

THERE IS A GOD IN HEAVEN (Part 1)

Daniel 2:1-30

Tonight, we continue our study of the Book of Daniel.

Please turn your Bibles and your attention to Daniel chapter 2.

As you're turning there, I want to remind you of the **central theme** – the grand purpose of this book [*fill it in on the handout*]:

The absolute sovereignty and trustworthiness of the true and living God.

You're going to see how chapter 2 clearly puts that theme on display.

Here in this chapter we will how God uses a dream given to King Nebuchadnezzar to reveal His sovereignty.

We're going to see how God revealed Himself as the only true and living God who can do what no human (or false god) can do!

And very significantly – We're going to see how in this chapter God revealed His plan for world history under four major Gentile Kingdoms.

Notice this **summary description** on your Handout **of Chapter 2**:

God gives a dream to the most powerful man in the world -- King Nebuchadnezzar – to reveal the future course of world history.

God uses a Jew, Daniel, not only to interpret the dream, but to declare the absolutely sovereignty of the true and living God.

The dream reveals a train of Four Major Gentile Kingdoms which will ultimately give way to God's Everlasting Kingdom.

Thus, this chapter unveils the future not only for the Jewish people, but for humanity.

Finally, the events of this story result in the promotion of Daniel (and his friends) to the highest offices of administration in Babylon.

Now, tonight, we're only going to be able to cover about half of the chapter, we won't actually get to the content of the Nebuchadnezzar's dream tonight...

But in the first half of this incredible story, we will get to know a lot more about Nebuchadnezzar....

And we will also get more insights into Daniel's godly character, which give such an example to follow.

We're going to cover vv. 1-30 tonight – let's go ahead and read this narrative in vv. 1-30.

[READ DANIEL 2:1-30] (*reading from LSB*).

We're going to walk through our section tonight by moving through several scenes, which you can see on your handout.

Let's start with this first scene: *#1 Nebuchadnezzar's Troubling Dream (1-3)*

vv. 1-3

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1 Now in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; and his spirit was troubled, and his sleep left him.2 Then the king said to call in the magicians, the conjurers, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans to tell the king his dreams. So they came in and stood before the king.3 Then the king said to them, "I had a dream, and my spirit is troubled to know the dream." |
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Notice the timestamp here is the "second" year of Neb's. reign – this would have been about 603-602 BC.

But just as a note here, the Babylonians accounted for a king's reign with a "year of accession".¹

¹ Stephen R. Miller, [Daniel](#), vol. 18, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 76.

- This “accession year” was the first year of a king’s reign, and then what we would consider his 2nd year was called his 1st year of reign.
- So, Neb’s “second year” really was his 3rd year in power: **603-602 B.C.**
 - *This is helpful to know because critics often attack the book of Daniel by pointing out certain apparent discrepancies in timelines.*
 - *But these objections are easily answered by understanding how the Babylonians reckoned the years of a king.*
- Another reason I bring that out is because do you remember how long Daniel’s enrollment in the King’s college was? **3 years.**
- So, this is most likely after Daniel had “graduated” and was working for the King in some capacity.
- At the end of the first chapter, you’ll recall that Daniel and his friends were found by Neb. to be the most gifted among all the young men.

Now let’s notice v. 1 again, “***Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; and his spirit was troubled, and his sleep left him***”

- “Dreams” in the plural – there is only one dream in view, so this was likely either:
 - a recurring dream,
 - or simply a statement that this dream came to Neb. in his state of dreaming – like, this message came to him ‘*in his dreams*’.
- But we pick up the story at a point in which this dream is **troubling** Neb. enough that he cannot sleep – this dream “*troubled his spirit*”
 - The idea here is that this dream tortured and haunted him.
 - Just, as an aside, notice that what troubles the spirit affects the body...he couldn’t sleep.
- And this is the bottom line: Neb. recognized that this dream was **important**. (And as we will see, indeed it WAS important!).

