

# War of the Gods

## Messages from the Book of Daniel

### Message 3

#### *God of Dreams*

Daniel 2:1-49

Read 2:1-23; 31-40, 44-45

#### *Serving the Enemy*

No one could stand before the power of King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian armies. First Babylon threw off the rule of Assyria, then she crushed the Assyrian Empire. From Media to Egypt Nebuchadnezzar marched, and all nations fell before him. Judah was caught up in Nebuchadnezzar's ambitions and became part of his empire. And to strengthen his power, the brightest and noblest of the Jewish boys were carried to Babylon and enrolled in the imperial school. It was a trip from which Daniel would never return.

Wrenched from his own family, community, and culture, Daniel was immersed in a pagan society and educated to enhance the prestige of his enemies. Last week we saw that Daniel avoided the two foolish extremes many people fall into. He refused to reject his God and blend into Babylonian society, and he also refused to antagonize his captors by stubborn rebellion. Instead Daniel followed God's command issued through the prophet Jeremiah to seek the good of the land in which he was now living. I do not know about you, but I would find it very hard to work enthusiastically, let alone willingly, for the people who had destroyed my society. I fear I would be tempted to hate them and try to sabotage their plans. But Daniel studied hard and became the best in his class. At examination time Daniel and his friends so excelled that they were given the choice positions in the empire. Their position would correspond to White House advisors today – people like Karl Rove. Daniel was determined to serve God, and God did not let him down. God gave Daniel the grace to excel in his work while resisting the temptation to adopt a pagan life.

In any society life at the top is full of difficulty and danger. People in those positions work extremely hard, and are always subject to attacks by others envious of their privileged position. And they have to please the top man, who is more often than not a difficult person to please. Do you think it was easy serving Alexander the Great, or Caesar, or Napoleon, or Hitler? And now soon after Daniel received his post, he discovers just how dangerous it will be to serve Nebuchadnezzar.

#### *The King and His Dream*

Do you have a vivid nightlife? I seldom remember my dreams, but Ruth engages in wild adventures between midnight and sunrise. We pay little attention to our dreams these days. Freud thought dreams revealed important information about a person's psyche, but most people today disagree. But people in the ancient world thought dreams held great significance. In particular, dreams were thought to reveal the future, and people were intensely interested in discovering the meaning of their dreams. So a whole industry arose of people who professed to be able to interpret dreams. They were very scientific about it. Over the centuries dreams were recorded and subsequent events were recorded along with them. These were organized into categories and published in fat dream manuals. It was the business of magicians, astrologers, and sorcerers to locate the pertinent passages in the dream manuals for a given dream and predict what was going to follow. You have to give them credit for employing an empirical method based on the regularity of nature! And kings, who had the responsibility of a realm and the wealth to hire assistants, employed many such people to interpret any dreams they might have. Interpreting the king's dreams was a vital part of Daniel's job.

Normal people have dreams frequently, and frequently forget them. It is part of life, like getting a cold in the winter. Perhaps this particular dream seemed especially important to king Nebuchadnezzar. It

was especially important, as it turned out. But no matter how important it was, nothing can excuse the rage of the king when his advisors cannot tell him what his dream had been. Their position was completely reasonable. They were trained and hired to interpret dreams, but only when the content of the dreams was known. After all, how else would they be able to consult their dream manuals and come to a reasoned conclusion about its meaning? But Nebuchadnezzar had not become master of the world by listening to reason. His stock in trade was enslavement or murder. The whole world had either submitted to his will or they were now dead. By golly, he was not going to listen to a bunch of frauds in his own house. Either they would learn to obey, or they die! The wise men vainly attempt to reason with the king, but that only inflames his anger. He concludes that they are stalling until the situation changes – he will forget all about the dream. So Nebuchadnezzar does what he knows best – he orders an execution.

