

Where is God when you need him?

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Preacher: Joshua Russell

[0 : 00] So they came in and stood before the king. And the king said to them, I had a dream and my spirit is troubled to know the dream. But if you show the dream and its interpretation, you shall receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor.

Therefore, show me the dream and its interpretation. He answered a second time and said, Let the king tell his servants the dream and we will show its interpretation. The king answered and said, I know with certainty that you are trying to gain time because you see that the word from me is firm. If you do not make the dream known to me, there is but one sentence for you. You have agreed to speak lying and corrupt words before me till the times change.

Therefore, tell me the dream and I shall know that you can show me its interpretation. The Chaldeans answered the king and said, There is not a man on earth who can meet the king's demand for no great and powerful king has asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or Chaldean.

The thing that the king asked is difficult. And no one can show it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh. Because of this, the king was angry and very furious and commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be destroyed.

[1 : 43] So the decree went out. And the wise men were about to be killed and they sought Daniel and his companions to kill them. And Daniel replied with prudence and discretion to Ariok, the captain of the king's guard, who had gone out to kill the wise men of Babylon.

He declared to Ariok, the king's captain, Why is the decree of the king so urgent? Then Ariok made the matter known to Daniel. And Daniel went in and requested the king to appoint him a time that he might show the interpretation to the king.

Then Daniel went to his house and made the matter known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions, and told them to seek mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his companions might not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.

Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven. Daniel answered and said, Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might.

He changes times and seasons. He removes kings and sets up kings. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding. He reveals deep and hidden things.

[2 : 56] He knows what is in the darkness and the light dwells with him. To you, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, for you have given me wisdom and might and have made known to me what we asked of you, for you have made known to us the king's matter.

Therefore Daniel went in to Ariok, 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 in before the king and I will show the king the interpretation. Then Ariok brought in Daniel before the king in haste and said thus to him, I have found among the exiles from Judah a man who will make known to the king the interpretation.

The king declared to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, Are you able to make known to me the dream that I have seen and its interpretation? Daniel answered the king and said, No wise men, enchanters, magicians or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked.

But there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries and he has made known to king Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days.

[4 : 08] Your dream and the visions of your head as you lay in your bed are these. To you, O king, as you lay in bed came thoughts of what would be after this. And he who reveals mysteries made known to you what is to be.

But as for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because of any wisdom that I have more than all the living, but in order that the interpretation may be made known to the king and that you may know the thoughts of your mind.

You saw, O king, and behold a great image. This image, mighty and of exceeding brightness, stood before you, and its appearance was frightening. The head of this image was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its middle and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay.

As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold all together were broken in pieces and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors, and the wind carried them away so that not a trace of them could be found.

But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. This was the dream. Now we will tell the king its interpretation.

[5 : 33] You, O king, the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power and the might and the glory, and into whose hand he has given, wherever they dwell, the children of man, the beasts of the field and the birds of the heavens, making you rule over them all, you are the head of gold.

Another kingdom, inferior to you, shall arise after you. And yet a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. And there shall be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron, because iron breaks to pieces and shatters all things.

And like iron that crushes, it shall break and crush all these. And as you saw, the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, it shall be a divided kingdom. But some of the firmness of iron shall be in it, just as you saw iron mixed with the soft clay.

And as the toes of the feet were partly iron and partly clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly brittle. As you saw, the iron mixed with soft clay, so they will mix with one another in marriage.

But they will not hold together, just as iron does not mix with clay. And in the days of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people.

[6 : 51] It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever. Just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold.

A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain and its interpretation sure. Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face and paid homage to Daniel and commanded that an offering and incense be offered up to him.

The king answered and said to Daniel, Truly your God is God of gods and Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery. Then the king gave Daniel high honors and many great gifts and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon.

Daniel made a request of the king and he appointed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego over the affairs of the province of Babylon. But Daniel remained at the king's court. This is the word of the Lord.

