

# **God's Kingdom: The Only Kingdom That Will Never Be Destroyed**

## **Daniel 2:1-49**

**Introduction** 1) Man, with his ambitions, ego and idolatries is often impressed by what he can build. God, on the other hand, is not. If you would like God's opinion on the great Kingdoms that men build in this world, then simply look at Daniel 2:35 where He says they "all together [are] 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." In our modern vernacular we might say they are "dust in the wind." They are "here today and gone tomorrow." There is only one kingdom "that shall never be destroyed." It is the kingdom "the God of heaven will set up" (2:44), the kingdom that God revealed in dreams to a pagan king named Nebuchadnezzar, dreams that only His servant Daniel could interpret.

2) In Daniel 1:17 we are told that God gave Daniel "understanding in all visions and dreams." Now in chapter 2 we see how valuable this gift from God is. It is a gift that will save not only his life, but also the lives of his friends (v.17) and the lives of all the wise men, magicians, enchanters, astrologers and sorcerers in Babylon. How did all of this come to pass? Listen to the story Daniel tells.

### **I. God creates impossible situations to reveal His greatness                      2:1-16**

1) Daniel 2-7 has a number of interesting characteristics that enhance our understanding of what God is trying to teach us. First, there is an obvious parallelism or chiasmic structure. Second, 2:4-7:28 is written not in Hebrew, but in Aramaic. The parallel structure look something like this:

- A Dream about four earthly kingdoms and God's kingdom (ch. 2)
- B Story about Jews being faithful in the face of death (ch. 3)
- C Story about royal hubris that is humbled (ch. 4)
- C' Story about royal hubris that is humbled (ch. 5)
- B' Story about a Jew who is faithful in the face of death (ch. 6)
- A' Vision about four earthly kingdoms and God's kingdom (ch. 7)

(Lucas, 68, Hill, EBC, 57).

2) The shift to Aramaic has long puzzled scholars with no consensus being reached. Hill provides a reasonable possibility when he writes, "It would be only logical for the wise men to communicate with a language common to all, since the wise men are a racially and ethnically diverse group" (Hill, 60). If Hill is correct, there is a missional impulse that must not go unnoticed in chapters 2-7. God's impossible situation is intended to reveal his greatness to the Gentile nations.

1) Unbelievers may respond with threats and anger 2:1-13

- Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon's greatest and longest reigning king, had a series of bad dreams in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of his kingship following his accession to the throne. (604-603). In fact the dreams "troubled him, and sleep deserted him" (v.1). In the ancient world, dreams were very significant. They were often viewed as predictions of future events. When it was the dream of a king, his kingdom's future could be in view, and if he understood its meaning, he could take action and make preparation for what was on the horizon. So, like any monarch, he sought the counsel of his wise men to help him interpret and understand his dreams (vs. 2-3). No problem they say, "Tell your servants the dream and we will give the interpretation" (v. 4).
- Well verse 5 reveals the curve ball the king threw. He wanted his college of counselors to tell him both the dream and its interpretation. And, if they don't? Can't? They will be torn limb from limb and their houses will be made a garbage dump (v.5). Body parts, outhouses, and dung hills are in your immediate future unless you obey my command. "My word is final." On the other hand, do your job, and you'll receive gifts, a reward, and great honor from me. So, get with it! (v. 6).
- Well, the wise men basically ignore what Nebuchadnezzar said and repeat their request of verse 4 (v. 7). Bad move. It ticks the king off and

he accuses them of stall tactics and conspiracy (vs. 8-9). The wise men (repeatedly called “the Chaldeans”) respond and accuse the king of making an utterly unreasonable request (vs. 10-11). In fact only “the gods, whose dwelling is not with mortals” could pull this request off (cf. Isa. 46:9-10). They got this one right, but it did not help them one bit with the king.

- Verse 12 informs us the king became violently angry (ESV, “angry and very furious”) and gave orders to execute all the wise men of Babylon. Things have gone from bad to worse for the wise men of Babylon that we now learn in verse 13, includes Daniel and his friends. Apparently they had not been with the others who failed at Nebuchadnezzar’s request. No matter, guilt by association condemns them too. All are to be executed by this decree of this volatile and unreasonable pagan king. What a contrast he is with Daniel as we are about to see!

