

The Book Of Daniel (Part Two)

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

Martin G. Collins

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At the end of Daniel 1, we are told that God gave Daniel three things. Because of his faithful decision not to defile himself with the food and culture of the Babylonians, God granted Daniel wisdom, influence, and health—wisdom beyond the wisdom of the Babylonians, influence beyond that of any in the kingdom, and health that resulted in long life.

However, when we move from the end of the first to the beginning of the second chapter, we find that each of these is immediately either disregarded or threatened. The way God works, sometimes, is it not that great blessings come and then the carpet gets pulled out from under us, at least seemingly so?

At the end of his period of training, Daniel is presumably graduated into the company of advisors and statesmen, referred to by Nebuchadnezzar as the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and astrologers—as Daniel 2:2 records. But we need to remember that Daniel was still only about 18 or 19 years of age at this time, and that there were undoubtedly many among those men who were far greater and far more influential than he was. They had been advisors to the emperors of Babylon for many years, and in that company Daniel would have been low man on the pole.

In fact, when Nebuchadnezzar had his dream, which is the central episode of chapter 2, an inquiry about it was made to these men—that is, all the men except Daniel—but Daniel did not seem to have been consulted, and in reality did not even know what was happening until the order was given to execute the wise men. So Daniel had no power and negligible influence.

In so far as health and long life were concerned, we find that when the wise men were unable to tell the king what his dream was and the king threatened to kill them all, Daniel, who was not even consulted and whose influence in ancient Babylon did not amount to a hill of beans at this time, was nevertheless also on the verge of extermination. So all of those gifts, promises, that God gave him seemed to be on the chopping block.

However, although his gifts were disregarded, and although he was now under sentence of death by Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel was wise, and the crisis became the occasion to which God brought him to the forefront of leadership in Babylon.

Let me emphasize this: It was God who placed Daniel in the foremost position. That is worth repeating because here, as elsewhere in the story, we find the overriding sovereignty of God in this young man's affairs. In fact, the sovereignty of God is the connection between these chapters, and moreover, it is the primary theme of the entire book of Daniel.

In chapter 1, God gave Daniel wisdom, influence, and health or long life. Now, in spite of the threat to kill Daniel, God fulfills what He has promised, but how? By being sovereign over the details of history and every detail of them.

If God does not control our lives, from the actions of the kings and others in positions of power to the minutest circumstances, then everything in life is uncertain. If this were true, it would mean that we are victims of circumstances and whatever happens will happen. But if God is sovereign, as the Bible declares Him to be, and if He is our God; if the promises He makes and the actions He takes are certain of fulfillment, then we can be confident of the future and know that we will be able to live our lives in a way that pleases God, be able to cope with anything—any trial, any threat of extermination, death—whatever the worst thing could be (torture, possibly). God is in control of our lives, but He does not because we still have freewill, and so we are still able to make decisions and even bad decisions in our lives. But overall, God has total control of our lives and will not let us suffer anymore than we are able. Whatever He allows us to suffer, He will give us the power to endure. He has given us that promise and there is no doubt of that.

Daniel 2:1-2 Now in the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; and his spirit was so troubled that his sleep left him. Then the king gave the command to call the magicians, the astrologers, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans to tell the king his dreams. So they came and stood before the king.

Nebuchadnezzar was not the first monarch in history to dream troublesome dreams. Nor was he the last. Statesmen are often troubled by the past and have forebodings about the future. But Nebuchadnezzar's dream was not like the dreams that normal statesmen have. Nebuchadnezzar's dream had been given to him by God, even though he did not know who this God was. Because it had been given to him by God, it was an accurate revelation; it was a prophecy of important events to come. And as we see now, in our lives, looking back, it was perfectly accurate; it was about the most important aspects of history in a general sense.

Nebuchadnezzar had people around him who were supposed to be able to deal with such things. So he called the magicians and the enchanters and the sorcerers and the astrologers together. And in verse 3:

Daniel 2:3-4 And the king said to them, “I have had a dream, and my spirit is anxious to know the dream.” Then the Chaldeans spoke to the king in Aramaic, “O king, live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will give the interpretation.”

It is worth a digression here to observe that beginning with this verse 4 the book of Daniel changes from being written in Hebrew, which has been the case up to this point, to Aramaic which continues to the end of chapter 7. For the most part, the Old Testament was written in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek, but there are a few exceptions and this is one of them. But why is that important? For one thing, it suggests that the earlier portion of the book—chapters 2 through 7—which deals with things that happen to Daniel and his friends in Babylon and concerns Babylon and was therefore recorded in a language that would make it available to the people of that land, while the latter portion of the book—chapters 8 through 12—which concerns the future of the Israelitish people, was written in their official language. In other words, the book of Daniel expresses God’s concern for both peoples. But there is more to it than that.

