

The Destiny of Kingdoms

Daniel 1:1-21

Introduction

There is a story about a man named Alexander, whose dream was to see the revered King of his homeland. On rare occasions the King would parade through different villages. Early in this man's childhood, he remembered such an event that he had missed... he was determined to not allow such an opportunity to slip by again.

Years passed and the fondness that Alexander had as a young boy for his king only grew with age. On a certain day Alexander's neighbor came to his house both exhausted and excited. Alexander wanted to ask what was wrong, but before he could ask, his neighbor exclaimed: "the king is coming, the king is coming... you can see him and his procession if you hurry!" Well Alexander wasted no time and they both ran as fast as their legs would take them a mile down the road of which the revered king was traveling.

As the procession came closer, Alexander could feel his heart pound with anticipation of finally seeing the king. As the procession began to pass, Alexander was overwhelmed by the horses that pulled the king's carriage. He couldn't help but notice their impressive size. He was amazed at their color and how brilliant the reflection of the sun was on their impressive coats. Alexander couldn't help noticing how the king's horses were decorated, the silver and gold leaf adorning every horse, the radiant colors of the cloth that covered their backs... all of it was so overwhelming. Alexander took it all in.

As he stood reflecting on the impressive beauty of the horses, Alexander's neighbor excitedly asked, "Did you see him, did you see the king?" It took Alexander a moment, but then he realized that as he was admiring the beauty of the horses, the king had passed without Alexander noticing.

The danger in reading Daniel, especially prophetic passages like Daniel 2:31-49 is that we can miss the King because we were too busy looking at the horses. American Christianity has historically been enamored with Bible prophecy and how the world is going to end (the theological term for this is eschatology). It is possible to be so enamored with the details for prophesy that you miss the point for why God provided it in the first place. I want to spend most of our time looking at the King today, but in doing so; I have to point out the horses.

The Rise of Kingdoms

There are all kinds of books written by so called "experts" in Bible prophesy that focus so much on the horses that the King becomes a supporting actor instead of the leading role in God's theater. The horses in Daniel 2:31-49 are the four different human empires that Nebuchadnezzar dreamt about. When God revealed the dream to Daniel, his response was one of praise:

“Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might. He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding; he reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with him. To you, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, for you have given me wisdom and might, and have now made known to me what we asked of you, for you have made known to us the king’s matter.” (Daniel 2:20–23)

In other words, the unchanging and all-powerful God changes times and seasons, and removes kings and sets up kings. What did the king see in his dream that bothered him so much? Daniel told the king the details of his dream:

You saw, O king, and behold, a great image. This image, mighty and of exceeding brightness, stood before you, and its appearance was frightening. The head of this image was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its middle and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces.” (Daniel 2:31–34)

There are two main interpretations of the kingdoms Daniel mentions here; one group is known as the Greek View and the other is the Roman View. Each group agrees that Daniel was written before the rise of the Roman empire, but where they differ is that most who hold to the Greek View believe that the four kingdoms are Babylon (Gold), Medo (Silver), Persia (Bronze), and Greece (Iron). The those who hold to the Roman View believe that the four kingdoms represented by Nebuchadnezzar’s dream includes Rome. So, they understand the dream with Babylon as the head of gold and silver represents Medo-Persia as a joint kingdom that eventually become one. One of the reasons why conservatives tend to hold to the Roman View is because later in Daniel 8:20 the kings of Media and Persian are identified as one kingdom. They believe Greece, under Alexander the Great, is represented by the bronze in the middle and thighs of the statute. The iron legs represent Rome which came after Daniel was already written. Liberal scholars obviously have a hard time with the Roman View because if it were true then they would have to agree that Daniel is both the word of God and supernatural in that it predicted the rise of Rome about 500 years before the birth of Rome. I hold to the Roman View and believe that Daniel is the author of this book named after him.

The difference between Babylon and the four kingdoms God said would follow Nebuchadnezzar’s empire, is that Babylon would be forever associated with mankind’s attempt to dethrone God. The kingdoms of Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome, like Babylon, were all a false counterfeit of God’s kingdom; all four kingdoms along with the feet that were partly iron and partly of clay were all governed by the spirit of Babylon just like every other kingdom and empire that has come after Rome. Some think that there will be another Rome that will rise again in the future, some think that the toes represent other kings or nations, I think that the toes of iron and clay represent how Rome became a weakened empire that eventually I think that such viewpoints are a possibility, but the point of Daniel 2:31-49 is not the specifics of the kingdoms, the point is that God is sovereign over all kingdoms and their kings.

The King Over Kingdoms

Notice how Daniel addressed the king. He referred to Nebuchadnezzar as, “Oh king,” “king of kings,” and the one who had the “power, and the might, and the glory.” Daniel recognized and respected the authority that the king had over the “children of men, the beasts of the field, and the birds of the heavens.” What Daniel also understood and reminded the king of is that his power and authority was given to him by the God of heaven and that the God of heaven ruled the rulers. Not only did God rule the rulers, but He would also eventually bring his kingdom to earth that would put down all other kingdoms.

There is a stone in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream that will come. It is a kingdom unlike any other kingdom before it, and when it comes, it will not only break to pieces all the kingdoms of the earth, it will reduce them to chaff which plows away and is forgotten. This kingdom that is coming, is the Kingdom of God:

And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever, just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure. (Daniel 2:44–46)

There are two observations I want to make with the time that we have left. The first has to do with the four kingdoms that are represented in Nebuchadnezzar’s statue, and the second has to do with the stone not made with human hands.

