

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH  
June 21, 2020  
Unshaken Revealer of Mysteries  
Heather Zempel

This weekend I was hiking with my family at Jug Bay Nature Preserve when we heard the loudest screeching of a bird we'd ever heard. We located it up at the top of a tree and then we saw a snake slowly slithering up the tree, and a full on fight broke out between the bird and the snake until the snake finally fell off the tree to its demise. Now in ancient Babylon, this would have been interpreted as a sign, an omen, a dark vision of something that is to come and it's about at this place where the relevance of that personal anecdote to my message ends. There's really no other point. It was just the most exciting thing that happened in my week, and I wanted to share it.

Again, welcome to NCC. No matter where you are joining us from, we pray that the peace and the joy and the hope of Jesus will invade the reality of your life wherever you are. Last weekend, we started a new series called 'Unshaken'; it's through the book of Daniel. If you missed last weekend want to encourage you go back and watch. I also want to point you to our resources at [NCC.re/unshaken](http://NCC.re/unshaken), there are opportunities for you to engage, there are resources for you to learn. One of our goals in this series as Pastor Mark just prayed. We want you to have an insatiable hunger for the word that our weekend messages cannot satisfy. We also want to equip you with tools and resources so you can dig into the word deeper for yourself. And so I just thought before we even dive in to Daniel two today that I would just kind of give you a little sneak peek at how I approach passages like this.

So Daniel two is a narrative, it's a story. So I read through it several times just to get a feel for the story itself, the who, what, why, when, where, how the arc of the story, and then I'll look at the setting, what is the culture, the history, the geography, the language so I can reconstruct the world in which the story happened. Now what's great is Pastor Mark did a lot, most all of the hard work on that for us last weekend, it's where you pull out the maps and you pull out the timeline. And then after that, I look for the words, the ways and the works of God in the passage. A lot of times when we jump right to looking for application for ourselves but if we can take a step back and look at who is God, and what is God doing in this story, the words, the works and the ways of God. And then I'll also look at the characters in the story, who are the characters? What is their posture? What is their response? What are they like? And then I do a little bit of a deeper dive, for instance, in this passage, there's a dream and an interpretation. It's a genre of writing called apocalyptic. So what does that mean and how do you approach it? How do you apply it? And then there's a language change in verse four, is that significant? And if so, why?

And then in Daniel two, we see this really interesting, unique literary structure called a Chiasmus. We see it in a lot of Hebrew writings. We see it in the teachings of Jesus in the parables. So what is that about and what does that teach us? It uses parallelisms and repetition to help make the message sink into the memory and into the gut of the reader.

Now, we don't have time to go into all of that in the next 25 minutes. And so what I want to do is I want to point you to the Q & A post sermon, I want to point you to our daily upper zoom prayer meetings. There's a pop up group on Daniel on Tuesday nights, there are sermon discussion guides, there's a notes tab in our online campus. So check out all of those things, to do a deeper dive. Now with all of that the two questions that really rose to the surface for me, when reading Daniel two were this

One, God trusts Daniel with the future. What kind of person does God trust with the future?

And then the second thing that rose to the surface for me was that God trusted Daniel before kings. What kind of person does God trust as His representative to stand before that level of influence?

So if we open up go to Daniel two, we begin reading in verse one. *“In the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his mind was troubled and he could not sleep.<sup>2</sup> So the king summoned the magicians, enchanters, 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.”*

Now the Babylonian religion looked for signs and omens in everything. They looked for signs in the skies and bizarre births, in animal livers, in dreams and visions. And the process was a king would have court advisors who are trained in dream interpretation. So the king would share with these advisors, this was my dream. And then they would consult from their experience and their training and their charts and their books, the interpretation of that dream.

