

The Book of Daniel #2

by: Ronald L. Dart

Daniel may be the most important prophet in the Bible. He is easily the most fascinating and he's the one that most tempts us to offer interpretations. His work is of singular value in providing a framework for understanding those prophets that would come later.

The dream that Nebuchadnezzar had in the second chapter of Daniel is an excellent example of this. Nebuchadnezzar saw in a dream a great statue. The important things to notice about that statue is this, that it is one image, and it's the image of a man. Whatever the image symbolized it was a single unit. The image degenerated over time from head to foot. The head was gold, the breast and arms were silver, the belly and thighs were mere brass, the legs were iron, the feet and toes were iron and clay.

King of Kings

Here is how Daniel interpreted this dream for King Nebuchadnezzar. In Daniel 2 and verse 37, he said, "You O King are a King of kings." This is something relatively new under the sun because most kings up until this time were kings of city states and they ruled their area and that was that.

Now we have come to a different time in history when empires are being built. Nebuchadnezzar was a King of kings. "For the God of heaven," said Daniel, "has given you a kingdom, power strength and glory, {38} And wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the fowls of heaven has he given into your hand and has made you ruler over them all. You are this head of gold."

But Nebuchadnezzar ruled an Empire, he was a king over kings. "After you," so here comes the time element in this image as we make our way from the head down to the toes.

"After you (verse 39) shall arise another kingdom inferior to you and another third kingdom of brass which shall bear rule over all the earth." There were two empires to come after Nebuchadnezzar, thus the image changes over time. With 20/20 hindsight we know what these kingdoms were. They were Persia, followed by Greece, Alexander the great in particular.

Fourth Empire Was Rome

"The fourth kingdom (Daniel 2:40) shall be strong as iron forasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and subdues all things and as iron breaks all these shall it break in pieces and bruise."

Now the next great empire ruled by a King of kings following Alexander was Rome. It is characterized as iron. Now the problem in this interpretation arises when you come to the feet and toes which are part iron and part clay. The iron suggests Rome but what about the clay? Well, if this is a problem, it's also an opening. Here's how Daniel interpreted this part of the dream. "Whereas you saw (Daniel 2:41) the feet and the toes, part of potter's clay and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided, but there should be in it, the strength of the iron forasmuch as you saw the iron mixed with the miry clay. {42} And as the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken."

Now there's no explanation of this, and so it is left to our imagination to think in terms of how that might be. But you have an Empire that is in decay, you have an Empire that is mixed in some way and while it has certain strengths, it also has certain vulnerabilities.

"Whereas you saw the iron mixed with miry clay, they will mingle themselves with the seed of men, but they shall not cleave to one another like iron is not mixed with clay." Now there's a thread continuing through all this. This thing still has the iron of Rome in it, right to the very end of the big toe, but it lacks coherence at the end.

Revivals of the Roman Empire

Historically, after the fall of the Roman Empire, it was revived in fits and starts over the ages but it has always been a European power. Many don't realize that Hitler's Third Reich was an attempt at a new Roman Empire, but if you will do a little research, you'll find that there were two huge kingdoms, and that is what the German means for Reich is kingdom. There were two kingdoms before Hitler and he thought he was bringing about a third revival of the Roman Empire.

Now Europe, to this day, has great difficulty in maintaining cohesion. They are working like beavers over there to try to put together a United States of Europe and sometimes they seem to be succeeding and other times it seems to fall part on them.

Now perhaps you can see from this why so many interpreters of this, see Europe in the final stages of this image.

Kingdom of God

Now the reason why all of this is important is not so much the image but what happens to it.

Here's Daniel again in Daniel 2 and verse 44, "Now in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom." Notice that God will set up a kingdom this time and we will call that the Kingdom of God, "which will never be destroyed and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms and it shall stand forever."

Now we are not talking about some new Israelite king coming on the scene. This is the Kingdom of God and it is going to last forever.

