

# DANIEL 2:1-47; DANIEL 7:1-28

## DANIEL AND PROPHETIC DREAMS

Daniel and Revelation Series

### OPENING PRAYER

God in heaven, whose loving purposes embrace all humanity and all of creation, thank you that you reveal yourself and your ways to those who see after you. Open our eyes to see the signs of your kingdom all around us, and open our eyes as we read the Scriptures. Amen

### EXEGESIS

Daniel 2:28 reads: 'there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries'. This is another major theme of the book: more is happening behind the scenes than we normally see; a cosmic conflict is raging that affects events on earth; but in dreams, visions and prophecies God reveals what is going on. Chapters 2 and 7 both contain prophetic dreams – an uncongenial idea in secular western culture but very familiar in most cultures. Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream (chapter 2) and his own dream (chapter 7) point towards the same conclusion: empires will rise and fall but God remains in control and his kingdom will come and last forever.

Various interpretations of the statue and the four kingdoms it represents have been proposed: the empires of Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome are favourite suggestions – four empires in succession, and during the era of the fourth of these God sets up his own kingdom through the coming of Jesus. There is a similar vision in chapter 7, although there the empires are portrayed as wild beasts.

The book of Daniel is an example of 'prophecy as political engagement'. What does Daniel teach about this? 1) God is the God of all creation, all history and all peoples: all politicians are under his authority, whether or not they acknowledge this, and are ultimately accountable to God. Daniel invites Babylonian rulers to recognise this, and Nebuchadnezzar declares that Daniel's God is the 'god of gods' (2:47). 2) No other nation, ancient or contemporary, has a covenant with God of the kind that Israel had. Such claims have sometimes been made for both Britain and America, as if God specially favours these nations. If that were so, we could call our society back to covenant allegiance to our God. Daniel does no such thing in Babylon. His prophetic message is based on the universal lordship of God and the accountability of all people and systems to God. 3) Prophetic speech and action can be gracious, respectful of others, creative, peaceful and winsome. This is the tone that Daniel adopts throughout his long life – clear and courageous, but wise and tactful. Read Daniel 1:12-13; 2:14; 4:27; 5:22. 4) Prophecy as political engagement involves spirituality as well as activism. Daniel was a man of prayer as well as a man of action. Political engagement without prayer is both exhausting and dangerous: it will lack a prophetic dimension.

## REFLECTION

Much biblical prophecy is overtly political, addressing social, economic, political and cultural issues, as well as explicitly religious issues. Any separation of religion and politics is modern and unbiblical. Jesus was crucified as a political threat. The kingdom of God has political as well as spiritual connotations. The alternative to political engagement – passivity – usually unwittingly supports the status quo. Our silence is counter-prophecy, acquiescing in injustice.

But prophecy as political engagement in post-Christendom will be different from political engagement in the Christendom era. Then the church was part of the status quo, with vested interests and more concerned about order than justice. Now we are a marginal community with less to lose and freer to advocate justice. Then the church spoke as a religious majority, often using an arrogant and moralistic tone. Now we are religious minority, one voice among many; any authority must be earned and our tone must be gracious. Then we were inspired by Israel under the monarchy, when kings and priests shared a religious worldview. Now our models for political engagement are Joseph in Egypt, Esther in Persia and Daniel in Babylon, who engaged prophetically with pagan rulers who did not share their faith.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What might be contemporary equivalents of the cultural issues the Israelite exiles faced in Daniel 1?
2. How important are attitudes, tone of voice and relational warmth when we dissent?

## CLOSING PRAYER

Sovereign Lord, whose presence can be known in Babylon as well as in Jerusalem, and who invites us to seek the welfare of wherever we live and work, guide us by your Spirit and in the company of your people into ways of courageous and gracious faithfulness.

Amen

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

Jonathan Bartley: Faith and Politics after Christendom (Paternoster, 2006)  
Ernest Lucas: Daniel (IVP, 2002)

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