**LESSON III**

**Daniel Chapter 2:1-23**

**God Gives Wisdom, Might, and Hidden Knowledge**

**Introduction:** Chapter 1 introduced many major themes in Daniel emphasizing God’s grace, e.g., providing safety to the Judean exiles (1:2), giving courage and wisdom to Daniel (1:8), and covenant kindness and compassion to Daniel and his colleagues (1:9). God sovereignly gives these gifts to whomever he wills, whether it be to King Nebuchadnezzar or the 4 Jewish exiles. His authority to give gifts includes who wins in battle and who survives in difficult times and trials. Chapter 2 begins in Nebuchadnezzar’s 2nd year as king and continues the same themes as well as adding new themes including how divine revelation of hidden knowledge saves the exiles and others from the wrath of Nebuchadnezzar.

Chapter 2 contains 4 sections:

I. 2:1-13: Nebuchadnezzar has a troubling dream that he does not understand and calls upon his wise men to help him interpret it. They are eager to help but they disagree with him as to how they are to do this. Nebuchadnezzar surprisingly assigns them the impossible task of both telling him the dream and interpreting it. His wise men protest (2:12-13) and in response, he orders them to be killed including Daniel and his colleagues.

II. 2:14-23: Daniel learns of Nebuchadnezzar’s threat and requests time to determine the dream and its interpretation. God answers the prayer of Daniel and his colleagues and reveals the contents of the dream and the interpretation to him. He praises God for his grace and willingness to help.

III. 2:24-45: Daniel tells the king the contents of the dream and the interpretation of it. This section introduces five historical kingdoms that will play an important role in chapters 7, 8, 9, 10-12.

IV. 2:46-49: Nebuchadnezzar praises God and promotes Daniel and his colleagues to high administrative positions in the kingdom.

NOTE: Beginning with the 2nd chapter of Daniel, the grand outline of the ages is laid out. Nowhere else in Scripture, except Daniel 7, is a more comprehensive picture given of biblical world history from the time of Daniel, 586 BC, to the time of the Millennial Kingdom. Daniel was given the “big picture” of what Christ referred to as “the times of the Gentiles” (i.e., the times of Gentile supremacy and chastisement of Israel; Lu 21:24) stretching from 586 BC to the 2nd advent.

NOTE: Because of the fulfilled prophetic revelation in these chapters, liberal critical scholarship labels the book of Daniel as a 2nd century BC forgery and alleges that the author is recording history rather than predicting history. On the other hand, conservative scholars consistently defend the authenticity of the book and maintain the 6th century BC authorship of Daniel who was taken captive from Jerusalem in 605 BC and transported to Babylon.

Among those who accept the 6th century BC authorship of Daniel, there is a subdivision into two theological groups: (1) those who interpret the vision from the amillennial or post millennial perspective; (2) those who interpret it from the premillennial perspective. The difference revolves largely around how the image is destroyed and its subsequent interpretation; and, how the image relates to the present age and the two comings of Christ.

Hence, few chapters in the Bible are more important than Daniel chapters 2 and 7 in establishing both the principle of interpretation and application of prophetic revelation.

**I. Nebuchadnezzar’s Troubling Dream and Hasty Decree, 2:1-13**

Disturbing dreams and visions occur throughout the book. The initial dream of Nebuchadnezzar occurs here and sets the stage for others. When the king receives this troubling dream and responds hastily, it adversely affects everyone in the book. However, Daniel intervenes and prays to the Lord who reveals the content of the dream and its interpretation to him. We’re all “kept in the dark” (so to say) throughout the chapter until Daniel tells the king the dream and its interpretation at the end (2:31-45).

V 1-4: Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon’s greatest and longest reigning king had a series of bad dreams beginning in the 2nd year of his reign. The dreams troubled him and sleep deserted him (v 1). In the ancient world, dreams were important and often viewed as predictors of things to come. When it was the dream of a king, the country’s future could be at stake so he had to seek the dream’s interpretation to take any necessary steps to protect his kingdom. So as would be expected, Nebuchadnezzar sought the counsel of his wise men to help him interpret the dreams (v 2-3). Eager to serve their king, they said “tell the dream to your servants and we will declare the interpretation (v 4).”

Nebuchadnezzar calls for all the different groups of wise men in the kingdom. The term “wise men”, itself, does not occur until v 27 and is a general term that refers to all of the various groups of wise men (magicians, conjurers, sorcerers, Chaldeans). He really was asking for help.

