

Daniel 2 Sermon – The Revealer of Mysteries

The man in Moscow is terrorising Ukrainian civilians, millions have died and many more are starving. They're clamping down on the Ukrainian language and taking rebels back to Russia with them in an act of psychological warfare. And this doesn't just concern the fit, fighting men – women, children, and the elderly are all affected and all in danger.

That is what was happening in the 1930s under Stalin. Imagine then how a Ukrainian citizen at the time would have felt if they had been told that in 60 years' time, the Soviet Union would fall, but that that would not be the end of their people's sufferings. Because 30 years later another man in Moscow would cause untold suffering in Ukraine. Imagine too how Stalin would have felt, if he'd been told his regime would collapse and be replaced by another, and another, and then another.

What should we do when monsters rule? That's the big question of the book of Daniel – we get the historic account of the Babylonian captivity and the human metaphorical monsters who ruled the empire, and then we see Daniel's visions of literal monsters, and thrones and all sorts of imagery, that shows us the cosmic events going on behind the scenes. And in this chapter we get a little taste of some of this imagery in Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

At the end of chapter one you'd be forgiven for thinking that God's on the ropes. His people are in captivity, and his miracle of sustaining them on humble food doesn't exactly look earth-shattering. The monsters are still in charge. And they're still in charge today. Corrupt politicians who fail to care for the vulnerable, warmongers who kill thousands of civilians and children, scammers, thieves, sex offenders. What should we do when monsters rule?

Well come with me to Babylon, and to King Nebuchadnezzar's ensuite bathroom as he stares at himself in the mirror and tries to convince himself that what he's just seen was only a dream. In this chapter, we see who's really in control, and that God is not on the ropes at all. Monsters don't rule, heaven rules. I think in this story we get a big contrast between Babylon and God, so we're going to see two titles, two names if you like, that belong not to Babylon, but to God. And we're going to see a bit about how we should respond to this God in a world where monsters seem to rule.

1) The Revealer of Mysteries

Not Babylon

So firstly we're going to see that the Revealer of Mysteries is not Babylon, but God. This is such a big theme in this story, the word 'reveal' or similar words come up over and over again. Nebuchadnezzar's there, by the sink, brushing his teeth wondering what on earth his dream means. And then he remembers that he's the king of Babylon, and he has many wise men and magicians under him who are skilled at interpreting dreams, and who can call on the power of the Babylonian gods to help them understand. So he calls them together, and says "tell me what my dream means. And also tell me what my dream was. Or I'm going to kill you". Literally he says he's going to make them 'pieces' and make their houses 'dunghills'. Who knows why he doesn't tell them the dream, surely that would make it

easier for them to interpret it? Even Pharaoh tells people the content of his dreams when he wants them interpreted in the book of Genesis. But Nebuchadnezzar doesn't, perhaps he's in a foul mood and just wants an excuse to kill someone. Perhaps he wants to test his magicians – otherwise they could just make something up and say it's the interpretation.

We don't know, but what we do know is this is an insight into what it's like to live under the monstrous rule of Babylon. It was a greatly glorious nation, they'd conquered God's people and could afford to give all their intellectuals, even the captives, choice food and wine. But behind all the glitz and glamour, it's a monstrous place to live – a place where you can be torn limb from limb for not being a mind reader. A place where the king has a right to make impossible demands, just because he's the king. When authority is claimed by someone who rejects the rule of the Lord God – we get Babylon, the rule of a monster.

A quick word to the kids here – in the world you grow up in, we may have good rulers, or bad ones. Remember that even when rulers look like monsters – the God of heaven is really in charge. Heaven Rules, not monsters.

But behind all the glitz and glamour of Babylon and their wise men, they're also useless! v11 “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.” They can't do it! They know their gods aren't going to answer them – they have no hope of the gods helping them reveal the dream or its interpretation. In fact, they don't even try! All the Babylonians can do is protest that what Nebuchadnezzar has asked is too difficult and beg him to reconsider!

But of course, he doesn't, so he orders them all to be executed. Not just those in front of him in the palace, but all the wise men of Babylon. All of them. Including those brought in from Jerusalem. Which is where we get to Daniel and his friends.

But God

So who can reveal mysteries? Not Babylon, but God.

Daniel hears about the decree, the death notice put on his head, and his response is to... Run and hide? No, he goes and finds the chief executioner, which seems pretty bold, and asks him – “Why did the king issue such a decree?” and Arioch, the commander of the guard, tells him that it's all because nobody could tell the king his dream and its interpretation.

So Daniel marches straight into the palace. Verse 16 “At this, Daniel went in to the king and asked for time, so that he might interpret the dream for him.” Compare his reaction to that of the Babylonians earlier. Daniel has so much confidence in God! He knows that the God of Israel is able to interpret dreams and trusts that he will help him. He has so much confidence that he goes in to the king before he even brings up the matter with God.

