

DREAM ON

DANIEL 2:24-49 OCTOBER 3, 2018

When the sun rises on a certain day in Daniel chapter 2, Nebuchadnezzar was living out his Babylonian dream. He was the supreme ruler of much of the world, had vast stores of treasure and power. It seemed like things we're going to get better and better. But, one night, he started thinking about the trajectory not only of *his* life, but of his empire and the wider world. What was going to happen? That evening, he had a dream. A dream that shocked and disturbed him to his core. And then, the next night, he had it again. Then again. And again.

He didn't understand this vision, but he desperately wanted to. There was something profoundly real and *significant* about what he was seeing and it consumed his thoughts. We've been looking at this the last couple of weeks.

When we left off, Daniel, the teenage prisoner of war, had miraculously received the interpretation of the dream after a prayer meeting with Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego. Tonight, he brings the answer Nebuchadnezzar was so desperate for, but it's not just for the king, it is, in fact, a broad outline of God's plan for human history, beginning with Nebuchadnezzar himself and then running all the way through to the end of the age, when Christ returns to establish His Kingdom on the earth.

In this outline we'll see the succession of 4 world empires before the Messiah returns. Now, perhaps that statement makes you think, "Wait a minute, there have been *way more* than 4 world empires since Babylon. What about the Mongols or the Ottomans or the British Empire or the Qing Dynasty?" The answer is that when the Bible talks about God's prophetic plan, it is in *relation* to those empires which ruled over Judea *and* the nation of Israel. When we understand *that*, it's easy to see just how perfectly accurate Bible prophecy really is.

The text breaks into 3 parts. In verses 24 through 30 we have the set up. In verses 31 through 45 we have the retelling and the interpretation of the dream. And in verses 46 through 49 we have Nebuchadnezzar's response to what he has heard. We begin in verse 24.

Daniel 2:24 - ²⁴ Therefore Daniel went to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to destroy the wise men of Babylon. He went and said thus to him: "Do not destroy the wise men of Babylon; take me before the king, and I will tell the king the interpretation."

Daniel is always fearless in his behavior. He doesn't send a letter to the mad king, he says, "take ME to him." In the Bible, we always admire those servants of God who say, "here am I, send me." We think of Caleb saying "give me my mountain." Or David saying, "*I'll* fight the giant." We think of Stephen in the book of Acts standing fearlessly as a witness before the Sanhedrin and then the first martyr of the Church.

If we find that we are Christians who shy away from preaching or serving, then we know how to be praying in our own lives, that we would have boldness and confidence and faith like Daniel.

Daniel 2:25 - ²⁵ Then Arioch quickly brought Daniel before the king, and said thus to him, "I have found a man of the captives of Judah, who will make known to the king the interpretation."

Mixed bag here with Arioch. He seems to have some personal decency. We saw that last week. He's moving *quickly* to get Daniel before Nebuchadnezzar. Clearly he didn't get *excited* about murdering all the wise men. On the other hand, he lies about his part in all this. *He* didn't find Daniel, Daniel found *him!* So a good reminder for us to be people of real integrity and honesty.

Daniel 2:26-28a - ²⁶ The king answered and said to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, "Are you able to make known to me the dream which I have seen, and its interpretation?" ²⁷ Daniel answered in the presence of the king, and said, "The secret which the king has demanded, the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, and the soothsayers cannot declare to the king. ²⁸ But there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days...

Once again, we see Daniel is in no hurry, he's not stressed out. His very life was hanging in the balance, and yet he takes the time to talk about the Lord. Clearly he gave a lot of thought to *what* he would say to the king when he got the chance. One thing Daniel highlights is the fact that this all-knowing God was *personally* reaching out to Nebuchadnezzar. He says, "This God has made known to *you* these things."

What a remarkable statement! Nebuchadnezzar had 'served' many gods in pagan Babylon, but none of them had ever had anything other than *silence* for Nebuchadnezzar. Now, for the first time, he hears, "There's a *real* God who wants to *tell* you something." This is a great way to evangelize!

Daniel uses a very important phrase there in verse 28 which helps us categorize what we are about to read. He says, "what will be *in the latter days*." This is a phrase used in the Bible, specifically in prophecy, that is wide in scope, but does not simply refer to the end of Nebuchadnezzar's life, but can extend all the way through to the end of human history. We find it, for example, in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea and Micah.

