

The Book of Daniel Lesson 2 Chap 2 by Walter C. Kaiser, Jr

Daniel 2 is one of the most important as well as one of the pivotal chapters in the Bible. It is also one of the longest. This chapter takes place in the “second year” of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign (2:1), so we are somewhere between April 603 B.C. and March 602 B.C. on our Julian calendar.

The whole story revolves around Nebuchadnezzar’s troubling dream, resulting in five scenes: (1) A king’s dream brings a crisis for the royal wise men (2:1-13). (2) Daniel intervenes on behalf of the wise men to ask God for the meaning of the dream (2:14-23). (3) Daniel is able to describe the contents of the king’s dream (2:24-35). (4) Daniel explains what the dream means (2:36-45). (5) The king responds to Daniel’s interpretation.

Nebuchadnezzar was not the first monarch to receive a divine revelation from God by way of a dream, for God spoke to Pharaoh through a dream (Gen 41) and to the Philistine leader Abimelech (Gen 22) and to Pharaoh Neco (2 Kgs 23 and 2 Chron 35; 2:46-49).

OUTLINE:

Title: “Facing our Fallen Culture”

Text: Daniel 2: 1-45

Focal Point: vs 44, “In the days of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people.”

Homiletical Keyword: “Concerns”

Interrogative: What are our concerns as we face our fallen culture?

I. Of Our Ultimate Questions (2:1-13)

- A. What Does the Future Hold?
- B. Where Is History Taking Us?
- C. Does Anyone Know What Is Really Going On?

II. Of Our Lack of Wisdom (2:14-23)

- A. Does the Future Hold a “Mystery”?
- B. Who Knows What the Meaning of the “Mystery” Is?
- C. Doxologies to God for Revealing the Future
- D. Oh, the Depth, Height, and Breadth of the Wisdom of God!

III. Of Our Limited Power (2:24-35)

- A. Intellectual Limitations
- B. Revelational Limitations

IV. Of Our Hope for the Future (2:36-45)

- A. Rulers Rule by Divine Permission of God
- B. Nations Tend to Become More and More Inferior to Their Predecessors in Unity, Worth, Fragility, Divisiveness, and Protectiveness

Conclusions

(STUDY OF TEXT BEGINS...)

I. Of Our Ultimate Questions (2:1-13)

- A. What Does the Future Hold?

The Aramaic section of Daniel begins in chapter 2:4b, immediately after King Nebuchadnezzar reported to his advisors that he has had a troubling dream, and the Aramaic language continues through the end of

chapter 7. In the chiastic structure [1] already mentioned, this second chapter of Daniel will be balanced off with chapter seven as both chapters speak of four successive earthly empires followed at last by the in-breaking of God's kingdom. The use of the *lingua franca* of that day is an interpretive tool that shows that these prophecies in chapters 2 to 7 were addressed to the Gentiles primarily.

B. Where Is History Taking Us?

The plot line of this court narrative takes place on two levels: on the human level there is challenge of the king to his royal advisors to explain the contents as well as the interpretation of the king's dream; on the spiritual level, there is another contest between the Living God, Yahweh, and the dead idols of the Babylonian pantheon to do the same, but without results for they are "nothings." Earlier in the eighth century B.C., the prophet Isaiah had challenged those same idols to do more than just stand there; they were to speak and say something, either good or bad (Isa 41:21-24; 47:9-10; 48:5).

Daniel and his three friends had been under instruction of the Babylonian wisdom guild for three years (1:5). Whether this means three full years or something less than three years, depending on whether what counted as their first year was a partial (i.e. an accession year that did not start until the New Year began), is difficult to say at this point. But Daniel and his three friends, whether they had graduated by this time or not, stood just as "condemned" as the rest of their class of royal advisors. But they had been trained in the literature, lore, and culture of the Babylonians. They were among those professionals here designated as "magicians," "enchanters," "sorcerers," and "astrologers" (which were also known as "Chaldeans").

