

Armagh Baptist Church: Sunday 14th October 2018

Daniel 2:25-49

“Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream (part 2)”

Introduction

When we looked at chapter 1 in September, we did so in two parts:

In Daniel 1:1-8, we noticed how Daniel refused to eat the king’s food, or drink the king’s wine, for conscience sake. And I asked ‘*Where are you going to draw your line?*’ in the world in which we live today...because sooner or later we all have to.

Then in Daniel 1:9-21 we saw that great truth: ‘*They that honour me; I will honour.*’ God looked after Daniel and his 3 friends, and even when they insisted on eating vegetables only, and drinking water only, they ended up looking far healthier than their colleagues. And after 3 years they ended up passing their finals with glowing colours! In fact, they were 10 times better than all the rest!

‘They that honour me; I will honour!’

And isn’t that what we have seen this week with Asher’s, Daniel & Amy McArthur? After 4 long years, and all the pressure that their wee family has been under, they finally were vindicated in the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom and were told they had not discriminated in any way against the LGBT activist who tried to place an order for a cake with a ‘*Support Gay Marriage*’ slogan on it.

That was a victory for all of us in this society; not just Christians. The right to free speech and freedom of expression has been upheld. We cannot be forced to say something, or endorse a cause, that we don’t believe in. We praise God for that!

Asher’s Bakery drew their line clearly in the sand. They said ‘*This far and no further!*’ And after 4 years God has said: ‘*They that honour me; I will honour.*’

Then last week we looked at the first half of chapter 2. There we saw...

1. The King’s Problem... (2:1-11) – He’d had a dream. He couldn’t understand it. He was troubled by it and couldn’t sleep. But the king’s problem quickly became...

2. Daniel’s Problem (2:12-16) – He and his friends were going to be killed along with all the other wise men of Babylon, if someone couldn’t be found to tell the king his dream and interpret it.

Now, even though God had given Daniel great wisdom in chapter 1:17 including the ability to understand dreams and interpret visions, yet still he got down to prayer before wading in, and so we saw...

3. Daniel’s Prayer... (2:17-19a) – which then turned into...

4. Daniel’s Praise! (2:19b-24) – as God revealed the dream and its interpretation to him during the night.

Then he goes to speak to the executioner. And that was our *cliff-hanger* last week:

- Will Daniel now be able to go into see the king?
- Will he be able to tell him his dream?
- Will he be able to tell him accurately what his dream means?

So let’s come to today’s passage and find out...

Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream (Part 2) (Daniel 2:25-49)

The first thing I want you to notice in our passage this morning is:

1. The Demeanour of Daniel (vs.25-30)

(v.25) ‘*Then Arioch 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.”’

Do you see straight away how Arioch, the executioner, was trying to take all the credit for finding Daniel – someone who was able to interpret the king’s dream?

Everybody looks out for No.1 – and that’s exactly what Arioch is doing here. Look at me! Look how great I am! He’s looking for all he can get from the king.

Now contrast that with Daniel’s demeanour when the king asks him “*Are you able to make known to me the dream that I have seen and its interpretation?*” (v.26).

You want Daniel to just say ‘*Yes!*’ – ‘*Yes, I can.*’

But instead the first word that comes out of Daniel’s mouth is ‘*No!*’ (v.27)

And in that split second you expect to hear from the King: ‘*Off with his head!*’

You’d think if your life was in danger from the king, the first word you would have said was ‘*Yes!*’ – but instead Daniel pauses, takes a deep breath, and launches into a statement that seeks no credit for himself - but gives all the glory to God!

‘No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked.’ (v.27)

...And you just want Daniel to get to the point and tell the king he can do it. And then comes the ‘*But*’ we’ve been waiting for...

‘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.’

And if you jump down to v.30 Daniel continues to be very self-effacing as he says:

'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.'

Daniel is the only wise man in all of Babylon who is going to be able to do this; he hasn't even graduated from the University of Babylon yet; he's about to become their star pupil; and yet still he has the humility to say, *'It's nothing to do with me; it's all of God!'* - I wonder how many of us would have behaved like Daniel? I'd say there would have been more of the spirit of Arioch in us, wouldn't you?

We all like to take a bit of personal credit for the things that we do. We don't like it when we're over-looked, or no-one notices what we have done. But all Daniel was concerned about was the glory of God! Not his own glory.

But before we move on, don't miss what Daniel says in vs.28-29.

*'There is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar **what will be in the latter days.** Your dream and the visions of your head as you lay in 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 know to you **what is to be.**'*

So before we actually get to the content of this dream, I want you to notice when these things applied to. What period of history did they apply to?

