



DANIEL

faith in adversity

BEYOND THE SERMON
Weekly Study

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DANIEL

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Table of Contents

September 2, 2018

Week 1: Stranded in Babylon

September 9, 2018

Week 2: Faith Under Pressure, And the God of the Impossible

Week 2 Cont'd: A Vision of Things to Come

September 16, 2018

Week 3: When Things Get Hot!

September 23, 2018

Week 4: Nebuchadnezzar and the Tree of Doom

Week 4 Cont'd: Lessons from A Loon

September 30, 2018

Week 5: Ichabod – and the Writing on the Wall

Week 5 Cont'd: The Precarious Position of an Unbeliever

STRANDED IN BABYLON

By I Gordon

Background

The book of Daniel was written by, well, Daniel, around 537 B.C. Daniel identifies himself as the author of the book in Daniel 12:4 and Jesus also identified him in Matt 24:15. That's good enough for me! Daniel was led into exile as a youth in 605 B.C.¹ and most estimates place him at around 16-18 years old at the time. We know from Daniel 10:1 that he was still alive in third year of Cyrus in 536 B.C so he was around 85 at that time. So how did Daniel, a Jewish boy, find himself exiled in Babylon you ask? Well, that is a good question and for those interested in a little bit of history, please check out the second footnote. Daniel's life is one of complete abandonment and devotion to the God of Israel. The book itself is well known for its extraordinary prophecies that outline the future gentile world powers, the coming Messiah and the end of this age but it also holds many lessons for living in an age and society that is hostile to belief in the God of Israel.

Introduction to the Siege and Exile – Then and Now!

Dan 1:1-2 In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god.

The book starts with Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Judah and Jerusalem. Why did the Lord allow Judah to be besieged? It can be traced back to the actions of Hezekiah in 2 Kings 20:12-19 and Isaiah's prophecy². In short, pride and worldliness! It is important also that you read Jeremiah 25:4-12 if you are truly interested in the

¹ David Guzik lists a few other world events taking place at this approximate time:

- Construction on the Acropolis in Athens began
- Mayan civilization flourished in Mexico
- Aesop wrote his fables
- Confucius and Buddha lived
- Greek art began to truly excel
- The Phoenicians made the first known sea journey around Africa
- The Greeks introduced the olive tree to Italy

² Ok, a bit of background to the background. After the reign of Solomon, the Israelite nation split into two different kingdoms. The northern kingdom was called 'Israel' and consisted of 10 of the twelve tribes. The southern kingdom was called 'Judah' and consisted of the two remaining tribes. Both of these kingdoms would eventually be ruled by 20 different kings. Out of the 20 kings who ruled in the southern kingdom, the Bible says that 7 were generally considered godly kings. Could the northern kingdom top that? Um, nope. Not likely! Out of their 20 kings they had precisely 0 godly kings. Couldn't even find one! It is not surprising then that they were the first to fall. You can read about in 2 Kings 18:9-11. While you are there, you will see that one of Judah's godly kings, Hezekiah, is coming under siege by the same Assyrian army that defeated the northern kingdom of Israel. Have a look 2 Kings 18:17-19:37. It is a fantastic story and highlights the trust and godliness of Hezekiah and the faithfulness of the God of Israel in looking after His people! But then read 2 Kings 20 - Especially vs 12-19. It seems that in his older age, even Hezekiah began to allow 'things' to take the place that the Lord should have. And in a moment of pride and worldliness he shows the Babylonians all his gold, silver, armory and treasures. Fatal mistake as Isaiah tells Hezekiah *'Hear the word of the LORD: The time will surely come when everything in your palace, and all that your fathers have stored up until this day, will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left, says the LORD.'*

So what can we learn from this? A few things come to mind -

:: Hezekiah's courting and flirting with Babylon (the world) would ultimately lead to Israel's downfall even though he would not have known his decision would have led to such consequences. It can have the same affect in our lives and that of the church (which does seem to be pretty smitten by the world!)

:: If even a godly man such as Hezekiah can lose his focus and start taking pride in worldly things then so can you. And so can I.

:: Always remember that in any long distance race anyone can take off sprinting at the start... that's not that impressive. I used to do it at school races and then drop out! But going the distance and finishing well is impressive. Be mindful to endure and finish your Christian life well. Gal 5:7 "You were running well – who hindered you from obeying the truth?"

background to how many Israelites, like Daniel, found themselves exiled in Babylon. Now Babylon means 'confusion' and traces its roots back to Genesis 11:9 where God confused the people's language at the tower of Babel. As a type, Babylon stands for this present world with its false religion and systems. The future fall of Babylon is prophesied in Revelation chapter 17 and 18 where these two systems are shown. Revelation chapter 17 speaks of the destruction of the world's false religious system and chapter 18 speaks of the fall of the world's financial system. So like Daniel, in many ways the Christian's life is one of exile, in a world that is by and large set against the ways of God. We too are under siege and are to consider ourselves as exiles and strangers on this earth because it is not our real home! See Heb 11:8-16.

The Goal of the Babylonians - Let the Brain Washing Begin

Dan 1:3-7 Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring in some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility— young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service. Among these were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego.

Now it is very interesting to see the method used to make good little "Babylonians" of the exiled Israelites. So what was Babylon's method? Well, first they were taught to speak the lingo... then they had to read all the Babylonian literature, and finally they even had their names changed. Everything is done to separate these guys from their Jewish roots. In short, brain washing and indoctrination! Babylon doesn't want them remembering or thinking of their real home. The idea was to make the Jews so taken up by the things of Babylon that no time is taken to think of their own home and their own God.³ Now, I am sure you see a familiar pattern here... You should because the enemies plan is no different for Christians today! The world would rather that we are just like them. But we're not.

Now in this passage we are introduced to four important Jewish youths – Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah - although you might know Daniel's friends by their Babylonian names – Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. It is interesting to look at the meaning of their names before and after the change. According to the Ryrie Study Bible:

Daniel ("God is judge") become Belteshazzar ("May Bel protect his life")
Hananiah ("Yahweh is gracious") becomes Shadrach ("command of Aku")
Mishael ("Who is what God is") becomes Meshach ("Who is what Aku is")
Azariah ("Whom Yahweh helps") becomes Abed-nego ("Servant of Nebo")

In each case, their Hebrew name spoke of the true God and their names were changed to speak of the Babylonian gods. The bottom line for our lives is clear: Don't let the world change your name or your character!⁴ So nearly all of Daniel's outward life was changed... But could they change his heart?

The Inner Resolve From God...

Dan 1:8-14 But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way. Now God had caused the official to show favor and sympathy to Daniel, but the official told Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has

³ Although this is easier said than done with the Jewish nation for the importance of their roots, background, beliefs and God are repeatedly taught to their young (in accordance with God's commands) from an early age. And it seems from Psalm 137 that the Jews in Babylon were in no mood to forget Jerusalem despite any attempts of the Babylonians to 'encourage' them to do so. It was by the rivers of Babylon, as Boney M used to sing about, that the Jews sat down and wept as they remembered Zion!

⁴ It is interesting that the first trial in the book of Daniel is towards worldliness. Later in the life of Daniel will come direct persecution. It's a side note really but currently, in the Western world at least, the main trial or temptation is towards worldliness. But there is a sense that things are changing and persecution of Christians even amongst so called 'Christian' nations is beginning. First comes worldly compromise and then comes persecution. That is the order in Daniel and will probably be the case in the western world.

assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you.” Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, “Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see.” So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days.

Verse 8 is obviously a key verse for anyone facing pressure from the ways of Babylon. Daniel resolved, or as the KJV says ‘Daniel purposed in his heart’, not to defile himself. They could change his name but they couldn’t change his heart! He was not swayed by the lure of Babylon even though he lived right in it’s midst. So think about the affect that the world has on your life? Is there a difference between the desires of your life and of those who don’t know the Lord? Because it is fair to say that non-Christians watch you a lot more than you think. And they watch and are interested in your actions more than your words. So watch what you’re doing!

Prov 25:26 states: "Like a muddied spring or a polluted well is a righteous man who gives way to the wicked."

If Daniel had given up his convictions and just become like the other Babylonians (as they wanted) then the Bible says he would have become like a muddied spring or a polluted well. That is, he would have become someone that once had the ability to give life and sustain the thirsty... but now was useless for that which it had been created! But thankfully, Daniel had a greater resolve than that! And strengthen by his faith, he wasn’t someone who was going to buckle... and nor should we.

A Small Note About Friends and Fellowship

Having spoken about Daniel’s resolve to stay true to God’s word in these trying conditions, it is also useful to note that he didn’t do this totally alone. God allowed his three friends to be there with him in this test. What do we take from this? It is important to have godly friends around you that can support you. It is important to maintain fellowship with likeminded believers. God helps us in our trials but one of the methods He uses is support from fellow believers. Don’t be an island all unto yourself. We are bombarded in this world with ‘Babylonian’ systems and beliefs. Fellowship with God is crucial but fellowship with godly friends comes next. A key element in the Christian life is the community of believers.

So we read above that Daniel and his friends decided to only eat vegetables instead of defiling himself with the King’s food and wine.⁵ But notice that they still acted wisely in this graciously asking permission of the chief official. They didn’t demand anything, get snarky or go on a hunger strike. We need to remember that the chief official was putting his life on the line here as well as he states. King Nebuchadnezzar could be highly unpredictable and wouldn’t want sickly looking servants coming into his presence! But Daniel, in his wisdom⁶, proposes a 10 day test. So would God honor such commitment or would Daniel and his friends be headed for the chop?

⁵ Just a useful comment on this from the Bible Knowledge Commentary concerning ‘defilement’:

“Nebuchadnezzar had made abundant provision for the captives. Theirs was a life of luxury, not deprivation, for they were given a portion of food and wine daily from the king’s own table. However, this food did not conform to the requirements of the Mosaic Law. The fact that it was prepared by Gentiles rendered it unclean. Also no doubt many things forbidden by the Law were served on the king’s table, so to partake of such food would defile the Jewish youths. Further, without doubt this royal food had been sacrificed and offered to pagan gods before it was offered to the king. To partake of such food would be contrary to Exodus 34:15, where the Jews were forbidden to eat flesh sacrificed to pagan gods. Similar problems would arise in drinking the wine... Daniel’s desire was to please God in all he did. So he resolved that even though he was not in his own land but in a culture that did not follow God’s laws, he would consider himself under the Law. He therefore asked the chief court official to be excused from eating and drinking the food and wine generously supplied by the king. Daniel was courageous, determined, and obedient to God.”

⁶ Proverbs tells us that wisdom builds her house on 7 pillars (Proverbs 9:1) James possibly picks up on this and lists 7 attributes of wisdom saying ‘The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. (James 3:17)’ In Daniel’s wise, gentle, reasonable, gracious response to this situation we see these characteristics in play.

The God Who Watches...

Daniel 1:15-16 At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.

Does God watch and act for those who fear Him and put Him first? We know from scripture that he does watch and He certainly does act when it is required⁷. Psalm 33:13-19 for it is very clear on this point.

Psalms 33:13-19 The LORD looks from heaven; He sees all the sons of men; (14) From His dwelling place He looks out On all the inhabitants of the earth, (15) He who fashions the hearts of them all, He who understands all their works. (16) The king is not saved by a mighty army; A warrior is not delivered by great strength. (17) A horse is a false hope for victory; Nor does it deliver anyone by its great strength. (18) Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him, On those who hope for His lovingkindness, (19) To deliver their soul from death And to keep them alive in famine.

So Daniel lives on only vegetables and water... Rather him than me! But that aside, God looks after Him, just as He promised in Psalm 33 above, because Daniel fears the Lord and puts God first. And after the 10 days he even ends up fatter on veges than those eating the King's choice food. Now that is a miracle! We need a simple, uncomplicated faith. A faith that says God watches and God cares, and God acts. The Christians that really know God seem to be blessed by what I would call a 'divine simplicity'. They know the character of God and this makes all the difference. It is also worth pointing out the spiritual lesson provided here with this food. The choice 'food' of Babylonian may seem attractive and nice but it won't sustain you like that which God gives. All too many feed exclusively on what the world offers and ultimately find it to be 'junk food'. It tastes good initially but only leads to further problems, emptiness and discontentment. Stick with what the Lord offers!

Every Good And Perfect Gift...

Dan 1:17-21 To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds. At the end of the time set by the king to bring them in, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's service. In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom. And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus.

