

Are you on the right side of history?

One of the most powerful men on earth at the moment is the president of the United States of America: Barack Obama. During the week I did some research and discovered that one of his favourite phrases and arguments for action is that we should be on the right side of history. To be on the right or wrong side of history is a phrase he has used over 40 times by him and his staff during his presidency.

Be on the right side of history. This is often an argument, particularly from our politicians, that we need to act or not act in certain ways in order to have history vindicate our actions.

The most famous example is the issue of race. Those who opposed voting rights and equality were later shown by history to be proven wrong. I mean, really, anyone who thinks that black people aren't equal in worth and value to the rest of us is really just a kooky member of the KKK right?

The argument for being on the right side of history is an argument that says history is inevitably going to move this way – generally in the way opposite to your feeble, uneducated attitude. At some point in the future people are going to look back upon you and laugh at you. So it's ultra-important to stand up on issues and make sure that you stand on the correct side of history.

But here's the thing: you have to be on the correct side of this world's history. The correct side of the history of a world in opposition to God.

Do you oppose same-sex marriage? You're on the wrong side of history.

Do you oppose legalising drugs like marijuana? You're on the wrong side of history.

But the question we have to ask is: how do you know that your opposition or acceptance of an issue is going to be on the right side of history? How far into the future do you have to go before you realise which side of history was correct?

And more importantly – does God have a view of which side of history we all need to be on?

Let me give the answer to that last question right now: Yes. God does have a view of history – and we better be on his side of it. And for us today that side of history is revealed in a strange dream given to one of the most powerful men on earth at the time: King Nebuchadnezzar.

Daniel 2 opens up with Nebuchadnezzar, the most powerful man on earth, powerless and having some very sleepless nights. He has some dreams, dreams so visually disturbing that it causes his spirit to be troubled. His soul is restless. Insomnia grips him.

Now you might think that maybe all Nebuchadnezzar needs is a nice warm glass of milk and a cookie and he should be fine. Dreams for us aren't anything major to be worried about – they maybe tell us something on of our subconscious thoughts and feelings. No drama.

But in the Ancient Near East – this area of Babylon and Persia and Israel and all that area around it – dreams were commonly seen as the way the gods communicated with humans. Remember Jacob had a vision from God about a ladder in Genesis 28 during his sleep. Daniel is going to have some strange visions from God in his sleep later in the book of Daniel as well. This strange dream that Nebuchadnezzar is having is more than just a dream, and its shaking him to the core.

So in verses 2-9 he calls in his magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and other wise men to help sort of the meaning of this dream. If anyone is going to help him understand it it'll be these men who supposedly have connections with the gods and other dark worlds.

But there's a problem. They don't know the dream, and Nebuchadnezzar is not going to tell them the dream. There's this funny back and forth between the two and it goes a little something like this:

Verse 3 – Nebuchadnezzar: I had a bad dream.

Verse 4 – Magicians: Tell us and we'll tell you what it means!

Verse 5-6 – No, you tell me what the dream was or you will die.

Verse 7 – Uhh... tell us please?

Verse 8-9 – Stop stalling for time, tell me now!

Verse 10-11 – Sorry, there's no way we could tell you if you don't tell us. There's no man alive who could do that. Only the gods can help you.

Now it might seem like Nebuchadnezzar is being a little irrational here. But look again at the passage and you'll see that Nebuchadnezzar is being rather shrewd.

When you look at verse 9 Nebuchadnezzar knows that if he reveals the dream then they can say whatever they want to buy time. *'You have agreed to speak lying and corrupt words before me till the times change.'* Basically he's saying that if I tell you the dream then you'll look up your books and tell me what I want to hear and maybe when things change it won't matter because you'll be long gone.

You've heard of "fake it till you make it"? If you don't know something, or don't know how to do something, fake it and keep going and eventually it'll work out? Nebuchadnezzar is calling them out on it. He's saying that they'll fake the interpretation to give themselves time.

Even Nebuchadnezzar's threat to kill off his wise men probably has a motivation. These wise men and magicians claim to have access to the gods – but if they can't reveal the dream and its interpretation then it raises questions about their abilities. They are not as powerful as they would have you believe. Faith Healers do not work in hospitals. Psychics don't win the lottery. In the face of death these magicians and their abilities are being tried and tested – and they know they will fail.

