

Main Idea: Daniel 2:1-23 shows us the importance of seeing God in the crunch times. God uses crunch times to teach us about two subjects.

- I. The Lord uses crunch times to teach us about people.
 - A. In crunch times, the ungodly squirm (1-13).
 1. Nebuchadnezzar was bothered by a dream (1-3).
 2. The wise men were bothered by a demand (4-13).
 - B. In crunch times, the godly stand (14-18).
 1. He asked for information.
 2. He asked for time.
 3. He asked for prayer.
- II. The Lord uses crunch times to teach us about Himself.
 - A. We learn who God is (19-20).
 1. His name is great.
 2. His wisdom is great.
 - B. We learn what God does (21-22).
 1. He controls history.
 2. He gives wisdom.
 3. He reveals hidden things.
 - C. We learn what God did (23).
 1. He gave Daniel wisdom.
 2. He answered prayer.

Make It Personal: We need to take inventory regarding two subjects.

1. We have learned about Jesus today.
2. We have learned about ourselves today.

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 40:25-31

We're going to talk this morning about crunch times. Crunch times are those painful occasions when you feel like your world is about to cave in, when you're not sure which way to turn. We all face crunch times. It's in the crunch times of life that you discover whether God is real in your life or not.

Such was the case with Daniel.

This morning our focus is on a crunch-time-event in Daniel's life described in Daniel chapter two. Daniel 2 records the story of King Nebuchadnezzar's dream, yet it's more than a simple story. It teaches us about God, about life, and about how to see God in the crunch times.

What's more, Daniel 2 is what Lehman Strauss describes as "a mountain peak of Bible prophecy".² He suggests that it is possibly one of the most famous chapters in the Bible because it contains one of the most amazing prophecies in the Bible. Dr. Ironside observed, "I suppose it contains the most complete, and yet the most simple prophetic picture that we have in all the Word of God."³

Daniel 2 gives us a snapshot of world history, past, present, and future. John Walvoord suggests, "Nowhere else in Scripture, except in Daniel 7, is a more

*** Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For an earlier development of this passage, see the Daniel series at WBC in 1996.

² Lehman Strauss, p. 51.

³ In Strauss, 51

comprehensive picture given of world history as it stretched from the time of Daniel, 600 years before Christ, to the consummation at the second advent of Christ."⁴

What's significant is to realize that this valuable account came as the result of a serious crunch time. If Daniel 2 teaches us anything, and it certainly teaches many things, it's this. *What is a crunch time to us is an opportunity for God.*

In crunch times God can do what God alone can do.

I read this week an email from our missionary Rachel Chambers as she shared about Jim's recent open heart surgery, and how the Lord took them from Zambia to within five minutes of the top surgeon in South Africa, and how every need has been provided. In crunch times God can do what God alone can do.

He has done the same with little Ivy Fawcett this week. And with the Mullins family. And many others. In crunch times we have the privilege of seeing God do what God alone can do.

Now, in specific terms what do crunch times give us the opportunity to see? In Daniel 2:1-23, we learn that crunch times are opportunities for God to teach us about two things.

I. The Lord uses crunch times to teach us about people.

According to the Bible, there are two categories of people in the world: the godly (those who know God through a saving relationship with His Son Jesus Christ) and the ungodly (those who do not know God, and therefore do not live for God). There are several differences between the godly and the ungodly, but one chief difference that Daniel 2 illustrates is how they respond to crunch times. First consider the ungodly...

A. In crunch times, the ungodly squirm (1-13).

The person who lives life without knowing the true and living God is like a ship in a storm without an anchor. In the crunch times, he begins to discover that he is not nearly as strong, nor as clever, nor as self-sufficient, and certainly not as stable as he once thought. When things out of his control start bombarding his life, he starts to squirm as his self-built foundation begins to crumble.

That's exactly what we see in the first scene with two ungodly parties.

1. Nebuchadnezzar was bothered by a dream (1-3).

Verse 1 says, "In the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his mind was troubled and he could not sleep."

The most powerful man in the world was bothered by a dream, actually "dreams". We'll see why next week as we investigate the dream itself and learn that in the dream, God was disclosing His plan for world history from that day until the final triumph of Christ. It was a dream that brought this great world leader down to size. No wonder he was troubled.

Before going further, let's pull together some details. Verse 1 says Nebuchadnezzar's dreams occurred in his second year as king.⁵ How does this relate to Daniel's training period which 1:5 says lasted three years?

