

Who knows the future? Daniel 2:1-49

We all know that the coronavirus is causing major changes to people's lives around the world. However, did you know that as well as causing millions of people around the world to be in lockdown in their houses, it is also affecting our **dreams**?

I'm not making this up. It seems that increased stress and changing sleep patterns have resulted in a dramatic increase in weird dreams.

Let me give you a few examples.

- Some people are having nightmares about not getting a Tesco delivery slot
- Some are waking up in a sweat after dreaming of bad lockdown haircuts
- One person described dreaming of heading on a trip to Paris to find cheese but sadly it resulted in failure
- Or listen to this one from a lady called Susan, "Last night I dreamt I discovered a cure for Coronavirus. It involved a sharp knife, a banana, an apple and some fizzy vitamin C tablets. I was in Sainsbury's with these things in a basket, being photographed for the press when I woke up. So I'll never know what to do with them."

I mention strange dreams because at the heart of **Daniel chapter 2** is a very unusual dream that wakes up and troubles one of the most powerful people in the ancient world,

He was called **Nebuchadnezzar** and he was King over the nation of **Babylon** in this chapter of the Bible.

We're told in **verse 1** that all this took place in the second year of his reign. So we're talking about the year **603 BC**. In this year, according to how **verse 1** continues, Nebuchadnezzar had **dreams** that troubled his mind and which meant his sleep was disturbed.

Regardless of whether you are interested in dreams or not this chapter has loads to teach us about **what God is like** and **what his plans are for this world**. So whether you are young or old, and whether you are a Christian or still thinking through the big questions of faith, let me encourage you to stay tuned as I take us on a tour of this exciting chapter of the Bible.

I want to show us two big truths about God.

- The God of Daniel communicates with his world (Vs 1-23)
- The God of Daniel is in charge of his world (Vs 24-49)

First, the God of Daniel communicates with his world (Vs 1-23)

Relationships work best when people speak to each other.

It's no fun to sit in a room with someone else that you really want to get to know and they don't say anything to you at all. They just stare. That's not helpful is it?

Some people think God is a bit like that. That somehow he or she or it is sitting high above us somewhere on a cloud but saying nothing. If this was true, this would be really bad news for us because we'd never be able to work out the truth about what God is like.

But thankfully the God of the Bible, the God of Daniel, is **a God who loves to communicate with his world**.

In the case of Nebuchadnezzar, it all started with a dream. However, it wasn't a dream that he understood. Listen to what we're told in verse 2. **Read verses 2 to 4.**

This was the standard way of doing things. You told the dream experts your dream and then they consulted their reference books and told you what your dream meant.

However, look at what Nebuchadnezzar says in verse 5. **Read verses 5 to 6.**

Have you ever listened to one of these modern day dream experts? I remember hearing one a few years ago on the radio. I listened as people phoned in, told their dreams, and then listened to an 'interpretation'. **It would have been a different story if people had phoned in and copied the strategy of King Nebuchadnezzar.** No I'm not going to tell you my dream. I want you to tell me my dream and then tell me what it means.

I love the response of the Babylonian dream experts in verse 10. **Read verses 10 to 11.**

This statement gets us to the heart of the issue. Who can reveal the truth about the world to human beings? Who can move us from guesswork to guidance? Is there a ceiling between humanity and heaven that shuts off all communication? Because if there is, we are stuffed. This is not a technical phrase from academic theology but I hope it alerts us to the starkness of our situation without a God who communicates with his world.

Without divine words all we are left with is human speculation. And if this is all we've got, then we can never be sure of the answers of some of our biggest questions. Is there a God? What is he like? What does he make of us? Is he in charge? What does the future have in store?

I'm sure it will come as no surprise to you that when King Nebuchadnezzar was told by his magicians that there was no answer for his dream, he was furious. Listen to verse 12. **Read verses 12 and 13.**

This is a highly volatile situation and the lives of Daniel and his friends are in imminent danger. The soldiers are on the way to arrest them and put them to death. But wonderfully because of how God had already shaped the character of Daniel, he didn't panic. Verse 14. **Read verses 14 to 16.**

This is a brilliant response from Daniel! The avalanche of pressure is coming towards him and he has every reason to panic and respond in ways that would inflame the situation. But he doesn't.

He knows that God is in charge of his life and not just in a theoretical way, that at some point he read it in a book. He has lived it out in his experience. And so when the time comes he can speak with wisdom and tact.

