

Daniel Series Part 3

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[0 : 00] It's a tiring business being the most powerful man in the world.

The Babylonian Oval Office had been a hub of activity as Nebuchadnezzar and his inner circle planned the next stage of their irresistible drive for world domination.

Nebuchadnezzar had only been in power a couple of years, but was already discovering that conquering was the easy part. Governing the restless natives was far more challenging.

But as days go, it had been a good one, and time for some well-deserved, odd and odd, a good meal, a glass of wine or two, and a good night's rest, just what the doctor ordered.

The meal, check. The wine, check. The night's rest, well, dream on. Well, actually, that was the problem.

[1 : 10] The king was dreaming dreams. Not the kind of dreams that inspire or intrigue. These were disturbing dreams that make you tremble and wake up in a sweat.

Dreams that terrify and perturb. Dreams that make sleep itself a frightening prospect. In the palace, the royal palace, the king does not sleep tonight.

Chapter 2 of Daniel begins by introducing us to a troubled king. We will soon be introduced to a godless intelligentsia, elite, before the appearance on stage of a godly teenager.

This is the manner in which we want to consider this first part of chapter 2 of Daniel. First of all, introducing ourselves to, as he has presented to us, this troubled king.

In verse 1 of chapter 2, we read, In the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams. His mind was troubled, and he could not sleep.

[2 : 25] What is it that troubles him? Well, he dreamed a dream. Now, in Nebuchadnezzar's day, such dreams were thought to be shadows that the future cast in front of itself.

Dreams gave an insight into the unknown, and that unknown or mysterious future disturbed Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar was a control freak.

Nebuchadnezzar was a control freak. Nebuchadnezzar was a control freak. It was a requirement to be one who dominates the world. But though he was so characterized by this urge to control everything, he could not control his own future.

He had the power, the power to put the fear of death in the hearts of others. But he had no power to quieten his own troubled heart.

He had wealth beyond imagining, but he could not buy a good night's sleep. He had everything except the one thing that he most needed, peace in his soul.

[3 : 43] His mind was troubled, and he could not sleep. Now, this is an ancient story, and yet Nebuchadnezzar is such a contemporary predicament.

You don't need to be a king to know what it is to be troubled. You don't need to be a king or an emperor to fear the future. You don't need to be one who dominates the world to question the purpose and the direction of your existence, to discover the mercurial quality of the peace that you long for, but struggle to grasp and to experience.

It doesn't seem to make sense. You have a decent job, yes, it could be better, it could be better paid, but it's okay. You have a nice family. Yes, there are problems, but yeah, it's a nice family that you're part of.

You look to the future, and your prospects are good, reasonable, and yet you're troubled, insecure, restless.

It was Augustine who famously observed that the human heart is restless until it finds its rest in God.

[5 : 07] We'll return to that in a few moments. But who is it that is troubling Nebuchadnezzar? He is troubled, that much is clear. Nebuchadnezzar, his mind was troubled, and he could not sleep.

But who is it that troubles him? Is that a reasonable question to pose? Can we actually identify a personal culprit? Is it not just life?

Life was troubling him. Is a troubled heart not just one of those things that so many experience? If we were to look for causes of his trouble, of his restlessness, of his insecurity, could we not identify a multiplicity of causes?

There would be, I'm sure, if we put to trying to find them a veritable cocktail of contributing factors that could explain why this man was troubled.

Some of them may be very visible, some of them hidden to the human eye. And of course, there may be much truth in what we've just said. But on this occasion, we have identified one who is described as the troubler of Nebuchadnezzar's soul.

[6 : 23] We can read verses 27 and 28. Daniel is about to reveal the mystery to Nebuchadnezzar. And what does Daniel say? 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 mystery. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come.

He is the one who has granted you this dream. He is the one who troubles Nebuchadnezzar. He is the culprit of Nebuchadnezzar's insomnia.

God is the one who is troubling Nebuchadnezzar. Now what do we make of such a God? A God who troubles men. Is God not meant to soothe and comfort?

A cosmic Prozac to blow away the blues. Is that not His job? To make us feel good and happy and peaceful? Is that not what God is there for?

[7 : 31] The God of the Scriptures is a troubling God. But He troubles with a purpose. A gracious purpose. In the case of Nebuchadnezzar, He would remind the king that His power is a given power.

The power that He enjoys, as we read in the interpretation of the dream. This power that He enjoys has been given to Him by God.

And it is a power that will pass, just as His empire will pass. And so, Nebuchadnezzar is troubled by God, that He would recognize that rather than revel in the gifts, Nebuchadnezzar must bow before the giver.

And God continues to trouble men and women. Perhaps He is troubling you.

