

Seeing Things as God Sees Them

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[0 : 00] Would you turn with me to Daniel chapter 2, page 717. Let me just pray as we look at this passage. Father, we pray that you would speak to us by your powerful Holy Spirit through the agency of your Holy Word and powerful Word.

And Lord, we pray that in hearing that word, that we would respond in faithful obedience. And we ask this for Christ's sake. Amen. Daniel chapter 2, verses 1 to 13.

Are you a wise man or a wimp? In the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, Nebuchadnezzar dreamed such dreams that his spirit was troubled and his sleep left him.

Nebuchadnezzar was simply troubled by his dream. And so he called in the professionals. Now, we're not speaking about the Babylonian real estate firm. When the king was puzzled, he looked to the wise men.

And when the king was puzzled, the whole nation was uptight. Babylonians, you see, believed that the future could be told by things like astrology, by extraordinary events in daily lives, in fact, by the shape of animal livers, and also by dreams.

[1 : 28] What a stark contrast that is to biblical revelation. Biblical revelations, which sometimes includes dreams, is the result of God taking the initiative and simply revealing information.

And the false religion of the Babylonians, like so much of New Age teaching today, uses occult means and is comprehensively condemned in scripture.

Verse 5. The king answered the Chaldeans, This is a public decree. If you don't tell me both the dream and its interpretation, you'll be torn limb from limb and your houses shall be laid in ruins.

In verse 10 we read, The Chaldeans answered the king, There's no one on earth who can reveal what the king demands. In fact, no king, however great and powerful, has ever asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or Chaldean.

You kind of get the impression, don't you, that Big Neb, that's how I've got to know him as I've read through the book, Big Neb was just marginally annoyed. Look at verse 12.

[2 : 42] Because of this, the king flew into a violent rage and commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be destroyed. The decree was issued and the wise men were about to be executed and they looked for Daniel and his companions to execute them.

See, the magicians, the enchanters, the sorcerers, they knew exactly what the problem was. The king had been given a divine communication and it needed interpretation.

And Daniel actually agreed with them completely. You see, all of the simple nonsense of astrology couldn't help. And friends, that's no different for us today.

In the US, the journal Psychology Today reported that 12 million Americans have changed their behaviour or have changed their plans on the basis of an astrology report.

People simply searching for meaning. People searching for something desperately to hang on to. People searching in all the wrong places.

[3 : 55] Building their lives on foundations, which in fact are no foundations at all. And Jesus' words apply just as powerfully today as they did when he spoke to them 2,000 years ago in Palestine.

He said, And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, the floods came, the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell.

And great was its fall. Verses 14 to 23. God of revelation, power and wisdom.

We read in verse 14, Then Daniel responded with prudence and discretion to Ariok, the king's chief executioner. Verse 16, And then verse 19, And then verse 19, And Daniel, How did he respond?

He blessed the God of heaven. Notice with me, if you would, in verse 20, the two aspects of God's character that Daniel highlights in this Thanksgiving prayer.

[5 : 33] Firstly, simply that God is powerful. Friends, we need to see the world through God's eyes. See, Nebuchadnezzar appeared powerful.

In fact, physical appearances suggested that he had great power. But from where did Nebuchadnezzar derive his authority?

Look at verse 21. We read, It is God who disposes kings and sets up kings. God is powerful. Second point that's highlighted in Daniel's prayer of thanksgiving. God is the all wise one. You see, Daniel simply had not got carried away with his own wisdom.

Look again at verse 21. Daniel's wisdom, he clearly sees as a gift from God. And if Daniel previously had any doubt about that, it would have vanished when God, as we read at the end of verse 23, revealed to me what we asked of you, for you have revealed to us what the king ordered.

[6 : 51] This great prayer of thanksgiving to God, the great revealer, highlighting his power and his wisdom. Verses 24 to 45.

Verse 26. Therefore Daniel went to Ariok, whom the king had appointed to destroy the wise men of Babylon, and said to him, Do not destroy the wise men of Babylon.