Then verse 18, he gathers his friends for a prayer meeting, and verse 19 “During the night the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision. Then Daniel praised the God of heaven.” There it is. Who reveals mysteries? Not Babylon, but God. It was God who gave Nebuchadnezzar this dream to make just this point. Nebuchadnezzar couldn't understand it, the Babylonians couldn't work it out, because God is the one who reveals mysteries.

And so Daniel praises the Revealer of Mysteries. God is the one seated on the throne, he alone reveals mysteries. Not Babylon but God. So Daniel adores him. And we're going to take a pause now, and join in with Daniel in singing praise to the God who is greater than all human powers.

Behold our God

So who reveals mysteries, not Babylon – but God. And just in case we missed it, the writer hammers it home for us one more time in verses 24-30. Daniel goes into the king and is asked if he can reveal the mystery. And surprisingly, he basically says “No, I can't, but God can!” v28 “But there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come.” Then v30 “This mystery has been revealed to me, *not* because I have greater wisdom than anyone else alive, but so that Your Majesty may know the interpretation and that you may understand what went through your mind.”

Do you see that? Daniel is not claiming greatness, he's humbly giving all the glory for the revelation to God. Daniel is only a tool used by God to reveal the truth, the meaning of the dream, to Nebuchadnezzar. Why then doesn't God show the meaning of the dream directly to Nebuchadnezzar? Why go through all the effort of getting Daniel to reveal it? Well don't you think Nebuchadnezzar would have then thought “Aren't I so clever to have worked this all out!”? No, he needed to know that it is the God of the Israelites who reveals mysteries, and even the king of Babylon is under his authority – he needs his help to know what his dream means.

So how do we act in a world where monsters rule? Well we trust the Revealer of Mysteries.

When you're hit with a huge disappointment in life, like the loss of a family member, or covid interrupting holiday plans – is God surprised? No, not at all! He's the revealer of mysteries! And that means he knows what's going to happen, and he's always known. He's not surprised!

Kids, are you worried about moving school when you go into year 7? You don't know what it's going to be like. Well God's got a plan laid out; he sees every single day written out in front of him. He might not tell us what's going to happen, but he knows the mysteries, and that means we can trust him. When it's a bad day, when it's a good day – he's ready for it! And at the right time he'll help you through it. Trust the revealer of mysteries.

What mysteries do we expect God to reveal now? Does he act in this way today? I think some of us these days like to think he does – we want little revelations from God about what car we should buy, or who we should marry, or what book to read, or what words to use to encourage a friend. But are those mysteries the same as the mystery revealed to Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel?

I think the answer is no, not quite, and that's for two reasons – setting and scale. Firstly setting – remember this all happens in Babylon. Let's not look at this story with twenty-first century goggles on. Let's remember this is a foreign land, where people worship other gods

and there are probably very few copies of the scriptures around. Where we are today, we have Bibles in every hotel room, signs on the motorway, churches on every street corner, all revealing God's rescue plan that Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. Does God reveal mysteries in dreams today? Yes he does, the Holy Spirit does give people prophetic dreams, but it's mainly in places where his word is not common – in Islamic countries, or remote tribes. In Huntingdon, if we want to see God's revelation – don't close your eyes and wait for a vision, open your eyes and open your Bible!

But Matt, the Bible doesn't say anything about what specific words I should say to my friend who's suffering, or where I should send my kids to school, or what job I should apply for, won't God reveal *those* things to me in a miraculous vision? Or will he give me a feeling that something is right? Well, maybe... But don't expect him to, he won't always. I think it's important to remember the *SCALE* of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. It's not personal guidance or advice – it's a message about God's sovereignty over history. God is the one who knows the end from the beginning, and he reveals what is to come to Nebuchadnezzar. Verse 29 "The revealer of mysteries showed you what is going to happen". And God has showed us what is going to happen too! Hebrews 1v1-2 "In the past, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us *by his Son*." You want to know the future? You want God to reveal wonderful things to you? Don't go to horoscopes or divination, they don't work, the Babylonians show that! Don't wait for a vision from God either, don't listen for a voice in the silence, or wait for a feeling. Those things might happen, but they're not God's primary way of speaking. This is his primary way of speaking. And any instinctive feeling we get or dream we have must be checked against God's revelation in scripture to see if it's true. The words of the prophets, and of his Son, and of his Son's appointed messengers. Expecting God's revelation and ignoring his word is like going to the cinema with a blindfold on.

The Bible is God's revelation of the mysteries of history and the future. Kids do you think of it like that? The Bible's not just another book like you might read in school – it's *the* book of God's mysteries. When you open it up, God is speaking to you, telling you wonderful true things about the world, about you, about him, and about the future. How exciting is that!

