

# SERMON | WHAT DO YOU PLEDGE ALLEGIANCE TO?

## SERIES | STRANGE LAND

STUDY GUIDE | DAVID STOCKTON | SUNDAY, APRIL 21, 2024

### SERMON SUMMARY

After Nebuchadnezzar experienced dreams that troubled him, he sought sorcerers and enchanters to tell him his own dream and then interpret it. He could not find anyone to interpret his dream, and out of his intense anger and power, he decreed all wise men of Babylon to be put to death, including Daniel and his friends. Daniel found out about it and used wisdom and tact with Arioch the commander, and Nebuchadnezzar the king, to buy some time.

Daniel pleaded with the Lord to reveal the mystery of the king's dream so that they wouldn't be killed. In God's great mercy, He revealed the king's dream to Daniel in a vision. Daniel didn't know if the vision he had was right, but he was confident it would satisfy the king, even though the message ended with the king being destroyed. Daniel responded with praise to God for His wisdom and power, and that He shares His wisdom, knowledge, and power with people. Then Daniel goes to the king, interprets the dream, and gives credit to God. His interpretation revealed that Babylon is an empire of gold and there will be inferior empires which come after it. At some point God will set up a kingdom which will seem small at first, but it is made by God and will destroy all the other kingdoms and fill the whole earth. Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah, and the wise men of Babylon were saved from death. Daniel was given great honor and became a governmental official in Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar declared Yahweh the King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

Despite the troubled king's threats, Daniel is able to keep his cool, turn to the Lord for help, and receive wisdom and understanding from God. With that wisdom, Daniel is able to give understanding and peace to the king, which then gives peace to all the wise men, and to Daniel as well. Everyone's lives are saved. The pagan king sees Daniel's good works, glorifies the true God in heaven, and shows favor to Daniel and his friends.

We don't know how long Daniel and his friends lived in the drudgery of slavery. We know it had been three years of indoctrination and training to become the king's slaves. We also don't know what Daniel did as the king's slave, but it seems to have something to do with gathering information through astrology, magic, scientific learning, or whatever else they convinced the king they could learn from. But God saw fit to trouble Nebuchadnezzar with a dream and to give the dreams message to the king through Daniel. God saw fit to cause Nebuchadnezzar to show kindness to Daniel and his friends Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah.

The message from God was that the kingdoms and empires of this world are nothing. They are just the conglomeration of human power. And human power is nothing before God. This should have been a humbling message for the king, but as we will see later in the book, he doesn't get the message. For Daniel, this is meant to be a message of hope and encouragement. Though Babylon seems all powerful and unstoppable, it is nothing to God, and God has not abandoned Daniel and His people forever. God will destroy all the different consolidations of human power, by establishing a Kingdom endowed, not with human power, but with His sovereign power.

What are we to receive from this for today? Patient endurance and prudent resistance. Daniel and his friends patiently endured their captivity. Every time we see Daniel he is respectful to his captors. We don't see him being syncretistic, separatist, or revolutionary. We see him patiently enduring. Daniel and his friends also prudently resisted. They did not consume the royal propaganda. They knew it was deceitful and could compromise their connection with God, so they resisted it. They prudently resisted overboard nationalism by not bowing when the national anthem was sung. Instead, they made it clear they were for God, not putting God and country on the same level. They

prudently resisted the law against praying in a certain place, by praying in that certain place. And they prudently resisted compromising their homeland identity with the identity of their captivity for decades.

We are citizens of heaven. The nation we live in is America. It is not the kingdom we live and die for. Our homeland is heaven, our King is Jesus, our constitution is the Sermon on the Mount and the rest of the Bible. As Christians, we don't live for God and country, we just live for God.

## SCRIPTURE READING

**READ THIS WEEKS BIBLE PASSAGE: Daniel 2:1-13, 17-23, 26-35, 46-47 (NIV)**

### **Nebuchadnezzar's Dream**

**2** In the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his mind was troubled and he could not sleep. **2** So the king summoned the magicians, enchanter, sorcerers and astrologers to tell him what he had dreamed. When they came in and stood before the king, **3** he said to them, "I have had a dream that troubles me and I want to know what it means." **4** Then the astrologers answered the king, "May the king live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will interpret it." **5** The king replied to the astrologers, "This is what I have firmly decided: If you do not tell me what my dream was and interpret it, I will have you cut into pieces and your houses turned into piles of rubble. **6** But if you tell me the dream and explain it, you will receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor. So tell me the dream and interpret it for me." **7** Once more they replied, "Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will interpret it." **8** Then the king answered, "I am certain that you are trying to gain time, because you realize that this is what I have firmly decided: **9** 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. So then, tell me the dream, and I will know that you can interpret it for me." **10** The astrologers 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. **11** 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." **12** This made the king so angry and furious that he ordered the execution of all the wise men of Babylon. **13** 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. – Daniel 2:1-13

**17** Then Daniel returned to his house and explained the matter to his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. **18** He urged them to plead for mercy 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 of Babylon. **19** During the night the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision. Then Daniel praised the God of heaven **20** and said: "Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are his. **21** He changes times and seasons; he deposes kings and raises up others. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. **22** He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with him. **23** 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." – Daniel 2:17-23

**26** The king asked Daniel (also called Belteshazzar), "Are you able to tell me what I saw in my dream and interpret it?" **27** Daniel replied, "No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about, **28** but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come. Your dream and the visions that passed through your mind as you were lying in bed are these: **29** "As Your Majesty was lying there, your mind turned to things to come, and the revealer of mysteries showed you what is going to happen. **30** As for me, 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. **31** "Your Majesty looked, and there before you stood a

large statue—an enormous, dazzling statue, awesome in appearance. <sup>32</sup> The head of the statue was made of pure gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, <sup>33</sup> its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay. <sup>34</sup> 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. <sup>35</sup> Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and 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. – Daniel 2:26-35

<sup>46</sup> Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and paid him honor and ordered that an offering and incense be presented to him. <sup>47</sup> 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.” – Daniel 2:46-47

## **BIBLE PASSAGE APPLICATION QUESTIONS**

What stood out to you in these passages? Did the Lord highlight anything to you? What do these passages teach you about the character of God? What do these passages teach you about mankind? What do these passages teach you about how mankind should respond to God? What do these passages teach you about how to respond to others?

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Read these passages again (use a different translation if helpful). How did these passages help to convict, correct, or encourage you?

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## **GROUP DISCUSSION**

### **DISCUSS THESE QUESTIONS WITH YOUR GROUP**

1. When you don't know the truth, do you pray and praise, or argue and negotiate?
2. What can we learn from Daniel's example on how to react during a personal crisis?
3. At various times in life, we might feel we are powerless to our circumstances. How should knowledge of God's wisdom, sovereignty, and power, affect our view when we feel powerless?
4. Daniel showed spiritual maturity in how he responded in times of chaos and crisis. Consider his wisdom in response to a crisis, his prayer in response to a problem, and his praise in response to God's faithfulness and power. How can Daniel's example help you grow in these areas?

## PRAYER

Take some time for prayer requests and pray over one another before wrapping up.