⁴ John Walvoord, p. 44.

⁵ Probably between April 603 and March 602 B.C.

Commentator John Walvoord gives an excellent explanation of what at first seems to be a discrepancy, the summary being that Hebrew writers counted a part of year as a whole.

Before becoming king, Nebuchadnezzar was a powerful general who was responsible for defeating Jerusalem in the summer of 605 B.C. When his father, Nabopolassar died in September of the same year, Nebuchadnezzar was made king over Babylon. Daniel was captured in 605 B.C., and his training actually began before Nebuchadnezzar became king. So Daniel's third year in training would have been Nebuchadnezzar's second official year as king. There is no contradiction.

Nebuchadnezzar was a powerful ruler. Someone has suggested that he did what we are prone to do—he took his problems to bed with him. His cares of the day became his cares of the night.⁶ He dreamed and became troubled.

But this was no ordinary dream. It was ordered by God.

Watch what the king did in verse 2, “So the king summoned the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers^[a] to tell him what he had dreamed. When they came in and stood before the king.”

I find it interesting that when Nebuchadnezzar was in trouble, he didn't turn for help to the ones he classified back in 1:20 as "ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers," that being Daniel and his godly friends. It's hard for us to forsake our old ways.

Please don't miss this. Power and wealth do not produce peace of mind. Nor do fame and influence. Nebuchadnezzar had it all, until God sent a dream, and then he began to squirm.

2. The wise men were bothered by a demand (4-13).

In verse 3, the king shared his predicament with his cabinet members, so to speak, “I have had a dream that troubles me and I want to know what it means.”

In verse 4, “Then the astrologers answered the king, ‘May the king live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will interpret it.’”

If we were reading the original text rather than English, we'd notice that the king's advisors actually spoke to the king in Aramaic.⁷ In fact, beginning in verse 4 the book switches from Hebrew to Aramaic, and continues in Aramaic until the end of chapter 7.

That's significant. The Spirit of God guided the prophets of old to record the Old Testament in Hebrew, except for this passage, Ezra 4:8-6:18; 7:12-26, and a gloss in Jeremiah 10:11.

Why the switch here to Aramaic? Think of what's happening. The Jews are no longer in the promised land, but in captivity in Babylon. Furthermore, Aramaic was the language used all over the Middle and Near East for international business and diplomacy. Daniel chapters 2-7 deal with prophecy which would be of primary interest to Gentiles, so Aramaic would be the natural language to utilize, whereas since Daniel chapters 8-12 deal with the future destiny of the Jews, the Hebrew language is fitting.

⁶ Walvoord, 47.

⁷ The 1984 NIV actually says so, but the 2010 NIV omits “in Aramaic.”

Nebuchadnezzar gave an interesting response in verses 5-6, "The king replied to the astrologers, 'This is what I have firmly decided: If you do not tell me what my dream was and interpret it, I will have you cut into pieces and your houses turned into piles of rubble.'⁶ But if you tell me the dream and explain it, you will receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor. So tell me the dream and interpret it for me.'"

Here's how the LB puts it, "But the king replied, 'I tell you, the dream is gone--I can't remember it. And if you don't tell me what it was and what it means, I'll have you torn limb from limb and your houses made into heaps of rubble!'"

So first, Nebuchadnezzar was bothered by a dream, and now his wise men are bothered by a demand. "Tell me what I dreamed!"

Watch how they responded in verse 7, "Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will interpret it."

To which the king replied in verses 8-9, "I am certain that you are trying to gain time, because you realize that this is what I have firmly decided:⁹ If you do not tell me the dream, there is only one penalty for you. You have conspired to tell me misleading and wicked things, hoping the situation will change. So then, tell me the dream, and I will know that you can interpret it for me."

To paraphrase, "You're stalling! You know the terms. You tell me the dream, and then I'll know you're not trying to trick me in the interpretation!"

Nebuchadnezzar sounds like a paranoid tyrant, doesn't he? Is the Sovereign Lord intimidated by irrational powerful world leaders? Just wait, and we'll see.

The wise men did the sensible thing next. They started to plead for mercy. In verses 10-11, "The astrologers answered the king, 'There is no one on earth who can do what the king asks! No king, however great and mighty, has ever asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or astrologer.'¹¹ What the king asks is too difficult. No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among humans.'"

