

# Nebuchadnezzar the Dreamer

---

*Daniel 2:1-16*

TEXT:

“In the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his spirit was troubled, and his sleep left him. Then the king commanded that the magicians, the enchanters, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans be summoned to tell the king his dreams. So they came in and stood before the king. And the king said to them, ‘I had a dream, and my spirit is troubled to know the dream.’ Then the Chaldeans said to the king in Aramaic, ‘O king, live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation.’ The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, ‘The word from me is firm: if you do not make known to me the dream and its interpretation, you shall be torn limb from limb, and your houses shall be laid in ruins. But if you show the dream and its interpretation, you shall receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor. Therefore show me the dream and its interpretation.’ They answered a second time and said, ‘Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will show its interpretation.’ The king answered and said, ‘I know with certainty that you are trying to gain time, because you see that the word from me is firm—if you do not make the dream known to me, there is but one sentence for you. You have agreed to speak lying and corrupt words before me till the times change. Therefore tell me the dream, and I shall know that you can show me its interpretation.’ The Chaldeans answered the king and said, ‘There is not a man on earth who can meet the king’s demand, for no great and powerful king has asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or Chaldean. The thing that the king asks is difficult, and no one can show it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh.’

“Because of this the king was angry and very furious, and commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be destroyed. So the decree went out, and the wise men were about to be killed; and they sought Daniel and his companions, to kill them. Then Daniel replied with prudence and discretion to Arioch, the captain of the king’s guard, who had gone out to kill the wise men of Babylon. He declared to Arioch, the king’s captain, ‘Why is the decree of the king so urgent?’ Then Arioch made the matter known to Daniel. And Daniel went in and requested the king to appoint him a time, that he might show the interpretation to the king.”

## NOTES:

- A. The text declares that “Nebuchadnezzar dreamed dreams.”
  1. Notice the plural “dreams.”
  2. Scholars have examined several ways to explain the use of the plural here.
    - a. Some believe that this should be translated, “Nebuchadnezzar was in a state when a dream came to him.”
    - b. Others believe that Daniel had several dreams & one of them finally roused him from his sleep.
  3. Whatever the case, it’s very clear that Nebuchadnezzar finally had a dream that troubled him greatly.
  4. Each one of us has likely had a dream that troubled us greatly, even though we recognized that any dream we had was nothing more than a dream.
    - a. Yet, Nebuchadnezzar realized his dream was not simply a dream like we might have, no matter how vivid they might be.
    - b. There are two very likely reasons that Nebuchadnezzar understood his dream to be different from any ordinary dream.
      - 1) Babylonian monarchs expected the gods to speak to them through dreams.
        - a) Herodotus, the “father of history,” tells how Persian monarchs kept magi for the purpose of interpreting dreams.
        - b) The fact that this narrative presents magi has trained in the interpretation of dreams strongly suggests that the Persians expected the gods to speak through dreams.

- 2) However, it also seems to me that Nebuchadnezzar at once realizes his dream is of a totally different variety than anything he's ever experienced previously. Why else would Nebuchadnezzar demand the interpretation of his dream in such strong language?
- B. Notice also that God sent this dream to a pagan ruler.
1. God ordinarily didn't reveal his plan to pagan rulers, even when he used them to fulfill his purpose.
    - a. For example: God clearly used Nebuchadnezzar to punish Judah when he sent him to sack Jerusalem.
    - b. However, clearly Nebuchadnezzar had no idea that was God's doing. If he had known that, would he have put the articles from the Temple in the house of his god? Would he have given the Hebrews pagan food to eat?
  2. Why would God then send this dream to Nebuchadnezzar?
    - a. Nebuchadnezzar had a huge problem with pride.
      - 1) As we know, he went out on his rooftop & boasted about the great Babylon that **he** had built.
      - 2) The interpretation of this dream makes clear that it was God who gave Nebuchadnezzar the kingdom in the first place: "You, O king, the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, and the might, and the glory, and into whose hand he has given, wherever they dwell, the children of man, the beasts of the field, and the birds of the heavens, making you rule over them all—you are the head of gold" (vv 37-38).
    - b. Nebuchadnezzar would also learn that earthly kingdoms were not the **real** kingdom.
      - 1) God had another kingdom, far more important, that was coming.
      - 2) "In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever" (2:44).
- C. Four different classes of wise men are commanded to stand before the king.
1. The English Standard Version refers to them as "the magicians, the enchanters, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans." The King James Version refers to them as "the magicians, and the astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans." The New International Version refers to them as "the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers."
  2. It doesn't necessarily appear that there is a specific difference in these classes of men; the point, rather, seems to be to include all sorts of various wise men as being summoned before the king.
  3. However, the "Chaldeans" were the most important class of wise men in the days of Daniel.
    - a. They were elite men & the emperor himself was a Chaldean.
    - b. We know that there were Chaldeans living in this region during the time of the patriarchs (Gn 11:28).
      - 1) The Chaldeans of whom we read in Daniel were likely men of great education who could trace their ancestry back to the days of the original Chaldeans.
      - 2) Therefore, they would have had a great amount of weight in the emperor's court.
- D. Nebuchadnezzar called these men before him & told them that he had a dream that greatly troubled him.
1. The different classes of magi said, "Tell us the dream & we will give you the interpretation." Nebuchadnezzar declares, "Not so fast. I'll tear you limb from limb & lay your houses in ruins if you don't tell me both the dream & the interpretation."
  2. It seems to me that the Holy Spirit guided Daniel to record this part of the conversation to demonstrate the power of God vis-à-vis the power of the magi.
    - a. They **claimed** to be able to interpret dreams, but here where the "rubber meets the road," they fail & fail miserably.
    - b. However, God knows & is able to reveal mysteries: "No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in

the latter days" (2:27-28).

c. As Nebuchadnezzar presses his magicians to give him the dream, they say to him:

1) "There is not a man on earth who can meet the king's demand, for no great and powerful king has asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or Chaldean. The thing that the king asks is difficult, and no one can show it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh" (2:10-11).

2) The irony of these verses is almost too much!

a) These men say to the king, "There's not a man on earth who can do what you've asked!"

b) That's exactly the point of this chapter. No man knows the future. No man holds the future. No man can reveal the future. Only The Most High can do so.

D. Nebuchadnezzar becomes quite angry & orders all the magi throughout the kingdom to be killed.

1. They go to search for Daniel & his companions.

2. Daniel asked that he be permitted to go before the king to reveal the dream & its interpretation.

a. There is a great deal of faith in this statement, for God has not yet revealed the dream or its interpretation to Daniel.

b. Right after Daniel asks to make the dream known to the king, we read: "Then Daniel went to his house and made the matter known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions, and told them to seek mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his companions might not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon" (2:17-18).