So who's the revealer of mysteries? Not Babylon, but God! And we can trust Him to reveal mysteries today. If you're not a Christian here – there's a wonderful mystery in the pages of the Bible – a story of God coming down in the person of Jesus to die on a cross for the sins of the world. Pray that he'll reveal that mystery to you, then open the book and let Him show you his love for you and the offer of eternal life.

The Wrecker of Monarchies v31-49

So what happens in the dream? We've got the strange picture of a statue in four parts that gets destroyed by a rock, and then Daniel shows that it's representative of four human kingdoms and then an eternal kingdom, set up by God. I'm not going to dig in to the imagery of the kingdoms too much here, we'll come back to it when we look at chapter 7. I'll just flag up the structure of Daniel here to show a bit more about how the content of chapter 2 and chapter 7 is similar.

We start with an introduction, then chapters 2, 3 and 4 are about kingdoms, rescue and humbling, then 5, 6 and 7 are about humbling, rescue and kingdoms. So look out for that structure as we go through the book.

What I will say about these kingdoms is what Daniel says – Nebuchadnezzar is the head of gold, the current glorious kingdom. But there is an ‘after Nebuchadnezzar’. His kingdom isn’t going to last forever. And after that there will be another, and another. And the last kingdom will be destructive, strong, but divided. Like iron mixed with clay

Kingdoms come, and kingdoms go. Look in the history books – where’s the Soviet Union now? Where’s the Roman empire? But when kingdoms go they’re replaced by others. Think of that Ukrainian in 1930 – Stalin’s on his way out, but it’s not all over – the new regime is coming. Are you hoping for change? Where are you hoping for it? Political/social reform? New kingdoms? No kingdom is permanent. And even if one is better than another, it may later be replaced by an even worse one. Eventually another man enters the Kremlin and wages war in Eastern Europe.

And Nebuchadnezzar would probably have liked to forget all about this, to bury this thought in the back of his mind. In his palace he can live under the delusion that Babylon is going to rule forever – but God brings it right to the front of his mind in this dream. “Nebuchadnezzar” he says “You’re nothing special. You’re one king in a long line of others, and your whole dynasty will be torn down one day”, in fact, that happens before the end of the book of Daniel.

Who’s the wrecker of monarchies? The kingdom to end all kingdoms? Not Babylon, but God. God is the one who brings down kings. Verse 44 “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.” The rock cut out not by human hands is a king established by God. The King in David’s line, the King to end all Kings. Nebuchadnezzar is called ‘king of kings’ in v37, in this sense meaning ‘the greatest king’ but God is the Lord of kings the one above all kings. And he will establish his Kingdom, and the one on the throne is the Messiah, the anointed one – Jesus. They didn’t know his name in Babylon, but Daniel knew he was coming, and God knew he was coming. And in the dream, God revealed to Nebuchadnezzar that human kingdoms were going to be destroyed and replaced by the kingdom of heaven – with God’s King Jesus on the throne.

The Babylonians needed to know this so they could get with the programme. And if you’re not a Christian today, you need to know this too. A rock is coming, and it will crush all of those who don’t belong to his kingdom. But the good news is if you trust in Jesus, you can be part of his kingdom. Don’t be an enemy of God’s eternal king. That’s the challenge to Nebuchadnezzar and it’s the challenge to you too. Fear the wrecker of monarchies.

And Daniel and his friends needed to know this so they could persevere in Babylon. This regime that had taken so much from them was not going to last. God’s not on the ropes, God’s the wrecker of monarchies and one day his rule will be established through his eternal

king, and every knee will bow before him. So followers of Jesus, keep going. Your King is coming. Fear him, obey him, go out and serve him – tell others of his kingdom. The wrecking rock is coming.

Kids – do your friends know this? Lots of people think Jesus is just a nice guy who wants us all to be kind to each other. He does want that, but he's also the king, and we all have turned away from the King. People need to know that Jesus is the King and he's coming to rule the world, so we need to turn back, and live with him as our King. Why not tell someone about that this week? Adults too, when someone asks what you did at the weekend, you could tell them you went to church and heard how Jesus is coming as King, and we need to get on the right side of him.

As we close let's see how the story ends. Sadly, the story ends with Nebuchadnezzar not really getting it. He says the right things, v47 "Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries" but he worships.... Daniel. Not God, Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar still has a way to go, he does good things for Daniel here, but as we see in the next few chapters, he's still a monster, and he still needs to be humbled, but we'll get to that later. Even with his inability to interpret his dream, and his knowledge that his kingdom won't last – he doesn't worship God. And sometimes it's like that when we tell someone about Jesus – it takes time for people to respond to the message of the gospel, of the coming king. But we all need to.

The Revealer of Mysteries can show you the mystery of the gospel, and the invitation into his eternal kingdom. And he knows the future, so we can trust him.

The wrecker of monarchies will destroy all evil – war, corruption, abuse, and he will establish his eternal kingdom, with Jesus on the throne. Fear him, and trust him.