

DANIEL TESTIFIES TO GOD'S COUNSEL BEFORE THE KING

Daniel 2,1-4,34

Key Verse 2,28

"But there is a God in heaven who can reveal secrets. He made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what was to happen in future times. With your dream and your faces when you slept, it was like this:"

In the previous passage, we learned about Daniel's decision for his identity. Even though he was brought as a captivity in the foreign land, he decided to live as God's chosen generation, royal priesthood, and as the holy people. Therefore, he decided not to make himself unclean in the pagan environment with the king's food. God blessed his decision and made him and his friends ten times wiser than all the people in the kingdom. God made this young man a shepherd for his people in the sad time of the Babylonian captivity, who implanted in them the hope of God.

In today's passage, we can learn about how God humbles Nebuchadnezzar, the ruler of a world-dominating empire. He was a king with immense power, who conquered as far as Egypt and ruled the world. With a single word, he could kill all the scholars in his kingdom, build huge golden statues for all to worship, and construct the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, thus making Babylon the greatest city in the world. People believed that he determined the order of the entire world. However, in today's passage, God humbles this arrogant King Nebuchadnezzar and prompts him to confess and acknowledge the full sovereignty of God. During this process, God uses the faith of Daniel and his three friends to reveal His glory and sovereignty to all the people of the world. Through today's passage, I pray that we may deeply experience God's sovereignty and dominion and learn how to live as global spiritual leaders in our time, bearing witness to our sovereign God.

Part 1: God revealing dreams (2:1-49)

Let us read verse 1: " In the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his mind was troubled and he could not sleep." This incident took place in the second year of his reign over Egypt. Since he conquered the Egypt, he became undoubtedly the most powerful man in the world at the time.

It seemed like nothing in the world could bother him. But now he was very troubled by his dream. This dream frightened him so much that he could not sleep. The dream was so extraordinary and he wanted to know its exact meaning. So he sent for the wise men of his empire with a special condition: to tell him the content of the dream before interpreting it. This was because he thought that only someone who knows the content of the dream could interpret it accurately. He said, "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 honor." However, when the wise men of his kingdom heard king's order, they were very frightened and complained. They answered the king that what he asks is too difficult for any human, and only gods, who don't live among us, can reveal it. When he heard this, the king became very angry and furious that he ordered the execution of all the wise men of Babylon.

Then Daniel and his friends also were in danger because they were included among the wise men of Babylon. Daniel, however, did not panic. When the commander of the king's guard had gone to put to death the wise men of Babylon, Daniel calmly and wisely asked why the king issued such a harsh decree. After hearing his explanation, Daniel went directly before the king and requested time to interpret the dream. Daniel himself didn't have the answer either. Nevertheless, he did not let himself be overwhelmed by the situation he could not control. This was because he believed and trusted in God's good plan. He believed that the king's dream was happening under the kind and powerful sovereignty of God. Then Daniel returned to his house and explained the matter to his friends. He urged them to plead for mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that he and his friends might not be executed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.

There are countless problems in this world that we simply cannot control. We often encounter the limits of our abilities when dealing with issues such as job-hunting, marriage, children, finances, health problems, discipleships and so on. However, when we face our limitations, it also presents an opportunity to experience the power of God. Our weaknesses become a pathway for God's power to manifest. God wants us to seek His mercy and pray when we face such situations. He desires that we come together in fervent prayer. "Merciful Father, have mercy on us." We should not seek human solutions in the face of problems confronting us individually or our community, but instead seek God's mercy and pray earnestly together by believing God's loving purpose.

Then what happened? Let's read verse 19, "During the night the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision. Then Daniel praised the God of heaven." When Daniel and his friends prayed, a dream was revealed to Daniel in a night vision. God opened his spiritual eyes to see the dream that the king had dreamt. Not only this, but God also provided the interpretation. The God in heaven had given him wisdom and the spirit of revelation. Overwhelmed with joy, Daniel praised God. "Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever."

