

“A Forever Kingdom”

Daniel 2:24-49

Alexander the Great is a familiar name in world history. He succeeded his father, Philip the Second, to the throne at the age of 20. He spent most of his reign on an unprecedented military campaign through Asia and northeast Africa. By age 30 he had created one of the largest empires of the ancient world. It stretched from Greece to northwestern India. He was undefeated in battle and is widely considered one of history's most successful military commanders.

The philosopher/historian Plutarch said this about Alexander. “When Alexander saw the breadth of his domain, he wept for there were no more worlds to conquer.” But some historians have a different outlook on Alexander’s tears.

Alexander knew they were nation/states that he hadn’t moved against. He and Phillip had fought Germanic tribes to the northwest along the Danube River, but most of Europe was unconquered. He knew the African continent existed by his time in Egypt. He knew there were whole worlds to the north of the Black, Caspian and Aral Seas. He knew of China and the Pacific Ocean, (it was then called the Great Eastern Sea.)

But after 13 years of almost continual warfare Alexander and his men were totally exhausted. Alexander’s tears could easily have been tears of frustration; he was unable to conquer any more lands. At his death, his kingdom was divided, eventually paving the way for the birth of the Roman Empire. Both of these empires appear in our Scripture text for today!

In our previous message from the book of Daniel we looked at verses 1 to 23 under the title “The Revealer of Secrets.” This first part of the chapter introduces Nebuchadnezzar, his dream, and his responses toward his wise men and court officials. Because these supposed “wise men” couldn’t tell the king his dream, he ordered them all put to death.

That death sentence included Daniel and his friends, even though it doesn’t seem they are present at the king’s pronouncement. So, Daniel asked for time so he and his friends could pray to their God. As you recall, God revealed the secret to Daniel. In response, Daniel praises and thanks God for His mercy and divine revelation.

Let’s turn now to our text for today, Daniel chapter 2, verses 24 to 49. I’ve titled the message, “A Forever Kingdom.” Listen carefully as I read the text, **Daniel 2:24 to 49**.

In this text God reveals this forever kingdom through a series of divine ACTIONS.

The First Divine ACTION is,

An Answer Obtained

I mentioned in the introduction, the prayers of Daniel and his friends. They prayed together that God would reveal the king's dream so that they, and all the other wise men, would not be executed! God responded to their pleas for mercy.

"So, Daniel blessed the God of heaven." God gave a clear answer to the prayers of Daniel and his friends. In response, Daniel calls us to bless the name of God forever and ever because wisdom and power belong to Him. In Holy Scripture, the name of God stands for His nature and His revealed character.

Daniel acknowledges that the times and seasons are under God's dominion. If God wants to change them, He can. He controls the destiny of nations. He sets up rulers to accomplish His purposes and removes them when their work is complete. He gives wisdom and understanding to those who seek Him.

And finally, Daniel's humility shines through in verse 23. Notice, he praises God that the king's secret has been revealed to *us*. Daniel credits the unified prayers of his friends for moving God's hand and revealing the secret of the king's dream. Daniel received the vision, but he acknowledged the role of his friends in receiving it. What a wonderful example for us to follow.

Now, it's time to let the king know about the answer. Daniel is fully in command of the situation. So, he goes to Arioch, the king's executioner, and boldly states; *"Do not destroy the wise men of Babylon. Bring me before the king and I will show the king the interpretation."* By stating he could give the interpretation, that also meant he knew what the dream was.

Notice how Arioch uses his oversight of Daniel to curry favor with the king. He said, *"I have found a man among the captives of Judah who can interpret your dream."* Well, that's not quite how it was, but Nebuchadnezzar doesn't know the difference; and, he probably doesn't care. He brushes off Arioch and gets to the thing he's really anxious about; he asks Daniel aka Belteshazzar. *"Can you really tell me what I dreamed and also tell me the interpretation?"*

I like how Daniel gently reminds the king that none of his wise men, astrologers, magicians, or soothsayers could tell the king what his dream was, let alone the interpretation. The secret the

king demanded to know was, in the words of his own officials, “only known to the gods.” And they weren’t telling what they knew!

But, Daniel says, “*there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and he is making known to you, King Nebuchadnezzar, what will take place in the latter days.*” As we’ll discover, this phrase, “the latter days” encompasses a huge span of world history. Charles Feinberg writes that “No dream [recorded or referred to in the Bible], before this or since, has ever revealed so much world history.”

John Walvoord writes of this phrase, “In the context of Daniel chapter 2, ‘the latter days’ include all the visions which Nebuchadnezzar received and stretches from 600 BC to the second coming of Christ to earth.”