No peace, a troubled conscience, fears of what tomorrow holds, annoying emptiness in your life that seemingly is not to be explained easily.

[8 : 46] And I say to you that if you are troubled, give thanks to God that He cares for you so much that He condescends to trouble you, to wake you out of your slumber, to challenge your pride and your self-sufficiency, that you too would bow down before the giver rather than just revel in the gifts.

So often life is made up of reveling in the gifts that are provided for us, and yet not a thought for the one who gives. No concern to bow before Him, no concern to acknowledge Him, no concern to recognize that our own life finds its purpose as we find our rest in Him.

And so God graciously troubles careless men and women, and we thank Him for it. But what does Nebuchadnezzar do?

He's troubled. It is God who is troubling him. But what does He do? Well, as day dawns on His sleepless night and His courtiers appear to attend to His every whim, they tentatively inquire as to His well-being.

I say tentatively because He looks like death warmed up, and they are understandably concerned as to His mood and what the implications might be for them.

[10 : 14] But tentatively they approach Him. How are you, O mighty King? How does Nebuchadnezzar reply to that inquiry? Does he say, oh, I'm fine?

I'm good? So-so? He does no such thing. Such is the intensity of His troubled state that He thinks nothing of revealing His vulnerability.

Now kings don't do vulnerable very well. It kind of messes up the image of omnipotence. But Nebuchadnezzar is desperate.

He's desperate. He's a troubled man. He needs help. And He cries out for help. What about you?

Perhaps the most popular line that we all are guilty of telling is a simple one, a short one, and it goes along these lines.

[11 : 16] I'm fine. I'm good. When we are far from fine and we are far from good. Now you may persuade others, but you know the reality.

Are you perhaps too proud to admit your troubled state? Too scared to ask for help? Too self-sufficient to seek answers to the big questions that trouble you, that gnaw at you, that in the quiet moments come to discomfort you?

Well, I would encourage you to learn from Nebuchadnezzar. This proud man, this powerful man, the most powerful man in the universe, and yet when he is troubled as he is troubled, he cries out for help.

He needs answers and he will not rest. Literally, he will not rest until he has answers to the questions that are torturing him. So we have a troubled king, but we also meet in the passage that we have read a godless intelligentsia.

And I use that word godless in its literal sense. An elite that knows nothing of God, has no time for God in their thinking. And we're going to develop this in a moment, but this is the adjective I've chosen to describe them.

[12 : 38] A godless intelligentsia. Verses 2 and 3. So the king summoned the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and astrologers to tell him what he had dreamed. And that's sufficient.

There we have described this intellectual elite that are called by Nebuchadnezzar. Now as we read of these men, and as we read the words that are used to describe them, magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and astrologers, we are maybe prone to imagine that these men are just a bunch of wackos, Babylonian mystic megs, or a Chaldean Russell Grant on a break from Strictly Come Dancing.

But we would be wrong to conclude that these men can be so easily dismissed as just a bunch of wackos. Much is made of the different names or designations used by Daniel, but it is likely that the use of multiple terms, magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, astrologers, is intended to paint a picture of an impressive array of experts in different fields of science and philosophy and indeed astrology.

These men were smart cookies. They were rightly recognized as the brightest minds of the empire, the creme de la creme of the Babylonian intelligentsia.

If anybody could help Nebuchadnezzar, these were the men. And what do we discover about them? Well, we can say the following about them from what we discover here in the chapter.

[14 : 19] First of all, these men were willing and confident. Notice in verse 4, Then the astrologers answered the king in Aramaic, O king, live forever. Tell your servants the dream and we will interpret it.

Notice their confidence. We will interpret it. They are confident in their own knowledge, in their own understanding, in their own discernment. These men know what they're talking about.

If they're given a dream, they will be able to interpret it. We will interpret it. They are not the charlatans that maybe even Nebuchadnezzar suspected they might be.

In his paranoia, he seems to be concerned that, well, they just make it up as they go along. Hence the challenge to actually tell them what the dream was and not only to interpret it.

Now, these men knew their stuff and they would apply their cutting-head knowledge to the questions the king might throw at them and they would have an answer. We will interpret it.

[15 : 19] As we fast forward to our own day, today we have our own intellectual elites, the high priests of scientific endeavor, the noble laureates, the professors and renowned academics, the experts and special advisors, all very clever, brilliant men and women.

We'll come back to them. But these Babylonian elites, willing and confident, but also we can say of them that they were honest. Proud though they no doubt were, they were honest enough to recognize their limitations.

We've read in verse 10 and 11, we can remind ourselves of the moment when they recognize that there are answers that they cannot give. The astrologers answered the king, there is not a man on earth who can do what the king asks.