So, the wise men fail, the guards are sent off with their swords to start rounding up all the wise men of Babylon for slaughter. They head towards Daniel who doesn't seem to flinch. Instead of panicking he calmly asks, 'Gentlemen, what seems to be the matter?' This is what it means when in verse 14 Daniel replies with 'prudence and discretion'. Daniel has a good head on his shoulders. Where the wise men failed in buying time, Daniel actually convinces Nebuchadnezzar to give him some time.

He heads back to his house in verse 17 and speaks with Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah – and he tells them to pray. Verse 18 – *he told them to seek mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his companions might not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.*

Daniel tells the boys to pray – pray for God's mercy, pray that God would reveal this mystery, and pray that God would do this so that not just he and his friends, but all the wise men of Babylon would not lose their lives.

Daniel knows that the time for trusting God alone is now. All human effort and safety has been knocked away. They have no one else to whom they can turn. Their prayer recognises that if God did not reveal the dream to them, then they had nowhere else to run. So they pray for mercy – they plead with God to be faithful to his people and to deliver them in their hour of need.

Verse 19 – *then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night.*

It's hard to imagine that they would say a quick prayer and jump into bed with their deaths looming over them. Rather the boys and Daniel may have been up all night praying together until Daniel finally received the vision.

And when the vision comes, Hallelujah! Daniel breaks out in a psalm of praise. Now it's worth teasing this out because what Daniel says here is not only extraordinary, but also gives us one of the central themes of this chapter.

First he starts off with praise and blessing:

*V20 – Blessed be the name of God forever and ever*

'Blessed be the name of God' is an encouragement to constantly praise God. We are to praise the name of God – which stands for God himself. His name is worthy to be praised not just forever, but forever and ever.

A few friends yesterday spent the day climbing Mt Tibrogargan on the Sunshine Coast. Now when you get up the top the view looks a little like this. Spectacular!

This is what one of the girls wrote, 'Accomplished a 3km return rock climb up Mt Tibrogargan today. Not everyone's cup of tea, but by the end it felt like such an achievement.'

Friends, if we persevere to the end and see God face to face, we are going to be staggered by his awesomeness and beauty. We will spend a 1000 years climbing the top of the mountain of his perfection and wonder. And when we reach the top it will feel like such an exhilarating accomplishment – but there will be a surprise for us. For having spent the last 1000 years climbing the mountain to view his perfection and beauty we will find another taller mountain of His joy to climb. And we will spend another 1000 years climbing this mountain, praising him every step of the way, to find yet another bigger mountain behind that. Then after 10,000 years of rejoicing and finding new things to praise God for, we will find more and more and more. God's perfection and beauty and worth are infinite – and that is why he is worthy of praise not just forever, but forever and ever and ever and ever.

V20b – *to whom belong wisdom and might* – God is honoured for his wisdom and might and power. His wisdom as revealed in the knowledge of the dream. His power over human history is mentioned next in verse 21 – *he changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings*. God is King over everything. Over the seasons of this world, over time, even over the Kings and kingdoms of this world who come and go according to his will.

I know there are some people who are genuinely worried about what will happen to this world if Donald Trump ever becomes President.

Are you concerned about Donald Trump? Well, no worries – he will only last as long as God wills. Are you concerned about any other power? No worries, God has them under his control.

V21b – *he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding*. Daniel is talking about spiritual wisdom to those who are his people. Spiritual wisdom – understanding who God is and his plans and purposes is not something you can achieve by human effort alone. It's ultimately something you receive from God's revelation in his Word. For those who have this wisdom and knowledge he gives even more – the more you know and understand of God, the more knowledge and understanding he works within you.

V22 – *he reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what is in the darkness and the light dwells with him*.

Basically God is the one who knows and reveals all things. Apart from God revealing the truth about himself, humans would never be able to find the meaning of life and death. It would all be subjective opinion and conjecture.

V23 – is an excited, joyful and personal conclusion to this song: *To you, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, for you have given me wisdom and might, and have now made known to me what we asked of you, for you have made known to us the king's matter.* Notice all the personal pronouns saturating this final verse – my fathers, I give thanks, have given me wisdom, made known to me what we asked. It's a wonderfully personal way to end this psalm of praise.

Now through this little song have you noticed what gets repeated a lot? Wisdom and revelation. V20 – to God belongs wisdom, v21 he gives wisdom, v22 he reveals, v23 you have given me wisdom, have now made known to me.

What is Daniel 2 all about? Daniel is saying that as much as we want to know the details of this crazy dream what's more important is that we know the God who knows the details.

Nebuchadnezzar desperately wants to know the details of his dream. Daniel wants Nebuchadnezzar to know the God who knows the details.