Daniel reminded the king that he was thinking about the future before falling asleep. It would be natural for a king to think about the future. How can I expand my reign and my power? Who will be my successor? What kind of man will he be? What kind of king will he become? God graciously gave Nebuchadnezzar a divine revelation to show him what the future would look like far beyond his own lifetime. For pagan king Nebuchadnezzar, this was a rare honor.

The Second Divine ACTION (in revealing this forever kingdom) is,

An Image Explained

Daniel now narrates the king’s dream as though he actually saw it! The central part of the dream is a great image. Is this where Nebuchadnezzar got the idea for his own image? I don’t know, but, at any rate, this wasn’t some little figurine! I believe this image was huge; impressive in its size. After all it represents the major kingdom of Daniel’s world and several successors. The word, great, places emphasis on the power this image represents. Interestingly, of all the things God could’ve chosen to reveal this information, He chose the figure of a man.

Feinberg suggests that “The figure of a man was employed here because God wished to make known what would transpire during man’s day, the ages in which mortal man ruled the earth. Here, in one panoramic sweep, the whole history of human civilization is spread before us, from the days of Nebuchadnezzar to the end of time.”

Let’s look carefully at this image. Try to create a picture in your mind to visualize the image. In addition to being huge, it was bright and glistening, arrayed in splendor. And, in the

king's dream it was close; it stood before (in front of) the king. It was also awesome and terrifying. Brave man that he was, even Nebuchadnezzar was frightened!

Daniel then goes on to describe the various materials the image was made from. The head was of the purest gold. Silver was the material that made up the breast and arms. The torso and the thighs were made from brass or bronze. The legs were constructed of iron, and, finally, the feet and the toes were a mixture of iron and clay.

What we have then is a top-heavy image as gold is the heaviest and all the other elements decrease in density. Furthermore, the image is weak in its feet, signifying an unstable foundation.

Now watch what happens! As the king is looking at this image, a stone is cut out from the side of a mountain. But that stone is not cut in the normal way, by a stonecutter or mason. Instead, it is supernaturally cut out without human hands. This stone flies through the air and smashes into the image at its weakest point, the feet, blowing them to smithereens!

Then, the whole image crumbles and dissolves into pieces so fine that they're carried away on the wind like chaff from the summer threshing-floor. In other words, they totally disappear; they're gone for good! But this supernatural stone that destroyed the image becomes a great mountain and fills the WHOLE earth. What an amazing sequence of events!

OK, so you and I, along with Nebuchadnezzar, have the details of the dream fixed in our minds. But what does all this mean?

Well, in verse 36 Daniel says *"This is the dream. Now we will tell the interpretation of it before the king."* I want you to notice what Daniel said. "We will give the interpretation..." He didn't say I will give the interpretation. Daniel knew that God was the one who had shown him the dream and the interpretation of it. And God had done that in response to the prayers of Daniel – and his friends. Daniel's spirit of humility is a wonderful example for each of us.

So, Daniel begins his interpretation of the image. *"You, O king, are a king of kings. For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory; and wherever the children of men dwell, or the beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven, He has given them into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all - **you are this head of gold.**"* I can imagine that must have made the king feel good!

Daniel acknowledges the greatness and superiority of Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom. He has power, strength, and glory. The city of Babylon contained the hanging gardens; one of the seven wonders of the ancient world! Nebuchadnezzar's power as a ruler was absolute, as you can see

from his treatment of his counselors! He is a king of kings. The prophet, Ezekiel, also refers to Nebuchadnezzar in this same way in his victory over the kingdom of Tyre (see Ezekiel 26:7).

Daniel reminds the king that wherever human beings live, along with the animal kingdom, you are ruler over all. However, you have this position by virtue of God's choosing. Daniel reminds the king that what he has, has been given to him by God.

The second and third kingdoms are just barely mentioned in the text. They get just one verse. Daniel states that the second kingdom will be **inferior** to Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar. Most Bible scholars agree that these kingdoms, corresponding to the upper and lower parts of the body represent the kingdoms of Medo-Persia and Greece.

The Medo-Persian Empire led by Cyrus the Great would have been inferior in quality to Babylon from Nebuchadnezzar's viewpoint, and it *was* in reality. The Medo-Persian monarchs could not annul a law once it went into effect. This restricted the absolute authority of the king.

The use of the word, inferior, means inferior in quality, but not necessarily inferior in every aspect. Obviously, gold is of greater value than silver or bronze. But Persia actually controlled more territory than Babylon, and the Greek empire was larger than Persia. However, neither of those empires had the kind of central organization of the Babylonian empire.

The kingdom that succeeded Medo-Persia was Greece - under Alexander the Great. Its territory was even larger than that of Medo-Persia. Greece dominated the ancient world from 331 to 31 B.C. It lasted longer than either Babylonia or Medo-Persia. However, after Alexander the Great died in 323 B.C., the empire split into four parts, and each of Alexander's generals took a part. So, Greece lacked the unified strength of Medo-Persia and Babylonia. Its democratic form of government gave more power to the people and less to the rulers.