Daniel uses 3 phrases: *'What is to be'* (end of v.29), *'What would be after this'* (v.29) and *'What will be in the latter days.'* (v.28). (ESV more accurate than NIV).

I want you to notice he doesn't say what will be in the **last** days, but what will be in the **latter** days. So this dream is not going to apply to the very end of time *'the last days'* but *'to the latter days'* – a period before *'the last days'* at the end of the O.T.

You see *'The Last Days'* started on the Day of Pentecost, and we are still living in the last days, that will continue right up until Jesus comes again. **We** are living in the last days.

But *'the latter days'* is a period in history before that – *'the latter days'* of the O.T. Nebuchadnezzar was concerned about what would be, of what would be *'after this'* – i.e. after his reign. Of what would be *'in the latter days'* after he was gone.

You see, he was only in the early days of his reign. He had just overthrown the Assyrian Empire, based in Nineveh, and their alliance with a former super-power Egypt. They had been defeated at the Battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C. and now

Nebuchnezzar was the most powerful man in the world. That's a very powerful place to be, but it's also a very insecure place to be. Because no sooner do you get to the top, than you realise you can't sing *'The only way is up'* anymore, but you have to realise: *'It's all downhill from here!'* - There's nowhere else to go! So he was concerned about what would happen after he was gone. 'What is to be?' 'What will be after this?' 'What will be in the latter days?'

So what we're going to be thinking about this morning is the sweep of history from the exile of God's people in Babylon under King Nebuchadnezzar around 600 BC up until the time of Christ. So we're covering a period of 600 – 700 years.

So that brings us secondly to...

2. The Description of the Dream (vs.31-36a)

Daniel is able to tell King Nebuchadnezzar that in his dream he had seen a great image. It was a mighty image. And it gleamed very brightly in the sun's rays. There it was standing before him in his dream and it was very frightening!

But as he looked closer he realised that the image was made out of different materials that would all have shone with different degrees of brightness in the sun:

- The **HEAD** of the image was made out of fine **gold**.
- It's **CHEST & ARMS** were made out of **silver**.
- It's **MIDDLE & THIGHS** were made of **bronze**.
- It's **LEGS** were made of **iron**. And it's **FEET** were partly made of **iron** and partly made of **clay**.

But then came a **STONE (ESV) or a ROCK (NIV)** that had been hewn out from somewhere (we don't know where) – *'but not by human hands'* (v.34). (Divine?)

And this **ROCK or STONE** strikes the image on its feet of **iron & clay** and breaks them in pieces.

Of course then the whole image comes crashing to the ground – the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold all together are broken in pieces, and they become like the chaff of the summer threshing floors and the wind blows them away, so that not a trace of them can be found (v.35).

But the **ROCK or the STONE** that struck the image grows to become a **GREAT MOUNTAIN** that fills the whole earth!

- *'This was the dream'* (v.36a).

So Daniel has been able to do the first part of the job. He has been able to describe the king's dream to him, even though the king wasn't able to tell him what he had dreamt. God had revealed it to Daniel in a night vision after he'd prayed.

But what are we to make of it?

Well, we come now to The Interpretation of the Dream, and especially to...

3. The Identification of the Kingdoms (vs.36-45)

Because that's what it's all about – each section of the image in the king's dream, represents the main kingdoms of the world from Babylon to the time of Christ.

(i) It starts off with Nebuchadnezzar – The King of Babylonia (vs.37-38)

Daniel speaks in very glowing terms about King Nebuchadnezzar in these verses:

*'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...'*

It's so important to remember here that any power a king, or a world leader has, has been given to them by the God of heaven. God has allowed them to reign, or to be in power. *'He has given them the kingdom'* - the power, the might and the glory. At this particular time, it was to Nebuchadnezzar that God had given all that.

'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.'

Doesn't that language take you back to Genesis 1, to what God said to Adam? Daniel is using terminology about Nebuchadnezzar that we haven't seen since the creation of Adam & Eve in the Garden of Eden. **(Read Genesis 1:26-28).**

You see, that's how Adam was supposed to be, before the Fall. He was supposed to rule over all created things. That was God's intention for us. In a sense Nebuchadnezzar was like Adam, ruling over the known world at that time. But was he ruling it *under God*, recognising his absolute power and authority, or was he ruling it *apart from God*, with no time for God, doing it his own way? Whether he was, or whether he wasn't, God says – ***'You are the head of gold!'***

What a privileged position for Nebuchadnezzar to be in! But what a responsibility! We will see in ch.4 how Nebuchadnezzar became puffed up with pride; how God had to humble him by making him live like a beast in the field, but how he repents and how God restored him to rule in power once again, as a changed man.

The Babylonian Empire, was ruled from 605 BC by Nebuchadnezzar down to one of his successors Belshazzar (ch.5) who was overthrown by Cyrus in 539 BC.