Where is God when you need him? In our passage today, we have a story, I think, basically about a God who came through. And it highlights for us the big difference between man-made religion, false religion, and religion based on God's revelation of himself.

[8 : 19] So, of course, in ancient Babylon, the Babylonians believed in lots of gods. And Nebuchadnezzar, by all accounts, was a very pious religious man.

He was named after the Babylonian god of wisdom, Nabu. His name means Nabu, protect my heir. Watch over my heir, the heir to the throne.

In the British Museum, there is a stone tablet dated to about 580 BC. It was found among the ruins of Babylon. It's called the East India inscription, because of the museum that it was originally located in, but it has nothing to do with East India apart from that.

So anyway, it was found in Babylon. Don't let that confuse you. And on this tablet, Nebuchadnezzar talks about all his piety. I don't know if I've got a slide of it, Simon, do I?

Yeah, here. Well, this night, we'll see if this works. Okay, here's the tablet. Nebuchadnezzar says, I am Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, the exalted prince, the favorite of the god Marduk, the

beloved of the god Nabu, the arbiter, the possessor of wisdom, who reverences their lordship, the untiring governor, who is constantly anxious for the maintenance of the shrines of Babylonia and Borsippa, the wise, the pious, the son of Nabupalassa, king of Babylon.

[9 : 52] So not struggling for confidence. Anyway, a little later on, Nebuchadnezzar tells us about the prayer he prayed to Marduk on the day of his coronation. Right?

Marduk was the chief god of the Babylonian pantheon. So when Nebuchadnezzar ascended to his throne, he prayed this, to Marduk, my lord, I make supplication.

Oh, eternal prince, lord of all being, guide in a straight path the king whom you love and whose name you have proclaimed as was pleasing to you. I am the prince, the favorite, the creature of your hand.

You have created me and entrusted me with dominion over all people. According to your favor, lord, which you do bestow on all people, cause me to love your exalted lordship.

Create in my heart the worship of your divinity and grant whatever is pleasing to you because you have my life. Nebuchadnezzar was a very devout religious man.

[10 : 55] He wanted to be a good ruler, a wise, righteous ruler, righteous obviously according to his gods. He knew that he depended on his gods for everything, for his life, for wisdom, for power.

So that even two and a half thousand years later, we are still reading about the prayers of this man. And let me just read one more for you. This is when Nebuchadnezzar rebuilt Ebabara, which was the temple to the sun god Shamash in Sippah.

He prayed. Oh Shamash, great lord, upon your joyful entrance into your splendid temple Ebabara, look with continuous favor on the work of my hands.

Mercy toward me be your command. By your righteous command, may I have abundant offspring. Grant me a long life and a firm throne. May my reign last forever.

With a righteous scepter of good rulership, with a firm staff, bringing peace to man, adorn my sovereignty forever. With powerful weapons leading on to battle, protect my soldiers.

[12 : 03] Oh Shamash, by oracle and dream, answer me correctly. These are the prayers of Nebuchadnezzar.

So a deeply religious man, dependent on his gods for all his power, wisdom and wealth. He wants to reign forever. And actually, he's looking for the gods to give him guidance from dreams and oracles.

Which of course brings us to our passage today. And if you've got an outline in front of you, you'll see we're going to tackle it basically in two parts. First, we'll talk about the story and then we'll talk about the dream.

Or you could say we're going to talk about the context of the dream and then the content of the dream. Okay. And obviously, we're not going to be able to cover every little detail this morning. But as we tackle the story, I basically just want to work through the four main characters in the story. So number one, Nebuchadnezzar. That's Nebuchadnezzar's background, but notice how he's portrayed in this particular story. Daniel writes, in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams.

[13 : 13] His spirit was troubled and his sleep left him. So think about this. Nebuchadnezzar was a very powerful king, the most powerful king in the world at the time.

He had all the resources of the age at his disposal, but for all his power and his piety and his prayers, he can't sleep.