- Part of the Babylonians' ancient worldview was the belief that dreams were messages from the gods.
- This certainty seems to be the case for Neb. because he calls in a group of interpreters who were essentially a "religious group".²

Notice. **vv. 2-3:**

"Then the king said to call in the magicians, the conjurers, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans to tell the king his dreams. So they came in and stood before the king. Then the king said to them, "I had a dream, and my spirit is troubled to know the dream"

- Basically, this group consisted of a mix of scholars and sorcerers.
- They were employed by the King for these kinds of things (*just like many kings in the ANE, like Pharaoh and Joseph, for example*).
- But as we will see in a moment, I want you to bear in mind that what is going on here is a *theological* worldview.
- It is fundamentally *religious*.
- Neb. is looking for a supernatural solution to this problem as we will see in the next few verses.

This brings us to the next scene: #2 *Nebuchadnezzar's Impossible Demand (4-9)*

Notice v. 4:

4 Then the Chaldeans spoke to the king in Aramaic: "O king, live forever! Say the dream to your servants, and we will declare the interpretation."

- I want you to know that right here in v. 4, Daniel switches from writing in Hebrew to writing in Aramaic (one of three biblical languages).
 - o The primary languages of Babylon were Akkadian and Aramaic – and at this point, Aramaic was quickly becoming the *"lingua*

² Stephen R. Miller, [Daniel](#), vol. 18, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 78.

franca”

- The Aramaic section will continue all the way until the end of chapter 7, then he switches back to Hebrew in 8:1.
- There are some important reasons for this language-switch which we will explore in a future lesson.
- But just mark that down in your minds for now...and take a look later at the structure of the Aramaic section [back of handout].
 - o It has a clearly “chiastic” structure. Intentionally organized.

But let’s resume the story and see Neb’s impossible demand.

The Chaldeans come in and respectfully ask the king to tell them the dream (this seems like it would be the normal procedure).

But Neb’s response shocks them.

Let’s read vv. 5-9

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|---|---|
| 5 | The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, “The word from me is firm: if you do not make known to me the dream and its interpretation, you will be torn limb from limb, and your houses will be made a rubbish heap. |
| 6 | “But if you declare the dream and its interpretation, you will receive from me gifts and a reward and great glory; therefore declare to me the dream and its interpretation.” |
| 7 | They answered a second time and said, “Let the king say the dream to his servants, and we will declare the interpretation.” |
| 8 | The king answered and said, “I know for certain that you are buying time, inasmuch as you have seen that the word from me is firm, |
| 9 | that if you do not make the dream known to me, there is only one law for you. Indeed, you have agreed together to speak lying and corrupt words before me until the time is changed; therefore say the dream to me, that I may know that you can declare to me its interpretation.” |

Neb. was looking for a supernatural answer here.

In many ways you can sense also that Neb. suspects his council of scholars and sorcerers of deception.

But he is so troubled by the importance of this dream that nothing less than a supernatural explanation will satisfy him.

This would also prove the trustworthiness of his council.

So, he gives them this test – which is an impossible demand for any human – not only to interpret the dream, but to tell him the dream itself.

He's asking them to read his mind!

And to intensify all of this, he adds a horrific threat: *if you can't do this, you will be torn limb-from-limb and your houses and families reduced to trash.*

And here we get a little insight into what kind of man Neb. was.

This was no idle threat.

History and the Bible itself describe some of Neb's violent treatment of those who did not bow to his will (cf. 2 Kings 25:1-7; Jer. 29:20).

In chapter 3 he will madly cast Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego into the fiery furnace.

This is not a man you want to cross. And the Chaldeans know this.

But again, we see the significance of this matter to Neb. not only by his threat, but also by the prize he offers.

He gives a double incentive here. Not only the threat of fear, but also of the promise of fame and fortune to the one who could meet his demand.

It seems that the Chaldeans were accustomed to hearing dreams and offering interpretations – “tells us the dream and we will interpret it” (v. 4).

This sort of thing has always been in the world. People pretending to interpret dreams and declaring all sorts of things that sound profound.

But Neb. was no fool to be played.

Nothing less than certainty would satisfy him here.

How would he be able to trust them? He sets up this test.

