

Lesson 6

Daniel 2:24-25

24 Therefore Daniel went in unto Arioch, whom the king had ordained to destroy the wise men of Babylon: he went and said thus unto him; Destroy not the wise men of Babylon: bring me in before the king, and I will shew unto the king the interpretation. 25 Then Arioch brought in Daniel before the king in haste, and said thus unto him, I have found a man of the captives of Judah, that will make known unto the king the interpretation.

Incredible, isn't it? All by himself, Arioch (the Chief Butcher) has managed to solve the king's problem. Notice how he takes all of the credit in verse 25. Perhaps he is remembering the reward mentioned back in verse 6!

Arioch's complete confidence in Daniel is interesting. He shows no doubt that Daniel will be able to interpret the king's dream. Daniel must have already made quite an impression on Arioch.

Think for a moment about the situation that Arioch would be in had Daniel failed to describe and interpret the dream! The executioner would likely have faced execution himself. We can see both the hand of God and the character of Daniel in why Daniel was so readily believed by Arioch.

Daniel's concern for others is shown in verse 24. His first words to Arioch were not "Don't kill me," but were instead "Destroy not the wise men of Babylon."

So Arioch brings Daniel to see the king.

Daniel 2:26-30

26 The king answered and said to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, Art thou able to make known unto me the dream which I have seen, and the interpretation thereof? 27 Daniel answered in the presence of the king, and said, The secret which the king hath demanded cannot the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, the soothsayers, shew unto the king; 28 But there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days. Thy dream, and the visions of thy head upon thy bed, are these; 29 As for thee, O king, thy thoughts came into thy mind upon thy bed, what should come to pass hereafter: and he that revealeth secrets maketh known to thee what shall come to pass. 30 But

as for me, this secret is not revealed to me for any wisdom that I have more than any living, but for their sakes that shall make known the interpretation to the king, and that thou mightest know the thoughts of thy heart.

Notice that Daniel reminds the reader of his Babylonian name (Belteshazzar) but then immediately resumes using his Hebrew name (Daniel).

And what does Daniel do? Does he come before the king and say, "I have solved your problem. I know all of the answers. Look what I can do." No. Daniel's response, unlike Arioch in verse 25, is not self-seeking. Daniel does not even mention himself in verses 27-28! Look at verse 28. Daniel does **not** say, "But there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known **to me** what shall be in the latter days." Instead Daniel saw himself as just the middle-man, and so he says, "But there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and **maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar** what shall be in the latter days." Daniel was very concerned that all the glory would go to God.

Rather than say look what I can do, Daniel says look what God can do. The power was not within Daniel, and Daniel knew it. God had told him what Nebuchadnezzar had dreamed - and absent that message from God, Daniel would have been just as clueless as the magicians were.

Again, we are faced with the stark truth about astrology, magic, and fortune telling. In verse 27, Daniel says that it does not work: "The secret which the king hath demanded **cannot** the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, the soothsayers, shew unto the king." It was very clearly not working here!

Notice how teenage Daniel speaks to Nebuchadnezzar with great boldness. Keep in mind that Daniel was under sentence of death, yet he takes this opportunity to effectively tell the king that all of the king's gods are worse than useless. But Daniel tells the king that there is a God who reveals mysteries - and it is not one of Nebuchadnezzar's false gods. If it were, then presumably one of the king's magicians could have told him the dream.

Daniel's answer to the king in verse 28 is that "there is a God in heaven." That's a very good answer, isn't it! We should use that answer more often ourselves.

Why don't you believe we got here by evolution? Because there is a God in heaven! Why are you against gay so-called "marriage"? Because there is a God in heaven! Why do you believe there is only male and female? Because there is a God in heaven! Why do you live the way you do? Because there is a God in heaven!

Note also the contrast that Daniel draws between the false Babylonian gods and the one true God. The king's gods were helpless, but there is a God in heaven who is all powerful.

We need to stop for a moment and consider the phrase "latter days" in verse 28. To what does that phrase refer?

The "latter days" could simply mean the future. That is, God was going to tell Nebuchadnezzar what would happen later. This seems to fit well with the parallel passage in verse 29 ("To you, O king, as you lay in bed came thoughts of what would be hereafter").

The "latter days" could refer to the latter days of Jewish history, which ended as far as God was concerned, first at the cross when the old covenant was replaced with the new, and then with complete finality in AD 70 when the Jewish temple and sacrificial system was destroyed never to return. And we know from Jesus' statements in Matthew 24 that at least one of Daniel's prophecies reached that far into the future.

