

Only a Superpower

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 05 November 2023

Preacher: Mark Chew

- [0 : 0 0] Please have your Bibles turned back to Daniel, chapter 2, page 882. And I know you're dying to know what the dream was. You wonder why I didn't read to the end of the chapter.
- Just be patient, okay? We'll get to it. Don't read ahead, please. Instead, I want to begin with a question. Maybe you might be able to offer me some answers of what you think.
- But have you ever wondered what the world's leaders lie awake thinking about at night? Think about, let's say, Putin, Xi Jinping, or Joe Biden.
- Pick one of those three. Any suggestions? What nightmares or dreams might they have? No? Yes, Vincent?
- A big belt. A big belt. Sorry? A big belt for Xi Jinping. Why? A belt on the road. Okay. Spoken like an engineer. Others?
- [1 : 1 1] Yes, Isaac? A carbon crashing. Carbon crashing. Who was that? That one over here? World domination. Eric? World domination.
- World domination. Good one, yes. That's a dream or a nightmare? I was talking about the domination of semiconductor. Domination of semiconductor. You're thinking of dominating, like taking over Taiwan, something like that?
- Well, let me give you mine. I think Putin. I think Putin. Putin. Putin. Putin. Putin. He's probably having nightmares about who might poison him or assassinate him. Putin.
- Pagolian used to be his food taster until he got killed himself. We don't know by whom. We don't know. We don't think. President Xi. Putin.
- I think he's probably having nightmares about the collapse in the property market in China. Or maybe in his dreams, he's thinking of all these people coming out from their lockdown apartments, getting at him because he's been so mean at them during COVID.
- [2 : 1 4] As for Joe Biden, I think his nightmare is Donald Trump. But we can only guess. Today, though, in Daniel 2, we actually have the dream of another leader that's revealed to us.
- King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Now, remember last week we nicknamed him Nebi. So I'm going to use that going forward. But it will take us a while before we discover this dream.
- And as Enoch was saying, at the start last week we saw Daniel and his friends captured and taken to Babylon because their king, king of Judah, Jehoiakim, had been taken into exile.
- Now, on the next slide, if you don't know where these places are, that's a map of where Israel is on the left and then Babylonia all the other way on the other side of the desert in Babylonia.
- Now, in chapter 2, attention turns to Nebi himself. So verse 1, in the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams. His mind was troubled and he could not sleep.

[3 : 23] So the king summoned the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers to tell him what he had dreamed. When they came in and stood before the king, he said to them, I've had a dream that troubles me and I want to know what it means.

Now, firstly, notice the dating, the second year of his reign, which means these dreams are quite early on in his reign. Probably before the conquest of Judah and definitely before Daniel himself had been trained in the palace.

So, Ida Nebi has been having these dreams recurring over a number of years or else he had it at once and then he couldn't shake it off and kept thinking about it.

Anyway, his first port of call were his counselors. Nebi, however, wasn't willing to tell them the dream. And again, we're not sure why.

Maybe he couldn't recall. I mean, many of you, I'm sure, have woken up in a sweat with a nightmare, but yet you didn't know what the details of that nightmare was. So maybe it was that. Or maybe, I think this is more likely, Nebi remembered, but he wanted to test his magicians by making sure that how they interpreted the dream was actually true.

[4 : 36] But of course, what he's asking for is impossible, isn't it? And so what we have is this comical to and fro. You know, the astrologers say to him, you tell us what the dream is and we will interpret it.

And the king says, no, you tell me what the dream is and you interpret it. And so we have this back and forth. And by the way, the king throws in as well.

If you don't, I'll cut you to pieces and demolish your houses. Oh, and I'll give you a reward as well. If you can tell me what it is, I'll give you great honor. Well, great incentive when you can't do it.

So verse 7, they plead. Now let the king tell his servants the dream and we will interpret it. By which time the king loses his patience and then he says in verse 8, stop playing games with me.

I'm certain you're trying to gain time because you realize this is what I have firmly decided. If you do not tell me the dream, there is only one penalty for you. You have conspired to tell me misleading and wicked things, hoping the situation will change.

[5 : 39] You're buying time. So then tell me the dream and I will know that you can interpret it for me. The astrologer answered the king, there is no one 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. What the king asks is too difficult. No one can reveal it to the king except the gods and they do not live among humans.

This made the king so angry and furious that he ordered the execution of all the wise men of Babylon. So the decree was issued to put the wise men to death. And men were sent to look for Daniel and his friends to put them to death.