Bring me in before the king, and I will give the king the interpretation. Verse 26. The king said to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, Are you able to tell me the dream that I've seen in its interpretation?

Daniel answered, No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or diviners, can show to the king the mystery that the king is asking.

Verse 28. Great words. But there is a God in heaven, who reveals mysteries, and he's disclosed to King Nebuchadnezzar, what will happen at the end of days.

[7 : 54] Daniel's a pretty good evangelist, isn't he? I mean, living in a world hostile to his faith. But there is a God in heaven, who reveals mysteries.

And Trevor, we might have a slide. Look with me at verse 36. Don't you love that? This was the dream. Now we will tell the king its interpretation.

You see, Daniel's boldness, his confidence, is not cockiness. In chapter 1, last week, we saw how as a young man, Daniel had great trust in the Lord.

In fact, trust in God, this was the pattern of his life. Living in a foreign land, living in a land that was hostile to his faith. Remember back in verse 18, Daniel and his three mates sought the Lord's mercy.

There was no attitude of demanding. There was no, if you like, theology of say the prayer this way and we can pull the strings of God. God was merciful.

[9 : 05] Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night and Daniel blessed the God of heaven. You see, God is the one who reveals.

In fact, he is the only revealer because he is the only God. So Daniel didn't have any concern about the accuracy of his interpretation.

And the golden head of the statue, as we read, represents the Babylonian kingdom. That's what the end of verse 38 tells us. And Trev, we might have the next slide up.

It might be a little hard to read for those towards the back. The other parts of the statue represent succeeding kingdoms. So we read in verse 39, After you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours, and yet a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over the whole earth.

And there'll be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron, just as iron crushes and smashes everything, it shall crush and shatter all these. As you saw, the feet and toes partly of potter's clay and partly of iron.

[10 : 17] It shall be a divided kingdom, but some of the strength of iron shall be in it, as you saw the iron mixed with the clay. As the toes of the feet were part iron and part clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly brittle.

And as you saw the iron mixed with clay, so will they mix with one another in marriage, but they will not hold together, just as iron does not mix with clay.

And on this graphic, I've also included the visions of the four beasts, which are described in chapter 7. Now, the designation of these particular kingdoms, who did they stand for?

This has just caused a huge amount of speculation down through the centuries, especially, in fact, in the last 150 years in the Western Evangelical Church, with the Western Evangelical Church's great interest in future prophecy, if you like, in eschatology, in the biblical teachings about the end times.

And one interpretation sees a link with the two vying kingdoms, which are actually described in Daniel 11. Both parts, in fact, of Alexander the Great's Greek empire.

[11 : 32] We might just have the next one up, Trev. And this one will be a bit hard to read. I should have done it in bold. But in the center column, you'll see Babylonian empire, Median kingdom, Persian empire, and the Greek empire.

In fact, that bottom one's standing for the split of the Greek empire between two of Alexander's sons. This, if you like, would be the non-traditional interpretation.

But it's got problems because the splitting of the Median kingdom and the Persian kingdom is problematic.

Daniel, for example, treats them as one unit. And he describes them that way in both chapter 5 of Daniel and also chapter 6. So we might have the next slide because on the next slide, in a graphic presentation, this, if you like, is the traditional interpretation of the kingdoms.

So you have the silver torso representing the Medo-Persian empire. Then you have the bronze midriff being the Greek empire. And then the iron legs, the Roman empire.

[12 : 41] We're only doing these six chapters in this series. But in chapter 8, a goat is specifically identified with Greece. And a ram is identified with Medo-Persia.

And in chapter 7, there are those four different animals. So one way to think about this is Daniel goes over the same periods of history but from different angles.

Once as metals in a statue. Again with one set of beasts and then with another. Now, I mean, just complete books are written on this.

But what's the critical part of the dream for us to understand? I mean, is it this thinking that we've got the proper identification of each part of the statue?