After the Jews’ return from Babylon, the common language of the people was Aramaic, which they learned during the 70 years of exile in Babylon, and the use of the two languages by Daniel is therefore a strong argument for the genuineness of this book. No one writing at a later date would have written part of the book in one language and part in another. A late impostor would have written it exclusively in Aramaic; an earlier impostor would have written it in Hebrew. But only a man who spoke Hebrew and who had learned Aramaic in the Babylonian court would have written a part of the book that dealt with Babylon in Aramaic so that it could be understood by Babylonians, and part in Hebrew so that it would fit in with the rest of the Israelitish scriptures.

Anyway, the astrologers answered the king in Aramaic saying, “Tell us this dream and we will interpret it.” Nebuchadnezzar ignored their request and repeated what he had said originally, but with the addition of a threat: If they did not tell him the dream and its interpretation, then something would happen to them.

Now continuing on in verse 5 of Daniel 2:

Daniel 2:5 The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, “My decision is

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firm: if you do not make known the dream to me, and its interpretation, you shall be cut in pieces, and your houses shall be made an ash heap.

That is worse than death.

Daniel 2:6 However, if you tell the dream and its interpretation, you shall receive from me gifts, rewards, and great honor. Therefore tell me the dream and its interpretation.”

At this point we would probably have detected a rising note of dismay in the wise men’s voices. They were probably terrified and beside themselves.

Daniel 2:7 They answered again and said, “Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will give its interpretation.”

If you have ever been in an interview when the conversation went from bad to worse, that is what seems to have happened here—each side had what we might call a reasonable position. The astrologers argued that they could not tell what the dream meant unless the king told them what the dream was; the king replied that if they were true astrologers and not fakes they should be able to divine what he had dreamed. And this was going nowhere quickly. The king was getting frustrated.

Daniel 2:8-9 The king [Nebuchadnezzar] answered and said, “I know for certain that you would gain time, because you see that my decision is firm: if you do not make known the dream to me, there is only one decree for you! For you have agreed to speak lying and corrupt words before me till the time has changed. Therefore tell me the dream, and I shall know that you can give me its interpretation.”

Otherwise, they could have made up anything after hearing the dream.

Daniel 2:10-11 The Chaldeans answered the king, and said, “There is not a man on earth who can tell the king’s matter; therefore no king, lord, or ruler has ever asked such things of any magician, astrologer, or Chaldean. It is a difficult thing that the king requests, and there is no other who can tell it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh.”

Was not that interesting—the conclusion that they came to? These astrologers said no one can reveal it to the king except the gods. But there was one true God who does reveal Himself to man, who would later say to Amos,

Amos 3:7 Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets.

In this case, God would reveal what He was about to do through Daniel, and the stage was set for the first great revelation to Nebuchadnezzar of the reality, wisdom, and power of the one true God. Throughout biblical history, you find occasions when God exposed the foolishness of the world and the deceptiveness of Satan. Moses and Aaron defeated the magicians of Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt; Elijah, on Mount Carmel, exposed the deception of Baal worship; and then there was Jeremiah who confronted the false prophet Hananiah and revealed his wickedness; and later there was Paul who exposed the deception of Bar-Jesus the sorcerer. But it was Jesus who by His life, teaching, and sacrificial death declared the wisdom of this world to be foolishness with God, and that includes all its myths and uses of religions. The statement of the advisors, in Daniel 2:10-11, wipes out astrology and other forms of human prophecy. Out of their own mouths, they condemned their own practices.

Now here in Daniel 2, we will continue with verse 12 and read down through verse 20.

Daniel 2:12-13 For this reason the king was angry and very furious, and gave the command to destroy all the wise men of Babylon. So the decree went out, and they began killing the wise men; and they sought Daniel and his companions, to kill them.

The cruelty of the ancient tyrants and their infliction of extreme, agonizing punishment on the most frivolous pretenses are legendary. Everybody who has read anything about history knows of them. The fury and anger of Nebuchadnezzar led to the most excruciating tortures and the sentence of death against the wise men. So by the time the men came to get Daniel and the others, there had already been tortures and deaths going on. It was a terrifying time; it was a time of heavy persecution against not even the Christians—they did not exist per se at that time—but it was against all who claimed to be able to speak for their god.

Next we get into Daniel's response in prayer and God's revelation of Nebuchadnezzar's

dream.

