock becomes a huge mountain that fills the whole earth. And that's a dream. And then he tells him what it means.

Verse 37 and 38. Your majesty, you are the king of kings. The God of heaven has given you dominion and power and might and glory. In your hands he has placed all mankind in the beasts of the field and the birds in the sky.

[26:26] Wherever they live, he has made you ruler over them all. You are that head of gold. You see, Nebuchadnezzar is part of the dream and perhaps he kind of knows that. Perhaps that's why he's so scared by it.

But what Daniel tells him, what his dream means, well, Nebuchadnezzar's power and might and authority, it is God given. He's the top dog in the ancient world, the top emperor, because God gave him dominion and power and might and glory.

And that could leave Nebuchadnezzar feeling pretty good about himself. But I think he feels good about himself until verse 39. Verse 39, after you. After you, Nebuchadnezzar, you are not forever. Another kingdom will arise. You and your empire, they are only temporary. And then we get a sequence of different human empires, each one not quite as good as the last and perhaps increasingly violent as well with the iron.

And it is possible to map these substances onto various ancient empires as we know them. So gold being Babylon, silver would be the kind of Medo-Persian empire which came straight afterwards.

[27:35] The bronze would be the Greek empire with Alexander and then the iron and the iron slash clay being Rome. But I think what they exactly correlate to is less important than their final destiny.

And because they have a final end and that final end is the stone. And jumping forward to verse 44. In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed. Nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end. But it will itself endure forever. This is the meaning of the vision.

The end of our kingdoms, the end of human kingdoms, is going to be because of the final arrival of God's kingdom. All of the human kingdoms that rule this world, they have authority and power now. That is true. They have their authority given to them by God. But they are temporary. Human authority and power will not last forever. Because in the end, the kingdom that is God's kingdom will be set up and it is going to crush all of those other kingdoms and bring them to an end.

[28:43] And swept away, nothing of them left. Nothing left of Babylon, nothing left of Persia or Greece or Rome. And so it follows, nothing left of Holyrood, Westminster, even Stormont.

and his kingdom will last forever. Verse 44. It will bring them to an end and it will itself endure forever. And it fills the whole world and that means it is going to be everywhere.

There will be nothing outside of the kingdom of God. No pockets of other little empires, no places of resistance or escape. And this is the future.

The words for future were all over the passage showing what was happening in the future. End of verse 45. The great God has shown the king what will take place in the future.

Verse 28 we saw it. He is showing King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come. Verse 29. Your mind turned to things to come, to what is going to happen.

[29:45] The future, according to God, is ongoing kingdoms coming and going until ultimately and eternally God's kingdom arrives and it will do away with all other empires and governments and authority.

Now God's kingdom is the place of his visible rule and where what he says goes. It's an amazing place and the place where we are who we are meant to be and living in God's rule is best for us. But the people who get to be in his kingdom are the people who call God king, who submit to the king of the kingdom. And not to submit to God is to be with the statue, to be crushed and blown away.

And ultimately this kingdom, this rock kingdom, is a kingdom brought about by Jesus, God's ultimate king, who at his return will wipe out human rebellion and create an eternal kingdom for everyone who believes in him.

God's kingdom. That is the future. What we see now will not be forever. God's rule and God's reign is forever. Now there might be some chances that some of you are thinking, well, that's all very well, but how do we know this for sure?

[31:01] This all might sound very well and good, but how do we know? We do know that kingdoms come one after the other. We can look back into history and see that, but how do we know the future is God's kingdom?

Well, we can be sure that God is in charge and that his kingdom is forever. And he gives us proof of this through the Lord Jesus, who is the rock that Daniel is talking about.

And he gives us proof of his rule and his eternal kingdom that goes on forever through the resurrection of Jesus, the historical fact that Jesus was died and has been brought back to life again.

And that shows that there is a future beyond death. There is something after this. And the thing after this is something that belongs to Jesus. As Paul says in Acts 17 when he explains the gospel to the philosophers in Athens, Acts 17 verse 31, for he, God, has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed.

And he has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus shows that he is the king of kings, the one who will do away with human rule and bring about God's everlasting rule, witnessed by hundreds of people and written down by people who saw it so that we can know about it.