Now this is a great piece of storytelling because we've come this far and we still don't know what the dream is. Just like the astrologers, this expense is killing us.

Except it's literally for them and thankfully not for us. Now poor Daniel of course and his friends are now caught up in this. They are wise men as well. And so their lives are at risk as well.

[6 : 49] And so Daniel has to act. Verse 14. When Ariok, the commander of the king's guard, had got out to put to death the wise men of Babylon, Daniel spoke to him with wisdom and tact. He asked the king's officer, why did the king issue such a harsh decree?

Ariok then explained the matter to Daniel. At this Daniel went into the king, asked for time so that he might interpret the dream for him. Now notice Daniel was not dumb enough to ask for the dream to be told.

He knew that that had infuriated the king. So all he asked was for more time with the hope of them being able to get a revelation directly from God. And so Daniel returned to his house, explained the matter to his friends.

He urged them to plead for mercy from God of heaven, 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. Now this is not Daniel having over-promised and then now in desperation praying.

No, this plea for mercy is simply a recognition that now their lives were truly in God's hands. If God did not act, then they would be done for.

[7 : 58] But God, in his mercy, hears and answers their plea. Verse 19. For during the night, the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision.

Great, Daniel. You now have the dream. Can you please tell us? Because we're all dying, no pun intended, to know what it is. But no, Daniel's not ready yet to let us know.

Instead, his first response is to praise and worship God. Because more important than the dream is the one who is revealing it to him.

And so Daniel praises God saying, Praise for the name of God forever and ever. Wisdom and power are his. He changes times and seasons. He deposes kings and raises up others.

He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. He reveals deep and hidden things. He knows what lies in darkness and light dwells with him. Wisdom and power belong to God.

[9 : 04] So Daniel rightly praises him for it. But notice that he also thanks God for giving this same wisdom and power to him.

For in the very next line, he says, I thank and praise you, God of my ancestors. You have given me wisdom and power. You have made known to me what we asked of you.

You have made known to us the dream of the king. And so now Daniel has the power given by God to save lives. Because he can now reveal this to the king.

And wisdom to help the king understand and see God's ways. And so verse 24, Daniel tells Ariok to stop the execution. Because Daniel is able to interpret the dream.

He's taken to the king at once. Who then asks him in verse 26, Are you able to tell me what I saw in my dream and interpret it? Again, the answer is yes.

[10 : 04] But, before the dream is revealed, Daniel has something else to say to Nebuchadnezzar. Something more important. Here's what he says, No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he had asked about.

But there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come. So Nebuchadnezzar needs to know it's not Daniel, but God who is speaking to him.

And if after he hears Daniel's interpretation, he's in awe, then it is God that he needs to give credit to. And so finally, we get to verse 29, and the dream.

Actually, not quite yet. There's still one more bit. As your majesty was lying there, Daniel said, Your mind turned to things to come, and the revealer of mysteries, that's God, showed you what is going to happen.

As for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because I have greater wisdom than anyone else alike, but so that your majesty may know the interpretation, and that you may understand that what went through your mind.

[11 : 17] Your majesty looked, and there before you stood a large statue, enormous, dazzling statue, awesome in appearance. The head of the statue was made of pure gold, its chairs and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of fake clay.

While you were watching, a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay, and smashed them. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, the gold, were all broken to pieces, and became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer.

The wind swept them away without leaving a trace, but the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain, and filled the whole earth. This was the dream, and now we will interpret it to the king.

Your majesty, you are the king of kings. The God of heaven has given you dominion and power and might and glory. In your hands he has placed all mankind, and the beasts of the field and the birds in the sky.

Wherever they live, he has made you ruler over them all. You are that head of gold. After you, another kingdom will arise, inferior to yours.

[12 : 34] Next, a third kingdom, one of bronze, will rule over the whole earth. Finally, there will be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron, for iron breaks and smashes everything, and as iron breaks things to pieces, so it will crush and break all the others.

Just as you saw that the feet and toes were partly of baked clay and partly of iron, so this will be a divided kingdom. Yet, it will have some of the strength of iron in it, even as you saw iron mixed with clay.

As the toes were partly iron and partly clay, so this kingdom will be partly strong and partly brittle. And just as you saw the iron mixed with baked clay, so the people will be a mixture and will not remain united any more than iron mixes with clay.

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. This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of the mountain, but not by human hands. A rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold to pieces.

