

Wisdom to Live By
"When Kingdoms Rise and Fall"
(Daniel 2:1-49; 12:1-3)

Introduction:-

Dreams and nightmares come to us all. More often than not, when they do, we learn to shake them off as having no real consequence for our lives. But in the Bible, when men of power and influence had unusual dreams, they were left shaking in their boots, or more appropriately PJs as one commentator puts it! What then must they do, and what must we do, in order to get "peace of mind"? Further, what message is left for us to ponder from these dreams today? Let us now focus more closely Daniel Chapter two for an answer.

1. First we have a case of a Bad Dream and Humanity's Basic Insecurity (verses 1-13).

This passage begins: "And in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar (604 BC), Nebuchadnezzar had dreams", which brought on a "troubled spirit" and "sleepless" nights (verse 1), as well as a deep sense of "anxiety" over the meaning of one particular dream (verse 3). A troubling trifecta if there ever was one!! In order to allay his fears and insecurity, he called upon all "four" categories of wise men from his own kingdom to try and interpret his dream, but he made this doubly difficult for them by asking for the detail of the dream itself, as well as the interpretation, probably because he knew that they were all too proficient in simply giving stock answers from their dream manuals (verse 9). Here the brutality as well as the deep insecurity of the king of Babylon is on display, but notice the all important confession of verse 11 which will lead to similar confessions as the chapter progresses, as well as the key to the chapter.

2. Secondly, we have a case of Knocking at Heaven's Door and Daniel saving the Day (verses 14-30).

In this section, the helplessness of Paganism is revealed as a religious cul-de-sac. It can give no sure word from outside. By contrast, life is a dead-end street without a God who is "accessible" and "discloses" what the future holds. This was also the message to the exiles in Babylon, as this section unfolds. In contrast to Nebuchadnezzar, the composure and wisdom of Daniel is displayed, by finally approaching the king, and praying about the matter with his three friends. Then during the night,

the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision (verse 19). The story would flow very nicely if immediately after verse 19 we read verse 24 and following. But the writer will have nothing of it!! He pauses for praise in verses 20-23. Some scholars consider this hymn to be the key to this chapter, just as a wisdom poem is placed at the centre of the book of Job at Job 28. The story is told how C.H. Spurgeon was in the process of explaining the gospel to a woman who was on the edge of entering the kingdom, when she burst out with the words, "Oh, Mr Spurgeon, if the Lord saves me, he shall never hear the end of it." That should be our attitude, and was Daniel's here, as he paused to give thanks for God's gracious intervention. And in these verses, Daniel praises God for his wisdom, power, and sovereignty over the nations. For God alone is the one who changes times and seasons; who gives wisdom to the wise, and knowledge to the discerning; who sets up kings and deposes them. Also, He alone is God, because only He reveals deep and hidden things, and can reveal the future. This word was also given by Isaiah to God's people living in Babylonian exile at this time under Nebuchadnezzar's reign, at Isaiah 41:21-29, when God's people themselves were tempted to look to lifeless idols for direction, either past, present, or future. Further, this passage from Isaiah also predicted the rise of a new deliverer in Cyrus the Persian, and the end of Nebuchadnezzar's reign. And so should we offer praise to our God when all around us is ignorance and darkness. Notice that this then leads to the further confession of verse 28 to the king, thus creating a parallel to verse 11 at the conclusion of the previous section. Back there, in verse 11, the confession of the wise men within Nebuchadnezzar's court was that the king's request was far too difficult, for no one could reveal such knowledge to the king, excepts the gods, and they do not live among men. In other words, these gods were not accessible, and for that reason, also unreliable. But now in verses 27-30, Daniel not only reinforces the inability of the wise men to explain to the king the mystery he has asked about, but now adds that there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and as such is accessible, and what is more, has revealed to the king what is about to happen in world history. In this way, Daniel contrasts his God with the pagan gods the Babylonians worship, thus making the further point that the wisdom that counts is not the wisdom taught by the Babylonians, but the wisdom which God reveals. This wisdom also became an instrument of grace and mercy toward the Babylonians, because when it became clear that Daniel could reveal and interpret the king's dream, Daniel then approached Arioch, the king's executioner, and asked that the wise men of Babylon not be executed. Again illustrating the point that true wisdom does not reside

in human beings; but even Daniel himself was totally dependent upon the God who alone can give such wisdom.

3. Thirdly, we have a case of a Kingdom that Cannot be Shaken (verses 31-49).

In this final section Daniel recounts the dream to the king (verses 31-35), and then proceeds with its interpretation (verses 36-45), followed by the grand confession and acknowledgment of Daniel's God by Nebuchadnezzar at verse 47; as God of gods, the Lord of kings, and one who reveals mysteries. This provides the third and final parallel to verses 11 and 28 as conclusions to the previous two sections. In the end, there is only one God who knows and controls the beginning of history to its very end. But this has no real traction for Nebuchadnezzar. For him, Daniel's God is really only one who "reveals mysteries", but not as one who has given him the power and authority to rule over creation in a responsible way in the light of Genesis 1:28. Later records, including the evidence of Daniel 4:8; would imply that Nebuchadnezzar never became an exclusive worshipper of the one true God. Then in the interpretation of the four metals/kingdoms which follow, which may represent the Babylon, Persian, Greek, and Roman empires, the major emphasis falls upon the first and fourth kingdoms. Notice verse 39 - "After you"... A final blow to human pride and presumption!! - Did Nebuchadnezzar give much thought to this? Do we? Finally history and kingdoms "degenerate". There is no "progress gene" that ensures some kind of movement upward. Finally, a fifth kingdom, which is set up, or built upon the foundation of all these kingdoms (verse 44), will finally crush them all to pieces, and usher in the eternal Kingdom of God, that will not be shaken. Finally this culminated with the coming of Jesus Christ and his proclamation of the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:14-15; Luke 11:20). The dream of Nebuchadnezzar thus represents the conflict between the kingdoms of this world and the kingdom of God, and announces that God will have the final victory!

Conclusion.

Nebuchadnezzar did not forget this dream. Neither should we, for we belong to a kingdom that shall not be broken. How does this affect the way in which we live out our kingdom values in the presence of a dark and perishing world? The Book of Daniel at 12:1-3 ends with a wisdom challenge. Speaking of the end times, Daniel says, "At that time, Michael the Great Prince who protects your people will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of the nations

until then. But at that time your people – everyone whose name is found written in the Book –will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. But those who are *wise* will shine like the brightness of the Heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, will shine like the stars forevermore.” We have inscribed this final text from Daniel 12:3 upon our daughter Cathy’s grave as a lasting memorial and blessing to her life. May we too walk into the future with this wisdom text engraved upon our lives. Amen.