Notice that the wise men correctly recognize that the solution to the king's problem is with the gods. But in spite of this, neither he nor they bother to consult the only God who actually has the answer. So the decree went out and the executions began. Soldiers were dispatched to seize Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego.

### ***Daniel and His Vision***

As the story turns to Daniel we find an entirely different reaction to the terrifying events of the day. In the face of imminent death Daniel calmly inquires the reason for the sentence, and then, in a masterfully bold move, requests an audience with the king. With stunning audacity Daniel marched right into the maw of death and declared that he would meet the king's demand.

This passage contains four lessons for us in Daniel's response to immediate danger. First, he trusted God. Now you may think that is obvious and trivial, but in fact, all our problems boil down to a failure to trust God. Why are you anxious about your classes? Isn't it because you do not trust God to help you do well? Why do you have trouble getting along with certain other people? Isn't it because you do not trust God to work out His plan in your relationship? Instead you manipulate each other to get what you want. You are afraid that if you love others with a selfless love like Jesus, everyone will take advantage of you. Why do you struggle so much with sexual purity? Isn't it because you do not believe that the greatest satisfaction is found in Jesus Himself? Why do you fail to get up for early classes? Because you do not believe that God has the power, and desire, to give you energy to get up. So believing in your tiredness more than in God's power and love, you go back to sleep.

Daniel was about to die, yet he calmly and boldly responded to this extreme danger because he trusted God to help him. Is your faith strong enough to face death unafraid? Not if you cannot face the morning unafraid. Daniel had the faith to endure this big challenge because he had been exercising his faith on small matters for a long time. Like refusing to eat the king's food. It took trust in God to put his neck on the line in the matter of food. But having trusted God in the smaller matter of food, which he could see, now Daniel could trust God in the matter of a dream which has been forgotten.

Do you believe in God? If you say yes, do you believe in God when He tells you to live by the scripture? Do you believe God when he tells you to love others more than yourself? Do you even believe Him in the silly little matter of getting up in the morning? If not, how can you ever trust Him in great matters? The biggest issue in life is trusting God.

The second lesson here is that Daniel was no Lone Ranger. He did not expect to succeed in serving God by himself. The first thing he did after leaving the king was to solicit the assistance of his friends. Is this your pattern? Do you have close Christian friends who you rely on for help? Daniel could never have accomplished much for God in a godless place like Babylon without the fellowship of godly friends – and you will not accomplish much for God here at Lehigh unless you are integrated into Christian fellowship.

Coming out on Tuesday nights is a good start. Make it a priority to come every week. I know sometimes you have classes or other required events at this time, but as much as possible join us every week. And then maintain that fellowship throughout the week. Our Bible studies last only one hour. Join one. Noon prayer lasts 20 to 25 minutes. Join us once or twice a week. Of course there are many other ways to maintain vital fellowship with other believers throughout the week, and the supremely important event is worship in church on the Lord's Day. You adopt habits that keep you in touch with other believers, and recruit your friends to join you.

The third lesson Daniel teaches us is to seek God. This may also seem obvious and trivial, but you know, Christian fellowship can become just a sanitized version of worldly friendship. Cultivate a life habit of seeking God in everything you do. It might seem illogical, but you will not seek God in your big problems if you do not learn to seek Him in the small ones. Let's try this for example. Do you seek God's help and guidance when you sit down to study? Or do you expect to accomplish your work in your own power? When it's 11:00 and you have spent 2 hours on one problem, do you call your friends and ask for prayer about it right then? You live and work among unbelievers. Do you daily ask God's help in telling them about Jesus? Isn't this an obvious, if not trivial, thing to do? Spring break is coming up. Will you ask God how to serve your family and friends in the break? Or will you make plans that please only you? You will not seek God in those moments when your life is on the line unless you learn to seek God in the affairs of everyday life.

Finally, Daniel glorified God. He glorified God immediately in his own room after receiving the vision, and he glorified God before Nebuchadnezzar. Look at verses 26-28.