Yes, we are very bright. Yes, we know our stuff, but what you ask of us today, we cannot answer. This goes beyond our capacity. What the king asks is too difficult.

It's just too difficult. They are honest enough to recognize that. It's true they had very little option but to recognize it, but honest nonetheless we can describe them as.

[16 : 36] The knowledge that was sought and the answers that were required were beyond them. Their science fell short. Their philosophy was impotent in the face of the demands that Nebuchadnezzar placed before them.

Nebuchadnezzar posed questions for which they had no answers. They had so many answers in every realm of human knowledge and science, but for these questions they had no answers.

And again, as we fast forward to our own day, do our own intellectual icons share that same honesty? No doubt some do, but there are those who labor under the illusion of omniscience.

They have all the answers. Their faith in science is bold and blind. They are swiftly filling all the gaps and so making redundant the God of the gaps as they would describe him.

They claim expertise not only in biology and physics, but offer answers in the realms of ethics and morality and purpose. Silly little men, they do tend to be men.

[17 : 45] Men seem to have a pretensity for folly. Silly little men with comically disproportionate egos who claim to have answers to all the questions.

Well, the Babylonian intellectuals, they were confident, but they were honest enough to recognize that here were questions they could not answer. But we can say one further thing about them, and that is that they were mistaken.

In what way were they mistaken? Well, they were capable men. They were honest men up to a point, but they were mistaken. They were profoundly mistaken in a rather intriguing aspect of their knowledge.

They were mistaken in their theology. You see, they reveal their theology there in verse 11. We've highlighted the verse already. Verse 11, 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. These intellectuals in Babylon believe in God or in any case in gods, but they are sure that God, if he does exist, whoever he is and whatever he might be or however many of them there are, this God or gods are uninvolved and uninterested in the likes of us.

[19 : 06] To quote their very words, they do not live among men. This was their theology. Gods do not live among men, and they were wrong.

They were mistaken. And again, as we think of how this might throw some light on our own generation, today we do have the militant new atheists who glory in their atheism, but many of the elite, yes, even the intellectuals make the same mistake as these Babylonian intellectuals.

A God of some description may exist. They don't discount the possibility. Some may even claim to believe in such a God, but this God has nothing or little to do with the real world.

So you can have a church-attending believer like Tony Blair, but whose right-hand man assured us in the matter of government, we don't do God.

See, God is out of the picture. Yes, He may exist. There may be such an entity, but He's nothing to do with the likes of us. He doesn't involve Himself in the day-to-day affairs of our life here in this world.

[20 : 25] So we meet these Babylonian experts, godless experts. God doesn't come into the picture. Godless advisors, godless counselors, with no answers for a troubled soul.

You see, this is very contemporary. You can have very, very clever men and women, and we applaud their capacity. We applaud their science.

We applaud their discoveries. We have no bones to pick with those who are so much more generously gifted in the intellectual realm than the one who speaks.

We applaud them. But there are answers that they cannot give, that their science textbooks and their discoveries cannot provide. There are answers that go beyond the realm of their knowledge.

But onto the stage in this account appears our friend Daniel, a godly teenager. We've discovered already that he would likely have been in his early to mid-teens, perhaps, when he was taken captive from Jerusalem.

[21 : 37] We're told that two or three years have passed, and so perhaps in his late teens. And this Daniel, in the very life that he lives, challenges the fundamental theological fallacy of the Babylonian intelligentsia.

You see, they contend that the gods do not live among men. That is their conviction. That is their theology. The gods do not live among men. But the god of Daniel is a hands-on god.

He is a god who is with Daniel, who dwells amongst Daniel. Daniel's god, the god of Abraham, the god of Isaac, the god of Jacob, the god of the scriptures, Jehovah.

He is a god who walks with Daniel, who talks with Daniel, who loves and directs Daniel. And this is eloquently illustrated in the account before us.

And let's just think about how God relates to Daniel, how God is with Daniel. As the crisis becomes apparent to Daniel, that indeed even his own life is in danger.

[22 : 50] He was one of the wise men, not called to the palace to interpret the dream or identify the dream in the first instance. He was a young lad after all others more able were called for that purpose.

But he is among that class of intellectuals, and so his life too is in danger. Indeed, the death sentence has been pronounced. And so when he is faced with that crisis, what does Daniel do?

Well, we're told what he does. We've read the chapter. He seeks an audience with the king and offers to interpret the dream. What can we say of this? Well, we can say this, that Daniel in this response that he gives is directed by God.

When Daniel is made aware of the crisis, his response is immediate. We read then in verse 14, when Ariok, the commander of the king's guard, had gone out to put to death the wise men of Babylon, he was on his way, sword in hand.

