

In the March 18 edition of U.S.News & World Report, there is an interesting conversation with astronomer Carl Sagan in an article entitled "Keeper of the Flame." Sagan has written a new book, The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark, in which he argues for science over (what he calls) superstition.

Sagan does not believe in a Creator, a fact that obviously influences his view of the Bible and religion. Here's what he had to say about science vs. religion:

"The Bible is not a scientific book, or not lately. The science of the Bible is mainly what the Jews during the Babylonian captivity got from the Babylonians 2,600 years ago. And that was the best science on the planet in 600 B.C., but we've learned a lot since. If, as fundamentalists do, you take the Bible as the literal word of God, dictated to a perfect stenographer with no room for metaphor or allegory, then you run into deep trouble because the Bible is demonstrably wrong in areas of science [note: don't miss Sagan's inaccurate, biased assessment here]. But if you take it as the work of inspired humans, if you believe that there's room for allegory and metaphor as most of the mainstream Jewish, Protestant and Roman Catholic sects do, then there's no problem, there's no conflict. Science and religion each are in their own sphere, and they're in fact mutually supportive."

That's quite a statement, isn't it? It's also an indicative revelation of the current attitude in society towards "fundamentalists" and biblical Christianity. Sagan says the Bible is demonstrably wrong in areas of science, yet he also throws in that science and religion are both mutually supportive as long as they what? Stay in their own sphere.

The secular mentality today is this, "The Bible is OK for Sunday, but leave it out of the schools Monday through Friday. You can use the Bible in church, but don't bring it to the workplace. The Ten Commandments belong in the hallway of the church, not the hallway of the court house."

You need to realize that the Bible doesn't fit in a secular world view. Secularists will give lip-service to the Bible as a literary masterpiece, true, but to them it's no more than that. It's an outdated, superstitious book, full of contradictions which relegate it to a level not much above Aesop's Fables.

You may wonder, "How does God react to people who demean His character and His Book in this manner?" We find the answer to that question in an intriguing episode recorded in Daniel 2. Daniel 2 drives the nail in the coffin of secularism. Daniel 2 disproves the faulty notion that science and religion are mutually exclusive, for in Daniel 2 we see the Sacred intersecting the secular.

In Daniel 2 we discover that all of life, both sacred and secular, both science and religion, is under the sovereign authority of the Living God. Nebuchadnezzar learned that truth firsthand. The event we are going to consider happened in the very time frame Sagan mentioned in his article, in Babylon, 2,600 years ago, around the year 600 B.C.

Do you ever ask yourself the question, "What in the world is God doing?" In Daniel 2, God reveals to us what He is doing in this world.

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

Proposition: 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. Scene #1: Daniel prepares to reveal the dream (24-30).
- II. Scene #2: Daniel reveals 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. Scene #3: Daniel interprets the dream (36-45).
 - A. Don't miss the obvious observations.
 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. Don't miss the obvious lessons.
 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. Scene #4: Daniel is honored (46-49).

Implications: Am I living with God's kingdom in mind?

1. Submit to the King.
2. Serve the King.

I. Scene #1: Daniel prepares to reveal the dream (24-30).

Last time we looked at the crunch-time-event in the beginning of chapter two. Nebuchadnezzar was bothered by a dream, and his wise men 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." They couldn't, of course, and went to pieces at the thought of being cut to pieces! In the crunch time, they folded.

On the other hand, with his life on the line, instead of panicking, Daniel prayed. And God answered.

Notice v 24, "Therefore, Daniel went in unto Arioch, whom the king had ordained to destroy the wise men...and said, Destroy not the wise men of Babylon. Bring me in before the king, and I will reveal unto the king the interpretation." 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.

We won't take time to read the entire section, but I would call your attention to an important contrast. On the one hand, notice how Arioch tried to take credit in the situation (25, "I have found a man"). On the other hand, watch Daniel's response in v 26. When the king asked Daniel, "Are you able to tell me what I saw in my dream and

interpret it?," here's how Daniel replied (27-28, NIV), "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."

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.

How do you respond when you hear: "You have a beautiful family." Do you say, "Well, thanks, I'm pretty proud of it myself." Or, "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, "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).

Note: Don't miss how Daniel defines God in v 28, as "the God in heaven who reveals secrets." Why that description? Because Nebuchadnezzar had many gods, and Daniel didn't want the king to see his God as one among many, but one above all others.

By the way, the same is true in our day. In talking to lost people, we mustn't assume things. Before we can do evangelism, we need to do pre-evangelism, and define the terms we use. Take for instance, "God created the world." To a person with a new age background, who is God? An impersonal force in the cosmos. Is that who you mean?

Scene #1 has to do with preparation. Now we're ready for scene 2.

