

# STRANGERS + EXILES: KINGDOM DREAMS

April 30, 2017 | Pastor Randy Remington

In our life group studies of Daniel, we will be studying a chapter a week. A good idea might be to read the next chapter in preparation.

We won't be doing a lot of review from our last lesson, but a key question will be; "how do we as believers live in an unbelieving world" ...as exiles? Daniel is our "textbook" example of how we are called to do this.

We can all imagine the change for Daniel and the other exiles, living in Jerusalem and Judah. In the "Great City" near the Temple of God and his presence and to be transported to an ungodly city and culture, with a powerful and evil dictator who has life and death in his hands. Ironically, in our nation in 2017 we find ourselves living in what some call a "post-Christian" era. There has been a shift in our culture, a radical shift. Conversations about church, Jesus, and your faith that used to be easy, now can be more difficult.

This can cause us to define ourselves by what we're not, i.e., the pushy Christian on the bullhorn. This can cause us to live with our beliefs but in a passive manner.

There is a group of writings that were written during this time of exiles; Daniel, Esther, Ezekiel and parts of Jeremiah. The exiles were thrust into a world that was such a contrast of where they use to live from a monotheistic society to a culture where there were many gods and a ruler who also dreamed to be worshipped. So how do they and how do we live in a "Babylon"?

Some theologians and critics challenge the book of Daniel only because the prophecies are so pinpoint accurate. We only have to look at the words of Jesus in Matthew 24:15, "So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand" Enough said...

Setting the context for our passage, King Nebuchadnezzar is a powerful, evil king, who had a vision of a powerful kingdom. So he amassed an army conquering the great kingdoms around him including Judah and the City of Jerusalem. The first time the king swept in and took captives, (including Daniel), intending to make them Babylonians and make Judah a Babylonian nation. During his second trip to Jerusalem, he would destroy the great city and God's Temple following a rebellion by Judah's king.

King Nebuchadnezzar had a disturbing dream: possibly a reoccurring dream. He knew this dream was "from the gods." He knew this was no ordinary dream. He asked all of his magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and astrologers to tell him his dream and interpret it. If they couldn't, it would cost them their lives and the lives of their family.

As the order went out to kill all the wise men of Babylon, Daniel goes before the king and asks for a window of time to pray and seek God:

***"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."***

***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."***

***The king asked Daniel (also called Belteshazzar), "Are you able to tell me what I saw in my dream and interpret it?"***

***Daniel replied, "No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about, 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:***

***"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. 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.*

*"Your Majesty looked, and there before you stood a large statue—an enormous, dazzling statue, awesome in appearance. The **head** of the statue was made of **pure gold**, its **chest and arms of silver**, its **belly and thighs of bronze**, its **legs of iron**, its **feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay**. 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. 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...***

*"In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands—a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces.*

*"The great God has shown the king what will take place in the future. The dream is true and its interpretation is trustworthy."*

*Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and paid him honor and ordered that an offering and incense be presented to him. 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 2:24-35, 44-47*

This passage will take our study into two main areas to consider:

- **GOD IS IN CONTROL**

We know from history and from Daniel's interpretation of the king's dream, that kingdoms will come and kingdoms will go. Some of these "kingdoms" that we find ourselves living in may be evil and oppressive, especially to our faith.

We must ask ourselves, how does God want us to respond to being where we might not want to be?

**"It was in the chaos of the hand that he was dealt, not the life he imagined living, that Daniel found his unique role in God's story"**

- **WORK FOR THE GOOD OF YOUR CITY**

In Jeremiah 28, we're told about the false prophet Hananiah, who was telling the people of God: 'I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon. 3 "Within two years I will bring back to this place all the articles of the Lord's house that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon removed from here and took to Babylon". Basically he was telling the people; this would be short-lived. Don't engage with this Godless people and evil city. But a true prophet of God, Jeremiah said:

***"Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper." (Jeremiah 29:5-7)***

God wants to bring "Shalom" peace to the troubled world around us. This isn't a tranquil state of mind, but what God intended from the beginning for us. He desires that shalom, his truth, and his holiness invade the darkest parts of our world.

