

# The War of Kings

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ]     Father, please help us this morning to understand this part of your word and help us to see its implications for us and please be at work in us by your Holy Spirit that we might have a desire and a will and an ability to respond in obedience.
- We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Please sit down, friends. Now, just before we get underway, I need to tell you just a little bit of my history. My previous parish that I was in before Ridley, I had done a building project and I had sworn I would never do another one again.
- But when they started approaching me about coming here, they said, we've got a building project underway. Well, that was a dicey moment. Anyway, what has made this building project so much easier than the last building project are two things.
- A very solidly working, well, one thing and one person, a very solidly working building committee, they have done such a great work.
- But without Hong Yong-sau, we would not have done nearly as much. So, Young, thank you very much. I personally appreciate it. Two years getting used to the parish and having you doing so much work.
- [ 1 : 2 8 ]     Thank you. I reckon, friends, he and the committee deserve a round of applause. Thank you very much.
- Ephraites, Nebuchadnezzar the Great. He's the devout worshipper of Marduk and Nabu. He's conqueror of the known world, a man of justice, philanthropist, benefactor, architect, builder.
- None before him could match him. None could challenge him. He was secure, popular, respected, feared. No one could threaten him or depose him.
- And then came this dream. Now, I need to tell you a bit about Heather and me, you see. Heather can remember all her dreams. I can remember none of mine. So, I have a theory about this that Nebuchadnezzar could not as well.
- I need to explain that before I get any further. Each night he would retire at peace. Each night he would wake in a cold sweat. He knew that he'd been dreaming some horrifying, terrifying, tormenting nightmare.
- [ 2 : 5 0 ]     But he was unable to remember its content or its thrust. Nebuchadnezzar knew, though, that dreams came from the gods. And so he was scared, you see. He wanted to find out, well, what on earth could the gods be telling him?
- But at the same time he feared what he might find out. But the point was somewhat academic because, try as he might, he could not remember his dream. However, all was not lost.
- After all, he had this huge range of astrologers, wise men, scientists and so on. And these men he paid and he gave them his good, rich food and drink. They enjoyed the benefits of his patronage.
- And they had a debt to pay off and an obligation to fulfil. And now is the time. The thing was that his patronage of these people turned out to be a huge waste.

They were a useless lot for all their science and their wisdom. They could not even tell him the dream, let alone interpret it. His sleepless nights were causing increased levels of frustration and stress.

[ 3 : 54 ] He found himself very frustrated, increasingly desperate. And he was becoming just a little angry with these guys. So he summoned the magicians, astrologers, philosophers, dream interpreters, gathered them all and he flashed before them these promises of great blessing.

He threatened them with horrible torture. You can see it in verses 5 and 6 of Daniel. If you don't tell me my dream, he said and interpret it, I will have you cut into pieces. Your house is turned into piles of rubble.

But if you tell me then I'll give you great honour and so on. Not even that worked. Again they replied, let the king tell his servants the dream. We'll interpret it.

This drove Nebuchadnezzar to breaking point. His frustrations, anxiety, feelings of helplessness were at fever pitch. He became morose, unpredictable and unreasonable.

You can see that in the text. And then perhaps in a fit of anger he made a decision. The bludgers must be made to pay. They had sponged off him for too long.

[ 4 : 59 ] He would do away with them. And he'd perhaps, you know, get some new replacements who could do the job. And so Nebuchadnezzar speaks to the wise men. You can see it in verses 8 and 9. I am certain that you are trying to gain time because you realise what I have firmly decided.

If you do not tell me the dream, there's just one penalty for you. You have conspired to tell me misleading and wicked things, hoping the situation will change. So then tell me the dream and I will know that you can interpret it for me.

And then came the truth. The astrologers gave Nebuchadnezzar the facts that he knew and that he feared. Verses 10 and 11. There is not a man on earth who can do what the king asks.

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

No one can reveal it to the king except the gods and, well, they don't dwell among men. Nebuchadnezzar's anger was, I think at this point, well beyond past hearing these men of learning.

[ 6 : 03 ] Not even the truth or their great learning could persuade him. So Nebuchadnezzar the great, who could not be defied, sent out a decree. And they were all to be gathered.

They were to be executed. And the guards left his presence. And I can imagine them working through the death list. Now, that is the situation that Daniel finds himself in, in Daniel 2.

And Daniel knows the king. He knows that perhaps the decree was impulsive and harsh. And so he decides if he can do something about it. And he turns to his friends and he tells them, pray about this.