Premillennialists teach that the "latter days" refer to a short time of tribulation preceding the "second coming" of Christ. But does that make sense? Is this what Nebuchadnezzar would have thought? "Well, I guess Daniel is about to tell me about what will happen in about 2600 years when the Chinese suddenly decide to invade the Holy Land and toss out the Arabs and fight against the troops sent by the Antichrist who will be living in Rome in the end time..." Remember - if our understanding of this book lacks any message for the those who first heard it, then our understanding is wrong.

A survey of how the phrase "the latter days" is used in the Old Testament reveals that the expression denotes the future, but the exact time in the future that is in view must be determined by the context. Sometimes the phrase is used to speak of events in the near future.

Deuteronomy 31:29 - For I know that after my death ye will utterly corrupt yourselves, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in **the latter days**; because ye will do evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger through the work of your hands.

But don't the "latter days" always refer to the end of the world? No. They do not. We just saw an example of that from Deuteronomy. And we see another example in Acts 2. There Peter refers back to a prophecy from Joel 2 and tells his listeners that that prophecy was on that day being fulfilled: "But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass **in the last days**,

saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh."

So when we see the "latter days" or the "last days" in the Bible, how do we know what it refers to? Sometimes we know because the Bible tells us explicitly as it does in Acts 2. But sometimes we need to look at the context and the timeframe of the prophecy and the events being described. But one thing we know with absolute certainty from Acts 2:16-17 is that the phrase does not always mean the end of the world.

Here in Daniel 2 we will be given a clear historical context - the vision will begin with the present king and the present kingdom, and it will end with the third kingdom that follows (Rome). If we ignore or twist that time frame, then there is no hope that we will properly understand this vision. As Jesus reminded his listeners in Matthew 24:15 in speaking of the book of Daniel - "Whoso readeth, let him understand!"

Daniel 2:31-35

31 Thou, O king, sawest, and behold a great image. This great image, whose brightness was excellent, stood before thee; and the form thereof was terrible. 32 This image's head was of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, 33 His legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay. 34 Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. 35 Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth.

At last the dream is revealed, and what Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream turns out to be one of the most amazing prophecies in the Bible.

Can you imagine the king's astonishment when Daniel started describing his dream? Can you imagine the astonishment and the relief of his wise men? Daniel had just saved their lives, and we will see later how they repay him.

Not only could Daniel reveal the meaning of the dream to the king, but Daniel could also reveal the content of the dream - and that was something the wise men had just said had never been done, had never been asked of anyone, and could never be done! And here was Daniel (an exiled Jewish

teenager) doing it!

There is no way to explain this scene apart from God, and the Chaldean wise men had earlier admitted as such!

So what did Nebuchadnezzar see in his dream? He saw a great image of a man, excellent in brightness and terrible in form, consisting of four parts:

- A head of gold.
- Breasts and arms of silver.
- Belly and thighs of brass.
- Legs of iron with feet of iron and clay.

But that was not all. The king also saw something else. He saw a stone.

The stone smashes into the feet of the statue, which were of iron and clay, and breaks them into pieces, causing the entire statue to collapse into pieces and be carried away like dust by the wind. The stone then becomes a great mountain and fills the whole earth.

Another very important feature of the stone is revealed in verse 34 - it was cut out without hands. What that means is that this stone was not of human origin. It was not cut out by human hands.

So why was Nebuchadnezzar so concerned about this dream? As we said earlier, he had only recently assumed his throne, and he was likely felt insecure in his position. And so he must have seen a giant statue smashed into pieces as a very bad personal omen for his future as king.

But is that what the dream meant? Was Nebuchadnezzar the focus of the dream? And if so, why were all of the different materials used in the great image? And what was this stone that was going to bring it all down?

The king must have had many questions. And fortunately for him and for us, Daniel had been given many answers.

Daniel 2:36-38

36 This is the dream; and we will tell the interpretation thereof before the king. 37 Thou, O king, art a king of kings: for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory. 38 And wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the heaven hath he given into thine hand, and hath made thee ruler over them all. Thou art this head of gold.

We are not left to figure this vision out for ourselves. God told Daniel what the dream means, and Daniel tells both us and the king what the dream means.

And for those interpretations of this dream that change with the headlines, let me say again that whatever this dream meant on the day that Nebuchadnezzar learned what it meant is precisely what that dream means today. And if our view of this dream would not have made any sense to Nebuchadnezzar in his day, then our view is wrong. Let's keep the historical context in mind.