Daniel's joy was not driven by escaping death or the possibility of gaining favor with the king. Instead, his true joy came from his personal experience with God. The nation had been ruined, but God was not. God was still alive, governing the natural order and the course of world history. God showed mercy to Daniel, revealing profound and hidden things to him, and granted him wisdom and strength. He deeply experienced God's presence through this matter. Then he couldn't help but praise and worship the Lord. This God is still alive today. He listens to our prayers and surely responds. He reveals profound and secret things to us. May we encounter Him in our daily lives through deep bible study and prayer life and be blessed with this heavenly joy.

The next day, Daniel stood before the king. Then the king asked Daniel, "Are you able to tell me what I saw in my dream and interpret it?" How did Daniel answer? Let's read verses 27 and 28a, "No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries." Daniel made it clear that he was no different from other wise men, who could not explain such mysteries. He humbly acknowledged that he was no more than an instrument; it was God in heaven who used him to reveal the mysteries.

In verses 31 to 45 we learn about the king's dream and its interpretation by Daniel. What was the content of the dream? The dream featured a large statue. Unlike a typical statue, which is usually made of a single material, this one featured a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron, and feet partly of iron and partly of clay. Suddenly, a stone untouched by human hands flew in, shattering the statue into pieces. The statue dispersed like chaff on a threshing floor. The untouched stone became a great mountain that filled the whole world. What does this dream mean?

Each component of the statue symbolizes a different empire. The head signifies the Babylonian Empire, while the chest and arms represent the Medes and Persians. The belly and thighs are symbolic of Greece, the legs denote Rome, and the divided feet suggest the fragmented Roman Empire. The stone represents the unshakeable kingdom that God will establish. Verse 44 declares, "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. "

People who have tasted success in the world often become arrogant and rely on their possessions and achievements, believing that their glory will last forever. But through Nebuchadnezzar's dream, we learn that everything in the world will be shattered and crushed until there's nothing left. Only the kingdom of God remains forever. This kingdom is the ultimate kingdom we should hope for. We give thanks and praise to the Lord, who saved us from our sins and made us the people of His eternal Kingdom. There will be no regret building our lives on the cornerstone that is Jesus. On the last day, we will not be put to

shame. We will reign eternally in heaven with Jesus. Therefore let us diligently store the inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade by spreading the gospel and making the disciples of Jesus.

Let's look at verses 46 to 49. When the king heard Daniel testify to God, he fell on his face and worshiped Daniel and this God in heaven. Then he confessed that this God, who can reveal secrets, is above all. The king exalted Daniel and gave him great and many gifts, and made him prince over all the land of Babylon and supreme over all wise men. The schools or workplaces to which we belong are not simply for our study or sustenance. God has called us to these places so that people in the world may come to know Him through us and reveal His glory. Therefore, we pray that we can bear witness to God and reveal His glory through a holy life in the places where we belong.

Part 2: The God of Daniel's Three Friends (3:1-30)

Despite hearing the interpretation that all kingdoms will ultimately fall, Nebuchadnezzar appeared to be indifferent. Look at 3:1. Since Nebuchadnezzar was so impressed that he was the head of gold in the statue in his dream, he made a huge golden statue of himself and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. It was a massive golden statue, sixty cubits (approximately 30 meters) in height and six cubits (3 meters) in width. According to historian Herodotus, this statue was adorned with 22 tons of gold. I think he wished for his kingdom to last eternally, not merely represented by the head, but extending all the way down to the toes of the statue, and he sought to compel his subjects to accept this vision. Then, he commanded all his subjects to fall down and worship the golden image that he had erected whenever they heard the sound of the instruments. He further decreed that anyone who failed to fall down, and worship would be thrown into a blazing furnace without delay.

Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of music, all the nations and peoples of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. However, there were people who rejected the king's terrifying command. They were Daniel's three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Even though they heard music, they didn't fall down nor worship the image of gold. Why? It was because the king's command directly violated the first and second commandments of God which are "You shall have no other gods before me.", "You shall not make for yourself an idol." Therefore, they were determined not to bow to the king's golden statue. They obeyed and feared the word of God more than king's order.