Daniel 2:14-17 Then with counsel and wisdom Daniel answered Arioch, the captain of the king's guard, who had gone out to kill the wise men of Babylon; he answered and said to Arioch the king's captain, "Why is the decree from the king so urgent?" Then Arioch made the decision known to Daniel. So Daniel went in and asked the king to give him time, that he might tell the king the interpretation. Then Daniel went to his house, and made the decision known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions...

Remember they were Meshach, Shadrach, and Abed-Nego.

Daniel 2:18-20 ...that they might seek mercies from the God of heaven concerning this secret, so that Daniel and his companions might not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. Then the secret was revealed to Daniel in a night vision. So Daniel blessed the God of heaven. Daniel answered and said: "Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, for wisdom and might are His."

Daniel shows the right response. He leads his friends in praying to the true God for insight. With remarkable faith, he had such confidence in God's will that Daniel requested from Arioch an appointment with the king to reveal the dream and its interpretation before God had revealed the dream to Daniel. What faith that shows!

Unlike the gods of the Babylon diviners, Daniel's God was able and willing to reveal such a mystery to His servants. Isaiah recorded God's statement about this type of thing in Isaiah 44:

Isaiah 44:7-8 [This is God speaking] And who can proclaim as I do? Then let him declare it and set it in order for Me, since I appointed the ancient people. And the things that are coming and shall come, let them show these to them. Do not fear, nor be afraid; have I not told you from that time, and declared it? You are My witnesses. Is there a God besides Me? Indeed there is no other Rock; I know not one.

So God would arrange the events in a proper order as an army is marshaled and arrayed for battle. God was not revealing things in a chaotic way, but He was revealing

His plans bit by bit and in an organized way. As an army is marshaled and arrayed for battle and there should be no improper sequences of events, no chance, no haphazard, no confusion, the events which take place under His government occur in proper order and time, and in a way that best serves His plans. And should not we be emulating that? Should not we be doing the same thing? Following certain orders of things, doing things in a proper way.

Daniel had not been party to this first confrontation because he was too much of a junior adviser to be invited. But when the command went out to execute the astrologers, Daniel was nevertheless included, and it was not long before Arioch, the commander of the king's guard, came to escort Daniel and his friends to death row. At this point, Daniel reveals an astonishing measure of faith, particularly for a young man. He went to the king and asked for time so that he might interpret the dream for him. Where did Daniel get faith in God strong enough to make such an offer?

No doubt, Daniel and his friends were well-versed in the Old Testament and they undoubtedly knew the story of Joseph and his interpretation of the dreams of the chief butler and the chief cup-bearer of Pharaoh, and the important dream of Pharaoh. The situation in Babylon was comparable to Joseph's. Moreover, when Daniel appeared before Nebuchadnezzar to explain the dream, he answered as Joseph had answered Pharaoh, giving full glory to God.

Daniel 2:27-28 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. 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:

For man it was an impossible situation, but for God it was no more difficult to disclose and interpret this dream than any other dream. The secret of Daniel's great faith and power is that he had his focus on God. He was not distracted by all of the incidents going on around him. We see this in Daniel's focus on the fact that God was revealing it to the king and Daniel took no credit for himself. Many people would have elevated themselves and said, "Look what God has revealed to me." But not Daniel. Right from the beginning, he gave God full credit and never took any, whatsoever, himself, not even if he thought that it might save him, because he knew where his Savior was and who He was.

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Like Peter, who walks toward Jesus over the churning water of the Sea of Galilee, Daniel had fixed his eyes on God and he did not doubt that God could both disclose the dream and give its meaning. That night Daniel got together with his three friends and the effectual fervent prayer of these four righteous men availed much. God revealed the dream to Daniel and the next day, Daniel revealed and interpreted the dream to King Nebuchadnezzar.

Now if we were telling the story, we might rush directly to the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream at this point, but instead Daniel gives us the prayer he made upon waking. Why is this inserted here in the story flow? The one answer is that it is undoubtedly the true record of what happened. Daniel was so struck by God's goodness in answering his prayer and that of his friends that he felt compelled to praise God for it. And whenever God remarkably blesses His servants, they are stirred up even more to praise Him. Well, that is one reason and a fine one. But the theme of the prayer is also the theme of these ongoing chapters—the sovereignty of God. Therefore, the commentary on why Daniel had been able to act as he acted and what the dream, which is yet to be interpreted, will be about.

In the first part—that is, of the prayer—there is praise to God for two of His most important attributes: wisdom and power. And this means that the prayer begins with adoration, as all good prayers do. How appropriate the first attribute is the ascription of wisdom to God in these circumstances.

