

Part Two—Daniel's Fortitude—Chapters 2-6

CHAPTER TWO

I. DESPOT'S DREAM—2:1-16

a. CHALLENGE TO CHALDEANS

TEXT: 2:1-6

- 1 And in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar dreamed dreams; and his spirit was troubled, and his sleep went from him.
- 2 Then the king commanded to call the magicians, and the enchanters, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans, to tell the king his dreams. So they came in and stood before the king.
- 3 And the king said unto them, I have dreamed a dream, and my spirit is troubled to know the dream.
- 4 Then spake the Chaldeans to the king in the Syrian language, O king, live for ever: tell thy servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation.
- 5 The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, The thing is gone from me: if ye make not known unto me the dream and the interpretation thereof, ye shall be cut in pieces, and your houses shall be made a dunghill.
- 6 But if ye show the dream and the interpretation thereof, ye shall receive of me gifts and rewards and great honor; therefore show me the dream and the interpretation thereof.

QUERIES

- a. Why is Nebuchadnezzar concerned with this particular dream?
- b. Why does the text mention the Syrian (Aramaic) language?
- c. Why did Nebuchadnezzar forget the dream?

PARAPHRASE

One night in the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had a very vivid and graphic dream. He was unable to sleep because he was deeply agitated in his mind and

soul to know if the dream had some meaning for his life. So he immediately called in all his magicians, enchanters and sorcerers and wise men and demanded that they tell him what his dream had been. When they had come into his presence, the king said to them, I have had a terrifying and mystifying dream and my very soul is in great anxiety to know what it means. Then the king's wise men, speaking in the Aramaic language, which was the language of common discourse then, said to the king, O king, may you live forever: if you will tell your humble servants the details of your dream we will begin at once to use all our knowledge and mystic powers to discern the interpretation of your dream. But the king replied, You are supposed to know every hidden thing: the details of the dream are thoroughly and indelibly set in my mind and now I am testing your claims. If you do not tell me exactly both the details of the dream itself and the interpretation of the dream, I will have you literally cut to pieces and dismembered and your homes destroyed and publicly disgraced. But, if you tell me both the dream and its interpretation I will give you many wonderful gifts and honors. So, begin!

### COMMENT

V. 1 . . . NEBUCHADNEZZAR DREAMED DREAMS; AND HIS SPIRIT WAS TROUBLED. . . . According to Babylonian reckoning, the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar would be the third year of Daniel's training. First year of reign for a Babylonian emperor was called The Year of Accession; his first year of reign would really be his second year; and his second year of reign would really be his third year on the throne. Even at that, this very graphic dream, sent by God, occurred at a very early period of this heathen emperor's reign.

Young seems to think the force of the plural should be translated "Nebuchadnezzar was in a state in which a dream came to him." Leupold believes the king dreamed several dreams, one of which finally roused and disturbed him. Whatever the case, the significant dream was the one of the great image. And it was no ordinary dream, but one which Jehovah God sent directly to this pagan ruler. It was

such an arresting dream he could not sleep for anxiety of spirit and soul, deeply troubled as to its meaning. The dream must have been so vivid as to seem to be actually happening right then—the king was terrified.

v. 2-3 . . . THE KING . . . COMMANDED . . . THE CHALDEANS, TO TELL HIS DREAMS . . . Four classes of dream interpreters or wise men are summoned to appear before the king. Leupold translates "magicians" as *scholars*; "enchanters" as *astrologers*. From other listings of such wise men in Daniel it does not seem any technical sense is intended here. The fourfold mention here is evidently designed to include all the classes of wise men and priests of Babylonian religion (see our Special Study on *Babylonian Priesthood* at the end of this chapter). "Chaldeans" constitute the most important group in the entire assembly. They seem to be regarded in their day as the very *elite* of Babylonian society, men in whose ranks the emperor himself appears to have been enrolled. A people by the name of "Chaldean" lived in southern Babylonia in the days of the early patriarchs (cf. Gen. 11:28). They were a warlike group who in the course of time caused the Assyrians much trouble and finally overcame them in the person of Nabopolassar, Nebuchadnezzar's father. These "Chaldeans" of Daniel's time were, therefore, probably men of great learning who could trace their ancestry back to families of the original conquerors of Babylon. They made themselves masters of that group of wise men who exercised the strongest influence in the political and religious affairs of the state.