Did you catch that? With their own words these wise men expose the fallacy of their belief system. Listen again to verse 11, this time in the LB, "This is an impossible thing the king requires. No one except the gods can tell you your dream, and they are not here to help."

But these astrologers, magicians, and sorcerers claimed to have spiritual power, didn't they? Yes. Didn't they claim to have special access to the spirit world? Yes. That was their belief system, not to mention their source of income. Yet what did they admit about their "gods"? They are not here to help.

And they were right.

I find it significant that God used a crunch time to send a dictator into turmoil, and to reveal the futility of false gods and rival belief systems. What a merciful God to help people see the painful truth about their fallacies.

Friends, the test for the value of a person's "god" is whether that "god" has the power to do the impossible. That's true for us as well as these men. If you are making money your god, realize this. You're money can't do the impossible. It can't save a marriage. It can't restore a wayward child. It can't put love back into a home that has been scarred by the past. It can't give peace to a guilty conscience. It can't give joy when death is imminent.

There is only one God that can do the impossible. And the ungodly don't know Him, so in the crunch times, they squirm.

B. In crunch times, the godly stand (14-18).

When the wise men stalled in verse 11, the king went into a tirade. In verse 12 two things happened to him. First he became exceedingly angry, and second, he made an outlandish decision. Verse 12, "This made the king so angry and furious that he ordered the execution of all the wise men of Babylon."

And since he's in charge, so it happened. Verse 13, "So the decree was issued to put the wise men to death, and men were sent to look for Daniel and his friends to put them to death."

Just think of the irrationality of that decree. If he killed all the trained wise men, who would be left to give him counsel? The untrained, unwise men. Now that's a decision he'd no doubt live to regret.

Sort of reminds me of when one of our girls was about two years old, a situation came up in which I told her no about something. Do you know what she did? She started hitting her own head on the floor, as if to say, "Well, I'll show you!"

So who is this king really hurting?

Did you ever notice how people who don't seek God's guidance do irrational things as they attempt to solve their problems in life? I've known spouses who were left high and dry by an unfaithful mate. They had been wronged and were in great pain, yet what did they do? They quickly got involved in another relationship in order to get back at the unfaithful spouse.

"I'm going to make HIM hurt like he hurt me."

But in the end, she hurts herself and her kids, for two wrongs never make a right.

What do the godly do in the crunch times? They do what Daniel did. They stand. They stand for God. But what does that mean? For Daniel, it meant taking three steps.

1. He asked for information.

Verse 13 informs us that the king's decision included Daniel and his Hebrew colleagues. But they were innocent! They hadn't done anything wrong, yet were liable by association. They didn't even know until the knock came at their door.

So in verses 14-15 Daniel asked for information. "When Arioch, the commander of the king's guard, had gone out to put to death the wise men of Babylon, Daniel spoke to him with wisdom and tact. ¹⁵ He asked the king's officer, 'Why did the king issue such a harsh decree?' Arioch then explained the matter to Daniel."

What did Daniel do in the crunch time, when his neck was on the line? He asked for information. And Arioch gave it to him. Why? The text says Daniel answered with "counsel and wisdom" (AV, NIV "with wisdom and tact"). He kept his head. He didn't react emotionally. He assessed the situation with the wisdom God had given him.

Remember that Proverbs says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom".

2. He asked for time.

In obtaining information, Daniel didn't stop with Arioch. There was no use convincing Arioch--he wasn't the problem. So Daniel went to the source of the problem--Nebuchadnezzar. Verse 16 says, "At this, Daniel went in to the king and asked for time, so that he might interpret the dream for him."

Although not the main intent of the story, Daniel's response here gives us a good model for problem-solving.⁸ This godly young man shows us what we should do if we have a problem with someone. Go to that person. It doesn't do any good to talk about the problem to others who aren't part of the solution. Daniel's problem was with the king, so to the king he went. He asked for time, and interestingly, the king granted it.

So why did the king grant Daniel his request when he angrily refused to do so with the wise men? No doubt, part of it had to do with the way Daniel approached the king, with respect and courtesy. The main reason was what he said to the king, for in verse 16 Daniel indicates that given time, he would show the dream's interpretation.

How in the world would Daniel do that?! Don't miss his third step.

3. *He asked for prayer.*

We're told in verses 17-18. "Then Daniel returned to his house and explained the matter to his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah."¹⁸ 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."