---

*What is Daniel 2 all about? Daniel is saying that as much as we want to know the details of this crazy dream what's more important is that we know the God who knows the details.*

---

Have a look at their conversation in v26:

*[26] The king declared to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, "Are you able to make known to me the dream that I have*

*seen and its interpretation?" [27] Daniel answered the king and said, "No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked, [28] but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries...*

Daniel's message to Nebuchadnezzar – no wise men can show you the mystery, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries.

Daniel makes it clear three times that he cannot do it himself – God must reveal the mystery to him:

V28 – *there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries...*

V29 – *To you, O King, as you lay in bed came thoughts of what would be after this, and he who reveals mysteries made known to you what is to be.*

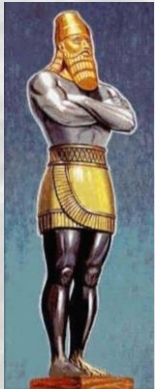
V30 – *But as for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because of any wisdom I have...*

Think about the temptation for Daniel – Nebuchadnezzar has no one who can show him what the dream means, and here's one person who can. How tempting it would have been for Daniel to take all the glory. How tempting it would have been to waltz into the King's court and dazzle him with his insiders knowledge.

What does Daniel do instead? He points to God. He makes it very clear that his God Yahweh is no match for all other foreign gods. And we as the reader need to be reminded of this as well. There is no God like our God.

God is the revealer of this mystery. Now, after 30 verses of waiting, Daniel reveals the mystery.

Bear with me, I'm going to read through it again for us and make some quick observations at the end:



*[31] “You saw, O king, and behold, a great image. This image, mighty and of exceeding brightness, stood before you, and its appearance was frightening. [32] The head of this image was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its middle and thighs of bronze, [33] its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. [34] As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. [35] Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.*

So first, Daniel reveals the details of the dream and it's a dream about a big statue. FYI – all the images I found online had the statue folding their arms... which I just found really cool.

Imagine for a moment Nebuchadnezzar's mind and heart as he heard Daniel relay the dream that had been troubling him for possibly weeks. Daniel's God who reveals mysteries is finally revealing this mystery.

*[36] “This was the dream. Now we will tell the king its interpretation. [37] You, O king, the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, and the might, and the glory, [38] and into whose hand he has given, wherever they dwell, the children of man, the beasts of the field, and the birds of the heavens, making you rule over them all—you are the head of gold. [39] Another kingdom inferior to you shall arise after you, and yet a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. [40] And there shall be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron, because iron breaks to pieces and shatters all things. And like iron that crushes, it shall break and crush all these. [41] And as you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, it shall be a divided kingdom, but some of the firmness of iron shall be in it, just as you saw iron mixed with the soft clay. [42] And as the toes of the feet were partly iron and partly clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly brittle. [43] As you saw the iron mixed with soft clay, so they will mix with one another in marriage, but they will not hold together, just as iron does not mix with clay. [44] And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever, [45] just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure.”*

Now, often lots of Christians try to identify which Kingdom belongs to which element in the statue. Daniel tells Nebuchadnezzar that the head of gold is him. So it's been natural for Christians to work out who the following empires are.

But here's the thing: the passage itself does not give us the detail. It's not important to the interpretation who is who. Because the interpretation is not there to give us a precise analysis of history to come: it's there to give us a big picture view of history as a whole.

---

*...the interpretation is not there to give us a precise analysis of history to come: it's there to give us a big picture view of history as a whole.*

---

It's not clear for us which empire relates to which metal in the statue. That's not clear. So what is clear?

First, from verse 37, God gives every earthly kingdom its glory and power. Nebuchadnezzar is the most powerful man on earth and is arrayed in glory not by his own effort and strength alone.

Second, from verse 39, no earthly kingdom will last forever. The gold gives way to silver, which in turn gives way to bronze and iron. Again, Daniel could be referring to the kingdoms that reign immediately after Babylon, but the dream could also be a picture of the whole of human history.

Earthly kingdoms come and go. The Ottoman empire made its way across huge areas Asia, Europe and Africa. It no longer exists. The British Empire was once the largest in world history, now it's gone. We still generally consider the United States to be the most powerful nation in the world, but it's waning in power and influence. Now we're moving into an era where China's global influence continues to grow. But you know what, one day that will disappear as well.

We need to be reminded again and again that God is sovereign and that His kingdom will reign. Earthly Kingdoms come and go. World powers come and go. Politicians come and go. Yes, it's rather scary that Donald Trump is so popular that he has a very strong chance to win the Presidential Election.