C. Does Anyone Know What Really is Going On?

The way these alleged experts in dreams operated was that dreams followed certain laws, that once given sufficient data on the dream, the meaning of the dream could be discovered using Babylonian dream

manuals. We have discovered from archaeological sources several of these dream manuals. However, they became inordinately long, since they tended to hopefully cover every kind of eventuality.

But Nebuchadnezzar had his suspicions: he must have thought these “professionals” were impostors leading him on, and who, furthermore, did not have any knowledge of the future, so he set up a test for them, in which he wanted to have the contents of his dream revealed before he would hear their interpretation of the dream. This put the wise men at a real disadvantage (v.2). When they protested (v.10) that such a request had never been made of people in their profession, the king took this to mean they were stalling for time (v.8) and that they had conspired to mislead him into hoping the circumstances would change while they were buying time (v.9). It is also possible that the king’s dream still haunted him, even though he may have forgotten the dream itself, or at least some of the details of the dream.

Nebuchadnezzar made no bones about his deep anger over the inability of these so-called professionals to do what they pretended to do (v.12), so a royal decree was issued to put all of the wise men to death (v.13). These so-called “wise men” were, in his estimation, false prophets, for they indeed had not stood in the council of the Lord, nor had they heard his word (Jer 23:28). It was as silly as comparing straw to grain to compare their prognostications of the future with a word from God, which was like fire and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces (Jer 23:29). These astrologers had one part of their theology partially straight: They said in verse 11, “No one can reveal [this dream] to the king except the gods, and they do not live among men.” However, only the true and Living God would be able to do what the king asked, not the pagan zero-gods.

II. Of Our Lack of Wisdom (2:14-23)

A. Does the Future Hold a “Mystery?”

Apparently, Daniel and his three friends were not aware of the king’s execution decree, for some unexplained reason, nor does this court narrative tell us how Daniel was able to arrange, on such short

notice, an audience with the king when he, along with all the others in his class of pros, were under the threat of death (14).

The commander of the king's guard, named Arioch (the same name occurs much earlier as a name for the king of Ellasar, perhaps somewhere in southern Mesopotamia, Gen 14:1), apparently had begun to round up the wise men for their fate, when Daniel boldly intervened by asking permission to speak with the king (14). Daniel used "wisdom and tact," which spoke of Daniel's ability to act wisely and to use "good taste" that was appropriate for such a grave situation. Daniel asked the king for "time" (16).

B. Who Knows What the Meaning of the "Mystery Is?

Then Daniel approached his three friends and urged them to "plead for mercy from the 'God of heaven'" (used 4 times, 2:18-19, 37, 44, possibly as a shortened form of "The God of heaven and earth," Gen 14:22) concerning this mystery" (17-18). Note that Daniel used his friends Hebrew names this time (17).

What the king asked for, Daniel termed a "mystery," the Aramaic word raz, used eight times in this chapter (2:18-19, 27-30, 47). It is used here with the word "to reveal," which made it a technical term for a divine revelation that went beyond human comprehension. As a Persian loan word, it meant a "secret." Thus, what had been hidden from the professional wise men was made known to Daniel in a vision that night (v.19).

C. Doxologies to God for Revealing the Future

This answer from the Lord God to the prayers of the four Hebrews gave vent to their relief and their spontaneous expression of praise in verse 20-24. This prayer is a paradigmatic model for all who have experienced God's amazing answers to one's prayers. They express deep amazement that they, mere mortals, should be given the privilege of sharing God's knowledge of the future. The closing lines repeat many of the thoughts of the first lines, beautifully linking the poetry of this psalm of thanksgiving.

This doxology, similar to other doxologies in 4:1-3, 34-37 and 6:25-27 distinctively has a four-fold anthem of praise. God's name is to be praised for (1) his wisdom and power; (2) for his being in charge of the vicissitudes of world history; (3) for his revealing the deep and hidden things; and (4) for his making known the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar.