He seems to know that this dream is significant for the future and if his council is going to tell the future, they should be able to tell the past.

So he gives them this impossible demand.

This exposes the Chaldeans. In response to this demand, they have nothing. They are completely powerless.

But more importantly, in God's great purpose here, this exposes the powerlessness of the Babylonians' false gods.

Let's move through the next scene: *#3 The Chaldeans' Powerless Deities (vv. 10-11)*

vv. 10-11

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| 10 | The Chaldeans answered the king and said, "There is not a man on earth who is able to declare the matter for the king, inasmuch as no great king or powerful ruler has <i>ever</i> asked <i>about</i> a matter like this of any magician, conjurer, or Chaldean. |
| 11 | "Moreover, the matter which the king asks is difficult, and there is no one else who could declare it to the king except gods, whose dwelling place is not with flesh." |

I love this! This is one of the great "set-ups" in the Bible (there are many!). God is the Master story-teller.

Here the Chaldeans confess their impotence – they cannot pass the king's test.

The king wants a supernatural thing that is impossible for mere men to do.

The Chaldeans are backed into a corner now.

They had tried to bypass the king's test by asking for the dream. He refused.

They had tried to buy more time by stalling – but the king called their bluff.

So, the Chaldeans grasp for the last negotiation straw here – they try to tell the king that his demand is impossible and unreasonable.

But I want you to notice how what they say is the perfect set up for God to come in!

They confess – *no man can do this!*

And then they go further – the only hope here is for the gods to answer.

And for all their religious beliefs in their many gods – the Chaldeans confess that their gods are no help either.

And I want you to notice especially the reason they give: they say it is **because** the dwelling place of the gods is not with men.

In other words, **because** the gods dwelling place is not with men, we can't expect them to be of any help.

Put a pin in that – because it is the *perfect set-up* for a showdown between the Nebuchadnezzar's gods and the true and living God!

But at this point, here is what is being exposed – the **powerlessness** of the Chaldean gods.

They are of no help here and the Chaldeans are now forced to admit that.

As you can imagine, this is embarrassing and infuriating for Nebuchadnezzar.

His trust in his council of scholars and sorcerers is completely shot.

And now his trust in his gods is taking a significant hit.

He lashes out in fury and that brings us to the scene in this story: #4 *Nebuchadnezzar's Furious Decree (vv. 12-13)*

vv. 12-13

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| 12 | Because of this the king became indignant and very furious and said <i>for them</i> to destroy all the wise men of Babylon. |
| 13 | So the law went forth that the wise men were to be killed; and they sought out Daniel and his friends to kill <i>them</i> . |

Neb's threat turns into a decree that is now set into motion.

Neb. gives orders for all the wise men of Babylon to be killed – this included Daniel and his friends.

In his rage, he didn't only want to kill those in his immediate presence who were failing him, he wanted the whole group eliminated.

And so, Daniel and his friends are now under death sentence because of 'guilt by association', as part of the wise men of Babylon.

We don't know exactly why Daniel and his friends weren't a part of the group that Neb called in – but it seems likely that they were in an apprentice stage.

I think this furious decree from Neb. gives us insight into what kind of man he was – but maybe it's an angle you wouldn't think of at first.

I think what we see on display here is an anger that flows from prideful insecurity.

Despite the mafia-boss bravado here, what we find is a man so wrapped up in the pride of his kingdom that he is flailing in insecurity of losing it.

Listen to what commentator Miller writes:

"...the king probably felt that the dream foretold some terrible disaster that was going to befall him...He may well have felt insecure about his newly acquired kingdom, and he may have considered the destruction of the statue a divine omen to him that he and his empire were doomed. Perhaps this led him to believe that someone was planning to assassinate him and take away his kingdom...Traitors may have been in his midst planning to overthrow his government at that very moment. Since a coup usually was perpetrated by the military or the court, the king may have

wondered if some of these very wise men were plotting against him. Thus, he was not reluctant to rid himself of them.”³

It seems clear all throughout this story that Neb. does not trust these men.

I think that’s an important piece of the picture to keep in mind as we consider his future relationship with Daniel, which ends in deep trust.

