

Main Idea: God has a plan for the world. What an encouraging reality! There are four scenes in Daniel 2:24-49 which will show us the big picture of what God is doing in this world.

- I. God gave Daniel a platform with the king (24-30).
 - II. God enabled Daniel to reveal the dream (31-35).
 - A. The head was gold.
 - B. The chest and arms were silver.
 - C. The belly and thighs were bronze.
 - D. The legs and feet were iron and clay.
 - III. God enabled Daniel to interpret the dream (36-45).
 - A. Here’s what we see.
 1. Though impressive, the statue is unstable.
 2. There is decreasing value in the metals.
 3. The four parts represent four kingdoms.
 - Gold: Babylonian empire
 - Silver: Medo-Persian empire
 - Bronze: Greek empire
 - Iron/clay: Roman empire
 - The Rock: God's kingdom
 - B. Here’s what we learn.
 1. Though impressive, man's kingdoms don't last.
 2. God's objective is to establish His kingdom.
 3. God is in control of world history.
 - IV. God caused the king to honor Daniel (46-49).
- Take Inventory: Since God’s plan is to establish His kingdom...
1. Make sure you are rightly related to the King.
 2. Make sure you are ready to see the King.
 3. Make sure you are seeking first the purposes of the King.

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 12

It was quite a year.

Jews were killed in Jerusalem. Refugees tried to make a new life in Iraq.

Tensions mounted between Iraq and her Persian neighbors in Iran. Bloodshed was a regular occurrence. Powerful leaders tried to stake their claims over the resources of the Middle East.

Yes, it was quite a year. But I’m not talking about last year. I’m actually describing what happened 2600 years ago.

Tensions in the Middle East are nothing new, and they certainly do not catch God by surprise. Which is why there’s tremendous hope for us as we open Daniel 2 together.

I’ve entitled this message, “God’s Plan for the World.” It’s encouraging to know that God does have a plan for the world, and He reveals it for our benefit in His holy Word.

Reading Daniel 2 is like reading the newspaper, but instead of reading about what happened, we read about what was *going* to happen.

Do you ever ask yourself, "What in the world is God doing?" In Daniel 2, God reveals the answer. There are four scenes in Daniel 2:24-49, and in these four scenes God did four things to make it clear He is the sovereign ruler of heaven and earth.

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For an earlier development of this passage, see the Daniel series at WBC in 1996.

I. God gave Daniel a platform with the king (24-30).

Last time we looked at the crunch-time-event in the beginning of chapter two. Nebeuchadnezzar was bothered by a dream, and he called his wise men, who were in turn bothered by a demand. The king gave them this edict, "Tell me what I dreamed, and the interpretation of that dream, and you will be rewarded. If you don't, you'll be cut in pieces."

The wise men couldn't, of course, and went to pieces at the thought of being cut to pieces. We learn a lot about ourselves in crunch times. In this crunch time, they folded.

On the other hand, Daniel, instead of panicking, prayed. And God answered.

Notice verse 24, "Then Daniel went to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to execute the wise men of Babylon, and said to him, 'Do not execute the wise men of Babylon. Take me to the king, and I will interpret his dream for him.'"

Imagine the surprised look on the face of Arioch. Impossible! This story is a great example of how God uses impossible situations to bring the ungodly down to size, and to bring honor to Himself.

Allow me to call your attention to an important contrast. On the one hand, notice how Arioch tried to take credit in the situation. In verse 25, "Arioch took Daniel to the king at once and said, '*I have found a man* among the exiles from Judah who can tell the king what his dream means.'"

On the other hand, watch Daniel's response in verse 26. When the king asked Daniel in verse 26, "Are you able to tell me what I saw in my dream and interpret it?," here's how Daniel replied. Verses 27-28, "No wise man, enchanter, magician, or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come. Your dream and the visions that passed through your mind as you were lying in bed are these."

Then Daniel said in verses 29-30, "As Your Majesty was lying there, your mind turned to things to come, and the revealer of mysteries showed you what is going to happen. As for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because I have greater wisdom than anyone else alive, but so that Your Majesty may know the interpretation and that you may understand what went through your mind."

Daniel wasn't a glory-hog. In fact, unlike self-seeking Arioch, he didn't even try to promote himself in the situation. He gave the glory to Whom the glory was due. *God*. Daniel is a man who used every opportunity he could to lift up God. He could have easily and honestly replied to Nebuchadnezzar, "Yes, I can tell you the dream," and he would have missed a golden opportunity for evangelism.

So how do you respond when you hear: "You have a beautiful family." Do you say, "Well, thanks, we've done our best."? Or do you use the platform to respond, "You're so kind. But if there's anything beautiful about us, it's because of the grace of God."?