Ancient Babylon was the seat of earthly wisdom. And Daniel and his friends had been brought to Babylon to be trained in that wisdom—the wisdom of the world, the traditions of men. However, in the story that leads up to this, the wisdom of the wisest of the Babylonians—the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and astrologers—had been shown to be inadequate, to say the least. They had confessed:

Daniel 2:10-11 (New International Version) There is [not a man] on earth who can do what the king asks!...What the king asks is too difficult. No one can reveal it to the king except the gods...

That was true. But there is a God in whom is hidden all wisdom and this is disclosed in the story. In his book, "The Knowledge of the Holy", by A. W. Tozer, he has a chapter called "The Wisdom of God" in which he says the following, and I think this is a very accurate and good description:

The idea of God as infinitely wise is at the root of all truth. It is a datum of

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belief necessary to the soundness of all other beliefs about God. Wisdom, among other things, is the ability to devise perfect ends and to achieve those ends by the most perfect means. It sees the end from the beginning so there can be no need to guess or conjecture. Wisdom sees everything in focus, each in proper relation to all, and is thus able to work toward predestined goals with flawless precision. All God's acts are done in perfect wisdom, first for His own glory and then for the highest good of the greatest number for the longest time, and all His acts are as pure as they are wise, and as good as they are wise and pure. Not only could His acts not be better done, a better way to do them could not be imagined. An infinitely wise God must work in a manner, not to be improved upon by finite preachers. O Lord, how manifold are Thy works. In wisdom hast Thou made them all. The earth is full of Thy riches.

The second attribute for which Daniel praised God is power, that is, His sovereignty, the theme of the book of Daniel. In the natural human state, nobody likes this attribute of God. This is because we want to be sovereign ourselves. We want to be powerful to control our own lives. And this was true of Nebuchadnezzar. Hopefully, with God's Holy Spirit, we are able to overcome that aspect of human nature—to want to be in complete control of our own lives.

As the story develops, we are going to see that the battle between Nebuchadnezzar and God was over this precise issue. Who was in control? Was it Nebuchadnezzar, the greatest ruler of the time? Nebuchadnezzar, who held the very lives of his subjects in his hands? Or was it God whom Nebuchadnezzar would not even acknowledge? As the story unfolds, Nebuchadnezzar, at length, subjects himself to this God and confesses openly.

Daniel 4:34-35—this begins talking of Nebuchadnezzar praising God.

Daniel 4:34-35 And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever: For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, "What have You done?"

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Of course, that ‘What have You done?’ is questioning Him on whether He was doing something wise or not. No one can do that.

The second part of Daniel’s prayer is the acknowledgement that although all wisdom and power are God’s, God nevertheless imparts both wisdom and power to mankind:

Daniel 2:21-22 And He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding. He reveals deep and secret things; He knows what is in the darkness, and light dwells with Him.

No doubt the greatest portion of this wisdom—wisdom of spiritual things—is reserved for God’s people alone. The Apostle Paul declares that same thing:

I Corinthians 2:14 But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

But there is a general wisdom given to non-believers too, just as political power is given to non-believing as well as believing rulers. The important thing is the recognition that this comes from God, which Daniel did recognize, but which Nebuchadnezzar—at least at this stage in his life—did not. It makes all the difference in the way we live our lives when we know that God and not man is ultimately in charge of these circumstances. That is why Daniel was able to make the right decision in faith and tell Nebuchadnezzar that he would be able to translate the dream—that revelation would come from God.

Finally, in the third part of his prayer, Daniel praises God for the wisdom and power He had imparted to him personally.

Daniel 2:23 I thank You and praise You, O God of my fathers; 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 demand.

Under normal circumstances, Daniel was in the habit of praying three times a day and records one of the most other-oriented or God-centered prayers in scripture in Daniel 9:4-19, which we will get to later in the series. Such a prayer sheds a flood of light upon the character of the man who expresses it. It was addressed to the God of heaven as

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that title was of unique significance when the facts of Daniel's history are taken in account.

He had been brought up among an idolatrous people who worshipped many gods and many lords: the sun, the moon, the planets, and a mob of inferior deities. Despite these influences, he had kept the faith of his fathers untainted. For Daniel, the one true God was the God of heaven, the almighty Ruler who had fashioned the great multitude of stars which the Chaldeans or the astrologers adored and had traced out through astronomical courses, from which the astrologers professed to gain their knowledge of the future.

Concerning the prayer itself, this is how an acknowledgement of praise both begins and ends. God removes kings and sets up kings, not human ambitions and earthly armies. He gives wisdom to the wise, not the promoters of Chaldean false beliefs. He reveals the deep and secret things, not the astrologers and diviners that call on heathen gods. There is a kind of subdued triumph in Daniel's prayer, a spirit of exaltation in its language without any mixture of human pride, but humility of one who had trusted so fully and been rewarded so richly. Daniel was a humble man of age 18-19 at this time.