## 2) Believers should respond with wisdom and faith 2:14-16

Arioch, the head of Nebuchadnezzar’s execution squad, comes looking for Daniel and his friends to have them ripped to pieces. However, unlike the tempestuous king, Daniel is “skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king’s palace” (1:4). God gave him favor and compassion before Ashpenaz in 1:9,

and he does the same before Arioch in 2:14. Daniel responds “with prudence and discernment” to “the captain of the king’s guard” who was there to lead them to their execution. He wisely and respectfully raises a question. Why is the king so urgent in his decree to commit mass murder of his major advisers? (v.15). Arioch told him why and Daniel responds with an incredible act of courage and faith. He goes in to the king’s throne room and asks for time, the very thing Nebuchadnezzar said “no” to in verse 8. Trusting in his God he promises to return and “show the interpretation to the king (v.16). Wow! Daniel is still a teenager, exiled, conquered, a slave, a man marked for death. Still, he is calm, poised and “fully capable of speaking truth to power” (Helm, *Daniel For You*, 32). The man of faith confronts the head of state. The question: will his God come through?

## **II. God delights in the prayers and praise of His children                      2:17-23**

Dee Duke wisely notes, “Almost everyone believes that prayer is important. But there is a difference between believing that prayer is important and believing it is essential. “Essential” means there are things that will not happen without prayer” (*EGT*, 225). The lives of Daniel, his friends and all the wise men of Babylonian are at stake. The request of the king is an impossible one to obey without divine intervention. Either God acts or they are finished.

“Game over!” What Daniel does is exemplary for all us when faced with such an impossible situation: Pray → get some rest → praise!

1) Go to God in prayer      2:17-19

Amos 3:7 says, “For the Lord God does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets.” I think Daniel believed this and so he returned home “and made the matter known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions” (v.17). They then decided to do the only thing they could given the situation: they decided that they should seek “mercy from the God of heaven” in prayer that he might reveal the king’s dream and spare their lives as well as the lives of “the rest of the wise men in Babylon” (v. 18). Daniel’s concern for the welfare of the lost and pagan wise men of Babylon should not go unnoticed. His heart for others is an example to us all. His obedience to Leviticus 19:18 sets the standard we should all attempt to reach. Daniel then does a remarkable, mind-blowing thing: he goes to sleep! He prayed, put the matter in God’s hand and did what the king could not do (v.1). He got a good night’s rest and as he did, God revealed the mystery “in a vision of the night” (v. 19).

2) Respond to God’s goodness with praise      2:19-24

Songs that blend theology and worship permeate the Bible, and not just in the book of Psalms. The Old Testament includes the Song of the Sea (Exod. 15); the Song of Deborah (Judg. 5); the Song of Hannah (1 Sam. 2:1-10); and the prayers or psalms of Jonah (Ch. 2) and Habakkuk (Ch. 3). In the New Testament there is the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55), those passages where Paul becomes a song writer (e.g. Phil. 2:5-11; 1 Tim. 3:16), as well as the many times when the book of Revelation breaks into song (e.g. 4:11; 5:9-10; 13-14; 15:3-4; 19:1-2, 5, 7-8). (Fyall, *Daniel*, 35). Daniel responds to God's answer to prayer with his own theologically rich song of praise. Two ideas stand out. First, God is absolutely sovereign. Second, God alone gives revelation. This is the center of chapter 2 and the place where Daniel wants us to focus. Interpreting the dream is important, but knowing and worshipping God is ultimate.

“Daniel blessed the God of heaven” verse 19 tells us. “God of heaven” is an important title for God in chapter 2 appearing 5 times (vs. 18, 19, 28, 36, 44). Its use is an important polemic against the pantheon of Babylonian gods. Bob Fyall points out the significance of it in Daniel's context. “Not by horoscopes, séances and divination would enlightenment come, but from the God of heaven, a title also used in the post-Exilic books of Ezra and Nehemiah. This is not simply the tribal God of Israel but the God who rules the heavenly

bodies, of which the study and attempt to manipulate lay at the heart of Babylonian religion.” (Fyall, 34).

Now, what are the specifics of this theologically rich song?

- 1) He praises God for His eternity (v.20).
- 2) He praises God for His omniscience and omnipotence (v.20).
- 3) He praises God for His sovereignty over the nations (v. 21).
- 4) He praises God for His gifts of wisdom, knowledge and understanding (v.21)
- 5) He praises God for His revelation and knowledge (omniscience again) (v.22).
- 6) He praises God for His faithfulness to His people (v.23)
- 7) He praises God for answering his prayer (v.23).

Truly with Daniel and all our brothers and sisters we can exclaim, “For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the people are worthless idols, but the Lord made the heavens” (Psalm 96:4-5).