Finally, we see that the abilities and giftings of these four teenagers were God given. Their knowledge, their understanding and their wisdom was all from God. I love it when simple folk with God first in their lives can confound the wise! But always remember what the Bible says is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge?⁸

Proverbs 1:7 'The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.'

So these young Jewish boys were 10 times better than any in the whole Babylonian kingdom. That's God! Is He in the right place in your life? Are you being conformed to the world's image or being transformed into the Lord's image? Do you have that divine simplicity of faith that trusts the Lord in trying times? I hope we all do. Daniel and his friends may be 'Stranded in Babylon', but though in the world, they are not of the world. May we be the same.

⁷ God watches, He notes and He acts. God is well able to look after His own. Whether it is Daniel in Babylon, Joseph in Egypt, Moses in the backside of the desert or even you! We are not called to totally separate ourselves from this world mind you. We are called to be in it, like Jesus was, but not of it (and yes, like Jesus again!)

⁸ Please read Prov 2:1-11 about knowledge, wisdom and understanding. It is a very interesting passage. What is God looking for from us?

FAITH UNDER PRESSURE, AND THE GOD OF THE IMPOSSIBLE

By I Gordon

Daniel 2 presents us with a very interesting little passage. As we shall soon see, Daniel, through no fault of his own, will find himself in a seemingly impossible situation with a death sentence hanging over his head. How did it get to this? Well, it involves God, a dream, and a cranky stressed-out king! In fact, everyone in this chapter will find themselves under some pretty intense pressure. And that's what we are going to look at – Faith under pressure and the God of the Impossible.

A God-given bad night sleep...

Dan 2:1-4 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." Then the astrologers answered the king in Aramaic, "O king, live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will interpret it."

Have you ever had a dream so vivid and real that you wake up startled, sweating, or with a pounding heart? Well King Nebuchadnezzar had one of those. But it came with a small twist – it was totally God given and it shook this king to his very core. God has been known to disturb the odd person's sleep from time to time but always at an opportune time.⁹ We'll examine the dream in detail next week but in brief Nebuchadnezzar saw a great and impressive statue that was smashed to pieces by a stone. That stone became a great mountain that filled the whole earth.

Now this had the king completely freaked out!¹⁰ ... Was the statue a representation of him? Was it his kingdom? When is it going to be smashed? You can imagine the thoughts that swirled in his head. He has all the power and wealth of the then known world but death is a great leveller and faced with the pressure of his possible death the king demands answers! Nothing else matters! Job contains an interesting word on this:

Job 33:14-18 For God does speak--now one way, now another-- though man may not perceive it. (15) In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls on men as they slumber in their beds, (16) he may speak in their ears and terrify them with warnings, (17) to turn man from wrongdoing and keep him from pride, (18) to preserve his soul from the pit, his life from perishing by the sword.

Well Nebuchadnezzar was 'terrified with warnings' alright! So he summons his 'wise men' - Basically a bunch of Spiritists and New Agers! The only ones not asked to consult were the Bible believers. Seems things haven't *servants the dream, and we will interpret it.* Like most mediums and clairvoyants they are probably thinking that they can just be clever and make up some vague waffly answer and get away with it... But the king has other ideas.

And you thought you were grumpy in the mornings!

⁹ For example, have a look at what He did to the king in the days of Esther (Esther 6:1). How perfect was His timing then? Or what about the dream He gave Pilate's wife in Matt 27:19. He also gave Abimelech a dream telling him that 'he was a dead man' because he had eyes for Abraham's wife Sarah! (Gen 20:3). Each dream or sleep disturbance was always at the most opportune time!

¹⁰ Just in the small print you've got to understand that in those days they believed dreams were messages from the 'gods'. So here he is seeing this great statue getting smashed to pieces and he has got to be thinking - 'Is that statue me? Is this a message from the gods to say that my time is up? Am I the statue?'

*Dan 2:5-9 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.** But if you tell me the dream and explain it, **you will receive from me gifts and rewards and great honour.** So tell me the dream and interpret it for me." Once more they replied, "Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will interpret it." Then the king answered, "**I am certain that you are trying to gain time, because you realize that this is what I have firmly decided: If you do not tell me the dream, there is just 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."*

The king isn't ready to play the wise men's little games however. He is grumpy. Very grumpy. Obviously likes a good night's sleep! In fact, if the wise men can't tell him both the dream itself and the interpretation then they will be cut into pieces and their houses will be turned into piles of rubble¹¹. Nice. On the plus side, if they can state both the dream and the interpretation all manner of rewards and honour will be theirs. So, quite literally, life and death stood before all involved. The foundation of all men was now to be tested. If they knew God and were given revelation they would live. If their so called wisdom was based on a lie or false hope, they would die. In a similar way all mankind now stand and all will be ultimately tested. Where is your hope? What is your foundation? Is it in the true God?

With the king dictating such extreme outcomes it is good to ask why he would do this. On a natural level the king is probably sick of 'wise men' that make it up as they go along. He is probably sick of their greasy advice that just tells him what he wants to hear. But on a more spiritual level it is God again who is behind this. And be assured that when God causes extreme things to happen (then or now), it is so He can act extremely.¹² God sometimes allows things to happen in our lives that are completely out of our control, as it was to become for Daniel, so that God HAS to act! And then God, and only God, can get the glory. We'll continue on and see if He gets the glory in this situation.

Daniel, the man of God.

*Dan 2:10-17 The astrologers answered the king, "There is not a man 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 men.**" This made the king so angry and furious that he ordered the execution of all the wise men of Babylon. 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. 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.** He asked the king's officer, "Why did the king issue such a harsh decree?" Arioch then explained the matter to Daniel. At this, Daniel went in to the king and asked for time, so that he might interpret the dream for him.*

So King Nebuchadnezzar has asked the impossible, which the king's magicians and astrologers openly acknowledge. Only the 'gods' can provide an answer for this and 'they do not live among men.' Well, the real God does dwell with His people and this shall soon be shown true. What I really liked about this passage though is Daniel's response when he finds out that he is about to be put to death (along with his friends). Does he panic? Does he freak out? Not at all! This boy (and remember, Daniel is still a teenager or possibly early 20's at this stage) knows God. And, as Major Ian Thomas said 'It is the presence of the Lord Jesus that allows a man to be gloriously detached from the pressure of circumstance!' Well, Daniel seems to be gloriously detached from the pressure of having his life on the line! That is the presence of God. Nothing else can do that. Someone once asked Einstein's wife if she understood the theory of relativity. She replied that she didn't but

¹¹ The king is under extreme pressure and obviously he is passing some of that onto the 'wise men'. In our day, if we are not performing at work or times are tough we might say something like 'I could get the boot... I'm facing the chop... looks like I'm gonna get the axe.' Well, for these 'wise men', including Daniel, these were not just figures of speech! It was quite literal!

¹² For example, specifically leading Israel into a dead end at the Red Sea, surrounded by the sea on one side and the entire Egyptian army on the other! Or Gideon sprinting down the hill, yelling at the top of his voice, with 300 fellow Jews, to take on the entire Midian army. As someone (well, many people) have said 'Man's extremity is God's opportunity!'

that Albert did and he could be trusted. How much more should we trust God! We may not know what is going on but God does and he can be trusted!

Proverbs 3:25-26 Do not be afraid of sudden fear Nor of the onslaught of the wicked when it comes; (26) For the LORD will be your confidence And will keep your foot from being caught.

In our day the pressure is on more and more. There is pressure with jobs, health, relationships... far more strain upon families and difficulties in raising children...world financial turmoil and associated anxiety are increasing. Things are getting harder. There is a shaking going on so that those things that are unshakable may remain (Heb 12:26-29). So are you convinced of the faithfulness of God? Daniel was able to remain calm when the pressure came on because of his close relationship to the Lord. May we be the same!

Best be organizing that prayer meeting though!

*Dan 2:18-19 Then Daniel returned to his house and explained the matter to his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. **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. During the night the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision.*

Nothing like a good old trial to get the prayer life firing though! Daniel's first action is to get on the blower and call for a prayer meeting! He swings straight into action and organises his three friends to begin praying to 'plead for mercy'. There is no doubt that in these days we need prayer, we need each other, and we need to be praying for each other! No doubt about it. Make sure you have people around you that you can ask to pray in times of trial. Daniel did. And make sure you take things straight away to the Lord instead of stewing on them for a while!¹³

So the Lord answered him and granted the answer to the mystery. The Bible says that it was revealed 'during the night'. We do not know whether Daniel kept praying till he received an answer of whether he was able to rest and sleep without yet getting the answer. Either way, Daniel showed great faith in a faithful God.¹⁴ He is certainly a wonderful example to us today.

Glory and praise to where it belongs!

*Dan 2:19-23 Then Daniel praised the God of heaven and said:
"Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever;
wisdom and power are his.
He changes times and seasons;
he sets up kings and deposes them.
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, O God of my fathers:
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."*

I love how this section concludes with Daniel offering up this wonderful word of praise. You can only imagine how much joy and amazement would have been in his heart at this time towards the Lord who had revealed this great mystery and saved them from a certain death. And of course, God gets the glory because only He

¹³ Check out Hezekiah's reaction when faced with overwhelming odds in Isaiah 37:14-21. It is a great example of laying things out before God in humility and prayer!

¹⁴ Here is a quiz starter. Please name the three most 'righteous' men in the Old Testament. Who would you go with? Enoch? Abraham? Joseph? Joshua? All great men.... no doubt about it. But they don't make God's top three list. Have a look in Ezek 14:14, 28:3.

could show them the answer and spare their lives. God doesn't 'need' anything. He is self sufficient. So what then can we give Him? Well, only our praise and our lives. Daniel also understood that God gives 'wisdom to the wise' and 'knowledge to the discerning'. This reminds us of what Jesus said - 'To him who has, more will be given.' If we have the wisdom to know that true knowledge and understanding is given from God, then more wisdom will be added to us because we will learn to rely on God and seek His wisdom.

I also like how Daniel said 'He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with him.' Obviously Daniel was thinking about the king's dream that had been revealed to him. But God reveals more than this. He can reveal the reasons concerning the dark times that we go through. Job 12:13-23 is a similar passage to Daniel 2:19-23. Verse 22 of Job 12 tells us '*He reveals the deep things of darkness and brings deep shadows into the light.*' What we would consider times of darkness is still light to the Lord.

In our age the pressure is on but God knows what lies in the darkness. May we be like Daniel and commit all things unto the one who holds our lives in His hand. He is still the God of the impossible. He reveals deep and hidden things. And He gives wisdom and power to those in need.

Conclusion – The purpose of the dream

So as a conclusion and review, let's just explore why God give this dream? What was God's purpose? This was such a dramatic event but God had a purpose in mind for all concerned. So what was the purpose for Nebuchadnezzar? For Daniel? For Babylon's wise men and onlookers? What about the purpose for us today?

The purpose for Nebuchadnezzar – Nebuchadnezzar was the king of Babylon that had just defeated Israel. The purpose of the dream for this king is to remind him that all earthly kingdoms will be crushed and smashed, including his own, and that only the Lord's kingdom is eternal. It was a dream specifically designed to put the fear of God into his heart! And it seemed to have worked! All those that are ignoring God can learn from this!

The purpose for Daniel – Daniel was a young man exiled in Babylon. Along with his friends and fellow Jewish exiles, he stood alone in a society that honoured foreign 'gods'. But through this dream God was reminding Daniel that He was the One who was in control. He ordained the rise and fall of kingdoms. Though exiled, Daniel would have received tremendous encouragement to see the God of Israel firmly in control even down in Babylon! We too can learn and take heart from this as we live in societies that no longer honour God.

The purpose for Babylon's wise men and on-lookers – God was showing them who the true God is. He was showing them that all their wisdom, 'gods' and everything that they placed their hope in amounted to nothing. They would be shown up by a young Israelite boy whose God, unlike theirs, was alive and active!

The purpose for all today – This God-given dream that Nebuchadnezzar had accurately listed the world empires that would rise (and fall) from that day down to the return of Jesus Christ. What an amazing dream! What an amazing God who declares the end from the beginning! Believers can look at this and know that God is in control despite the chaos of world events. They can know that it is all building for the grand finale where the stone cut without human hands (the Lord Jesus) smashes the kingdoms of the world and establishes His own on this planet. Come Lord Jesus!

A VISION OF THINGS TO COME

By I Gordon

We saw in the first part of Daniel chapter 2 that King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream... Well, more like a nightmare for it shook him to the core! Now so far we haven't heard the actual dream – we've just seen his reaction and that was to warn all his wise men that they will be toast if they don't tell him both the dream and its interpretation. And that is no easy feat! This study will focus on the dream itself and the prophetic and practical implications for our lives. Let's have a look.