Fundamentally, because he lacks wisdom despite his claims. Right? That's what he needs. The one who proclaimed himself the possessor of wisdom, right?

And the favorite of the wisdom god, Nabu, he knows that the gods have been trying to communicate to him through a dream, but he doesn't know what it means and it's troubling him.

And of course, we know that with great power often great anxieties come and troubles as well. Dictators and tyrants like Nebuchadnezzar worry about how to hold on to their power, how to accrue more power, who might be trying to lurk in the shadows, trying to overthrow them.

[14 : 21] So I think we're supposed to have some sympathy for Nebuchadnezzar here. I know the Bible teaches us that we're all culpable for our foolishness on the one hand, because the fundamental reason that we lack wisdom is because we refuse to listen to God, right?

Our ignorance stems from the fact that we ignore the truth rather than that it's sort of inherently inaccessible. But we're also all victims of sin and foolishness and ignorance.

And the Bible encourages us to have sympathy for the lost, those who are wandering around in the darkness, scared and in peril. And that's Nebuchadnezzar. A wicked man, in many ways, but also a scared man.

For all his power and piety, he lacks wisdom. And it's keeping him awake at night, in the darkness, troubled. But of course, Nebuchadnezzar had all the great minds of his day at his disposal. You can imagine him sort of calling up on the local university and getting together a crack squad. right in verse 2. The king commanded that the magicians, the enchanters, the sorcerers, you know, these are all the different departments, and the Chaldeans be summoned to tell the king his dreams.

[15:41] In other words, these are the creme de la creme of Babylonian society, the sandstone bunch, the men of wisdom, of understanding, the men who can divine what the gods are saying by examining omens and entrails and astrology, you know, the kind of thing that we do at UQ.

Perhaps one of them has received an oracle or a dream. So, if anyone can help the king in his desperate situation, then it's going to be these men. Unfortunately, the wise men of Babylon on this occasion proved useless.

And it's funny, isn't it, how they go back and forth for a while, the wise men keep insisting that the king must tell them the dream first so that they can interpret it for him. But the king very shrewdly tells them, no, he'd like them to tell him the dream and the interpretation so that he can really be confident that they're not just making something up, but they actually have access to the gods. They really know the truth from the gods. So, in verse 9, he says, if you do not make the dream known to me, there is but one sentence for you.

And he's referring to that punishment in verse 5. They're going to be torn limb from limb, etc. He says, you have agreed to speak lying and corrupt words before me till the times change.

[17:03] So, Nebuchadnezzar perceives that the wise men are stalling for time, lying to him, and they're waiting for the times to change, which essentially, I think, is code for a new king. They are waiting for a new king.

That's what Nebuchadnezzar is saying. But, whether or not his own officials are sort of that brazenly plotting against him, the most important thing to notice about the wise men of Babylon in this situation is that they were completely useless.

Now, remember back in chapter 1, Daniel and all his friends were being trained to be Babylonian wise men. And at one level, they accepted that and there was nothing wrong with that. Again, we might think about someone today studying science or philosophy or psychiatry or whatever, learning from the wisdom of the world.

The Babylonians were great mathematicians. So, think about the power of logic and deduction or empiricism and all the wonderful things we've worked out using those tools. Going all the way back to the Tower of Babel, right, obviously the root of this civilization, of course, the Babylonians were very technologically advanced for their age.

so that they were able to make special bricks out of mud. They didn't need to quarry stone. They could make their own stones and build gigantic ziggurats. And again, at one level, there's nothing wrong with that.

[18:24] There's nothing wrong with being technologically advanced and sophisticated, with learning from the wisdom of the world. We'll come back to that. But for now, I think the point here is that all human knowledge is the most sophisticated, wise civilization of the day, all human knowledge has its limits.

And here's where it has come up short. And in fact, many things that are important for us to know cannot be deduced or discovered by human reason or experience.

Instead, what Nebuchadnezzar is looking for is revelation, isn't he? he needs God or the gods to reveal the truth to him because he can't work it out.

