

When Dreams Come True

Daniel 2:31-49

“Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries...”

Introduction: If you visit the Bakker house, you will note a few distinct aspects of its décor. First, there will be a plethora of seasonal items, especially since Hobby Lobby is a stone’s throw away. Second, we love candles. Third, we believe in the power of the countdown. In multiple places there will be a chalkboard or wooden cubes that visualize the anticipation of events that are looked forward to: birthdays, summer break, Christmas break, vacations, trips to Disneyland, etc. Each day the number is switched, the anticipation grows, and the reality gets more and more realized. I thought about why this is such a fun practice for us. We do not put things on the board that we dread: homework deadlines, smog checks, or paying taxes (that is for another calendar). We put things that are sure, or at least WERE sure until this last year (yes, we still had birthdays, but certain trips or openings of things were switched or cancelled). Looking *forward* to things gives us hope of the future IN the present, and that hopefulness helps in the midst of any and every circumstance we may find ourselves.

We come back to Daniel 2 where Daniel is given the answer to King Nebuchadnezzar’s question regarding his dream. Remember that early in his reign, the king had a dream that shook him, causing him to be afraid, insecure, and respond in anger when it was shown that his highly trained counselors had only ignorance to offer rather than the solution he was looking for. It was abundantly clear that his magicians, star-gazers, sorcerers, and wise men COULD not come up with WHAT he dreamed, since they did NOT have access to the divine but only what was revealed through observation. This is where Daniel, a teenage captive who had just finished a three year course in Babylonian culture **calmly, courageously, and confidently** stepped forward, offered to tell the dream and its interpretation, and engaged in a night vigil in prayer with his 3 teenage buddies where God **revealed** the king’s dream. Daniel was given access to the king, was able to save his fellow counselors, and God used this to move him into a key position in the kingdom of Babylon. Much like **Joseph** in the book of Genesis, God worked through his faithfulness to move him in a position of a foreign government to accomplish HIS PURPOSES with His people.

In revealing the dream, we will see that God is seen as the ultimate authority and revealer over all others, as Daniel did the seemingly impossible: **meticulously repeated back, in detail**, the king’s dream and offered a sure and confident interpretation that was not based on scientific manuals but rather direct, divine revelation. **Before we unpack the particulars of the dream and its interpretation, there are a few principles and pieces of information we must consider.** This dream was given to a foreign king to not only show him the greatness of God, but also as a comfort to an exiled people who would be reminded (and again in later chapters) that God keeps His promises, had not forgotten about them, and would fulfill all that He said. In other words, this was a hopeful message to those waiting for a return to the land. God gave a view of history to come, both in the centuries to follow Babylon’s rule but also in the millennia to come.

- 1) **God wants us to know the future ---- but does not always fill in every detail or date** – Because we can look back at this dream, we know that there were some parts of it that have ALREADY been historically fulfilled. But we also know (and will continue to see) that it touches on a future to come. Much like our family chalk board, God informs us of what is to come so that we will live with hope as we anticipate what is to come. We are given **surety** that His kingdom will come, but we are not given specific days/dates. Why? We still walk by faith and live everyday

with the expectation that Christ's return is imminent, keeping watchfulness and eagerness for the Master of the house to return. This gives us **confidence in the present and patience/steadfastness to endure.**

- 2) **Every generation has believed they were living in the end times, and this is good, but we should be cautious** – Between Jesus' resurrection and ascension into heaven, the disciples asked the question that we have all asked at some point: *"Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"* (Acts 1:6). Jesus reminded them that no one but the Father knows the times and seasons. As He was lifted out of their sight into heaven, they were looking longingly at His departure (like following a helium balloon in the sky), they were reminded that He would return in the same way He departed (Acts 1:11). The apostles then lived in the reality that He would return IN THEIR LIFETIME, as have successive generations, especially those that have seen World Wars, Israel's return to the land, and globalization. Today we are closer to Christ's return than ever before, and we can easily see pieces coming together for Antichrist to take power, etc. This absolutely COULD be the case, but we must be cautious NOT to read current events back into the text, but let the Word speak. When we read events back into the text, we can easily miss the point AND run the risk of artificially setting times and dates and play the role that God has reserved for Himself alone.

