

The Kingdoms of the World

Daniel 2:31-49

Daniel 2 is one of the pivotal chapters of the Bible. It contains important truth about world history from God's point of view. One writer calls Daniel 2 "the Prophetic Alphabet" because in it you find the ABCs of Bible prophecy. Many people are wondering if we are living in the Last Days. Some misguided Bible teachers are even insisting that the rapture of the church will occur in September of this year. In times like these we need to know exactly what God says about the future.

I am struck by Peter's characterization of prophecy of scripture as "**a more sure word...which shines as a light in a dark place...**" (2 Peter 1:19). Rather than engaging in speculation or the setting of dates, we would do much better to just believe what God says in His Word. Bible prophecy is a good thing if it leads people to the Lord and to the Word of God and away from useless speculation. And with that in mind, I can't think of a better place to begin than Daniel 2.

As you recall from last week's study, King Nebuchadnezzar had dreamed something which had disturbed him greatly. He called the so-called wise men of Babylon together to interpret the dream, but he told them that they first had to tell him what he had dreamed. He may have forgotten the details of the dream, but more than that, he wanted to know whether his wise men would be able to interpret it correctly. When the men claimed that no one on earth could do such a thing, he commanded that all of the wise men in the kingdom of Babylon be put to death.

Now, Daniel and his three friends had not been invited to the dream interpretation meeting, but they were to be killed along with the rest. Daniel succeeded in asking the king to grant them some time, and they went to prayer. God revealed the dream and its interpretation to Daniel in a night vision. We left off when Nebuchadnezzar was told by Daniel that he'd been given a vision of what would take place in the latter days. In verse 28 Daniel says,

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. Your dream, and the visions of your head upon your bed, were these:

So the first clue as to the nature of the dream and its interpretation is that in it God is revealing what will take place in the "**latter days**." This is a phrase often used in Bible prophecy to refer to an extended period of time regarded as the consummation of the prophetic fore view. The expression is found as early as Genesis 49:1 where Jacob predicts the future of his sons. It is used by Balaam in Numbers 24:14 and Moses in Deuteronomy 4:30; 31:29 in connection with the future of Israel. Jeremiah uses the expression a number of times to refer to the climax of the age relating to the second coming of the Messiah (Jer 23:20; 30:24; 48:47; 49:39). Ezekiel 38:16 identifies the times of the invasion of Gog and Magog as "**in the latter days**". The minor prophets Hosea and Micah also use the expression in reference to the Messianic age (Hosea 3:5; Micah 4:1).

John Walvoord writes, "On the basis of scriptural usage in the Old Testament, it can be concluded that the expression (*the latter days*) is larger than that of Messianic times specifically, but that it always includes this element in its consummation."

So God revealed to Nebuchadnezzar a prophecy of the latter days, the future which encompasses all of the history of the nations until Christ returns and reigns over His eternal Kingdom.

Verse 29 tells us that Nebuchadnezzar had been thinking about the future before he went to sleep. Daniel said,

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.

Before interpreting the dream, in verse 30 Daniel made sure to note that this was not his own wisdom so that God should receive all credit for this interpretation.

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.

And so, as we pick up chapter two in verse 31, Daniel begins to reveal the dream.

2:31-35 The King's Dream

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.

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.

Nebuchadnezzar's dream was of a colossal statue made of several different metals. This massive brilliantly shining image was awesome. It inspired terror. Remember Daniel 2:1 said the king's spirit was so troubled by it he could not sleep.

Notice that the metals as you go down the statue are decreasing in value—gold, then silver, bronze, iron, and finally iron mixed with potter's clay or ceramic. Not

only are they decreasing in value, but they get less dense as you go down the statue. In other words, the statue is top-heavy. The gold at the top is more than twice as heavy as the iron and clay at the bottom. The metals also get harder and stronger as you descend the statue until finally the clay is hard, but brittle. From its head of gold to the fragile feet of clay mixed with iron, the image is fragile and prone to fall over.

And fall over it does when the stone cut out without human hands struck the statue's feet and crushed the entire image, which blew away to nothing. That stone then turned into a huge mountain that filled the whole earth. That's the strange dream that had Nebuchadnezzar all upset.

2:36-45 The Interpretation

Nebuchadnezzar has now heard Daniel tell the dream so he is ready for the interpretation. Verse 36,

36 "This is the dream. Now we will tell the interpretation of it before the king.

Daniel now begins to describe to the king of Babylon what each section of the image was.

2:37-38 The Head Of Gold

The image is a picture of the succession of four kingdoms that are eventually destroyed by a fifth kingdom that lasts forever. As we will see, The image represents four world empires in succeeding stages from Nebuchadnezzar all the way to the Kingdom of Heaven under the Lord Jesus Christ.