### **III. God reveals the mystery of His kingdom to demonstrate His power**

**2:24-45**



Daniel had used no astrology or board games to discover the content and meaning of the king's dream. He had consulted no dream manuals or read any books (!) as other ancient diviners did to communicate with their useless and lifeless gods (Pierce, Daniel, 37). He went to the only God who truly exists, sought his mercy (v. 18) and got his answer. Like Joseph before Pharaoh in Genesis 40-41, a Hebrew slave by divine enablement will reveal God's plan and purposes to the man of power, power he has only by virtue of God's sovereign plan. Drama has been building. The narrator slowed the action to build suspense (Davis, BST, 45). Now, it is showtime!

1) Only the God of heaven knows all things 2:24-30

- Daniel goes to Arioch, the executioner, and tells him don't kill anyone, take me to the king, "and I will show the king the interpretation" (v.24). His class in "Biblical Dream Hermeneutics" had paid off!
- Arioch quickly (ESV, "in haste") brought Daniel to Nebuchadnezzar, appearing to take some credit ("I have found") for locating this Jewish slave who can solve the king's problem (v. 25).
- The king asked Daniel, also called Belshazzar, if he could indeed tell and interpret the dream. Daniel's answer is striking both in its honesty and humility, something we can all learn from. To be honest, he says,

your boys, the “wise men, enchanters, magicians and astrologers” cannot help you out (vs. 26-27). To be blunt, they are impotent.

- On the other hand, “there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries and he has made known [to you] what will be in the latter days” (*NIV*, “days to come”, v. 28). Daniel even details how and where God gave Nebuchadnezzar his dream (vs. 28-29). Then Daniel does another remarkable thing, the thing God’s man should always do. He gives all the credit to God! It is “not because of any wisdom that I have more than all the living.” I am not smarter, wiser or more brilliant than others. This is all God’s doing “in order that the interpretation may be made known to the king, and that you may know the thoughts of your mind” (v. 30). I love what Sinclair Ferguson says at this point, “This is the spirit of Jesus before the high priests and Pilate; it is the spirit of Elijah before Jezebel; it is the spirit of John the Baptist before Herod. Daniel is full of the spirit of truth. Even Nebuchadnezzar can recognize that...” (p. 52).

## 2) Only the God of heaven can do all things                      2:31-45

Verses 31-45 finally reveal the content and interpretation of the dream.

They reveal a God who is absolutely sovereign in what He knows

(omniscience) and what He will do (omnipotence). This God knows the

future, has a plan for the future, and will accomplish that future. This is

the God of Isaiah 4:6-9-10 where the Bible says, “Remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.’” Making this very practical and applicable to us today, David Jeremiah simply says, “You may not know what the future holds, but you know who holds the future. Since the whole world is in God’s hands, your world is in God’s hand” (*Agents of Babylon*, 52-53).

a) God revealed the content of the dreams                      2:31-35

- God showed the king a great image or statue that was powerful and bright (*NIV*, “dazzling”) and frightening (*NIV*, “awesome”) in appearance (v.31). Its appearance was 4-fold: 1) head of gold, 2) chest and arms of silver, 3) middle and thighs of bronze (v.32), and 4) legs of iron with “feet partly of iron and partly of clay” (v33).
- Then something happens to the statue. “A stone was cut out by no human hand [a divine stone!], and it struck the image of its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces” (v.34). Then the whole statue or image crumbled, “broken in pieces, and became like chaff that the wind carries away.” Gone. Disappeared. “Not a trace of

them could be found.” In stark contrast, “the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth” (v.35).

This is the dream God gave the Babylonian King.

b) God provided the interpretation of the dreams 2:36-45

Daniel, by God’s enablement, has told the king his dream. Now, by that same divine power, he gives its interpretation (v. 36). The beginning of his explanation is plain (vs. 37-38). The rest is more vague until the end (vs. 39-43, 44-45). Still, most evangelical scholars who believe in predictive prophecy agree on what the various parts of the statue represent.

1) Babylon is the head of gold 2:37-38 (cf. 2:32)

Daniel tells Nebuchadnezzar his exalted status as king of his vast empire at that time was a divine gift. The language, which recalls the authority and dominion that God gave Adam in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 1:28-30), emphasizes the magnitude and magnificence of Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar (vs. 37-38). He is the head of gold, the representative of this awesome empire. However, he would be followed by a succession of weak and incompetent rulers.