But do you honestly believe that if Donald Trump wins that Jesus will look down from heaven and go, 'Yikes, I totally didn't see that one coming. Geez, I really have no idea what to do...'

Do you honestly believe that if same-sex marriage becomes legal in Australia, and maybe one day in Singapore and Malaysia, that Jesus will look down at his church and say, 'Geez guys, you really stuffed it up and now look... can't do anything now...'

No. The General is not shaking in his boots. Here's why:

Third, from verse 35, and verses 44 onwards, there is a Kingdom which will reign for eternity. In the midst of all these kingdoms which come and go, God will start his own kingdom. It will start small and be lacking in glory, but it will eventually grow through the power of God into the largest mountain the world has ever seen. Larger than Mount Everest. So large it will fill the earth. It will grow until it dominates everything. Only this divine kingdom is eternal.

It is the Kingdom of God that will reign.

It is the Kingdom that Jesus brought near when he first came to this earth:

Mark 1:15 – *The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.*

It is the Kingdom that Jesus is King of and that we are assured of entering if we persevere in faith:

2 Peter 1:11 – *For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*

Only this divine Kingdom is eternal.

I don't know how history is going to unfold itself over the next 12 months, 12 years, 12 decades, and maybe 12 centuries – but I do know this: history will finish with this Kingdom reigning forever. If you want to be on the right side of history then you better be a part of this kingdom.

Well, let's come back to Daniel.

At the end of it all Nebuchadnezzar has been given the interpretation of his dream. He bows down before Daniel maybe in worship, but more likely to pay homage to Daniel, and then summarises it all for us today in verse 47: *The king answered and said to Daniel, "Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery."*

Daniel's message gets through – Nebuchadnezzar gets it. Daniel didn't tell Nebuchadnezzar the details of the dream, he pointed him to the God who knows the details. And Nebuchadnezzar responds in worship – glorifying the God of all wisdom.

Is this a worship that will last him a lifetime? Is it a worship that is also full of repentance and faith in God? We'll see how that pans out next week.

For now, Daniel 2 is telling us that the mystery of Nebuchadnezzar's dream is revealed in wisdom to Daniel. The mystery is that God is sovereign over the kingdoms of this world, and God will establish his own everlasting Kingdom. And while we may want all the details of how this is going to work, what's more important is knowing the God who knows the details.

For Daniel the details of God's plans for the future are kept hidden. For Christians those details are revealed. The eternal kingdom is revealed in God's wisdom. God's wisdom in sending down a King to set up his kingdom. His King is his Son Jesus. But he sets up this kingdom not by the victorious conquering and of the nations by a world power lead by an army general of a King – no. He sets up this kingdom by sending his Son as a servant, to live a relatively obscure and humble life, and he sets up his kingdom by sending his king to die.

If you know this plan and if you understand it, then you are a wise person in the sight of God and a fool in the sight of the world. But if God's kingdom is the one which is eternal, then I'd rather be considered a fool today than be on the wrong side of history.

Two quick things for us to take away today.



First on wisdom. Daniel says in his psalm of praise that God gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding. The wisdom of God – his plans and purposes for history – are revealed here, in the bible. So it's crucial for all of us who say we belong to Jesus to keep reading and studying his word. Make it a priority in your life. Let your quiet times with the bible and in prayer flow into your daily routine. Prioritise fellowship groups that encourage you as you read and study the bible. As you're listening to sermons do what you can to listen and pay attention – take notes if that helps, wrestle with what the preachers are saying, ask people about the sermon after the service. When we do all of these things we will be growing in wisdom.

Secondly, since it is the Kingdom of God which will endure, the wise person makes Jesus Christ their central priority in life. We need to constantly remember that this world will fade and that it's Jesus' kingdom which will last into eternity.

When things are not going well – when we we're sick, when we're feeling isolated and alone, when we face persecution and even death itself – we need to remember that there is a kingdom that lasts beyond the present trial.

We also need to remember this when things are going well. Just like Nebuchadnezzar who was the head of gold – sometimes we will be showered with honour and favour. We'll get the 7's we are working for. We'll be offered a promotion. We'll get that car we've always wanted. We need to remember that when these good things happen, there will come a day when it becomes dust. I might think that my beautiful bookshelves in my beautiful new office will last into eternity because they have been built so well, but they will become dust. And I will stand before God to give an account of my life.

What are we living for? Is Jesus Christ our central priority in life?

“Only one life, 'twill soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last.” – C.T. Studd