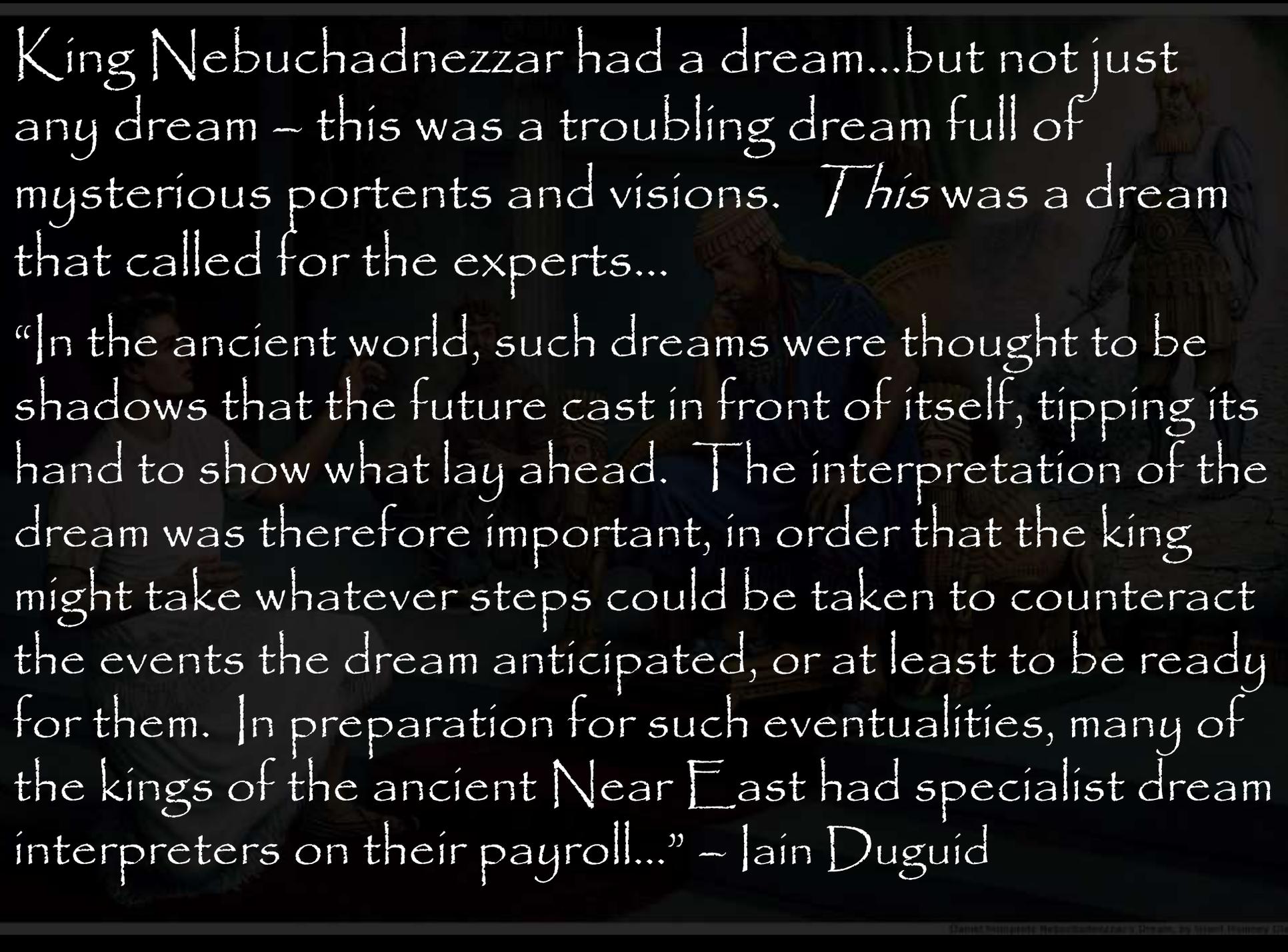








Daniel Interprets Nebuchadnezzar's Dream, by Grant Romney Cla

The background of the slide features a dark, textured image of ancient Egyptian figures. On the right side, a woman in a long, patterned dress and a tall, ornate headdress is visible. In the center, a man in a blue tunic and a golden headpiece is depicted. The overall scene is dimly lit, with the figures appearing as silhouettes against a slightly lighter background.

King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream...but not just any dream – this was a troubling dream full of mysterious portents and visions. *This* was a dream that called for the experts...

“In the ancient world, such dreams were thought to be shadows that the future cast in front of itself, tipping its hand to show what lay ahead. The interpretation of the dream was therefore important, in order that the king might take whatever steps could be taken to counteract the events the dream anticipated, or at least to be ready for them. In preparation for such eventualities, many of the kings of the ancient Near East had specialist dream interpreters on their payroll...” – Iain Duguid

But before we go any further, let's do this:

The book's main theme: The King of the Nations

Key verse ~ 4:34b—"His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom endures from generation to generation."