When Nebuchadnezzar heard about them, he became furious and summoned them. The king threatened to throw them into the fiery furnace as he said this, "what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?" Nebuchadnezzar mocked the God of Israel and boasted about the gods of Babylon.

Clearly, Judah had been ruined by Babylon. God's temple had fallen, and many Jews had been brought as captives. Looking at these brutal realities, it might seem rational to bow down to the golden statue of Babylon.

However, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego made no compromises. They firmly rejected the king's command. They said in verse 16-18, "King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up." They clearly testified to the king that God could save them from the fiery furnace. They told the king that even if God did not save them, they would not worship Nebuchadnezzar's image.

How could the three friends so courageously worship God alone and bear witness to Him before the king? This bravery came from their deep faith and trust in God's power and enduring love. They love God more than their lives and fear Him more than the fear of the fiery furnace. Their faith was not just about seeking deliverance, but about honoring God regardless of the outcome. Their loyalty to God is truly beautiful and genuine.

After listening their answer, Nebuchadnezzar became so angry that he ordered the fiery furnace to be made seven times hotter. As a result, those who brought Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego up to the furnace were killed by the flames. Then what happened? God protected Daniel's friends by sending his angel. Look at verse 25. The king saw them walking naturally in the fire along with a mysterious figure. Some scholars say it was the Jesus. Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!" When they came out of the fire, not a single hair was singed. Observing this, Nebuchadnezzar was greatly astonished and acknowledged them as "servants of the Most High God". In verse 9, he mocked God, asking "Who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?" However, through this event, he has realized how great God is. He praised God and issued the decree that anyone who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be punished severely, as no other god can save like this.

Through this chapter, we can learn how God protects and honors those who honor Him. The world threatens us, seeking to dominate us and demanding us to follow their way of life. It mocks us, questioning how we can survive in this harsh world without conforming to its order. Recently, American schools have been teaching young children about gender identity, stating that they can choose their own gender if they wish. They also declare June as "Pride Month," honoring and celebrating the LGBTQ+ community. Those who do not follow this trend are often criticized as being out of touch with the times. In the midst of such a sinful environment, we must guard the core of our faith and not compromise with

the world. We must obey God's Word absolutely and uphold the truth. Even if we face trials like being thrown into a fiery furnace to obey His word, we pray to deeply experience God's presence within these trials and reveal His glory.

Part 3: Nebuchadnezzar's Pride and Repentance (3:31-4:34)

Through previous passages, King Nebuchadnezzar personally encountered the God of Israel. These experiences should have guided him to embrace God sincerely, living a life of humility and righteousness in His presence. Yet, he chose to persist in his prideful ways, boasting about his accomplishments. In response to this arrogance, God presented him with another dream, a divine caution against his self-exaltation.

Look at verse 4-5. Once, he was at home in his palace, contented and prosperous, he had a dream that made him afraid. So he summoned Daniel to interpret it. In his dream, he saw a huge tree providing food and shelter to all creatures. Then, a holy messenger ordered it cut down, only preserving its stump, bound with iron and bronze, remaining in the ground. The messenger said that the man is destined to live among animals and his mind will be replaced with beasts until seven cycles pass. Daniel quickly understood the meaning of the dream. So he was greatly perplexed for a while because it was a very shocking event for the king. However, he did not hide the truth.

Daniel explained to the king that Nebuchadnezzar was the giant tree, and the holy guardian is God. He said, Nebuchadnezzar would be driven away from people, so that he would dwell with the animals. He would eat grass, get wet, and would not be able to exercise his royal office again until seven times later, when he would acknowledge God as the Mighty. Then Daniel gave an advice to the king out of his shepherd heart. "Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue."

