

John Neate Interview

How has your faith in Jesus impacted the way you do Business? Where have you experienced conflict between your Christian values and traditional business values/practices?

Where has God given you opportunities to represent Him in the secular market place?

After preaching from the Book of Daniel the last two weeks, I've been receiving a lot of feedback about how Daniel's story is connecting with your life. God's word intersects everyday life. We should not be surprised when the Bible, ancient though it is, seems so current, so relevant, so powerful—it is all of these things and more.

In Acts 4:12 we read, *“the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”* My conviction is that as we submit our minds and hearts to the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit takes this word and plants it deep within us where it can bear fruit. The Scripture reminds us who God is, who we are, how much God loves us, and His plan for the world. The Holy Spirit uses the Scripture to bear—in us—the fruit of repentance, and, the fruit of a renewed mind.

Eugene Peterson writes, “The most important question we can ask of this text is not ‘What does this mean?’ but ‘What can I obey?’ A simple act of obedience will open up our lives to [God and] this text

far more quickly than any number of Bible studies”.¹ Without a commitment to live these words, we will quickly lose touch with God, and blend into the surrounding culture.

Not unlike Daniel, we live at a time in Vancouver where God is not really known, nor is He honoured. Exile-living is not easy—it's not for those who want the path of least resistance. We live at time in Vancouver where the call to remain true to Jesus will mean standing out—we will draw a line in the sand on certain issues that West Coast culture will not understand or embrace.

Like all exiles, at times, we find ourselves pulled between two kingdoms, between two competing cultures. Throughout the history of the church, in order to resolve this tension, people have swung to one of two extremes: either (a) fleeing from the culture into a holy huddle (i.e. Hutterites); or (b) embracing culture with such abandon that our distinctiveness is gradually lost.

Jesus rejected both of these extremes, opting for something much more radical. Jesus can be found standing between God and culture, with an arm reaching in both directions. And the church has always been at her best, when it stands with Jesus and does the same.

The prophet Jeremiah spoke to Daniel and the other exiles in Babylon—this was God's word to them: *“Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the*

¹ Eugene H. Peterson, *Eat This Book: a conversation in the art of spiritual reading*, 71.

peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.” Jeremiah 29:5-8

In other words, get on with living in a foreign land. Seek the peace and prosperity of the place God has planted you. And pray for the city, for on one level, your fate is bound up with it. As we continue to live in exile, in Vancouver, we must learn to celebrate the good and the beautiful that we see in culture, to mourn over that which is neither good nor beautiful, and to work for the change that is possible.²

This morning, in Daniel 2, we see once again that **in spite of all appearances, God is in control**, and this gives exiles tremendous hope. For if God can work through Daniel, in exile, for the sake of Babylon, then He can certainly work through us, in exile, for the sake of Vancouver. At this time, let me invite you to turn with me in your Bibles to Daniel 2.

In order to get the most out of Daniel 2, I'm going to subdivide the text into 4 Acts. I'm going to walk through each Act, reading part of the account, summarizing other parts, and offering teaching and application throughout. Let's begin with Act 1.

Act 1: The King, his dream, and his advisors (2:1-13). Verses 1-3, *“In the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his mind was troubled and he could not sleep. So the king summoned the*

magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers to tell him what he had dreamed. When they came in and stood before the king, he said to them, “I have had a dream that troubles me and I want to know what it means.”

The Babylonian religion encouraged looking for signs in the middle of daily life, signs, that might speak a word about the future. They believed that signs could be found among the stars, in strange phenomena, and the entrails of animals. Most people in the Ancient Near East also believed that the gods spoke to people as they slept—a dream rightly understood might unlock the mysteries of the future.

Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that troubled him and so he called for the dream experts, for those who were able to communicate with the gods. The interpretation of dreams was something of a science—both Egyptians and Babylonians had extensive manuals that had long lists of dreams and their possible meanings.³ Upon hearing a dream, the “experts” would then consult their manual and offer an interpretation.

But on this occasion, Nebuchadnezzar deviated from standard operating procedure. He called for his experts, but he refused to share the details of his dream. It would appear that Nebuchadnezzar wanted to test the integrity of their god-connection. If these “experts” were indeed experts, then surely the gods could reveal to them both the nature of his dream and its interpretation. If they could tell him the dream, he could trust their interpretation.

² Miroslav Volf, *A Public Faith*, 83.