[32:25] And if you're here today and you say that actually, well, I wouldn't trust in Jesus, I wouldn't recognize God as king, then I think this passage contains a big challenge for you. Because this tells us that the only secure place to be is in God's kingdom and to submit to God as king.

Our contemporary culture has told us a lie. It's told us a lie that there is no after this and there is no future and that this world and human kingdoms and empires are all there are.

I think my challenge for you would be, how do you know that? How do you know that this is all there is? And I'll say to you, I don't think you can see the future. And why do you believe what you believe about the future?

Why do you believe that that is the case? And what basis do you have? How can you know that for sure? And I encourage you to take a closer look at the person of Jesus as the Bible tells us about him and to see that God does give us proof of his forever kingdom and that being on Jesus' side is the only option that makes sense.

But for those of us who do believe and say we belong to God, what difference does this, what does this make to us? What difference does Daniel chapter 2 make to us today? I've got a couple of things to talk about there.

[33:44] We know that God knows and that he's revealed the future to us. I guess there's a question for us of where do we get this wisdom and knowledge for us? Because it hasn't happened to me, it may have happened to you, but God has never given me the ability to interpret someone else's dream.

I guess you can guess about it, but that's not where we get our wisdom and knowledge from. But God has revealed to us his future, he reveals through the person of Jesus.

As Paul says in Colossians chapter 1 verse 26 and 27, which is there on your handout, reference for later, in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

knowledge. How we gain wisdom and knowledge for ourselves as believers is to only be found in what God shows us about Jesus. And how do we get Jesus?

Well, we get Jesus through his words. We get him through God's words in the Bible as he teaches us about the Lord Jesus and who he was and what he achieved. And as we come to Bible books and passage by passage and we listen to what God says, we can gain that wisdom and knowledge for ourselves.

[34:53] And God gives us wisdom and knowledge through his son and then through his words so that we are not wise in ourselves, but we can be wise in what God has given us. I mean, there's a difference also that this future makes and being confident of that.

I was talking to a friend a couple of weeks back who recently started teaching at a secondary school, a Christian guy. And he was telling me about something, asked me how he was, he just told me about something that happened to him at work.

And some students in his class had started asking him about his religious beliefs. They'd asked him what he believed and he asked him whether there was a heaven and a hell. And he said, yes, there is a heaven and hell and gave honest answers about the truth.

And the next day he told me he got a call to come to, I think, the head teacher's office and it turns out that the students had still been talking about what he had said to them when they'd gone to their next class. And another teacher had overheard them talking about it and reported this Christian teacher to their boss.

And he said the outcome of it was that they had drawn a line under it and it wasn't to go any further. But it would be so easy to get scared or shaken by something like that and to hide your beliefs and to stop speaking clearly, to stop making it really clear that you belong to the kingdom of God.

[36:12] And you wouldn't be able to do that with any confidence unless you know that you know, unless you know that it's not just your opinion, but it's what God has revealed. He can be confident in his knowledge to speak in that situation, confident in what he knows, but also confident in the future, confident that being on God's side now was the right thing to do, to know that any consequences in this world are not permanent and that belonging to the kingdom of God might bring conflict and difference with the world now.

And it actually might look like you're on the losing side of that fight as well. But to put yourself on God's side is to put yourself on the winning side eternally so that we can bravely live distinctively as part of God's kingdom now.

And without a God who reveals to us the future, that would be a very difficult thing to do. So in whatever sphere we find ourselves, in work or at university or at school, in a world full of knowledge and that claims to know things.

And we can live confidently for God because he has made things known to us and through his son Jesus. We can know that in the Lord Jesus, living for him is not stupid. We can be confident and secure in him.

I'm going to pray for us. Father God, we thank and praise you that you reveal to us mysteries, that we can live confident and secure in a world that we do not belong to because of what you have made known to us in the Lord Jesus.

[37:44] Thank you that in your mercy that we can become part of your kingdom when we put our trust in Jesus. Please help us to live bravely in a world that does not know you, speaking bravely of the truth about you so that other people may also come to know you.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.