He begs Yahweh to act according to his nature. That is to give enlightenment and act in mercy toward his people. And again, the Lord replies and acts. In verse 19, very important verse, we're told that he revealed the dream.

And Nebuchadnezzar tells the authorities, this is the case. He offers to be taken to the king. He comes into the king. And Daniel tells Nebuchadnezzar the dream.

[ 7 : 00 ] And you know the dream. It's a dream. Oh, by the way, I should say something to you. One of the things that amazes me about the book of Daniel, and you'll see it time and time again, is that sayings that spring from Daniel have come into normal language.

You'll find here that this statue we're going to look at rests upon feet of clay. We'll mix clay and iron and so on. And that I think has come from Daniel.

But you watch for others as we work through Daniel. They're there. Anyway, here's this dream of this massive colossus out on the sand. It's dazzling in beauty, awesome in appearance. It's got this head of gold, breast of arm and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron and feet of iron, or iron and baked clay.

From head to toe, it progresses in strength and durability until it gets to the final little bit. But from head to toe, it also decreases in splendour. But above all, it rests finally on feet of fragile clay and baked clay and iron.

In other words, can you see what's being said? This structure is unstable and numbered in its days. It's not going to stand there long on the plain by itself. But I want you to notice that that's not the cause of the downfall of this statue.

[ 8 : 20 ] It comes from elsewhere. For as Nebuchadnezzar looks on, he sees this stone cut from a rock without the assistance of any hand. And then it is just hurled at this statue.

And under the impact of the stone, this great and magnificent statue is pulverised. It's fine dust, blows out to the four winds of the earth to disappear forever.

Nebuchadnezzar heard this dream recounted by Daniel. He recognised, that's mine, I can see it now. Every detail's correct. Belteshazzar, this man from this insignificant nation, has got it right where all the Chaldeans had failed.

Anyway, Daniel refuses to stop there. He's a good evangelist, if you like. In verse 36, he presses on and he gives the interpretation.

The man who said no to the greatest power of the world a year ago, or for us a week ago, that man who asked an angry king for a stay of execution just a day ago, now proceeds to be brutally frank with this king, perhaps one of the greatest kings the world had seen to this point.

[ 9 : 31 ] He refuses to hide its meaning. He says, you Nebuchadnezzar, you're the head of stone. Your kingdom will go through its development in history. It'll give place to three or four other kingdoms after it, and each one will be impressive in its own right.

However, as time goes on, these man-made kingdoms will be seen for what they really are. They'll be exposed as an edifice which rests upon feet of clay, unable to bear the weight and strain they've been called upon to bear.

And their end will come from a surprising corner. Their end will come because these kingdoms stand in the way of another kingdom, a God-designed kingdom.

Now, the king didn't need to hear the words from Daniel, which assured him of the faithfulness of this revelation, its interpretation. He knew it was a genuine article.

After all, he'd heard the man tell him the dream he couldn't remember. He'd heard its interpretation. He knew the dream was true. He knew the interpretation was faithful. Surely the gods had visited the earth in this man.

[ 10 : 34 ] So, faced with this, the great and devout Nebuchadnezzar did what all devout men do in the presence of deity or messenger of the deity. He fell to the ground in homage and respect.

He honoured this man through gifts and promotions. But more than this, he honoured the God of Daniel, the God of gods, the Lord of lords, and the revealer of mysteries.

So, there's the story. I've just retold it. We've had now the Bible reading, the retelling. I've tried to show some things to you as we've gone. It is a magnificent story, isn't it? By the way, it intrigues me, you know, that some of the first stories we tell to our children are the stories in the book of Daniel.

But let me tell you, they are violent stories, and if they're on the TV, we wouldn't let our kids watch them. But perhaps because they're in the Bible, we think it's fair game. It is intriguing, isn't it, you see? But anyway, now I've narrated it to you.

Let's see if we can summarise some key ideas from it. The first idea is found in the three crucial comments about the gods and their ability to reveal mysteries. Did you hear them as we went through?

[ 11 : 41 ] Can you remember them? One comes from verse 11. Have a look at it there in the text. They say, the astrologers say, what the king asks is too difficult. No one can reveal a dream to the king except the gods, and they do not live among men.

Another comes from Daniel. So, astrologers first, Daniel second. Look at verses 27 and 28. After he's revealed the dreamer's interpretation, he says this, 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, and he has shown to Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in the days to come.