- 3) **How we interpret prophetic passages matters** – Daniel is full of prophetic language and visions of the future. Often this comes in the form of graphic pictures or vivid imagery, and in that it can seem confusing (statues, rams with horns, lions with eagle wings, a bear with ribs in its mouth, etc). But we must remember that we have a **consistent hermeneutic**, or way of interpretation, that takes Scripture in *literal, grammatical, and historical ways, including prophecy*. What we will find in Daniel is that he actually has many of the dreams interpreted for him, and that there is consistency throughout Scripture, from Daniel to Revelation. That means we must take figures of speech and metaphors carefully but consistently, and understand that these things happen literally and historically, in space and time, unless we are explicitly told differently.

- 4) **We will not divide over different interpretations** – I say this at the outset of where we will go over the next few months, understanding that there are those who I love, learn from, and listen to that disagree with interpretations of future things. We will touch on one of those this morning, but we will commit to this: *no matter if we agree or disagree in terms of certain verses, we will maintain a spirit of love and unity* (1 Pet. 1:22; Eph. 4:3). *The point* of all of this is to point us to Christ, to be assured in the sovereignty of God, to look to Scripture as our source of revelation, to be encouraged by what is to come, and to comfort one another with this information (1 Thess. 4:18; 5:11). When we get too caught up in nitpicking over nuances we lose sight of the grand purpose of *why God gives us this information in the first place.*

The Dream Revealed (31-35)

You saw, O king, and behold, a great image. This image, mighty and of exceeding brightness, stood before you, and its appearance was frightening. 32 The head of this image was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its middle and thighs of bronze, 33 its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. 34 As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. 35 Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind

*carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. **But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.***

Just a few observations from this section as Daniel did a fine job in explaining the dream:

- The king was awed by the clarity Daniel brought to his dream. Some have interpreted that Nebuchadnezzar had actually forgotten the dream, and this would have brought phenomenal relief to him. Whether he remembered it or not, it is clear that Daniel had a level of detail that no one could have possessed. It was like he was in the king's head, explaining the image.
- The statue he saw was hard to look at since it was immense and emanating light. It's interesting to note that in the next chapter, the king made an image of gold that was 90 feet in height and 9 feet wide, no doubt inspired by his dream (of which he clearly missed the point!)
- He was scared out of his gourd by the dream. It was frightening to him, confusing, and left him agitated and sleepless.

The Interpretation Realized (36-45)

*"This was the dream. **Now we will tell the king its interpretation.** 37 **You, O king, the king of kings,** to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, and the might, and the glory, 38 and into whose hand he has given, wherever they dwell, the children of man, the beasts of the field, and the birds of the heavens, making you rule over them all—**you are the head of gold.** 39 **Another kingdom inferior** to you shall arise after you, and yet a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. 40 And there shall be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron, because iron breaks to pieces and shatters all things. And like iron that crushes, it shall break and crush all these. 41 And as you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, it shall be a divided kingdom, but some of the firmness of iron shall be in it, just as you saw iron mixed with the soft clay. 42 And as the toes of the feet were partly iron and partly clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly brittle. 43 As you saw the iron mixed with soft clay, so they will mix with one another in marriage, but they will not hold together, just as iron does not mix with clay. 44 And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever, 45 just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure."*

A Description of 5 Kingdoms

- 1) **The Head of Gold** (32, 37-38) – Possibly the least debated interpretation is what was meant by the "head of gold". It was Nebuchadnezzar himself. We've talked a bit about his rule already, as he came to prominence in 605 B.C., destroyed and carried off Jews from Judah in 605, 597 B.C., and finally in 586 B.C. He was considered one of the world's most accomplished rulers, bringing a sense of law, beauty, architectural grandeur and might to the Neo-Babylonian Empire. He ruled for **43 years**, and though the Empire lasted another 23 (until 539 B.C), it never reached the heights of his rule again.

Two parts stand out here. Nebuchadnezzar is described as "king of kings", or the *greatest king of the earth* (see also Ezek. 26:7). His rule was over the known world, was singular in power, and had dominion over man and beast alike. It is worthy to note that a *kingship* is God's design for rule, as God Himself was king of Israel (1 Sam. 8:7), and Christ is King over the earth (1 Tim. 6:15), who is described as king of king and LORD of lords. But it is also clear that it was God Himself that placed him on the throne, given him power and put him in a position to glorify himself. We are reminded that what Nebuchadnezzar thought was his alone to possess and

magnify was truly God's plan all along to be used as His instrument to exercise His wrath against His people in Judah.