- **PRAY AS IF YOUR LIFE DEPENDS ON IT**

This is a great pattern that we see in Daniel's life. He always went to the Lord in prayer first and had brothers around him who would keep him accountable to walk in the dream God gave him.

*"Then Daniel returned to his house and explained the matter to his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. 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. During the night the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision. Then Daniel praised the God of heaven." (Daniel 2:17-19)*

- **GOD IS UP TO SOMETHING**

Many times when we read and study this passage, we focus on the statue, its meaning, etc. But the real focus of the dream is the little rock. It's not made by human hands and will grow large. King Nebuchadnezzar will build a golden statue of himself, unlike any other. This is his dream...but God is up to something!

**"The biggest difference between you and God is God doesn't think he's you."**

*"People who live under an "I am God" delusion are always just one bad dream away from utter insecurity. They are building a house on sand, and it takes only one big storm to cause everything to come tumbling down." (John Ortberg)*

*"Dreams by definition are supposed to be unique and imaginative, yet the bulk of our population is dreaming the same dream. It's a dream of wealth, power, fame, plenty of sex and exciting recreational activities. A whole population dreams the same dream of empires triumphant, which reveals that imagination has been taken captive. An alternative to the empire requires different dreams animated by a different narrative." (Brian Walsh)*

**"What Kingdom are you dreaming of? What kingdom are you building"?**

Dreams without God reveal that we have a faulty foundation of clay. Even in the church, we have to ask: who's dream are we building? At times our actions give our intent away, we're clearly building our dream, our image. Unfortunately building a "dream" without God will collapse. However, we should put our focus back on the "rock" and God's kingdom:

*"So this is what the Sovereign Lord says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who relies on it will never be stricken with panic." (Isaiah 28:16)*

*"As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him— 5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 For in Scripture it says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame." 7 Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," 8 and, "A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." (1 Peter 2:4-7)*

1 Peter is very clear that Jesus is the rock referred to in Daniel 2.

So what else do we see about the rock?

- **The Rock is not cut out with hands...it is completely supernatural**
- **The Rock is the least valuable substance in the dream**
- **The Rock starts small but grows large**

*"For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God." (Hebrews 11:10)*

*"In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills and peoples will stream to it. Many nations will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.*

*Everyone will sit under their own vine and under their own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid, for the Lord Almighty has spoken.*

*All the nations may walk in the name of their gods, but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever." (Micah 4:1-5)*

A small stone not made by human hands strikes the statue at its weakest point and causes it to fall. That stone then grows into a mountain.

If you build yourself on anything other than Jesus, you will drown in insecurities and you will collapse.

What is the foundation I am building on? Is it Jesus or my reputation and what I want others to see me as.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Think about the situation Daniel and his companions found themselves in. They were living in Jerusalem, worshipping at the Temple and an evil ruler of a pagan nation took them into exile. So what are your initial thoughts? If this were you, how would you honestly be feeling?
2. The first thing we learn from this passage is that God is in control. Can we see why Daniel and others like him may wonder if this is true? They changed his name, his diet and attempted to change his faith. Think of a time in your life where you wondered if he was in control.
3. In light of this what does this quote mean to you? "It was in the chaos of the hand that he was dealt, not the life he imagined living, that Daniel found his unique role in God's story"
4. "Work for the good of your city", so here they are in this pagan city and the prophet Jeremiah speaks to the exiles. Look at our notes on page 4 and discuss what he told them.
5. "Pray as if your life depends on it". On page 5 after observing Daniel during a life and death situation (under threat from the king) and all he was going through in his life, we see him do two things. He prayed and he was around others who helped him continue to pursue God's dream and purpose. During difficult or overwhelming times how important are these?
6. "God is up to something". Here is my favorite nugget in this chapter. In the midst of an evil culture, a tyrannical king and the apparent helplessness of their situation that they found themselves in...God was up to something.
7. A crucial question for all of us is: "What Kingdom are you dreaming of? What kingdom are you building"? Are you building and dreaming of someone else's kingdom, your own or is it God's kingdom?
8. Daniel interprets the Kings dream, an incredible statue, the mystery of empires to come. Yet many times the small "rock" is overlooked or minimized, in reality it is the most important thing in the dream. Why is the rock so important and who or what is the rock?