Magicians is a translation of a word with stylus in its root; so, it might refer to scholars rather than magicians. Conjurers (also translated as enchanters) could mean those who sought communication with the dead. Sorcerers were those who practice sorcery or incantations (to speak magic spells or charms). Chaldeans (most significant group) usually referred to a group of astrologers. Here it could refer to people who lived previously in southern Babylonia, Gen 11:28, and who conquered the Assyrians when Nebuchadnezzar’s father (Nabopolassar) was their king. It makes sense, therefore, that they would join with Nebuchadnezzar and come into the kingdom in Babylon after Nabopolassar’s death.

The Chaldeans are eager to please the king and address him with typical Oriental courtesy, “Oh king, live forever.” They declare with confidence, if the king would tell them the dream, they would give the interpretation.

However, in v 5, the king arrogantly demands that they tell him both the dream and its interpretation. If they don’t or can’t, they will be killed and their houses “made into a rubbish heap.” In v 6 the king says his word is final but if they tell the king his dream and its interpretation, they will be spared. This is not an idle threat but was keeping with the cruelty which could be expected from a despot like Nebuchadnezzar.

Apparently not taking the king seriously, the wise men ignore the king’s statement and repeat their request for the king to tell them the dream (v 7). However, this angers the king more and he accuses them of stalling and conspiracy (v 8-9). The wise men (“the Chaldeans”) respond and accuse the king of making a completely unreasonable request (v 10-11). They said “there is no one else who could declare it to the king except gods, whose dwelling place is not with mortal flesh.”

Because of this, the king became “indignant and very furious and gave orders to destroy all the wise men of Babylon (v 12).” The word “furious” comes from a root similar to the Hebrew word for the wrath of Pharaoh (Gen 40:2; 41:10).

Things have gone from bad to worse for the wise men and now we learn that Daniel and his friends are included in the order to be killed with all the wise men of Babylon (v 13). Apparently, they were not present when the king dialogued with the wise men but they are guilty by association since they were in training to become wise men in the king’s court.

**II. God Reveals Hidden Knowledge, 2:14-23**

As in 1:8-16, the situation brings out Daniel’s maturity and wisdom. Under great pressure, he tries to do as the king asks rather than joining in with the wise men saying that it cannot be done. Nebuchadnezzar therefore grants a reprieve and gives him some time.

NOTE: Like any humble wise person, he knows he needs help from his friends and the Lord to succeed. Prayer plays a big role in the book of Daniel and this section displays the first instance of its importance. Having accepted the responsibility of trying to save himself, his friends, and the other wise men, Daniel has his friends pray for him (2:17-18). After God reveals the dream and its interpretation to him, Daniel responds with prayer and thanksgiving to God.

V 14: Daniel encounters Arioch, “who had gone out to slay the wise men of Babylon.” The text does not reveal if Daniel heard about the decree and went to find Arioch thus putting himself in danger and taking the situation in hand, or if Arioch had sought and found Daniel to kill him. Either way, Daniel remains very composed and focused under pressure, a trait that serves him well in other situations throughout the book. Instead of words that might have enraged the king, Daniel offers words of “discretion and discernment” to Arioch (v 14).

Wisdom takes over instead of pride and foolishness. Unlike the earlier wise men, he does not call the decree hasty or brutal. Instead, he wonders why it is so urgent (v 15). Arioch then takes the time to “inform Daniel about the matter” and explain it to him. Daniel’s discretion will help him to succeed where the other wise men failed.

This respectful exchange between Arioch and Daniel reveals the respect and trust they had for each other. Daniel is able to convince Arioch to speak to the king on his behalf allowing him time to seek the necessary information and truth from the Lord in prayer.

V 16: scholars have argued that this verse contradicts 2:24-25, since Daniel seems already to have gained access to the king here, but in 2:24-25, he must go through an intermediary because the king does not know him. However, the text says “Daniel went and requested of the king that he would give him time, in order that he might declare the interpretation to the king.” He could have done this through an intermediary just as he will use an intermediary in 2:24-25. Arioch, easily could have been the person who mediated for him in both instances (he is part of the account from 2:16 through to 2:25).

Note: Daniel is narrating in the 3rd person and could have left out some details in the summary of his 1st interaction with the king. The point in the text is the speed of the king’s command and the speed in which Daniel must respond. It’s probable that neither Nebuchadnezzar nor Arioch wanted to carry out the king’s command. Arioch clearly is not blood thirsty and the king needs someone to come forth and to tell him his dream and its interpretation.

V 17-18: Daniel must seek help from the Lord and does not waste time. He immediately “went to his house and informed his friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, about the matter so that they might request compassion from the God of Heaven concerning this mystery.” His purpose was for them to join him in prayer for God’s mercy and compassion in order to obtain the content of the dream from the Lord.