Today we have not been given Daniel's special ability to know and understand dreams in the significant way as he did, but we have been given a special wisdom to know and believe in Jesus Christ personally and to have the Father revealed to us. This is both a great honor and a tremendous privilege.

Colossians 2:3 says that in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. So to know Jesus as Savior and Lord is to be wise and the fear—that is reverence—of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. If you have that knowledge, you thank God for it, as Daniel did. You praise Him for the wisdom that has made you wise to salvation. You should always be and continuously be praying and thanking God for that, both asking and thanking Him for it.

To the question of the king, whether he was able to show the dream with its interpretation, Daniel replies by directing him from man, who is unable to accomplish such a thing, to the living God in heaven who alone reveals secrets. In reply to the king's question, Daniel immediately gave all glory to the God of Heaven, and in this he reminds us of Joseph when he interpreted Pharaoh's dreams in Genesis 41. Nebuchadnezzar must have been shocked when Daniel even told him that he knew the king had been worrying about the future of his kingdom before he had his dream.

The book of Daniel is a magnificent story of the triumph of Daniel and the three other

Godly men in the midst of the moral and spiritual murkiness of ancient Babylon, but it is also a record of important visions that prophesy both immediate and distant historical events.

Daniel 2:24-28 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." 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." 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?" 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. 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.

Notice, "He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar, [not Daniel]"—is the way Daniel words it. He did not take the credit.

Daniel 2:28-30 Your dream, and the visions of your head upon your bed, were these: 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. 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.

So Daniel's humility is very apparent here.

Daniel 2:31-36 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. This image's head was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. 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. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together,

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

Now the phrase “latter days” in verse 28, sometimes translated “last days” or “last times,” is found frequently in scripture beginning with Genesis 49:1 and ending with II Peter 3:3. Jesus Christ ushered in the last days with His death, resurrection, and ascension to heaven. So we are living now in that period of time when God is wrapping things up. God has plans for the latter days of Israel which will climax with the Messiah’s returning to earth and being received by His people.

The last days for the church include perilous times—the apostasy of many, the rise of scoffers and deniers of the truth—and this period will end when Christ returns with His saints to establish God’s government on earth.

On hearing this accurate description, the king knew that Daniel was telling the truth and that what he said could be trusted. Only the God of heaven who sent the dream could have revealed it.

Daniel 2:36-40 This is the dream. Now we will tell the interpretation of it before the king. You, O king, are a king of kings. For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory; 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. But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours; then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. 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.

As Daniel explained it, Nebuchadnezzar had dreamed about a large statue—an enormous dazzling image—awesome in physical appearance. The large image represented four world-ruling kingdoms or empires.

The first part of this statue—the head of gold—represents Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian kingdom, and we see in this a biblical prophecy that a king in prophecy represents an entire kingdom. This was the Chaldean-Babylonian empire. It lasted from

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about 625 BC to 539 BC. Jeremiah called Babylon “a gold cup in the Lord’s hand” in Jeremiah 51:7. Now this brief description of the importance of Babylon in world history is very accurate. It is significant that this is the point at which the vision starts. One reason is that Nebuchadnezzar was then living, and Babylon was the world empire of the time.

The city of Babylon was exceptionally impressive even by today’s standards. The walls were 60 miles in circumference and 300 feet high around the city. Its foundation extended 30 feet underground, and if that were not enough, the walls were 80 feet thick. There were 250 guard towers spaced around the top of the wall. There were 100 bronze gates set in the wall. A chariot drawn by four horses could make a U-turn on the wall. A moat surrounded the outer wall and a second smaller wall was inside the larger wall. It was truly a world-class city even by today’s standards. This is where Daniel and his three friends lived: a world-class city with a powerful leader who had the power of life and death, if God allowed him.

But in the biblical perspective, Babylon is also the first and prototype of all world empires. The Bible introduces Babylon in the early chapters of Genesis as the center of Nimrod’s empire, the place where men first banded together against God who scattered them by the confusion of their language.

Apparently, Babylon had always been great, but it had reason to hype the previously unmatched magnificence under Nebuchadnezzar. It was there, for example, that the famous hanging gardens—one of the wonders of the ancient world—were located. But this was God’s doing, not Nebuchadnezzar’s. The dominant position given to God is seen very clearly in Daniel 2:37-38.