But it also reveals a deeply insecure and prideful heart – which we will see on full display in chapter 4.

But, back to the story, Neb. sends Arioch to “*execute order 66*” and kill all the wise men, including Daniel and his friends.

That brings us to consider Daniel’s response to this in a fifth scene: *#5 Daniel’s Godly Display (vv. 14-18)*

vv. 14-18

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| 14 | Then Daniel replied with discretion and discernment to Arioch, the captain of the king’s bodyguard, who had gone forth to kill the wise men of Babylon; |
| 15 | he answered and said to Arioch, a powerful official for the king, “For what reason is the law from the king so urgent?” Then Arioch made the matter known to Daniel. |
| 16 | So Daniel went in and sought from the king that he would give him time, in order that he might declare the interpretation to the king. |
| 17 | Then Daniel went to his house and made the matter known to his friends, to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, |
| 18 | so that they might seek compassion from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his friends would not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. |

What we find here is another remarkable portrait of Daniel’s wisdom and godliness. Even at a very young age (prob. 17-18 now).

Imagine this moment: Daniel sitting in his room, when suddenly Arioch, the captain of the king’s guard bangs on the door to arrest and kill him.

This is a terrifying moment.

³ Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel*, vol. 18, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 82.

But, rather than respond with panic or outrage, the text says that Daniel responded with **discretion and discernment**.

Let me color-in what these words mean⁴.

- Discretion: *counsel, wisdom, good judgement; appropriate; suitable; aware.*
- Discernment: *understanding, good sense; good taste, or tact*

That is how a godly man responds in moments of crisis.

When the pressure is put on, this is what comes out of a godly man:
discretion and discernment.

[IMPL]

- Just think about how often we fail at this.
- And our crises aren't death threats!
- How do we respond as we deal with daily drama and disappointments?
- What comes out of our mouths?
- Is it lashing out? Or is it *discreet* and *discerning*?

We're going to come back to this in a moment, but let's keep following the story.

Daniel speaks to Arioch and asks him what the situation is.

Here we find exactly what we found in chapter 1 – Daniel is a man who knows how to speak wisely with those in authority.

It's also clear by what happens next that Daniel has the respect of those in authority over him.

Once he learns the situation, Daniel has enough respect from Arioch and Neb. that he is able to go in before the king and do what the others failed to do:

Request more time.

⁴ Consulted HALOT; Holladay; and Miller's commentary.

And while we don't have the details of the interchange between Daniel and the king, we can trust that Daniel carried himself with *discretion* and *discernment*.

Whatever went down in that room is unknown to us, but Daniel succeeded where the Chaldeans failed.

And King Neb. is convinced enough by Daniel to give him **time!**

Then, I love what we see next – Daniel returns to his house (and it seems like he lived with his band of brothers).

And the first thing he does is share the matter with his friends – Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (v. 17).

But notice the purpose for this in v. 18:

“So that they might seek compassion from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his friends would not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.”

This is their only recourse: PRAYER!

This band of brothers knew that the only hope was prayer!

This like Jehoshaphat in 2 Chron. 20:12 when Israel was out numbered by her enemies:

“O our God...we are powerless before this great multitude who are coming against us; and we do not know what we should do, **but our eyes are on You.**”

This is what godly people do when a crisis reaches it's fever pitch – they turn their eyes to God.

Desperation flings them toward God, not away from Him.

Daniel and his friends turned their eyes to God in prayer!

[IMP]

- Beloved young adults, is this what we do?
- Is our natural reflex to **pray?**

Together, this band of brothers turns to God, asking Him to reveal the mystery and so spare their lives.

And God miraculously intervenes in answer to their prayers!

This brings us to v. 19 and the next scene in the story: *#6 God's Gracious Disclosure (v. 19)*

Notice the beginning of v. 19 – it's almost tucked away:

"Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a night vision."

The agent of this revelation is clearly the God to whom they had been praying.

He uses a night vision to give Neb's dream and its interpretation to Daniel.

Amazing! Daniel now has the key to save them all from death.

But notice that Daniel doesn't immediately rush off to solve the problem.