[13 : 43] The great God has shown the king what will take place in the future. So dream is true, and its interpretation is trustworthy. Now, of the many dreams and parables in the Bible, this is probably one of the easier ones to understand, including the interpretation.

First, we see, don't we, that the statue is a representation of kingdoms in history, and in particular of empires. So you look on the next page, the statue I stole from Google, and draw it up myself.

But it begins right at the very top with the Babylonian Empire, because even though there were other empires around at the time, this was the first empire, as it were, that took control of the land of Israel, of Judah in particular, and Jerusalem, the city.

So the rule over Judah and Jerusalem by foreigners begins with Babylonia, either 601 BC or 597, depending on how you want to look at it.

But Nebi and the Babylonians were the first to conquer Judah. His is the head of gold, the most glamorous. But then it's taken over by the Persians, who conquer Babylonia.

[15 : 05] That's the silver chest and arms. Then the Greeks come after. That's the bronze with the thigh. And after the Romans, which Daniel says, is the iron will be particularly strong and brutal, breaking and smashing the other kingdoms, just like iron does.

But Daniel also says that it will be brittle, divided by internal disunity, hence mixed with clay and iron, as the feet are. Now some think that the feet are actually a different kingdom to the lakes, represent some of the empires after the Romans, all the way up to the modern age.

But I tend not to agree, because Daniel here speaks only of four kingdoms, doesn't he? And so the feet of iron and clay are really part of the fourth kingdom. Besides, when we get to the stone later on, and we see the timing of the stone crushing the feet, it aligns up with the time of the Roman Empire.

But we'll get to the stone in a while, because I just want to reflect again, just a bit more about the statue itself. Because you can see, isn't it, that this statue is shaped like a human being.

And humans are made in God's image. Notice even in verse 37, that Daniel's words describes Nebuchadnezzar's rule in language that is reminiscent of Genesis chapter 1, in terms of when God created humans.

[16 : 36] He says that he's given to Nebuchadnezzar dominion and power over the beasts of the field and birds of the sky. That's Genesis 1 language. He's to rule over them.

And so, what we're to see is that these kingdoms all are given authority by God to rule. They only rule because God has allowed it to be.

Daniel himself says that God has given this power to Nebuchadnezzar. And so, likewise, the other kingdoms, whether silver, bronze, or iron, they rule only because God has established them to do so.

And yet, this image, that of a statue, enormous, dazzling, and awesome in power, as it says in verse 31, is cast like an idol, which people then are prone to worship.

And that is the way with empires, isn't it? They command attention, and then they demand allegiance. But against all of this comes the stone, which we read in verse 34, is not cut by human hands.

[17 : 47] It strikes the statue, breaks it all into pieces, and then sweeps all the other kingdoms away without a trace. The rock, in turn, becomes a huge mountain, and then fills the earth.

And when we get to interpretation, in verse 44, it tells us that this kingdom is a kingdom which God will set up, that will never be destroyed, but will bring all other kingdoms to an end.

Now, when Nebuchadnezzar heard this, he knew at once that this was true, because after all, that was his dream, and Daniel has revealed and interpreted his dream exactly. And so what he does, verse 46, is that he falls prostrate before Daniel and paid him honor, in order that an offering of incense be presented to him.

The king said to Daniel, 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. Then the king placed Daniel in a high position, lavish men who gives on him.

He made a ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men. Moreover, at Daniel's request, the king appointed Shadrach, Meshach, and Bittnego administrators over the province of Babylon.

[18 : 59] While Daniel himself remained at the royal court. Imagine what a reversal of picture, isn't it? Because this is the head of gold. That was Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar, the head of gold, falling prostrate in front of Daniel, God's prophet, giving glory to the God of heaven.

And from his very mouth, Nebuchadnezzar proclaims the truth, doesn't he? Your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings.

He's the revealer of mysteries. When I hear that and see that, it foreshadows, doesn't it? The time when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Well, we'll soon get to Jesus, but let me just dwell here with Daniel for just a little while longer because for the people that would have read this prophecy for the first time, people during the exile or even years afterwards, this story would have been a great comfort and encouragement to them because they would have either been in exile or come back from it, but still living under the rule of the harsh kingdoms, their empires lording over them.

And at times like this, it's really hard, isn't it, to imagine, to see beyond the stranglehold of the power of these rulers. It would almost seem like there was no end in sight.

[20 : 32] Now, we can imagine our own history just think, think about the US or China. Can you imagine a time when neither of these would be superpowers? A bit hard to think, isn't it?

