

Armagh Baptist Church: Sunday 7th October 2018

Daniel 2:1-24

“Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream (part 1)”

Introduction

So far in this series we have looked at chapter 1 in two parts:

Daniel 1:1-8 – ‘Where are you going to draw your line?’

Daniel 1:9-21 – ‘They that honour me; I will honour.’

I said, right at the very beginning, that I’d be taking 2 bites at each chapter, because there is a cliff-hanger in the middle of every story.

In chapter 1, we were left with a cliff-hanger at the end of v.8 – what was going to happen to Daniel when he refused to eat the king’s food or drink the king’s wine? And I left you to mull over where exactly you are going to draw your line in the world in which we live today. When will you say, **‘This far and no further’?**

When we looked at the second half of chapter 1, we discovered that great truth: **‘They that honour me; I will honour.’** Daniel had taken his stand, and the Lord honoured him for it, giving him favour in the eyes of the chief steward, giving him health and strength when he ate only vegetables and water, and giving him special gifts and abilities through the course of his 3 years of study in Babylon.

Well, we see this idea of the cliff-hanger once again in the middle of chapter 2. The lives of Daniel and his 3 friends are in danger for the first time in Babylon.

It was none of their doing. They had done nothing wrong.

They were simply at the whim of a powerful king, who was annoyed that no-one could tell him his dream and interpret it for him. So all the wise men of Babylon were about to lose their lives, and that included those in training like Daniel!

So how would they get out of this one?

Well, let’s get into this story here in ch.2 to find out...

1. The King’s Problem... (2:1-11)

I want you to notice first of all, **when** the events of chapter 2 took place. We sometimes make the mistake of thinking that the chapters of Daniel follow on chronologically after each other. Daniel has just been assessed at the end of his 3 years of study in the University of Babylon, at the end of chapter one, and he has been found to be 10 times better than all the magicians and enchanters and wise men in all the kingdom. So he’s been studying for the past 3 years, and Nebuchadnezzar has been king for the past 3 years, ever since he raided Jerusalem and brought back Daniel and his friends to his land, and the treasures of Yahweh to the temples of his gods.

And yet, look closely at the first verse of chapter 2. When did it happen?

What we’re about to look at this morning happened in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, so that means it happened when Daniel was in second year at the University of Babylon. He’s still a student. He has not yet qualified. He has not yet graduated as a wise man of Babylon, ten times better than all the rest!

He has not yet become ‘a Chaldean’!

That’s a term that appears 5 times in this section. What does it mean?

(NIV translates it ‘astrologer’ – someone who reads the stars – like horoscopes)

If you go back to ch.1:4, you will see that Daniel and his friends, who had been exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon, were brought to the king’s palace and they were to be taught for 3 years, *‘the literature and language of the Chaldeans.’*

Now Ur of the Chaldeans is where Abram was called from, when God called him away back in Genesis ch.12 to leave his home, and his father’s house, and to go to the land that God would show him. So the Chaldeans were a people-group that lived at the end of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers where they fed into the Persian Gulf – it’s actually modern-day Kuwait. That’s where the Chaldeans came from geographically. But who were ‘the Chaldeans’ that are mentioned here in ch.2? Well, this term has become a name for the wise men of Babylon. It has a mystical sense now. Not just that they were wise in terms of education, but they had insight, spiritual insight into dreams and visions, they could interpret dreams, and they could understand visions, and they could foretell the future.

That’s who this group of men, known as the ‘Chaldeans’ were at that time.

And that’s what Daniel and his 3 friends were being trained to be at the end of their 3 years of study. But at this point in the story, they’re only in 2nd year!

They still have a lot to learn! Daniel is nowhere near ready to practice!

He’s still wet behind the ears. So what’s going to happen?

Well, the king has a problem. What was the king’s problem?

Well, for most of us, it would have been no big deal. We would have got up the next morning, had our corn flakes and headed off into our day and we would have forgotten all about it. But not Nebuchadnezzar!

What was his problem? His problem was, that he had a dream. - Big deal!