And then he makes another great decision. Look at verse 17. **Read verses 17 to 19a.**

Do you see the contrast between the God of Daniel and the gods of the Babylonians? For the Babylonians magicians, heaven was silent. But Daniel believed in a God who could and who wanted to communicate with his world. And so during the night the mystery of King Nebuchadnezzar's dream was revealed to Daniel.

I love what he does next. He doesn't rush to the king's apartments, bang on the door and say "I've got it. Let me in and I'll tell you everything you want to know." No. He praises God for the message he has received.

Verse 20. **Read verses 20 to 23.**

What does all this mean for us? Hear the big lesson. The God of Daniel communicates with his world.

How? He has written a book, the Bible. Let's run here to listen to the voice of God.

When we do, **let's not try and read between the lines as if the Bible is a book like no other.** Of course in one sense it is a book like no other as it's God's book but it is a book. So it has sentences and chapters. So we read it like any other book. We read the lines. Yes, we read prayerfully, asking God's Holy Spirit to help us see what is there. But friends let's read the words.

Some people are concerned that they can't hear God speaking to them. My question to you is, are you listening to his voice in the right place? Or let me put it slightly differently, are you reading his words in the Bible? Because his written words are his voice to us.

Imagine I went on a trip and I said to my wife Vicky that I would call her every night at 8pm. I did this. But she never picked up. When I got home she was cross with me. She accused me of never speaking to her. I explained that I called and then asked where were you at 8pm each night? Oh I went and sat at the top of North Bay and waited to hear your voice? Why? That's not where I promised to speak to you. You should have picked up your phone and you would have heard my voice loud and clear. Friends, if we want to hear God's voice loud and clear, let's pick up our Bibles and read.

As a respond to God's revelation in the Bible, let's take a lesson out of Daniel's book. His revelation to God's revelation was exuberant, joyful praise!

Is this still our response to having a bible in our language that we have the freedom to pick up and read?

I remember years ago watching a video of the **Kimyal tribe in Indonesia** receiving the New Testament in their language for the first time. They had waited 47 years to have a translation in their heart language. It was delivered on a plane. The tribe were having a party as the plane touched down and there was so much dancing and tears of joys. **Why?** Because they understand what this book was. It was the God of Daniel communicating with his world.

Let's not grow dull in our appreciation of the Bible and let's not think it is somehow a second class way of God speaking to us. **It is God's primary way of communicating with his world.**

Second, the God of Daniel is in charge of his world (Vs 24-49)

After Daniel had finished praying he made an appointment with the King and told him everything he wanted to know. We don't have the time to look at all these verses so let's focus on the interpretation of the dream.

- Listen to verse 37. **Read verses 37 to 40.**
- And then verse 44. **Read verses 44 and 45.**

What does all this mean?

The big lesson is that the God of Daniel is completely in charge of his world.

He is the one who raises up and brings down the kingdoms of humanity. Behind all their pomp and circumstance, the real explanation for why someone is in a position of power is not because they are clever or influential or because they were voted or because they organised a military coup, but because the God of Daniel put them there for his own purposes.

And what is incredible as we gaze at Daniel chapter 2 and listen to these words spoken to King Nebuchadnezzar is the revelation that God has his future plans already mapped out.

So it's not that Daniel says to the King, "Yes, you are the head of gold but no one knows what will happen after your empire fades." No, he is able to tell him some very precise details about the future God already has in store.

So we hear about the existence of four empires, and then during the time of the fourth empire God himself will setup a new kingdom that will be completely different from anything that has ever gone before. It will last forever and at the end of the day it will be the only kingdom on the face of this planet. He's talking about the kingdom of God, the kingdom that Jesus came to setup when he was born 2000 years ago. A kingdom that started small, that is now of global proportions and one day will be the only kingdom in the universe.

And when did it start? During the fourth empire spoken of in Daniel chapter 2. The Gold was the Babylonians Empire. The Silver was the Medo-Persian Empire. The Bronze was the Greek Empire and the Iron was the Roman Empire. And what happened during the Roman Empire? God sent his Son to setup a new kingdom, to save people and to gather people under his loving rule, so they could belong to something that would never perish. All this was predicted long before anyone had ever heard of these empires.

We all know that at the time earthly kingdoms look important and grand and eternal. They want our time, our energy and our commitment. Our temptation will be to seek their rewards and live for their dreams. But friends no earthly kingdom will last.

So make sure you join the kingdom of Jesus. And when we do, let's stand firm, knowing that we haven't made a mistake.

We have a God who **communicates** and a God who is in **control**.

Let's pray.