III. Of Our Limited Power (2:24-35)

A. Intellectual Limitations

Daniel returns to Arioch with the good news that the executions the king had ordered will not be needed, for he has the solution to the details of the content of the dream and its interpretation (v.24). Arioch took Daniel to the king with the news that he (!) had found a man from among the exiles from Judah who could interpret the dream. When the king inquired of Daniel, who had also been given a Babylonian name, "Belteshazzar" (v.26), if this was so, Daniel responded by informing the king that "no wise man, enchanter, magician, or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about" (v.27). One can almost see the wrath of the king momentarily rising once again, but Daniel quickly adds, "but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries" (v.28a). And you, Nebuchadnezzar have been especially privileged, because this God has shown you "what will happen in days to come" (v.28b). He it is who will be able to tell you the dream and the visions that went through your mind as you lay on your bed (v.30c).

For my part, O king, I can say that this God has revealed to me this mystery (v.30a), "not because I have greater wisdom than other men," but so that you, O king, may know the interpretation and that you may understand" (v.30b). This type of wisdom cannot be achieved through reason, conventional insight or anything like that; it can only come from the Living God. There is no one like him who can foretell what is to come (Isa 44:7).

Try as we may, using human research, group therapy, professional consultation, or even any kind of wizardry, we are unable to say what

the future holds unless God makes it known to his servants. Just as Marathon runners “hit the wall” around mile 20 of the some 27 miles in the race, so we too hit the wall in interpretation unless God reveals to his apostles and prophets what we are lacking in such difficult questions. It is his word and his alone that we depend on hearing in situations like this one.

B. Revelational Limitation

Daniel now begins to unfold the dream the king had (v.28). As the king was lying in bed wondering what would become of his kingdom, he saw an immensely large statue, such as is usually erected to represent gods or kings, but this one was awesome in its appearance (v.31). It took a human form, but it had an extraordinary size and a most startling brilliance (v.31b). The head of this statue was made of pure gold, its chest and arms were made of silver, while its belly and thighs were of bronze and its legs were partially made of iron and partially of baked clay (vv.32-33).

While the king was taking in the form of this statue, suddenly a “rock” was cut out of the mountains, but not by human hands (v.34). This rock struck the statue on its legs, smashing the whole image reducing it to smithereens (vv.34-35), so that the wind was able to blow it away, not even leaving a trace of it behind (v.35c).

The rock that struck the statue, however, “became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth” (v.35d). The fact that the rock had been formed “not by human hands” (v.34b) indicated that it had originated as a result of God’s own will and not as a result of human engineering. This feature of the prophecy reminded us of Isaiah 41:15-16, where those nations who oppressed Israel would be changed into chaff and eventually blown away.

The fact that the rock became a “mountain” that filled the whole earth was right in line with those previous predictions that mentioned that the “mountain of the Lord’s temple,” which pointed to the temple in Jerusalem, would be exalted and raised up in the later days as a place where all the nations would travel yearly to be taught by the Lord and

to worship the Lord as king (Isa 2:2-5; Mic 4:1-4).

IV. Of Our Hope for the Future (2:36-46)

A. Rulers Rule by God's Permission.

Daniel had revealed the content of the king's dream; now it was time for this Hebrew captive to reveal the meaning of this royal dream. Daniel pointedly announced: "You, O king, are the king of kings. The God of heaven has given you dominion and power and might and glory; in your hands he has placed mankind and the beasts of the field and the birds of the air. Wherever they live, he has made you ruler over them all. You are that head of gold" (vv.37-38). Even though Nebuchadnezzar had soared to unheard heights of sovereignty, nevertheless, there was a God greater than he, who had bestowed all of this on this monarch. There could be no doubt; Nebuchadnezzar had enjoyed spectacular unity (symbolized by the single head), unrivaled value (gold) and unprecedented lordship (head) over most of mankind, including the animal world and even the birds of the air.

B. Nations Tend to Become More and More Inferior in Unity, Worth, and Divisiveness.

Once Nebuchadnezzar's time had expired, deterioration would set in as another kingdom (v.39), that followed his own, would be made of "silver" and not gold. That second kingdom would deteriorate further into a third kingdom, for it would be composed of "bronze," only to be succeeded by a fourth kingdom made of "iron and clay." None of these four kingdoms would last forever; only the one set up from the "rock," that would fill the whole earth in the final day of our Lord Jesus Christ's second coming would last eternally.