We think that, you know, they will keep going, you know, because they've got so much advantage. Well, likewise, the people living then would find it hard, wouldn't it, to see that these empires could fall.

And yet, standing at the end of this long history and looking back, we know that they did, didn't they? None of these empires, none of these empires are around anymore.

And even the more recent ones, you know, Holy Roman Empire, the Ottoman, the British Empire, they've all come and gone. I know the UK is still around, that's fine, but they're not an empire now, are they?

They've all come and they've all gone. But Daniel tells us that there is one kingdom, one kingdom that will not end. And it's portrayed as a stone that is divided in origin because it's not cut by human heads.

[21 : 42] And that's a contrast, isn't it, to the statue which has been forged with metal by humans. And this kingdom, this stone, it's not static, is it? Because after it has struck the statue, it grows into a mountain and fills the whole earth.

It's a living kingdom. It's a universal kingdom, isn't it? Now this stone, of course, we know, represents Jesus and his kingdom. And Jesus, in our second reading in Luke, portrays himself as such a stone.

When he quotes, he initially quotes from Psalm 118, doesn't he, when he says that he is the stone that the builders rejected that has become the cornerstone. But then, in the very next verse, he goes on to say, everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces.

Anyone on whom it falls will be crushed. Did you notice the same words that are being used of the stone in Daniel chapter 2? This is an allusion.

Jesus may be quoting from Psalm 118, but he's also alluding to Daniel chapter 2. But of course, the way that Jesus builds his kingdom is not like how the other kingdoms are.

[22 : 55] When Jesus talks about us falling on that stone, it is to be broken in repentance. It's our pride that needs to be dismantled. And at the same time, Jesus himself is broken for us at the cross.

Because it's his broken body that is the means by which we enter God's kingdom through faith and repentance. And that's why, as I said, the feet and the clay must be the royal empire still, because that is the timing of his death on the cross, isn't it?

That is the means by which he crushes all the earthly kingdoms. But one day, all earthly kingdoms will cease. Because Jesus then says, anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.

Meaning all kingdoms on whom he falls will be crushed. No one will remain standing save those who have faith in him.

Come the last day, as I said, every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. So either we are broken now in repentance or we face God's crushing judgment of the kingdoms at the end.

[24 : 11] Now for those of us who do believe, then we have the same comfort, don't we, as the people during Daniel's time had. And in your outline, I give you those three things.

First, we are comfort to know that there is a God in heaven who has revealed himself to us. Not just in a dream, but throughout scriptures. God has not been silent. He has told us how history will pan out.

Not in the detail. We're not going to know how the US is going to fall from grace or China. but the grand scheme of things we do. The salvation plan in Jesus Christ we do.

And what we know as well is that every human kingdom, no matter how powerful, will come to an end. So, you know, I think, you know, sometimes, I don't know where you guys spend a lot of time on the internet, but we get onto, you know, the internet and we get spooked.

I don't know, but you may. We get spooked by some of these conspiracy theories, isn't it? That, you know, there is a new world order that's coming about that used COVID to do that and China's rise is going to be so dangerous and all that.

[25 : 18] Now, I'm not saying that none of these things wouldn't happen because we know that humans do lust for power, don't they? And history has shown us dictators and superpowers that try every which way they can to achieve dominion.

And some of them do. Some succeed. But despite all of that, none of these things happen outside God's sovereign control. Every kingdom, as I said, exists only because God allows it to.

And they will come to an end one way or another. We've looked at history and that has been already proven. But more importantly, God's word has confirmed it.

That is a better assurance. And God's word also confirms that there will be another kingdom that will be set up, that will never be destroyed, that kingdom is the kingdom of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

What He's done on the cross has secured His kingdom forever. Nothing in history can ever undo that. No one, no matter how powerful, can ever do what the Lord Jesus has done.

[26 : 26] He has crushed, He has crushed the kingdoms of this world. and this is the kingdom that we belong to by faith and the one that we declare to the world to be part of.

It's the mountain that keeps growing and growing to fill the whole earth. And even though from the perspective of human eyes, it may appear weak and powerless at the moment, Jesus' kingdom is the one that will endure forever.

So let me finish by praising God for this kingdom. Let's pray. Father, we thank You that You have revealed Your will to us in this chapter and in Your Word.

Thank You that You have established Your eternal kingdom in Your Son. And so we can be part of it through faith in Him. We praise Him. We praise the name of Jesus.

We worship Him. Save us from all other human kingdoms through His blood. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.