Now it's right here in the passage that the language changes. These first four verses are in Hebrew, and then the language changes in the original text to Aramaic, and continues in Aramaic for the next several chapters until it flips back again to Hebrew. Why is that? Is that important? Well, there are a number of reasons why it could be that way. It could be that the language itself actually sets up the entire book of Daniel as a Chiasmus. It could be that Daniel one and Daniel eight through 12 are meant for a primarily Hebrew audience, while Daniel two through seven is meant for a more global audience. No matter what the reason is, the one thing that we know is that the author of this book is fluent in two languages. He's fluent in the culture and the language of the people of God. And he's fluent in the language of the culture of the empire that he's in. He's somebody that understands there's dual citizenship, both in the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the empire that he's in and he's bilingual.

We keep reading Daniel to verse four, *“Then the astrologers answered the king, “May the king live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will interpret it.”<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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.”*

In my Bible right about here I wrote, he is crazy. This doesn't make any sense that the process is that you tell your advisors the dream and then they interpret it but Nebuchadnezzar will not tell them the content of the dream. Now maybe he forgot it, maybe that's what was so troubling to him is he knew he had been impacted by this dream, but he couldn't remember what it was about. Or maybe he is just testing the ability and the integrity of his court advisors. It's a little bit like going to the doctor and the doctor saying, "Tell me your symptoms", and you saying, "No, you tell me what my symptoms are and tell me what's wrong with me". This isn't the way it normally works.

And so there's a bit of back and forth between King Nebuchadnezzar and his advisors, until finally his advisors say in verse 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.”*

Now, this is interesting because this actually is a plotline that runs all the way through Daniel, that in stark contrast to the gods of Babylon, the God of Daniel dwells with his people. There's this paradox that we have got to grab a hold of that God is both sovereign and he is near. This idea that no matter what the circumstances, God has got it, no matter how difficult the struggle is, you're facing God's got it. No matter how chaotic, confusing, troubling, disheartening, the situation that you're in, God's got it. And not only does God got it, when the world is spinning out of control, God has also got you. He is transcendent, seated upon the throne over the universe that he created. He's got it, he's got you.

But then there's this seemingly opposite, and yet nonetheless, true theme that is also running through the Scriptures that God is also near, that he is with us, that He's the God that shows up in the fiery furnace and walks with us, that He's the God that shows up in the lion's den and shuts the mouths of the lions, that he's the God that shows up in the middle of the night to give revelation that saves a generation and a nation. God's got it. God's got you, and God is with you.

And Nebuchadnezzar's advisors complain that what the king is asking from them is supernatural and they cannot do it. And they are correct in that their training and their experience and their books and their charts are inadequate to crack the code of what is troubling the king. And so Nebuchadnezzar sentences them to death.

Enter Daniel, and Daniel's God, Daniel 2:14, *"When Arioch, the commander of the king's guard, had gone out to put to death the wise men of Babylon, Daniel spoke to him with wisdom and tact. <sup>15</sup> He asked the king's officer, "Why did the king issue such a harsh decree?" Arioch then explained the matter to Daniel. <sup>16</sup> At this, Daniel went in to the king and asked for time, so that he might interpret the dream for him."*

This is really interesting, the idea that dreams were a method of divine communication was an idea that was shared by both Babylonians and Israelites. Daniel found a place of common ground where he could move forward with the king. And then we find that he also moves forward with wisdom and tact. This is critical. Look, when I was a young leader, I was obsessed with finding the calling of God on my life. I wanted to find the purpose of God in my life because I didn't want to miss it and I didn't want to disappoint God. And the older I got, I realized that I'm focused on the wrong thing. But then more importantly than me trying to figure out my calling, I need to leave the calling to God and focus everything I've got on cultivating the character that I'm going to need to sustain that calling.

When you are facing impossible circumstances, you will respond out of the character that has been built within you. When you're faced with an impossible circumstance, you may have the best idea you may have the solution, you may have the knowledge that is needed, but it is your character that will open the door to give you a seat at the table, to give you a voice into the circumstance. See, crisis shapes our character, but it also reveals the character that's already been built.

