

Series Daniel

Scripture Daniel 2:31-49

Daniel chapter 2 began with a description of the troubled and confused state of mind of King Nebuchadnezzar. While lying on his bed thinking about the future, he had a dream. Nebuchadnezzar recognized that the dream was significant. He knew that his counselors would offer some interpretation if they were told the dream, but he wanted some way to evaluate their interpretation and to affirm the accuracy of their understanding. Therefore he insisted that they first describe his dream, and then offer their explanation. He reasoned that if his advisors had the powers that they claimed to have, they would be able to describe his dream as well as give the meaning.

The wise men of Babylon were unable to describe the dream. When they stated that no man on earth had the ability to do what the king had asked them to do, Nebuchadnezzar became angry and ordered that all of them be killed. When Daniel found out the reason for the executions, he and his friends prayed that Yahweh would be merciful and reveal to them the dream so that their lives would be spared.

God answered the prayer of these Jewish young men and revealed the dream to Daniel. Daniel expressed his praise and thanksgiving to God by saying, "You (the God of heaven) 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." Daniel not only was supernaturally given the content of the dream but also an understanding of its meaning and significance. When he appeared before the king, Daniel quite boldly pointed out the superiority of his God over those gods in which the Babylonians believed.

That was a brief review of the first part of chapter 2. Today we are going to focus on the description and interpretation of the dream, but before we read the Scripture, I want to explain the strategic importance of this chapter. The primary emphasis of this book is the sovereignty of God in human history. Daniel chapter 2 provides the broad outline of God's future program for the nations, for Israel, and for the glorious kingdom to be established by the Messiah when He returns to earth at the end of the age. Chapter 2 is the foundational passage to help us understand Biblical prophecy. All other passages of prophecy in Scripture must fit into the outline given to us in Daniel if they are to be considered valid. Nebuchadnezzar's dream is really important for us today.

The dream was God's response to the concerns that the king had. As Daniel stated to him, "the revealer of mysteries (another reference to the God of heaven) showed you what is going to happen." There was a specific reason why the future was revealed to Nebuchadnezzar. He was the first Gentile king in the period of Biblical history which came to be known as the "times of the Gentiles." The "times of the Gentiles" refers to the domination of Gentile political powers over Israel. The "times of the Gentiles" extends from Nebuchadnezzar, who conquered Judah and took thousands of Jews as captives into Babylonia, until the second coming of the Messiah, at which time the powers of the Gentiles will end and the Kingdom of God will be established on earth.

Please keep the strategic importance of Daniel chapter 2 in mind as we read.

Read Daniel 2:31-49

Daniel's first responsibility was to describe the dream. Nebuchadnezzar had seen a very large and impressive statue in the shape of a man. Besides its size, the statue was unique because of its composition. The head was of gold, the arms and chest of silver, the belly and thighs of brass, and the legs of iron with the feet a mixture of iron and clay.

There was some dramatic activity in the dream. A rock struck the feet of the statue, crushing the feet, and also collapsing the statue into such fine dust that the wind blew it all away, scattering it all without a trace. In its place, the rock increased in size until it filled the earth.

In verse 36 Daniel moved from report to interpretation. Daniel referred to Nebuchadnezzar as the king of kings and identified him with the head of gold. From an earthly standpoint, Nebuchadnezzar was a "one-of-a-kind" ruler. He had complete authority and absolute control of the life and death of all living things throughout Babylonia, including beasts of the field and birds of the air. That was Daniel's way of emphasizing the extent of his authority.

Nebuchadnezzar's word was law. No one could challenge his will. No other king who came after him, whether in Babylonia itself or in succeeding empires, held the level of authority of Nebuchadnezzar. For this reason Nebuchadnezzar was named as the head of gold. From the standpoint of the personal power and authority wielded by autocratic political leaders, we might say that he represented the "gold standard."

Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom was spread over a wide region of the Ancient Near East, from the Persian Gulf in the east to the Mediterranean Sea coast in the west and into present day Turkey in the north. His armies had gained victories over Assyria and Egypt and numerous smaller kingdoms and fiefdoms in the region including Israel. Nebuchadnezzar ruled over his empire for about 40 years, but after his death, the Babylonian empire lasted for only another 21 years.

Daniel made it very clear that Nebuchadnezzar had been given his position by the God of heaven and that his life was under God's control.

Daniel did not say very much about the second and third kingdoms in this passage, although, in later chapters, he provides a great deal of information about them. The silver section of the statue represented the empire of the Medo-Persians. This was the empire which succeeded Babylonia. The arms of the statue suggest the individual backgrounds of the Medes and the Persians. These two groups were united under Cyrus the Great. He was the leader who conquered Babylonia in 539 BC.

The Medo-Persian kingdom was inferior to that of Nebuchadnezzar, in the same way that silver is of lesser value than gold. The aspect in which the later kingdoms were inferior did not concern size, because each succeeding kingdom was larger than the previous ones. Rather, the inferiority of the succeeding kingdoms was in regard to the quality of their governments. Babylonian rule was completely unified under one person, whereas there was the sharing of power and the limitations of authority in all the other political entities. The silver empire of Persia lasted for about 200 years.

The third world kingdom was Greece. Beginning about 330 BC, Alexander the Great raced across the Middle East and Central Asia. His armies never lost a battle. The empire fashioned by Alexander extended from Europe and Egypt all the way eastward to India.

After his death in 323, the territories gained by the armies of Greece were split up into four smaller realms, each one ruled over by one of Alexander's former generals. There was very little cooperation and unity among these realms, and each one was eventually lost to non-Grecian political powers. Rome emerged as the fourth kingdom in Daniel's interpretation. The transition to Roman control was completed in 31 BC. The bronze kingdom of Greece existed for about 300 years.

You will notice that the description of the fourth kingdom is more detailed than that given for the others. In the image of the statue, the Roman empire was represented by iron. Iron is not as valuable as gold, silver, or bronze, but it is much stronger. Daniel said that “iron breaks and smashes everything.” Verse 40 indicates that the Roman empire would be strong enough to “crush and break all the other” kingdoms that would presume to oppose it. Rome was so strong that no power was able to dislodge Rome from her position as world leader for several hundred years — until 476 AD in the West and until 1453 AD in the East. There was a time when the Roman empire extended from Spain and the British Isles in the west to India in the east.

The feet and toes receive special attention in Daniel’s explanation. The significant fact is that the feet and toes were not made of compatible materials. From the iron there was solidity and “firmness.” Rome’s government was solidly organized. Her armies were disciplined. Rome had the ability to conquer and subjugate many territories. The iron represented the well-organized rule that allowed Rome to dominate the world of its time and to maintain her identity for centuries.

The baked clay indicated its brittleness. Baked clay is hard, but it can be easily cracked and shattered. The weakness of Rome, which led to its eventual collapse, was the deterioration of moral fiber among its citizens as well as the ethnic diversity of its people groups. Idleness, luxurious living, dissipation of character, combined with diversity, proved to be incompatible when intermixed with the more disciplined and structured aspects of Roman government and society.

The incompatibility of iron and baked clay was another indication of the deteriorating quality of the successive kingdoms. Gold had given way to silver, which in turn gave way to bronze, then iron, and finally the composite of iron and baked clay. In its final stages, the Roman kingdom was a fragmented kingdom, in some ways strong and in many ways brittle.

As I stated earlier, the metals in the statue represented forms of governmental power and authority. The power of Nebuchadnezzar was absolute. The kings of the Medo-Persian empire and the Greek empire had powers which were less absolute. In fact, in the Greek system of government, there were elements of democracy, with the people having a voice in the decisions of government. In the Roman empire, there was further development of a form of government which gave even more voice to the people.