Daniel's interpretation begins at the top. The first part of the image was the head of gold. Daniel says that Nebuchadnezzar is the head of gold, calling him "a king of kings."

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.

Nebuchadnezzar was a king of kings. His rule and reign had conquered many nations, and the men who sat on the thrones of these nations served him. The Neo-Babylonian Empire under Nebuchadnezzar had conquered both Assyrian Empire and the Egyptian armies and had gained authority over many nations.

The head of gold represented Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom, Babylon. Just as the king personified the kingdom, so too did its capital city. Isaiah referred to Babylon as "the golden city" (Isaiah 14:4, KJV). Herodotus the Greek historian visited Babylon 90 years after Nebuchadnezzar's era. He was amazed at the sheer quantity of gold in Babylon. It seemed to cover nearly everything. Even the walls around the city, remembered for such size and width that two chariots could race

on them, were plated with gold. Babylon was rightly represented as the head of gold.

Daniel tells Nebuchadnezzar that this power and authority came from God. God of heaven granted him his kingdom. We know from the other prophets in the Old Testament that God raised up Nebuchadnezzar and his kingdom to be a chastening agent for His people, Israel and Judah. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Habakkuk and others had specifically prophesied that God would empower Babylon to conquer the nations including Judea and Jerusalem.

The kingdom of Babylon had been established by God for God's own purposes. Daniel had praised the name of God earlier in the chapter saying, Dan. 2:21 "... **He removes kings and raises up kings...**" So when God's chastening work through Babylon was done, it passed out of existence and was replaced by the silver kingdom.

2:39 The Breast And Arms Of Silver

Daniel prophesied that after the fall of Babylon, a second kingdom would arise. This was represented in the image by the breast and arms made of silver. Verse 39,

39 But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours; ...

We really do not have to guess the identities of these successive kingdoms because we have history to tell us what happened. Verse 39 was fulfilled in 539 BC when Cyrus, the king of Persia, and Darius, the king of Media, besieged Babylon. We will see this take place when we get to the end of Daniel chapter five. At this point, the world power became the Medo-Persian empire.

The characteristic of this Medo-Persian Empire would silver. Now silver in Aramaic language is the same word as money. The Medo-Persian Empire developed a vast system of taxation. They required that their taxes be paid in silver and they literally amassed tons and tons of silver. The prophecy here then is that there would come a second kingdom to replace Babylon and that kingdom would be characterized by silver.

Notice that Daniel calls it an inferior kingdom. Literally that is "*of the earth*" meaning lower. He is not speaking of strength or size. Certainly, the Medo-Persian empire was stronger and larger than the Babylonian Empire. However, it lacked the unity and absolute power of the king that Babylon had.

The Belly And Thighs Of Bronze

The third kingdom was, in the dream, the image's belly and thighs made of bronze. The second half of verse 39,

39 ... then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth.

This kingdom turns out to be the Greek Empire, under Alexander the Great. Notice that Daniel prophesied that this third kingdom would "**rule over all the earth.**" Very interesting statement because Alexander the Great commanded

people to call him by this title: *Alexander King of all the Earth*. Not only did Alexander defeat Darius the Mede's army, but he soon had defeated everyone else as well. You may have heard in world history class that at the age of 33, Alexander sat down and wept because there was no one left to conquer. The Greek Empire lasted from 330 BC to about 63 BC.

This kingdom is characterized by bronze or brass. Bronze is not as valuable as silver but bronze is stronger than silver. When you saw a Greek soldier, he would've had on his head a helmet of brass, on his body a breastplate of brass. Before him he would be carrying a shield of brass and a sword made out of brass.

2:40 The Legs Of Iron

The fourth kingdom Daniel described was one of iron. Verse 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.

This kingdom would crush everything. We know that this kingdom was Rome. The Roman Empire crushed and destroyed everything and everyone in its path. "There was no empire in world history that so crushed all of its enemies as Rome did. They were not satisfied just to take over a country and make them pay taxes, they slaughtered them. Rome crushed the peoples so that they would never even consider rebelling." (Hocking)

Rome, no question, was the strongest empire the world has ever known. Babylon lasted only about 70 years, Medo-Persia lasted around 200. The Greek empire lasted around 200 years. The Roman Empire lasted 500 years in the West and all the way to 1453 in the east when Constantinople conquered by the Turks. No other empire even comes close.

