

April 29, 2020 Bible Study – Daniel 2:1–11

Daniel 2:1–11 in your favorite translation. I will print the NET–2 translation.

2:1 In the second year of his reign Nebuchadnezzar had many dreams. His mind was disturbed and he suffered from insomnia. 2 The king issued an order to summon the magicians, astrologers, sorcerers, and wise men in order to explain his dreams to him. So they came and awaited the king's instructions.

2:3 The king told them, "I have had a dream, and I am anxious to understand the dream." 4 The wise men replied to the king: [What follows is in Aramaic] "O king, live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will disclose its interpretation." 5 The king replied to the wise men, "My decision is firm. If you do not inform me of both the dream and its interpretation, you will be dismembered and your homes reduced to rubble! 6 But if you can disclose the dream and its interpretation, you will receive from me gifts, a reward, and considerable honor. So disclose to me the dream and its interpretation." 7 They again replied, "Let the king inform us of the dream; then we will disclose its interpretation." 8 The king replied, "I know for sure that you are attempting to gain time, because you see that my decision is firm. 9 If you don't inform me of the dream, there is only one thing that is going to happen to you. For you have agreed among yourselves to report to me something false and deceitful until such time as things might change. So tell me the dream, and I will have confidence that you can disclose its interpretation."

2:10 The wise men replied to the king, "There is no man on earth who is able to disclose the king's secret, for no king, regardless of his position and power, has ever requested such a thing from any magician, astrologer, or wise man. 11 What the king is asking is too difficult, and no one exists who can disclose it to the king, except for the gods—but they don't live among mortals!"

COMMENTS:

Introduction to dreams in ancient times: In Old and New Testament times and throughout the ancient world dreams were recognized as an ordinary human experience, but could also be a means of divine communication. Some would have a straightforward verbal message, while in others the message came in symbols that require interpretation.

Neither Israel nor other cultures gave dreams a central place as means of divine communication, but neither do they take a negative attitude towards the phenomenon. Nebuchadnezzar's summoning of the diviners implies he believed the royal dream is of some state significance.

It is the magicians responsibility to interpret omens of various kinds for him and to advise him on how to avert any misfortune threatened by them. Their role in Babylon paralleled that of prophets in Israel.

The word translated as 'astrologers' by NET–2 translators and enchantors by the ESV, NRSV and others, is a more common Babylonian term for magical practitioners skilled at interpreting signs in people who are ill and (presumably) at conjurations and rituals designed to influence how matters turn out for them.

Sorcerers is another word for people skilled in charms and incantations, a more common O.T. term used to denote the pathetic and sinful practice of magic and divination (e.g., Isa 47:9, 12).

The word translated as Chaldeans (ESV, NRSV & NASB95 & wise men in NET–2) to denote the groups as a whole, such as sages. The "sages" here are not wise men such as Proverbs speaks of, but experts in esoteric wisdom and a soothsayer. They are people who can resolve mysteries.

The terms are used randomly and interchangeably. There was no Babylonian group specifically concerned with interpreting dreams. They are all variant synonyms for the Babylonian diviners whose role was central to Babylonian religious and political life.

Now the story begins to get interesting. The king informs all those gathered that he had a dream which he is anxious to understand. Now suddenly the language changes from Hebrew to Aramaic all the way through 7:28. Why this sudden change?

Now Daniel wants to write the story in a language which all could understand. Aramaic is like Latin, French, and English languages which were at various times the primary language of commerce and national negotiations between world powers. Now the story is in a language all educated people could understand.

All of these advisors to the king couldn't quite understand his request. He didn't just want to have an interpretation of his dream; he wants them to also tell him his dream. Some speculate the king was having trouble remembering the dream, but it is equally possible that the king was so unsettled by the dream, that he wanted proof they really could interpret the dream.

Now if they could first tell him the dream and then give their interpretation, he could be fairly confident they had a special gift and what they said would be correct. The advisors immediately tell the king, "You are asking what no one has ever asked before. It is impossible for anyone to comply with this request.

The only ones who could do this would have to be gods. No one else can comply with this request. It is interesting to me that they don't believe any of the gods would associate with mortal beings. That is why it has always been easier for humans to believe Jesus was truly human and so hard for them to believe he is also true God.

REFLECTION QUESTION: Why do you think the king had this new demand – tell me both my dream and its meaning? It certainly makes the story of Daniel more interesting. Be watching in tomorrow reading to see how Daniel handles this problem. We often talk about being caught between a rock and a hard place. Here is a chance to learn what to do when it actually happens to us.