

DANIEL 2
Daniel and the Revelation (revised)
by Uriah Smith

1 And in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar dreamed dreams, wherewith his spirit was troubled, and his sleep brake from him.

Sleepless in Babylon! The king's dreams left him fatigued and uneasy. But in God's providence, Daniel's attention would soon be brought to focus on the meaning of the king's anxiety-provoking dreams.

2 Then the king commanded to call the magicians, and the astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans, for to shew the king his dreams. So they came and stood before the king.

The magicians used superstitious rites and the ceremonies of fortune tellers and others. Sorcerers were those who communicated with evil spirits, who impersonated the dead.

3 And the king said unto them, I have dreamed a dream, and my spirit was troubled to know the dream. 4 Then spake the Chaldeans to the king in Syriack, O king, live for ever: tell thy servants the dream, and we will shew the interpretation.

Note: The "dream interpreters" spoke to the king in Syriac—a dialect of the Chaldean language used by the educated and cultured classes. From this point to the end of chapter 7, the record continues in Chaldean.

These men seem to have been thoroughly schooled in the art of drawing out sufficient information to form a basis for some shrewd calculation, or of framing their answers so ambiguously that their prediction would be equally applicable no matter how things turned out. So, true to their cunning instincts, they called on the king to make known to them his dream. Armed with this information, they could easily agree on some interpretation which would not endanger their reputation.

5 The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, The thing is gone from me: if ye will not make known unto me the dream, with the interpretation thereof, ye shall be cut in pieces, and your houses shall be made a dunghill. 6 But if ye shew the dream, and the interpretation thereof, ye shall receive of me gifts and rewards and great honour: therefore shew me the dream, and the interpretation thereof. 7 They answered again and said, Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will shew the interpretation of it. 8 The king answered and said, I know of certainty that ye would gain the time, because ye see the thing is gone from me. 9 But if ye will not make known unto me the dream, *there is but one decree for you: for ye have prepared lying and corrupt words to speak before me, till the time be changed: therefore tell me the dream, and I shall know that ye can shew me the interpretation thereof.* 10 The Chaldeans answered before the king, and said, There is not a man upon the earth that can

shew the king's matter: therefore *there is* no king, lord, nor ruler, *that* asked such things at any magician, or astrologer, or Chaldean. 11 And *it is* a rare thing that the king requireth, and there is none other that can shew it before the king, except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh. 12 For this cause the king was angry and very furious, and commanded to destroy all the wise *men* of Babylon. 13 And the decree went forth that the wise *men* should be slain; and they sought Daniel and his fellows to be slain.

Some have criticized Nebuchadnezzar as acting the part of a heartless, unreasonable tyrant. But what did these magicians profess to be able to do? To reveal hidden things; to foretell future events; to make known mysteries entirely beyond human foresight and penetration, and to do all this by the aid of supernatural agencies. If, then, their claim was worth anything, could they not make known to the king what he had dreamed? They certainly could. And if they were able, knowing the dream, to give a reliable interpretation, would they not also be able to make known the dream itself when it had gone from the king? Certainly, if there was any virtue in their pretended communication with the other world. There was therefore nothing unjust in Nebuchadnezzar's demand that they should make known his dream.

14 Then Daniel answered with counsel and wisdom to Arioch the captain of the king's guard, which was gone forth to slay the wise *men* of Babylon: 15 He answered and said to Arioch the king's captain, *Why is* the decree so hasty from the king? Then Arioch made the thing known to Daniel. 16 Then Daniel went in, and desired of the king that he would give him time, and that he would shew the king the interpretation. 17 Then Daniel went to his house, and made the thing known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions: 18 That they would desire mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret; that Daniel and his fellows should not perish with the rest of the wise *men* of Babylon.

In this story we see God's providence at work. It was providential that the dream of the king impressed him so much that, though he was full of anxiety about it, he could not remember what it was. This led to the complete exposure of the false system of the magicians and other pagan teachers. It was also remarkable that Daniel and his companions were not consulted at all in this matter. But God was at work in this, as well. For had the king called on Daniel at first, and had Daniel at once made known the dream, the magicians would not have been put to the test. So God let the astrologers and magicians try and ignominiously fail, even under the penalty of death, that God's name might be honored. Third, Daniel knew nothing about the matter until the executioners came for his arrest. His own life therefore being at stake, he would be led to seek the Lord with all his heart.

19 Then was the secret revealed unto Daniel in a night vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven. 20 Daniel answered and said, Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his: 21 And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding: 22 He revealeth the deep and secret things: he knoweth what is in the

darkness, and the light dwelleth with him. 23 I thank thee, and praise thee, O thou God of my fathers, who hast given me wisdom and might, and hast made known unto me now what we desired of thee: for thou hast now made known unto us the king's matter.