Now look at verse 47. So, astrologers, Nebuchadnezzar, and now, Nebuchadnezzar, sorry, astrologers, Daniel, now, Nebuchadnezzar. Look at him, verse 47.

Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery. You see, he knows the source is this God. Each of the main players in this story are agreed, and their point is clear.

The gods of the Babylonians really are impotent in relation to revelation of mystery. They cannot do it. But the God of Israel, well, he can.

[ 12 : 59 ] He is a revealer. He's a revealer of mysteries. He's a cut above these pagan gods. In Nebuchadnezzar's own words, he is a God of gods. So, through this dream, God has been speaking.

He's declaring, I'm not dead. I haven't been killed on the battlefield by Nebuchadnezzar's gods or whatever. I'm here. I'm alive. I can take on the gods of Babylonia.

I am the winner. I will be the winner. But more than that, he's saying his winning is inevitable. After all, he alone has what it takes to be God.

He alone controls history. He alone reveals mysteries. But friends, there are some more implications for us. Let me show you. Friends, we live in a modern Babylon.

We live in a world, don't we, that is set against God. And so in our jobs, in our studies, in our watching of TV, in our relationships with each other, we're caught in the midst of a great conflict in the same way as Daniel was.

[ 14 : 07 ] He was in a foreign land, caught in the midst of a great conflict between the kingdoms of human beings and the kingdom of God. And it's that, in that conflict, the principal player is God.

In us and through us, God is engaged in cosmic conflict. He is taking on the false gods of this world. He is showing them up to be false.

In this case, it was through Daniel's revealing of mysteries. In our case, it may be quite different. But there is one place where he does it particularly, where he shows up the falseness of the gods of this world.

And that is time, that is the time and place when we share the gospel with people. Think about it for a moment, friends. You see, when you share the gospel with people, God is at work, isn't he?

And as people respond to the gospel and they say, yes, I accept Jesus, God is saying, you see, I am not absent. I am present.

[ 15 : 08 ] I am alive. I am still in control and I am able to beat the so-called gods of this world. He is still able to turn people, you see, away from idols to serve the living and true God, as Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 1.

But friends, if I could push it just a little bit further, it's also true in other areas, you see. It is the case when we live godly lives. You see, as we make decisions that we will turn away from ungodly conduct in our relationships to godly conduct, when we say I am going to turn away from the gross materialism of our age, when I am going to flee the trap of careerism, when I am going to turn away from lying and deceit in my work, when I am going to shun cheating in my studies, God is at work because he is the one who has filled our decisions at that point.

When we say, I am not going to go along with what society has decided about what marriage is or is not, and I am going to decide that what God says is right, then God is asserting his sovereignty over the world even if it is only with us individuals.

He is saying to his world that he can and win the war in which he is engaged. You see, our struggle and our victory over sin, the world, and the flesh, and the devil is the continuance of a victory that was won on the cross by Jesus.

It's a foretaste of that victory which will come about when God's kingdom is consummated at the end of the age. So friends, stick at it, you see. Stick at it for there is only one kingdom that will stand at the end of the day.

[ 16 : 47 ] But there's more in this passage. I wonder if you noticed it. Did you notice the difference between the gods of Babylon and the gods, the God of Israel? Did you notice that by their own admission the Babylonians worshipped gods that were inaccessible?

Did you hear it? They do say it. They declared that such gods do not live among men but the God of Daniel is different. You see, look at verse 21.

Verse 21. Instead of being inaccessible, the Lord is the one who gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. In other words, he's not a hidden God.

No, he's accessible. He's a revealing and active God. And this is a truth proclaimed from the very first page of the Bible through to the last.

Leon Morris, who was once a member of this parish, I think he counted the number of times God had spoken in the Bible and my recollection is that it was somewhere around the 3,000 plus.

[ 17 : 53 ] Now, he knew that God is a revealing God. You see, the picture of the God of the Bible is that he constantly acts but also he constantly and incessantly speaks.

He reveals himself to the people of the world and he does so because he's a God who loves relationships. He's a God who seeks relationship with those whom he has made. Let's take this thought and its implications and see, we'll see what implications it has for gospel living.

You see, the New Testament tells us that God, the God who communicates has come near to us. The New Testament tells us the story of God leaving heaven in Jesus.

God lives and dies as one of us human beings in Jesus and in his death and his resurrection and his ascension Jesus is, or God is proclaiming through Jesus clear truths.

