



# 7 Visions from God

## Key Theme

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- God is sovereign over all things.

## Key Passages

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- Daniel 2:1–45, 7:15–22, 8:15–27

## Objectives

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Students will be able to:

- Identify the source of the interpretation of dreams.
- Identify the attributes God demonstrates in fulfilling His plans.



## Lesson Overview



### Come On In

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Write on the board, “How does God reveal His attributes?”



### Studying God’s Word

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Daniel was given visions and dreams of things yet to come. Daniel could fully trust in the coming of the various kingdoms he had seen in the visions because God declared the trustworthiness of the words delivered. God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and can never lie.

- Go Before the Throne.
- Read through the lesson key passages and Prepare to Share.



### Activity: Seeing God’s Attributes

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The students will try to discern the attributes of God that are demonstrated in Daniel 2.

- Student Guides
- Pencils



## Prepare to Share

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the lesson key passages along with this background.

Throughout the Old Testament, God communicated to certain people through dreams and visions. God appeared to Abraham, Jacob, and Solomon in dreams. Joseph received dreams and interpreted dreams. Many of the prophets received visions. We see in these dreams a supernatural form of communication that we can learn much from today. We will look at a dream interpreted by Daniel and the visions given to Daniel.

This lesson takes us back a bit in the history of the captivity, but also looks forward with prophetic images. Daniel was one of the captives carried away by Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon in 607 BC. Technically, Nebuchadnezzar was only the viceroy of the Babylonian Empire at this time until his father died in 605, so the dream that he had in Daniel 2 actually happened in 604, the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign (Daniel 2:1). Looking at the text, it seems that the dream was given shortly after the three years of training that Daniel and the other captives were given to instruct them in the ways of the Babylonians. Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah had exceeded all the others as God blessed them, and they were installed as advisors in the king's service (1:17–20).

Nebuchadnezzar had dreams that troubled him so much that he was unable to sleep. As kings were known to do, he called for his astrologers, magicians, and wise men and asked them to interpret the dream. No problem, right? Well, Nebuchadnezzar refused to tell them the dream but rather expected them to give both the dream and the interpretation (2:1–5). The men protested the unreasonableness of this request, but the king held his ground, apparently believing that his counselors had been deceiving him. Eventually, Nebuchadnezzar ordered that all wise men in Babylon should be killed since they could not relate and interpret his dream.

Apparently, Daniel and his three companions had not been called on to interpret the dream. When the king's captain showed up to kill the quartet, Daniel persuaded the captain to let him appear before the king. The four men diligently sought God and then Daniel

received the dream and its interpretation in a vision, leading him to praise God for His provision.

As Daniel appeared before Nebuchadnezzar, he pointed directly to God as the one who provided the dream and its interpretation. After Daniel explained the dream and its interpretation, Nebuchadnezzar announced, "Truly your God is the God of gods, the Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, since you could reveal this secret" (2:47). As a result, the king promoted Daniel and gave him many gifts as well as promoting the other three men to positions of greater authority. God had shown Himself sovereign over the dreams of a king and over the kingdoms that would come afterward (see historical section below).

In chapters 7 through 12, Daniel recorded visions that he received during the reign of King Belshazzar, the son (or grandson) of Nebuchadnezzar. Belshazzar took power in 555 BC, so Daniel would have been in his sixties at the time. The visions Daniel received were of events that would happen in the near future as well as the distant future. He saw rams and goats and beasts with horns of different sizes and shapes and didn't know what to make of all these things (7:15, 8:27). Daniel needed an explanation to truly understand what all of these images represented.

Have you ever looked at a painting or read an allegory and things just didn't quite make sense? Maybe you thought you knew what an image was supposed to represent or who a character was supposed to embody. Then, you read the author's explanation or heard an interview with the painter only to find out you missed it. That is where Daniel was, and he needed help from God to understand the truths of the visions. In the first vision, Daniel had seen four beasts and then Jesus approaching the throne of God (7:1–14). Daniel went to one of the angels standing by, and the angel explained what Daniel had seen (7:15–18).

In chapter 8, Daniel recorded a vision he received two years later. He saw a ram being destroyed by a goat with horns, which became great and strong. Again, one of the angels spoke and added some information, but Daniel was still confused. So that Daniel would understand, God, perhaps the Son of God, spoke to the angel

Gabriel telling him to explain the vision to Daniel. Then Gabriel explained to Daniel that these things referred to the end time—things that would happen in the future. Daniel may not have understood those things on his own, but he understood them with the guidance of God.

