

The STORY CHURCH

Summer Bible Study: The Book of Daniel

Session 2 Content

Dreams and Interpretations (Daniel 2:1)

The Babylonian Magi vs. Daniel (2:2-18)

Daniel's Interpretation (2:19-49)

Dreams & Interpretations

"In the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams.." - Daniel 2:1

What are dreams? The various world religions hold wildly divergent views about dreams, and for all of its many advances, modern science remains mostly confounded by them. As believers, what should we make of our dreams?

The Most Common Dreams Reported by Country

[borrowed from a pop culture commentary (timeout.com) on a dreams survey conducted by *BedGuide*, a British sleep research firm]

Looking at the results, it's safe to say that dreams can say a lot about a country's psyche. The UK, for example, supposedly dreams most about teeth falling out, which apparently can mean you've been feeling anxious or stressed. Which, to be honest, probably feels about right.

The USA, Canada and Australia also both had lots of toothless dreams, but the most common dream around the world concerned snakes. The slithery bastards featured as the most common dream in more than a third of all countries, from Brazil and India to Kazakhstan and Egypt. Other animal-based dreams featured mice, lice, doves, squirrels and fish.

While animals featured a lot in the study, there were plenty of other popular subjects. These included ex-relationships (Japan, Togo, Madagascar), falling into water (South Korea), being cheated on (Andorra) and the dead (Costa Rica, Hungary).

Other countries ranked with slightly more positive subjects. Iceland apparently dreams a lot about snow, Greece about hats, Ethiopia about shoes, Bhutan about rainbows and Albania about breasts. Others dreamt about marriage, pregnancy, money, and cutting their hair.

The STORY CHURCH

Summer Bible Study: The Book of Daniel

“In the ancient Near East dreams were considered one of the ways in which the gods communicated with humans. Since kings were believed to stand in a special relationship to the gods, their dreams were of particular importance. Several reports of dreams are found in royal inscriptions from Egypt and Mesopotamia. Nebuchadnezzar’s dream is an example of a symbolic dream, the meaning of which is not obvious and needs to be interpreted. Until this was done, he would not know whether it foretold good or ill. Dreams played only a secondary role in Mesopotamian divination. They were more important in the reigns of some kings than others, perhaps a reflection of the king’s personal piety. Dreams were thought to be messages from the gods brought by a spirit messenger whose Akkadian name was Zaqiqu. Basically two types of dreams were recognized as communications from the gods. In message dreams a divine being spoke directly to the dreamer, so that interpretation was not needed. A symbolic dream involved the dreamer seeing or experiencing something, the meaning of which was not obvious; thus, interpretation was needed. All known records of this kind of dream come from Sumerian or Babylonian sources rather than from Assyrian ones. Interpretation could be done in one of two ways. Deductive interpretation relied on consultation of collections of dream omens (called “dream books”), which contained lists of things that might occur in dreams and assigned meanings to each one. Intuitive interpretation depended simply on the wisdom and insight of the interpreter. There is no evidence of a specific group of professionals who devoted themselves wholly to dream interpretation. Instead, this was done by priests, both male and female, who were competent in several types of divination. When a dream presaged something bad, there were rituals that could be performed to prevent the calamity from happening. This is one reason why it was important to discover the meaning of a dream as soon as possible.” (Dr. Craig Keener, *NIV Cultural Backgrounds Bible*)

Ancient Egyptians thought of dreams as simply a different form of seeing, with trained dreamers serving as seers to help plan battles and make state decisions. The ancient Greeks and Romans believed that dreams were equal parts predictions of future events and visitations by the dead.

The STORY CHURCH

Summer Bible Study: The Book of Daniel

Throughout the Bible, God is often the source of dreams:

Dreams of the Bible



There are 21 dreams recorded in the Bible.
10 happen in the book of Genesis.



6
Six dreamers are kings

1
Only one is a woman.

2
Two are named Joseph.

All of them are asleep when the dream happens.
That's a no-brainer. It's also the key difference between dreams and visions in the Bible.