Daniel spoke to him with wisdom and tact. He asked the king's officer, why did the king issue such a harsh decree? Ariok then explained the matter to Daniel. At this, Daniel went into the king and asked for time.

[23 : 54] It could be understood asked for an appointment so that he might interpret the dream for him. In order to respond to the crisis that faces him in this very dramatic way, unanticipated way, Daniel does not need to secure an audience with some distant deity so as to inquire as to what he might do.

He knows his God. He has previous experience of the faithfulness of God, and so he is able, directed by God, to assure the king that there will be an answer for his big questions that trouble him so.

He's directed by God, but Daniel also relies upon God in facing this challenge that is presented to him. The confidence that he has, and clearly he is confident, though maybe he doesn't have a clear vision as to what will happen when he first offers to interpret the dream for the king.

But certainly the confidence that he has is not a presumptuous confidence. See, the occasion demanded immediate action, but this is swiftly followed by dependent prayer.

Then in verse 17, then Daniel, having secured this audience with the king and having the challenge to return with an interpretation of the dream, we read, then Daniel returned to his house and explained the matter to his friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

[25 : 24] 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. God has answers.

He had answers for the big questions that troubled Nebuchadnezzar's soul, and he has answers to the big questions that can trouble your soul. But in order for us to discover these answers, we must ask of God, we must ask him that he would reveal to us the answers that we seek and that we need.

Daniel asks that God would reveal to him the mystery. He involves his friends that they too would cry out to God and seek the answers that are required.

God ordinarily will speak through men and women, and it is through Daniel that he will speak to Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel's directed by God, he relies upon God, but Daniel also gives thanks to God.

You see, during the night, the mystery is revealed. During the night, the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision. What does Daniel do? Now, just place yourselves in the situation.

[26 : 45] He knows that the order has been given, that he and all the wise men be executed. And Nebuchadnezzar was not a man to give such orders lightly or to turn back on his word.

There is imminent danger of death, and now he has the revelation of the mystery. What would you expect him to do? What would you do in those circumstances? I imagine what I would do is, as quickly as my legs could carry me, I would be heading to that palace to tell the king the mystery that has been revealed to me, and so save myself from impending death.

But what does Daniel do? Then Daniel praised the God of heaven, and said, Praise be to the name of God forever 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.

[27 : 59] Daniel gives thanks to God, the God who is all-wise and all-powerful, but the God who chooses to grant wisdom to those who ask for it.

He grants knowledge and understanding and discernment to those who humbly ask for it. He reveals deep and hidden things.

He has answers for the big questions. He is the one who can satisfy the hungry soul and comfort the disturbed spirit.

And Daniel before he makes his way to the palace, bows down before his God and gives thanks to his God for who he is and for what he has done in revealing this mystery to Daniel.

What of today? Well, this is the same God. The God of Daniel is the same God who continues to address the big questions, who continues to be willing to answer the desperate cries of the confused and the tormented, and he continues to speak through his servants as he did through Daniel, so he does through us.

[29 : 22] A godly teenager, dependent upon the God of heaven, is revealed the mystery and is able to bring the answers that Nebuchadnezzar seeks.

We'll think more about the answers, the dream, and the interpretation on another occasion. But as we draw things to a close, as we pose ourselves the question, what are the answers to life's big questions?

perhaps the more relevant question is this, who is the answer to life's big questions? And the answer is the one who came to live among men.

You see, we've read of these Babylonian intellectuals and their conviction that God does not live among men, but the answer is precisely the one who came to live among men.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God. We've read in John's Gospel, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

[30 : 34] And then we have read these glorious words, and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We have a God who dwells among men, not a distant deity ininterested and apathetic to what goes on down here.

No, he came and dwelt among us. Not only did he dwell among us, but he died in our place.

On Calvary he paid the price of our sin as he died in our place. And on the third day he rose triumphant from the grave, and today he offers forgiveness and new life to all who would come to him.

He is able to forgive the troubled soul, to lighten the heavy heart, to bring peace where there is confusion, joy where there is despair.

And so be honest with yourself as I pose these questions. Is your heart troubled? Is your mind troubled?

[31 : 44] Is your soul troubled? Do you have big questions? To whom will you turn? The wisdom of this world, impressive though it is, will not satisfy.

It cannot answer those kind of questions. But there is one who can. There is one who came and dwelt among us.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, he can bring peace to your troubled soul. He can answer the questions that torment you. And so I would urge you, come to him.

Put your trust in him. Confess your sins to him that he would forgive you and grant you life and life in all its fullness. Come to Jesus.

Come quickly. Let us pray. El Him Him will Him will come to him.

[32 : 56] Pass home