All of this exalts God and demonstrates His attributes to us. What kindness He shows us by revealing His character and plans to us in His Word! God was able to place a dream in the mind of an individual and then give another person an understanding of what that dream showed and what it meant. Knowing this puts God's omnipotence on a pedestal for us to examine. We also see God's mercy in how the interpretation was given to spare the life of Daniel, his three friends, and many other wise men. We see God's sovereignty, guiding the course of history according to His plan, in how God brought to pass the events that were represented in the visions and dreams.

What comfort we should draw from all these things. Even more so, we know that Christ has already come into the world—the Messiah that Daniel was looking forward to—and has paid the penalty for our sins and is seated at the right hand of the Father. And we know we have the Holy Spirit dwelling within us to assure us of the fulfillment of God's plan for the future. We can only long for that day when we will be with God and thank Him that we have seen a glimpse of that future in His Word.

## HISTORICAL/APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND

When Daniel interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the statue and explained the other visions, God revealed His plan for the Middle East. Looking back, we can see how certain leaders and kingdoms fulfilled these prophecies. The gold head was Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 2:38) and represented the Babylonian Empire. The silver chest represented the Medo-Persian Empire that would conquer Babylon in 538 under Cyrus's leadership. This empire is also the ram with the two horns in the later vision (8:20). The bronze belly and thighs represented the rise of the Greek Empire under the leadership of Alexander the Great. This is also the

goat that rose up with a single horn, Alexander, and the four leaders that took power after his death (8:21–22). The iron legs represent the Roman Empire that rose to conquer the Greeks and expand far into Asia, Africa, and Europe. The toes of mixed iron and clay are a bit more challenging to interpret, but the stone that crushed them all and rose to be a great mountain is clear. This stone represents the rule of God over all of these nations, and specifically, the reign of the Messiah over all the earth. Here we see the far-future prophecy in the vision. The kingdom of the Messiah will fill the entire earth at His Second Coming, and He will reign forever (2:44).

These and many other details are described through the rest of the book of Daniel. In portions of those visions, we see God's sure fulfillment of His plans for the past. In other parts we hear of things that are still to come (8:26). Knowing that He was faithful and powerful to bring about the fulfillment of the prophecies in the past should give us confidence to know that He will surely send Christ to reign over all of the nations in the consummation of all things. What a day that will be!



### BEFORE THE THRONE

Dear holy God, I consider your holiness in new ways since I've studied visions of your throne room. Entering into your presence with awe, I confess my sin. My sin would keep me from your presence, if not for the Lamb of God whose blood washes it away. Thank you for your mercies which are new every morning. I am inspired by these people of faith who have gone before me. My desire is to live each moment in obedience to you without fear. I will start by teaching this lesson confidently. If my students believe what they are learning, they will be able to impact the world for your glory! So move through me, Holy Spirit, to bring these people and truths to life.

➤ **Pace your lesson!** Use the clocks to mark the time you want to finish each section. This will help you stay on track and finish on time. You may need to shorten or drop sections as necessary.





## COME ON IN

- Write on the board, “How does God reveal His attributes?”



## Review

Our last lesson looked at the events recorded in the book of Esther.

- ? What was the main point of our examination of Esther last week? *God uses people to accomplish His plans in the world. God is sovereign and could accomplish things without us, but He is pleased to work through us.*

- ? Did anyone read through the entire account? What did you find interesting in light of our lesson? *Discuss various answers.*

We can see how the events of Esther play into the thread of redemption that weaves throughout the Old Testament. Had Haman been successful, we would not have a Redeemer. But thank God that He worked

through Mordecai and Esther, and even a pagan king, to fulfill His promise to send Jesus hundreds of years later.

Our lesson today is going to veer from our chronological approach just a bit. The younger students are doing a review lesson, so we are going to look back to Daniel and something we skipped over as we talked about that period of time. But, the content of the visions we will be looking at deals with the events of the exile and the history looking forward to the time of Christ, so we are not too far from our goal of examining the text chronologically.



- Write on the board, “How does God reveal His attributes?”