The book divides naturally into two halves...

- Daniel in the King's courts ~ chs. 1-6
- Daniel and the King's visions ~ chs. 7-12

2:1-13—A crisis in the King's palace

2:14-30—Daniel's response to the King's decree

2:31-49—The King's dream interpreted

And we need to say this too at this point:

Who are the players in this chapter?

- Nebuchadnezzar
- The magicians
- Arioch, Captain of the King's Guard
- Daniel
- Daniel's companions: Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah

Each of them learns something from the events in this chapter, but we can't get caught up in the events and overlook the most important thing: Daniel's intended audience—God's people living as strangers and exiles in a place that is not their home. What would *they* have seen in this chapter?

One of the keys to understanding Daniel's book are the commands of God in Jer. 29:4-7 to His people going into exile.

Daniel intervenes on behalf of the pagan "wise men of Babylon" (2:24). God knows the suffering of His people, and they know the reason behind it. For them to have hope, they needed to see God working for their good and their welfare: through this account of Nebuchadnezzar's dream and its interpretation, they would have seen God as the great Sovereign of the nations, with power no one can resist. He orders and moves kings, nations, and world events for His own purposes. Coupling that with Ps. 105:7-11 would have helped them to patiently endure.

Nebuchadnezzar's first dream—Daniel ch. 2

A crisis in the King's palace! – v. 1-13

The King had a bad dream—“his spirit was troubled, and his sleep left him.” Why is this such a big deal?

- Because “a king's dreams had significance for the nation as a whole,” and he may need to plan for the outcome of the dream, or to counteract it.

This all happens very early in his reign (605-562 BC).

Since the King was laying awake, might as well wake others up too...he summons his dream interpreters: “the magicians, the enchanters, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans” (v. 2).

A crisis in the King's palace! – v. 1-13

Ok—no big deal, they lose some sleep, but he's the King, he signs the paychecks, just keep him happy.

Until we get to verse 5. Now it's a big deal.

- The King's professional dream interpreters show up and say what they have likely said several times, v. 4.
- But Nebuchadnezzar is an absolute monarch, and he gets to make the rules—this dream has troubled him deeply, and he wants to know that what his interpreters tell him is truth...so he changes the rules in v. 5.
- To put it mildly, the outlook for them is bleak.

A crisis in the King's palace! – v. 1-13

The dream interpreters make a last appeal, along with a heavyweight theological statement in v. 10-11:
“...no one can show it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh.”

Which implies what?

- Human wisdom has failed—man cannot penetrate the veil of the unknown and the future (much as we might like to, or like to think that we can).
- Pagan religion has failed—whatever connection these magicians and enchanters had with their gods, they were unable to reveal the future.

A crisis in the King's palace! – v. 1-13

The King has suspected that his sorcerers and enchanters were only trying to keep him happy and keep the gravy train rolling along (v. 8-9). Once he hears their plea in v. 10-11, he “was angry and very furious.”

- Both the rewards for success (v. 6), and the consequences of failure (v. 5, 12) were extravagant.
- This decree encompassed “all the wise men of Babylon” (v. 12), a much larger number, which also included Daniel, Mishael, Hananiah, and Azariah (v. 13). Life is great in an absolute monarchy...until the King gets a bee in his bonnet.

Daniel's response to the King's decree ~ v. 14-30

We have the theological center of this entire chapter in this passage...what do you think it is?

The most important thing in this chapter is not the dream or its interpretation...

- ...the most important thing is the recognition and praise of the "God in heaven who reveals mysteries" (v. 28).
- The theological center of this chapter is Daniel's exclamation of praise in v. 20-23.

The King had a bad night...now all the wise men of Babylon are condemned to death. Time to panic?

Daniel's response to the King's decree – v. 14-30

Daniel goes and talks to the captain of the King's guard—Arioach.

- How does he know him? How does this teenager (probably) get taken that seriously? We don't know—it's not an important detail to the writer.

Daniel even gets an audience with the King! (v. 16)

- How does *that* happen? Again, we don't know—it's not an important detail to the writer.

So there was a prayer meeting (v. 17-18).

- But we don't hear the details of their prayers, or their conversation.

Daniel's response to the King's decree – v. 14-30

But the author gives us all the words of Daniel's exclamation of praise to God.

So think back for a minute—Daniel and his friends are not very old at this point, likely still teenagers.

And now, for the second time in just a couple of years, they are facing possible death. What does Daniel do?

- He does what looks like the worst, most foolish, possible thing: he goes to talk to the very man who is seeking to kill him (notice v. 13-14). First thing he does is go talk face to face with the King's head executioner.