Is it the identity of the ten toes which gets lots of coverage with the European Common Market? Is it the two legs? Do you think it's any of that?

[13 : 49] Look then at verse 34 again. As you looked on, a stone was cut out, not by human hands, and it struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and broke them in pieces.

And then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were all broken in pieces. They became like chaff of the summer threshing floors. And the wind carried them away so that not a trace of them could be found.

But the stone that struck the statue became a great mountain and it filled the whole earth. And then verse 44. And in the days of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall this kingdom be left to another people.

It shall crush all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever. Just as you saw that a stone was cut from the mountain not by hands and that it crushed the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold, the great God has informed the king what shall be hereafter.

The dream is certain and its interpretation trustworthy. So, friends, who or what is this stone.

[15 : 15] In Luke 20, in the parable of the wicked tenants, Jesus identifies himself with this rock. And in fact, he combines this image with that of the rejected stone in Psalm 118.

And in doing this, Jesus created the metaphor of a rejected stone. That is, Jesus being rejected as the most important stone, the stone that will crush his enemies, as the rock in Daniel that crushes the kingdoms of the earth, making them like chaff which the wind drives away.

You see, we just simply need to see things as God sees them. The kingdoms of this earth, including the iron legs, are all who oppose the gospel and resist the kingdom of God which grows to fill the earth.

The kingdoms of this world are very temporary. I found it interesting as I was thinking about this this week that the Babylonian Empire lasted just really not that much longer than the Soviet Union.

At their peak, earthly empires appear invincible. For those who are not in the junior youth, you will remember just how powerful the Soviet Union appeared in the mid-80s.

[16 : 48] In fact, the annual parade of military hardware and thousands of soldiers through Red Square in Moscow, it was a sobering sight during those years of tension in the Cold War period.

I mean, who could have conceived how quickly the Soviet Union would disintegrate? Who could have conceived that a huge party would be held on the Berlin Wall with thousands of excited people, both young people and older ones, climbing all over it, singing songs of freedom, taking home their little sample of the Berlin Wall.

But, but for many in East Berlin, indeed for many in East Germany, who thought, if you like, metaphorically, that their little piece of the wall would bring lasting fulfillment and tranquility. The last decade has in fact shattered that false hope. You see, their faulty foundation has been exposed because the oppression of the communist regime has simply given away to another societal evil.

Youths with hunger and despair in their hearts have embraced neo-Nazi ideology and fascist gangs perpetrate violence in a wanton manner.

[18 : 18] Previously, state-sponsored violence. Now, neighbourhood violence. You see, the world has a deep, deep problem.

It's not a political problem. It's not even fundamentally, despite the news this week, a terrorist problem. The world's actually got a building problem. And so, our unsaved friends, our unsaved family members, our school and work colleagues, they have a deep, deep problem.

And it's a building problem. Jesus says, everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock.

The rain fell, the floods came, the winds blew, they beat on the house, but it didn't fall because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand.

The rain fell, the floods came, the winds blew, beat against the house and it fell, and Jesus says, and great was its fall.

[19 : 36] You see, if our hope for the future is only built on some little piece of stone from the Berlin Wall or its equivalent in Australia, then our fall will be great.

There is only one foundation, the rock, the Lord Jesus Christ. And so the message is just so straightforward. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved.

Verses 46 to 49, the big neb wakes up. The king said to Daniel, truly your God is a God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery.

Then the king promoted Daniel, gave him many great gifts, made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men. And Daniel made a request to the king and he appointed Shadrach and Meshach and Abednego over the affairs of the province of Babylon.

But Daniel remained at the king's court. The big neb. By the end of chapter 2, we see him praising God as a revealer of mysteries.

[20 : 55] But, but was he trusting Daniel's God? Was he, in fact, trusting the true and living God?

Well, if you come back next week, we'll look at that in chapter 3. And I want to close and highlight three points of application.