- 2) **The Chest and Arms of Silver** – The second kingdom is NOT mentioned by name here, but it follows the Babylon, which was a **real, literal kingdom**. Later in Daniel we see a vision of a ram with two horns that is identified as **Medo-Persia** (Dan. 8:20), and we see **Cyrus, king of Persia** in Daniel 10:1. It is clear that the next kingdom down from the head of gold is the kingdom of Medo-Persia, which had dominance over the world for the next **208 years** (539-331 B.C.). It's possible that the two arms represented the two parts of a united kingdom. There is very little here (but more in visions to come) about this kingdom, other than it will be **inferior**. It is clear that it was not inferior by **length of domination** or amount of territory controlled, which was more extensive than Babylon.

There are two possibilities: 1) It was inferior in leadership, as each successive ruler was lesser than Nebuchadnezzar. However, this seems unlikely since the next ruler after Cyrus was a world conqueror. Most likely it meant **inferior in moral sense**. Each metal used down the statue was descending in value. Since the Fall of man in Genesis 3, mankind has not been on a pathway of *improvement* but of *corruption*. Most empires do not fall simply through military loss, but from the moral decay within. In fact, the metals also go up in strength as they move down the statue, meaning their **military might only went up**. But inevitably, as a culture **progresses in their own glory and satisfaction**, they actually move further and further away from truth and reliance on the Lord. We need look no further than our own country as wealth, material gain, relative peace, technological advance, and free education has not produced moral gain, but growing entitlement, laziness, self-focus, blame, and lack of self-sacrifice. **Progress** in science and technology has not brought *Utopia*, but rather brought us to a precipice of existence. One thing that a study in the world powers throughout history has taught us that powerful nations have a **shelf life**, and when leaders fail or focus fades, empires fall.

- 3) **The Middle and Thighs of Bronze** - The third section was made out of bronze, but I know we all wish it were made out of steel, since then we could say it had "Abs of Steel". In **332 B.C.**, a young general named Alexander marched against the Medo-Persian Empire and defeated them in a series of decisive battles, ushering in **The Greek Empire** for the next **185 years (331 B.C. - 146 B.C.)**. We will take a look at this rule in later chapters, as Alexander swiftly and in unprecedented manner ran through Western Asia and Northeastern Africa, and by the age of **30** had created one of the largest empires in the ancient world ("*which shall rule over all the earth*") In 323 B.C. he died in the palace of Nebuchadnezzar II in Babylon in a drunken stupor at the age of 32.
- 4) **The Legs of Iron** - The fourth kingdom was one of the most powerful militarily and was categorized by military might. Notice it was made out of **iron**, and the description of how iron interplayed was by **breaking into pieces, shattering, crushes, break, and crush** (41). In the battle of **Carthage in 146 B.C.** to the division of the East and West Empires in AD 395, Rome rules nearly 500 years. The last Roman emperor rules in the West until **A.D 476**, but the influence and rule was extensive, including the Pax Romana and worldwide rule which were instrumental in Jesus' first coming in a stable in Bethlehem.
- 5) **The Feet And Toes of Iron/Clay** - Most conservative theologians and commentators agree with the four fold breakdown above. Where things begin to have disagreement is in the next two kingdoms presented in the Great Statue. There are several descriptions which inform us as the nature of his **5th kingdom: 1) It would be a divided kingdom** - Whereas these four former kingdoms had centralized power and universal rule, this next iteration would have more than

one vying for power and with ruling authority. **2) It was marked by FEET and TOES** - Some have refused to see that toes are significant here, but in Daniel 7 and Rev. 17:12, there is a divided kingdom of **10 kings** that will rule. **3) It will be a mixture of strong and weak** - Some of these 10 will be strong like iron, while others will be like clay, and ultimately they will not be a good mix and will not hold together for long; **4) This kingdom will somehow be attached to the last one** - Just as each kingdom succeeded and was absorbed by the next one down on the statue, so this 5th kingdom will have some attachment to the fourth, and in this case, Rome.

Why does this 5th kingdom matter to us? For Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar, everything on the statue was prophecy. Cyrus was not around, Alexander the Great was not born, and Rome was an unknown threat. For us, **these all can be verified in history**. You can Google information about Medo-Persia, watch a terrible depiction of Alexander the Great by a bleach blond Colin Farrell (perhaps Will Ferrell would have been better), and watch volumes of documentaries on Roman rule. But what we have not had in history is a **10 kingdom union of worldwide rule**. That means that what Daniel saw and what the statue pictured was something still to come, a real, historical kingdom that will have worldwide power that is still future. Clearly in this first dream there is not much detail given, but there is much more given through the rest of Daniel. But the point is NOT THE 5th KINGDOM, it is the one that crushed all the other ones.