Daniel, the dream interpreter

Dan 2:25-28 'Then Daniel went to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to execute the wise men of Babylon, and said to him, "Do not execute the wise men of Babylon. Take me to the king, and I will interpret his dream for him." Arioch took Daniel to the king at once and said, "I have found a man among the exiles from Judah who can tell the king what his dream means." The king asked Daniel (also called Belteshazzar), "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.** He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come. Your dream and the visions that passed through your mind as you lay on your bed are these...'

There are plenty of mysteries that are unknowable and unfathomable to natural man.¹⁵ Knowing someone else's dream? Impossible! Understanding the future? Unknowable! Stating someone else's dream about the future? Off the Richter! So Daniel comes to the king and the king asks whether he can declare the dream and its interpretation. Now remember that the king wanted both the dream itself and its interpretation... No easy feat! It's like someone demanding an answer to a question they hadn't yet asked. Now note that Daniel is very careful to make sure that only the true God gets the glory for revealing the mystery surrounding the dream. So he answers *'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.'* And hopefully Daniel put a rather large pause between the words 'about' and 'but' just to build the suspense a little. 'No one can explain it...', he says. '...but there is a God in Heaven who can!' We also have to be careful to make sure that it is God who gets the glory for our lives and actions. As Paul said, 'we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord.' (2 Cor 4:5)

Now the dream pertains to the 'latter days'¹⁶ (NASB). The question immediately arises... The latter days of what? The latter days of the king's life? The latter days of the Babylonian kingdom? No... This time frame pertains to the latter days of man's kingdom's ruling on earth. This dream would see the end of man's rule and the establishment of God's rule on the earth!

The dream is revealed

Dan 2:29-35 "As you were lying there, O king, your mind turned to things to come, and the revealer of mysteries showed you what is going to happen. As for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because I have greater wisdom than other living men, but so that you, O king, may know the interpretation and that you may understand what went through your mind. **"You looked, O king, and there before you stood a large statue—an enormous, dazzling statue, awesome in appearance.**

¹⁵ I'm sure some married couples might put their spouse into this category but I couldn't possibly comment on that.

¹⁶ The 'latter days' is a common phrase used in the Bible. See Hos 3:5, Jer 23:21, Mic 4:1, 2 Pet 3:1-4. Be assured that things won't just carry on forever. God has established exactly how many days there will be and the 'latter days' will lead up to a time when God says 'enough! It is time for the kingdom of this world to become the kingdom of the Lord.'

The head of the statue was made of pure gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay. While you were watching, a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were broken to pieces at the same time and became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth.

So here at last is a description of the dream Nebuchadnezzar had. He saw a tremendous statue constructed mostly by previous metals. A few things are noteworthy concerning this image of the statue that King Nebuchadnezzar saw. You hopefully understand that the dream spoke of four gentile empires that would dominate Jerusalem from the time of Daniel onwards. The gentile kingdoms are of course, as follows:

Head of Gold - Babylonian Empire (606-538 BC)

Silver Chest and Arms - Medes and Persian Empire (538-331 BC)

Thighs of Bronze - Greek Empire (331-168 BC)

Legs of Iron - Roman Empire (168 BC - 476 AD)

Feet of Iron & Clay - Revised Roman Empire (?AD -?AD)

Firstly, you will note that the metals described decrease in value as they are described, but they increase in strength. That is, the metals go from gold, to silver, to bronze, to iron – they decrease in value going from the most expensive to the least. Thus, God was showing that each successive kingdom would be less glorious than its predecessor. But note also that each metal is stronger than the predecessor so each empire would be succeeded by one that was stronger. Each metal also characterized that Kingdom. Explaining the use of the different metals, Dr. Renald Showers, in his book 'The Most High God', writes

'Babylon used gold extensively in its buildings, images and shrines. Even walls and buildings were overlaid with gold... In ancient times silver signified money. Medo-Persia became noted for basing its power on money... The Greeks developed this metal (bronze) highly and used it extensively... Ancient Rome was noted for its use of iron in its military weaponry.'

But a rock (or stone as other translations have it) that was cut out, but not by human hands, struck the statue on its feet and sent the whole crashing down! This rock then became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth. And a great wind blew on the broken statue pieces like chaff and blew them all away so that there was not a trace of them left. Mmmm. Interesting. Let's have a look at that now.

The Interpretation

Dan 2:36-45 "This was the dream, and now we will interpret it to the king. You, O king, are the king of kings. The God of heaven has given you dominion and power and might and glory; in your hands he has placed mankind and the beasts of the field and the birds of the air. Wherever they live, he has made you ruler over them all. You are that head of gold. "After you, another kingdom will rise, inferior to yours. Next, a third kingdom, one of bronze, will rule over the whole earth. Finally, there will be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron—for iron breaks and smashes everything—and as iron breaks things to pieces, so it will crush and break all the others. Just as you saw that the feet and toes were partly of baked clay and partly of iron, so this will be a divided kingdom; yet it will have some of the strength of iron in it, even as you saw iron mixed with clay. As the toes were partly iron and partly clay, so this kingdom will be partly strong and partly brittle. And just as you saw the iron mixed with baked clay, so the people will be a mixture and will not remain united, any more than iron mixes with clay. **"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 the interpretation is trustworthy."

We know from this prophecy and others that the last kingdom that will reign on this earth will be one of ten kings. That is what is meant by the ten toes mentioned above. Daniel 7:23-24 is an associated prophecy to this:

Daniel 7:23-24 He gave me this explanation: 'The fourth beast is a fourth kingdom that will appear on earth. It will be different from all the other kingdoms and will devour the whole earth, trampling it down and crushing it. (24) The ten horns are ten kings who will come from this kingdom. After them another king will arise, different from the earlier ones; he will subdue three kings.

And just as the ten toes are partly iron and partly clay, so it will be based on a revived Roman empire, but there will be division and weakness within its strength. It specifically says that within this last kingdom there will be a brittle component due to disunity. This may come about because of the vast immigration most countries in the West have seen in these last days leaving these nations with a mixture of cultures, religions, ideas and allegiances. Now, the main thing to focus on is a different kingdom. It is pictured as a stone or a rock that will crush all these gentile kingdoms (but it strikes specifically at the feet - or in the days when the ten kings represented by the ten toes, are in power). Who or what is this stone? Simple I know.¹⁷

This stone then, who is Jesus, will strike the ten kings at His coming as is revealed in Revelation 17:12-14. In this passage, they are pictured as ten horns.

"The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast. They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast. They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers."

Jesus shall then reign on this earth as it says above for 'the God of Heaven shall set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed!' See Isaiah 2:1-4. Please also remember what it said earlier in Daniel 2:35 – *'Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were broken to pieces at the same time and became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth.*

In other words this prophetic dream saw something radical! It doesn't give us a picture of Christianity slowly becoming greater and man's kingdom's slowly decreasing. No... It shows God smashing all earthly kingdom's in one event and at one time. Note also that the entire image (all its kingdoms) were smashed at the same time. So while the last human kingdom focused on the revived Roman Empire with its ten toes (kings) there will still be remnants and power in the other kingdoms as well such as Babylon (Iraq, Syria region) and Medo-Persia (Iran). All will be destroyed at the same time and to such an extent that they will be swept away without a trace! A whole new order will then be set up that is established over the entire earth... The kingdom of God! Finally.

The greatest mystery is yet to be revealed!

Dan 2:46-49 Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and paid him honor 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."** Then the king placed Daniel in a high position and lavished many gifts on him. He made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men. Moreover, at Daniel's request the king appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego administrators over the province of Babylon, while Daniel himself remained at the royal court.

Obviously king Nebuchadnezzar is blown away! He is probably relieved to some extent that this dream doesn't indicate the immediate end of him or his kingdom. In fact, such is his relief and amazement that he even lies down prostrate before Daniel. Not bad for a young Jewish boy exiled into a strange land! Not that Daniel would

¹⁷ Jesus is known as the Rejected Stone (Psalm 118:22), Tried Stone (Isaiah 28:16), Stumbling Stone (Isaiah 8:14-15), Living Stone (1 Pet 2:4-8), The Stone of Israel (Gen 49:24)

have wanted such praise however. He would have preferred God was given the glory. But the king states correctly that Daniel's God is the God of gods and the revealer of mysteries.

And that is certainly what God is. With the coming of the Lord Jesus all manner of mysteries were revealed and this continued with the ministry of the Apostle Paul especially. But the greatest mystery is yet to be revealed however. It is one that has been announced will be revealed at the time of the end. Do you know which mystery I speak of? It is the greatest mystery of all. It is the mystery that has puzzled every generation since being banished from the garden. I'll leave the answer for the small print while you contemplate your answer!¹⁸

And so Daniel is given a place of extreme honour. It is good to see that in his honour and exaltation, Daniel didn't forget his friends! He makes sure that they too are given places of authority and are made administrators over the province of Babylon. Unfortunately, things have a habit of changing pretty quickly in this life and we shall see this very thing starting as quickly as the next chapter!

Conclusion

Before closing it is worth asking what message do we take from a chapter such as this? I think the message we take is the same that King Nebuchadnezzar would have taken. You see, in verse 29 it says that this dream came at a time when he was thinking about his future. As he contemplated his vast kingdom and all that he had achieved, God gave him a vision that showed the whole thing being destroyed and coming to nothing. The king had to learn that the greatness of his kingdom meant nothing. It would be reduced to chaff and be blown away. The king had to learn that if he wanted to be part of something eternal then he had to be looking to and following the 'stone' that would become an everlasting kingdom over the entire earth! Is this not the same for mankind now? Even as Christians do we not spend most of our time on that which will be destroyed? We also need to remember that our entire lives will pass through a fire that will test our works. Only that which is built upon the foundation of the true stone, Jesus Christ, will remain (1 Cor 3:10-15). This is the message that God would have wanted the king then, and us now, to meditate upon. It is fine to study what is happening in this world and how it lines up with Biblical prophecy. That is to be encouraged. But God doesn't reveal these matters just for knowledge sake or as a puzzle to be solved primarily. They are revealed so that our hearts would be reminded and changed by the truth of eternal matters. What matters to you and what occupies your time and thought? Does it have any eternal significance? Important questions don't you agree?.

¹⁸ The greatest mystery I speak of is announced in Revelation 10:5-7. In it we read the following: *'Then the angel I had seen standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven. And he swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who created the heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it, and said, "There will be no more delay! But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets."*

The greatest mystery that will be revealed is the mystery of God. For centuries mankind has pondered God. Is there a God? Who is this God? Christians have come into a relationship with Him yet the vastness of God still cannot be comprehended. Who is this one who speaks light into being? Who is this one who knows all the stars by name? Who is this one that can create man from the dust of the ground and declares the end from the beginning? He is huge! One day the mystery will be revealed for God, Jesus Christ, will live amongst us again when He sets up His kingdom on earth.

WHEN THINGS GET HOT!

By I Gordon

Daniel chapter 3 is a well known and well loved chapter in the Bible. It contains things we all like in a story... 90 foot idols, furious kings, fiery furnaces hot enough to kill people who are just passing by... That sort of thing. When we left our friends at the end of chapter two everything was going along very nicely thank you very much. Daniel and his three amigos Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were exalted to a position of privilege and power in Babylon. But unfortunately things have a habit of changing in this life. And so they did, for King Nebuchadnezzar decided to setup a golden image that was ninety foot high and nine foot wide! And what's worse, everyone is commanded to bow down and worship the image! Oh great! Now there are a couple of ways to take a passage such as this – personally and prophetically. While I'll focus more on the former, there are some really interesting prophetic implications of this chapter that will definitely be noted!

A defiant image

Dan 3:1-3 King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, ninety feet high and nine feet wide, and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. He then summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials to come to the dedication of the image he had set up. So the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up, and they stood before it.

So king Nebuchadnezzar makes an image of gold and it is no small undertaking. This image is 30m high! So the first question is where do you think they got this idea from? While the Bible doesn't say exactly what the image was of, many commentators believe that the king would have been inspired by the vision that he had had in chapter 2 and created an image of a man. It could even have been in his own image. The Bible states it was all in gold. You may remember from chapter 2 that in the dream of the statue, he was the head of gold but he also learned that this head of gold would come to an end. It is therefore likely that king Nebuchadnezzar had this image set entirely in gold to indicate that his Babylonian empire would never perish or be conquered. While this is speculation, knowing the pride of Nebuchadnezzar it's probably on the money. So the king gathers all his leaders in preparation of some grand dedication. Seems like something big is on the way!