The word translated “friends” refers to persons who are both companions and allies. They respect each other and are loyal to one another and line up together against their enemies. Their job is to seek compassion from the “God of Heaven.” God earlier gave fatherly compassion to them in 1:9 and they need the same help from the Lord now. They are his children and they are seeking their Father’s help.

NOTE: Chapters 2, 3, 6, and 9 demonstrate that for Daniel, prayer was a way of life with his friends. It was not a last resort. It was essential.

NOTE: “God of Heaven” is a favorite expression for God among the prophets. The reference to the “God of Heaven” contrasts with the religious superstitions of the Babylonians who worshipped the starry heaven. Daniel’s God is the God of Heaven not Heaven itself. Unlike the other wise men, Daniel and his friends believe their God does indeed reveal hidden knowledge. They intend to discover if on this occasion the particular knowledge they need remains with God alone or will he entrust it to them.

V 19: God answers their prayers. Deliverance came in a night vision to Daniel. “Then the mystery was revealed (uncovered) to Daniel in a night vision.”

The phrase “night vision” is found in Job 4:13; 33:15; and Zechariah 1:8 and appears to mean that the recipient was in a deep sleep but not dreaming himself because the imagery did not rise out of his own mind, but by God’s direct intervention. Walvoord says it “apparently was not a dream but a supernatural revelation given to Daniel in his waking hours. Possibly both he and his companions prayed long into the night and the vision came when Daniel was awake.” He believes this because the revelation required both a vision (like Nebuchadnezzar had) and a corresponding divine interpretation. Through this vision, the “mystery”, the matter beyond human comprehension, became known to Daniel.

“Then Daniel blessed the God of Heaven”, i.e., he spoke of God’s wondrous works on his behalf. NOTE: Praise for answered prayer comes as natural to Daniel as the prayer for help itself.

V 20-23: Daniel responds to God’s answer with a prayer of thanksgiving similar to the book of Psalms (e.g., Ps 72:18;103:1-22). This prayer/poem has at least 3 parts:

First: Daniel praises God’s name and attributes (2:20). His name is synonymous with who he is. The word “praise” is a participle meaning let God be praised continuously “for ever and ever.” Daniel focuses on 2 attributes of God’s nature as reason for his praise: his power and his wisdom. Having the “power” to implement his carefully balanced plans for the world (his “wisdom”) makes him worthy of our praise.

Second: he recounts God’s deeds (2:21-22). As the all-powerful God of Heaven, he changes times and seasons (2:21). This contrasts with the deities of Babylon who supposedly set times and seasons by the movement of the sun, moon, and stars. They didn’t know this but nature’s rhythms (i.e., the movement of sun, moon and stars) move at His command (Job 38:1-42:6).

NOTE: Daniel’s faith was based upon a BIG God, a God much greater than the god of the king. Just as he ends one season and replaces it with another, he raises up kings and removes kings. Such a God provides wisdom for the wise, and knowledge for the ones with discernment. To those wise enough to trust in the God of Daniel and who have insight to see through the superstitions of Babylonian religion, there was the possibility for Divine understanding. God doesn’t “waste” his wisdom but gives it to those who are seeking and desiring it of him (Matt 25:14-30).

Third, he praises God for his power to do what he did in this particular instance (2:23). God’s answer proves his ability to reveal secret things that lie beyond human comprehension, such as the meaning of secret dreams in the night (2:22). Nothing is too hicdden for him to see, for his revealing light dwells with him always. He reveals his plans to whom he wills according to his purposes, to people as different as Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel.

NOTE: Overall, Daniel directs his praise to the faithful covenant keeping God of Israel. The One who chose Israel for deliverance and his service has not changed, even though, now, he has given Judah into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar (1:1-2). He merits praise for ever (2:20) for his works (i.e., answered prayer and granted wisdom, 2:23). God gave Daniel wisdom, might, and knowledge, which means God shares his attributes with his servants (Exod 34:6-7; Ps 111-112).

That he shares his attributes and wisdom constitutes one of the great mysteries. Daniel did not merit these gifts. They resulted from God’s grace (1:9). The whole prayer demonstrates that God shows compassion (2:18; Ex 34:6-7; Ps 103:8) to those who call on him. Having attributed to God these infinite attributes of wisdom, power, sovereignty, and knowledge, Daniel has personally expressed his thanks to God for his revelation to him of the secret. Although no mention is made of his deliverance from death, obviously this is included.

QUESTIONS:

1. What attributes of God are you thankful for in your life and do you thank him personally for his work in your life?
2. Can you recall an instance where God provided a great deliverance on your behalf? Can you remember how you felt? Did you share this with someone and give him praise and thanksgiving?
3. Do you set aside a regular time of prayer every day? If not, why not?
4. Do you believe God can do great things in your life? Are you praying for these things to occur?
5. What is a prayer of faith?