In the last stages of the Roman empire, human government was a mixture of imperialism and democracy. Factors such as race and ethnicity, economic/class differences, territorial ambitions, civil war, political idealism, relativism in morality and philosophy prevented the final form of the kingdom from having unity and cohesiveness.

The most important part of Daniel's interpretation of the dream begins in verse 44. In previous verses the emphasis was on the deteriorating quality and limited duration of human forms of government. Beginning with verse 44, the emphasis is on a final, supernatural, and eternal form of government which will destroy and replace human governments.

Verse 44 gives information about a future time. If we carefully examine history, we discover that there was never a "ten-toed" stage in the old Roman empire in the fifth and sixth centuries — never a time in which ten leaders were ruling more or less simultaneously. The fact is that Daniel's description of the toes has not yet occurred. The leaders represented by the toes are yet future. The rock has not yet smashed and destroyed forms of human government.

Verse 44 speaks of God's kingdom being established in the "time of those kings." The words, "those kings," obviously refer back to the immediately preceding verses, and, linguistically, the most obvious link is to the "toes." The "toes," therefore, represent the leaders of a future revived Roman-type empire, which, as the previous verses indicated, will be characterized by a condition similar to that of original Rome: partly strong and partly weak, divided by diversity.

We can only conclude that Daniel's prophecy of the toes leaps over most of this present age, this period between the first and second comings of Christ. There is nothing unusual about this blending of near and far events. The Old Testament prophets frequently connected the first and second comings of Jesus without being able to distinguish the factor of time.

As I mentioned in the introduction, the statue represents the "times of the Gentiles," the period in which Israel is dominated by the Gentile powers. The "times of the Gentiles" will be brought to its conclusion by the appearance of the rock which "will crush all the previous kingdoms and bring them to an end." According to verse 44, "the God of heaven will (someday) set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed." It will "not be left to another earthly people." The rock will be the Messiah, Jesus. Sometime in the future He will establish the Kingdom of God on earth after eradicating all forms of Gentile power.

Verse 44 explains that the rock will endure forever, in contrast to each of the previous earthly kingdoms which held power for limited periods of time. The text indicates that the rise of Christ's kingdom will be sudden and with supernatural power. Verse 35 indicated that the rock would become a huge mountain and fill the earth. The kingdom of God will be greater than all earthly kingdoms, and it will endure eternally after all earthly kingdoms are reduced to dust.

Daniel closed his explanation of the dream by reminding Nebuchadnezzar that the great God of heaven had granted the king's desire to know what would take place in the future, and that the interpretation was absolutely trustworthy. It was important for Nebuchadnezzar to know about the kingdoms which would follow his, but the greatest significance of the dream concerned what God was going to do. Daniel wanted the king to recognize both the existing and the ultimate supremacy of God and His program over mankind.

The concluding section of the chapter concerns Nebuchadnezzar's response to Daniel's words. He highly honored the young man who had revealed so convincingly all that he wanted to know, and he praised the God to whom Daniel had given all credit. Nebuchadnezzar knew of Yahweh only through Daniel. He recognized that the revelation given to Daniel was supernatural, leading him to state: "Your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings." This was quite an admission coming from such a pagan egotistical person.

At the beginning of this chapter Nebuchadnezzar had promised great rewards to the person who could tell the dream and interpret it. Daniel was given not only presents, but also two positions of power. He was made "ruler over all the province of Babylon" and headship over all the wise men! These were extremely responsible positions for someone who was not yet 20 years old.

In these two roles, Daniel's influence in Babylonian affairs became very significant. As chief of the wise men, Daniel's counsel would have been sought in important matters and by the more influential people in the kingdom. We must keep in mind that Daniel was given these positions prior to the captivity of his fellow Judeans in 597 and 586 BC. Daniel was situated so that he might work to their best welfare when they arrived.

This chapter, so basic to an understanding of all God's dealing in history and prophecy, reveals three important truths:

God, not man, is sovereign in world affairs

Our sovereign God has a plan for the world

God is ordering history according to His plan