II. Scene #2: Daniel reveals the dream (31-35).

Before Daniel ever interpreted the dream, he summed up the nature of the dream. Back in v 28 he explained for Nebuchadnezzar that this dream has to do with "what shall be in the latter days," or as stated in v 29, the "hereafter." Interestingly, v 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 (Walvoord, 59)." In this dream, God revealed His plan for world history, from 600 B.C. to the second coming of Christ to the earth.

Let's examine the dream itself. V 31 "Thou, O king, saw and behold a great image. This great image whose brightness was excellent, stood before you, and the form of it was terrible." The KJV uses the word "image," but the object wasn't an idol, but more accurately, a statue. Daniel describes it as being "great" (large), brilliant (apparently it reflected light), and "terrible" (or terrifying).

The statue had four metallic components (32-33).

- 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.**

Quite a sight! We'll discuss the significance in a moment, but first, notice what happened to the statue in vv 34-35 (LB), "But as you watched, a Rock was cut from the mountainside by supernatural means. It came hurtling towards the statue (Walvoord suggests a stone flying through the air as a missile, 64) 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."

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

III. Scene #3: Daniel interprets the dream (36-45).

Commentators have a hay-day with all the spectacular details of Daniel 2. They speculate about the significance of the metal, the two arms, the ten toes, and more. In analyzing Daniel's interpretation, I would suggest it's important to do two things.

A. Don't miss the obvious observations. 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. The approximate specific gravity of gold is 19, silver 11, brass 8.5, and iron 7.8 (p. 63).

The statue is obviously 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 the flying Rock.

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. Why is that significant?

3. The four parts represent four kingdoms.

How do we know? Daniel tells us in verses 36ff. What are the four kingdoms?

•Gold: Babylonian empire

Vv 37-38 state, "Thou, O king, art a king of kings, for the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory. And wherever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the heavens He has given into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all. Thou art this head of gold."

The gold head, then, represents the first kingdom, the Babylonian kingdom. The text says that God gave Nebuchadnezzar his power to rule (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. God predicted it ahead of time. V 39 "After thee (Nebuchadnezzar) shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee."

•Silver: Medo-Persian empire

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's answer is helpful (66), "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."

•Bronze: Greek empire

V 39 concludes, "And another third kingdom of bronze, which shall bear rule over all the earth." The second empire lasted for two centuries until a man named Alexander the Great came along and invaded Persia in 334 B.C. Although Alexander ruled only for a few years until his death, he established the largest empire of ancient times, from Yugoslavia to India. After his death in 323 B.C., 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.

•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 (in Walvoord, 68), "The Roman legions were noted for their ability to crush all resistance with an iron heel." Daniel states in v 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 v 41, "And whereas you saw the feet and toes, part of potters' clay and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided." And v 42, "So the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly broken." What does that mean? In what sense was the fourth kingdom "divided"? Again, the speculation abounds, but Walvoord's suggestion is plausible. He proposes that the meaning is geographic (73), "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."

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

•The Rock: God's kingdom -- We'll explore this next.

B. Don't miss the obvious lessons.

Instead of focusing on what is not clear about the dream, allow me to zero in on the obvious--three obvious lessons.

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.

Nazi Germany did not last. Stalin's Soviet Union did not last. For that matter, the USA will not last forever. None of man's kingdoms shall last. None.

What are the implications of that truth? In an election year, one should be obvious. Exercise caution when you 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. Our loyalty is to our King. Why be loyal to the Lord? Because His kingdom alone shall last. How do we know?

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

V 44 says something startling, "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever."

When will v 44 be fulfilled? V 45 says when the "stone" breaks down the statue. Who is the stone? Of this there can be no doubt. He is the "rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands" (45, NIV). 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.

Don't miss this. In a dream, God revealed to Nebuchadnezzar that one day He would establish an eternal kingdom. And 600 years later, what did Jesus announce when He came? "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand (Matt 4:17)."

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 will establish when He returns. Rev 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."

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

You may ask, "Are you sure about this?" Look at Daniel's concluding words in v 45, "The dream is certain, and the interpretation of it sure." 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. His plan cannot fail.

IV. Scene #4: Daniel is honored (46-49).

What did Nebuchadnezzar do after Daniel finished? He fell on his face before Daniel (46). 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." (Walvoord)

Nebuchadnezzar honored Daniel and Daniel's God. He said (47), "Of a truth your God is the God of gods, and the Lord of kings..."

Implications: Am I 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?

If we are serious about living with God's kingdom in mind, how do we do it? We must make two decisions.

1. Submit to the King. Nebuchadnezzar did here...almost. He gave lip-service 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 give Him our lives. Have you ever given Jesus Christ your life? Is He the Lord of your life?

2. *Serve the King.* I have a great concern for God's people. Some of us who know the King aren't living with kingdom values in mind. Are you? What are you living for? Will it last? Or in the end will it topple?