Daniel's boldness before King Nebuchadnezzar is incredible! He was not afraid to speak truth to power! But, of course, Daniel's confidence and boldness came from God and from Daniel's faith in God. Daniel's boldness came from the word that he had received from God. We also have a word from God. Shouldn't God's word make us just as bold today to speak truth to power?

So what does Daniel tell the king? Daniel makes it very clear right from the start who is in charge here - and it is not the king!

Yes, Nebuchadnezzar was a king of kings, but he had been given his kingdom, his power, his strength, and his glory by God. And wherever the children of men dwelt and the beasts of the field and the fowls of the heaven had all been given into his hand by God, and God had made him ruler over them all.

Nebuchadnezzar may have thought he was a self-made man, but he was not. God made him what he was, God gave him whatever he had, and God would use him however God wanted to use him.

As I said, this was a very bold thing to say to King Nebuchadnezzar! Had Daniel said that to the king under other circumstances, he would likely have been killed on the spot. But after hearing Daniel describe his dream, Nebuchadnezzar was in the mood to listen to whatever else Daniel had to say!

So what does the dream mean?

The explanation begins at the end of verse 38 when Daniel says to Nebuchadnezzar, "Thou art this head of gold."

So does the head of gold represent a king or a kingdom? The answer is that it represents both. Here we see that it represents a king, but later we will see that the gold head also represents a kingdom. And we will see this again later in the book.

How do we explain that? Simple. A king and his kingdom were inseparable - and that was especially true of Nebuchadnezzar. He was a true despot. The explanation of this vision treats the king as a stand-in for his kingdom, and it uses the terms interchangeably.

"Thou art this head of gold." The king may have initially taken this declaration as a great compliment, until he remembered what had just happened to that head of gold! What Daniel was telling King Nebuchadnezzar in verse 38 was that he with his kingdom would one day be smashed into dust!

Again we see the hand of God. What if the king had told the wisemen his dream? Then he would have gotten the wrong meaning from their book of dreams. But what if the king had told Daniel the dream like Pharaoh told Joseph? Then why would the king have believed Daniel's answer? Wouldn't the king just had Daniel thrown into the fire for his effrontery? For this to work out as it did, Daniel had to reveal both the content and the meaning of the dream, and that is what happened.

So what do the other parts of the dream mean?

Daniel 2:39-40

39 And after thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee, and another third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth. 40 And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron: forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things: and as iron that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise.

Remember what the wise men said to the king in verse 4? "O, King, Live Forever." Is that Daniel's message to the king? Hardly! Verse 39 begins with the phrase "And after thee..."

Nebuchadnezzar was just a man, and one day he would face the same appointment of Hebrews 9:27 that awaits us all. And Daniel had the courage to remind the king of that fact!

That the head represents both the king and the kingdom is shown in verse 39 - "After thee shall arise another kingdom, and another third kingdom." We will also see that in verse 44.

In fact, what we see is that the four parts of the great image each represent a kingdom. The head represents Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom, and the remaining three parts of the image are also kingdoms - the "another" kingdom in verse 39, the "third kingdom" in verse 39, and the "fourth kingdom" in verse 40.

So what are these kingdoms?

The first one is easy. It is Nebuchadnezzar's own kingdom, which was Babylon, or more precisely the Chaldean kingdom that ruled from Babylon.

So what about the other three? Let's look at the clues.

First, we have a temporal order here. These three kingdoms would arise "after" Nebuchadnezzar. The second comes after the first, and it seems that the third must come after the second given that the third would rule over all the earth. In fact, that description of the third kingdom also tells us that the fourth kingdom must come after the third. So we have four kingdoms in temporal order.

Second, we see in verse 39 that the second kingdom would be inferior in some way to the first.

Third, and as we just mentioned, we see in that same verse that the third kingdom would rule over all the earth.

And fourth, we see that the fourth kingdom would be as strong as iron and would break in pieces and subdue all things.

And fifth, we see from the vision that all four of these kingdoms would be destroyed by a stone, but we don't yet know what that stone is.

So what are the second, third, and fourth kingdoms?

I have an idea. This might have been a tough question for someone in Nebuchadnezzar's day, but is it a tough question for us? Why don't we just open a history book and see what three kingdoms followed the Babylonian kingdom? What do we find when we do that?

What we find is that the Babylonian kingdom was overthrown by the Medo-Persian kingdom about 60 years after this vision. In fact, we will see that event described in this book of Daniel.

But what then does it mean in verse 39 that the second kingdom would be inferior to the first? After all, if the second kingdom defeated the first kingdom, then wouldn't that mean it was superior?