³ Andrew Reid, *Kingdoms In Conflict: Reading Daniel Today*, 41.

vs. 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. 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.**”*

This confession reveals two things: the limitation of human wisdom, and, the limitation of the Babylonian gods. In essence, the wise men were saying, we can’t answer your question, and our gods won’t answer your question—they are too far off to be of any help.

While the first readers of Daniel could not have known it, there is a foreshadowing going on in their confession. The Old Testament points forward to Jesus as both the fulfilment of God’s purpose and of His promise to dwell among His people. In John 1:14 we read that God the Son took on flesh and blood, and for a time, made His dwelling on earth. Verse 18 says, *“No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.”* Through Jesus, God came near, and by the Holy Spirit, He remains with us, even in this very moment.

At the time however, the king was so infuriated by the response of the advisors that he ordered the execution of all of his so called “wise” men.

Act 2: God reveals the mystery to Daniel (2:14-23). When Daniel heard that he was to be put to death along with the rest of the king’s wise men, he sought out his three friends and they began to pray. In vs. 18-19, we see them pleading *“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. During the night the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision.”

It’s interesting how God answered their prayer. He could have changed the king’s mind, but instead, He chose to reveal the mystery of the dream to Daniel. *The question is why?* Nebuchadnezzar was the king of kings; throughout his reign he had no one to rival his wealth or power. But though he appeared invincible, his knowledge was limited, his power was limited, and his gods were limited. By revealing the mystery to Daniel, Babylon’s king would learn that Israel’s God had no limits. Israel’s God *knows the future, and, He dwells among His people*—even in exile.

When God revealed the king’s dream to Daniel, he gave thanks to God saying, *“Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are his. He changes times and seasons; he deposes kings and raises up others. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with him. 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.”*

If you want to know what a person believes, listen to what they pray. Daniel’s prayer has been recorded because it reveals something about God that we need to understand and embrace:

- **First**, God is the Source of all Wisdom—vs. 22—nothing is hidden from Him; He knows the future and can reveal it.
- **Second**, God is the Source of all Power—vs. 21—He is sovereign over “times,” “seasons,” and even “kings”. God can

raise up. God can cast down. Everyone and everything exists under His authority.

- **Third**, God is the Source of all Provision—vs. 23—He gave Daniel what He needed, and He can do the same for us.

Perhaps you feel overwhelmed by your circumstances and unable to cope this morning. Perhaps you cannot see through the fog of confusion that surrounds you. Perhaps you feel trapped in a situation that you cannot navigate through. We need to take our cues from Daniel. God is not overwhelmed; He is not limited in wisdom or power. God is close to us—closer than our heartbeat—and He is for us, not against us.

Act 3: The Dream and its interpretation (2:24-45).

After Daniel gave thanks to God, he came before the king—let's pick up the story in verse 26. *“The king asked Daniel... ‘Are you able to tell me what I saw in my dream and interpret it?’ Daniel replied, ‘No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about, **but** there is a **God** in heaven who reveals mysteries.’”*

Note Daniel's response to Nebuchadnezzar. He agrees with the Babylonian advisors—no human could tell the king what he wanted to know, **but God** can do all things, and He had divinely empowered Daniel to do what the king had asked.

I want you to look at verse 28 and take note of two words—**but God**—these two words are good news to us! We were dead in our

sin, **but God**, made us alive through Jesus Christ; once we were not a people, **but** now, because of **Jesus**, we are the people of God.

I am weak **but God** is my strength.

I am broken **but God** is my wholeness.

I am confused **but God** is my wisdom.

I am afraid **but God** is my peace.

I am surrounded **but God** is my Defender.

With God all things are possible. Because Daniel knows this, he can stand before the king. When we know this, we can stand, no matter our circumstances. God's presence, His love, His power are game changers.

Let's get back to Nebuchadnezzar's dream—vs. 29. *“He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come.”* The king's dream had to do with the future.

In his dream, Nebuchadnezzar saw a large statue with a head made of gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, and its legs made of iron. Then he saw a rock cut out from a mountain—though not from human hands—this rock struck the statue and smashed it to pieces. A wind swept the pieces away *“without leaving a trace. But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth. (vs. 35)”*

The interpretation? This was a dream about unfolding world history—the composite statue represented the succession of empires. It's important to note that only the first empire kingdom is named—the head of gold represented Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian Empire (vs. 37-38). The most common interpretation lists the

succession of empires as Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. But we miss the point when we focus on who the empires were—God offers no specifics about the who, or, the when. God is making a more important point about history.

illus: When Naomi and I lived in Calgary, there was a family that treated us like we were family. This family had two pairs of seasons tickets to the Calgary Flames and I ended up seeing my fair share of games. What I loved about these two pairs of tickets was the unique perspective that came with each set.