And no one can discover it. No one can find it. This is precisely what he could not get. And again, actually, it does take us back to the great tower of Babel, doesn't it?

Because that was the time when all the peoples of the earth tried to invade heaven so that they could walk among the gods. You know, they wanted to build basically a stairway into heaven so that they could come and go with the gods as they pleased, to walk with the gods.

[19:43] But here in verse 11, you see how they admit, the thing that the king asks is difficult and no one can show it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh.

See how critical that line is. This is the essence of the Babylonian problem. They cannot get up to the gods and the gods aren't coming down to them.

They can't work out the king's dream using math, logic or anything that they've got. They can't see it for themselves or hear it or taste it or touch it.

They can't manipulate the spiritual forces, evil forces to try and find it. So for all their wisdom and again we might say for all their science and technology, on this occasion they have proved completely useless.

And so as we'll see they have no idea of particularly the future or God's plans for the world and for the kingdom. Which of course in verse 12 then throws the king into a rage and he decrees that all the wise men should be destroyed.

[20 : 53] Which of course is where Daniel and his friends enter the story. As wise men we don't know where they were or why they haven't been in the story before this. But now we know that the threat of destruction looms over their heads as well.

Daniel and his friends are about to be killed. But in the end the desperateness of the situation only serves to highlight Daniel's impeccable behavior and it reinforces the main point of the passage that we can trust God, the God who comes through even in the most desperate of situations.

actions. So against this darkest of backdrops Daniel shines as a model for us. And I just want to mention four ways that Daniel is being held up as a model.

Number one, prudence. See that's the word used in verse 14 paired with destruction. Sorry, discretion, that's important. Or in the NIV the translation is wisdom and tact.

Basically Daniel behaved in a sensible way. You know, he was smart. He kept his head in a moment of crisis. Under pressure he acted shrewdly and decisively.

[22 : 01] He said the right thing at the right time. A model of Israelite, you know, think of the Proverbs, a model of Israelite wisdom. And number two, Daniel was brave, wasn't he, right?

Courageous. He didn't run and hide. In fact, he stepped into the way of danger. He went in to see the king and even before he had the answer from the Lord, he stuck his neck out and said that he'll get the interpretation.

Let him kind of deal with this, as it were. Thirdly, of course, Daniel was prayerful. In verse 18, he gets all his buddies together and he told them all to seek mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery so that Daniel and his companions might not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon, which might mean apart from the rest of the wise men of Babylon or it might mean together with them.

Prayerfulness is a very important part of our relationship to God because it shows basically two things. It shows what we think about God and it shows what we think about ourselves.

It shows that, well, we wouldn't go to God for help if we thought that he was incompetent or uncaring or too far away or something like that. And we wouldn't go to God for help if we thought we could take care of things ourselves.

[23 : 23] So Daniel here in his prayerfulness is showing off these two things, what he thinks about God and what he thinks about himself. He is trust in God and his personal humility. He cries out to God for mercy, right, or the word means compassion.

So this is not a matter of bargaining with God, you know, or you owe me or something like that. He's not naming it and claiming it even though he's already stuck his neck out, right, and said that God will come through for him.

But he knows that God doesn't have to give him revelation as a matter of kind of rights or something. He's just throwing himself in God's mercy. And of course God does come through for him.

So the fourth way in which Daniel is a model for us is praise. In verses 19 to 23, Daniel blesses God. And this introduces for us the fourth and most important character in the whole story, of course.

God. Daniel's God. Because in the end, Daniel isn't really the hero who saves the day, is he? He acknowledges that when he goes and talks to the king. Just cast your eye down to verse 26.

[24 : 31] When the king asks him, are you able to make known to me the dream that I have seen and its interpretation? Daniel answered the king and said, no wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked.

But there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. So Daniel isn't trying to steal glory from God or anything like that. And just as Daniel prayed, this is really a story about the God of mercy who reveals mysteries.