“The times, they are a changin’”

Dan 3:4-7 Then the herald loudly proclaimed, “This is what you are commanded to do, O peoples, nations and men of every language: As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace.” Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the peoples, nations and men of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

This passage and event constitutes a change for the lives of all Jews exiled in Babylon. They had faced indoctrination before but not persecution for their religious beliefs.¹⁹ That is now beginning. Note also the extent of this decree – whatever is happening here with the proclamation and decree is going to affect all peoples and men of every language. Everyone is going to be put on the spot – do you obey the king? Do you go with these new laws of the land? What about if you are Jewish and to bow down and worship this image

¹⁹ I see a parallel coming for the church in the west. Things seem to be moving from being influenced to being persecuted. We are moving from Daniel 1 to Daniel 3. Maybe not in the same extent because we would consider ourselves slightly more 'civilized' but the times they are a changing and the picture given in Daniel 3 is where things will end up under the coming world ruler.

would break the first two of the Ten Commandments? But what of the alternative? To not do so will probably cost you your life.

Christians in persecuted countries have faced these questions since the time of Christ. In the West however it is a recent development where the laws of the land are coming into conflict with the laws of God. But this has been increasing and changing fast. Christians in employment associated with marriage (such as florists, cake makers, signing marriage licenses or officiating in the ceremony) now have to decide whether they will participate in homosexual marriages. Many have declined and been fined heavily and faced public persecution and ridicule for not doing so. Some have lost their business. An officer in the US army was recently court marshaled for refusing to remove a scripture that he had put up. Students face ridicule and persecution for standing up for what they believe in.

There are many areas where the laws of the land are now coming into conflict with the ways of God. An 'Answers in Genesis' article²⁰ states that the Government is:

- Attempting to force pastors to officiate at gay weddings.
- Coercing Christian colleges to accept homosexual behavior or lose government aid.
- Telling ministries to open their hiring to non-adherents to their faith, including practicing LGBT people
- Effectively forcing religious and pro-life groups based in Washington, DC, to hire people who are pro abortion and provide them the insurance coverage that includes abortions

Eventually we will all, more and more, be put on the spot about what values and beliefs we hold to and whether they will influence the decisions we make... or whether we 'go with the flow' of the world's opinions.

When the world puts you on the spot!

*Dan 2:7-15 Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the peoples, nations and men of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews. They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, live forever! You have issued a decree, O king, that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace. But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—who pay no attention to you, O king. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up." Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. **Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?**"*

So what do you do? You've been led into captivity to a foreign country and suddenly the king, whose favourite saying is that he will 'tear you limb from limb and turn your house into rubble', is commanding that you fall down and worship this golden oversized monstrosity. You know that to do so will break the first two commandments in that you should not have any other 'gods' or idols. There are times when Christians have to disobey the law of the land when it goes against what is being commanded by God. There are times, in the words of the apostle Peter, that 'we must obey God and not men' (see Acts 4:18-20, 5:27-29). The interesting thing about this chapter is that it is not just historical. It is actually prophetic of what conditions will be like in the last days. Please read the following footnote to see this important point.²¹

²⁰ From <https://answersingenesis.org/religious-freedom/not-just-acceptance-but-coercion-christians-now-being-told-to-embrace-gay-marriage-or-else/>

²¹ Daniel is a prophetic book. I'm sure you know that. But apart from the overtly prophetic portions of scripture in Daniel, there are also some glimpses of the end times through the stories that occurred in the life of Daniel and his friends. This chapter, chapter 3, is definitely one of those times. Here is what we have... a wicked King, with absolute power, setting up an image that must be worshipped. Disobey and you'll lose your life. A global decree has gone out: 'All peoples, nations, men of every language had to bow down!' What exactly is happening here? What is Nebuchadnezzar doing? I believe he is uniting world religion! He would have known that the kingdom that was struck and smashed in chapter 2:41 was a divided kingdom. That's what made it weak. So the king's thought is to unite religious belief in the worship of his image! Note also that this new image is 60 cubits by 6 cubits! (Remembering that the number

So we've left our three friends with quite a decision to make. The horns of a dilemma you might say. The king, without a hint of a smile on his face has just challenged them with 'if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?' So it seems that the king has already forgotten about the God of Daniel and his friends that he was introduced to in chapter 2. So here is the moment of choice for Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

True faith in the face of the fire

*Dan 3:16-18 Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, **the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.**"*

What amazing faith our three amigos had! Having committed themselves to the God of Israel²², God now commits Himself to them and supplies²³ the boldness and strength to stand and defy the king! What an amazing testimony they gave²⁴. You would think that they would fall somewhat silent as they contemplated how to respond to such a threat but they spoke immediately with grace yet firm resolve and faith. It is one thing to 'think' that we will be strong in such a time but another to actually do it. Peter told Jesus that even if all deserted Him, he never would. Great speech! Yet at the moment of testing, he even had to lie to a small girl saying he didn't know Jesus! (Matt 26:69) The moral of this story is that we should never have such great pride and confidence in ourselves but rely on God to give what is needed in such times. That is the answer to the confidence that our three amigos exhibited.

So how do you think the king would respond? What's going to happen to these three little worms that don't want to go along with this new one world religion?

A furious fuehrer and a fierce flaming fire

Dan 3:19-23 Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. The king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.

How would Nebuchadnezzar respond? Well, not well. He heated the furnace up seven times hotter and decrees that our three friends will be thrown in alive. It is about now that we should be reminded that God's

6 is the number of man). If this is not yet clear. let me spell it out. In the last days, this shall happen again as we read in Revelation 13:11-18. A king will rule the entire earth and will unite worship unto himself. The false prophet shall setup an image that the entire earth has to worship. One religion once again! And he will give that image power to speak and cause those that will not bow down in worship to be killed. Although, like in the days of Daniel, there will be some that it cannot touch (more on that later). That is where things are heading. As it was in the days of Daniel 3, so shall it be again.

²² Commitment is becoming a rare quality in this age (in the west at least). Especially this type of commitment that places no conditions on God whatsoever. We tend to give in and give up. This happens in jobs, marriages, faith and even our lives. Even Christians can sometimes believe that God primarily exists for their benefit... He exists to bless them. Nope. We exist for His pleasure. Our friends placed no such conditions on God – deliverance or not, God is good and worth obeying!

²³ Probably said this story before but I like it. When Corrie Ten Boom was afraid as a small girl that she would never have the courage to put her faith on the line for Jesus, her godly father simply said to her 'Corrie, when we take the train to Amsterdam, when do I give you the money for the ticket? Three weeks early? No. I don't give you the money until we approach the ticket office. So it is with God. He provides the strength we need at the time we need it.' That's how it would have been with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego I believe.

²⁴ What they did in the midst of this fiery ordeal is what Peter tells us to do:

'...don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you... if you are suffering according to God's will, keep on doing what is right, and trust yourself to the God who made you, for he will never fail you.' (1 Pet 4:12,19)

ways are not our ways! You can probably imagine the prayer groups leaping into action as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are lead away. If we were a fly on the wall it might have gone something like this:

Prayer Group: "Oh Lord, we beseech thee, change Nebuchadnezzar's heart!"

God: "No"

Prayer Group: "Oh Lord, don't let your faithful servants be thrown in the fire... please, think of their families!"

God: "I want them thrown in the fire"

Prayer Group: "Oh Lord, they're getting close, um... I command the flames to be gone in Jesus name!"

God: "My child, it is my will and desire that they go through the flames – I have something for them but it is only found in the midst of the fire."

If you think about it, probably 95% of your prayer life is spent telling God what He should do. But God didn't take the fire away. He can, and sometimes does, but in my experience he usually has a purpose in letting people go through the fire. So let's look at that very purpose:

The purpose for the flames

*Dan 3:24-25 Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, "**Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?**" They replied, "**Certainly, O king.**" He said, "**Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.**"*

What a result! In direct fulfilment of Isaiah 43:2 the flames didn't even touch them! In fact, the only thing burnt by the flames were the ropes that the king had used to bind our three friends! That is God for ya! He can even use a nasty trial to free us from the things that would seek to bind us. And notice why it was that they were able to come through this fiery trial (quite literally!) intact - because one like 'a son of the gods' was with them. That is Jesus, who is with His people through their trials.²⁵ So what was God's purpose for the flames?

1. It was for Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego themselves. They were able to experience God! They were able to experience His protection, fellowship and peace when circumstances would state otherwise! Think about your own life... I would suspect that the times when you have experienced God the most have come in the midst of fiery ordeals.
2. It was for Nebuchadnezzar and those looking on – They got to see that with God you could go through the fire and not be burned. They got to see that they were upheld, loosed and free. They got to see that someone ('a son of the gods') was with them. Never underestimate God's desire to witness to others when you go through a trial!

Dan 3:26 Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!"

"But Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego yelled back saying "Na, na, naaa! How about you come on in where we are!" Ok, so that's not their real response but it would have been a good one! Here is the real response.

One amazed king and three thankful believers

*Dan 3:26-30 **So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them. Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way."** Then the king promoted*

²⁵ Now, as a prophetic side note, this passage also reminds us of the another set of Jewish males who will not bow down in the end times. But they also will not be harmed. In the last days, 144,000 Jewish males will be set aside by God and will have His seal in their forehead. This will mean that they will not be able to be harmed by the different trials that will come upon the earth. (See Rev 7:1-8). No doubt, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego stand as a type of this group that in the last days will be similarly protected. Just as Daniel, who is completely absent from this whole scene, represents the Church that is removed before the tribulation comes upon the earth.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar was obviously, and rightfully, blown away! Probably couldn't believe his eyes but one thing he knew for sure is that the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego was unlike any other 'god' he had come across before! And so, our three friends received a job promotion. From zero to hero you might say. Straight from the depths of the fire and into a new job ruling over the provinces of Babylon! Not bad. The king is obviously very impressed, once again, with the God of Israel. Would this last? Unfortunately, as we shall see in the next chapter, he still isn't as impressed with the God of Israel as he is with himself! Oh mankind! When will you ever learn? Well, that is another study. For now, let me just leave you with the words of Peter:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls. (1 Peter 1:3-9)

NEBUCHADNEZZAR AND THE TREE OF DOOM

By I Gordon

We looked last time at Nebuchadnezzar and the temple of doom. Well, not quite that exciting but something very close - Nebuchadnezzar and the fiery furnace. You may remember that the king gave everyone one of two options – bow down before a 90 foot image he had set up or be placed in a furnace and be burnt alive. Hmm... Which to choose? This study is on Nebuchadnezzar and the tree of doom!²⁶ This will be the first part of two studies looking at the unique nature of Daniel chapter 4. The lessons given in this chapter are universal – they apply to Christian and non Christian alike. They involve the heart and desire of man verses the heart and desire of God. Let's have a look.

One Unique Chapter

*Dan 4:1-3 King Nebuchadnezzar, To the peoples, nations and men of every language, who live in all the world: **May your peace abound! It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me.** How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; his dominion endures from generation to generation.*

Daniel chapter 4 is unique and awesome! You see, it is the personal testimony of a man who at the time of writing was the most powerful person in the entire earth. Daniel chapter 4 records a public decree of King Nebuchadnezzar to all peoples, nations and languages.²⁷ This is his testimony and clearly, he had something important that he wanted to make known. You will note that he starts by stating 'may your peace abound'. Kind of strange don't you think coming from the man whose favourite saying was that he was going to 'tear you limb from limb and turn your house into a rubbish heap!?' Has something happened to this king that has made him mellow to the point where he's starting to sound more like Peter or Paul from the New Testament? Something sure has happened²⁸... and something radical! You see, the king has come to experience something of this peace that he now writes about... the peace that only comes when a man is right with God (Rom 5:1). And he wants everyone to know about it! There is certainly a lesson in that for us. The NASB says for verse 2 'it **seemed good to me to declare** the signs and wonders **that the Most High God has done for me.**' Yes, it is always good to declare what God has done for us and Nebuchadnezzar doesn't disappoint in this testimony!

²⁶ There is a slim possibility that the name of this study is being influenced by the hype surrounding the release of the latest Indiana Jones movie. Clearly I am too easily led astray!