Nebuchadnezzar should have taken to heart God's message delivered through Daniel and humbled himself. He should have recognized his sin, acted in fairness and justice, and lived a life of mercy towards the poor. Unfortunately, after a year, Nebuchadnezzar quickly became arrogant again, forgetting the warning words that God had given him. Once he climbed to the roof of his palace, he boasted and honored himself as he looked at Babylon, saying, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?" Then even as the words were on his lips, a voice came from heaven and pronounced judgment on him. He was driven away from people and ate grass like the ox. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird. When God passed judgment, even a king

who ruled the entire world was brought down to the level of a beast in an instant. And his madness continued for seven years. After appointed times had passed, his sanity was restored and he finally realized that God is the Most High. So he honored and glorified God who lives forever. Let's read verse 37, "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble." Ultimately, he recognized his true standing before God Most High. He had believed that he ruled and governed the world, yet he came to realize that the glory he had established was nothing and could vanish in a blink of an eye. He confessed that the God of Israel is the true God, and that His kingdom alone is everlasting.

In today's passage, we learn who truly governs the world. Nebuchadnezzar was a figure of absolute power in his time. Everyone feared him and lived according to his commands. However, when God struck him, he had no choice but to fall to the position of a beast in an instant. Daniel and his three friends were captives who had been brought to Babylon from a distant land when their country fell. Despite their circumstances, they revered the Lord, the true Ruler of the world, and lived lives of absolute obedience to His Word. Then God revealed Himself and manifested His glory through these faithful servants. They became blessings to many people and shone like stars in a dark age. So who were the real global leaders at that time? Indeed, it was Daniel and his friends. We are praying to raise global spiritual leaders through GLEF, and today's passage clearly teaches us how we can become such leaders. It is by living a life that bears witness to God, not fearing the rulers of this world but worshipping and serving only God by submitting to His word, and humbly acknowledging our true standing before the Most High God. I pray that we wholeheartedly devote ourselves to preaching the Gospel and making disciples with absolute obedience to God's call as a holy nation and a priestly people of this age. By doing this, we may live lives that reveal God's glory and shine like stars, just as Daniel and his friends did.

Last year, I decided to revive my major from university and learn coding. So, I invested a significant amount of money in registering for a coding boot camp in Rutgers and studied diligently for three months, accumulating skills and completing the course with top marks at the start of this year. However, when it came time to find a job, the wall of reality was too high. Despite applying and sending resumes to many places, there were hardly any responses, and no one seemed interested in me due to my lack of experience and age. Moreover, the employment market shrunk significantly as some Silicon Valley banks went bankrupt and massive layoffs in major IT companies after COVID-19. Amidst this, the emergence of AI ChatGPT greatly reduced the need for Junior level developers. Then my heart shrank like the heart of the Israelites who were taken captive to a far country after their country was destroyed. At this time, I couldn't think about GLEF and ISBC. Because my future was still uncertain, it was not easy to decide to attend and serve at GLEF or ISBC. Therefore, I did not even register for ISBC. However, God rebuked our narrowed hearts through His word. He called me to repent for my hearts shrunk by the given circumstances and not trusting in God, the ruler of history. So I decided to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and if I was hesitant to attend GLEF or ISBC due to my job issue, I made up my mind to find a job after that. And I decided to offer my talent for God's work in the meantime. Then, I went to the UBF website and volunteered to serve fully until ISBC by applying to the UBF Online Mission Team. Through this, I got in touch with a missionary in LA and consequently, I could join his startup company as

a developer from mid-May. Therefore, I am able to work remotely without any time or space constraints while taking care of my children which was the best option for my family. As a startup company, there were many opportunities to develop my skills as much as I had a lot of roles. The ChatGPT, which seemed to threaten junior level developer jobs, turned out to be the best tool to help junior developers achieve the performance of senior developers. I praise God, who led me on the best way. Through this experience, I learned that I shouldn't fear the circumstances but trust God's sovereignty and dominion. Even now, I often find myself easily shaken and anxious, depending on the situation. Each time, I need to seek God's mercy through prayer and obey God's word that called me to be a spiritual leader of this age, and seek first His kingdom and His righteousness. I pray that I can serve my entrusted JBF flock and my children through the Word and prayer, and live a glorious life shining like the stars in the sky by raising many disciples of Jesus.