The Babylonians, as did other ancients, put much stock in a philosophy that the movements of the stars and heavenly bodies determined the events of history and destinies of men on the earth. Astrology, the casting of horoscopes and other predictions based on observations of the stars was used to determine political, religious and moral meaning to mystical experiences such as dreams. Nebuchadnezzar undoubtedly had some strange, inexplicable foreboding concerning the dream that kept him awake.

v. 4 . . . TELL THY SERVANTS THE DREAM, AND WE WILL SHOW THE INTERPRETATION . . . Xenophon relates that the Babylonians spoke a form of Aramaic and it is not

unlikely that this would be the language of common discourse. The covenant people of the exile returned to their homeland speaking Aramaic which they learned in captivity. Just why the fact is deemed necessary to mention in v. 4 that the Chaldeans spoke to the king in the Syrian (Aramaic) language is unknown.

The Chaldeans made the only request they could, being finite creatures with no knowledge of the secrets of men's hearts unless they are told those secrets. There was no possibility of anyone telling the king what he had dreamed unless he tell them the dream or unless God, who knows all the secrets of men's minds, tell it. God did eventually tell it through Daniel. If the king had related the facts of his dream to the Chaldeans, they could have set about at once to compare the details with their astrological charts, cast their horoscopes, made their incantations, submitted the dream to their magic and have come up with an interpretation (which, by the way, would probably have been flattering to the king's ego and favorable to his whims of government and indulgence).

v. 5-6 . . . IF YE MAKE NOT KNOWN . . . THE DREAM AND THE INTERPRETATION . . . YE SHALL BE CUT IN PIECES . . . BUT IF YE SHOW THE DREAM AND THE INTERPRETATION, YE SHALL RECEIVE . . . GIFTS . . . REWARDS . . . GREAT HONOR . . . Why did Nebuchadnezzar insist that the Chaldeans tell him the details of the actual dream as well as the interpretation? It is not because he had forgotten the dream. Our English translation is misleading here. Leupold, Young and many others agree that the proper rendering of the original here should read "the matter has been fully determined by me." The king was sure and certain of the details of the dream itself. Now he was testing his "wise men" to see, in such a significant experience, if they really had access to the deepest and most completely hidden things. It may very well be that Nebuchadnezzar, deep within himself, knew that most of the religion of Babylon was mere superstition and not the truth—he must have been skeptical of a great part of it. There is a record of a king of Yemen, Rabia by name, who saw a vision and was terrified by it. He assembled all the priests and magicians and star-gazers

of his kingdom and said to them, "Verily, I have seen a vision and was frightened by it. Tell it to me and its interpretation." They said, "Relate it to us, and we shall inform thee of its interpretation." So he replied, "If I tell you it, I shall have no certainty as to what you tell me of its interpretation. Verily, no one knows the interpretation unless he knows it before I tell him (the dream)." So, Nebuchadnezzar was putting his wise men to the test to determine once and for all if they could divine the secret things of men and nature or not.

The despotic nature of the punishment pronounced should the Chaldeans fail is in character for an Eastern monarch of that day. Assyrians and Persians were especially notorious for the barbarity of their punishments. Even today in Arabia cruel punishments for misdemeanors are meted out even to the severing of members of the body for certain crimes. These Chaldeans faced certain dismemberment since they had no power to tell Nebuchadnezzar his dream. They would be hacked to pieces and their homes razed. And as a final indignity the ruins of their homes would be made public toilets.

It is plain that God is active in this matter to demonstrate to Nebuchadnezzar, to Daniel, to all the heathen who will learn and to all the covenant people who will learn, that there is only One, True God, who knows the secrets of men and Jehovah is His Name; there is only one true prophet of God, Daniel is his name. God sent the dream; now He, through His prophet, will demonstrate that the interpretation His prophet places on the dream is true because His prophet will tell the king what he dreamed.

### QUIZ

1. How many years had Nebuchadnezzar actually been on the throne now?
2. Who are the "Chaldeans" and where did they come from?
3. Why did the Chaldeans speak to the king in Syriac (Aramaic)?
4. Why did Nebuchadnezzar insist that they tell him his dream?