A Description of 1 Kingdom (*to rule them all*)

The emphasis of the dream and what brought such dread to Nebuchadnezzar was the uncut stone that had the ability to obliterate the others, crushing them to dust, and becoming a *mountain, not a statue, that would fill the whole earth*. There was something categorically different about this stone, since it had the ability to make the hardest and most valuable stones on earth into dust. Notice a few things about this **kingdom that will come**: **1) It will be in the days of "those kings"**, which refers to this 5th kingdom since the stone struck the feet of the statue; **2) It will be the MOST powerful the world has ever seen since it will never be destroyed**; **3) It will stand forever** - no other kingdom could ever boast that reality, since kingdoms come and go like fashion trends and TikTok dances (and in that, we all rejoice); **4) God Himself will set up this kingdom, the God of Heaven** who has dominion and power over all other gods or pseudo powers of the world.

Now, Nebuchadnezzar would have heard this and understood that his kingdom would not only be great, but it would NOT last forever, and though he viewed himself as a divine ruler, there was still One greater than him, who not only gave him his power but would set up a kingdom that earthly kings could literally only dream of. This was the point of the dream for Neb., the most immediate purpose and point of the text. However, for us, at this point of history and having a complete revelation in Scripture, we know that there is a **kingdom still to come, one that was inaugurated by Jesus in His first appearing and will be instituted in His second coming**. Jesus' kingdom will be like the others in the fact that it is physical, worldwide, and on earth, but will be categorically different in its scope, power, and eternity. This is the hope that we **hold onto**.

The Work Rewarded (46-49)

Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face and paid homage to Daniel, and commanded that an offering and incense be offered up to him. 47 The king answered and said to Daniel, "Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery." 48 Then the king gave Daniel high honors and many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon. 49 Daniel made a request

of the king, and he appointed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego over the affairs of the province of Babylon. But Daniel remained at the king's court.

What was the result of this sequence of dreams and interpretation? The king was awed by what took place and was introduced to the God of heaven, which would pave the way for his humility and repentance of chapter 4. He recognized that Daniel's God is "**God of gods and Lord of kings, the revealer of mysteries**", though he was not ready to yield himself to this God. But this paved the way for Daniel to be assigned as ruler of the whole province of Babylon, head over the wise men, and elevate his friends into influential positions in the king's court. Much like Joseph, God turned a miserable, ridiculous, and unfair circumstances into opportunities for influence and serving the Lord in greater capacities.

So what do we take away from all of this:

- **A Kingdom is still coming, and what we have today ain't it** - We get caught in the tyranny of urgent and trap of the present when we think that somehow **this is the kingdom God is setting up**. This is not heaven, folks. And because this is not heaven nor Christ's kingdom, this present space that we live in has a shelf life, and will have to come to an end in order for something better to come. That means our hope is NOT to clutch to THIS kingdom, but remember that we have a mission while here, to make disciples, to reach the nations, and to make much of Jesus in our time here.
- **Our God is Greater and More Powerful than all others** - No earthly government is bankable since they are a house built on empty and vain promises. Will America continue to weaken morally? Collapse financially? Be defeated militarily? No idea. But will there be a kingdom that WILL COME, will rule all others forever and be established by God Himself with Christ as its King? **ABSOLUTELY!!!!**
- **Future Realities Can Be Lived out in Present Lives** - *through Jesus Christ alone* - Jesus is NOT mentioned here by name, but we know it is His kingdom that will come. I've found myself coming back to **1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 often these last months:**

*"For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you **turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and TO WAIT for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.**"*

Because Jesus lived, died, and rose again, we can turn to Him from our vain idols in repentance, to serve Him, AND to wait in anticipation for His return! This waiting is not *passive*, but *active*, waiting by serving, hoping, and trusting. Nebuchadnezzar was presented with the reality of the God of heaven, but simply viewed it as Daniel's religion. *Is that how you view Jesus? Is He someone else's Savior, or is He yours? One of the ways that you know the answer to that is whether you are actively waiting for Him.*

So we learn about the power of our God and the future of our Savior through a prophecy given to a pagan King interpreted by a teenage captive, so that we can have hope in the midst of a pandemic, serving Jesus joyfully until He comes again. What an amazing truth we've been gifted!