Now Nebuchadnezzar will dispute this, which is what the third and fourth chapters of Daniel are about. But he is to learn that it is God, nevertheless, who had set him up and that it would be God who would also take him down. As Nebuchadnezzar later acknowledges, as recorded in Daniel 4:35, God does as He pleases with the powers of heaven on the peoples of the earth.

The second part of the statue—the chest and arms of silver—represents the kingdom of the Medes and Persians, the Medo-Persian empire, a kingdom that would succeed but would be inferior to that of Nebuchadnezzar’s. It lasted from about 539 BC to 330 BC. Darius the Mede conquered Babylon. It was brought to its zenith of power by King Darius, and Darius is introduced to us at the end of Daniel 5.

The third part of the statue—the belly and thighs of bronze—represents the kingdom of the Greeks established by Alexander the Great: the Greco-Macedonian empire. It lasted

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from about 330 BC to 31 BC. Alexander the Great established what was probably the largest empire in ancient times, and he died in 323 BC.

Fourth part of the statue—the legs of iron and the feet of iron and clay—represents the Roman Empire and its daughters. This empire ruled beginning in 31 AD; the imagery suggests that it will exist in some form until the end of the age. Iron represents strength, but clay represents weakness. Rome was strong in law, organization, and military might but the empire included so many different peoples that this created weakness, and it was spiritually weak as well. The people would be an ethnic mixture; it would not remain united for long. Although this kingdom was still hundreds of years in the future, as Daniel spoke, he nevertheless described it accurately.

Daniel 2:40-43 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. 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. 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. 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 accurate forecast of the Gentile world empires following the fall of Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon is proof of God's sovereignty, which is the dominant theme of Daniel, as I have mentioned several times. The proof is that God can foretell what is going to come about in history because God is in control of history. He has the omniscience and wisdom and experience that enable Him to be able to accurately anticipate what people and nations will do. He is able to foretell what will happen because He has determined what will happen and because He has the power to make it happen. What is more, this shows God to be the true God.

I said in my first sermon that my interest and my goal in these sermons on the book of Daniel are not as much about the historical aspect of things as they are about the spiritual principles that are applicable to us and that we can learn from. But nevertheless, there is a great deal of history in this. So there is a certain amount of basic coverage that I will do.

God presents this argument in Isaiah 41. There God challenges the false gods of the time by asking them to tell the future as proof that they are real gods. Well, failing that,

He challenges them to do something, anything, to show their value.

Isaiah 41:21-24 “Present your case,” says the Lord. “Bring forth your strong reasons,” says the King of Jacob. Let them bring forth and show us what will happen; let them show the former things, what they were, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or declare to us things to come. Show the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods; yes, do good or do evil, that we may be dismayed and see it together. Indeed you are nothing, and your work is nothing; he who chooses you is an abomination.

That is quite frank, blunt, and final—an abomination.

I once worked with a guy who used to eat oysters in front of me. He knew that I did not eat them. And I said, “You know, God says that is an abomination.” He says, “Well, He says it is an abomination, but He does not say you cannot eat it.” So I said, “Okay, there is no use continuing on that note.” So we never did speak religion again.

As simple as this explanation appears, it carries with it some important and profound messages. A first message is that it reveals that God is in control of history. He knows the future because He plans the future. This does not mean that God is to be blame for the evil things that leaders of nations do, but that He can overrule even their wickedness to accomplish His divine purposes.

The God of Heaven gave Nebuchadnezzar his throne and enabled him to defeat his enemies and expand his empire. But the God who gave him his authority could also take it away, and He did. The king did not know how long his empire would last, but he knew it would end some day. In fact, Babylon was conquered by what Daniel called “an inferior kingdom.”

The second message is that the dream reveals that human enterprises decline as time goes on. The massive and awesome image not only changed in value from head to foot—from gold to clay—but it also changed in strength, finally ending in feet made of iron mixed with clay. Now actually the statue was top-heavy because the atomic weight of gold is ten times that of clay and silver; it is five times heavier than clay.

From age to age, nations and kingdoms appear strong and durable, but they are always in danger of falling over and crashing because as goes the head, so goes the body. The image Nebuchadnezzar saw dazzled him with the brilliance of the gold, iron, bronze, but

it is standing on feet composed of iron and clay. As we survey history, on one level we see progress and improvement, and when we go deeper we see decay and decline. Thoreau said that America had “improved means to unimproved ends”. And that can be said of any developing nation of the world.

A third message is that it will be difficult for things to hold together at the end of the age. The feet of the image were composed of a mixture of iron and clay. Iron is strong and durable but clay is weak and prone to crumble. The iron in the image gives the appearance of strength and endurance but the clay announces just the opposite. In fact, the clay robs the iron of its ability to hold things together because wherever the iron touches the clay, at those points there is weakness.