Can you hear what God is saying in his son? He's saying, here I am. There is no mystery about me. I can be found. I'm available, what's more, I'm available to anyone who cares to look.

[ 19 : 10 ] In Jesus, I am living with, dwelling with humans like you. I am here and available, not some esoteric God, far removed, who you never can have contact with, no, a God who comes to you.

Friends, this incredible revelation of God in Jesus is recorded for us in the scriptures. So in one sense the equivalent of Daniel's praying and saying, God reveal yourself, is looking for Jesus in the pages of scripture and finding him.

Asking God to reveal himself by his spirit as we read through the scriptures. It is God at work in us by his spirit that we might rightly understand his word, see its relevance and see his son.

I can't finish there. Let's focus on this statue. You see, all of you I know want to know what this statue is about. And I reckon Daniel would have found it as tantalising as we do.

He would have wanted to know, yeah, look, tell me a bit more. No, but what interests me is that he makes no effort to identify the kingdoms here. Did you notice that? No effort at all.

[ 20 : 20 ] He doesn't want to know who the arms are, the breasts are, the belly and thighs are, the legs and the feet. Commentators do. Ordinary Christians do.

But Daniel doesn't seem to be interested. And my guess is he doesn't because their identity is not the main point, you see. The main point is not who the people represent or who the various parts of this statue represent.

That's not the main point and actually you'll miss the main point if you concentrate on that. I think it can be seen in the contrasting portrayals of Nebuchadnezzar in the dream. Let me explain what I mean.

I want to read to you from Daniel 2, 37 to 38. I want you as you hear these verses read to say, have I heard them elsewhere in scripture? Let me read them to you.

And if so, where by the way? Have I heard them elsewhere in scripture? And if so, where? Listen to them closely. You, O king, are the king of kings. The God of heaven has given you dominion and power and might and glory.

[ 21 : 22 ] In your hands he has placed mankind and the beasts of the field and the birds of the air wherever they live he has made you ruler over them. You are that head of gold. Now just miss the last half sentence and think, in your hands he has placed mankind, the beasts of the field, the birds of the air.

Have you heard those words before? Genesis 1 aren't they? Adam was given rule over the birds of the air, the fish of the sea, everything that moved upon the surface of the earth. And I can see some of you have recognised that.

Now, do you see what is being said of Nebuchadnezzar? Adam was appointed ruler over the world under God's rule. So is Nebuchadnezzar.

His rule is given by God. Therefore, this is the implication, isn't it? This is terrifying when you think about it. Therefore, to submit to the rule of Nebuchadnezzar is in one sense to submit to the overarching rule of God.

The implication is that Daniel, rather than resisting Nebuchadnezzar or planning his overthrow, should give him his allegiance, for God has appointed him. He should honour Nebuchadnezzar knowing that as he does so, he'll be giving allegiance and honour to God who gave him that rule.

[ 22 : 36 ] Now, friends, this is a complicated issue, and I know for some people in our world, they are living under very oppressive rulers, and there are nuanced things to say, but I want to speak to us here in Australia, and our rulers are not like, not even close to Nebuchadnezzar.

They are democratically elected rulers, and we Christians know that even a power such as Rome can be seen as exercising the rule of God.

You can see this in Romans 13, and in 1 Peter 2, even Rome is placed as a government in our world by God, and given the rule of God to exercise.

And even Christians in the first century under the rule of Rome were called to submit to such authorities when they demand obedience. And friends, if that's so, how much more true is it of us with democratically elected governments?

So when you're next filling out your tax form in just two or three months, remember that. That authority has been given by God.

[ 23 : 50 ] When you fill it out and pay them the money that is due to them, it is so they might rule properly. And when they tell us to keep road rules and not to infringe copyright on books, videotapes or computer software or whatever, they do so as representatives of God at this point.

They are ordering society so that it might rightly punish wickedness and so on and protect the poor and so on. You see, now unfortunately Christians, we don't always stand out in this area, do we?

More often than not, we flout the rules of government and legislators and invent rationalisations for illegal and ungodly things. No, friends, metaphorically sometimes we shake our fist rather than submit to them as representatives of God, but our governments are appointed as it were by God.

Now let me say that there may be times in our life when our higher command from God may contradict the command from an earthly ruler, but most of the commands that they give us are not so designed.

Our road rules that say stick at a reasonable speed on local roads are entirely sensible and we ought to put our foot on the brakes and slow down and pay the fines they send us when we break the rules.