How about this: "Hey, great job on that work project!" Do you say, "Well, I worked pretty hard at it." Or, "It was a team effort." Or better, "Thanks, but the truth is I asked God to help me, and He did. I couldn't do anything without Him."

You see, God loves to use a person who doesn't cling to the glory. God blesses the humble (1 Pet 5:5-6).

So God gave Daniel a platform with the king. And Daniel used it for His glory. That's scene one. And this of course is something God does with us too. He gives us platforms from which to point people's attention to Him.

Now we're ready for scene 2.

II. God enabled Daniel to reveal the dream (31-35).

Before Daniel ever interpreted the dream, he summed up the nature of the dream. Back in verse 28 he explained for Nebuchadnezzar that this dream has to do with "what shall be in the latter days," or as stated in verse 29, the "hereafter." Interestingly, verse 29 indicates that before going to sleep that night, the king had been thinking about the future.

The dream is prophetic. The expression "in the latter days" occurs 14 times in the Old Testament, and always denotes the closing period of the future."² In this dream, God revealed His plan for world history, from approximately 600 B.C. to the coming of the Messiah to the earth which, as we know, is actually two comings, the second yet future.

Let's examine the dream itself. Verse 31, "Your Majesty looked, and there before you stood a large statue—an enormous, dazzling statue, awesome in appearance."

The KJV uses the word "image," but the object wasn't an idol, but more accurately, a statue, as in the NIV. Daniel describes it as being "great" (large), brilliant (apparently it reflected light), and "terrible" (or terrifying).

The statue had four metallic components. Verses 32-33, "The head of the statue was made of pure gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay."

A. The head was gold.

B. The chest and arms were silver.

C. The belly and thighs were bronze.

D. The legs and feet were iron and clay.

That's quite a sight! We'll discuss the significance in a moment, but first, notice what happened to the statue in verses 34-35, "While you were watching, a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them.³ Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were all broken to pieces and became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth."⁴

Wouldn't it be great to have had a camera to take a picture of the look on Nebuchadnezzar's face after Daniel revealed the dream?! A stunned look would be an

² Walvoord, 59

³ Walvoord suggests a stone flying through the air as a missile, p. 64.

⁴ Here's the Living Bible paraphrase, "But as you watched, a Rock was cut from the mountainside by supernatural means. It came hurtling towards the statue and crushed the feet of iron and clay, smashing them to bits. Then the whole statue collapsed into a heap of iron, clay, brass, silver, and gold; its pieces were crushed as small as chaff, and the wind blew them all away. But the Rock that knocked the statue down became a great mountain that covered the whole earth."

understatement. Whether he was speechless or not, we don't know, for the text gives no response from the king. So Daniel proceeded to interpret the dream.

That's scene three.

III. God enabled Daniel to interpret the dream (36-45).

Commentators have lots to say about the details in Daniel 2. They speculate about the significance of the metal, the two arms, the ten toes, and more. In analyzing Daniel's interpretation, I want us to focus on two things, first, what we see, then what we learn.

A. Here's what we see.

Let's not miss the obvious. Three observations stand out.

1. Though impressive, the statue is unstable.

From its gold head to its fragile feet of glazed china mixed with iron, the image is both dazzling and wobbly. Walvoord points out the weights of the four metals decreases in terms of specific gravity. The gold is much heavier than the silver, the silver than the brass, the brass than the iron, and the clay in the feet is the lightest material of all.

In case you're wondering, the approximate specific gravity of gold is 19, silver 11, brass 8.5, and iron 7.8.⁵

So the statue is top-heavy. But that's not the reason it fell. In fact, the statue didn't fall by itself, but was smashed to the ground by a Rock that struck the statue on its feet.

2. There is decreasing value in the metals.

Obviously, gold is more precious than silver, which is more valuable than bronze, which is more costly than iron. So the value decreases as we move from the top down.

3. The four parts represent four kingdoms.

How do we know? Daniel tells us when he begins the interpretation in verse 36. Notice verse 36, "This was the dream, and now we will interpret it to the king." And here's the interpretation.

Verses 37-38, "Your Majesty, you 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 all mankind and the beasts of the field and the birds in the sky. Wherever they live, he has made you ruler over them all. You are that head of gold."

So the four parts represent four kingdoms, and here's the first.

•Gold: Babylonian empire

The gold head, then, represents the first kingdom, the Babylonian kingdom. The text says that God gave Nebuchadnezzar his power to rule. Let's never forget that God is sovereign; kings and presidents are not.