So the head of gold – the Babylonian Kingdom lasted for about 65 years.

(ii) Then came an inferior kingdom (silver) and a kingdom of bronze (v.39)

This inferior, or silver kingdom, most likely refers to the **Medo-Persian Empire** that Cyrus ruled over, which took over from Babylon in 539 B.C.

The kingdom of bronze probably refers to the **Greek Empire** which came after that when Alexander the Great took over in 333BC. It lasted until 146 BC dividing four ways after the death of Alexander the Great, so none of them were too stable!

(iii) The fourth kingdom would be as strong as iron, breaking and shattering all things (v.40)

That would be The Roman Empire (from 146 BC – 476 AD).

Now there are various opinions on these Kingdoms, as to which world empire they were supposed to represent. We have to remember that Nebuchadnezzar from his stand-point, had no idea who they would be, or when they would reign.

He would simply have been relieved that he was OK for his day and generation. All this would take place *'after him'* – after he was gone. So in a sense he could breathe a sigh of relief.

And in fact the way this story is told, we're not supposed to get all taken up with the first 4 kingdoms! The focus or attention of this story is on the fifth kingdom, represented by the rock, or the stone, depending on which version you're reading.

So come with me to vs.44-45 to get the real point of this story:

'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 hands, 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.'

So in the time of the last of the four kingdoms – in the time of the Roman Empire, God was going to set up his own Kingdom – *'The Kingdom of God'* in our N.T.s.

Notice a few things about **the Kingdom of God** from Daniel's interpretation:

- It shall never be destroyed (v.44)
- It shall not be left to another people (v.44)
- It shall break in pieces and bring to an end all the kingdoms of this world.
- It shall stand forever (v.44)

The Kingdom of God is represented by a **stone** in Nebuchadnezzar's dream:

- It was cut from a mountain by no human hands – it's of divine origin (v.45).
- It broke in pieces the iron, bronze, clay, silver & gold of earthly kingdoms.
- It grew to become a great mountain that filled the whole earth (v.35).

The Stone is first mentioned in a prophecy of Jacob on his 12 sons in Gen.49:24. The Messiah would be known as 'The Shepherd' and as **'The Stone of Israel'**.

Psalms 118:22 **'The Stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.'**

Isaiah goes on to say in ch.8:13-15 that *'the LORD of hosts' ... 'will become a ... stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many shall stumble on it. They shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken.'*

Jesus takes these O.T. references on his own lips in the Gospels: He quotes from Psalm 118:22 in Matthew 21:42, Mark 12:10, and in Luke 20:17-18. And then he adds: *'Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.'*

Peter says in Acts 4:11 *'Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no-one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.'*

Paul says in Romans 9:32-33 that the Jewish people *'have stumbled over the stumbling stone, as it is written, 'Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.'*

Peter goes on to deal with it at length in 1 Peter 2:1-8, and finally the stone appears again in the last book of the Bible – Revelation 18:21

'Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, "So will Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence, and will be found no more."

That's in a chapter all about the final overthrow of Babylon the Great!

You can also trace the theme of **The Kingdom of God** through the N.T. –

Jesus came preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom calling men and women to repent of their sins and believe the Gospel, if they want to escape being destroyed by this **stone** that will smash all the kingdoms of the earth one day.

'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel!' (Mark 1:15)

We are called to **'Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness'** (Matt 6:33) because all the kingdoms of *this* world are one day going to pass away.

We're told in John 3:3 that *'Unless you're born again you cannot see the kingdom of God!'*

The Book of Hebrews finishes with these words in ch.12:28-29...

'Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe' – Why? – 'For our God is a consuming fire!'

And finally let me read Rev.12:9-12. 'Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come!' (v.10)

* The **Stone** that crushes all the kingdoms of this world is the Lord Jesus Christ *

* He came to set up his **Kingdom** in the hearts of men and women who repent of their sins and submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in their lives. So we as believers make up the worldwide kingdom of God, if Jesus rules in our hearts.

* But when He comes again, He will destroy all earthly kingdoms with just a breath of his mouth. So either you are trusting in the **stone** who is Christ, or you will one day face the crushing wrath of this **stone**, who is Christ! - Which will it be for you?

Conclusion

I don't know what impact this is having on you this morning, but I want you to see:

4. The Impact it had on the King (vs.46-49)

First of all the most powerful man in all the world fell on his face before Daniel! Then he said this: *"Truly, your God (not mine) is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery."*

His own gods couldn't do it for him! He's beginning to recognise Daniel's God as the Living and True God. Daniel was a witness to him. God was at work. By the end of chapter 4, Nebuchadnezzar will put his trust in God! - Will you trust him?