Firstly, if you're a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ and you're here with us tonight, then take heart. I mean, get excited. Rejoice. Because we're actually part of the fulfillment of this dream.

The growing kingdom of God. The kingdom of God has entered through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and his death and resurrection. resurrection. It's not established in some mystical way.

It's established through the regenerated lives of people. People like you, people like me.

Regenerated by the Holy Spirit as we turn from our rebellion and simply put our trust in the Lord Jesus.

[22 : 05] The kingdom of God is here and it's growing. And friends, the kingdom of God is growing in the context of what? In the context of the rise and fall of empires.

It's growing in the context of good days and bad days. It's growing in the context of good kings and evil despots throughout the world.

The kingdom of God is here and it's growing and the king's coming back. The Lord Jesus Christ is returning and the kingdom of God will ultimately triumph throughout the whole earth.

It's amazing, isn't it, that God declares his purposes through the dream of a pagan, of a pagan 6th century king. God will establish his purposes in the world and he'll do it by whatever means he pleases.

So firstly, if you're a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, be excited, rejoice, take heart. You're in the kingdom and the kingdom is growing. Secondly, if you're a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, I trust that you regularly praise him that in his mercy and grace he saved you.

[23 : 26] he transferred you from a kingdom of darkness, a kingdom that has no eternal foundation and transferred you to the kingdom of God's son.

So, if we are indeed citizens of the kingdom of God, it makes no sense to keep sort of popping back to the old kingdom of darkness.

Think about this. Imagine if the next time the big neb had a dream that Daniel responded with something like this, look, I'll be back in a gif.

I'm just going to consult my astrology books. I mean, we'd be sort of crying out, I mean, don't be such a fool, Daniel. And of course, that's not how Daniel responded.

We'll see in chapter 4, that's not the way he responded. Daniel was no fool. His life was built on rock solid foundations, faith in Yahweh.

[24 : 26] And as we go through the next chapters, we'll see that Daniel's faith remains steadfast, regardless of the apparent power of the kingdom, the earthly kingdom in which he lived.

So how foolish if Daniel, after being graciously given the content, being given the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, simply next time went back to the astrology charts.

How foolish then if I, how foolish if indeed you, as followers of the Lord Jesus, who've been given new life in Christ, keep going back to the old values, to the old practices of the kingdom of darkness.

The values and practices of the world, yes, that physically we live in. We are citizens of an eternal kingdom, and it should be our delight to honour the king in every aspect of our lives.

thirdly and finally, present appearances can be so, so misleading. I mean, does it seem from media reports that the world is out of control?

[25 : 47] I mean, you can just about feel the palpable anxiety through the TV sets as footage is shown of travellers at Heathrow waiting to board aeroplanes.

The headline in Saturday's age simply was this, Terror's Next Generation. Fear grows in England's green and pleasant land.

Friends, we need to see the world, the world in which we live, through God's eyes. God has always been in control, he is in control, and he will always be in control.

Sin and its consequences are real, they're very real, but they're actually temporary if you take the grand vista. sin, evil, destruction, death, all will be vanished when the king returns and brings in a recreated world.

So as God's children, if you're a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, we can have absolute confidence in the future, even if the present is dominated by hostile powers.

[27 : 09] Nebuchadnezzar dreamed of the future, and such dreams come from Daniel's God. They demonstrate not only God's complete and absolute control over and the knowledge of events, but friends, also that these events will proceed according to plan.

iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were all broken in pieces, and they became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors.

The wind carried them away, so not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the statue became a great mountain, and it filled the whole earth.

earth. We actually live in the days predicted by Daniel, the days when the rock not made with hands is growing into a great mountain and filling the earth.

So let me ask, do you long for the day? Are your eyes fixed on the day when the Lord Jesus Christ returns in glory?

[28 : 21] when in the words of the prophet Habakkuk, the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

May this indeed be the certain confidence of each one of us who's gathered here this evening. Amen.