The descending value of the substances in this image seems to suggest the degeneration of the human race through the ages. But notice, that the **decreasing value** of the materials is countered by their **increasing strength**. This leads us to expect an increase in military power and might during "the times of the Gentiles." Also note that the third empire ends at the thighs of the image. The third empire, Greece, controlled territory in both the Eastern and Western world. This becomes significant in analyzing the fourth empire.

That brings us to the fourth kingdom represented by the image. Daniel gives more attention to this kingdom than any of the other kingdoms. This fourth kingdom seems to encompass ancient Rome, but also to reach beyond - to a time yet in the future.

The fourth kingdom will be as strong as iron; the strongest of the materials. And yet, it will be mixed with clay. It will dominate all the other kingdoms, breaking them in pieces and crushing them. The original wording is a double verb = crush and demolish! The Roman legions were famous for their ability to crush all resistance under their iron heel.

But because the feet are a mixture of iron and clay there would be mingled strength and weakness. Iron and clay do not stick well to each other. The clay here, is hardened clay. Ancient literature uses this same word to mean “a formed pottery object, whether complete or broken.” Note how Daniel emphasizes this mixture of iron and clay in verses 34, 35; 40-43. He spends more time explaining this than any other part of the image!

So, this 4th kingdom is hard, but it’s also brittle. This weakness in the feet especially, indicates the instability of the entire image. In English we have an idiom we use in referring to a hidden character flaw or weakness in a person. We say, “they have feet of clay.” The kingdoms of men cannot endure against the kingdom of God! Verse 43 suggests that the mixture of iron and clay is weak because of the diversity of peoples in the 4th kingdom. One aspect of the Roman Empire was its incredible diversity of peoples, languages, local governments, and so on. It embraced peoples and cultures from the East and from the West.

Ultimately, in the final earthly kingdom, at the end of the age, this incredible diversity breaks out into a gigantic civil war. Forces from the south, the east, and the west will contend with the ruler of the Mediterranean for supremacy, according to Daniel 11:36-45.

It’s important to note that Daniel’s prophecy seems to skip over the time from the Roman Empire until the final kingdom set up by the God of Heaven. This kind of gap is not uncommon among the prophetic texts in the Scripture. Let me give you just one example from Acts chapter two. In this text, Peter is preaching on the day of Pentecost and he quotes the prophet Joel. Listen to what Peter says.

“But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: ‘And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your young men shall see visions, Your old men shall dream dreams. And on My menservants and on My maid-servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; And they shall prophesy. I will show wonders in heaven above and signs in the earth beneath: Blood and fire and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, And the moon into blood, Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD. And it shall come to pass That whoever calls on the

name of the LORD Shall be saved.'”

Clearly, the first part of Joel’s prophecy was fulfilled at Pentecost. God poured out His Spirit on the Believers and they spoke in languages they had never spoken before. And there were even signs in nature in connection with the death and resurrection of Jesus. But the sun was not turned into long-term darkness nor the moon turned to blood. Notice, that will happen before the great and awesome Day of the Lord. That day is still in the future, but the gap is not even mentioned by Peter. He just quotes the whole prophecy. There are many other examples like this.

The interpretation of verses 42 and 43 depends on the evidence leading to the conclusion that the ten-toe stage of the image hasn’t been fulfilled in history and is still prophetic. Many commentaries try to find a ten-toe stage of the image in the fifth and sixth centuries A.D. But they don’t correspond to the actual facts of history and don’t fulfill the ten-toe stage. According to Daniel’s prophecy, the ten-toe stage is simultaneous. The kingdoms exist side by side and are destroyed by one sudden catastrophic blow. Nothing like this has yet occurred in history.

The Final Divine ACTION (in revealing this forever kingdom) is,

A Kingdom Ordained

I believe the key to the interpretation is found in vv. 44 and 45. The kingdom which the God of heaven will set up, the kingdom which shall never be destroyed, can only be the kingdom of God! “In the days of these kings” must refer to those who will be in control during the last days of “the times of the Gentiles.” Today, 1900+ years after Christ, there is still no evidence that the kingdom of God has conquered the entire world.

Some commentators say that the kingdom was established at Christ’s first coming and that the Church was the “stone” that broke the power of pagan Rome. However, the symbolism of the stone striking the feet of the image seems to picture a short, intense time of conflict. The demise of the Roman Empire took more than 1,000 years! Rome rotted from within as political corruption and moral decay spread across the empire.

The Scriptures contain many references to God and to Jesus as the Rock or Stone. In Psalm 18:2, the psalmist says, “*the Lord is my Rock...*” Jesus referred to Himself as “*the stone that the builders rejected.*” Paul says in First Corinthians 10:4 that the children of Israel “*drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them [in the wilderness], and that rock was Christ.*” There would be many other examples.