Daniel walked in wisdom and tact he walked in humility. Humility isn't thinking less of yourself. It's just thinking of yourself less. He walked in honor, acknowledging and declaring the value of the other. We've got to be people that walk in integrity, meaning that we are unbreakable no matter the pressure. We are authentic, no matter the audience. And we are responsible no matter the cost. We're people that have thick skin, but soft hearts and soft words that we know how to find common ground and speak a common language so people can hear and

understand. It's about walking in humble confidence and holy courage. When we walk into impossible circumstances, may we walk in wisdom and tact.

Keep reading Daniel to verse 17, "*Then Daniel returned to his house and explained the matter to his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah.* <sup>18</sup> *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.*"

When we walk in impossible circumstances, we've also got to walk in community. I think a lot of times we think about people like Esther and Daniel and Nehemiah and David as people that just stand with, with courage when nobody else will stand up, but they kind of stand alone in this isolated place of holy courage. But we forget that that Esther had Mordecai and an entire community that was praying and fasting with her and for her, we forget that David had a whole group of mighty men and Daniel had Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; we might know them better unfortunately, by their Babylonian names, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. They had a circle, we are stronger together, we are better together.

Now some of you have heard me talk about this before but the best image that comes to my mind when I think about the strength of community is found in the towering giant sequoias in the national parks of California. These trees can grow up to a height of 300 feet, but their roots at the root systems are actually pretty shallow. These giant trees can survive and on average, about, you know, just like 12 feet of root system, they can thrive in something as shallow as three feet. Instead of their roots going deep, their roots form a web with one another; they intertwine with the root systems of the surrounding sequoias of the cedars, the fir trees, the pines that are around them in the same ecosystem. They share water and mineral and nutrients and resources. And they're intertwined roots create a web of structural stability that guards against erosion. Their strength is not found in the depth of their root system, but in how deeply interconnected they are with the others in their environment.

When you face impossible circumstances, I hope you are rooted deeply in the word of God, but I also hope that you are deeply interconnected with people around you. When you walk into impossible circumstances, your strength will be found in the circle that is around you. We have small groups going on online right now [NCC.re/connect](http://NCC.re/connect), we would love to have you join us in one of those groups find your circle.

Now after Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego Daniel pray together, God reveals the dream and the meaning to Daniel in the middle of the night. And what we see in verses 19 through 23 is this song of praise that Daniel immediately goes into, his first instinct. His first reaction is just to praise God. And I'm going to actually dive into this in our upper zoom prayer meetings this week as we move forward in the week. So if you want dive into that section of the text Join us Monday morning for the upper zoom.

I want to point out two things really quick though in verse 22. He says that God is one who knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells in him. When we're faced with impossible circumstances, we need the light of God to shine in that situation to show the way. He also says in verse 23, he addresses the God of my ancestors. If we want to have the faith, to play the long game of navigating difficult, impossible circumstances, we've got to rest on the faithfulness of God in our past.

Let's pick things up in verse 24, "*Then Daniel went to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to execute the wise men of Babylon, and said to him, "Do not execute the wise men of Babylon. Take me to the king, and I will*

*interpret his dream for him.”<sup>25</sup> Arioch took Daniel to the king at once and said, “I have found a man among the exiles from Judah who can tell the king what his dream means.”<sup>26</sup> The king asked Daniel (also called Belteshazzar), “Are you able to tell me what I saw in my dream and interpret it?”<sup>27</sup> Daniel replied, “No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about,<sup>28</sup> but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries.”*

The king was looking for clarity, he was looking for answers. And there was nothing in the training and the background and the experience and the resources, the books the charts of the Babylonian wise men that could crack the code that could reveal the mystery that could give a word that brought clarity. And Daniel acknowledges that there are some mysteries, there are some problems, there are some challenges that can only be illuminated by a word of God. There was only one voice that could bring clarity to the chaos that was happening in the Kings mind. There was only one voice that could bring peace to the trouble that was in the Kings heart.