²⁷ You can imagine what the 'peoples and nations' were thinking when they heard that there was another decree coming from the king! They would have still remembered the last one – you know, the last decree where the king said come and bow or be biffed in the fire. I'm sure that last decree went down well! The nations would have been wondering what's going to happen this time. And this time it would have really shocked them. But with a good shock!

²⁸ Please... it would be good to go away and read Jer 52:4-14 for a moment to remind yourself about this king. You see, the mellow yellow fellow before us in Daniel chapter 4 didn't used to be this way. Alright... here are some highlights 9if you can call them that!)

Jeremiah 52:4-13 So in the ninth year of Zedekiah's reign, on the tenth day of the tenth month, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon marched against Jerusalem with his whole army. They camped outside the city and built siege works all around it. (5) The city was kept under siege until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. (6) By the ninth day of the fourth month the famine in the city had become so severe that there was no food for the people to eat. (7) Then the city wall was broken through, and the whole army fled. They left the city at night through the gate between the two walls near the king's garden, though the Babylonians were surrounding the city. They fled toward the Arabah, (8) but the Babylonian army pursued King Zedekiah and overtook him in the plains of Jericho. All his soldiers were separated from him and scattered, (9) and he was captured. He was taken to the king of Babylon at Riblah in the land of Hamath, where he pronounced sentence on him. (10) There at Riblah the king of Babylon slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes; he also killed all the officials of Judah. (11) Then he put out Zedekiah's eyes, bound him with bronze shackles and took him to Babylon, where he put him in prison till the day of his death.

What is that has happened to this king that he now knows that there is a 'Most High God' whose kingdom will never come to an end? Let's look at it what he had to say!²⁹

The 6 P's

Daniel 4:4-5 I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at home in my palace, contented and prosperous. I had a dream that made me afraid. As I was lying in my bed, the images and visions that passed through my mind terrified me.

Before rushing ahead too fast let's just take note of the situation as it existed at the start of Nebuchadnezzar's story. What situation do we find king Nebuchadnezzar in? Well, basically ease, comfort and prosperity. He had the 6 P's – the palace, the power, the pleasure, the peace and the prosperity. Um, actually no, it's looking like he had the 5 P's. But what more could you want? I said in the introduction that we would look at the heart of man versus the heart and desire of God. Well here it is. Here is the heart and desire of man. The 5 P's contain the goal of the vast majority of humankind. That's what most of us spend most of our time trying to achieve. And it should be said that these can be the gift of God at times. But when the gift of God takes the place of God then Houston, we have a problem.

Well this was the situation that the king found himself in. Peace, power and prosperity but no God... not good. So what do we see above? Well, we see God shake the situation up. Nebuchadnezzar receives a God-given dream that rattles him to his core. God is well able to shake things up with Christians and non-Christians alike. His heart and desire is often not ours for he has priorities that are far higher and longer lasting than ours!³⁰

The stubborn heart

Daniel 4:6-9 So I commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be brought before me to interpret the dream for me. When the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners came, I told them the dream, but they could not interpret it for me. Finally, Daniel came into my presence and I told him the dream. (He is called Belteshazzar, after the name of my god, and the spirit of the holy gods is in him.)

As the king continues recounting his story to all the peoples and nations we see that faced with a terrifying dream he goes initially to his own people. Why? Well, clearly they walked in first so I guess that is a pretty good reason. But there is more to it. In the ancient world military conquests generally meant that your 'gods' were greater than that of the conquered nation. Well here was king Nebuchadnezzar... he had conquered all that he cared for so clearly his Babylonian gods must be the most powerful gods right? And yet he knew that Daniel worshipped the God of Israel and the king didn't want to have to acknowledge that Daniel's God could reveal things that his own gods couldn't!³¹

Some people are very stubborn and don't want to acknowledge God unless they have to! Some have to face a major trial before seeking His face. Some hold off right to the end of their life. And some, sadly, hold off even when faced with a Christ less eternity. But God knows what buttons to push to give people the right opportunity to acknowledge Him and that is what He is about to do with the king. Having exhausted all his 'Babylonian' avenues, Daniel is finally called before the king.

²⁹ To put this testimony in some kind of perspective, try to imagine some modern or recent leader or dictator making an announcement to the world that he had come to know and worship the God of Israel, the true God. Imagine the current Chinese leader stating that he is going to make an important worldwide broadcast next Friday night. So everyone waits wondering what is going to be said ... And then the announcement: He has had a radical experience with the Lord Jesus and now believes in Him as Lord and Savior. Imagine if someone like Hitler did that! Or Putin or Obama! Well that is fairly much what King Nebuchadnezzar did in this chapter before us. Pretty amazing!

³⁰ I had an email come into the website once asking if it was ever God's will for His children to be sick. Our human heart that generally centers in on peace and prosperity being the chief end of man would like to hear that God is also working as hard as He can to keep our little life and world as stable as possible for our good. But always remember that God works on a far higher realm. His will is expressed in Rom 8:29 and that is the basis of His desire for us.

³¹ It would kind of be like a staunch crystal loving, spirit guide led New Ager having to come to a Christian and ask for wisdom or prayer. It could happen but there is a bit of pride to swallow first!

Not just another tree chopped down

Daniel 4:10-18 I said, "Beltshazzar, chief of the magicians, I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you, and no mystery is too difficult for you. Here is my dream; interpret it for me. These are the visions I saw while lying in my bed: I looked, and there before me stood a tree in the middle of the land. Its height was enormous. The tree grew large and strong and its top touched the sky; it was visible to the ends of the earth. Its leaves were beautiful, its fruit abundant, and on it was food for all. Under it the beasts of the field found shelter, and the birds of the air lived in its branches; from it every creature was fed. "In the visions I saw while lying in my bed, I looked, and there before me was a messenger, a holy one, coming down from heaven. He called in a loud voice: 'Cut down the tree and trim off its branches; strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the animals flee from under it and the birds from its branches. But let the stump and its roots, bound with iron and bronze, remain in the ground, in the grass of the field. "Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him live with the animals among the plants of the earth. Let his mind be changed from that of a man and let him be given the mind of an animal, till seven times pass by for him. "The decision is announced by messengers, the holy ones declare the verdict, so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men.' "This is the dream that I, King Nebuchadnezzar, had. Now, Beltshazzar, tell me what it means, for none of the wise men in my kingdom can interpret it for me. But you can, because the spirit of the holy gods is in you."

So here is the dream he had. It is of one very impressive tree that grew enormously tall and stood out for its beauty and abundance. This tree was visible to the ends of the earth signifying that extent of the Babylonian kingdom and its influence on the then known world. Beasts and birds alike are said to have found shelter and provision under this tree. And yet, in the midst of this impressive tree watching exercise, an angelic 'watcher' comes forth and issues a decree of judgment. The tree will be chopped down.

Now, there are a few interesting things to note in this vision of this great tree. In Renald Showers book 'The Most High God' he writes 'in his inscriptions, Nebuchadnezzar boasted that he had personally cut down some of these huge trees (from the forests of Lebanon). He even had a picture of himself cutting a cedar inscribed on stone. One gets the impression that the king exalted in the fact that he could cut down such a towering giant of strength. This king who delighted in cutting down trees would himself be cut down.' So it seems that God very specifically gave the king this vision of a large tree being cut down. It was the tree of doom! But note there was a flicker of hope for the tree wouldn't be completely destroyed. The stump would be left in the ground but with a band of bronze around it. Bronze in the Bible speaks of judgment and so it would be for this king. We see also in this dream that what the king saw and heard swaps from being a tree to a person. It goes from 'cut down the tree' to 'let him (that which was cut down) live with the animals among the plants of the earth'. No wonder he was beginning to sweat! His so called 'wise-men' have let him down (again) so it is back to Daniel... Can he help? Can Daniel's God give revelation where others have failed?

Daniel interprets the vision

*Daniel 4:19-27 **Then Daniel (also called Beltshazzar) was greatly perplexed for a time, and his thoughts terrified him.** So the king said, "Beltshazzar, do not let the dream or its meaning alarm you." Beltshazzar answered, "My lord, if only the dream applied to your enemies and its meaning to your adversaries! The tree you saw, which grew large and strong, with its top touching the sky, visible to the whole earth, with beautiful leaves and abundant fruit, providing food for all, giving shelter to the beasts of the field, and having nesting places in its branches for the birds of the air— **you, O king, are that tree!** You have become great and strong; your greatness has grown until it reaches the sky, and your dominion extends to distant parts of the earth. "You, O king, saw a messenger, a holy one, coming down from heaven and saying, 'Cut down the tree and destroy it, but leave the stump, bound with iron and bronze, in the grass of the field, while its roots remain in the ground. Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven; let him live like the wild animals, until seven times pass by for him.' "This is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree the Most High has issued against my lord the king: **You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle and be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes. The command to leave the stump of the tree with its roots means that your***

kingdom will be restored to you when you acknowledge that Heaven rules. Therefore, O king, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue."

Not very good news for the king is it? God is going to do something very radical to this king so that he will be brought to the place where he will finally acknowledge the God of Daniel as the Most High God. In fact, it is so radical that at first, even Daniel hesitates in giving the interpretation to the king because of what it means. Daniel would prefer that the interpretation applied to Nebuchadnezzar's enemies and not the king himself. But speak he must. In like manner, the gospel can sometimes be hard for some to hear, and hard for others to give. But like Daniel we are still called to speak the truth in love. We want to show the same type of concern that Daniel did in giving the message but, again like Daniel, we still have to speak the truth.

'For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task? Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God.' (2 Cor 2:15-17)

So Daniel tells the king the God is going to judge him for seven periods of time (most likely seven years because of his appearance in Dan 4:33). According to the Ryrie study bible notes, the king's illness is boanthropy (imagining himself to be an animal and acting accordingly.) The only advice Daniel gives is for Nebuchadnezzar to renounce his sins and act righteously. Sound advice. Could not God repent of his warning of judgment if the king repented of his sin and pride? Of course He could just as He did when Nineveh repented in the days of Jonah. Well it seems to have worked for a little while... Twelve months to be precise. But when pride is firmly established in the heart of a man it is only a matter of time before it rises again and we see examples of what happens next!

The root of the problem - All those I's and My's!

*Dan 4:28-32 All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar. **Twelve months later**, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, he said, "Is not this the great Babylon **I have built** as the royal residence, **by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty**?" The words were still on his lips when a voice came from heaven, "This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you. You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes."*

It took 12 months from Daniel's interpretation of the vision, but soon enough the king was back to his life of ease and pride! As he walked around the roof of his palace, surveying all that he could see, he couldn't contain himself any longer! He just had to give glory and honor and praise to the one who had performed such marvellous things... 'and yep' he thinks to himself, 'that would be me!' 'All this is by my mighty power and my glory and majesty!' Oh dear. What a poor memory and sure enough, the interpretation of the vision came true. The Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is completely consistent and clear on this - 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.' Unfortunately, some people only learn from experience. They cannot be told the truth. But God has ways of humbling all those that would walk in pride and like some sickly medicine, it isn't always nice but it is for our own good!

Well that is where we will leave this study³². We'll leave it with a vivid manifestation of that strange principle, that strange mystery of iniquity that indwells each of us – pride. Somehow the king would have to go from 'I and Me' to 'Him and He'! But it can be done, as we shall see in even the most hardened proud man. The fires of God would soon burn strongly upon this king of Babylon. And yet, through grace, he may just come through refined and not utterly consumed. We'll see in the next study!

³² I know, it's an ending a bit like the first Lord of the rings movie where Frodo is escaping from the orcs, he's in the middle of nowhere, you're wondering what's going to happen next... and... the credits roll! Well this is only part 1 of Daniel chapter 4. You need to come back and read the 2nd part – Lessons from a loon. And at least you don't have to wait a whole year to find out what happened next like you did with LOTR!

LESSONS FROM A LOON

By I Gordon

We looked last time at Nebuchadnezzar and the tree of doom and I'm sure you have remembered that we only got half way through Daniel chapter 4 before that study came to an abrupt screeching halt! We saw last time that king Nebuchadnezzar was given a frightening prophetic dream of what would come upon him. Unfortunately, the king didn't take this warning completely to heart and as we left the king he was out on his balcony, looking over his whole kingdom, and giving praise to the one responsible for such greatness... Himself! Nice.

It is good to remember that this chapter is a written testimony by Nebuchadnezzar to the then known world. He personally learnt a lot through this time and so can we. What we are going to do in this study is look at the remainder of Nebuchadnezzar's testimony and examine the lessons that we can gather from such a radical story. They are 5 simple lessons from a loon! We'll also look briefly at what this chapter means from a prophetic point of view as there are some interesting pointers to the end of the age.