The first set were nine rows up from the ice. You could hear the blades cutting the ice and the players calling to one another. You could see the sweat dripping down their faces. You could feel the vibrations of a good body check against the boards. At that level, you almost felt like you were a part of the action.

The second set of tickets was on the second level, parallel with the blue line. Gone was the sound of the blades, the sight of sweat, and the feel of the vibrations, but those seats offered something priceless—perspective—we had a bird's eye view of the game. You could watch a play develop and a strategy unfold—you could see a player sneaking along the board into the perfect game-changing position.

This is what we receive in Daniel 2—a God's Eye View of history. God doesn't offer specific details, but He tells us something very important. Invincible empires will crumble. Invincible leaders will

fall. Gone is the power of Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. It was once said that the sun never sets on the British Empire, so vast was its holdings—these words can no longer be said. Capitalism is one of the new global empires, but it is rotting from the inside out—when will it fall? *Which Empire will be next?*

All throughout the Book of Daniel, exiles are grappling with the question: “*who is really Lord and King? Is it Nebuchadnezzar, or, God who is running things?*” Daniel 2 reminds us that nations will rise and fall, powers will come and go, but God's purposes will last forever.

Let me read vs. 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. 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.*”

In Nebuchadnezzar's dream, the four empires were succeeded by a fifth, and while God's kingdom will be located on the earth, it will have a heavenly origin.⁴ Jesus began His public ministry preaching, “*The time has come...the Kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the Good News!*”⁵ Wake up! About-face! God's rule has come near!

⁴ John Goldingay, *Word Biblical Commentary: Daniel*, 59.

⁵ Mark 1:15.

It can be dizzying watching the news and scanning the paper, trying to predict from the micro what will happen at the macro. What will happen between Russia and Ukraine? What is the fate of ISIS? What will happen to the global economy, or interest rates in Canada? Closer to home, what does the future hold when it comes to your marriage, your family, your health, or your job? Much of the anxiety we experience today stems from our inability to know and control the future.

In Daniel 2 we are given a God's Eye View of history—*God knows the future, God holds the future, and He is leading all of history to its ultimate fulfilment.* All kingdoms will fall but one. One day God's Kingdom will rule without rival. In this we must find our rest, or, we will find no rest at all.

Let's turn our attention to the final Act of Daniel 2.

Act 4: The King's response (2:46-48). After Daniel revealed the king's dream and offered an interpretation, "*King Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and paid him honour and ordered that an offering and incense be presented to him. The king said to Daniel, 'Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery.'*"

Truer words were never spoken—Nebuchadnezzar might be the "King of kings," but Daniel's God is the "*God of gods and the Lord of kings*". It sounds like worship, doesn't it? Well, Nebuchadnezzar hasn't quite converted, but his understanding of God is growing.

The greater the power, influence, and wealth that one has, the harder it is to learn humility and embrace the gift of limits. Nebuchadnezzar

appears to be learning, but in chapters 3 and 4, he will relearn these lessons with greater pain and at a much higher cost.

This chapter concludes with the king placing Daniel and his friends in positions of power and influence. What looked like a death sentence turned out to be an opportunity to showcase God's glory in a foreign land.

Now that you've heard about Nebuchadnezzar's response, I want to invite you to consider your own—*how will you respond to God today?* As I said earlier, "The most important question we can ask of this text is not 'What does this mean?' but 'What can I obey?,'" or, how now shall I live? *What difference will it make that God knows the future, that God holds your future in His hands?*

Do you need to stop grasping for control? Do you need to let go of fear? If God is on His throne, and the future is in His hands, the wisest thing we can do is to bow before Him, to surrender our relationships, our circumstances, our fears, hopes, and desires to Him. *Is there anything more counter-cultural than choosing to surrender our lives to God?*

Jeremiah's word to those living in exile still stands today: get on with your life, seek the peace and prosperity of the city you find yourself in. And Jeremiah goes on to offer a promise that many of you know by heart, but perhaps you've never heard his words in context. Jeremiah 29:11-13, "*For I know the plans I have for you,*" declares the Lord, "*plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.*" **Pray**