




THE COMMUNITY

Revealer of Mysteries | INCREMENTAL PROGRESS

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

Daniel 2

As chapter 2 opens, King Nebuchadnezzar has awoken from a frightening dream, and he wants to know what it means. So he summons those who claim to be able to reveal such things, and demands that they not only tell him the meaning of the dream, but first, recount its actual content. It's a brilliant move on his part, because he suspects that those officials fawning around him are charlatans, and indeed they are. Before hearing their interpretations, which are unverifiable, he wants to know if they really do have the ability to discern mysteries, and they'll need to tell him what he dreamed to prove it. Clearly, they don't have that ability, so they stutter and stammer and stall for time.

Nebuchadnezzar, in characteristic rage and excess, demands that all wise men be killed. Guess who's included among the wise men? Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. The ironic thing is that they never would have been in this predicament if they hadn't been so successful in chapter 1. But because they were trusting God and trying to live for His glory, they found themselves in a situation where they were absolutely dependent on Him. If we are constantly safe and never at risk, we should really wonder if we are living by faith and pursuing God. He calls us into places of danger so we'll learn to trust Him. Are you following?

Daniel and his friends do all they can do: they plead to God for mercy and ask for His help. There is absolutely nothing they can do to save themselves. Their hope is in God. In response, God does something that is completely bizarre. He gives Daniel the same dream that the king had. Can you imagine? That kind of thing just doesn't happen. But it did.

Daniel 2 identifies three reasons that God does this unprecedented thing. One, to save the lives of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah, and the other wisemen (v. 18); two, to reveal the glory of God (vv. 20-23, 47); and three, so that Nebuchadnezzar will know and understand the meaning of the dream (v. 30).

The dream concerns Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom, and three earthly kingdoms that will follow it. With each passing kingdom, comes diminished glory, but increased strength. Sometime during the fourth and final kingdom, another kingdom will come and destroy all the others, fill the earth, and endure forever. Only this one isn't of human origin, it is the kingdom of the Messiah.

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What's the Big Idea?

In last week's study, we saw Daniel and his friends living out the three commitments that are prerequisites for ministry in a secular environment: walking with the Lord, developing relationships, and pursuing excellence. This week, we'll see how Daniel, standing atop that three-part foundation, is able to begin to warm the heart of the king towards the true God, and make His glory known.

What's the Problem?

Just like last week the chief problem is that God's glory isn't seen or savored. Changing that takes time and progress is often slow and incremental. When we are impatient we may not be able to see the fruit that comes with long steady service.

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Let the people in your study try to figure out which kingdoms are being described.

In chapter 7, Daniel himself has a dream in which the same four kingdoms are depicted. Only this time they aren't beautiful statues as Nebuchadnezzar saw them, but rather vicious, devouring beasts. It's interesting how God's perspective differs from man's. Compare the two, and see if that helps you connect these visions to their historical fulfillments.

After you have explained all this so that your people understand the situation, have them scan back through the text and look for those three elements being lived out. Where do you see Daniel's commitment to walk with God? What is he doing to develop relationships? How is the seriousness with he approaches his work evident? Since our goal with this series is to learn how we can have an impact in a secular culture, it's important to take the time to study how Daniel accomplished all that he did. The "What Are The Answers?" section lists several occurrences for each. your students will better internalize the information, if they find it themselves.

Finally, observe the effect that is produced. A pagan, wicked king, exclaims, "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." It's not a declaration of faith in God, (as we'll see next week) but it is an evidence that he is beginning to see the "God of Israel" in a different light. Ministry in the marketplace is often slow and incremental. Daniel and his friends are patient. Over the course of their lives, God will use them to do extraordinary things. And he'll do the same with you. But your first steps need to be to walk with God, develop relationships, and pursue excellence in all your responsibilities.

What's Our Response?

The great heroes of the faith seem like they were often in dangerous places. If your life is full of peace and safety, take some risks, and look for the opportunities where you'll need to trust God for great things.

