

We continue in our series called Daniel, Lessons in Exile. As we saw last week, Daniel and his friends were exiled into the Kingdom of Ancient Babylon. It was around 600 BC, and Babylon was ruled by King Nebuchadnezzar. Ancient Babylon has come to symbolize powerful empires throughout history that are opposed to the things of God. And in order for us to apply the teachings of Daniel today, we need to recognize that here in the United States, we live under the influence of forces opposed to God.

And these forces present challenges to Christians. We are called to be holy, set apart, unstained by these powerful forces. Whether one might call the Bay Area modern-day Babylon or maybe Babylonesque, there are dark, powerful forces at work. And as Daniel learned to live for God in his Babylon, so too, we can follow his example and learn to live for God in our Babylon.

We will look at Daniel 2 and how God allowed Daniel to be a Godly influencer on his Babylon. May our study equip us to influence our Babylon for God's glory. *"In the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his mind was troubled and he could not sleep"* (Daniel 2:1). According to research on dreams, most people over ten years old have four to six dreams a night. More than half of us believe our dreams reveal meaningful truths. There is something to this.

What is even more interesting to me is that sometimes God has revealed himself through supernatural dreams as a means to communicate with us. In fact, in the Bible, there are over 100 references to dreams God had given people as a means to communicate with them. Daniel 2 is one of those times. Nebuchadnezzar has a dream. He does not know that this is a dream from God, but it is. And in this dream, God reveals to Nebuchadnezzar a little bit about himself, Babylon, and Daniel's God.

#### **The King and His Occultic Advisors**

**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. vv. 2-3**

After the king had this dream, he was disturbed, so he called on his advisors. He called on what the Bible calls magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and astrologers. They were specifically trained in the occult to tap into spiritual forces. No doubt these guys were the cream of the occultic crop. They used incantations in order to call on the demonic to try to discern things. I read that a favorite practice of these spiritual advisors was to gather chicken livers and jiggle them. And if they jiggled the livers just right, the jiggling livers would reveal the future.

**Then the astrologers answered the king, "May the king live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will interpret it." 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 honor. 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." vv. 4-7**

His advisors, of course, protested. "Who could interpret dreams without knowing the dream?" But the king stood firm. He said, "If you don't tell me my dream, I will have you cut into pieces and your houses turned into rubble." His advisors continued to protest, probably stalling for time, hoping the king might change his mind. When he didn't,

**The astrologers answered the king, "There is no one on earth who can do what the king asks! No king, however great and mighty, has ever asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or astrologer. What the king asks is too difficult. No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among humans." vv. 10-11**

Nebuchadnezzar ordered the execution of all the wise men in Babylon. I guess when you are considered a god by your people, and you are unaccountable, you do stuff like that. Remember that Daniel and his friends had advanced through their service to the king, and they were now lumped in with these advisers. It looks like there is very little job security for these government jobs. The king's guard was sent to look for Daniel and his friends to put them to death too. It's looking like Daniel and his friends' influence on their Babylon was about to come to a violent end here in Chapter 2.

**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. vv. 14-15**

Think about the pressure on this teenage Hebrew boy in the strange land of Babylon. We need to dig deeper here. We cannot influence our Babylon without wisdom and tact. I have been known to describe someone I admire spiritually as a person with wisdom, but I never describe them as a person with tact. I just don't think that way. But God wants us to think that way and see that a wise person is a tactful person. And tact is a necessary virtue to influence our Babylon.

A tactful person shows discretion and good judgment. They handle hard situations delicately. Daniel had the ability to say things without

offending people. Tact is the knack of making a point without making an enemy. O. A. Battista, a well-known chemist and author said it this way, "Tact is the ability to make a person see the lightning without letting him feel the bolt."

When we think of wisdom in the Bible, we tend to go to a book like Proverbs for inspiration. I know I do. A person seeking wisdom may embark on a journey to memorize and apply certain proverbs over their long life of experience and learning from their mistakes. But the fact that Daniel is declared wise points to more than living by lists of wise principles. There are a lot of wise people living in our Babylon. We all live by people and have worked with people who have some wisdom but don't follow God. We also live by people who have superior intellect and impressive credentials but just seem to make unwise decisions. And this baffles us.

What made Daniel so wise? His wisdom came out of a relationship with God. What Daniel had that the king didn't, that his advisers didn't, was a relationship with God. I love how someone put it, "Wisdom is not a concept to be learned but a relationship to be enjoyed."

So for us to influence our own Babylon, we need to embrace the spiritual reality that true wisdom comes through a relationship with a person, Jesus Christ. So if we want to influence our Babylon, we need to:

### **Know Who is True Wisdom**

The Apostle Paul encourages us with this in 1 Corinthians. *"It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God" (1 Cor. 1:30a)*. He goes on to say that we have the mind of Christ.