Daniel called a prayer meeting, with one request at the top of the list, "to plead for mercy from the God of heaven." You see, in the crunch times, the godly stand. Or more accurately, they stand before men because they choose to kneel before God. There's the difference between the godly and the ungodly.

The issue is what happens in the crunch times. When the pink slip comes. When the doctor uses the dreaded "C" word. When you face what is humanly impossible. That's when we discover whether what we've *claimed* is genuine.

One Saturday many years ago, a good friend of mine received a terrible phone call. He learned that his parents were dead as the result of a murder/suicide. I talked with him a couple of weeks after the tragedy, and asked him how he was doing. We talked specifically about grieving and he told me, "You know, psychologists say you're supposed to go through a grieving process. I've had a person tell me that as part of my grieving process I had to go through certain steps, one of which is being angry towards God. I'm told if I don't have anger towards God, I'm in denial."

You've probably heard the same at some point. But the truth is, a secular counselor can't understand the difference that God makes in the lives of God's people. My friend shared this with me, "I've not been angry with God. I don't understand. I hurt, yes, but I know He is sovereign. It is doctrine that has brought me through this."

And I've seen that happen time and time again. It's doctrine, solid biblical truth about God, that brings us through the crunch times.

Which brings us to a second vital observation from Daniel 2. First, the Lord uses crunch times to teach us about people (others and ourselves). Second...

II. The Lord uses crunch times to teach us about Himself.

We never volunteer for crunch times. But oh what we can learn about the Lord! And what do we learn about God in the crunch time of Daniel 2? Three things.

A. We learn who God is (19-20).

⁸ 1 Corinthians 10:11 says, "These things happened to them as examples..."

During this prayer meeting, God answered. Verse 19 says, "During the night the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision. Then Daniel praised the God of heaven."

How did Daniel respond? Instinctively, he "blessed the God of heaven." Often we are quick to ask, but slow to give credit. Not Daniel. The mark of a godly man is that he gives credit to whom it's due.

We learn about two attributes of God from Daniel's prayer in verse 20. "Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are his."

1. *His name is great.* "Blessed be the name of God forever and ever." "The name of God is a strong tower," says Proverbs 18:10. "Those who know your name will trust in you, for you Lord have never forsaken those who seek you (Psalm 9:10)."

2. *His wisdom is great.* "For wisdom and might are His." "Oh the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God (Romans 11:33)."

Yes, Daniel had a great problem back in verse 13, but in verse 20 we learn that he had a great God! And so do we. In the crunch times we learn who God is, and not just academically, but in reality.

B. We learn what God does (21-22).

In the next section of Daniel's prayer, Daniel affirms three things that God does.

1. *He controls history.* Verse 21, "He changes times and seasons; he deposes kings and raises up others." In the AV, "And he changes the times and the seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings."

We'll see why this particular reality is on Daniel's heart when we see him deliver and interpret the king's dream, for it's a God-send dream that verifies He indeed controls history.

That's good for us to remember during this presidential election. The true and living God raises up leaders and removes them. Thankfully, and this was not the case for Daniel, God has privileged us to have a say in the process. We get to vote and select the leaders we believe would best serve our nation.

I urge you to be involved in the process. Yes, pray. But then vote. If you're not registered and live in Ohio, there's a registration form in today's bulletin. It must be in to the Court House by Tuesday if you want to vote in Ohio's primary on March 15.

Our God controls history. What else does He do?

2. *He gives wisdom.* Again verse 21, "He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning." What an encouraging thought. He is not only wise, but He gives wisdom. And He gives it to the wise, to those who fear Him, for the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Prov 1:7).

3. *He reveals hidden things.* Verse 22, "He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with him."

"He reveals the deep and secret things," says the AV. He's the maker and owner of the universe, so He knows all there is to know about it. But He also reveals. He is a revealing God.

He revealed the deep and hidden things to men like Daniel, and Isaiah, and Jeremiah, and Moses, for they were His chosen prophets. And these men and the apostles and their associates that followed wrote down this divine revelation. That's how we obtained our Bible.

The Bible is God's self-revelation. The Bible is how God reveals deep and hidden things to us.

And ultimately, God revealed hidden things to us by sending His Son into the world. "In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways,² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe (Hebrews 1:1-2)."