I would say that we're in a season in history where there is chaos, that we need clarity on, that there is unrest that we need to find peace. We're facing problems in our world that seem like they're impossible. We're trying to solve equations where we can't quite isolate the variables. We're looking for answers. But where are we looking?

Look, I'm in a season right now where I am reading more books and listening to more podcasts and having more conversations and scrolling through more social media than I think I ever have in my life, because I want to learn and I want to grow and I want to walk and wisdom intact. I want to do what Daniel did, where he spent three years learning the language and the customs of the Chaldeans. But ultimately, at the end of the day, we need a word from God. We need a word of God to break into the chaos, to break into the impossibility, to shine a light. Make sure that God is your source of wisdom.

And Daniel gave credit where credit was due. For the next 17 verses Daniel details the content of the dream that the King had, he brings meaning and interpretation to it. This is the first of many symbolic visions and dreams that we see in the book of Daniel. Many of them are in Daniel seven to 12. In this particular one the King has seen a vision of a statue and it was made of four different metals that symbolized four different kingdoms. It was Babylon and the Medes and the Persians and the Greeks and possibly the Romans depending on your interpretation of timeline. And then a rock rises up and overturns and uproots these oppressive and tyrannical kingdoms.

Now, depending on how you approach this there, there are many possible ways this could be applied. Was this message meant for the Jewish people in 166 BC under the oppression of Antiochus Epiphanes? Was it for Jewish people that were living under Roman occupation and oppression during the time of Jesus? Is it pointing us to some future event? In some ways, I believe the answer to all of those is yes, because the underlying message of this vision and this interpretation has less to do with timelines and charts and everything to do with the message that God is sovereign, that God has got this, that God is breaking into our world to show up and show off and do the work that only he can do. He is sovereign over empires over kings over history. It's the hope that God is breaking into the reality of our lives, to bring hope, to bring peace, to make right what has gone wrong. God's got this. God's got you, and God is with you.

In verse 46, *"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."*

And then Daniel and all of his friends got a big promotion. But can we just stop and imagine for a minute. The most powerful pagan in the world is lying face down at the feet of a Jewish exile. What brings that kind of change? What causes that to happen? The reality is the tyrants, the oppressors will fall in reverence will bow in worship at one word from God, because of one prayer that is prayed by a faith filled community, because of one person who stands unshaken in the knowledge that God is at work, even when the world is falling apart. God trusted Daniel, with knowledge of the future with inside information about what was to come. What kind of person does God trust with the future?

I think if we want God to trust us with the future, we've got to prove ourselves trust worthy in the present. We've got to walk with wisdom and tact; we've got to realize that the answers to the problems of this world are riding on the sound waves of heaven. And Daniel was trusted before kings, what kind of person does God trust before kings? What kind of person does God trust that level of influence? I think it's somebody that has allowed the voice of God to be amplified in their life. God will use the voice of the one who has made the voice of God loudest in their ears, the one who has allowed themselves to be shaped by a faith filled community.

I want to invite our worship team to come back up and I want to make this very personal today. God is in the business of interrupting the reality of our lives. And for some of you today, you're faced with this decision of allowing that interruption to happen for the first time. Hundreds of years later in Luke chapter 20, Jesus will grab on to this imagery of the rock, to talk about the work that God was doing in his own day as he came to break into human history, to turn the impossible into the possible, to allow opportunity for relationship with God and man to be restored. And if you've never made that decision, like Nebuchadnezzar does right here to declare that God is the God of gods and the king of Lords to allow your life to fall down in reverence, in obedience, in submission and alignment to God, I just want to encourage you to make that decision today, you don't have to fall down on your face like Nebuchadnezzar did, you can just hit that raise hand button on our online platform and say I want to make a decision to follow Jesus today, I want to be counted in the generation of Daniels. Those people that see beyond the current reality to a future of infinite possibility. People that are entrusted to have access to and influence with those in authority, people who are willing to see the impossible become possible with one word from the Lord, people that realize that God is still at work, even when the world seems to be falling apart around them, people that stand unshaken knowing that God will make a way.