

DANIEL REVEALS THE MEANING OF THE DREAM TO NEBUCHADNEZZAR

DANIEL 2:31-49

SCRIPTURE READING AND INSIGHTS

Begin by reading Daniel 2:31-49 in your favorite Bible. As you read, trust God to open your eyes so you can discover wondrous things in His Word (Psalm 119:18).

In yesterday's lesson, Daniel reported to Nebuchadnezzar that God had provided the meaning of the dream to him. Now Daniel reveals the dream and its meaning to the king. With your Bible still accessible, consider the following insights on the biblical text, verse by verse.

Daniel 2:31-35

A great image (2:31): As a backdrop, apocalyptic literature is a special kind of writing that arose among the Jews and Christians in Bible times to reveal certain mysteries about the end times and the world to come. This type of literature is often characterized by visions, exhortations to make ethical and moral decisions or changes as a result of such visions, and a pervasive use of symbols and imagery. Daniel is an apocalyptic book, so we are not surprised to find kingdoms described as a statue made of gold, silver, bronze, iron, and clay (Daniel 2:32-35).

Its appearance was frightening (2:31): The size and appearance of the image must have been staggering, especially considering the metals from which it was constructed. With a head of gold on top and fragile feet at the bottom, this image seemed likely to topple.

Head...chest and arms...middle and thighs...legs...feet (2:32-33): The various metals and clay make this an interesting image. The head was made of gold, the chest and arms of silver, the stomach area and thighs of bronze, the legs of iron, and the feet a mix of iron and clay. Nebuchadnezzar probably considered this mix to be the most confusing element of the dream. Simply eyeballing the image gave no clue about its meaning. That would require revelation from God.

A stone was cut out (2:34): With a head of gold and fragile feet, the top-heavy image seemed prone to topple, but Nebuchadnezzar's dream revealed that a stone would aid the process by striking the image.

PARALLELS

Daniel 2:34—Christ crushes the antichrist's kingdom.

Revelation 3:21; 5:5; 17:14—Christ is Conqueror.

All together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff (2:35): First the feet and then the rest of the body shattered, and the remaining particles were blown away in the wind like chaff. ("Chaff" refers to the worthless husks that are separated from grain during the process of threshing.) Not a trace of the image could thereafter be found.

The stone that struck the image (2:35): The stone then became a great mountain that filled the whole earth. Nebuchadnezzar must have been baffled by this dream—no wonder it unnerved him.

Daniel 2:36-45

The dream...its interpretation (2:36): Daniel had informed Nebuchadnezzar of his dream. Part two of the process would now begin—the interpretation of the image. We will see that as Daniel explains the image, he is actually referring to the Gentile nations that would rule over Palestine and the people of Israel.

You, O king, the king of kings...you are the head of gold (2:37-38): Daniel first revealed that Nebuchadnezzar—the “king of kings” whom God put into power, not only over human beings but over the animal kingdom as well—is the head of gold. The reference to animals brings to mind Genesis 1:26, where God affirmed after creating human beings, “Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

Another kingdom (2:39): Nebuchadnezzar was a finite being. He would not live forever, so another kingdom would arise after his. This next kingdom relates to the “chest and arms of silver” we read about in verse 32. The two arms of silver represent the rise of the Medes and Persians, who would conquer Babylon in 539 BC. Though the Medo-Persian Empire was strong and would last more than 200 years, it was nevertheless inferior to the kingdom of Babylon, just as silver is inferior to gold.

A third kingdom (2:39): Yet another kingdom would arise after the Medo-Persian Empire. This relates to the “middle and thighs of bronze” mentioned in verse 32. The word “middle” refers to the stomach area of the image. This refers to the Greek Empire, which conquered the Medo-Persian Empire between 334 and 330 BC under the leadership of Alexander the Great.

A fourth kingdom (2:40): A fourth kingdom would arise after the Greek Empire. This relates to the “legs of iron” mentioned in verse 32. This refers to the Roman Empire, which conquered the Greeks in 63 BC. Just as iron is the strongest among metals, so this empire would be stronger than all the previous empires. So strong was Rome that it was able to conquer many peoples and subdue any rebellion.

Feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron (2:41): Scholars have debated this verse and those that follow, some ascribing the verses to the Roman Empire of old, and others ascribing the verses to the revived Roman Empire in the end times, over which the antichrist will rule. There are several reasons that make the latter view preferable.

First, the ten toes in Daniel 2:41 and the ten horns in Daniel 7 seem to represent the same ten kings. These revelations belong together. These kings will exercise rule in the revived Roman Empire in the end times.

Second, prophecy scholars have noted that the ten toes of Nebuchadnezzar's image have not yet corresponded to anything in history and therefore must relate to the prophetic future. As prophecy scholar John F. Walvoord put it, "According to Daniel's prophecy, the kingdoms represented by the ten toes existed side by side and were destroyed by one sudden catastrophic blow. Nothing like this has yet occurred in history."¹ But this *will* occur in history as the final revived Roman Empire is shattered at the second coming of Jesus Christ in glory.