Oh no – Daniel's first reaction is to burst into grateful praise and thanksgiving!

A prayer – a song of worship.

Notice the end of v. 19: *"Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven..."*

This brings us to a 7th scene: *#7 Daniel's Grateful Doxology (v. 20-23)*

Let's listen in on Daniel's song in vv. 20-23 and consider how intelligently he extols the character and power of God – this is not empty, surface-level praying:

20	Daniel answered and said, "Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever, For wisdom and might belong to Him.
21	"And He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and establishes kings; He gives wisdom to wise men And knowledge to men of understanding.

22 "He reveals the deep and hidden things;
He knows what is in the darkness,
And the light dwells with Him.

23 "To You, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise,
For You have given me wisdom and might;
Even now You have made known to me what we sought from You,
For You have made known to us the king's matter."

Amazing worship of God!

THIS is how to respond to **the absolute sovereignty and trustworthiness of the true and living God!**

This is first response of a godly believer when God provides an answer to prayer!

And, as I said, this is the turning point in this story.

Daniel now has the answer – the resolution to the crisis!

But before we go on, I want to just pause for a moment and consider some important takeaway lessons from Daniel here.

[Fill in the Blanks]

Four Exemplary Steps in Daniel's Response to a Life-threatening Dilemma

#1 Control Impulsive Reactions (vv. 14-16)

#2 Confide in Fellow Believers (v. 17)

#3 Cry Out to God in Prayer (vv. 18-19)

#4 Celebrate God's Character in Worship (vv. 20-23)

[Develop Implications]

Back to the story: This is the great turning point.

And it brings us to our final scene tonight: *#8 Daniel's Bold Declaration (v. 24-30)*

Let's just read the story – vv. 24-26:

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| 24 | Therefore, Daniel went in to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to destroy the wise men of Babylon; he went and said thus to him: “Do not destroy the wise men of Babylon! Bring me before the king, and I will declare the interpretation to the king.” |
| 25 | Then Arioch hurriedly brought Daniel before the king and said thus to him: “I have found a man among the exiles from Judah who can make the interpretation known to the king!” |
| 26 | The king answered and said to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, “Are you able to make known to me the dream which I have seen and its interpretation?” |

Now, let's pause here, because I want to remind you of that great “set-up” back in v. 11.

The Chaldeans had exposed their own impotence AND the powerlessness of their gods to answer this matter.

And the reason they gave was because the gods do not dwell with men.

With that in our minds let's listen to Daniel's bold declaration before the king:

vv. 27-28

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| 27 | Daniel answered before the king and said, “As for the mystery about which the king is asking, neither wise men, conjurers, magicians, <i>nor</i> diviners are able to declare <i>it</i> to the king. |
| 28 | “However, <u>there is a God in heaven</u> who reveals mysteries, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will take place in the last days. |

Here we find Daniel before the most powerful man on earth – King Nebuchadnezzar.

And just feel the weight of this moment.

The king has just asked Daniel if he is able to tell him the dream and the interpretation.

But instead of jumping straight to it (remember the king is furious and ready to kill everyone, so that would've been reasonable...)

Instead, Daniel seizes this moment to make this most profound declaration:
THERE IS A GOD IN HEAVEN!

And this God, whose dwelling place is heaven CAN answer!

- v. 26 ~ Nebuchadnezzar asks if Daniel can meet his impossible demand – *can Daniel pass the king's test of authenticity?*
- v. 27 ~ Daniel answers and emphasizes the impossibility of the demand (humanly speaking) by pointing out the inability of the king's advisors.
- v. 28 ~ But then Daniel contrasts their inability *NOT* with his special ability, but by declaring God's existence and supreme sovereignty.

Daniel is not interested in taking ANY credit (just like we saw in ch. 1).

He re-directs all credit to God (unlike Arioch who wanted to take credit for finding Daniel).

Daniel makes himself equal with the Chaldeans and admits that no man can do this.

But he does NOT make God equal with the Chaldean gods – here Daniel draws a line and declares there is a God in heaven!