When did you last have a dream? Can you remember what it was about?

Probably not!

But Nebuchadnezzar had more than one dream – he had ‘dreams’ (v.1).

Probably the same dream over and over again as we’ll see later in ch.2.

But his spirit was troubled (v.1). And then his sleep left him (v.1).

Poor Nebuchadnezzar! The poor king! He’s having a few dreams, he’s a wee bit anxious about them, and he’s not sleeping!

Now, for most of us, we would just have got on with it. But not the most powerful man in the world. No, he has to make a scene about it – a big issue out of it! So everybody is sent for the next morning! (v.2)

'Then the king commanded that the magicians, the enchanters, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans be summoned to tell the king his dreams.'

So they came in and stood before the king. They've been summonsed! And the king said to them (v.3)

'I had a dream, and my spirit is troubled to know the dream.'

50 years ago, when the Civil Rights Movement was at its height around the world, Dr Martin Luther King made a very famous speech in the U.S. – *'I have a dream!'* He was a visionary. He was a leader. He could see a bright future for his people. And he wanted to lead them into 'the promised land' of racial equality, etc, etc.

But this man, the most powerful man in the world, doesn't have a dream to lead him and his people into the future. No he *'had'* a dream that was causing him to stand in fear and trembling, before all the wise men of Babylon the next morning. You can almost see him standing there in his PJs and night-cap! - A sorry figure!

So, 'the Chaldeans' (v.4) - these wise men of Babylon, speak to the king in Aramaic. (By the way, from v.4 of Daniel ch.2 right through to the end of ch.7, God's Word is written in Aramaic. The rest of the O.T. is written in Hebrew, but these chapters are written in Aramaic – the local language of Babylon). So what did the Chaldeans say in Aramaic?

"O king, live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation." (v.4)

And that would have been normal practice. You tell them your dream; and they'll tell you what it means. That's how this divination worked in those days. But (v.5)...

'The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, "The word from me is firm: If you do not make known to me the dream and its interpretation, you shall be torn limb from limb, and your houses shall be laid in ruins. But if you show the dream and its interpretation, you shall receive from me gifts and rewards and great honour. Therefore show me the dream and its interpretation."

He's having a bit of a hissy fit, isn't he? What are you like the morning after the night before, when you've had something on your mind, and you haven't slept much, and you've been dreaming, or having nightmares? You're not too nice the next morning, are you? Well, I think Nebuchadnezzar was a bit like that in the

morning. He's being totally unreasonable! Come on, it's only a dream! But he's making it difficult for them. If they can't tell him his dream and tell him what it means, then it will be 'off with their heads' - they'll be torn limb from limb, and their houses will be knocked down with their families still inside! That's what he meant!

He's not a very nice man, is he? He might be the most powerful man in the world, but there's no need to take a bad night's sleep out on his people like that, is there?

You see, sometimes, even the most powerful men in the world, behave like kids! Did you see President Trump this week at a campaign rally, mocking that woman who bared her heart on screen and in public before the Supreme Court about something she says happened to her when she was at High School, at the hands of a man, who Trump wants to appoint as a Judge to the Supreme Court panel?

Now, I've no idea who's telling the truth – the woman, or the man – and you'd probably need the wisdom of Solomon to work that one out – but is that any way for the most powerful man in the world to treat a woman who told what was obviously a very painful story, that has affected her life and her family so deeply?

Or think back a few weeks ago to President Putin, making fun of the two suspects who were being investigated for the novichoc poisoning of the Scripals in Salisbury in England. He was sniggering as he said they were only tourists who had come to see Salisbury Cathedral! And yet within weeks they were both found to be top-ranking, decorated generals in the Russian army! Is that any way for the two most powerful men in our world to behave in their positions?

They might be powerful, but they don't have a lot of wisdom!

And that's the whole point of this passage of Scripture – Who has the wisdom?