The Babylonian Empire began in 605 B.C., continued under Nebuchadnezzar until he died around 562 B.C., and then for another 21 years after his death. History tells us that Babylon fell in 539 B.C. But God predicted the fall ahead of time.

Notice verse 39, "After you, another kingdom will arise, inferior to yours." So here's the second kingdom.

•Silver: Medo-Persian empire

⁵ Walvoord, p. 63.

That's interesting. Daniel revealed that the second kingdom would be "inferior" to Nebuchadnezzar's. If you know history, you may be wondering, "Wait a minute. Persia had more territory than did Babylon. So did the other kingdoms. How could they be 'inferior'?"

Walvoord suggests, "Daniel did not say that the head was larger in size than the body; but the nature of the metal, gold, was more precious than that of silver or brass... History certainly confirms that the Med-Persian Empire...lacked the central authority and fine organization which characterized the Babylonian Empire."⁶

The *NIV Study Bible* explains, "The diminishing value of the metals from gold to silver to bronze to iron represents the decreasing power and grandeur of the rulers of the successive empires, from the absolute despotism of Nebuchadnezzar to the democratic system of checks and balances that characterized the Roman senates and assemblies. The metals also symbolize a growing degree of toughness and endurance, with each successive empire lasting longer than the preceding one."⁷

Now look at the end of verse 39, "Next, a third kingdom, one of bronze, will rule over the whole earth."

•Bronze: Greek empire

The second empire lasted for two centuries until a man named Alexander the Great came along and invaded Persia in 334 BC. Although Alexander ruled only for a few years until his death, he established the largest empire of ancient times, from Greece to India. After his death in 323 BC, the empire was split into four parts and ruled over by four of Alexander's generals.

The bronze kingdom lasted some 300 years until a fourth came along. Verses 40-43, "Finally, there will be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron—for iron breaks and smashes everything—and as iron breaks things to pieces, so it will crush and break all the others. Just as you saw that the feet and toes were partly of baked clay and partly of iron, so this will be a divided kingdom; yet it will have some of the strength of iron in it, even as you saw iron mixed with clay. As the toes were partly iron and partly clay, so this kingdom will be partly strong and partly brittle. And just as you saw the iron mixed with baked clay, so the people will be a mixture and will not remain united, any more than iron mixes with clay."

•Iron/clay: Roman empire

Bible scholars offer various suggestions as to the identity of the iron and clay kingdom, but the most likely is the Roman Empire. Leupold states, "The Roman legions were noted for their ability to crush all resistance with an iron heel."⁸ Daniel states in verse 40, "And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron, forasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and subdues all things..."

He also predicts an interesting feature of this fourth kingdom--it will be a divided kingdom. Notice verse 41, "And whereas you saw the feet and toes, part of potters' clay and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided." And verse 42, "So the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly broken."

⁶ Walvoord, p. 66.

⁷ *NIV Study Bible*, p. 1293.

⁸ in Walvoord, p. 68

So what does this mean? In what sense was the fourth kingdom "divided"? Again, the speculation abounds, but Walvoord suggests that the meaning is geographic, "This was two-legged because it embraced two continents, or two major geographic areas, the East and the West. The Roman Empire continued this twofold division and extended its sway over the entire Mediterranean area as well as western Asia."⁹

The climax of the dream, however, has to do with a Rock.

•The Rock: God's kingdom

Verse 34, "A rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them."

And verse 45, "This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands—a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces."

So that's what we see. An impressive, unstable statue, with four metals decreasing in value that represents four earthly kingdoms, and a rock representing God's kingdom that brings down the other kingdoms.

Fascinating, but what's the point?

B. Here's what we learn.

Instead of focusing on what is not clear about the dream, allow me to zero in on what I would suggest are three take-aways.

1. Though impressive, man's kingdoms don't last.

Babylon was vast, wealthy, and powerful. But it came and went just like smoke out of a chimney. The same can be said of the Medes and Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans. They have come and gone.

Closer to home, Nazi Germany did not last. Stalin's Soviet Union did not last. For that matter, Mao's China will not last. Nor will the Kim dynasty in North Korea. And for that matter, as much as we love our country, the United States will not last forever.

None of man's kingdoms shall last. Not one.

What are the implications of this truth? In an election year, here's one that should be obvious. Let's exercise caution when we listen to the promises of politicians. I thank God for those who serve in governmental positions, and we should pray for them. Yet we must never forget that though impressive at times, man's kingdoms do not last. As believers in Christ, our loyalty must not be to a political party, for we've given our loyalty to the King of kings, our beloved Savior who rescued us by dying in our place.

There's the first take-away. Though impressive, man's kingdoms don't last.