Daniel's response to the King's decree – v. 14-30

Funny, isn't it—the magicians, sorcerers, enchanters, and astrologers want a little time to think about it, but the King refuses, and decrees their death.

- But when Daniel asks for a little time (v. 16), the King grants his request. Why?
- Because Daniel knew something: “The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He will.” – Prov. 21:1
- Daniel, young as he was, was convinced of the sovereignty of God: “He changes times and seasons; He removes kings and sets up kings...”

And then they go to prayer...

Daniel's response to the King's decree ~ v. 14-30

Question: What was the point—the goal—of the prayer meeting? In other words, *why* did they pray?

Answer: This—“to seek mercy from the God of heaven...so that Daniel and his companions might not be destroyed...” (v. 18).

- Notice this—they echoed the prayer of King Solomon at the dedication of the temple, see 1 Kings 8:46-53. What is significant about that?
- This: the temple that they were supposed to pray toward (1 Ki. 8:48) was now in ruins—abandoned by God (Ezek. 10:9-22; 11:22-23) and destroyed by the Babylonians (2 Ki. 25; Jer. 52).

Daniel's response to the King's decree – v. 14-30

Which suggests what?

- Every human means of help or support was gone...again.
- All they had to trust in—literally—was the compassion and call and covenant of God: 1 Ki. 8:50-53. There was nothing else.
- God—in His sovereign wisdom—intentionally put Daniel and his friends in a place in life where there was nothing left to trust in. Except Him.

Did God deliver them? Well, yes—their lives were spared. But they were still captives in Babylon. Deliverance is not always what we might expect.

Daniel's response to the King's decree ~ v. 14-30

When Daniel told his friends of the King's decree, he asked them "to seek mercy from the God of heaven..." (v. 18). What is *mercy*?

First, this: It is what God is. In other words, mercy is an attribute of His. Even better, I think, is to say it like this: mercy is one of the perfections of God.

"God's mercy means God's goodness toward those in misery and distress." ~ Grudem

"God's mercy describes Him as perfectly having deep compassion for people, such that He demonstrates benevolent goodness to those in a pitiable or miserable condition, even though they do not deserve it." ~

Biblical Doctrine

Daniel's response to the King's decree ~ v. 14-30

The ones who need mercy are the ones who are the worst off, in the most miserable condition. Let's slow down for a minute and take a closer look...

- Ex. 25:17 ~ marvel that it was in the mind of God to do this for man.
 - Ps. 145:9
 - Ps. 51:1
 - Luke 1:78
 - Eph. 2:4
 - 1 Tim. 1:16
 - 1 Pet. 1:13
- “God is eager to extravagantly give of Himself to meet the needs of lost sinners, so they should flee to Him with confidence.” ~ ESV Study Bible

Daniel's response to the King's decree ~ v. 14-30

God answered the prayers of His servants (v. 19), and v. 20-23 was Daniel's response.

Now that he knows the meaning of the King's dream, he goes back to Arioch, "whom the king had appointed to destroy the wise men of Babylon" (v. 24).

It seems like Arioch really was not looking forward to carrying out the King's decree—v. 25 tells us that he brought Daniel before the King "in haste."

- Daniel declares to the King that human wisdom and pagan religion have both failed (v. 27), "but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries..."
- Daniel is careful to give the glory to God—v. 30.

Remember Daniel's audience...

Through the ages, from the time Daniel wrote until now, God's people have suffered in many ways—some is the common suffering of people in a broken, sinful world. Some is the particular suffering of His people simply because they are His: persecution.

Daniel wrote to a suffering people immersed in a sea of pagan religion and human wisdom and his message was simple: God is in control, He knows your suffering. His ultimate victory over this present evil age is sure, so be faithful in the meantime. The wisdom and power of the world may look impressive, but it is empty and without hope (1 Cor. 1:18-20).

Remember Daniel's audience...

“We too are surrounded by the power and wisdom of the world. Sometimes it takes explicitly religious shape and promises us enlightenment and deeper experience of life through New Age meditation or practices borrowed from Eastern religions.

Sometimes it takes the form of an explicit denial that God can really know and control the future, preferring to imagine an ‘open’ God who is struggling His way through the historical process alongside us.

At other times, it comes to us in secular forms, promising power and success through applying its strategies in business and personal relationships. It often presents impressive credentials and, like the

Remember Daniel's audience...

“Babylonian diviners, comes to us strongly endorsed by the society in which we live. The wisdom of the world looks outwardly very impressive, with its qualifications and influence in high places in our society. Yet at the root the wisdom of the world is always an empty sham. It neither understands the true nature of humanity, nor the true nature of the world in which we live. How can it, when it denies the existence or ignores the relevance of the one true God who created and controls all things? His power works all things according to His will (Rom. 8:28). His wisdom is the true source of insight for skillful living (Pr. 1:7). ~
Iain Duguid