True, that fourth kingdom would possess the strength of iron, but it also had internal weaknesses, for just as iron and clay do not easily mix, or bond together, so the unity seen in that head of gold would be impossible for this fourth kingdom, as it was composed of elements that did not coalesce. These two parts "will not remain united" (v.43b).

Interpreters usually only agree on their identification of the head of gold as the Babylonian Empire, but after that a confusion sets in among many of the mainline critical interpreters. Some want to say the chest and arms of silver represents only the Median Kingdom, but that interpretation fails to adequately account for the fact that there are two arms along with the chest, and this fits more naturally, both in history and in interpretation of the Medo-Persian Empire. This also allows for the third empire, according to the traditional interpretation then, to be the Greco-Macedonian kingdom represented by Alexander the Great and later by his four generals who divided up his kingdom after he died, having conquered all the known world of his day.

The fourth kingdom, then, is the Roman or western empire with all of its strength (iron) and all its divisiveness (2 legs) and its non-coalescing parts of iron and clay. The "rock" that smashes the four preceding empires, however, brings all these four kingdoms to an abrupt end as it takes the place of all of them and itself stretches on out into all of eternity.

C. The Kingdom of God Will Erupt into this Present World System to Last Forever.

"In the days of those kings," taught Daniel, "the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people" (v.44). What a contrast! Whereas one king and kingdom had succeeded one after the other, a day was coming when God would establish his kingdom with a rule and a reign that would never be ceded to any other earthly or worldly power, for his would last for an eternity. While the preceding kingdoms were overtaken by storm, this fifth kingdom would never be overridden by any other power or storm. It would be the rule and reign of Messiah forever and forever.

This narrative ends with Nebuchadnezzar falling on his face in deep reverence before Daniel and his God, whom he exclaimed was, "the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries" (v.47). Consequently, Nebuchadnezzar lavished all sorts of gifts on

Daniel as he made him “ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men” (v.48). Neither did Daniel forget his three friends as he requested that they too be recognized (v.49). Therefore they were made “administrators” over the province of Babylon, while Daniel himself remained at the royal court” (v.49b-c). Nebuchadnezzar honored Daniel and his friends because of what God had done through them, not because of their own abilities.

Despite Nebuchadnezzar’s high praise of Daniel’s God, there are no signs in this chapter that he was “converted” to the God taught in the Bible; it appeared that he merely added another god to his polytheistic pantheon.

Christ himself is that “Rock” or “Stone,” mentioned as the head of that fifth kingdom, which is the Kingdom of God announced by John the Baptist and Jesus (Mt 3:2; 4:23; 12:28; Mk 9:1; Lk 9:1-2). In fact, Jesus refers to this passage in Matthew 21:44 after quoting Psalm 118:22-23, as “The Stone the builders rejected,” which has now become “the capstone.” Jesus went on to say, “He who falls on this Stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed” (cf. Lk 20:18, which all manuscripts have, but some do not have Matthew 21:44). The in-breaking of Christ into history will bring devastating judgment; but it will also bring a rule and reign that will last forever.

Conclusions:

1. What is this Colossus but the worst, as well as some of the best, of everything in the succession of the empires in the history of the world?
2. Sometimes a religious experience can stimulate an impressive response at an artificial level without its touching the depths of our being.
3. Such a response from an impulse of the moment is no substitute for real repentance and actual faith in God, for even Pharaoh of Egypt gave glory to God at several points in the midst of the plagues only to renege later on.

4. God's kingdom will triumph over every obstacle or challenge put to it in the history of this world.
5. God will continue to be sovereign and the wisdom and revelation of all mysteries will remain in his hands.

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[1] "chiastic structure." As cited in Lesson 1, a chiasmus is when grammatical constructions, or concepts, are repeated in reverse order in the same, or a modified, form; e.g. "Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds."

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