Daniel 2:28b-30 - Your dream, and the visions of your head upon your bed, were these: ²⁹ As for you, O king, thoughts came to your mind while on your bed, about what would come to pass after this; and He who reveals secrets has made known to you what will be. ³⁰ But as for me, this secret has not been revealed to me because I have more wisdom than anyone living, but for *our* sakes who make known the interpretation to the king, and that you may know the thoughts of your heart.

Something I love about these verses is how God went the extra mile. Remember: Nebuchadnezzar had told his wise men "You have to tell me the dream and *then* the interpretation." That was, of course, impossible. But here, God not only gives the interpretation *and* the dream, Daniel is able to say, "Here's what you were thinking *before you even went to sleep!*"

But here, Daniel doubles down and states again that God had come *looking* for Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel says, "Look, God wants to save *my* life, but He also wants you to know the thoughts of your heart. He's a God of revelation and answers and *personal* care, even for a man like you, Nebuchadnezzar. He's a God of *compassion*."

Daniel 2:31-33 - ³¹ "You, O king, were watching; and behold, a great image! This great image, whose splendor was excellent, stood before you; and its form was awesome. ³² This image's

head was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, ³³ its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay.

In his dream, Nebuchadnezzar saw a magnificent statue. It was full of earthly glory, immense and formidable. We see it described from the top down in 5 portions. What we notice is that each section is less *precious* than the last, but that each is also *harder* than the last, until the toes which mingles the strongest metal with the weakness of clay.

Daniel 2:34-36a - ³⁴ You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which 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 were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. ³⁶ “This is the dream...

The statue stands until a stone emerges and strikes the feet. Note that only the feet are struck. And, as a result, the entire image is ground to powder and blown away, without a trace being left. And then, this powerful stone starts to grow. If we thought the metal image was impressive, standing tall in some field somewhere, now we're *really* seeing something, as this stone grows and fills the *entire earth*. As the dream closes, we see that this stone is greater than the statue in power and magnitude on a level that cannot be computed. Having retold the dream, Daniel now gives the explanation.

Daniel 2:36b-38 - ...Now we will tell the interpretation of it before the king. ³⁷ You, O king, are a king of kings. For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory; ³⁸ and wherever the children of men dwell, or the beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven, He has given *them* into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all—you are this head of gold.

This is very important for us to lock in on: The golden head was a symbol for a *real* man and his *real* kingdom. It doesn't stand for something metaphorical or allegorical. Daniel is clear: “You, Nebuchadnezzar, are the head of gold and your kingdom is a portion of this vision.” But he's immediately told that it's all from the Lord. And, as readers, we're reminded that he may be a king of kings, but he is not *THE* King of kings. No matter who has power, God's power is greater.

Daniel 2:39 - ³⁹ But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours; then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth.

We can fill in what Daniel doesn't specify here because this passage doesn't exist in isolation. This vision isn't an only child. There is more revealed not only in the rest of this book, but in the rest of the Bible. You know, more than a quarter of the Bible is prophetic in nature. So, we can *combine* the other things we're told in other passages, and we can also look back through recorded history and gain insight into what some of these elements are. We can't read prophetic passages in isolation. That's a quick way to theological trouble. The Bible *harmonizes*. Daniel will cooperate with Ezekiel and Isaiah and Revelation and they will, *together*, explain what God wants us to know.

The second world empire, the silver kingdom, is the Medo-Persian empire. We're told as much in Daniel 5:28.

Daniel 5:28 - Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.

After Babylon, the kingdom which ruled over Israel was the Medo-Persian empire. Why was it inferior? Well, many scholars point to the fact that the ruler of the Medes and Persians was not in total control, like Nebuchadnezzar had been. We'll see Darius the king getting taken advantage of and how he himself is subject to the law. Others argue that the downgrade in metals signifies the deterioration of morality with each empire. Hard to say which is more appropriate.

The 3rd kingdom, made of bronze, was the empire of the Greeks. Alexander the Great conquered the Persians in 331 B.C. that included the region of Judea. In fact, the historian Josephus records that when Alexander came into Jerusalem, the high priest brought him to the temple and showed him the book of Daniel, saying, "We knew you were coming."¹

Now, the fourth kingdom.

Daniel 2:40 - ⁴⁰ And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that crushes, *that kingdom* will break in pieces and crush all the others.

We identify this as the Roman empire. It was Rome who conquered the Greeks and, in 63 B.C., took control of Judea. Rome was known for strength and ferocity. These characteristics are developed in another vision we'll see in Daniel 7. One writer said: "*Rome's rise and fall was like a human weather system, as destructive as nature's most violent hurricanes.*"²

But, unlike the previous 3 kingdoms of Babylon, Persia and Greece, *this* empire has a second phase in the vision. The first is the legs of iron, but then we see a *5th* segment, the feet and toes, where iron is mixed with clay. So we see 4 empires in 5 parts.