The Dreams




Abimelech's warning
God stops Abimelech, the king of Gerar, from sleeping with Sarah (Abraham's wife).
Dreamer: Abimelech (Genesis 20)




Jacob's ladder
Jacob sees angels ascending and descending a ladder between earth and heaven.
Dreamer: Jacob (Genesis 28:12)




Go home, Jacob
The Lord tells Jacob to return to the land of his father.
Dreamer: Jacob (Genesis 31:10-11)



Laban's warning
God warns Laban not to bless or curse Jacob as he heads home.
Dreamer: Laban (Genesis 31:24)



Joseph's grain
One sheaf stands straight up; 11 other bow to it.



Joseph's stars
The sun, moon and stars bow down to Joseph.

Both dreams signify that Joseph's family will bow to him.
Dreamer: Joseph (Genesis 37:1-10)

The STORY CHURCH

Summer Bible Study: The Book of Daniel



3 branches

The cupbearer presses grapes from a vine and gives them to Pharaoh.



3 baskets

The baker carries three baskets of bread on his head, and the birds eat it.

Both dreams signify these men's fates after three days. The cupbearer is restored to honor; the baker is executed.

Dreamer: Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker (Genesis 40)



Pharaoh's cows

Seven fat cows come up from the Nile to graze, but seven thin cows devour the fat cows.



Pharaoh's stalk

Seven plump ears of grain grow on a single stalk, but seven thin ears swallow them.

Both dreams signify that Egypt will undergo seven years of plenty and then seven years of famine.

Dreamer: Pharaoh (Genesis 41)



Runaway barley loaf

A piece of bread rolls* into Midianites' camp and turns over the tents, foreshadowing Gideon's victory.

Dreamer: Unnamed man (Judges 7:13)

**bun intended?*



Solomon's blank check

The Lord appears to Solomon, the new king of Israel, and offers him anything. Solomon chooses wisdom.

Dreamer: Solomon (1 Kings 3:5-15)



Nebuchadnezzar's statue

A great statue made of various materials (symbolizing future empires) is crushed by a stone (symbolizing the kingdom of God).

Dreamer: Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 2)



Nebuchadnezzar's tree

An enormous tree is hacked to earth, signifying Nebuchadnezzar's future seven years of insanity.

Dreamer: Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4)



Daniel's four beasts

A lion, a bear, a leopard, and a mysterious beast with 10 horns are judged by God, and a Son of Man is given dominion. The beasts represent four kingdoms.

Dreamer: Daniel (Daniel 7)



Backstory for Joseph

An angel tells Joseph (the carpenter) not to divorce Mary: her child is the Savior.

Dreamer: Joseph (Matthew 1:18-24)



Magi's warning

God warns the magi not to return to Herod from Bethlehem.



To Egypt!

An angel tells Joseph to escape before Herod slaughters all male babies.



Back to Israel

An angel tells Joseph to return to Israel with Jesus, because Herod is dead.



But not Judea

Herod's son is on the throne in Judea, so God warns Joseph to steer clear.

These dreams were all given to protect the young Jesus Christ.

Dreamer: Joseph of Nazareth, Magi (Matthew 2)



The Jesus nightmare

Pontius Pilate's wife has a nightmare concerning Jesus' trial, because she knows He is innocent.

Dreamer: Pontius Pilate's wife (Matthew 27:19)

The STORY CHURCH

Summer Bible Study: The Book of Daniel

In modern times, experts from various fields of study have agreed to disagree:

- **Carl Jung**: emotions or thoughts released by the deep subconscious and entrained into narratives by higher regions of the brain.
- **Sigmund Freud**: repressed sexual desires.
- **Max Planck 2017 Study**: the brain's way of freeing up storage by sifting through short-term memories by transferring some into long-term memory storage and discarding others altogether.
- **Threat Simulation Theory**: dreams are the brain's response to potential future danger by running what amounts to fire drills while we sleep, to keep us sharp. That may be the source of the persistent dream about failing to study for finals — with finals as a stand-in for a presentation you have to write for work in your adult life. Dreaming about losing some or all of your teeth — reported by a surprising number of respondents in studies — appears to be about anxiety over saying the wrong thing at the wrong moment. It may also be about bodily deterioration — something we all fear even in childhood.