Daniel had the highest confidence in what had been shown to him. He did not first go to the king to see if what had been revealed to him was indeed the king's dream—rather, he immediately praised God for having answered his prayer. Although the matter was revealed to Daniel, he did not take honor to himself as if it were by his prayers alone that this thing had been revealed. Instead, he immediately associated his companions with himself and acknowledged the answer to be as much to their prayers as to his own. It was, said he, “what we desired of thee,” and thou hast made it “known unto us.”

24 Therefore Daniel went in unto Arioch, whom the king had ordained to destroy the wise men of Babylon: he went and said thus unto him; Destroy not the wise men of Babylon: bring me in before the king, and I will shew unto the king the interpretation.

Daniel's first plea is for the wise men of Babylon. “Destroy them not, for the king's secret is revealed.” Though it was through no merit of theirs that the dream had been revealed, their own confession of utter impotence was humiliation enough for them, and Daniel was anxious that they should have their lives spared. They were saved because there was a man of God among them. And that is how it always is. For the sake of Paul and Silas, all the prisoners with them were loosed. Acts 16:26. For the sake of Paul, the lives of all who sailed with him were saved. Acts 27:24. Thus the wicked are benefited by the presence of the righteous. This is something we all would do well to remember. What saves the world today? For whose sake is it still spared? For the sake of the few righteous persons who are yet left.

25 Then Arioch brought in Daniel before the king in haste, and said thus unto him, I have found a man of the captives of Judah, that will make known unto the king the interpretation. 26 The king answered and said to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, Art thou able to make known unto me the dream which I have seen, and the interpretation thereof? 27 Daniel answered in the presence of the king, and said, The secret which the king hath demanded cannot the wise *men*, the astrologers, the magicians, the soothsayers, shew unto the king; 28 But there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days. Thy dream, and the visions of thy head upon thy bed, are these;

Daniel declared plainly that the wise men, the astrologers, the soothsayers, and the magicians could not make known this secret, because it was beyond their power. The prophet made known the true God as the only One who is the Revealer of secrets.

29 As for thee, O king, thy thoughts came *into thy mind* upon thy bed, what should come to pass hereafter: and he that revealeth secrets maketh known to thee what shall come to pass. 30 But as for me, this secret is not revealed to me for *any* wisdom that I have more than any

living, but for *their* sakes that shall make known the interpretation to the king, and that thou mightest know the thoughts of thy heart.

When traced to their source, all favors, no matter who receives them, are found to be due to the regard God has for His own children. How comprehensive was the work of God in this instance! By this one act of revealing the king's dream to Daniel, He accomplished all of these: (1) He made known to the king the things He desired; (2) He saved His servants who trusted in Him; (3) He brought conspicuously before the Chaldean nation the knowledge of the true God; (4) He poured contempt on the false systems of the soothsayers and magicians; and (5) He honored His own name and exalted His servants in their eyes.

31 Thou, O king, sawest, and behold a great image. This great image, whose brightness was excellent, stood before thee; and the form thereof was terrible.

Nebuchadnezzar, practicing the Chaldean religion, was an idolater; so an image would at once command his interest and respect. What mattered most to him were wealth, political power, and his gods. By presenting him with a giant godlike statue made from a variety of precious metals, then revealing to His servant what the dream was and what it meant, God captured this heathen ruler's attention.

32 This image's head was of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, 33 His legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay. 34 Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. 35 Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth.

Below this head of gold was a body composed of inferior metals descending in value, until they reached their basest form in the feet and toes of iron mingled with miry clay—the message being that earthly greatness and glory will fade and vanish.

36 This is the dream; and we will tell the interpretation thereof before the king. 37 Thou, O king, art a king of kings: for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory. 38 And wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the heaven hath he given into thine hand, and hath made thee ruler over them all. Thou art this head of gold.

Now opens one of the most incredible summaries of human history ever penned. Eight short verses of the inspired record tell the whole story; yet that story embraces the history of this world's pomp and power. Human wisdom has never devised so brief a record which has embraced so much. The finger of God is here. With what interest, as

well as astonishment, must the king have listened, as he was informed by the prophet that *his* kingdom was the golden head of the magnificent image he had seen.

Ancient kings valued their power above all else, and the patron deity to whom they attributed their success was the object upon which they would lavish their richest treasures and bestow their best devotions. Daniel informs the king that in this case all these are due to the God of heaven, since He is the one who has given him his kingdom and made him ruler over everything. This would restrain him from the pride of thinking that he had attained his position by his own power and wisdom and would enlist the gratitude of his heart toward the true God.

Though other nations existed at this time, Babylon was the great and supreme power in the political world of the time. It necessarily eclipsed all else, and Daniel would naturally speak of it as a kingdom ruling over all the earth. All provinces of countries against which Babylon moved at the height of its power were subdued by its arms. The character of this empire is fittingly indicated by gold—it was the golden kingdom of a golden age. Babylon, its metropolis, towered to a height never reached by any of its successors.