Now I want to be careful not to over interpret Daniel. That has been done far too often and the prophecy tempts us to do just that, but what makes this prophecy so important is, that it outlines the history of a governmental system, a kingdom if you will, that continues all the way from Nebuchadnezzar until it is destroyed and supplanted by the Kingdom of God. That's why Daniel 2 has been called the longest prophecy in the Bible, because the time it spans runs from the time of Nebuchadnezzar all the way to the return of Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom of God.

This kind of brings to mind Revelation chapter 11 and verse 15. Now in revelation, if you're reading through, you'll find that there are seven trumpets that are blown in succession, one after another, as we come down to the very last days.

The seventh angel sounds in Chapter 11 and verse 15, "The seventh angel sounded, and there were great voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever." Now you can draw a bright line from this right back to Daniel 2, to the stone cut out without hands that smote the image on his feet and scattered it all over the world.

Now tread carefully here, because while there may be a sense in which the Kingdom of God is within you, this prophecy is about something altogether different. This Kingdom is real, it is present, it is even violent.

That governmental system displayed in Daniel's image has a curious unity about it, even though it changes over time and is headquartered in Babylon, Athens, and finally headquartered in Rome.

What it does seem to mean is that the image is still with us perhaps today in its final form, and it is sorely tempting to see the image in the frustrating attempts of Europe to form a union of some kind right in the heart of the old Roman Empire and of how mixed they are like miry clay.

Jesus Will Be King of Kings

Remember Daniel saying that Nebuchadnezzar was a King of kings? That brings to mind a much later prophecy in Revelation. It is in chapter 19 and verse 11. John in vision opens his eyes and says, "I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse, and he that sat upon it was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he does judge and makes war. {12} His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on his head there were many crowns, and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. {13} He was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood, his name is called The Word of God."

You must realize that John wrote this, and that John also was talking about this in the first chapter of his gospel where he speaks of the word of God which became flesh (John 1:1-3).

Continuing in Revelation 19 and verse 14, "The armies in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. {15} Out of his mouth goes a sharp sword that with it he should smite the nations, he shall rule them with a rod of iron, he treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. {16} And he has on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords."

This harkens back to the 'Hallelujah Chorus' in the 'Messiah' where the King of kings and the Lord of lords is none other than Jesus Christ. But that's the title King of kings that was placed upon Nebuchadnezzar at the very beginning of the prophecy in Daniel two.

This theme rattles through the Bible emerging even in the Psalms. In the second Psalm, for example, verse six, "God say, "Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion. {7} I will declare the decree the Lord has said to me, 'You are my son, this day have I begotten you. {8} Ask of me, and I will give you the heathen for your inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the Earth for your possession." He is talking about the Kingdom of God and then he says, {9} "You shall break them with a rod of iron, you shall dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel, {10} Be wise therefore, O you kings, be instructed you judges of the earth, {11} Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling, {12} Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish from the way when his wrath is kindled only a little."

Sounds tough doesn't it? He is going to break them with a rod of iron, and the imagery, while it is slightly different, comes to the same idea that is expressed in Daniel 2, with the destruction of the great image.

Then continuing in the second chapter of Daniel and verse 45, "Forasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, that it broke in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God has shown to the king, what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof is sure. {46} Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face, and worshiped Daniel, and commanded that they should offer an oblation and sweet odors unto him. {47} The king answered Daniel, and said, 'Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, seeing that you could reveal this secret.' {48} Then the king made Daniel a great man, and gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon. {49} Then Daniel requested of the king, and he set Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, over the affairs of the province of Babylon: but Daniel sat in the gate of the king." Now what that means is, that he was the judge, in a way, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.

Nebuchadnezzar's Image of Gold

"Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold." We are in Daniel chapter 3 and verse one. "The height of this image was 60 cubits, the breadth of it was six cubits, he set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon." Now this thing is pretty impressive, it reaches a height nearly of a nine story building, however it is the image of a man, and the image that he saw in his vision was ten times as tall as it was wide.

"Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent to gather together the princes, the governors, and the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counselors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, to come to the dedication of the image which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up."

"Then a herald (verse 4) cried aloud, 'To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages.'"

Now remember, this is an Empire composed of many peoples, and it is safe to say that all this thing was religious but it was also highly political. Everyone was commanded to worship Babylon's god. In those days it was pretty well impossible to separate politics and religion.

"The herald cries, 'All you people, {5} At whatever time you hear the sound of the orchestra and all kinds of music, you fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king has set up. {6} Whoever doesn't fall down and worship at the same hour, he should be cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.'" Kind of a crematorium, I guess.

So, {7} "At the time when all the people heard the sound of the orchestra, all the people by nations, languages, fell down and worshiped this golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.

Chaldeans Accused the Jews

"Now about this time, certain Chaldeans" (Daniel 3:8), who appeared to have been a priestly class, natural rivals of Daniel and his friends, "they came near and accused the Jews. {9} They spoke and said to King Nebuchadnezzar, O king, live for ever. {10} You, O king, have made a decree, that every man who shall hear the sound of the music shall fall down and worship the golden image. {11} And anyone that falls not down and worships it, shall be cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.'" The king said, "Yes, so?" The Chaldeans said, {12} "Well, there are certain Jews." You could almost hear the sneer in their voices at the use of the word 'Jews.'

"Certain Jews, whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon, by name Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, now these men, O King, have not paid any attention to you. They serve not your gods, nor worship the golden image which you have set up." Now

you know that in any type of authoritarian structure like this, all the people around the big guy know exactly which buttons to push to cause him to blow his top. They make their choices and they set things up and they insure the fact that Nebuchadnezzar will fly into a rage and do something.

"So Nebuchadnezzar in his rage and fury commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and they brought them before the King."

Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego

And thus begins a truly fascinating confrontation. In Daniel 3 and verse 14, "Nebuchadnezzar spoke and said to them, "Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you don't serve my gods? That you won't worship the golden image that I have set up? {15} Now if you're ready at whatever time you hear the sound of music you will fall down and worship the image which I have made then well, but if you don't, you're going to be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace and who is that God that will deliver you out of my hand?"

Well, Nebuchadnezzar laid down a challenge there that could not be ignored, not by God. {16} "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said to the king, 'O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter."

{17} If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace and he will deliver us out of your hand, O King."

Now do you think that's faith? Wait till you hear what they said next. They said {17} "He will deliver us out of your hand, O King, {18} But if not, be it known unto you, O King, that we will not serve your gods nor worship the golden image that you have set up." Whether God delivers us or whether he doesn't, we are still not going to do it. It is right in the vein of Job's very powerful statement, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him" (Job 13:15).

Now the question is put squarely to us, will we remain faithful, even if God does not deliver us? You know this is the whole question that was the big argument between Satan and God about Job. Satan's whole argument was that Job doesn't serve you for nothing (Job 1:9-10). "He serves you because it pays. You have a hedge around him and you take care of him and you have made him a rich man, no wonder he serves you."

The question comes back into Job's lap when God allowed Satan to try him, "Will Job fear God for nothing? (Job 1:9). Will he serve God for nothing?" Well Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego said, "Yes, we will serve God for nothing."

The Fiery Furnace

Well, "Nebuchadnezzar was full of fury (Daniel 3:19) and the form of his visage was changed, his whole face got twisted up, and he spoke and commanded they should heat the

furnace seven times hotter than it was usually heated." People like this who have absolute power really don't take it well when somebody rejects their commands.

"Nebuchadnezzar commanded the most mighty men in his army." He got his strongest men because it was going to be a problem getting close to the furnace. {21} "They tied Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and threw them into the fiery furnace. {22} Because the King's command was urgent and the furnace was exceedingly hot, the flame of the fire killed the men that took them and threw them in the furnace.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego fell down bound in the midst of the burning fiery furnace. {24} "Nebuchadnezzar looked, got up in a hurry, and spoke to his counselors, "Hey, didn't we cast three men tied up into the midst of the fire." They said, "Yes, that's true, O King." {25} Nebuchadnezzar said, "How come I see four men loose and walking in the midst of the fire. They are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like a son of the gods."

