

THE GREATEST HISTORY LESSON

Theme: God, through Daniel, outlines the history of 'the times of the Gentiles'.

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In the previous chapter, Daniel revealed his character. He was a man of God who was faithful in small things. He purposed in his heart that he would not allow himself to be defiled by foods that were unclean for Jewish people (1:8). And now, his character having been demonstrated, God graciously gives him and his three friends an answer to his prayer that saved their lives.

This chapter gives us one of the most remarkable prophecies in all the Bible. It reveals to us the history of the entire course of what the Bible calls "the times of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24).

I. THE KING'S DREAM (vv. 1-13).

In his second year, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had a dream. This dream impacted him in a powerful way--so much so, in fact, that he became desperate to understand its meaning (v. 1). He called for an assembly of all his wise men and advisors (v. 2). But he did something that none of them anticipated. He told them that they must not only tell him the interpretation of the dream, but also the dream itself. This was an act of great cunning; for if they could not tell him this vitally important dream, he could in no way be confident that they truly knew its true interpretation.

Naturally, they sought to negotiate with him. But he remained resolute. The penalty for failing to tell him the dream was very harsh--as the reward for correctly telling it was also very great (vv. 5-6). And this was clearly because of his sense of the significance of this dream. They were unable to persuade him to change his mind--and even dared to speak against his resolve (vv. 10-11). The result was that the king became "angry and very furious"; and sent out a decree to gather all of the wise men of his land together and execute them. This, of course, would have included Daniel and his three friends.

II. DANIEL'S PRAYER (vv. 14-23).

Again--as in the previous chapter--Daniel's character shines through. He didn't respond with the kind of desperation that the wise men did. Instead, he calmly sought a reason for the harshness of the decree; and then, sent a request to the king for more time that he might seek the dream--and its interpretation--from God (vv. 14-16). (Daniel was probably not among the wise men, but was most likely considered an "intern". Yet, because of his association with them, his own life was also in danger.)

Daniel immediately told his three friends; and together, they sought that "the God of heaven" (a significant name that revealed God's superiority over the nations) would mercifully reveal the dream to them. The secret was revealed to him in "a night vision" (v. 19); and for this, Daniel did not fail to praise and thank God (vv. 19-23).

III. THE DREAM'S INTERPRETATION (vv. 24-45).

Daniel urged the king's guard to cease from killing the wise men, because he would tell the king the dream and the interpretation (v. 24). We're told that the guard brought Daniel "quickly" to the king--clearly not wishing to have to carry out the king's terrible decree any further than as had already been done (v. 25). The king was understandably skeptical. Who was this mere 'boy' to offer to tell him the dream and the interpretation when the wisest men of the kingdom could not do so? (v. 26). But Daniel humbly informed the king that the answer he sought was not with mere men, but with the "God in heaven who reveals secrets" (v. 27-30). Daniel tells the king of the dream: one in which he saw a great image. It was an astonishing image to the king--and "its form was awesome". Imagine what must have been going

on in the king as Daniel described this dream in accurate detail! (vv. 31-35).

The story of how Daniel was given the dream and its interpretation is fascinating and important. But the real value of this chapter is because of the dream itself--and the individual aspects of this great image. Four metals are mentioned; and each of the metals represent a degrading nature from the one that precedes it. The series of metals represent a declining specific gravity; that is, gold is heavier than silver, which is heavier than bronze, and etc.. What's more, the value of gold is greater than silver, and of silver than bronze, and etc. And there appears to be a degradation through division: the head is one, the arms are two, the loins are one, the legs are two, and the toes are ten. It is all crushed by a "stone cut without hands" that eventually becomes a great mountain.

Daniel's divine interpretation gives us a history of God's plan for the "times of the Gentiles" (a time that began prophetically with Israel's Babylonian captivity, and that will end when Jesus Christ returns to this earth at Jerusalem). Daniel specifically stated that this is a vision that concerns "what will be in the later days" (v. 28).

-- The gold head represents the kingdom of Babylon (vv. 36-38).

-- The chest and arms of silver (note the two arms) represents the world domination of the two kingdoms of Media and Persia; which followed after Babylon (v. 39a). Daniel would continue to be in service to this second kingdom some time after the Babylonian kingdom had been conquered by it.

-- The belly and thighs of bronze represent the empire of Greece, which followed after Media-Persia (v. 39b). It was the kingdom of Alexander the Great; and it was later divided among his four generals. They fought between themselves, but the kingdom was still one kingdom.

-- The two legs of iron represent the Roman empire that followed after that of Greece (v. 40). The two legs may be representative of the two main divisions of the empire (East and West). This kingdom eventually becomes feet mixed with iron and clay (vv. 41-43). This may represent the admixture of the Roman empire with the people groups it conquered. The ten toes (as informed by Daniel 7) represent a revived form of the Roman empire divided among ten different kings. (Note that, between the time of the legs of iron and the feet mixed of iron and clay is an interruption of undisclosed duration. This is the time of the church age. The tenation revival of the Roman empire will precede the return of Christ. See Revelation 17:12.)

-- The stone cut without hands represents the Lord Jesus Christ (again described in greater detail in Daniel 7). It breaks all the previous kingdoms in pieces (vv. 44-45). It is urged upon the king that these things will most certainly come to pass.



IV. THE KING'S RESPONSE (vv. 46-49).

The king responded in such a way as to exalt the God of Daniel above all others (vv. 46-47). This was far short of a genuine worship of God, though. As we will see in Chapter 3, Nebuchadnezzar struggled along the way. But by the time we get to the fourth chapter, he does, indeed worship the one

true God. Immediately after hearing the dream and its interpretation, the king promoted Daniel; and this gave Daniel the opportunity to petition the king for offices of honor for his three friends (vv. 48-49). Daniel had shown his character in many ways in this chapter; and this request on behalf of his friends was yet one more demonstration.