2. God's objective is to establish His kingdom.

Verse 44 says something startling, "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."

When will verse 44 be fulfilled? Verse 45 says when the rock breaks down the statue. Verse 45 says, "This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands—a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the

⁹ Walvoord, p. 73.

silver and the gold to pieces. The great God has shown the king what will take place in the future. The dream is true and its interpretation is trustworthy.”

Who is the rock? Of this there can be no doubt. He is the "rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands" (45). The New Testament calls Him "a stone that will make men stumble," and "a rock that will make them fall" (1 Pet 2:6-8). He is the precious cornerstone (Isa 28:16). The stone, the rock is none other than Jesus Christ.

So what in the world is God doing? 2600 years ago He gave the answer. In a dream, God revealed to Nebuchadnezzar that one day He would establish an eternal kingdom.

And that’s exactly what He is going. Six hundred years after the dream, God sent His Son into the world born of a virgin. What did Jesus announce when He launched His public ministry? Matthew 4:17, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

The King had come. According to verse 44, “the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed.” That’s what King Jesus came to do.

First, by rescuing subjects for His kingdom. At His first coming, Jesus died in the place of rebel sinners—that’s you and me—so that by means of His perfect life and substitutionary death we could be forgiven and declared eternal citizens of His kingdom.

That’s what He did. And we benefit from it by simply putting our trust in Him.

But He’s not done. The King who came the first time to die will come a second time to rule and reign, joined by all who have given their allegiance to Him.

3. God is in control of world history.

God has a plan, and in His plan all of history is heading towards a climax. What the first Adam forfeited in the Garden, the last Adam, Jesus, will establish when He returns. Revelation 11:15 describes that day, "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever."

Yes, one day, Jesus Christ will reign. His kingdom will be indestructible. His kingdom will be eternal. His kingdom will crush all other kingdoms.

And lest there be any doubt, look at Daniel's concluding words in verse 45, “The dream is true and its interpretation is trustworthy.” Beloved, reading God's prophetic account of the future is more reliable than reading the newspaper's account of yesterday's events. God is sovereign, and this is His plan for the world.

IV. God caused the king to honor Daniel (46-49).

What did Nebuchadnezzar do after Daniel finished? He fell on his face before Daniel. Verses 46-47, “Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and paid him honor and ordered that an offering and incense be presented to him. The king said to Daniel, ‘Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery.’”

That’s quite an admission from a totalitarian dictator, isn’t it?

And notice what he did to Daniel in verses 48-49, “Then the king placed Daniel in a high position and lavished many gifts on him. He made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men. Moreover, at Daniel’s request the king appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego administrators over the province of Babylon, while Daniel himself remained at the royal court.”

The Jewish historian Josephus records an interesting story about Alexander the Great. When this powerful conqueror appeared before the high priest of the Jews, he bowed. One of his generals, Parmenion, asked him why he would bow since ordinarily men bowed before him. Alexander the Great replied, "It was not before him that I prostrated myself, but the God of whom he has the honour to be high priest."¹⁰

That's what's happening here. Nebuchadnezzar honored Daniel because of Daniel's God. He said in verse 47, "Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings."

So the Lord gave Daniel a platform, which Daniel used to point back to God, which resulted in still more honor to Daniel and ultimately to Daniel's God.

"Seek first the kingdom of God," said King Jesus in Matthew 6:33.

Are we doing that? Are we living with God's kingdom in mind?

Carl Sagan said that science and religion belong in their own spheres. May I ask you a question? Have you compartmentalized your life? Have you put God in "Sunday's box" or do you live by kingdom values Monday through Saturday as well?

Friends, God's plan is to establish His kingdom. Are we on the same page?

Take Inventory: Since God's plan is to establish His kingdom...

We need to make sure of three things.

1. *Make sure you are rightly related to the King.*

If we are serious about living with God's kingdom in mind, we need to receive the King as our Lord and Savior. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

Are you rightly related to the King who is coming?

2. *Make sure you are ready to see the King.*

How? By submitting your life to the King. Nebuchadnezzar did here...almost. He gave lipservice to God in chapter two, but he didn't give his life to God until God humbled him in chapter four. To submit to the King means we yield our lives to Him.

Have you given Jesus Christ your life? Is He the Lord of your life?

If He is, then you will serve Him, and gladly so.

3. *Make sure you are seeking first the purposes of the King.*

He's given you and me a life and an opportunity. We just said goodbye to our brother Elmer Mullins on Friday. At his memorial service I quoted a text I'd like to quote again as we finish today.

"Show me, Lord, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life. You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Each man's life is but a breath." Psalm 39:4-5

¹⁰ See Walvoord.