[ 25 : 12 ] Why? Because they're sensible things that stop people being hurt and our governments have been placed there in order to do that. And when they do it wisely and well, okay. When they ask to contribute taxes so that they can be spent on upkeep of our country and on paying for roads and caring for the poor, they're good things.

Friends, when there's a greater command from God, we have no choice, we must obey God rather than men, but our country is not known for terrifying rules like that. The day may come when we have to make choices, but can I put it this way?

The fact is that most of us have more to learn in the area of civil obedience than we have in the area of civil disobedience. However, it's only one side of the picture of Nebuchadnezzar, you know, Nebuchadnezzar appointed by God, only one side.

The other side is equally clear in this passage. Nebuchadnezzar's rule can also be represented by what? this massive, huge image.

In other words, it can be pictured as an idol. This is the most large idol you have ever seen, isn't it? It can be the ultimate in human pretensions to power, sovereignty and beauty and such idols will be thrown down by God.

[ 26 : 32 ] Saddam Hussein modelled himself on Nebuchadnezzar and he went the same way as Nebuchadnezzar. And such idols will be thrown down by God. Friends, can you see what I'm saying?

Nebuchadnezzar had been given the rule of God, however he's no better than any other person at exercising it. In the long run his kingdom is handmade and human made. It may have been brilliant in splendour, it might have had a head of gold followed by breasts and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze and so on, but like all human kingdoms it rested on feet of iron mixed with clay.

However, God's kingdom is not like human kingdoms. It is different. It is made of stone. It is a kingdom which will never be shaken.

It is solid and it is lasting and it is enduring and it breaks into the midst of world affairs with irresistible and ever-growing power. It establishes itself without rival and without opposition and Daniel knew where that kingdom would come from.

I wonder if you noticed it, it's just a little telltale sign. He knew of, he speaks of a mountain from which God would carve out a kingdom. Now if you're a Jew, there's only one mountain in the world that's worth worrying about, Zion, the mountain on which Jerusalem sits.

[ 27 : 55 ] This was the part of the dream which could never be understood by Nebuchadnezzar, that Daniel would have understood it. He knew that the mountain would come from God's mountain, Mount Zion. He knew that that stone which decimated every other kingdom, that kingdom made without hands was God's kingdom and it came from God and he knew that this kingdom would spell the end of all human kingdoms.

I just want to finish by a postscript to all of this. You see as Daniel grew older he would dream dreams too. He would dream of four kingdoms just like Nebuchadnezzar did and like Nebuchadnezzar he'd find parts of his dream he didn't quite understand and he'd have to ask others such as angelic messengers and in particular there's one thing he wanted to know, when?

When would it arrive? How would the kingdom of God come? What events would preface its emergence? And like the prophets before him who spoke of the grace to come he searched intently and earnestly trying to find the time and circumstance at which the spirit was pointing to and after the after years after the death of Daniel it happened.

Let me tell you it came from the most unlikely quarter. God began to steadily carve out a kingdom made without hands. He got together a reluctant priest and a barren woman and he gave them a child.

And the child grew up to be this wild and reclusive man whose mouth spilled words of fire and judgment not dissimilar to some things that Daniel had heralded.

[ 29 : 34 ] And from this most unlikely source the announcement came of the coming kingdom of God and I can imagine it ringing out amongst the hills and valleys of Palestine. And Matthew 3, 2 contains the words that were spoken.

Repent. For the kingdom of heaven is at hand. And again Matthew 3, 11 to 12. I baptize you with water for repentance but after me comes one who is more powerful than I whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork will be in his hand and he will clear the threshing floor and gather the wheat into the barn and burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

See John the Baptist spoke of the sorts of things Daniel spoke about. He spoke of a coming kingdom of God that would put an end to all other kingdoms of men and of women. He spoke about Jesus in whom God would set up a kingdom made without hands.

And in Jesus the world did see God at work. You see in Jesus God broke into history and set up a kingdom from Davidic stock, Zion stock if you like.

[ 30 : 47 ] And today we see that continue to see that kingdom breaking into history, altering it, bringing salvation and judgment in its path. In Jesus you see God is hurling the rock at the foot of the kingdoms of humans as he revealed he would in that sort of shadow world of Nebuchadnezzar's dreams.

kingdom of God is and if I might just close with some application for us. It's here I think the crunch comes to us. You see we live before a God who's king of all the earth and this says that he will bring an end to all human kingdoms.