## Studying God's Word

### READ THE WORD

Let's read Daniel 2 together to look at the first description of a dream being interpreted. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

### EXAMINE THE WORD

#### Observe the Text

- ? **When did these events take place?** *In the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, so 604 BC is the date.*
- ? **Who did the king bring to his court to interpret the dream?** *The magicians, astrologers, sorcerers, and Chaldeans were called. The Chaldeans may be those who were responsible for teaching Daniel and the others the Chaldean culture.*

- ? **What was the king's demand regarding the dream?** *He asked the counselors to not only interpret the dream, but to also tell him what the dream was.*
- ? **How did the counselors respond?** *They told the king it was a hard task and suggested that it was unreasonable to ask such a thing, as no ruler had ever expected such a thing.*
- ? **Was the king's request unreasonable?** *No. If these people could really discern so many things and had supernatural abilities, they should be able to not only interpret the dream, but tell him what he dreamt. It may be that the king was tired of their poor counsel, but we cannot know the motives for sure.*
- ? **Looking at the counselors' response in verse 11, what do we learn about their theology?** *1) There are multiple gods; 2) The gods can reveal things to the king; 3) The gods do not dwell with flesh (man).*
- ? **How does the king respond to the counselors?** *He becomes angry and calls for all of the wise men of Babylon to be killed.*
- ? **Was Daniel among the counselors asked to interpret the dream?** *No, he learns of the decree later.*
- ? **How did Daniel learn of his impending death?** *Arioch, the captain of the guard, came to Daniel and was about to kill him and the other three men.*
- ? **How did Daniel escape the decree?** *He answered Arioch wisely and was apparently granted a reprieve by Arioch. This is more evidence of the favor God granted Daniel in the king's court.*
- ? **Where did Daniel get such wisdom?** *We know from our previous study that this was a blessing and gift from God.*
- ? **What other example of God's favor do we see?** *The king allows Daniel time to interpret the dream when he had refused the same request to the other counselors.*
- ? **How did Daniel go about discovering the interpretation of the dream?** *He urged Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah to seek God's mercy in revealing the dream. They turned to the God of heaven for mercy.*
- ? **What does this action tell us about their theology?** *1) They knew that God was merciful; 2) They knew that God could reveal the dream and its interpretation; 3) They knew they could seek God and that He would answer.*
- ? **How did Daniel learn the dream and its interpretation?** *He received a vision in the night.*
- ? **How did he respond to the revelation?** *Daniel offered a blessing to God, extolling His wisdom and goodness and acknowledging that his wisdom comes from God.*
- ? **Flip back to Daniel 1:17. How do we understand this verse more fully in light of the blessing Daniel offered to God?** *We know that Daniel had this ability to interpret dreams and visions because God had given him that ability. It is not a gift that was inherent in Daniel, but a gift given by God. Daniel readily acknowledged this fact and demonstrated his reliance on God by seeking Him in prayer. Daniel also affirmed this in 2:30.*
- ? **How did Daniel demonstrate compassion in verse 24?** *He asked Arioch to stop killing the wise men.*
- ? **When Daniel came before the king, to whom did he give credit for the interpretation?** *He pointed to the true God, not many gods, who had revealed the dream and its interpretation to Daniel.*

Daniel 1:17

- ? **Who did Daniel point to as the source of Nebuchadnezzar's dream?** *He made it clear in verse 29 that God gave the dream to the king.*
- ? **According to verses 28 and 29, what was the dream pointing to?** *It was pointing to things that would happen in the future.*
- ? **What had Nebuchadnezzar seen in his dream?** *He saw a giant statue with a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron, and feet of clay and iron. Then, a stone crushed the statue to powder and grew into a mountain that filled the whole earth.*
- ? **How did Daniel interpret each part of the statue?** *Nebuchadnezzar is the head of gold; the silver is a kingdom that will succeed Babylon, but be weaker; the bronze is another kingdom that will follow; the iron another kingdom that had a weaker and stronger portion.*
- ? **What did the stone that smashed the statue and grew into a mountain represent?** *The stone represents a king that would crush all of the earthly kingdoms and be established as king forever.*
- ? **Who is the only king who could match this description?** *This must be referring to Jesus as king since He is the only king who will reign forever.*
- ? **How did the king respond to Daniel's interpretation?** *He bowed before Daniel, presented an offering to Daniel, and then acknowledged that Daniel's God was the God of gods. Daniel was also promoted to rule over all of Babylon and the wise men. Daniel also asked for the promotion of the other three Jews.*

## Discover the Truth

God had revealed the future of the Middle East to a king and had one of His prophets provide the interpretation. All of these things were from God. God sent the dream into the mind of Nebuchadnezzar. God gave the vision of the dream and its interpretation to Daniel.

Looking ahead to chapter 7, Daniel had a vision of four beasts. These beasts are analogous to the four kingdoms and give some geographical details. Today, we can look back at the history of the region and identify the four empires that followed Babylon—the four parts of the statue and the four beasts. We will also look at more descriptions in Daniel 8.