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?"<sup>27</sup> 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."<sup>28</sup> 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." (Daniel 2:26-28)

Daniel did not have to say this. He could have said "yes". Nebuchadnezzar's statement was true. Daniel *was* able to tell him the dream and its interpretation. But Daniel made a point of giving God the glory for this ability. Daniel did not make a nuisance of himself witnessing at inappropriate moments, but he had no hesitation about identifying with God when he could.

We could take a lesson from Daniel. Let's pray for God to give us greater insight to know when to tell others about Him, and greater courage to speak clearly when we have a chance.

### ***God of History***

When we finally hear the dream, it is no wonder that Nebuchadnezzar was so focused on it. I am sure the image of a huge, awesome statue made purely of gold, silver, bronze, and iron made a stunning impression. And surely it must mean *something*! Such a statue is entirely unnatural. No one would build such a thing. So the only reason for it must be to convey some meaning. And as that meaning unfolds, Nebuchadnezzar had reason to become increasingly disturbed. I am sure he was pleased to hear that he was the head, the kingdom of gold, overwhelming all other kingdoms in its glory. His life's work was not useless. But then there is the bad news. His kingdom will be replaced. True, the next one will not measure up to his, but it is distressing to think that the labors of a lifetime will be inherited by a foreigner. And then there is the bronze kingdom, and finally the iron. Ugh! What a dog that king will be. Nothing to compare to the great, glorious Nebuchadnezzar. But why should there ever be such trash on the throne. Then there is the mysterious rock. A rock? What is a measly rock doing in this dream? And how can a mere rock destroy such

a strong, magnificent statue as this? How could such a thing happen? It's a gross insult! And then this rock will fill the whole earth and endure forever. The end of this vision is deeply upsetting.

I bet Nebuchadnezzar wondered who these other kingdoms would be. I wonder if he suspected the Medes and Persians. I wonder if he even knew about the Greeks. I really doubt that he knew anything about the Romans. From our vantage point in history can look back and ask if these great empires are the fulfillment of this dream. From Daniel's time until today people still debate the specifics of this dream. We will take up this question again when we return from spring break and get into the latter half of the book. But for now the clear message of this dream is that God rules history, and His Kingdom will prevail.

Many people do not believe that God rules history. They think history unfolds as men and women make choices and pursue their competing agendas on the world stage. The outcome of war, industry, and business is the result of labor, intelligence, luck, and the weather. Go into any bookstore or library and you will find numerous volumes attributing the rise and fall of nations to natural resources, disease, natural disasters, fortune, and the like. Nowhere will you find a book that explains the course of history as the unfolding will of God. In this Christians are just as guilty as anyone. Daniel rebukes this radical unbelief. The message of Daniel is that God, and ultimately God alone, determines the course of history. Certainly He uses many means of accomplishing His goals. God uses disease, natural resources, storms, and all sorts of conditions to direct history. God uses the individual choices of men and women pursuing their own goals to accomplish His purposes. But there is no chance in it. God directs all.

And the one overriding goal of history is to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. That kingdom will not come with earthly brilliance. It will come small. But it will grow, and grow, and grow. It will grow until it crushes every kingdom on earth and remains the only kingdom. In the midst of many uncertainties in life, this is one thing that is sure.

### ***Kingdom of Stone***

Daniel lists three characteristics of the kingdom of stone. First, it destroys all other empires. Second, it is eternal. Third, it is not man-made. Nebuchadnezzar must have been completely ignorant of where this kingdom would come from, but Daniel knew. This is the kingdom of the Messiah that Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel had prophesied. Listen to the end of Isaiah's prophecy.