Lesson 1: Who rules the roost?

Dan 4:29:32 All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar. Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, he said, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?" The words were still on his lips when a voice came from heaven, "This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you. You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes."

This passage encapsulates the chapter for it demonstrates the biggest lesson that mankind has to learn – Who rules the roost? We see that as the king is busy praising himself, the decree is given from on high that his authority has been taken from him and that he will now be eating grass like an animal until he acknowledges that it is the Most High that is sovereign! Now I don't want to gloss over this point because it is crux of the matter. What was it that led the king to this point? What was it that had kept God out of His rightful place in Nebuchadnezzar's life? We can clearly see from the passage above that it was pride and his popular close cousin, independence. Now, have you ever thought of where this came from? Was mankind created to live independently of God?

Just a quick time warp detour...

If we go back to the beginning, back to Genesis, we find something interesting. When God created the animal kingdom he gave them something that would govern their actions and be their guide for how they should live and operate. We call that something 'instinct'.³³ To mankind he didn't give instinct. He gave Himself. His

³³ An old sermon by Major Ian Thomas is about the wonder of the animal kingdom and specifically, bees. Did you know that within the hive different bees are assigned different tasks? Some bees simply clean the hive. Some continue to build the hive using mathematically perfect hexagonal cells of wax. Others flap their wings to circulate air and keep the hive at a constant temperature. Others go out looking for nectar and when they have found some they do a little dance inside the hive which instructs the others bees where to find it! How do they do all this? Instinct! God has programmed within them the knowledge of how to do these things. No one has to teach them. Instinct governs their actions. In his sermon, Major Ian asks what would happen if instinct within the bee kingdom suddenly snapped! Imagine if the bees decided that they were sick and tired of having to do what the other bees want. Imagine if those assigned to keeping the hive at a constant temperature suddenly decide that they are not going flap anymore. 'Go and do your own flapping' they say 'I've been flapping for months without even a word of thanks!' 'Yeah, we'll I'm not dancing anymore. No more telling you guys where the nectar is. You're always riding on my coat-tails... you find your own nectar. This is mine!' Major Ian spoke about what we would end up with if instinct snapped and it was every bee for himself. It would be chaos and the breakdown of the bee kingdom. And yet that is what mankind decided to do in the garden. They chose to go it alone without God. Every man for himself! Crazy.

presence, His life, represented by the tree of life, was to be mankind's guide. Mankind was not programmed to operate instinctively but was designed to live in dependence upon God and His life within them. Well, that was the plan... until a voice arose in the garden...

"You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

In other words – 'you don't need to live dependant upon God. You can be like God! You can know good and evil. You can gain knowledge and not be trapped needing God. You can make your own rules, your own decisions... You can go your own way and be your own person. Just break free from God and you can be your own God!

So they did. They bought the lie and were sold a lemon... Instead of freedom they received a life long battle and bondage to self centeredness. Instead of liberating knowledge they received pride, smugness and independence. So when our nice little king Nebuchadnezzar stands in great pride on his balcony overlooking his kingdom and sings praises to himself, he is only verbalising that which dwells within the heart of most of us – Pride and independence. It may be thousands of years since the fall of man but nothing has changed. There is nothing new under the sun.³⁴ The first lesson that Nebuchadnezzar, and mankind in general, had to learn was who rules the roost? Is it God or is it you?

Lesson 2: Revelation often comes through brokenness

Daniel 4:33 Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like cattle. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird.

As we continue looking at Nebuchadnezzar's testimony we read the above, dramatic, turn of events! One minute wallowing in pride and self exaltation... the next being brought right down to ground level (quite literally!). The one who ruled the people now can't even control himself. He who dined on the choicest of foods now feeds on grass. He who wore the royal robes is now covered by thick hair like feathers. I called this lesson 'Revelation often comes through brokenness'. I could have also said 'Spiritual highs are often reached through personal lows'. To turn from yourself to God requires that you truly know yourself and have gotten over yourself! And that often (but not always) requires humbling by God. So how low does the king go? He is taken right back to grass roots. His severe pride required a severe humbling.³⁵ But always remember that God has a purpose in all that He does and it is not to simply humiliate someone! God loved Nebuchadnezzar. Despite the ego trips, despite throwing people into the fire, despite turning people's houses into rubble... God still loved this king. And the king would soon be granted a very personal revelation of God's grace and faithfulness. He would soon reach a new spiritual high. But this was the valley he had to walk through to get there. If things are tough in your life always remember that God may just have chosen to reveal more of Himself to you. And for that matter, remember the next lesson that the king learned...

Lesson 3: There is no hole so deep that God can't lift you out of!

Daniel 4:34 At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever.

Now, I want you to do something for me. But it may not relate to right now in your life... But the next time you think that you have blown it and there is no way back... The next time you wallow in despair thinking that you can never get out of this mess...

³⁴ But thankfully there can be something new under the Son! Only in Christ are things made new. As Larry Norman used to sing: "Unless JC sets you free, everything remains the same. We are what we are until the day that we die."

³⁵ According to the note in my bible, the king's illness has a name - It's called Boanthropy and it means that you imagine yourself to be an animal and act accordingly. You may want to note it down cos I'm kind of thinking that you don't want to catch this one!

The next time you regret some past action and think that it can't ever be put right...
Think of Nebuchadnezzar!

This guy was an animal... No, he literally was an animal. It makes you wonder as he was munching on some grass in the field whether he ever just stopped and thought – 'Oh man... how did it come to this? I was once a king and now I'm a lunatic! I used to eat at banquets and now I munch out on grass! All because of my stubborn proud heart! I wonder if I'll ever get out of this?' As low as you may be now or in the future, I doubt you will be as low as our poor king. And his testimony is that as low as you may go, God is still able to elevate and restore that which was lost. There is no hole so deep that God cannot lift you out.³⁶

In the depths of Nebuchadnezzar's trial he raised his eyes toward heaven. He praised the Most High. There was nothing left of self that was praise worthy. There was no palace, power, pleasure or prosperity anymore. All was stripped away until only God remained. And as he raised his eyes toward God his sanity was restored! What an amazing testimony! What a great lesson to learn and experience!

Lesson 4: Only the things of God last forever

Daniel 4:34-37 His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?"

You may remember in chapter 2 of Daniel that Nebuchadnezzar had a dream of a great statue. He, and his kingdom, were said to be the head of gold in that statue. Now if you remember that, do you also remember that the king was told that God would set up His own kingdom that would put to an end all man-made earthly kingdoms? If you do then you're doing better than most! But do you also remember that the king then went and built his own image all in gold signifying that his kingdom would not be defeated or be demolished? Of course you did!

Well, that brings us to the 4th lesson that God required this king to learn. And that is that only the things of God last forever. Now, I'll take a wild stab here and guess that you don't have the power, palace and position of the king before us. And yet, if you are like me, you still spend a fair amount of your time building up your own little kingdom down here on earth while often forgetting about the eternal kingdom. We forget how temporary our lives on this planet are. We forget that only the things of God last forever. It was to this attitude that Isaiah spoke when he said:

*A voice says, "Cry out." And I said, "What shall I cry?" "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever."*³⁷

Our good king learned his lesson! Once he was restored he no longer spoke of how great he or his kingdom was... No, his language and thoughts were now onto that which was eternal! Read what he wrote to all the peoples and nations once again in verse 34. Remember that this is his testimony to the then known world! So

³⁶ The Bible is of course full of such amazing stories of men and women who have been raised from the depths. We could talk of Job and all that he went through... yet God restored all that he had lost. We could talk of Joseph, wrongly accused and thrown into prison until the timing of God was such that he should be exalted and made ruler over Egypt! We could talk of a wicked king of Judah called Manasseh who was taken with a hook in his nose and shackles on his feet down into a dungeon in Babylon. And yet, in the depths of his despair he called on God with a repentant heart and God lifted him out of that hole and through pure grace he ended up in the line and genealogy of Jesus! (It's a great story, please read 2 Chron 33). Or what about the thief on the cross? Did you know that at the start of the crucifixion both of the thief's were mocking Jesus?

³⁷ It was this same lesson that Jesus tried to teach his listeners where he spoke:

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

what did he tell them? Basically that it's not about you and your little kingdom. God doesn't regard man like other men do! If you want to be part of something that truly lasts then it's all about God's kingdom and his rule. Everything else is nothing. He learned this lesson the hard way – only the things of God last forever.

Lesson 5 – Our Response...Speak!

*Daniel 4:36-37 At the same time that my sanity was restored, my honor and splendor were returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisers and nobles sought me out, and I was restored to my throne and became even greater than before. **Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just.** And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.*

*Daniel 4:2 **It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me.***

The last lesson that we can learn from the king is simply what he did with this great experience that God gave him – He told others about it! How cool. I know I've mentioned it before but always remember that chapter 4 of Daniel is the personal testimony of the king that he sent out for all to read and hear. Too often (and I'm definitely including myself here) we keep the things of God out of conversation for fear of what others may think. Not this king! He spoke and I have no doubt that his words and testimony changed peoples lives as God worked in their lives too.

The NIV says for verse 2 that 'It is my pleasure to tell you...' The NASB says 'It seemed good to me to tell...' Have you found that it is both good and a pleasure to tell others about what God has done?

Conclusion

There are great universal lessons that God wished to teach the king then, and us now, in Daniel chapter 4. Mankind doesn't change and while the extent of the highs and lows in this chapter may not be your experience, the process and principles taught hold true none the less. M. Lloyd Jones once said that all of mankind's history could be expressed thus:

"Man formed, man deformed, man informed, man transformed."

I like that and it certainly holds true for this chapter and the life of king Nebuchadnezzar. And I hope that you have got to the last stage of the process as well!

Appendix – the prophetic element

We have looked at this study from a personal point of view exploring some of the lessons that we can learn from Nebuchadnezzar. But it is worth adding a note about the prophetic significance. Jesus spoke about the 'times of the Gentiles' (Luke 21:24) This is the time when Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentile nations. Interestingly, it begins with the time of Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian kingdom. It ends at the return of Jesus when he sets up His kingdom in Israel. It is worth noting the parallels in this judgement and that which is still to come. A.C Gaebelin writes well on this:

'As judgment came upon the great monarch in the beginning of the times of the Gentiles, so judgment will yet fall upon this proud and self exalting age of the Gentiles. That great big, political and religious tree will some day be hewn down and be destroyed.

And Nebuchadnezzar's great humiliation in becoming a beast for seven times (seven years), points us to the end of this Gentile age once more. Apostasy from God will be the great characteristic of that end. There will be no more looking up to God, but the attitude of the beast will be the attitude of the nations. We see much of this already. They mind earthly things and become the "earth dwellers" so frequently mentioned in the book of Revelation. Madness and bestiality will seize upon the Gentiles, after the One who hinders, the Holy Spirit is removed. Then proud and apostate Christendom will believe the lie and follow the beast with its lying wonders. This will last seven times, that is, seven years.

The stump of the great tree which remains in the field suggests the fact that the judgments which fall upon the nations in the time of the end will not completely destroy all nations. Many of them will be swept away. For those who wilfully rejected the gospel and turned away from the truth, there is no hope. But there are others which will be left and when

these judgments are in the earth, the nations learn righteousness.

The millennium is also seen in this chapter in the restoration of Nebuchadnezzar and in the praise He gives to the Most High. In the previous chapter the three friends of Daniel speak of "our God," but in this chapter we hear of "the Most High." It is the millennial name of God. We see then in the fourth chapter the pride and self exaltation of the Gentiles, and how the Gentiles will be humiliated and judged. First there is self exaltation, that is followed by judgment, and then follows restoration and the acknowledgement of the Most High.

That nothing more is now reported of Nebuchadnezzar, that the last which we hear of him in Scripture is his acknowledgment of the Most High, is also not without meaning. It foreshadows the universal acknowledgment of God in the kingdom which the God of heaven will set up, when the stone fills as the mountain the whole earth.