We know from the text that the gold head was Babylon. The silver chest and arms represented the Medo-Persian Empire that conquered Babylon in 538 BC. The bronze belly and thighs represented the Greek Empire initially led by Alexander the Great, and the iron portions represented the Roman Empire that conquered much more than any of the previous empires. The mingled iron and clay toes are up for a bit of debate, so we will just mention that and you can look at some different commentaries on that topic if you desire.

Despite his profession of God as the true God, it was not long before Nebuchadnezzar had the gold image built and the three Jewish men thrown into the fiery furnace. He praised God after the salvation from the furnace, but it was not long until Nebuchadnezzar was humbled by God

again after boasting of his own greatness. God made him insane for seven years, and he was later restored after acknowledging God's authority. All of these events are described in the first four chapters of Daniel.



## Seeing God's Attributes

### MATERIALS

- Student Guides
- Pencils

### INSTRUCTIONS

God is kind to us in revealing His character in the pages of Scripture. Using the Seeing God's Attributes activity in your Student Guide, I want you to think about how we see God's character displayed in this account from Daniel. We will come back together in a few minutes to discuss these ideas. *Have the students work alone or in small groups and refer to The Attributes of God poster.*

### CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

- ? 1. What attribute is displayed in granting the interpretation to Daniel so that he and

others would not be killed by the king? *God is merciful to spare the lives of these men when the king had sought to unjustly kill them.*

- ? 2. What attribute is displayed in giving the dream to Nebuchadnezzar and also to Daniel? *God is able to do whatever He pleases as He possesses all power—He is omnipotent.*

- ? 3. What attribute is displayed in God's ability to bring about the four future empires? *God is in complete control of all events in history, so this displays His sovereignty.*

- ? 4. What other attributes do you see displayed in this text? *Discuss various answers including God's omniscience demonstrated in knowing all of the events and thoughts of those involved.*



### READ THE WORD

Our next passage takes us forward to the time of King Belshazzar of Babylon in 553 BC. Interestingly, Belshazzar died back in chapter 5, so this must be a bit of a flashback, as was the vision of the four beasts in chapter 7. Let's read Daniel 8:1–27. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

Daniel 8:1–27

### EXAMINE THE WORD

#### Observe the Text

- ? Who was the king at the time of this vision? *Belshazzar of Babylon.*
- ? Who was the source of the vision? *The vision came from God, the only one who can know the future with this type of accuracy and specificity.*
- ? What is described in detail about each of the rams? *The horns are described in detail.*

➤ Horns were a symbol of power in Eastern culture.

- ? **What is significant about horns? What are they intended to symbolize?** *Horns are used as symbols of power throughout Scripture.*
- ? **Why were some of the horns bigger than others, grow larger, or get broken?** *Some kings were more powerful than others, their strength grew, and others were crushed.*
- ? **Can anyone think of other passages of Scripture that use a horn as a symbol of power?** *Refer to some of these passages, reading "strength" in place of "horn" to demonstrate the symbolism being used: Deuteronomy 33:17; 1 Samuel 2:1; 2 Samuel 22:3; Psalm 18:2, 75:10, 89:17, 89:24; Lamentations 2:3; Ezekiel 29:21; Micah 4:13; Luke 1:69; Revelation 5:6.*
- ? **Who was speaking in verses 13–14?** *"Holy one" refers to the angels who were speaking to one another and to Daniel.*
- ? **Which angel addressed Daniel?** *Gabriel is identified; this is the first time in Scripture an angel is given a name.*
- ? **What do verses 17–19 tell us about the timing of the events described in the vision?** *Gabriel said that these things were looking forward to the times appointed for each event.*
- ? **What did Gabriel reveal to Daniel about the ram with two horns?** *Its horns represented the Medes and Persians, Persia being the larger horn that grew up later. This is referring to Cyrus and is also linked to Isaiah's prophecy in Isaiah 45:1–7.*
- ? **What was revealed about the goat that moved without touching the ground?** *It is Greece; the single horn would be Alexander the Great whose empire was divided into four parts represented by the other four horns rising out of the broken horn.*
- ? **What switch happens in verse 23?** *The text moves from narrative to poetic form.*
- ? **In verse 9, a small horn grows up exceedingly great. What was he described as doing and where did it happen?** *He was described as warring against the Glorious Land, Israel, and interrupting the sacrifices and defiling the sanctuary. We see this in narrative form in verses 9–12 and poetically in 23–26.*
- ? **When were these events supposed to take place?** *Verse 23 identifies this as happening in the latter time of the four kings of Greece. However, there is also a future sense of these verses. Many understand these verses to also be referring to the Antichrist and his deceit of the nations at the end of the age and before the Second Coming of Christ. There seems to be a near and future fulfillment indicated in this last prophecy.*
- ? **Does anyone know which king of Greece was the near fulfillment of this prophecy?** *Antiochus Epiphanes rose to power and defiled the Temple in Jerusalem around 170 BC. He sacrificed a pig on the altar of God and oppressed the Jews.*
- ? **How did Daniel respond to the truths he had received in the vision?** *He was sick for days and amazed, but eventually got back to work for the king.*

➤ The visions in Daniel have been understood differently by different Christians throughout history. Some understand them to refer to the future Second Coming while some believe they were primarily fulfilled by the first century AD.