By the way, who benefits from God's revelation? Not just any casual inquirer. The natural man doesn't receive the things of God (1 Cor 2:14). To know the Lord takes supernatural grace. And grace He gives to the humble (James 4:6).

C. We learn what God did (23).

For Daniel, God did two things. Verse 23, "I thank and praise you, God of my ancestors: You have given me wisdom and power, you have made known to me what we asked of you, you have made known to us the dream of the king."

1. *He gave Daniel wisdom.* "You have given me wisdom."

I love Jeremiah 9:23-24, "This is what the LORD says: "Let not the wise boast of their wisdom or the strong boast of their strength or the rich boast of their riches, but let the one who boasts boast about this: that they have the understanding to know me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD."

2. *He answered prayer.* V 23b "You have made known to me what we asked of you."

We can learn some practical lessons about prayer from Daniel's prayer. Prayer should be God-centered, not self-centered; personal, not mere recitation; and sound in theology, not sentimental.

But perhaps the greatest lesson Daniel models is this. When you face a crunch time, why panic when you can pray and talk to the One who is in control?

We need not dread crunch times. Crunch times can be teaching times, for they can teach us about ourselves, but more importantly, they can teach us and others about God.

In reality, what is a crunch time for us is an opportunity for God to do two things.

One, get the attention of the ungodly. In the crunch times, God exalts Himself in the eyes of pagans, like Nebuchadnezzar. In crunch times, God sends us a needed warning, "Only one life, it will soon be passed; only what's done for Christ will last."

Two, strengthen the godly.

We've been seeing this in living color in Matt and Abby Fawcett recently. Their daughter, of course, entered this world on January 31 with significant heart complications. Matt has been posting a daily blog expressing not only what's been happening, but how the Lord has been working in all this for His glory and their good.

Here's the opening part of Matt's post from Fatherhood Day #9:⁹

All that thrills my soul is Jesus, He is more than life to me

And the fairest of ten-thousand In my blessed Lord I see.

What a powerful Hymn. All that thrills my soul is Jesus. I think back to things that have thrilled me. Getting my first guitar when I was 11, my license

⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/notes/matt-fawcett/fatherhood-day-9/10153513464763565>

when I was 16, getting married, finding out we were pregnant and January 31st at 6:00 am when Ivy showed up. (outside the womb at least. She was alive and well for 9 months before that) But even all those rolled up into one event still pale in comparison to what Christ has done for me and for you. Nothing gets me more fired up than talking about God's grace and mercy given to us freely on the Cross that Christ bore for us. "What a wonderful redemption! Never can a mortal know How my sin through red and crimson, can be whiter than snow."

And here's how Matt closes the same post:

We know that God is in control and that He loves us with a Love that is unquenchable. Nothing that happens this week, next week, next year or 50 years from now will take Him by surprise, and I know that He loves us enough that whatever happens will be for my good and His Glory. He's not worried about my happiness, but my holiness. The more like Christ I become, the happier I will be. The happier all of us will be if we choose to follow Christ, not out of selfish ambition, or vain conceit, but to value others above ourselves. Because God in His foreknowledge loved us first, even while we were still sinners.

Make It Personal: We need to take inventory regarding two subjects.

1. *We have learned about Jesus today.* Daniel 2 points us to Jesus, as every chapter and verse in the Old Testament does.

First it shows us why we need Jesus. Sin. Every human being is a sinner who, left to himself, tries to navigate life without trusting in the Sovereign One.

But Daniel 2 also shows us what the Sovereign One did to prepare the world for Jesus. He sets up kingdoms and takes them down. He gave Nebuchadnezzar a dream that predicted not only his kingdom, but the Medo-Persian kingdom, and the Greek kingdom, and the Roman empire. Come back next time and we'll see.

But here's the climax of it all. It's during the Roman empire that He will send into the world the King of kings. Notice verses 44-45:

"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.⁴⁵ 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."

God will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed. That's why Jesus came. To set up a kingdom. First, by dying for His unworthy and helpless subjects. He gave His life for them on the cross, and conquered death, so that by simply repenting and putting their trust in Him, He would save them and become their King.

And He will come again, to set up His kingdom over all the earth, and eventually in a new heaven and earth.

Have you given your allegiance to the King of kings?

2. *We have learned about ourselves today.* We are weak and needy. That's something the crunch times reveal loudly and clearly. But as we turn to the Sovereign One, we experience exactly what we need to honor Him in the crunch times.