Not any wise man or enchanter or magician or astrologer or guru or intellectual or philosopher or scientist or politician. Christian. So let's dwell on verses 19 to 23 for a moment to see what Daniel says about God because this is really the theological heart of the passage.

Verse 19 we read, then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven.

Daniel answered and said, blessed be the name of God forever and ever to whom belong wisdom and might. He changes times and seasons. He removes kings and sets up kings.

[25 : 45] He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding. He reveals deep and hidden things. He knows what is in the darkness and the light dwells with him. To you, a God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise.

You have given me wisdom and might and have now made known to me what we asked of you. For you have made known to us the king's matter. So three things about God.

We've already noted that God is merciful, but three more things. Number one, God is gracious. You see in this hymn of praise how many times Daniel mentions that God gives. God gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding.

And God has given Daniel wisdom and might. The point is that God is not a taking God or even a withholding sort of God, a stingy God, but a giving God, a generous, sharing God.

And secondly, of course, God is a God of wisdom. In fact, Daniel says all wisdom belongs to him. He gives wisdom to the wise. Obviously, not meaning those who are already wise, he just gives them more wisdom.

[26 : 59] But meaning anyone who has wisdom, he gave it to them. And knowledge to those who have understanding. He reveals deep and hidden things. He knows what is in the darkness and the light dwells with him.

This is where I think it's just worth coming back and making a little comment about the wisdom of the world, actually. Because, of course, Daniel is not saying just that God gives wisdom to his people or that he gives wisdom to prophets and people like Daniel in visions and dreams and so on. And Daniel is saying that ultimately all wisdom comes from God. Anyone who has any knowledge or wisdom, they receive that knowledge and wisdom from God. So there is nothing true that any scientist or philosopher or engineer has ever discovered that God did not graciously reveal to them. Theologians would talk about God's common grace here. That actually, as Christians, we should thank God for the gifts and knowledge that he has given to unbelievers as well as to us.

Whenever someone knows how to build a skyscraper or run a business or do a cool guitar riff or sculpt a fantastic statue or whatever it is, they may not be doing those things to the glory of God, but we can still appreciate their wisdom and skill and knowledge and glorify God for them because we know that God is the one who gave them all their gifts.

[28 : 35] See, that's what Daniel is saying here, that ultimately all wisdom belongs to God and God gives wisdom graciously as he wills, both in general ways, you know, which is what we see all around us, the kinds of wise things Daniel was learning in Babylon, but also in special ways as we have here, the things that the Babylonians in all their wisdom could not access.

And thirdly, of course, Daniel says the same thing about God's gracious gift of power or might. All power, all strength is ultimately God's power.

So that God, verse 21, changes times and seasons. And he removes kings and sets up kings. All power comes from God, which is why Daniel can be so bold in the face of power, because he knows that God is ultimately the one who gives power and the one who can take it away.

Which leads us then into the second half of the chapter and the content of the dream. First of all, in verses 28 and 29, Daniel says in several ways that the dream refers to the future or the latter days. That's important. Of course, Daniel is speaking from his perspective so that actually what was future for him isn't necessarily future for us now. And I think most of the things Daniel talks about here have actually come to pass.

[29 : 57] But it's important that for Daniel it was in the future. Because a big part of what God is doing here is showing Nebuchadnezzar and all of us that he is the only true and living God guiding and directing the whole history of the world.

What other God or prophet can tell the future hundreds and hundreds of years in advance? And it's not just that God knows what's going to happen or knows all things. But because he is sovereignly working his purposes out.

Daniel's God is the unstoppable God controlling history. And Daniel recounts the dream itself in verses 31 to 35. And he gives the interpretation in verses 36 to 45.

So let me just read the dream again for us so that we can have it in our heads. Daniel says in verse 31, You saw, O king, and behold, a great image.

This image, mighty, which of course is important because we've just been told where might comes from. This image, mighty, and of exceeding brightness, stood before you and its appearance was frightening.