Wow, Nebuchadnezzar is stunned by what he sees! {26} "He came as close as he could to the mouth of the burning fiery furnace and he spoke and said, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, you servants of the most high God, come forth, then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came forth out of the midst of the fire."

"Then," verse 27, "the princes, the governors, the captains, and the King's counselors, everyone was there, and they saw there these men upon whose bodies the fire had no power, not a hair of their head was singed, neither were their coats scorched, nor did they even smell like smoke." Everybody saw it.

"Nebuchadnezzar spoke and said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants who trusted in him, and have changed the King's word and have yielded their bodies that they might not serve or worship any god except their own God. {29} Therefore I make a decree, that every people, every nation, every language which speak anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be cut in pieces, their houses shall be made a dunghill, because there is no other God who can deliver after this sort. {30} Then he promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon."

And for the time being, that settled the political issue, but Nebuchadnezzar is not through dreaming.

Nebuchadnezzar Wrote A Chapter of the Bible

Strangely, Nebuchadnezzar wrote part of the Bible.

You could call the fourth chapter of Daniel, First Nebuchadnezzar. It is a letter from Nebuchadnezzar.

"Nebuchadnezzar the king, unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell on all the earth; Peace be multiplied to you. {2} I thought it good to show the signs and wonders that the High God has performed for me." Now, I wouldn't call this man converted. He realizes that God is the High God, but at the same time, he figures that He is the High God but there might be others.

Let's continue in verse 3, "How great are his signs! And how mighty are his wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion is from generation to generation. {4} I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at rest in my house, and flourishing in my palace: {5} I saw a dream that made me afraid, and the thoughts upon my bed and the visions of my head troubled me. {6} So I made a decree to bring in all the wise men of Babylon before me, that they might make known unto me the interpretation of the dream." Here we go again, they couldn't do it. This time he told them the dream and they were not able to make known an interpretation.

"But at last, Daniel came in before me, whose name was Belteshazzar, according to the name of my god, and in whom is the spirit of the holy gods: and before him I told the dream, I said this, {9} O Belteshazzar, master of the magicians, because I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you, and no secret troubles you, tell me the visions of my dream that I have seen, and the interpretation thereof. {10} Now here are the visions of my head in my bed; I looked, and behold, there was a tree in the middle of the earth, and it was a great high tree. {11} The tree grew, and was strong, and the height of this tree reached up into heaven, and the sight thereof to the end of all the earth.'" People could see it everywhere.

"The leaves were beautiful, and there was a lot of fruit, and in it was food for everybody: The beasts of the field came and had shadow under it, and the fowls of the heaven lodged in the branches of it, and all flesh was fed from this tree. {13} I saw in the visions of my head upon my bed, and, behold, a watcher, a holy one, came down from heaven; {14} He cried aloud, and said this, 'Cut down the tree, and cut off its branches, shake off its leaves, and scatter his fruit: let the beasts get away from under it, and the fowls from his branches: {15} Nevertheless leave the stump of his roots in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field; and let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth: {16} Let his heart be changed from a mans, and let a beast's heart be given unto him: and let seven times pass over him.'" "

What a strange thing. A tree, it sounds like it might represent a man, who is cut down but not killed.

It says "Let his heart be changed from a mans and let a beast's heart be given to him. He becomes like an animal and seven times are to pass over him. Usually, that will refer to seven years.

The watcher continued to say, {17} "This matter is by decree of the watchers and the demand by the word of the holy ones with a purpose, that the living may know that the most

high rules in the kingdoms of men and he gives it to ever he will and sets up over at the basest of men."

We will have to talk about that next time, until then, I'm Ronald Dart and you were Born to Win!

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