TABLE CONVERSATIONS: *What role have dreams played in your life, and what meaning (if any) have you attached to them? (5 mins)*

The Babylonian Magi vs. Daniel

Read: Daniel 2:2-18

Who were the *magi*, and what was Daniel's relationship with them? (see Daniel 1:17 and 2:48)

What does the "Nativity" story in Matthew's gospel tell us about the *magi*, and about God? How and why did God use pagan sorcerers and kings in the Bible? (See 1 Chronicles 6:15, Jeremiah 25:9)

Daniel's Interpretation

Read: Daniel 2:19-23

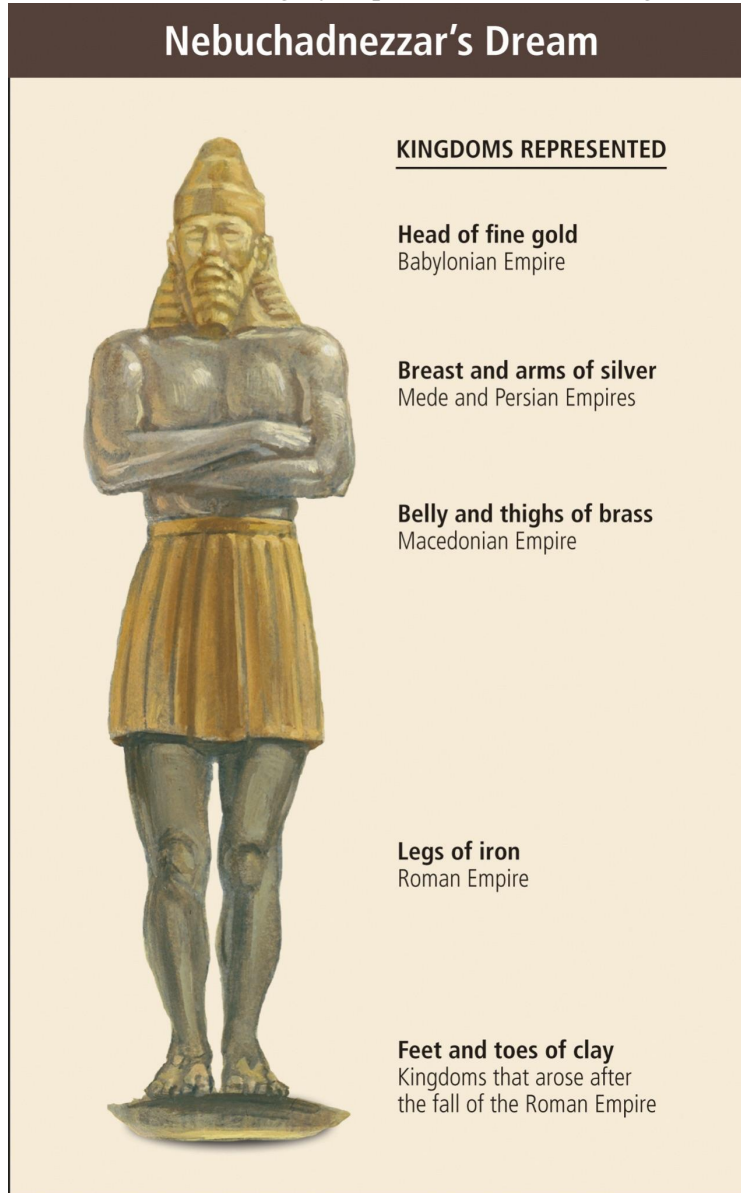
After God miraculously revealed the king's dream to Daniel, the young man took time to offer worship and praise to God. Why do we often skip this step when God comes through for us?

Read: Daniel 2:24-43

The STORY CHURCH

Summer Bible Study: The Book of Daniel

Daniel began his interpretation with humility before God (v.28) and before King Nebuchadnezzar (v.30). Next, he thoroughly explained what the king saw in his dream:



Read: Daniel 2:44-45

What was the meaning of the “rock” in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream? (see also: Isaiah 9:6-7)

Table conversations: *How would it change our conversations with others - especially our political conversations - if we shared Daniel’s confidence in the absolute sovereignty of God?* (5 minutes)