The great Babylonian kingdom would only last a mere 65 years (605-539 B. C.). This mighty empire came to an end in a hurry. Daniel 5 records its demise and end at the hand of Darius the Mede (probably a name also for Cyrus).

ii) Medo-Persia is the chest and arms of silver 2:39 (cf. 2:32)

Medo-Persia would follow Babylon in 539. It was inferior in its totalitarian rule. However, it would, also be a vast empire and last for more than 200 years (539-331 B.C.)

iii) Greece is the middle and thighs of bronze 2:39 (cf. 2:32)

The middle section of the body and the thighs of bronze “which shall rule over all the earth” was Greece, built by Alexander the Great who would conquer the known world and then die at the young age of 33 (356-323 B. C.) This kingdom would last for right at 185 years (331-146 B.C.).

iv) Rome is the legs of iron with feet of iron and clay 2:40-43 (cf. 2:33)

The 4<sup>th</sup> kingdom is mighty Rome, a great and powerful empire that was “strong as iron,” because “iron breaks to pieces and shatters all things.” And like iron that crushes, it shall break

and crush all these” (v. 40). Rome, of course, is the greatest empire this world has known until now. It lasted by some accounts and in some form, from 146 B.C. – A. D. 1476 in the West and A. D. 1453 in the East. 1500 years, and its influence is still with us today, especially in Western Civilization.

Verses 41-43 are vague and uncertain as to their meaning and call for great humility by interpreters of this apocalyptic vision. Good faithful students of the Bible are all over the place in how best to understand them. Following the insights of Stephen Miller, in part, (*Daniel, NAC*, 98), I think we can at least make the following observations. First, Rome will be incredibly strong but also vulnerable and unstable, with numerous nations and divisions making up its empire (v. 41-42). Historically this was the case. Second, although various people groups and nations constitute the one Roman Empire, their unity was a tenuous and imposed unity. They are mixed in their union, not really one, and eventually “they will not hold together.” This is also true whether you date the dissolution of Roma at A.D. 395, 476, 1054, 1453 or 1476. The Roman Empire is gone. Whether it will be revived in the last days as a

part of the empire led by the one the Bible calls the antichrist or Beast is a good and interesting question, but it is best addressed in other texts of Scripture.

v) The Stone that smashes and becomes a great mountain is Christ and the kingdom of God 2:44-45 (cf. 2:34-36)

- These verses show us where the dream is pointing all along. Some understand the verses as pointing to the end of the age when Christ comes again to establish His universal and visible Kingdom (see Rev. 19:11-20:6). Others believe they are pointing to His first coming and the inauguration of His kingdom. I believe both are in view of (cf. Isa. 61:1-2). They are pointing to his first coming and the inauguration of His kingdom, while also looking to and anticipating his eschatological kingdom. Like twin peaks with a hidden valley in between, the kingdom is inaugurated at Christ's first coming and fully realized at his second. Old Testament prophecy often functions in this kind of way.

In contrast to the temporal and chaff-like kingdoms of this world (cf. Psalm 1:4-5), the God of heaven will set up a kingdom [by His Messiah, see Daniel 7) “that shall never

pass away” nor be given or left to another people or empire (v. 44). In fact the kingdom of God “shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end.” It is God’s kingdom that “shall stand forever” (v. 44). He will do this by that stone that “was cut from a mountain by no human hands,” a stone that will break and shatter and scatter like chaff “the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold.” That this language of breaking and shattering recalls the language of the Messianic Psalm 2 is not accidental or coincidental, for as we shall see at the end, this stone is Christ! His kingdom is coming and it will never end.

- Daniel brings his interpretation to a close with two resounding affirmations: 1) A great God has revealed this; 2) “the dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure” (v. 45). You can count in it! You can take it to the bank!
- The ESV Study Bible provides a helpful note in summarizing the significance of the vision of this great image God gave to king Nebuchadnezzar:

“Another point being made in the dream is that each earthly kingdom has its own glory but also its own end: both



have been assigned to it by God. The progression of world history is typically not upward to glory and unity but rather downward to dishonor and disunity. Thus the statue progresses from gold, to silver, to bronze, to iron, and from one head, to a chest and arms, to a belly and thighs, to feet and toes of composite iron and clay. (This list of metals shows a progressive decrease in the value and splendor of the materials but an increase in toughness and endurance. Some commentators understand this to indicate a general decline in the moral quality of the governments and an increase in the amount of time they lasted. In contrast, God's kingdom grows from humble beginnings to ultimate, united glory as a single kingdom that fills the whole earth forever. The stone that will break in pieces all these other four kingdoms is most likely Christ (see Luke 20:18). He is the mystery of the ages, the one in whom God plans to unite all things in his glorious kingdom (Eph. 1:9-10).” (p. 1590).

