

Foundation Prophecy of World Events

Those who know Daniel 2 can understand what happened. Here was this book, written in the sixth century B.C., laying out the history of the world from Daniel's time through ours, and even beyond. It's hard to see how any rational person, after studying Daniel 2, could come away unimpressed by the prophecy and the God who has revealed Himself in it. In fact, so powerful is Daniel 2 (as well as other parts of the book) as a witness for the Christian faith that, in early centuries of the church, opponents already argued that Daniel was written in the middle of the second century B.C., after the events it talked about, a view still held by many today. This theory, though, is not only unsubstantiated but doesn't explain how the chapter could predict events long centuries beyond the supposed second-century B.C. date of its composition.

Let's look at this fascinating prophecy, which helps form the foundation for our study this quarter on the judgment and the gospel.

The Big Picture

Read Daniel 2:1-25 and then answer the following questions:

- Why did the king's servants want him to tell them the dream?
- What were the only two possible fates all the wise men of Babylon faced with the king's decree?
- How did Daniel's actions reveal the utter helplessness of his situation from a human standpoint alone?
- Why was Daniel so confident (vs. 24) that he could reveal to the king this secret?

Daniel's prayer of thanksgiving in many ways reveals the main message of the whole book: Despite outward appearances, the Lord is Sovereign, even to the point of removing or setting up kings. Though we, with our limited view of things (1 Cor. 13:12), may feel overwhelmed by events, we can have the assurance that God is ultimately in control. Even more important, what this first section of the chapter shows is that not only is God in control of the big picture, He's close to us as individuals. Look at how He came to Daniel in a "night vision" and revealed to him what he needed to know. Talk about intimate contact! Though Daniel was only a foreign captive in a massive world empire, the Lord of all the earth (Josh. 3:11), the Creator of the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1), the One who holds the stars in their paths (Job 38:31), manifested His power and His care to this simple Hebrew lad. And, lest we forget, this is the same God whom we worship and serve today.

Secret Revealed

Read Daniel 2:26-45 and write out a summary of the dream and the interpretation. To the best of your knowledge, what are the four earthly kingdoms represented here?

Here's Daniel, six centuries before the birth of Christ, laying out the history of the world. The head of gold, of course, is named as Babylon (vs. 38). The next kingdom, the one depicted by the breast and arms of silver (vss. 32, 39), was the Medo-Persian Empire. The next one, symbolized by the belly and thighs of brass (vss. 32, 39), was Greece; and the fourth kingdom, symbolized by the iron in the legs (vss. 33, 40), was the Roman Empire, which eventually led into the nations of modern Europe, symbolized by the feet, part of iron

and part of clay (vss. 33, 41-43). This is not some Adventist scenario: Jewish and Christian Bible students for many centuries have long interpreted Daniel 2 in this manner.

Daniel 2 unfolds a sweeping panorama of history, an unbroken succession of world powers beginning more than five centuries before Christ and ending sometime in the future, when God's eternal kingdom will be established after Christ's return. Thus, Daniel 2 takes us to the end of the world as we now know it. Those who limit it and its prophecies to events prior even to the first advent of Christ are severely misinterpreting a foundational teaching of the chapter, not to mention (as we'll see) the entire book. Daniel, without question, is a book that unfolds events right up to the second coming of Christ, and beyond. It truly is, as it says in other places, dealing with the time of "the end" (Dan. 8:17, 19; 12:4, 9, 13).

The authenticity of Daniel is beyond question. First, it is part of the inspired Scriptures. Second, Jesus advised His disciples to pay heed to Daniel's prophecy as end-time events drew near (Matt. 24:15, Mark 13:14). If Jesus accepted Daniel as an inspired authority, should we do less? This week we begin a series of studies on Daniel as it relates to God's plan of history and His way of concluding that plan. This particular study concentrates on Daniel 2 as it speaks of the Lord who is trustworthy, the Lord who controls history, and the Lord of the final judgment.

The Lord Who Is Trustworthy

Daniel 2 begins with Nebuchadnezzar and his forgotten dream. The king believed the dream had an important message for him, but none of Babylon's wise men could assist him. There was, however, Daniel, who knew that in moments of calm or crisis there is only One who is trustworthy. So, he turned to God before he went to the king (Dan. 2:20-23). Prayer preceded the revelation and interpretation of the king's forgotten dream. Daniel's remarkable appeal teaches us to remember that because God is in control, all is safe.

Four facts stand out in this prayer:

- (1) Wisdom and power are God's;
- (2) God controls "times and seasons," as well as the movements of nations and powers;
- (3) "He reveals deep and hidden things," (vs. 22) and those who walk with Him need not fear darkness;
- (4) He is a God who answers prayers.
 - Our God is trustworthy, indeed!

The Lord of History

"In the word of God the curtain is drawn aside, and we behold, above, behind, and through all the play and counterplay of human interest and power and passions, the agencies of the All-merciful One, silently, patiently working out the counsels of His own will." —Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 500. The "play and counterplay of human interest and power" is what we see in Daniel 2.

The golden head of Babylon must give way to the silver chest and arms of Media-Persia, which in turn is overcome by the bronze belly and thighs of Greece. Then comes the iron rule of the Roman Empire, only to be broken into disunited Europe. What this image

teaches is that no human power provides stability or continuity. Rather, human history is a picture of sin's distortion, its ups and downs, and its inability to solve the human quest for eternal peace. For such peace, we need to look elsewhere. "While you were watching" kingdom succeeding kingdom, Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar, "a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them" (Dan. 2:34).

That rock is God's kingdom. Hence, Christianity takes history seriously and looks for its fulfillment in the establishment of that kingdom. Daniel shows the temporal nature of human powers and directs the king to look beyond. "In the time 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. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever" (vs. 44).

History is dominated with conflict between kingdoms—the kingdom of Christ and human kingdoms dominated by Satan. This conflict provides the vantage point from which we should draw an important lesson. The Christian "should understand the nature of the two principles that are contending for supremacy, and should learn to trace their working through the records of history and prophecy, to the great consummation. He should see how this controversy enters into every phase of human experience; how in every act of life he himself reveals the one or the other of the two antagonistic motives; and how, whether he will or not, he is even now deciding upon which side of the controversy he will be found."—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 190.

The Lord of Judgment

Daniel 2 shows that God allows earthly powers to run their course. They will not, cannot, last forever.

Does this message still impress modern listeners? Which aspect of this amazing prophecy do you find most compelling? Most comforting?

- Daniel 2 is an outstanding example of a Bible prophecy that inspires and enlightens believers. Imagine the impact that this prophecy had on believers of different periods. What lesson would believers during Daniel's time have taken from it? How about believers during the time of Christ? Believers in the medieval church? Today's believers? Is the message basically the same in all ages? Or are there different emphases in different ages?
- The tension between religious and political power is one of the great themes of the Bible. Sometimes worldly leaders have opposed God's people; sometimes worldly leaders are God's people. Give three examples of each. What does the symbol of iron mixed with miry clay represent? What does it indicate in terms of the religio-political setting of the last days?
- According to Daniel 2, the present union of religio-political power will continue to be the most significant influence on the world stage until Jesus comes and establishes His eternal kingdom. Is this something that can be resisted, or is it inevitable? What form would resistance take?
- The kingdom established "without hands" (Dan. 2:34) is a symbol of God's sovereignty. What do you see in today's world—good or bad—that indicates God's will is being accomplished in all the earth?