[31 : 06] The head of this image was a fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its middle and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay and broke them in pieces.

Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold all together were broken in pieces and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors. And the wind carried them away so that not a trace of them could be found.

But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. This was the dream. Now we will tell the king its interpretation. You, O king, the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom the power and the might and the glory, and into whose hand he has given, wherever they dwell, the children of man, the beasts of the field and the birds of the heavens, making you rule over them all.

You are the head of gold. And we'll just pause there for a moment. Now if you think back to Nebuchadnezzar's inscription then, he wasn't exaggerating, was he? He said to Marduk, you have created me and entrusted me with the dominion of all people.

And that's exactly how Daniel sees it too. That's what this vision portrays. Nebuchadnezzar was a spectacular, great king of magnificent wealth and power. The only problem was that he gave all the credit to Marduk and Nabu and Shamash.

[32 : 32] But Daniel says, no, there is a God of heaven, one God, the true and living God, Daniel's God, and he is the one who has given you all this kingdom and your power and might and glory.

So Nebuchadnezzar is the head of gold. In verse 39, Daniel says, another kingdom inferior to you shall arise after you, and yet a third kingdom of bronze which shall rule over all the earth, and there shall be a fourth kingdom strong as iron.

Now, there are debates about this passage, as you might expect, and how they match up to subsequent history. But I think the simplest explanation is probably the best, and it's by far the most common understanding.

After the Babylonians, there were three more very significant kingdoms that rose to power and dominated the people of God, or affected the people of Israel.

So in 539 BC, the Persians came along. Then after the Persians, and they actually ruled jointly with the Medes, which is what has caused some of the confusion, but I think the Medes and the Persians should be taken as one empire or one kingdom.

[33 : 43] Then after the Persians, in about 330 BC, the Greeks conquered them. That's Alexander the Great and so on. And then finally, the Romans came along and slowly but surely pushed east, beginning in about 200 BC, and then they eventually conquered Judea in 63 BC.

So I think the four most, those four empires are the most likely kind of candidates for the kingdoms that are mentioned here. And Nebuchadnezzar's dream seems to show that on the one hand, each of these kingdoms will have their different characteristics.

Some more glorious than others, some stronger than others. But on the other hand, they are all, in a sense, you know, of a piece. One frightening statue of human power.

Superficial changes, as the Babylonians become the Persians, become the Greeks, become the Romans. Each tribe is kind of rising and falling and fighting it out and they think they're important. But ultimately, they're all part of the same image. This frightening image of human power. Until, of course, the final kingdom in verse 44, which Daniel says God will set up in the days of the fourth kingdom, i.e., I think, the Roman Empire.

[35 : 05] Daniel says, verse 44, And in the days of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people.

It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever, just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold.

So in the end, after all the kings and kingdoms of this world have come and gone, there will be one king and one kingdom of a very different character. Number one, this king or kingdom is represented by a stone, cut from a mountain by no human hand.

The point is that the kingdom is of divine origin. The king or the kingdom is of divine origin. Some of us might be familiar with Psalm 118 or Isaiah 8, the sort of language of a stone.

In fact, the language goes all the way back to Genesis 49. When Jacob was getting older and his sons gathered around him and he blessed them, he said to Joseph that all of his blessings would come through God, the mighty one, the shepherd, the stone.

[36 : 24] Right? The mighty one, the shepherd, the stone of Israel. That's Genesis chapter 49 verse 24. So God in the Old Testament is described this way in several places as a stone or a rock because he is solid and reliable, the one upon whom we ultimately depend.

So Nebuchadnezzar's dream here is communicating that one day a kingdom will come that will have the very character of God himself. Number two, the stone is going to destroy the statue. This represents sudden judgment. And the kingdom of God is not going to bring kind of gradual reform, but decisive overthrow. It is not just going to arise after all the kingdoms of the earth have kind of faded or destroyed themselves.