Daniel 2:41-43 - ⁴¹ Whereas you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; yet the strength of the iron shall be in it, just as you saw the iron mixed with ceramic clay. ⁴² And as the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile. ⁴³ As you saw iron mixed with ceramic clay, they will mingle with the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay.

This second phase of the Roman empire, is characterized by this amalgam of strength with weakness. In verse 44 we'll be told that it will not be ruled by one single monarch, but by *kings*, plural. This is developed in greater detail in chapter 7.

Daniel 2:44-45 - ⁴⁴ And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. ⁴⁵ Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold—the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure."

¹ <https://www.thetrumpet.com/13892-alexander-the-great-was-prophesied-in-the-bible-and-he-knew-it>

² <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/world-history/the-roman-supremacy-how-a-mighty-new-empire-was-built-by-violent-copycats-1608034.html>

The Stone made without hands is a clear reference to the Messiah. This imagery is developed in the multiple verses dealing with God's Cornerstone which the builders rejected, found in Psalms and the Gospels, and, after the resurrection Jesus is referred to the Temple made without hands.

So here in our text we see that, at some point, the Messiah of God will arrive, strike the kingdom which is represented by the feet and toes of this statue, and then all human empires will be totally wiped away. Then an everlasting, heavenly kingdom will be established *in place* of the previous world kingdoms.

The question arises: Is this referring to Christ's *first* coming or His *second* coming. While to us the answer is obvious, there are many Christians and branches of the Church which hold to the idea that this image of the stone is simply an analogy for the *first* coming of Christ and the spread of the Gospel. Their teaching is that there is no, literal, future Kingdom, but that the Kingdom is now in heaven and in our hearts, expressed through the Church.

There are a *lot* of insurmountable problems with that interpretation. The worst one, in my mind, is the fact that you have to change the way you interpret the vision *in the middle of the vision!* The head of gold? That's a real man and a real kingdom. The chest of silver? The belly of bronze? Oh yes, each one was a *real*, literal kingdom. The coming, heavenly Kingdom? Oh, that's just allegorical. Not real. In other words, in the *first* half of the vision, $2+2=4$ but in the *second* half $2+2=$ just about anything *other* than 4!

Another problem is that, in the first coming of Jesus, He did *not* destroy the Roman empire. In fact, He said plainly, "give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar!" He ascended into heaven with Tiberius on his throne! And then, from that time, have we seen the Gospel go out and conquer all human empires? Quite the contrary! It has spread, but it has not conquered.

Instead, we recognize this vision to be discussing the *second* coming of Christ at the end of the future Great Tribulation, when He will establish a real, literal, thousand year reign on the earth, followed by eternity in Heaven. We interpret the feet and toes to be a *revived* Roman empire that is yet to come on the scene. Why? Because no other empire in history has fit the bill. And no other Gentile kingdom *after* the first Roman empire has ruled over Judea with God's people *in* their land. In 70AD, under the first Roman empire, the Jews were dispersed and were stateless for 2,000 years. Then in 1948 they came back and have been independent until now. A future, revived Roman empire is coming, which will rule over Israel and fulfill Daniel 2.

The text closes, starting in verse 46:

Daniel 2:46-48 - ⁴⁶ Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell on his face, prostrate before Daniel, and commanded that they should present an offering and incense to him. ⁴⁷ The king answered Daniel, and said, "Truly your God *is* the God of gods, the Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, since you could reveal this secret." ⁴⁸ Then the king promoted Daniel and gave him many great gifts; and he made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief administrator over all the wise *men* of Babylon. ⁴⁹ Also Daniel petitioned the king, and he set Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego over the affairs of the province of Babylon; but Daniel *sat* in the gate of the king.

Nebuchadnezzar is not a believer yet. He'll get there, but his proclamations are in response to the remarkable wonder he just witnessed. However we'll see in the very next text that he defies God *in response* to this vision.

We note Daniel's generosity and kindness to his friends, watching out for them. And that is a great exhortation for us.

Here as we see God's broad plan for the world, we are encouraged that God is most definitely in charge. The victory is His and He extends that victory to us in whatever empire we might find ourselves in. Along the way, we can be like Daniel: People who are bold, full of faith and integrity, confident in the work of God, kind and generous toward others, humble about ourselves and sharing the truth of God's personal compassion, even with the worst people around us. That's the life of privilege we've been granted by the grace of our Lord.