5. How was God at work in this event in Nebuchadnezzar's life?

## b. DILEMMA OF THE DIVINERS

TEXT: 2:7-11

- 7 They answered the second time and said, Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation.
- 8 The king answered and said, I know of a certainty that ye would gain time, because ye see the thing is gone from me.
- 9 But if ye make not known unto me the dream, there is but one law for you; for ye have prepared lying and corrupt words to speak before me, till the time be changed: therefore tell me the dream, and I shall know that ye can show me the interpretation thereof.
- 10 The Chaldeans answered before the king, and said, There is not a man upon the earth that can show the king's matter, forasmuch as no king, lord, or ruler, hath asked such a thing of any magician, or enchanter, or Chaldean.
- 11 And it is a rare thing that the king requireth, and there is no other than can show it before the king, except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh.

### QUERIES

- a. Why was Nebuchadnezzar suspicious of their "stalling?"
- b. Why was the king's demand such a "rare" thing?
- c. Which "gods" did the Chaldeans have in mind?

### PARAPHRASE

The Chaldeans replied again, If the king please, only tell his humble servants what he dreamed and we will most gladly show him its interpretation. But the king retorted, I can see very plainly that you are only stalling for time, because you are aware that my mind is made up to punish

you severely if you do not tell me the dream. And, you are correct, for if you do not tell me what I dreamed there is only one consequence you may expect—the punishment which I have decreed. I know what you are up to—you have agreed with one another to try to deceive me with words hoping that the passing of time will bring a change in my demands. I am wise to your scheme. Tell me the dream—only then will I believe that you can show me the true interpretation. The Chaldeans pleaded with the king, saying, You are asking the impossible—there is not a man on the earth who can tell the king what he has dreamed. No great king, lord or ruler such as yourself has ever asked such an impossible thing of any mortal magician, enchanter or Chaldean such as we. What you have asked is so difficult there is no human being who could ever reveal to the king what he dreamed. Only the gods could do this and they do not dwell on earth with mortals.

### COMMENT

v. 7 . . . LET THE KING TELL HIS SERVANTS THE DREAM . . . Notice the subtle flattery here. The Chaldeans berate themselves as “servants.” They must find out what the dream was and so they insist—but they insist politely.

v. 8 . . . I KNOW . . . THAT YE WOULD GAIN TIME, BECAUSE . . . THE THING IS GONE FROM ME . . . They are not fooling the king. He knows they are stalling for time and he knows why—they are aware of his resolute determination that they shall either tell him what he dreamed or they shall be punished severely. It is the immutability of the king’s decree that is meant by the phrase “because ye see the thing is gone from me.”

v. 9 . . . YE HAVE PREPARED LYING AND CORRUPT WORDS TO SPEAK BEFORE ME, TILL THE TIME BE CHANGED . . . Nebuchadnezzar seems to be fully cognizant of their scheme to hide their insufficiency. He senses that there is some kind of collaboration between them to speak words of deception and legerdemain until, they hoped, circumstances would change; perhaps the king’s ugly mood will change with time

if they can only stall the matter by talk. But the king sees through their scheme. If they do not with haste make known to the king what he dreamed as well as the interpretation, he has determined their fate by royal decree and that decree cannot be changed.

v. 10-11 . . . THERE IS NOT A MAN UPON THE EARTH THAT CAN SHOW THE KING'S MATTER . . . EXCEPT THE GODS, WHOSE DWELLING IS NOT WITH FLESH . . . These Chaldeans face a terrifying dilemma. On the one hand there is a desperate attempt not to say anything that might further irritate or offend the despot; on the other hand they must convey to the king the idea that his demand is unreasonable and impossible. Their first statement is a frank admission of their impotency in the matter demanded. Then they hastily add another subtle innuendo of flattery, "No great king or ruler has ever asked such an impossible thing from such lowly magicians and enchanters as we." They are trying to convey to the king that the gods have not given these priests of the national religion the power to reveal the dream—they have power only to interpret the dream. Their statement is that only the gods could produce what the king has demanded and the gods do not dwell among men. There seems to be in their consciousness an admission of higher, superhuman beings, but their concepts are so saturated with ignorance and moral depravity they are thoroughly polytheistic. The enchanters specify that the gods do not dwell with men in order to specify that they have no way of being instructed with the superior knowledge of the gods.

## QUIZ

1. How do the Chaldeans use flattery to try to learn the king's dream?
2. What does the king accuse them of attempting to do?
3. What advantage did the Chaldeans think time would bring them?
4. How did the Chaldeans frankly declare their inability to tell his dream?