The Hebrew word for "inferior" just means "beneath you." So verse 39 may simply mean that the second kingdom was beneath the first kingdom in the image that Nebuchadnezzar saw.

A second possibility is that the second kingdom was inferior to Nebuchadnezzar in the sense that the Persian leaders did not share the same absolute and unfettered power that Nebuchadnezzar enjoyed. Later in Daniel 6:12 we will see that a Persian ruler lacked the power to annul a law once he had made it.

In fact, the choice of materials itself denotes a decline of each kingdom from the one above it as we move from gold to silver to bronze and then to iron and iron mixed with clay.

The second kingdom is Medo-Persia (often just called Persia). The Bible tells us that, and secular history tells us that. Cyrus the Great of Persia conquered Babylon in 539 BC.

And, as we saw in the introduction, Daniel does not consider the Medes and Persians to be separate kingdoms, but instead explicitly treats them as what they were at the time - a single unified kingdom.

So Babylon is the first kingdom, and Persia is the second kingdom. Daniel was living now under Babylonian rule, and he would later live under Persian rule.

What kingdom came next? What is the third kingdom that verse 39 says would rule over all the earth?

It must be the Greeks under Alexander the Great. The Persian empire ruled for about two centuries but was never able to completely subdue the Greeks on its western border. Eventually Persia was conquered by Alexander the Great. He invaded Persia in 334 BC and completely defeated it in 331 BC. We saw a prophecy of that event in our study of Zechariah.

Did Greece rule over all of the earth? At one point, Alexander ruled an area from Yugoslavia to India, which was the largest empire of ancient times.

But wait, some might say, I take every word in the Bible literally, and verse 39 says that the third kingdom would rule over all the earth. Greece did not rule over all the earth, and therefore Greece cannot be the third kingdom.

How do we respond to that? We respond by saying in all kindness that God does not want us to check our brains at the door. The phrase "over all the earth" does not require Alexander the Great to have conquered Peru. How do I know that for sure? Because I have read the rest of the Bible.

Luke 2:1 - And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that **all the world** should be taxed.

Romans 1:8 - First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout **the whole world**.

Likewise, the Greeks under Alexander ruled over all the earth. Common sense goes a long way in understanding the Bible!

After Alexander died young in Babylon in 323 BC, his kingdom was split into four pieces that were ruled by his four former generals. We will see some remarkable prophecies about the Greeks and Alexander the Great when we get to Chapters 8 and 11.

So if Babylon is the first, Persia is the second, and Greece is the third, then what is the fourth kingdom?

Any history book will answer that question for us, and the answer is Rome.

Eventually most of the Greek empire was annexed by Rome. By 146 BC, Greece was permanently subdued, and Egypt became a Roman province in 31 BC.

What about the descriptions in verse 40 - do they apply to Rome? "And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron: forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things: and as iron that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise."

Verse 40 is a perfect description of Rome, written long before Rome was any sort of world power. How is that possible? The Roman empire started out as a dusty village on Italy's Tiber River in the 8th century BC. How could anyone have ever predicted that such a group would someday rule the known world as mighty Rome?

Historians today are still asking that same question. Listen to a few sentences from the introduction to the recent book, *Rome and Her Enemies: An Empire Created and Destroyed by War*, by Jane Penrose:

Lying at its heart is a mystery as profound as any in the records of human civilization. How on earth did the Romans do it? How did a single city, one that began as a small community of cattle-rustlers, camped out among marshes and hills, end up ruling an empire that stretched from the moors of Scotland to the deserts of Iraq?

The answer to that profound mystery is found in the book of Daniel. Those cattle-rustlers became the Roman empire because God made them so.

And once Rome had arisen, who would have thought it would ever fall? And again, historians ask the same question. Gamaliel Milner, in his 1931 book *The Problem of Decadence*, wrote:

The general impression that we receive from the story of Rome's fall is that vast cosmic forces were at work which frustrated the counsels of the wisest statesmen, and rendered nugatory the skill and valour of the greatest generals; ... if ever in human history we can discern the working of destiny or inevitable fate, it is here.

Yes, Rome's fall was inevitable, but it was not due to fate or destiny. Rome's fall was inevitable because, long before Rome had ever risen, God had said Rome would fall. And Rome did fall.

When did Rome fall? We will look at that question later, but whatever method we use to date the fall of Rome, two things are certain: (1) Rome fell, and (2) Rome fell because God determined that it would fall - and God did so centuries before that fall occurred.

And we know at least one reason *why* Rome fell because Daniel told us in the next few verses. Let's keep reading.

#daniel