Is it Nebuchadnezzar – who's named after the Babylonian god of wisdom, Nebu? Or is it his wise men – who look to the stars and divination to foretell the future? Or is it Daniel – a young exiled student from Jerusalem who worships Yahweh? Or is it Daniel's God – is He the source of Wisdom? Where can we get wisdom?

The wise men of Babylon try a second time in vs.7-11 to get the king to see sense, but to no avail. He accuses them of trying to buy time (v.8), and of trying to spin things out until the times change (v.9) ...when they'd be let off the hook.

They accuse him of being unreasonable (vs.10-11): *'There is not a man on earth who can meet the king's demands, for no great and powerful king has asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or Chaldean. The thing that the king asks is difficult, and no one can show it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh.'* (ESV) – *'...Or the gods, and they do not live among men'* (NIV).

So at least these so-called 'wise men' of Babylon have got one thing right. The only way that Nebuchadnezzar is going to understand his dream, without telling them what the dream was, is if someone gets a divine revelation - If God steps in!

And that's how the **King's problem** becomes **Daniel's problem** in vs.12-16.

2. ...Daniel's Problem (2:12-16)

...Because the king is hopping mad at this point (v.12).

'Because of this the king was angry and very furious, and commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be destroyed. So the decree went out, and the wise men were about to be killed; and they sought Daniel and his companions, to kill them.'

So there was Daniel and his 3 friends in their student flat in Babylon, minding their own business, getting on with their studies, aiming to be better than all the other students in their finals, and what do you know, there's a death sentence hanging over their heads – and they've done absolutely nothing wrong!

That's what it's like to live under a totalitarian regime - under the rule of a dictator. You can be getting on with life, doing everything right, trying your best to make ends meet, when suddenly something you've always believed and practised, and something you believe in with all your heart, gets turned on its head, and you find yourself on the wrong side of the law – through no fault of your own!

Once again Daniel McArthur's family are on tender-hooks this weekend. The UK Supreme Court announced last Thursday as I was preparing this message, that they would give their decision on the Asher's case next Wednesday 10th October.

There's an example of a Christian family getting on with their business life, just like they always had done. Baking cakes and icing them. Living life as a family just like they'd always done. A young married couple with a couple of children, believing in the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour, going along to church, trying to raise their children, seeking to live out their Christian principles in their everyday lives, when suddenly someone walks into their shop, asks for a cake to be made and iced with the words *'Support Gay Marriage'* and in that moment, they find themselves hauled over the coals for something that all of us always believed to be true – that marriage is between one man and one woman and that it should be for life. And the last few years have put them and their business in the spotlight!

That's exactly what happened to Daniel. He hadn't done anything wrong, and yet because the king had a dream, and nobody could interpret it, all the wise men of Babylon were in the firing line, and that included Daniel & his 3 friends from Judah. That's how the **King's problem** suddenly became **Daniel's problem**.

What would you have done?

What did Daniel do?

Well, Daniel tapped into something that God had given him at the end of ch.1. Look at v.17. *'As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom...'*

And now in ch.2 in v.14 that wisdom had to come into play.

'So Daniel replied with prudence and discretion (ESV)
*(**'with wisdom and tact'** - NIV) to Arioch, the captain of the king's guard,*
who had gone out to kill the wise men of Babylon.'

Daniel had been given wisdom for such a time as this. His head was screwed on. So he spoke to this army commander *'with wisdom and tact'* and he asked him:

'Why is the decree of the king so urgent?'
Then Arioch made the matter known to Daniel.
And Daniel went in and requested the king to appoint him a time,
That he might show the interpretation to the king.'

Here Daniel was acting on something else God had given him back in ch.1:17. As well as wisdom, God gave Daniel ***'understanding in all visions & dreams.'***

Daniel still had no idea what the king's dream was, or what it meant, and yet because he had been given understanding in all visions and dreams by God, he could go in confidently and arrange an appointment, a time, when he would come back to the king with what he wanted to know. All he was asking for at the minute was for a stay of execution on himself and his 3 friends, as well as all the other wise men of Babylon. A lot of lives were spared that day by Daniel acting wisely!