ICHABOD – AND THE WRITING ON THE WALL

By I Gordon

Ichabod! Why give this chapter the title 'Ichabod' you ask? Well, do you remember the story from a dark period in Israel's history, when the Philistines battled against Israel and took the Ark of the Covenant? If this is news to you, then I suggest you read about it in 1 Sam 4:1-22. If you do remember however, then you will also recall how Eli's daughter in law gave birth to a wee baby and called her new born son 'Ichabod'. Nice name, although not overly popular today. It means 'no glory', for she said 'The glory has departed from Israel.' It was a sad time. Well, Daniel chapter 5 is also about the departure of glory. Not from Israel, but from the greatest worldwide kingdom at that time - the Babylonian empire. And it is interesting to note some of the factors that led to the fall of Babylon because it has some very valid lessons for our age as well. So in this study we will look at four things:

1. The spirit of Babylon
2. What God thought...
3. What God did!
4. Our response

The Spirit of Babylon - Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die...

Dan 5:1-4 King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine with them. While Belshazzar was drinking his wine, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them. So they brought in the gold goblets that had been taken from the temple of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them. As they drank the wine, they praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone.

The chapter starts then, with a new king. King Belshazzar was believed to have been Nebuchadnezzar's grandson³⁸ and unfortunately, as we see above, the humility and faith that King Nebuchadnezzar had come into had not carried on with Belshazzar. The saying that God only has sons, not grandsons, is true indeed. Now there are three things that stand out in this passage concerning their attitude at this time:

- 1) Life was a party! They had it all... Nobles, wives, concubines, wine... Historians tell us that these 'parties' were essentially drunken sexual orgies. Live for today was the motto of Babylon. Live for pleasure. It was hedonism at it's finest. They sought pleasure as the ultimate goal and way of life.³⁹
- 2) They worshiped created things – The second point that stands out is that they worshiped the 'gods' of silver and gold yet mocked the true God. We see that Belshazzar had no problem in using the sacred items from the Jewish temple to worship and honor these other 'gods' while emphasising his superiority over the God of Israel!

³⁸ Please note that the term 'father' as it is used in Dan 5:2 can refer to any male ancestor. J Vernon McGee comments on this king stating: 'During the time of the events recorded in chapter 5, Nabonidus was on the field of battle while Belshazzar his son remained in Babylon. We will notice that when Belshazzar offers Daniel a position in the kingdom, it is to be the third ruler in the kingdom. Why not second to Belshazzar? Well, Belshazzar himself was number two—his father was really the king.'

³⁹ The scene is reminiscent of what Paul wrote in 1 Cor 15:32 "If the dead are not raised, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.' In other words, if there is no God, if there is no after life, if there is no resurrection or judgment to come, then live it up! Party, party party! Live for today only, for tomorrow we die! That was Belshazzar's attitude. It is also the attitude of countless others today. It would make perfect sense... if there was no God. It makes no sense if there is a God and there is a life and judgment after death.

- 3) Self confident smugness – The history and setting of this passage is very interesting. History tells us that as they partied up, the Medo-Persian empire was outside the walls of Babylon. They were actually under siege as this drunken party went on!⁴⁰ They wined and dined as the enemy circled!

So that was the spirit of Babylon – live for pleasure, live for today. Worship the gods of silver and gold while mocking the true God. Live in a smug self confidence thinking that nothing can happen to you. Well, with that being the case, let's have a look at what the true God thought of that attitude!

What God thought - Oh you wanton creature!

*Isa 47:9-11 "Now then, listen, you **wanton creature, lounging in your security** and saying to yourself, "**I am, and there is none besides me.** I will never be a widow or suffer the loss of children.' Both of these will overtake you in a moment, **on a single day**: loss of children and widowhood. They will come upon you in full measure, in spite of your many sorceries and all your potent spells. **You have trusted in your wickedness and have said, 'No one sees me.'** Your wisdom and knowledge mislead you when you say to yourself, 'I am, and there is none besides me.' **Disaster will come upon you, and you will not know how to conjure it away.** A calamity will fall upon you that you cannot ward off with a ransom; a catastrophe you cannot foresee will suddenly come upon you.*

We do not have to be in the dark at all about what God thought of this Babylonian spirit for it has been recorded for us through Isaiah's prophecy in chapter 47. I have written some of it above but you would do well to go away and read it all. Firstly, God calls them a 'wanton creature'. The word wanton means 'sexually loose, senseless, extravagant'. We see again here that their attitude was to say to themselves that 'I am...', 'I have no need...', 'Nothing can ever touch me'. 'I don't even need God!' Remind you of anything?⁴¹ But note what this prophecy says concerning Babylon – 'Disaster will come upon you and you will not know how to conjure it away'. It also says it will come on a single day. Well, in the book of Daniel we have reached that day. It is the day of judgement upon this world kingdom. Let's now have a look at God's response.

What God did – The Writing is on the Wall!

*Daniel 5:5-9 Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall, near the lampstand in the royal palace. **The king watched the hand as it wrote. His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his knees knocked together and his legs gave way.** The king called out for the enchanters, astrologers and diviners to be brought and said to these wise men of Babylon, "Whoever reads this writing and tells me what it means will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around his neck, and he will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom." Then all the king's wise men came in, but they could not read the writing or tell the king what it meant. So King Belshazzar became even more terrified and his face grew more pale. His nobles were baffled.*

Even as he and his guests wined and dined, the Medo-Persian Empire sat outside the Babylonian walls. But the king didn't care. He was confident that they had done everything necessary to ensure their victory. Nothing

⁴⁰ As Dr Renald Showers points out in his book 'The Most High God'

'Nebuchadnezzar had made Babylon into the world's mightiest fortress. The outer wall was so thick that no battering rams or instruments of warfare were able to knock it down. The presence of a second inner wall made any attempts to scale the walls suicidal. As a result, Babylon appeared impregnable... The walls of Babylon had been built over the Euphrates river. Thus, that river flowed through the city at all times, providing a constant source of fresh water. In anticipation of a blockade by Medo-Persia, the Babylonians supplied the city with enough food to maintain its population for more than twenty years. Ancient historians indicate that, in light of these great preparations, the people of Babylon laughed at the siege of their city by Medo-Persia.'

⁴¹ Here is a clue. It is one of the churches in the book of Revelation. Doesn't really rhyme with anything but starts with 'L' and ends with 'Cea'. It reminds us, does it not, of the Laodicean church of Revelation chapter 3 where Jesus is pictured outside the church while those inside revel in their wealth saying 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' The worship of the gods of gold and silver isn't just a thing of the past! Is not 'Ichabod' written already over the wealthy self-sufficient western churches of our modern 'Laodicean' age?

could spoil this party. But then a strange little hand appeared and the laughter turned to fear.⁴² The king didn't find this hand at all funny. In fact, he was so frightened that his knees even knocked together! Have you ever had such a shock or fright that your knees or other parts of your body literally shook? If so you have a small glimpse into the king's experience right about now. What the might of the Medo-Persian Empire hadn't been able to do, God had now performed through the use of a hand, a wall, and four little words. While the king couldn't understand the meaning of the words, he inwardly knew this wasn't something good. This outward message probably added to the inner message coming from his conscience in fully convicting this king!

Now it is fair to say that seeing the writing on the wall⁴³ is a fearful thing - then and now. The writing is on the wall for any nation that revels in the same Babylonian spirit that we see here.⁴⁴ And unfortunately we see the same type of spirit in the West today as is being expressed here with Babylon 2500 years ago. There is a mocking of the true God. There is a self-centred 'me' spirit that exalts in pleasure and parties ignoring the real situation at the doors. It is like the days of Noah where the people were living it up right to the very day that the judgement of the flood came... and they had no idea!

Now this king should have known better. He would have heard of the tremendous testimony of his grand-father Nebuchadnezzar about all that the Most High God did for him. But unfortunately, Belshazzar had rejected the light that he had received. As it says in God's word:

Proverbs 29:1 A man who remains stiff-necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed--without remedy.

He obviously learned nothing from the stories of king Nebuchadnezzar, and again turns to the threefold 'dummies' of his enchanters, astrologers and diviners. And they again prove themselves to be as 'on to it' as their predecessors had been in the days of Nebuchadnezzar... Ah, not at all! Of course we knew it would be this way for Isaiah's prophecy quoted above said that when the disaster struck they would not be able to conjure it away. God has seen and heard enough. The light given to these Babylonians had not only been rejected but was now being used to mock the very God who gave them life. The humility and acknowledgment of the true God shown by king Nebuchadnezzar, was not on the lips of his grandson Belshazzar.

⁴² You've all heard the saying 'the writing is on the wall' I'm sure. It's roots is Daniel 5 – that passage before us. It signifies some impending doom. Someone might say 'I haven't lost my job yet but the writing is on the wall'. 'Well that same is spoken of nations. Something inevitable is about to happen to Babylon. Something that no one can stop for it comes from the hand of God.

⁴³ The phrase 'the writing is on the wall' is still used today and obviously comes from this passage. It expresses the thought that something ominous or bad is about to happen.

⁴⁴ Ok, this is likely to be a larger footnote. Preparations for this study took me into some passages and quotes from Edward Gibbon's 6 volume work on the fall of Rome. I know, that's a different empire. But it is interesting that historians that have studied these things tell us that nations and empires have births and deaths like people do. In fact, the following cycle has been discovered about the birth and death of nations. It has been noted that nations go...

"From bondage to spiritual faith; from spiritual faith to great courage; from courage to liberty; from liberty to abundance; from abundance to selfishness; from selfishness to complacency; from complacency to apathy; from apathy to dependence; from dependence to bondage."

That being the case, where would you say the United States of America and many other Western nations are on that cycle? It's quite scary really. Anyway, back to Edward Gibbon's work on the fall of Rome... Here are the main reasons attributed to Gibbon's for Rome's fall (as quoted in the book 'Is America committing suicide?')

1. The rapid increase in divorce and the undermining of the sanctity of the home
2. The spiraling rise of taxes and extravagant spending
3. The mounting craze for pleasure and the brutalization of sports
4. The building of gigantic armaments and the failure to realize that the real enemy lay within the walls with the moral decay of the people.
5. The decay of religion and the fading of faith into a mere form leaving the people without a guide.

Read those five points again for they are eerily reminiscent of the age in which we live. In connection to this, consider the following quote from Abraham Lincoln concerning the USA – "If this nation is to be destroyed it will be from within and not from without."

Sobering words and thoughts in the current economic, social and political climate!

Conclusion: Our response

*Daniel 5:10-16 The queen, hearing the voices of the king and his nobles, came into the banquet hall. "O king, live forever!" she said. "Don't be alarmed! Don't look so pale! **There is a man in your kingdom who has the spirit of the holy gods in him. In the time of your father he was found to have insight and intelligence and wisdom like that of the gods.** King Nebuchadnezzar your father—your father the king, I say—appointed him chief of the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners. This man Daniel, whom the king called Belteshazzar, was found to have a keen mind and knowledge and understanding, and also the ability to interpret dreams, explain riddles and solve difficult problems. Call for Daniel, and he will tell you what the writing means." So Daniel was brought before the king, and the king said to him, "Are you Daniel, one of the exiles my father the king brought from Judah? I have heard that the spirit of the gods is in you and that you have insight, intelligence and outstanding wisdom. The wise men and enchanters were brought before me to read this writing and tell me what it means, but they could not explain it. Now I have heard that you are able to give interpretations and to solve difficult problems. If you can read this writing and tell me what it means, you will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around your neck, and you will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom."*

It is interesting that people, like the king, could see that the writing is on the wall and that it made them fearful... but they didn't know what it all meant or what to do about it. It seems that we are in that position now. There is fear and anxiety over the financial markets and job security. There is fear over the rise of Islam and immigration. Many in the world fear over CO2 emissions and so-called global warming. But most do not know what to do. God is allowing unsolvable problems to be heaped up one upon another. What is needed is a 'Daniel' who can not only see the writing on the wall, but can also interpret the signs for the people. Bible believing Christians should be that people.

Now the king may have been a dead loss but at least the queen (likely the queen mother) had some wisdom as in the moment of crisis she remembered that 'there is a man' who could help.⁴⁵ It is interesting that in the time of a crisis people start looking for answers! From the above passage it seems that Daniel hadn't been consulted for some time. Not in the reign of this king at least. And yet, when real trouble comes into town, he is sought for again. It seems in the west at least that we have hit that part of the cycle where our abundance has led to selfishness, and selfishness has led to apathy towards spiritual matters. Is God now shaking things up? Each new day seems to bring forth more world crises. Is He allowing this to shake people out of their complacency? I believe so. We'll see in the next study what became of Babylon but for now consider those around you who do not know the Lord. Consider your own relationship with the Lord. Have you been sucked in by the Babylonian spirit that pervades the Western world? And consider Daniel... a man set apart who could speak into the situation.

May we too be like him as we see and interpret the writing that is appearing on the wall.