#### **IV. God honors His servants who faithfully serve Him      2:46-49**

In the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) Jesus said, “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and

put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:14-16).

Daniel and his friends were indeed lights in a dark place brightly shining.

Nebuchadnezzar could not deny the good works he saw in them. And, even as a pagan king, he gave glory to the “God of heaven,” the “Father who is in heaven” of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

1) God may choose to have people praise them 2:46-47

The king acted in an unusual, if not unprecedented manner: he “fell upon his face and paid homage to Daniel.” (cf. Isaiah 49:7, 23). Further, “he commanded that an offering and incense be offered to him” (v. 46).

Nebuchadnezzar treats Daniel, I believe, as a representative of his God (also, Lucas, Daniel, Apollos OT Com., 77). Tremper Longman is right, “Daniel is honored because of what his God has done, not because of what he has done” (Daniel, *NIVAC*, 83). This is confirmed by the confession (not a confession of conversion) of the king in verse 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.’” David Helms’ observation is helpful at this point:

“Daniel’s God now shares the stage with the Babylonians deities. Given what we know of Nebuchadnezzar’s religiosity, this is truly amazing. The one who had been named for Babylon’s deity of wisdom, who prayed to Marduk at his coronation only one year previously, now gave space to a competing deity and even offered public words of praise to him. For the first time in Nebuchadnezzar’s life, Marduk had competition in his interior world—all because one godly man remained poised, prayerful and willing to speak truth to power” (p. 42).

## 2) God may choose to have people promote them 2:48-49

- The king kept his word from verse 6 to give gifts and rewards and great honor to anyone who could cure his insomnia and “show the dream and its interpretation.” In the process, life improved dramatically for Daniel and his friends. Daniel received “high honors and many great gifts.” He was also promoted as “ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect (the one in charge) over all the wise men of Babylon” (v. 48). Any way you slice it, this is impressive and it was all the doing of Daniel’s God!
- Daniel did not forget his friends. He asked the king to appoint them to positions of authority and significance and he did (v. 49). There was a

high honor too, but it would also be a dangerous and risky position as the next chapter makes clear. Those at the top are easy targets. The trio will find this out in chapter 3. Daniel will find it out in chapter 6.

### **Conclusion: How does our text point to Christ?**

- That Daniel is a foreshadowing of Jesus in this chapter is easy to see. As David Helm points out, “God took a conquered Hebrew prisoner of war, and stood him confidently before the ruler and his own execution—a foretaste of what Jesus would later do for us, except that he not only faced but endured execution” (p. 35).
- However, it is the image of “the stone that struck the image [and] became a great mountain and filled the earth” (v. 35) that should captivate our attention. The rock or stone imagery is rich and multifaceted in the Bible. That Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, is the rock upon which Christ builds his Church and His Kingdom (Matt. 16:18). Psalm 118:22 speaks of a “stone that the builders rejected that has become the cornerstone.” Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10-11; Luke 20:17, 1 Peter 2:7 all tell us the stone is Christ. Further Isaiah 8:14 and 28:16 also use the stone imagery and Romans 9:33 and 1 Peter 2:6, 8 again cite these texts as pointing to Christ. But as Longman points out, we get a clear reference to Daniel 2 in Luke 20:18 (Daniel, *NIVAC*, 92-93). There Jesus quotes Psalm 118:22 and makes a direct connection to Daniel 2! The

stone that the builders rejected which has become the cornerstone, is the stone that breaks and crushes everyone who fall on (rejects) that stone. Placing all of this in an end-time, eschatological context, Chuck Swindoll says it like this,

“When Jesus Christ returns to earth to establish His Millennial Kingdom, He will “break [the nations] with a rod of iron. [He will] shatter them like earthenware” (Ps. 2:9). As the smiting stone in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, the Lord will not absorb, restructure, or adapt to previous kingdoms; He will totally annihilate them and set up his own monarchy, which will be absolutely perfect politically, morally, economically, and religiously. And he will rule over all the earth as King of Kings and Lord of lords (Isa. 2:2-4; cf. Rev. 19:11-16).” (p.27).

This is the stone the world rejected. This is the stone God will exalt and build His Kingdom that will never be destroyed.