“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth;  
And the former shall not be remembered or come to mind.  
<sup>18</sup> But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create;  
For behold, I create Jerusalem as a rejoicing, And her people a joy.  
<sup>19</sup> I will rejoice in Jerusalem, And joy in My people;  
The voice of weeping shall no longer be heard in her, Nor the voice of crying.  
<sup>20</sup> No more shall an infant from there live but a few days,  
Nor an old man who has not fulfilled his days;  
For the child shall die one hundred years old,  
But the sinner being one hundred years old shall be accursed.  
<sup>21</sup> They shall build houses and inhabit them;  
They shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.  
<sup>22</sup> They shall not build and another inhabit;  
They shall not plant and another eat;  
For as the days of a tree, so shall be the days of My people,  
And My elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands.  
<sup>23</sup> They shall not labor in vain,  
Nor bring forth children for trouble;

For they shall be the descendants of the blessed of the LORD,  
And their offspring with them.

<sup>24</sup> It shall come to pass That before they call, I will answer;  
And while they are still speaking, I will hear.

<sup>25</sup> The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,  
The lion shall eat straw like the ox,  
And dust shall be the serpent's food.

They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain," Says the LORD.  
(Isaiah 65:17-25)

While this vision must have been partly encouraging and partly distressing to Nebuchadnezzar, I am sure it was completely thrilling to Daniel. Far, far away in pagan Babylon, God was reaffirming His promise of a Messiah. Jerusalem is a smoldering rubbish heap, but God is still in charge and His promise is still good. Ultimately the wickedness of these pagan lands will bow before the glory of a holy God!

But we can see even more clearly than Daniel what the kingdom of stone is. Scripture tells us that the eternal, uncreated king is Jesus Christ. Here is how John introduces his gospel of Jesus Christ.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup> All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made...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. (John 1:1-3, 14)

John introduces Jesus by calling Him the Word. Notice that *Jesus* is the One who was eternally with the Father. Although He was born of Mary and partakes of our flesh, He was not made by man, for He pre-existed all men. Paul emphasizes this in his letter to the Colossians.

[Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. <sup>16</sup> For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. <sup>17</sup> And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. (Colossians 1:15-17)

The most convincing evidence that Jesus is the stone in Daniel's vision is His own statements in the gospels that He is the rock. Peter gathers these ideas together and make this comment in his first letter.

Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, <sup>5</sup> you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. <sup>6</sup> Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, "Behold, I lay in Zion A chief cornerstone, elect, precious, And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame." <sup>7</sup> Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, "The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone," <sup>8</sup> and "A stone of stumbling And a rock of offense." They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed. (1 Peter 2:4-8)

Jesus is that rock cut without hands which is growing to fill the whole earth. He established His Kingdom when He came to earth, and He is in the process of building it until all other kingdoms are subdued. This is what he meant when he said that nothing could stand against the ministry of the church. "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." (Matthew 16:18) And in the words of the apostle John, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!

(Revelation 11:15) Amen! Reign King Jesus!

***Living Stones***

Did you notice in the passage from 1 Peter that we also are stones? Jesus is the rock cut without hands that will fill the whole earth, and we are little rocks that build a temple for Jesus. If we are like Jesus, we must live like Him. Daniel trusted in God's promise of a Messiah, and in the face of enormous distress, he believed in God. Now we look back and see God's promise came true – as the scripture says, “in the fullness of time”. The rock has arrived and is taking over the earth.

This brings us to three brief applications. First, live in the full confidence of Jesus' victory. The Christian life is not easy, but you are assured of success – if you keep looking to Jesus. Satan has lost, but he will try to convince you he is winning. Do not fall for such transparent lies. Second, labor for Jesus' Kingdom. We are on the winning side! In heaven we are going to tell war stories about our battle for control of the earth. You do not want to have to admit that you really did not do much. This is where life is! Win some for Jesus! Third and most important – worship Jesus. Jesus is what it is all about. That stone which the builders rejected is more glorious than a statue all of gold. Jesus is indescribably wonderful. Worship Him all day, every day, in all you do.

Amen! Reign King Jesus!

C. David Green  
Lehigh University  
January 31, 2006