⁴⁵ Ultimately Jesus Christ is the only man with any lasting answers. But we are his ambassadors so you should have some answers for people who are living in fear and anxiety due to the writing that is appearing on the wall.

THE PRECARIOUS POSITION OF AN UNBELIEVER

By I Gordon

Well, we looked last time at a great party! The king of Babylon was throwing a wild party and huge celebrations were in order. Yep, they had the wine, the women and their precious gods of gold and silver. Everything was going swimmingly... well, everything apart from that strange creepy little hand that just suddenly appeared and started writing strange mysterious things on the wall! Yeah, fair enough, that did seem to quiet the party down pretty quickly.

We looked at how God can write 'Ichabod' over a nation and this is what He did with the Babylonian empire. The word Ichabod means 'no glory' and God is able to give or remove the glory of a nation as He so determines. We also saw how nations and empires are like people in that they can have births and deaths. Scary stuff actually for we tend to think that things will continue as they always did and that 'our nation' won't fall like others have. But alas, we also saw that the same Babylonian spirit manifests itself today and you can begin to see the writing on the wall once again.

Anyway, time to move on! This study carries on from where the last one finished and looks at Daniel 5:18-30. Where as the last study focused more on nations as a whole, this study is bringing it back home... this study will focus on the individual with particular emphasis on the following two things:

- 1) The precarious position of the unbeliever
- 2) The importance of this life for the believer

So let's have a look. Daniel has just been called in to give the interpretation of the writing to the king.

Why the history lesson?

Daniel 5:18-21 "O king, the Most High God gave your father Nebuchadnezzar sovereignty and greatness and glory and splendor. Because of the high position he gave him, all the peoples and nations and men of every language dreaded and feared him. Those the king wanted to put to death, he put to death; those he wanted to spare, he spared; those he wanted to promote, he promoted; and those he wanted to humble, he humbled. But when his heart became arrogant and hardened with pride, he was deposed from his royal throne and stripped of his glory. He was driven away from people and given the mind of an animal; he lived with the wild donkeys and ate grass like cattle; and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven, until he acknowledged that the Most High God is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and sets over them anyone he wishes.

As Daniel confronts king Belshazzar he begins with a slightly unusual approach. He starts with a history lesson. Why you ask? Well, this king should have learned! This king should have seen what happened to his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar and humbled himself before God. Belshazzar had been given great light. He had been given tremendous grace. He should have learned⁴⁶... he should have known better than to mock the God of Israel while praising the so called gods of silver and gold. So Daniel, like a wise court prosecutor, starts with the facts of history. He is building his case and laying a foundation for the judgement and conclusion to come! And once he has finished laying out the facts, all will know why the writing has now appeared.

⁴⁶ There is an old saying 'those who do not learn from history are condemned to repeat it.' Too true. On the lighter side, a school put up a sign in the hall that read 'those who fail history are condemned to repeat it!' Unfortunately that is also true as many of us discovered! But examine history and we find that mankind is so slow to learn. The German philosopher Hegel said 'History teaches that man learns nothing from history.' Sad but true and especially so in king Belshazzar's case as we shall see.

The precarious position of the unbeliever

*Daniel 5:22-23 "But you his son, O Belshazzar, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this. Instead, you have set yourself up against the Lord of heaven. You had the goblets from his temple brought to you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines drank wine from them. You praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or understand. **But you did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways.***

When Daniel was asked to interpret the Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the great tree being chopped down, he did so almost with a sadness that the interpretation applied to king Nebuchadnezzar and not his enemies. There seemed to be a fondness there. Well, things are quite different for this king and Daniel is straight to the point. "You knew all this!" "You knew it Belshazzar... you saw how God humbled your Grandfather and yet you still wouldn't humble yourself!" "You had been given great revelation and light from God and you rejected it! You mocked the true God and made created things into a god!" You can just imagine the force of Daniel's words as he speaks straight to the king's actions. And yet, as I write this, I see the same words condemning those in the western nations. Have not America, the United Kingdom, Western Europe etc done the same thing? When we look at our history we see that we were given great light. We have received much revelation and teaching concerning the true God and His ways and yet, as a whole, it is now being rejected. That is what makes this book of Daniel so important in this age!

Look at how this scripture above describes the One whom they despise and turn their backs on: "the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways". The one that is being mocked and being declared irrelevant in our societies is the one who holds the very life and breath of the mocker in His hand. God could clench His fist and snuff out their life if He so wished. Now I don't want to rush past this verse too quickly as it was one of the main verses in this passage that stood out to me and we all know people in this position. For those curious (and with good eyesight) more has been added in the small print which explores further this precarious position of the unbeliever.⁴⁷

What strange little words are these...?

Vs 25 This is the inscription that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN

Now here are the words that were written on the wall – Mene, Mene, Tekel, Parsin. Four little words but what confusion they caused! The problem was that each Aramaic word had more than one meaning.

Mene – means 'numbered' or mena (a unit of money)

Tekel – means 'weighed' or 'shekel' (a unit of money)

Parsin – means 'divided' or 'Persia' or 'half a shekel'

So as the Babylonians tried to interpret this message there were a few interpretations open to them. At it's best it might be saying 'money, money, money!'. Or, just possibly, it meant something more foreboding. I'm sure you know the story... they weren't coming into some quick riches...it was the later. Something foreboding! It meant...

⁴⁷ This brief little detour will just examine this precarious position of the unbeliever a little more. There is a key Psalm that emphasises this well. I have written briefly on this before but let's look again at Psalm 73. You are going to have to read it please! Go on, I did say please. In verses 1-3 we read of Asaph, a godly man struggling to remain godly as he views the prosperity of the wicked. Look at how he describes his culture in verses 4-11... it could well be describing king Belshazzar in the text before us. Or for that matter it could also be describing many in our own culture today. Now look at the important verses in 16-20: "*When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me **till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny. Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin. How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors! As a dream when one awakes, so when you arise, O Lord, you will despise them as fantasies.***"

After being envious of the prosperity of the wicked, Asaph gets a glimpse of their true position. They are standing on slippery ground and only the goodness of God holds them from falling. Nothing else! And He could take His hand away and let them go whenever He wishes. The one they mock is the only one who now holds them from slipping into a Christ-less eternity! That is the precarious position of the unbeliever!

Numbered, weighed and divided

Vs 26-28 "This is what these words mean: Mene: God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end. Tekel: You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting. Peres: Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians."

As Daniel gives the true interpretation of the writing on the wall you can only imagine the fear rising within the king. "Numbered, numbered, weighed and divided. Your number is up Belshazzar. You have been weighed and found to be a spiritual featherweight. Your life and kingdom is over. You have been found wanting."

Important words for us all! God not only numbers our days, but he weighs our lives. And He not only weighs our lives, but He records and judges our deeds. The fact is that all of us will have to hop on the heavenly scales one day. The Bible says that "it is appointed unto all men to die once and then face judgement." For the believer, this will not be a judgement of their sins, for that took place 2000 years ago as Jesus was nailed to the cross. But there is a judgement of our lives and all that was based on Jesus will remain and be rewarded.

1 John 2:28 And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.⁴⁸

Third in the Kingdom... for a whole entire hour

Daniel 5:29-31 Then at Belshazzar's command, Daniel was clothed in purple, a gold chain was placed around his neck, and he was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom. That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain, and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom, at the age of sixty-two.

Finally we see that for telling Belshazzar that his kingdom has come to an end, Daniel is rewarded by being made a third ruler in the kingdom! You can probably see Daniel just shaking his head saying 'you don't get it do you? Are you not listening... you don't have a kingdom!' Now from what I know of God, if the king had genuinely repented even at this very late stage then he wouldn't have been judged and lost his life.⁴⁹

So we read in the scripture that that very night Darius the Mede took over the kingdom and king Belshazzar was killed. Hmm... and I thought the walls of Babylon were impenetrable! Belshazzar obviously thought that was the case. So how did the Medes and the Persian army get in? Well it is an interesting story and one that shows how even the mighty can fall in one day.

History records for us how they did it. You may remember that the Medo-Persian army had been camped outside the walls of Babylon. But the walls of Babylon were said to be wide enough to race six chariots side by side so there was no breaking in! The Babylonians had also stock piled up to 20 years of food so there was no starving them out either. But they had an Achilles heel. The river Euphrates ran underneath the wall giving the city a constant source of fresh water. So what the Medes and Persians did was dig up river an alternative channel for the water to flow. This reduced the amount of water flowing under the walls enough so that they could simply walk in under the walls of Babylon. With the king throwing such a grand party inside the Medo-

⁴⁸ When someone dies, there is the sense of finality. That is, you know that nothing can now be changed, no more words can be said or expressed. Sometimes people feel regret when someone dies that they hadn't been with them more or had an issue between them resolved. But death is final in terms of our relationship with someone in this life. 1 John 2:28 tells us to abide in Christ so that when He comes we will be confident and won't feel any shame. It gives the possibility at least that some will feel shame at His coming. Obviously there will be great joy and wonder, but there also could be a limited time of shame or regret over a life that was not lived with eternity in mind. Worth thinking about.

⁴⁹ Other examples exist like the Ninevites in Jonah chapter 3 who genuinely repented and were spared judgement (much to Jonah's annoyance!) They were just as wicked as the Babylonians but after a decree from the king, everyone humbled themselves before the Lord when they heard of the upcoming judgement. Even every beast had to be covered in sackcloth! But not our Belshazzar. No sign of repentance here! Or think of the thief on the cross. It says in Matt 27:44 that at the start both robbers who were crucified with Jesus hurled abuse on Him. And yet, through a miracle, one robber would later believe in Jesus! Even at the this very late stage of his life, because he genuinely turned to the Lord, salvation was granted to him. Amazing. I have always enjoyed the words of Martyn Lloyd Jones concerning these two robbers crucified with Christ -

"One thief was saved so that there would always be hope. But only one so that there would not be presumption."

Persian army was able to take the city without much force. And thus, king Belshazzar of Babylon was killed the very night that God wrote His judgement upon the wall.

But this had all been prophesied earlier by Isaiah concerning Babylon:

Isaiah 47:7-9 You said, 'I will continue forever-- the eternal queen!' But you did not consider these things or reflect on what might happen. (8) Now then, listen, you wanton creature, lounging in your security and saying to yourself, 'I am, and there is none besides me. I will never be a widow or suffer the loss of children.' (9) Both of these will overtake you in a moment, on a single day: loss of children and widowhood. They will come upon you in full measure, in spite of your many sorceries and all your potent spells.

Conclusion

Daniels case against Belshazzar was based upon the fact that God had given the king great light and understanding, yet it made no difference and the king carried on living in contempt of God. This speaks to our nation and culture as well as to our lives personally. There is often a disconnection between what we know and how it affects our daily lives. There is no doubting that the pull of the world and the Babylonian spirit are very strong.⁵⁰

But let us remember the two aspects that have come out of this study – the precarious position of the unbeliever and the importance of this life for the believer. Let us not be like king Belshazzar who knew it all but did nothing, but like Daniel who set himself apart for the Lord to use

⁵⁰ Regarding the pull of the world, I watched the movie 'Into the Wild' the other day. It is the kind of movie that stays with you for a while. It is the sad story of Chris McCandless who grew up in Annandale, Virginia. After graduating in 1990 from Emory University, McCandless gave away his bank savings of \$25,000 to Oxfam, burned his remaining money, cut up his credit cards and went 'Into the Wild'. Now, I'm not suggesting you do that but the movie sure made me think about the pull of society towards commercialism and conformity. As Christians, we should 'conform' to the ways of our Lord, not the ways of this world. McCandless sadly died in Alaska alone (from starvation) but the movie does show some earlier encounters he had with Christians and I can only hope that he knew God before his death. In his journal they found this written - 'I have had a happy life and thank the Lord. Goodbye and may God bless all!'

Here are some lyrics from one of the songs from the movie:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=68796wVvtrU>

Society

ohhh, It's a mystery to me,
we have a greed, with which we have agreed
You think you have to want more than you need
until you have it all you won't be free

society, you're a crazy breed
I hope you're not lonely without me

When you want more than you have, you think you need
and when you think more than you want your thoughts begin to bleed
I think I need to find a bigger place
'cos when you have more than you think you need more space

society, you're a crazy breed
I hope you're not lonely without me
society, have mercy on me
I hope you're not angry if I disagree
society, crazy and deep
I hope you're not lonely without me



Service Times: 9:00am & 10:45am

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