Each of the empires outlasted the empire it succeeded. The empire of Babylon only lasted 65 years but was the purest of the four empires in that it was truly ruled by the king with little bureaucracy and experienced great success only while Nebuchadnezzar was king. However, Nebuchadnezzar was followed by a succession of weak and incompetent rulers. Of the four metals, Gold is the most beautiful, but the weakest.

The second kingdom represented in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream was the Medo-Persian Empire, which outlasted Babylon by over 100 years and was established by Cyrus. This kingdom was inferior to Babylon in its totalitarian rule.

The third empire is represented in the bronze middle and thighs, which is stronger than both gold and silver. According to Daniel, this kingdom would rule over the world and is the reason why critics of the Bible believe that Daniel was written latter by another person. However, the same God who spoke the galaxies into existence is the God who, “**changes times and seasons and removes kings and sets up kings**” (2:21). The kingdom represented in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream would not come for another 274 years; that kingdom was the Greek empire that was established by Alexander the Great. Under the Alexander the Great, the known world was conquered and its territory dwarfed Babylon. It was also under Alexander the Great that the known world was Hellenized; part of the Hellenization of the known world was a universal language the empire imposed on all who were within the empire.

The fourth kingdom in the statue was represented by the iron legs and possibly the feet made of both iron and clay. This kingdom was the Roman empire that dominated the world, created a road system that allowed for international travel. Iron is what weapons were made of, iron was capable of crushing and destroying, and that is what Rome did. Of the four kingdoms represented in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, Rome dominated the world for 539 years and is estimated to have existed for at least 1500 years. To this day, Rome is the greatest of history's empires and its influence is still seen and experienced to this day.

Under the Roman Empire, nations were conquered, an impressive road system was developed, and crucifixion as a form of humiliation, torture, and death was perfected. Also, under Rome, Jesus was born, lived a life of perfect piety, and was then crucified. While Caesar Augustus ruled as the emperor and self-proclaimed savior of the world, the true savior of the world was born in obscurity and whose birth was only announced to Shepherds by an angel: **"Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord"** (Luke 2:10-11).

The desire of the emperors who ruled their empires was simple: to expand their influence and culture through their military might. Their intentions were evil; but unknown to them, the God of Daniel was moving and working through history to quietly introduce the King who will rule over his kingdom. Through Alexander the Great, a universal language spoken throughout the known world was established; and through Rome, a universal road system that allowed for international travel was established. This is what Paul meant when he wrote Galatians 4:4-7, **"But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God."** (Galatians 4:4-7)

While Rome oppressed her citizens by her power and motivated her people through fear, Jesus introduced another kingdom. It was not through an iron sword that Jesus brought his kingdom; he introduced his kingdom with another power that was clothed in servitude and love and evidenced by miracles and petrified demons. While Rome expanded her empire through a might only given to her by God, Jesus grew His with the offer of a grace and mercy mankind did not deserve: **"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls"** (Matthew 11:28-29).

After Jesus was eventually handed over to Pontus Pilate to be crucified, because he was accused of claiming to be a king, Pilate asked Jesus if he was the King of the Jews. Jesus answered: **"My kingdom is not of this world"** (John 18:36). Pilate also asked Jesus, **"Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?"** to which Jesus replied: **"You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above"** (see John 19:9-11). Pilate handed Jesus over to be crucified and Rome had done its worst by murdering the Son of God. Rome thought it was flexing her muscles, but Jesus said, **"No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have**

authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.” There was again a division among the Jews because of these words” (John 10:18–19).

Jesus was buried in a borrowed tomb and out of a fear that his body would go missing, Rome had placed some of its soldiers to guard the tomb. Jesus rose on the third day and not even Rome could stop him. No one expected this to happen, not even the disciples expected Jesus to rise from the grave even though Jesus said that he would. Why would Jesus rise from the grave? Because not only would he do so to conquer sin and death, but he had to because he is the stone in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream that will strike down all earthly kingdoms into pieces.

After Peter confessed to Jesus: **“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”** (Matt. 16:15), Jesus said, **“I tell you... on this rock I will build my Church”** (v. 18). Jesus also promised that he would come back to earth, and when he does: **“all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory”** (Matt. 24:30). Jesus is the stone that will strike the nations in such a devastating way that they will be like, **“the chaff of the summer threshing floors...”** that the wind will carry away so that there will be no trace of them on earth anymore (Dan. 2:34-35).

Conclusion

So what does this mean? What this means is that Jesus is coming back and when he does, he will put down the Spirit of Babylon. The book of Revelation, which complements the book of Daniel, says of Jesus in the very first chapter: **“Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him”** (Rev. 1:7).

The point of passages like Daniel 2 is not so that you can guess who the next antichrist is, build a shelter underground, or collect canned goods and other nonperishables so that you can ride out the trouble that is coming. The book of Daniel, like the book of Revelation, talk about a time that is coming that is still in the future. Theologians have a word for this, and that word is eschatology; eschatology is the study of the future the Bible says is coming (the doctrine of end times). There is another “E” word that we need to consider, and that word is “ethics.” Ethics are the moral principles that govern a person’s behavior. The point of eschatology is always ethics. The point of eschatology in the Bible is to encourage you to live your life in light of what is coming.

Nebuchadnezzar’s response to the eschatology of Daniel’s interpretation and what God said was coming is similar to the kind of response a lot of “church-folk” have to the eschatology of the Bible: a fascination of what is coming without any real affection for the one who is coming. We are told that after Daniel interpreted the dream, **“Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face and paid homage to Daniel, and commanded that an offering and incense be offered up to him. 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’”** (Daniel 2:46–47).

Nebuchadnezzar missed the King because he was too busy staring at the horses. How about you? On what or whom are you setting your eyes and your affection? If your eyes are on the

King of kings, the Stone who will crush all other kingdoms, how is that affecting the ethics of your life?