His work to form us empowers us with His wisdom. Paul prayed that God would give us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation. And that we would understand this interconnection between a life with Christ and a life of wisdom. *"I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better" (Eph. 1:17)*.

And James tells us that if we lack wisdom from God, we should ask, and God will answer. As Daniel needed wisdom from God to influence his Babylon, we need wisdom from God to influence our Babylon. *"If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you" (James 1:5)*. Go to God every day and ask for wisdom in your Babylon and trust God that he will give what you ask for. That God will give you what you need for that day.

So this edict from the king must have raised Daniel's anxiety and stress levels. He and his friends were about to be executed, and he didn't know why. He asked Arioch, the king's guard, why the king issued such a harsh decree. After Arioch explained things to him, Daniel made a decision to go to the king and ask for more time, which the king granted. He needed more time because he didn't have anything from God, at that time, to offer the king.

So what would Daniel do next? Does he pack a bag, sneak out, and make a run for it? Does he try to figure out a clever way to trick the king into believing he knew his dream? Does he just throw himself at the feet of the king and plead for his life?

**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. Daniel 2: 17-18**

Daniel responded to this crisis in his Babylon with prayer. Can you imagine the intensity of that prayer meeting? Daniel gathered his friends who loved God and prayed like crazy. From what we learned last week in chapter 1, Daniel was the wisest man in his Babylon, and what did he do first? He went to pray. He pleaded for God's mercy. He pleaded that God would intervene. Folks, you might have high levels of intelligence, experience, proven problem-solving skills, but prayer is the wisest first response to any crisis in our lives.

### **Know When to Pray**

Make prayer the priority in your Babylon. Pray first, pray often, and pray fervently. Daniel models prayer as our first line of defense, not the last resort. Prayer means to ask God and pause to listen for His answer. Daniel and his friends prayed and listened throughout the night.

I think we have a lot to learn about the space for prayer in our Babylon? To influence our Babylon, we need to confess to God our limitations. We don't have the smarts to stop the dark forces opposed to God. One of the wisest confessions we can make to God in our Babylon is, "God, I can't fix this! Please be merciful. I can't heal the wound, correct the fault, clean up the mess without you. God, you must take control. God, you must act in my crisis in Babylon. God, I am not able, only you are." This is wisdom!

When our hearts are committed to these truths, our actions change. We start going to prayer before we pick up the phone, schedule a meeting, create a list, or write up a plan. It's wisdom to go to God first. And it is wisdom to affirm the conviction that God can help. Prayer is God's way out.

I can tell you that when God's people focus on prayer, doors do open. This past year, we saw some people healed spiritually and even healed physically. We have seen marriages healed and relationships reconciled. And even if God didn't heal in the specific way we were praying, we saw those who prayed grow deeper in their relationship with Christ, grow deeper in their relationship with their church family, and become more of an influencer in their Babylon. We have seen our friends in Babylon surprised and without an answer when God answers prayer.

Maybe some of us are hesitant to seek God in prayer in a time of crisis because we haven't sought him regularly ever before. Don't let that stop you. If you haven't made prayer your first response, make it your next response. *"During the night the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision..." (Daniel 2:19a)*. God spoke directly and specifically to Daniel when he prayed.

This way of God speaking seems rare today. I believe that God can still speak through dreams or vision and reveal himself to us if he chooses to. But any claim that a dream comes from God should never contradict the Bible, God's written Word. Any special word from God should point

us to Jesus and His good news that through his death and resurrection, redemption is promised to all who believe and accept him by faith. Any word from God should lead us to give God credit with praise.

**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 deposes kings and raises up others. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with him. I thank and praise you, God of my ancestors: You have given me wisdom and power, you have made known to me what we asked of you, you have made known to us the dream of the king." vv. 19b-23**

The straightforward way of looking at this is: Daniel prayed. God answered. Daniel praised God. Crisis over, right? But Daniel is still faced just a threatening situation because he knew what the king's dream meant. And he knew that the king probably wasn't going to like what he was about to tell him. Nebuchadnezzar had dreamed of an enormous statue (31-33). Its head was made of gold. The chest and arms were of silver, the belly and thighs were bronze, the legs were iron, and the feet were iron and clay.

Then in the king's dream, a rock that was not cut and formed by human hands struck the statue and shattered it and pulverized it into dust, and the wind swept the dust away. And the rock that destroyed the statue became a huge mountain and filled the earth. (34-35). Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar his entire dream.

Then the king said, "Now, Daniel, tell me what this means." And Daniel laid out the interpretation. Try to imagine this teenager standing before the most powerful king on earth, who had the power to kill Daniel with a flick of his hand. Did Daniel's voice quiver? Was he nauseous? His life and the life of his friends seemed to depend on his actions. I imagine Daniel swallowed hard, whispered another "God Help Me" prayer, and then told the king this.