And the phrase that Daniel uses here is not saying that God is one among many possible gods.

The idea here is, in contrast to your whole pantheon of gods which can do nothing, there is a God in heaven who is true and living!

Montgomery notes, "That ***there is a God in heaven***, as against man-made gods and deified men, is the supreme theme of the book"⁵

⁵ Stephen R. Miller, [Daniel](#), vol. 18, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 89.

vv. 28-30

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| 28 | “However, there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will take place in the ^b last days. This was your dream and the visions of your head <i>while</i> on your bed. |
| 29 | “As for you, O king, <i>while</i> on your bed your thoughts turned to what would happen in the future; and He who reveals mysteries has made known to you what will happen. |
| 30 | “But as for me, this mystery has not been revealed to me by any wisdom which is in me more than <i>in</i> any <i>other</i> living man, but for the purpose of making the interpretation known to the king, and that you may know the thoughts of your heart. |

- v. 29 ~ Daniel re-emphasizes that this is an *eschatological* dream, sourced in God.
 - Daniel here affirms that Nebuchadnezzar’s perturbation over the significance of this dream was warranted – this dream is **monumental**.
 - Consider the certainty of the ‘**future**’ language (*this is near and far future*):
 - Your thoughts turned to “...what will happen the future...”
 - God “...has made known to you what will happen...”
- v. 30 ~ Daniel re-emphasizes God’s glory, directly refusing to receive any credit.
 - Daniel anticipates that Nebuchadnezzar’s reaction will be to glorify Daniel (which still happens in v. 46), but Daniel is intent on correcting this false worship and directing the king’s attention and worship to the only One who is worthy.
 - Notice again Daniel’s example of **humility** here – he doesn’t use this situation to distinguish himself over against the advisors, rather he points out their equal status as creatures under the sovereign God of heaven.
- Very importantly, as this section closes, Daniel now gives the **reason** that God has revealed the mystery to Daniel:

- the purpose is so that the king, *and by effect and extension*, the rest of the world (including us) might see God's plan for world history *predicted BEFORE it came to pass*.

In a rare moment of supernatural intervention, God breaks into history to give us insight into His plan for the future.

As we read the OT, we might come away imagining broadly that this type of special revelation was always happening, but that is not the case.

*This is indeed **monumental!** One of those rare periods of time where God was revealing Himself and moving His redemptive plan forward.*

AMAZING!

SO: what is the dream and what does it mean?

Well, to find out, you'll need to come back next time!

But, as we end here.

Let me leave you with two very helpful observations about Daniel's motivations. [Your final fill-in-the-blanks].

In Daniel's opening proclamation to Nebuchadnezzar, I think we get some insight into his heart—into what motivated this young man.

Two Controlling Motivations that Fuel Bold Proclamation

#1 Zeal for God's Glory (true humility) (28-30)

It is evident in Daniel's example, that he is controlled by a zeal for God's glory.

Before, during, and after his interpretation of the dream, Daniel does not claim any glory for himself but gives all glory to God.

*Daniel **seizes** the unique opportunity to boldly proclaim God to the most powerful man in the world.*

#2 Concern for Lost Souls (true love) (implicit)

Consider this: the bold proclamation: THERE IS A GOD IN HEAVEN was fundamentally evangelistic!

Why would Daniel care to proclaim God to King Nebuchadnezzar?

He wanted this powerful king to recognize that his greatest need was to humble himself before the sovereign, living God.

Daniel cared for the soul of the king – and for others too:

His first words to Arioch after getting the answer from God were, “do not execute the wise men of Babylon” (v. 24).

Daniel could have simply interpreted the dream (done the job) and ‘solved’ the immediate problem.

But Daniel’s proclamation gives us insight into his heart for this unbelieving king.

We will see this heart more fully developed later in the book as their relationship progresses.

But now as we close, I want to turn this to you.

Are you motivated by these two controlling things?

Zeal for God’s Glory and a Concern for the Souls of Others?

I pray that Daniel’s example will help us grow!

[HOPE IN CHRIST]

[PRAY AND THEN OPEN UP DISCUSSION]