The stone is going to be the cause of the destruction of all the other kingdoms. And number three, the stone of course is eventually going to fill the whole earth.

It grows into a huge mountain. This represents universal expansion. As far as the Babylonian empire stretched or the Persian empire or the British empire for that matter, none of them ever conquered the whole world.

[37 : 40] But God's kingdom is going to be universal. And number four, God's kingdom is going to be eternal. Daniel says the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed.

It will never be left to another people. And so this kingdom is going to last forever. Now of course, I hope there are no surprises here.

All of this reaches its glorious climax in King Jesus, our Lord. When Jesus arrived, he came proclaiming the kingdom of God and demonstrating himself as the king who would bring in this kingdom.

In Luke chapter 20, for instance, he picks up the stone language and applies it to himself. He says, the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces. And when the stone falls on anyone, it will crush him. Now Jesus is quoting from Psalm 118, but he's actually picking up on Daniel chapter 2 as well, alluding to Daniel 2.

[38 : 44] He's picking up on this theme that flows from Genesis through the Psalms, through Isaiah and Daniel. And he's saying that it all culminates in him. He is the stone.

He is the king. In fact, he is the kingdom of divine origin. He is the king who is going to decisively overthrow all of the other kingdoms of this world and reign over all the earth.

His kingdom is going to last forever and ever and ever. Praise the Lord. So as we finish, let's return to our original question.

Where is God when you need him? The major theme of this chapter is a contrast between Daniel and his God and the Babylonians and their gods. The key question is which God will come through for his people?

It's a lot like the contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal, actually, isn't it? On Mount Carmel, if you remember that episode. The Babylonian wise men were given every opportunity to prove themselves in this chapter.

[39 : 57] Daniel doesn't even seem to have been in the room at the beginning. But they proved useless. Where was Marduk when they needed him? Nabu or Shemash?

Perhaps on holiday somewhere. Relieving himself, as Elijah would say. Has he fallen asleep? What of all their magic and mathematics?

Is useless. In the end, they simply had to acknowledge that they cannot get up to the gods and the gods have not come down to them.

But of course, Daniel's God is very different. Because although he is the God of heaven who reigns far above us, is transcendent, is high and exalted, he is also the God who bends to hear our every prayer with sovereign power and tender care.

And ultimately, the God of the Bible is the God who always comes through for his people. Of course, he did come down to dwell among flesh, didn't he?

[41 : 06] By sending his own son in the flesh. What a glorious mystery the incarnation is. How did God, the son, unite divinity and humanity in the one person? We can describe it, but we can't comprehend it.

And then, of course, just as he said he would, God established the everlasting kingdom through the death and resurrection of his son. And in his death, he upends all the wisdom of the world.

He thwarts the wisdom of the wise, the strength of the strong. Whoever would have thought of God achieving such a spectacular, glorious conquest through weakness, through his own death, the glory of the incarnation, the glory of the cross, overthrows worldly wisdom.

And what it means now is that the time for speculation about God and idolatry is over. Do you remember how Paul puts it in Acts chapter 17?

Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man.

[42 : 21] The times of ignorance God overlooked. But now he commands all people everywhere to repent because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed.

And of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead. So for centuries and centuries, God overlooked the ignorance of humanity. He was being patient with the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks and the Romans while they worshipped their idols made of gold and silver and stone.

But now with the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, it is time for the kingdom of the great stone to begin. The kingdom of God.

God's patience is swiftly running out.

It's time to turn away from humanism or self-reliance. It's time to humble ourselves and turn back to God. To submit ourselves to his rule and put our hope in him alone and his kingdom alone.

[43 : 30] He is the only God who will come through for us. In the end. In the end, Yahweh, the Lord our God.

No matter what sort of twists and turns the story takes while we're getting there, on the journey there. In the end, Yahweh, the Lord our God. The God of mercy, the God of grace, wisdom and power.

He is the God who is going to reign forever and ever. Through Jesus Christ our Lord.