## c. SAVED BY THE SUBJUGATED

TEXT: 2:12-16

- 12 For this cause the king was angry and very furious, and commanded to destroy all the wise men of Babylon.
- 13 So the decree went forth, and the wise men were to be slain; and they sought Daniel and his companions to be slain.
- 14 Then Daniel returned answer with counsel and prudence to Arioch the captain of the king's guard, who was gone forth to slay the wise men of Babylon;
- 15 he answered and said to Arioch the king's captain, Wherefore is the decree so urgent from the king? Then Arioch made the thing known to Daniel.
- 16 And Daniel went in, and desired of the king that he would appoint him a time, and he would show the king the interpretation.

## QUERIES

- a. Why destroy all the wise men of Babylon?
- b. Why did Daniel think he could do what the others could not?

## PARAPHRASE

The admitted inability of the Chaldean wise-men to be able to tell Nebuchadnezar his secret dream and its interpretation made the king's anger grow exceeding furious. He commanded that all the wise-men of the city of Babylon should be executed. The decree of the arrest and execution of all the wise-men was made official and as it was being carried out they eventually came to arrest Daniel and his three Hebrew companions. When Arioch, the captain of the king's guard, came to arrest Daniel, Daniel reasoned with him with great discretion and prudence. Among other things, Daniel asked Arioch why the decision of the king was so severe. Arioch answered Daniel and told him all about the wise-men's failure and the king's decree. It was then that Daniel, observing all the proper protocol, gained audience with the king and asked for a personal appointment affirm-

ing that he would be able to show both the dream and the interpretation.

### COMMENT

v. 12-13 . . . THE KING WAS ANGRY AND VERY FURIOUS . . . The verb used here indicates a growing mounting anger until it reaches the point of violence. He commanded that all the wise-men of Babylon be put to death. The king is enraged at these who have gained fame and fortune and power by claiming to know the deepest secrets of man and the gods—and they cannot even tell him what he has dreamed.

After the king issued his personal command it would have to be transmitted in formal publication throughout the capitol city. His guards would have to go in search of many of the wise-men not present at the royal court that particular day. It would be some time before the actual execution could take place. Finally, the captain of the king's guard, Arioch, came to take Daniel and his three Hebrew companions into custody.

v. 14-16 THEN DANIEL RETURNED ANSWER WITH COUNSEL AND PRUDENCE . . . The first thing to realize about this account is that it is very abbreviated—we do not have a record of all that Daniel must have said to Arioch. As Leupold says, "The very audacity of Daniel's plan" must have impressed Arioch. Besides, the king would still be perplexed as to the interpretation of his dream and knowing of the exceptional wisdom and capabilities of Daniel (Arioch had undoubtedly heard of Daniel's fame also), it would be very prudent for Daniel to talk with Arioch and persuade him that he could interpret the king's dream. Daniel was acting on the basis of his faith in God and without doubt on the basis of a revelation from God that he should do so.

Daniel speaks to Arioch as if they were already well acquainted—perhaps even good friends—when he asks, "Why is the decree of the king so severe?" Arioch feels impelled to answer Daniel's question and probably relates the entire incident to him.

Leupold points out that when Daniel "went in, and desired of the king . . ." we must presume that Daniel went

through the proper channels and observed the correct protocol in approaching the king. We know from the book of Esther that unless one were bidden properly to approach an Eastern potentate to do so presumptuously meant certain death. All that Daniel asks is "time." This will postpone the execution until he could commune with his God, and give the desired interpretation to the king.

It is most interesting to note that Daniel was sure he could give the king the interpretation of the dream before he had even received the knowledge of what the dream was from God (cf. 2:19). Daniel had such faith in God that he believed the will of God would be done before it was actually done! This same "great" faith the Lord expects of all His children. Only the "interpretation" is mentioned and not the dream itself. However the conciseness of the narrative explains this omission. If Daniel knows the interpretation, he most certainly must first know the dream and he is not asking the king what the dream was, as did the Chaldeans.

### QUIZ

1. Why seek out Daniel to be slain?
2. How did Daniel answer with "counsel and prudence?"
3. Why did Daniel ask for an appointment to the presence of the king?
4. How would one have made such an appointment in those days?

## II. DANIEL'S DECLARATION—2:17-35

### a. PRAYER

TEXT: 2:17-24

- 17 Then Daniel went to his house, and made the thing known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions:
- 18 that they would desire mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret; that Daniel and his companions