Society today is held together by treaties that can be broken, promises that can be ignored, traditions that can be forgotten, organizations that can disbanded, and money-making enterprises that can fail—all of it iron mixed with clay. Man at his best is clay because God made him out of the dust of the earth. Though man and woman are both made in the image of God, sin has robbed us of the dominion He gave us. We are both creators and destroyers, bent on destroying one another and the world God has graciously given us. The heart of every problem is the problem in the human heart—rebellion against God. Thankfully, we in God’s church have come out of that and are doing our best to live God’s way of life. We have God’s power and strength and wisdom to help us every moment of everyday.

The image gives us a fourth message. Jesus Christ will return, destroy His enemies, and establish His Kingdom. The stone is a frequent image of God in Scripture and especially of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The phrase “without hands” is used in scripture to mean “not by human power” and refers to something only God can do. It appears that the Roman Empire will in some ways continue until the end of the age and culminate in the rule of ten kings.

Daniel 2:44 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.

The world will be delivered from evil, not by a process but by a crisis—the promised return of Jesus Christ. Whatever remains of the four world kingdoms, passed from one kingdom to the next, will be destroyed and turned into chaff. Then Christ will establish God’s Kingdom, which will fill all the earth.

When we consider these messages, our response should be one of joyful confidence, knowing that God has everything under control and will one day reign on this earth. While God's people should do everything they can to live God's way of life and set a good example, our hope is not in man's laws or its political alliances or moral crusades; there is no hope in those. Our hope is in the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. People's hearts can only be changed by the grace of God, and that means God's people must be true witnesses to the ends of the earth, as His representatives. The only Kingdom that will stand forever is God's Kingdom, and the only people who will be citizens of that Kingdom are those who have trusted Him and been born from above through the power of the Spirit of God.

What would all of this have meant to king Nebuchadnezzar as he sat on his throne, listening to the young Jewish lad explain God's mysteries? For one thing, the message of the image should have humbled him. It was not Nebuchadnezzar who conquered nations and kings; it was God who enabled him to do it and who gave him his empire. Daniel said, "For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory." Alas, the great king forgot his lesson and one day said, "Is not this great Babylon that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?" What arrogance! The total opposite attitude of Daniel who was so humble. God had to humble the king and make him live like an animal until he learned that God does according to His own will and alone deserves the glory.

In giving the dream and enabling Daniel to know the dream and explain it, God displayed His wisdom and power. God has the wisdom to plan the ages and the power to execute His plan. Nebuchadnezzar ruled for a little more than 40 years, but Jesus Christ will rule forever and ever. Of His Kingdom, there shall be no end.

There is another thing to be seen about Daniel's prophecy concerning the world's empires before we consider the great stone that is the climax of the vision. It is the decline of glory and even the decline of resilience that this vision represents. Daniel makes the point, explicitly showing that each kingdom is inferior to the one before it in terms of its glory. That is to say, gold is the most precious of metals and since the golden head of the statue represents Babylon, Babylon was therefore the most glorious of the four world kingdoms. Silver is less precious than gold, therefore less glorious. Bronze is less precious than silver, therefore also a step further down in splendor. Iron, the most basic of these metals, is the least glorious of all. Yet, each of these is also stronger up to a point: silver is stronger than gold, bronze is stronger than silver, and iron is stronger than bronze.

Daniel stresses this, saying iron breaks and smashes everything. The kingdoms of the

world seemed to be trading magnificence for strength, which they must do if the succeeding empires are to be sufficiently strong enough to destroy their predecessors. Is there any end to the technology that man creates in ways of destroying himself? Yet amazingly, when the vision gets to the strongest empire of all—the Roman Empire—the dream shows that the kingdom would be divided and in its divided state would have its strength of iron mixed with brittle clay. This is the opposite of the humanistic view of world progress.

In its purest form, the doctrine of progress by the humanists insists that progress must always occur on all fronts. This is not true of course. There are declines as well as gains. So modified expressions of the progress philosophy argue that losses in one area—that is glory or magnificence, for example—are more than compensated for by gains in another area—strength and power to preserve, for example.

But even that is an illusion, according to this chapter of Daniel. When we go on with God, as Daniel and his friends did go on, we move on from strength to strength, from victory and victory, and this is real progress—both personal and social. But apart from God, even our imagined advances are actually declines.

Is the United States not morally and spiritually weaker today though physically stronger than it was a generation or so ago? Is not the same thing true of most other technically advanced societies?

We come then to the climax of the king's dream—the stone or rock that struck the feet of the statue, destroying it. Daniel interpreted this part of the dream

Daniel 2:44-45 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. 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.

