

Introduction

- God's people under the thumb of the Babylonians:
 - subdued in 605BC, and some carried off - including Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah
 - these we meet in training to be wise men and senior civil servants in the Babylonian empire in chapter 1, fighting to remain loyal to God in the midst of a godless world
 - in chapter 2 we hear of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, and all the upset, worry and concern that goes with it - **both for him** and **for the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers he orders killed for not knowing his dream!!**
- We left Nebuchadnezzar hearing from Daniel something of the purpose for which God had sent the dream:
 - I summarised it as "**that Nebuchadnezzar might understand**" - and commented that **understand** had as much to do with God and who he is as it did the future
 - before we plunge into the detail of this week's passage, glance back at Daniel 2:28 **He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come.**"
 - sounds like the future!!
 - but a literal rendering of the text is "**He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days**"
 - **latter days** is more than merely **the future**; it is the end time, the destination of history, the Kingdom of God with its goal of God's sovereign rule over all things finally clear and acknowledged...
- *Nebuchadnezzar is being shown God's purposes, the meaning behind the events, that he might know the one who gives those events their meaning*

The Dream (v.31-35)

- Enormous, dazzling statue:
 - perhaps not too surprising - Nebuchadnezzar would have been familiar with great statues of Marduk that occupied prominent positions in Babylon
 - further, not uncommon for kings to lie at foot of statues of an image of a god in a temple, eg to ask for guidance...
- Four metals (v.32) probably symbolise the variety of the natural resources of the earth:
 - four also probably suggests a **universal scope**, cf "**four corners of the earth**", or the four rivers of Eden (**Gen 2:10-14**)
 - gold and silver carry overtones of wealth
 - bronze and iron carry overtones of power
 - however, the clay carries the sense of fatal weakness
 - and it is this weakness that proves the great statue's undoing
- So we get to v.34 and the rock cut not by human hand
 - **remember, this is a dream - images are melting and flowing into one another!**
 - but the insubstantial nature of the statue is vividly evoked by its dissolving into chaff
 - the contrast with the rock is clear - **he who laughs last, laughs longest...**
 - "**filled the whole earth**" evokes echoes of Habakkuk 2:14...
 - **For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea (Hab 2:14)**
- *But what does it mean?*

The Interpretation (v.36-45)

- Important to remember that the dream **on its own** is not revelation
 - to say, as one commentator does, that the dream is merely "**raw material for revelation**", and suggest the full focus of the revelation is in the interpretation, doesn't do justice to what is happening here

Daniel 2:31-49 **The future from a Divine perspective** Fintry, 9/9/2007, pm

- this dream came from God, (as did its interpretation) - both are needed for all that God intended to reveal, meaning and the emotional force and impact that the imagery of the dream carries (over and above a dry description of future purposes)
- but certainly on its own, without interpretation, the dream could be heard to mean many things!
- vs.36-38
 - note blend of respect for Nebuchadnezzar alongside an uncompromising loyalty to God
 - (more on who the four kingdoms might be later)
 - but Nebuchadnezzar/Babylong identified as gold kingdom
 - Nebuchadnezzar flattered, presumably, and later points about destruction coming after his time would be reassuring too
- v.39
 - emphasis is on who is doing the changing - God
- v.40
 - does this contradict v.44, and the kingdom that will never be destroyed? - no, for God can accomodate this humanly all-conquering kingdom within his over-ruling providence, which uses human activity to work out his purpose
 - and indeed, this kingdom is vulnerable, as the next verses show...
- vs.41-34
 - many different suggestions have been made about this, but iron is suggestive to many of an authoritarian rule
 - whatever the detail, this kingdom has a fundamental weakness, a flaw at its heart
- vs.44-45
 - "those kings" are presumably the rulers of the various kingdoms?
 - and the distinction is being drawn between them and this new sovereignty - not least in its permanence
 - how this will happen is not specified (more in chapter 7!)
 - and indeed full revelation must await the coming of the King himself, Jesus Christ...
 - yet a partial glimpse is given here - a truth we cling to, even when the earthly kingdoms of our day, whether in nation state or cultural dominance, appear to reign supreme and the Kingdom of God does not...
 - ...for this is trustworthy

The Aftermath (v.46-49)

- Nebuchadnezzar is a bit OTT in his gratitude?!?
 - and notice, he's not actually paying much attention to the message of the dream!!
 - he's noticed the messenger, but not got the message
 - see how he talks of God in v.47: with something less than an acknowledgement of God as the only true God (for now at least - see chapter 4!)
 - he remains a polytheist, who can accomodate another God, albeit a powerful one!
 - and his focus is on God as revealer of mysteries rather than the one who changes times and seasons (v.21)
- In other words, he's getting there - he's not got there!
 - God's purpose of self-revelation is working, but is not instant
- Finish the exposition with the practical outworkings, the promotions:
 - there are some puzzles - how does the three years of 1:5 and apparently 1:18 reconcile with 2:1?
 - but worth noting that the different jobs given to Daniel ("high position" is literally

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"at the gate of the king", and probably a cabinet post in our terms) and Hananiah/Shadrach, Mishael/Meshach and Azariah/Abednego (provincial governors, outside the city itself) will help explain why they are at the centre of the drama of chapter three, and Daniel is not

Conclusions

- Issues raised by this whole chapter not already dealt with:

First, the Eternal and the Contemporary

- Truths like "God is sovereign" are timeless, true for every age and generation
 - however, they remain at the level of **blessed thoughts** unless they are lived out in the reality of present experience
 - is God in control today? Yes
 - but is he in control of our living? In the face of church decline, of 9/11 and on-going terrorism around the world, of Iraq and Afghanistan, of Zimbabwe and Sudan/Darfur, of terrible individual instances of evil?
 - as with every previous generation, we need to learn to trust - **belief in the fule of God is essential for the life of faith**

Second, the place of Revelation

- Can't simply read events and draw conclusions about what God is doing:
 - **for like the dream, we need the interpretation...**
 - and mostly we can't, Daniel like, make instant identifications between prophetic messages and world events!
 - so we need to hold up events and messages, whether world events, or visions or dreams we or others may have, against God's revelation - supremely in Scripture
 - we test and weigh, and ask God to reveal (cf 1 Corinthians 14:6)

Third, God and History

- This chapter in Daniel shows us, or reminds us, that **God is the Lord of history**, who works out his purposes even in the apparently meaningless flux of events
 - **there is purpose**
- How do we look to the future?
 - want to know?
 - fear?