And that brings us thirdly to...

3. Daniel's Prayer... (2:17-19a)

We've seen how the King's problem (vs.1-11) became Daniel's problem (v.12-16). We've seen Daniel acting on his God-given wisdom and his God-given ability to understand visions and dreams, but before he does anything he gets to prayer.

(v.17) 'Then Daniel went to his house and made the matter known
to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions,
and told them to seek mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery..!'

That was the only way the four of them were going to escape being destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon (v.18).

- Isn't that a lovely picture in v.17? - Of 4 friends praying together.

Daniel has the **wisdom**, and he has the **ability** to interpret dreams, but instead of launching straight in, to try and sort out matters on his own, on the spur of the moment, he takes time out, he goes back to his student flat – he gets together with his mates – and they get down to prayer together! Surely there's a lesson for us?

Maybe like me, you're an activist, you want to get things done! You like solving problems. You need to be in control. You want to get everything sorted out. So you just breeze in and get on with it, in your own strength. And we leave God out!

That attitude doesn't make us men and women of prayer, does it?

If we do happen to sort things out, all the glory goes to us, not to God, doesn't it?

Daniel was wise, Daniel was gifted, but Daniel took time to pray. Why don't we?

And if you find praying on your own is hard, get a few friends together, form a prayer group, or a prayer triplet, and start to pray regularly with each other for growth and accountability. - Or just come to a home group, or prayer meeting!

It looks like Daniel and his friends then went on to bed, after they had prayed, because later on *'in a vision of the night'* God revealed the mystery of the king's dream to Daniel. And then *'Daniel blessed the God of heaven!'* (v.19).

In the first part of this chapter **the King's Problem** became **Daniel's Problem**. But now **Daniel's prayer becomes...**

4. Daniel's Praise! (2:19b-24)

He doesn't just get up and throw his clothes on and rush on over to see the king. No, he stops, to praise and worship the King of kings and Lord of lords. And that's what this chapter is all about! Just look at the themes of his praise:

He will bless the name of His God forever and ever, not the Babylonian gods. They didn't give their wisdom or revelation to their wise men, even though their lives were at risk. No, wisdom and might belong to our God, because He is the only living and true God. All other gods don't even exist, at all, they're useless!

He acknowledges the fact that our God changes times and seasons; He removes kings and sets up kings – including the great Nebuchadnezzar! Our times are in His hands! *'The times they are a-changing'* – but God knows all about that. None of it takes him by surprise. He's the God of the ages, not the God of yesterday. He's able to cope with all the changes, when we struggle with them!

Our God is in control of Mr Trump, Mr Putin & Mrs May. Our God is in control whatever happens with Brexit. He already knows what the deal is going to be!

Do you know that verse in James 1:5?

*'If any of you lacks **wisdom**, let him ask God who gives generously to all, without reproach, and it will be given him.'*

Well, Daniel could say 'Amen' to that. Because he had to ask God for wisdom in the circumstances in which he found himself, and God didn't let him down. So he praises him for it (vs.21b-22)

*'**He** gives **wisdom** to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding. He **reveals** deep and hidden things; He knows what is in the darkness, And the light dwells with **Him**.'*

So Daniel has been able to prove the Living and True God far away from home in Babylon. He wasn't confined to Jerusalem. He can be reached in prayer at a moment's notice, wherever we happen to find ourselves in the world:

*'To you, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, for you have given me **wisdom** and might, and have now made known to me what we asked of you, for you have made known to us the king's matter!'*

Daniel was worshipping God as *'The Revealer of Mysteries!'* The God who knows the end from the beginning. The God who knows the future before it even happens. That's the God who can be trusted. That's the God we need for today!

Conclusion

So, next morning, Daniel heads out into his day with confidence, to face the executioner who had been sent to take his life, with a message for the king.

The **King's Problem** became **Daniel's Problem**.
But when he took it to the Lord,
Daniel's Prayer became the cause of **Daniel's Praise**.

We have a God who can be trusted to not let us down - home or away! Amen.