It was during the rule of the Roman Empire that the Son of God, Jesus Christ came into the world and lived as a man among us. It was Roman taxation that drove Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem where Jesus would be born. It was on a Roman cross that Jesus was crucified. It was Roman soldiers that guarded the tomb of Jesus when the stone was rolled away and Jesus rose from the dead.

I could preach all day about Jesus' first coming, but we need to finish with the interpretation of the dream today.

2:41-43 Feet Of Iron Mixed With Clay

Now the image progresses down to the toes, with the iron becoming mixed with clay. Verses 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.

Notice that this is not described as a fifth kingdom, but an extension of the fourth one.

It is highly significant that no world empire ever arose after the Roman Empire broke up. It is out of the old Roman Empire that what we call "Western Civilization" arose. In a sense though the Roman Empire no longer exists, its influence is still felt through all the nations that came out of the territory it once ruled. And "Western Civilization" itself (which includes the United States in a broad sense) traces its history in large part back to ancient Rome and Greece.

Notice that when the stone hits the statue, it doesn't hit the head, the chest, the thighs, or the legs, but strikes the feet and toes of iron mixed with clay. The feet and toes represent the Roman Empire at the time it is destroyed. This kingdom is pictured in a later vision of Daniel's as a beast with ten horns. I believe this takes us into a vision that is yet future. I believe this means that the stone (which represents Christ coming back to the earth to establish His kingdom) will smash the governments of mankind as they are allied together in the Last Days.

This is further explained in the book of Revelation. The devil appears in Revelation 12 as a red dragon having seven heads and ten horns. Then, in chapter 13, the antichrist arises with these same ten horns and seven heads. In chapter 17, these things are explained to John by an angel. The seven heads are seven mountains, which speak of the city of Rome. The ten horns are the ten kings. The angel says,

[Rev 17:13-14 NKJV] 13 "These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast. 14 "These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those [who are] with Him [are] called, chosen, and faithful."

The Lamb will overcome them. Who is the Lamb? Jesus Christ. As Revelation 11 says,

[Rev 11:15 NKJV] 15 Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world have become [the kingdoms] of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!"

Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God who overcame sin and death by His sacrifice of Himself on the cross of Calvary and through His glorious resurrection. The Lamb overcomes the Kingdoms of this world. He is also the crushing stone in verse 44,

2:44-45 The Crushing Stone

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."

Daniel tells of the stone crushing the kingdoms. In the Bible Jesus has often been referred to as a stone. 1 Peter 2 pulls some of these references together:

[1Peter 2:6-7 NKJV] 6 Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, (here Peter quotes Isaiah 28:16) "Behold, I lay in Zion A chief cornerstone, elect, precious, And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame." 7 Therefore, to you who believe, [He is] precious; but to those who are disobedient, "The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone," (Quoting Psalm 118:22). 8 and (now quoting Isaiah 8:14) "A stone of stumbling And a rock of offense." They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.

Jesus spoke of Himself in this way as well.

[Mat 21:42-44 NKJV] 42 Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone. This was the LORD's doing, And it is marvelous in our eyes' ? 43 "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. 44 "And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder."

So there is the choice: you can fall on the stone, or the stone will fall on you. Those of the fourth world kingdom will not fall on the stone - He will fall on them. And when that happens, when Jesus comes again, the stone will become a mountain. He will establish a permanent kingdom - with a new heavens and a new earth. That kingdom will last for all eternity.

Note what Daniel says about that final kingdom.

1) It is not made by human hands. Here is the final rebuke to human effort. When Christ sets up His kingdom, He won't need any help from human beings.

2) It will smash all earthly kingdoms. Today is a day of grace when God permits opposition to his program in order that sinners might have more time to consider their ways and turn to the Lord. But a day of judgment is coming when the Lord Jesus will crush all his enemies under his feet.

3) It is universal and eternal. To borrow a phrase from Charles Wesley, "Jesus shall reign, where'er the sun doth its successive journeys run. His Kingdom spread from shore to shore, 'til moons shall wax and wane no more." Daniel plainly says the final kingdom will not be left to another people. His kingdom is

the final kingdom. He will never be replaced by anyone else and no one will ever overthrow Him.

Last in chapter 2 we see Daniel's:

2:46-49 Advancement In Babylon

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 recognized that Daniel's God was more powerful than those which he worshiped. Unfortunately, as we get into chapter three, we will see that viewing himself as the head of gold will lead to terrible sin.

As we close I want to take you again to Jesus Christ, the stone cut out without human hands, the stone that the builders rejected, the stone on which you are either broken, or which will break you in pieces.

Today you have the opportunity to believe in Jesus Christ to fall on Him and receive forgiveness for your sin and the gift of eternal life in the Kingdom of Heaven.