Ultimately, the stone cut out of the mountain “without hands” i.e. without human intervention, is a kingdom that will crush and consume all other kingdoms. It will also last forever; this is the KINGDOM OF GOD. And we are still awaiting its complete fulfillment!

If the Rock cut out without hands is Jesus, and I believe it is, then the mountain must refer to God Himself. God's kingdom, the mountain of verse 35, will fill the earth and will last forever. God made this forever promise to David in Second Samuel 7:16. It will never suffer destruction or be succeeded by another kingdom, as all the preceding kingdoms had. It will begin with the Millennium and continue forever in the eternal state.

Robert Chisolm writes; ““Though the differing metals within the image represent four chronologically successive kingdoms, the single statue suggests that these kingdoms, though diverse in their identity, actually comprise one entity, a world empire opposed to God. This explains why the entire statue is depicted as destroyed by the rock with a single blow delivered to the feet and why this event is said to occur 'in the times of those kings,' that is, the kings of the four kingdoms symbolized in the vision.”

Almost all expositors agree that the kingdom of God is in view in this vision and its interpretation. They disagree on the nature and timing of this kingdom, and how it will destroy the other kingdoms represented by the image.

Because we have limited time we need to paint with a pretty broad brush, but here are some of the basic interpretations.

Amillennials don't believe in a literal 1,000-year reign of Christ on earth, even though it is specifically referenced in Revelation chapter 20. They believe that Christ established His kingdom at His first Advent. They view the church as this kingdom that caused the downfall of the Roman Empire. One writer stated it this way; ““The disintegrating and corrupt empire crumbled through decay from within as well as through the impact of the sound morals and the healthy life of Christianity that condemned lascivious Rome...Christianity was in a sense God's judgment upon sinful Rome.”

Post-millennials see the current church-age as the millennium. In other words, we are living in this 1,000-year period right now. This group would include “reconstructionists” who believe and teach that the church will ultimately influence the world for righteousness to the point where they usher in the kingdom of God. But we're way past 1,000 years since the church was inaugurated. And, the world is certainly not getting more righteous as the years pass by!

Premillennials believe in the present spiritual kingdom of God, but also in a future, literal 1,000-year reign of Christ on earth. They believe this reign will precede the Second Coming of Christ and the final judgment. Since the four kingdoms Daniel saw in his vision were earthly kingdoms, Premillennials believe the fifth kingdom must be an earthly kingdom too.

Now some observations; Rome did not fail primarily because of Christianity. It was decaying from within and being attacked from the outside. Visigoths from the north invaded, and eventually defeated the Roman Legions. Also, Daniel's vision shows the ten-toes kingdoms as being swept away in a moment of time. Rome's decline was long and gradual. Its influence was still being felt for several hundred years after Christ's first coming.

In addition, few people today would honestly say that the kingdom of God has conquered the world; not spiritually, politically, or socially. In fact, we often refer to the times we live in as "post-Christian." Further, after Jesus ascended to heaven, the apostle John was given a revelation that Jesus would return to earth as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He will destroy the nations with the sword of His Word and rule them with a rod of iron, Revelation 19:11 to 16.

If we see the destruction of the final stage of the fourth kingdom as future, it seems more in harmony with the facts of history and with other Scriptures (like Daniel 7:24 and Revelation 17:12). This premillennial view sees the kingdom that Jesus will set up on earth, following His second advent, as the first stage of His eternal rule. The stone in Nebuchadnezzar's vision represents *that* Ruler and His kingdom.

All of these interpretations contain unanswered questions. I personally believe that the premillennial view is the one that fits most closely with a literal interpretation of the prophetic Scriptures. So that is the filter through which we will look at this prophetic book.

At the conclusion of Daniel's revelation, this powerful king falls on his face and worships Daniel as a representative of the true God. He does not credit Daniel, but rather, Daniel's God, with the revelation of this incredible dream. A similar case exists in the history of Alexander the Great, when he bowed before the Jewish High Priest. When questioned by one of his generals about this, Alexander replied; "It was not before him that I prostrated myself, but the God of whom he has the honor to be high priest."

Nebuchadnezzar does not even mention his gods who failed to provide a realistic response to his inquiry. He recognized Daniel's God as a God of gods, i.e. as being supreme.

Daniel is lavishly rewarded as per the king's promise, and he graciously requests appointments for

his 3 friends who joined him in praying for God's revelation of the king's dream.

Daniel's God, Jehovah, is one true God among all the gods of this world. He is sovereign over all and He is in control of human history. He is the God we worship through His Son, Jesus Christ. His kingdom exists here and now, in a spiritual sense; but one day, according to the prophet Zechariah and others, He will rule and reign here on earth.

Are you ready for that "forever kingdom?"