At the end of the latter days, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed. It will crush all the rebellious kingdoms of the earth and bring them to an end but it will itself endure forever. The great God has shown the king what will take place in the future. The dream is true and the interpretation is trustworthy. Now the stone is

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easily identified with Jesus Christ. The stone—Christ—that struck the image representing four kingdoms became a great mountain—kingdom or government—and will fill the whole earth. This represents the Kingdom of God which Christ will establish at His second coming of the same time period. Isaiah 2:2 predicts:

Isaiah 2:2 Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain [that is, kingdom] of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains [that is, the big nations], and shall be exalted above the hills [referring to the smaller nations]; and all nations shall flow to it.

Mention of the stone unveils a rich load of biblical imagery. Notice the reference in Psalm 118:22, where it says:

Psalm 118:22 (NIV) The stone the builders rejected has become the [capstone].

This refers to something that happened in the building of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem. The stones of the Temple were quarried from the temple site according to detailed plans supplied by the Temple architects, and they were transported to the site and assembled without the noise of stone and cutting tools. Early in the construction a stone was sent that did not seem to fit, and since the builders did not know what to do with it, they laid it aside and forgot it. Later when they came to replace a large capstone on their now nearly-completed structure and sent to the quarry for it, they were told that it was not there, that it had already been sent up. They searched for it and found the stone that had been laid aside earlier and installed it. It fit perfectly. Thus the stone the builders rejected became the capstone.

Jesus applied this and the following verse to Himself:

Matthew 21:42-44 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'? Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder."

You do not have to turn there, but Isaiah 28:16 is another well-known text based on this

image. It says:

Isaiah 28:16 Therefore thus says the Lord God: Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; whoever believes will not act hastily.

In the New Testament, Peter quotes both of those passages in I Peter 2:6-8 in reference to Jesus, adding in the third place Isaiah 8:14 for good measure.

I Peter 2:6-8 Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, "Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame." 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," and "a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense." They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.

These passages and others make clear that the stone of Nebuchadnezzar's dream is Jesus Christ, a divine Christ not made by human hands, and the mountain in the dream is God's Kingdom.

I want to emphasize that the main point made by Daniel's interpretation of this dream, or should we say God's interpretation of this dream, is not the precise period of history in which the Kingdom of God will grow and fill the earth or how that will happen, but rather that it will happen and that the kingdoms of this world will be crushed before it. Daniel's real point is that of Psalm 2.

Psalm 2:2 (NIRV) The kings [and people] of the earth take their stand against the Lord [and]... his anointed...

But what is the reaction of God to this act of cosmic arrogance? Does God tremble before kings like Nebuchadnezzar or the secularists of our time? (Well, that is a rhetorical question.) Of course not. The Psalm says that God laughs at their rebellion. This is the only place in the entire Bible where we are told that God laughs, and it is not a good-humored joyful laugh; it is a laugh of derision, of scorn, of contempt.

Psalm 2:1-3 Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing? The

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kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying, "Let us break their bonds in pieces and cast away their cords from us."

Is it not what is going on in this nation right now, as they reject everything that is associated with Christianity?

Psalm 2:4-6 He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall hold them in derision. Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, and distress them in His deep displeasure: "Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion."

That is Daniel's main message for Nebuchadnezzar and for our own time.

The kingdoms of this world are powerful and sometimes even glorious from our human point of view, but even their strength is given to them by God. Just as God sets up kingdoms, so does He bring them down and dispose them. He has done that with Nebuchadnezzar, and He has done that with all the world's past kingdoms, and He will do it with those of our time.

Nebuchadnezzar recognized and honored Daniel's God and promoted Daniel and his friends within the Babylonian court, giving them further opportunity to promote the peace and welfare of the city where God had exiled them.

Daniel 2:46-49 Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell on his face, prostrate before Daniel, and commanded that they should present an offering and incense to him. 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." 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. 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.

The king kept his word and promoted Daniel with great honors, just as Pharaoh honored and promoted Joseph in Egypt. Babylon was divided into many provinces, each one under the leadership of a satrap. Daniel was evidently made a satrap or governor over the province in which the royal court was located. This was the province in which the

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city of Babylon was located. Daniel did not forget his friends but asked that they be promoted, too. So the king made them administrators to serve under Daniel in the same province.

In a remarkable way, God elevated Daniel to a position in the royal court so that he could serve as a mediator between the king and the exiles from Judah who would shortly, in 597 and 586 BC, be brought to Babylon. God always plans ahead for the protection and well-being of his people. What started out as a possible tragedy—the slaughter of four godly men—was turned into great triumph, and the God of Daniel received great glory.