## Discover the Truth

Just as God had revealed Nebuchadnezzar's dream and its interpretation to Daniel, He then gave Daniel another vision and provided the interpretation. God was the source of the vision and its interpretation. God was revealing Himself and what He planned to bring about in the

future. Daniel received many more details given in other visions and lots of timeframes that help us to understand more fully how God brought about all of these events and His plans for the future consummation of all things—when Christ returns again.

One truth that stands above all of these things is that God is in control and that Christ is the Prince of princes who will bring about His plans in the end times. All of this points to the weakness and failure of human kings to rule the earth in righteousness. This is only something that Jesus can do as He is the only righteous King of kings.



## Applying God's Word

### WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

Daniel was looking forward to the time when all of these visions would come to pass. For the most part, we are looking back on the time when these things happened. We have the benefit of history to inform us how these events played out, but God was never in the dark. God knew exactly what was coming and could boldly describe these things to Daniel with no fear of being wrong.

God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and can never lie. Daniel could fully trust in the coming of the various kingdoms he had seen in the visions because God declared the trustworthiness of the words delivered. Daniel put his faith in God and served Him faithfully throughout his life. He trusted that there was a King coming who would exercise ultimate power and dominion. God also allowed Daniel to see that the future was sure and in His control. This should give us great hope and cause us to long for the day when King Jesus returns and reigns in righteousness for all eternity.

### GOD'S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

- ? How does looking carefully at a narrative passage of Scripture help us to understand how God's attributes are reflected in the events of history? *Rather than simply looking for a list where God describes Himself or someone describes God, we can look for His attributes to be displayed within the events that come to pass and His specific actions in the world. In this way, we see God and His character in places other than lists of attributes.*
- ? Which of the attributes we have discussed today do you have the most trouble understanding? *Discuss various answers and help the students to understand these things more fully, realizing that we can never fully understand the attributes of a transcendent God.*
- ? How do we understand dreams today? Do the dreams given to Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel indicate that we should expect the same

**things today?** *Although there are examples of dreams and visions given to people in the Old Testament, there is nothing in these texts that indicates we should expect dreams or their interpretation. To answer this question, a much broader study of Scripture would have to be performed. Various denominations understand this issue differently, but we must be careful that we never interpret anything from our experiences in a way that is contrary to Scripture. We must look to the Bible as the absolute authority and trust what God has revealed to us in its pages.*

? **If you were a skeptic, how would you seek to explain the prophecies of the coming kings of the visions? As a Christian, how would you answer such claims?** *Some may choose to say that the prophecies are so vague that they could have described many different leaders and not Alexander or Antiochus Epiphanies. Others may say that these sections were added to the book of Daniel at a later date to make it look like Daniel was delivering a prophecy when he was not. Because the natural man seeks to repress the truths of God, they seek to harm the testimony of Scripture. As Christians, we must call people to accept the authority of God's Word. We can also ask them to present a positive case for their claims that the text was changed later. This would be extremely difficult in light of the manuscript evidence we have for the Old Testament books. We can trust the Bible to reveal truth to us.*

? **How could you use the ideas from today's lesson, either God's attributes or the prophecies, to communicate the gospel to someone who does not trust Christ for their salvation?** *Discuss various answers being sure to point to the relationships between the events of history and the coming of the Messiah.*

? **How does your view of the end times (eschatology) impact the way that you live your life?** *If we understand the events that Daniel described as being fulfilled by the first century AD, then we will not be looking for the fulfillment of the prophecy in the future. If we believe there is a future part of these prophecies that still must be fulfilled before Christ returns, we will be looking forward to those things, attempting to discern when, where, how, and who will bring these things to fulfillment. Our eschatology influences how we view politics, evangelism, and many other things.*



### MEMORY VERSE

**Proverbs 21:1** The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes.



### GROUP PRAYER TIME

Be sure to pray with your class before you dismiss them.

- Thank God for revealing His attributes to us in Scripture.
- Praise God for His sovereign reign over all of history.
- Ask God for grateful hearts for all of His kindness to us.