Third, Old Testament prophecies commonly gloss over long periods of time. For example, some Old Testament prophecies lump together predictions concerning the first and second comings of Christ without mentioning the extended time between the two. Consequently, the legs of Nebuchadnezzar's image can easily refer to the Roman Empire of old, and the toes can refer to the revived Roman Empire in the end times.

Thus we can say that this latter-day Roman Empire will not attain true unity or cohesiveness, but will be like a mixture of iron and clay. It will be as strong as iron but will be characterized by divisions.

The God of heaven will set up a kingdom (2:44): Daniel now speaks of the overthrow of all earthly kingdoms, including the revived Roman Empire of the end times. Nebuchadnezzar had witnessed a rock smashing into the image (verse 34). The term "rock" is often used in reference to the divine Messiah, Jesus Christ (see Psalm 118:22; Isaiah 8:14; 28:16; 1 Peter 2:6-8). Christ will not only overthrow earthly kingdoms but will—following the second coming—set up His own millennial kingdom that will last 1,000 years on earth (Revelation 11:15; 19:11-20; 20:4). Following the millennial kingdom, Christ will continue His reign forever and ever.

PARALLELS

Daniel 2:44—God's kingdom stands eternal.

Revelation 11:17; 12:10; 19:6—God Almighty reigns supreme.

The dream is certain (2:45): The interpretation of the dream is certain, for

the source of the interpretation is God Himself, the Revealer of mysteries (see verses 19, 23, 28, 30).

Daniel 2:46-47

Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face (2:46): Nebuchadnezzar was “blown away” by Daniel’s account of God’s interpretation of the dream. He fell down and paid homage to Daniel and commanded that an offering and incense be offered up to him—actions traditionally reserved for the worship of Babylon’s deities.

Your God is God of gods and Lord of kings (2:47): Daniel already knew that his God was superior to the gods of Babylon (which actually didn’t exist). Now Nebuchadnezzar was forced to admit the superiority of Daniel’s God.

PARALLELS

Daniel 2:47—God unveils mysteries.

Revelation 1:1; 4:1; 17:7; 22:6, 16—God reveals mysteries and foretells the future.

Daniel 2:48-49

High honors...great gifts...ruler...chief prefect (2:48): Daniel was rewarded with incredible material wealth as well as greatly increased authority in Babylon.

Daniel made a request (2:49): Daniel did not forget his friends. Through his influence, he was able to secure promotions for them as well. They became administrators under Daniel’s authority. Of course, Nebuchadnezzar’s promotion of Daniel and his friends was the providential work of the sovereign God.

MAJOR THEMES

1. *The supremacy of the one true God.* From the very beginning of the Old Testament, the one true God (Yahweh) is portrayed as incomparable to false, pagan gods. Moses said, “There is no one like the LORD our God” (Exodus 8:10). Rhetorical questions emphasized this same truth: “Who is like you,

O LORD, among the gods?" (Exodus 15:11). The implied answer is, no one in the entire universe. God is supreme and incomparable. Nebuchadnezzar came to realize this, and the book of Daniel continually emphasizes it.

2. *Nebuchadnezzar paid Daniel homage.* Following Daniel's revelation of the dream and its meaning, the king greatly honored both Daniel and Daniel's God. We should not miss the fact that if Daniel had taken all the credit for himself, the king would have honored only Daniel. But because Daniel gave glory to God in this episode, the king said, "Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings" (Daniel 2:47). Pay special attention to the word "kings," which includes Nebuchadnezzar himself. Because of Daniel's witness, Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged that the true God was supreme even over him. That's quite an admission for a pagan king who claimed to be divine.

DIGGING DEEPER WITH CROSS-REFERENCES

God's eternal kingdom—2 Samuel 7:16; Psalms 145:13; 146:10; Isaiah 9:7; Micah 4:7; Luke 1:32-33; Hebrews 12:28; 2 Peter 1:11; Revelation 11:15

The exaltation of the true God—Exodus 15:2; 1 Chronicles 29:11; Nehemiah 9:5; Job 22:12; Psalms 21:13; 46:10; 57:11; 92:8; 97:9; 108:5; Isaiah 2:11; 6:1; 25:1; Ezekiel 38:23

LIFE LESSONS

1. *The humble are exalted.* This theme is repeated over and over again in Daniel. God providentially exalted Daniel in Babylon because he was consistently humble. As 1 Peter 5:6 puts it, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you" (see also James 4:10). Proverbs reminds us, "Humility comes before honor" (15:33), "The reward for humility and fear of the LORD is riches and honor and life" (22:4), and "One's pride will bring him low, but he who is lowly in spirit will obtain honor" (29:23).
2. *True believers.* Daniel and his Jewish colleagues were the "real deal." They not only talked the talk but also walked the walk (see James 2:14-26).

Some have said that many today are secret-agent Christians who have never blown their cover. In other words, it's hard to recognize that some people are Christians by their words or actions, for they don't seem very "Christian." But Daniel and his friends lived out their faith for all to see, regardless of the consequences. What a great example they set for each of us!

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Daniel explained, "The God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed...it shall stand forever" (Daniel 2:44). What do you learn in this passage about the prominence of God's kingdom over the finite kingdoms of the earth? Does that give you a sense of security?
2. What attributes of God do you see highlighted in today's lesson?
3. If somebody accused you of being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?