Help your group continue to evaluate their lives. Are they laying a foundation for ministry by walking with God, developing relationships, and pursuing excellence in their responsibilities?

Invite them to look for (and celebrate!) slow, incremental warming towards God in the lives of those they are actively seeking to reach.

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What Are the Questions?

Daniel 2

Launch

Ministry can be frustrating and demotivating when we don't see people come to Christ right away. With whom have you been sharing Christ for the longest time? Have you seen someone believe after months or years of praying for and reaching out to them?

Explore

1. Last week, we saw how Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah focused on three major areas, which built them a ministry platform. What were those three areas? As we follow the story in chapter two, be on the lookout for these three commitments in their lives.

Read vv. 1-13.

2. Why do you think it's so important to Nebuchadnezzar to understand this dream?

3. Why does he demand that the wisemen recount the dream itself, as well as explain its meaning?

4. Why were Daniel and his friends included in the execution order?

5. How did they get to be there?

6. Does this make you wonder if they were outside of God's will?

7. Do difficult circumstances make you wonder if you are out of God's will? Why does God allow us to be in those situations?

Read vv. 14-28.

8. How does Daniel respond?

9. Do you think God still gives incredible answers to prayers like that?

10. Why did He do it for Daniel?

Read vv. 29-45.

11. According to Daniel, the four parts of the statue represent four human kingdoms. Which historical kingdoms do you think they correspond to?

12. What does the rock that breaks the statue represent?

13. In the preceding verses, what do you notice about Daniel's walk with the Lord?

14. What do you observe about his relationships with others in the palace?

15. What can you glean about his attitude toward work?

16. Finally, notice the effect that the four are beginning to have on Nebuchadnezzar. What do you think he means in v. 47? Is he a worshipper of God?

Apply

17. Which of these three areas (walk with the Lord, relationships, and excellence in your work) did you choose to focus on this week? How did it go?

18. We change incrementally and so do those around us. Are you seeing any small signs of life in those you are seeking to influence for Christ?

NOTES:

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What Are the Answers?

1. Walk with God, relationships, excellence in their work.
2. He's scared. Plus, you generally get the sense that everything is a big deal to him. He's pretty quick to threaten to cut you to pieces, and tear down the house for a variety of offenses. Sovereign kings tend to be like that.
3. To prove that they are able to discern mysteries. He suspects they are scamming him (and he's right).
4. They too were advisors to the king because of their great success in chapter 1.
5. Their excellence, and the favor of God.
6. Allow the group to discuss. But the answer is no, not at all! (See "What Do I Need To Know About the Passage?" for more on this.)
7. Allow the group to discuss.
8. He prays, and gets his friends to pray.
9. Allow the group to discuss.
10. To save the lives of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah, and the other wisemen (v. 18); to reveal the glory of God (vv. 20-23, 47); so that Nebuchadnezzar would know and understand the meaning of the dream (v. 30).
11. Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome.
12. Discuss. In vv. 17-23, notice his dependence upon and gratitude toward the Lord. In v. 28, he refuses to steal glory from God. In v. 45, he again gives credit to his great God.
13. The rock represents Christ and His Kingdom. How sweet is it that God reveals this to Daniel? As he walks with God he receives great insight about the Messiah. See especially Daniels 7:9-14.
14. Allow the group to discuss. As in chapter 1, he interacts with other officials with wisdom and tact (v. 14). Also, there is building evidence that he has become a friend of the king himself. Given what we see about the king's personality, this was probably no easy task.
15. Allow the group to discuss. Throughout the entire chapter, Daniel is excellent. He is the only person in the kingdom who can do what the king asks. By God's grace, he does such an outstanding job, he is promoted to rule the entire province.
16. He is impressed, but not truly a believer, as his actions in chapter 3 will show. The important thing, though, is that incremental progress has begun in his heart. Ministry is a process.
- 17.-18. Allow the group to discuss.

Memorize

Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are His. He changes times and seasons; He sets up kings and deposes them. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. He reveals deep and hidden things; He knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with Him.

Daniel 2:20-22



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