"King Nebuchadnezzar, eventually your kingdom will end. Your kingdom is the golden head of the statue. After you, there would be another kingdom represented by the silver chest and arms. It will be less powerful and less opulent than yours. (Many commentators believe this second kingdom is the Medo-Persian Empire) And king, this second kingdom will be conquered by a third kingdom represented by the bronze in its middle and thighs. (Many commentators believe this second kingdom is the Greek Empire under Alexander) The bronze is powerful, but it would shine less bright in the world. And this third kingdom will be conquered by a 4th kingdom represented by the legs, feet, and toes. This 4th kingdom is made of iron and clay, which is the strongest at the beginning but eventually will go off in different directions and not stay held together. (Many commentators believe this second kingdom is the Roman Empire)

So I could picture Nebuchadnezzar staring at Daniel and then asking him, "Young man, are you saying that some big rock not made by human hands will shatter my kingdom into pieces so small and insignificant

that they will blow away like chaff in the wind? I imagine Daniel gulped and, with as much confidence as he could muster, answered, "Yes, sir."

So let's stop the story for a moment. In the midst of real danger in his Babylon, Daniel praised God because he had confidence that God was near and working out his plan. Folks, God will never abandon us in Babylon. He keeps working no matter how hard it may get.

### **Know Why to Praise**

When we see God work, we become strong instead of weak. When we see God work, we become joyful in our praise instead of despairing in our circumstances. When we see God work, we become confident in our praise instead of unsure in our fears. So let me give you some things to think about if you are struggling with reasons to praise God in your Babylon.

Praise God for His present good. Daniel didn't know how every detail would work out in the future; he did recognize that God's care was real for him in the present. God had shown Daniel he was working by letting him see and understand the king's dream. There was enough present good to praise God even though the future details remained scary. Daniel praised God for the good he could see.

When you are struggling to praise God, go back to the priority of prayer. "Lord, where did I see your goodness yesterday?" Ask a friend, "Hey, I'm having a hard time praising God. Can you help me to see some good God is doing around me?"

Praise God for His past good. In Daniel's praise in verses 20-23, he remembered God's goodness to his ancestors. And just back in chapter 1, Daniel saw that God was faithful to preserve him and his friends. God's past faithfulness to these young men must have encouraged them to gather together to pray and praise in this latest crisis. To know why to praise God in your current Babylon, remember the good God has done in your past. Also, praise God for His future good. We are about to see that Daniel could praise because God had revealed to him some of what would happen in the future.

That rock that was not formed by human hands, the rock that busted the kingdoms of the world into millions of tiny pieces, will form the 5th kingdom. And we now know that the Rock is Jesus Christ, and his 5th kingdom includes his church that will be built and be God's ultimate triumph on earth. Your Babylon will not stand against the 5th kingdom.

**"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 endure forever. This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands—a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold to pieces. "The great God has shown the king what will take place in the future. The dream is true and its interpretation is trustworthy." vv. 44-45**

God's goodness displays itself in our past, present, and future. Perhaps you are really being beaten up by Babylon. Shift your focus. Daniel tells us that no matter how deep the darkness is, we are still in God's hands.

He does not let go. Maybe God will have us sit in the darkness, in the unknown for a season, as Daniel did in that all-night prayer meeting. I love this quote from Corrie Ten Boom. "Never be afraid to entrust our unknown future into the hands of a known God."

In order to influence our Babylon, we need to know who is true, when to pray, why we praise, and lastly, we need to know what to tell others.

**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 were lying in bed are these: "As Your Majesty was lying there, 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 anyone else alive, but so that Your Majesty may know the interpretation and that you may understand what went through your mind. vv. 27-30**

Daniel resisted the temptation to take credit for the amazing revelation that God gave him. He made sure the king knew that God alone was to be glorified for the revelation.

### **Know What to Tell Others**

Back in November, I was walking behind my two-year-old grandson on dangerous stairs. He could not recognize that I was keeping him from falling by walking closely behind him with my hands on each side of his little rear end. Part of the way down the stairs, he looked over his shoulder back at me with a proud look that said, "I'm doing it by myself, Poppy." With the palms of my hands, I was preventing a catastrophic fall. When he reached the bottom, he was so proud of himself for safely navigating the stairs; he didn't give any glory to me. In the same way, we think we are pretty important and in control, real influencers, but in reality, God's hands are keeping us from a catastrophic fall. Be like Daniel; recognize that God guides you and give him the glory!

### **The King's Response**

**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." vv. 46-47**

When we tell others about our God, they see our God is better. God chooses to work most powerfully when his name is made known. For Daniel, the risk was great, and God assumed control when Daniel was courageous to tell others about his God. By our witness, others see the

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

Lord better, and as a consequence, they are forced to deal with God's goodness on some level.

**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. vv. 48-49**

God gives us everything we need to influence our Babylon. May God help us all never to lose sight that he has told us what to do, who to trust, and who to tell others about so we might influence our Babylon. Amen!

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