- ▶ Situated in the garden of the East;
- ▶ laid out in a perfect square sixty miles in circumference, fifteen miles on each side;
- ▶ surrounded by a wall three hundred and fifty feet high and eighty-seven feet thick, with a moat, or ditch around this, of equal cubic capacity with the wall itself;
- ▶ its two hundred and twenty-five square miles of enclosed surface,
- ▶ laid out in luxuriant pleasure-grounds and gardens, interspersed with magnificent dwellings,
- ▶ this city, with its sixty miles of moat,
- ▶ its sixty miles of outer wall,
- ▶ its thirty miles of river wall through its center,
- ▶ its hundred and fifty gates of solid brass,
- ▶ its hanging gardens, rising terrace above terrace till they equaled in height the walls themselves,
- ▶ its temple of Belus, three miles in circumference,
- ▶ its two royal palaces, one three and a half and the other eight miles in circumference,
- ▶ with its subterranean tunnel under the River Euphrates connecting these two palaces,
- ▶ its perfect arrangement for convenience, ornament, and defense, and its unlimited resources;
- ▶ this city, containing in itself many things which were themselves wonders of the world,
- ▶ was itself another and still mightier wonder.

Never before had the earth seen a city like it; never since has it seen its equal. And there, with the whole earth prostrate at her feet, a queen in peerless grandeur, drawing from the pen of inspiration itself this glowing title—“the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees’ excellency”—sat this city, fit capital of that kingdom which constituted the golden head of this great historic image. Such was Babylon, with Nebuchadnezzar—in the prime of life, bold, vigorous, accomplished—seated upon its throne, when Daniel entered its impregnable walls to serve as a captive for seventy years in its gorgeous palaces.

39 And after thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee, and another third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth.

Just two years after the death of Nebuchadnezzar, war broke out between the Babylonians and the Medes. Darius (Dan. 5:31), summoned to his aid his nephew, Cyrus, of the Persian line, in his efforts against the Babylonians. Cyrus laid siege to Babylon, the only city in all the East which continued holding out against him. The Babylonians—secured within their impregnable walls with provisions on hand for twenty years and enough land within the city to feed the inhabitants and garrison for an indefinite period—scoffed at Cyrus from their lofty walls and derided his seemingly useless efforts to bring them into subjection. Reckoned by any earthly probability or with any means of warfare then known, could that city ever be taken. So they breathed as freely and slept as soundly as if no foe were waiting and watching for their destruction around their beleaguered walls.

But God had decreed that the proud and wicked city should indeed come down from her throne of glory; and when He speaks, no mortal arm can defeat His word. In their very feeling of security lay their danger. Cyrus resolved to accomplish by stratagem what he could not effect by force. Learning of an upcoming annual festival in which the whole city would be given up to drunken carousing, he decided on that day as the time to carry out his plan. There was no entrance for him into that city except where the River Euphrates entered and emerged, passing under the city walls. He decided to make the channel of the river his own highway into the stronghold of his enemy. To do this, the water must be turned aside from its channel through the city.

So on the evening of the feast day he commissioned three bodies of soldiers: the first to turn the river at a given hour into a large artificial lake a short distance above the city; the second to position themselves at the point where the river entered the city; the third to take a position fifteen miles below, where the river emerged from the city.

These two latter parties were instructed to enter the channel as soon as they found the river fordable and in the darkness of the night explore their way beneath the walls and press on to the palace of the king, where they were to meet, surprise the palace, slay the guards, and capture or slay the king. Once the water had been channeled into the

lake, the river soon became fordable, and the soldiers chosen for that purpose followed its channel into the heart of the city of Babylon.

But all this would have been in vain, had not the whole city, on that eventful night, given themselves over to the drunken carousing which Cyrus had counted on. For on each side of the river, through the entire length of the city, were high walls just as thick as the outer walls. In these walls were huge gates of solid brass which were closed and guarded, preventing all entrance from the riverbed to any of the twenty-five streets that crossed the river. If they been closed at this time, the soldiers of Cyrus might have marched into the city along the river-bed and then marched out again without accomplishing a thing. But in the drunken revelry of that fatal night, these river gates were all left open, and no one saw the Persian soldiers enter. The Babylonians went into their besotted merrymaking subjects of the king of Babylon; they awoke from it as slaves to the king of Persia. "In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain. And Darius the Median took the kingdom, being about threescore and two years old."

"And after thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee." The succeeding kingdom, Medo-Persia, is the one which answers to the breast and arms of silver of the great image. It was to be inferior to the preceding kingdom. In what respect inferior? Not in power; for it was its conqueror. Not in extent; for Cyrus subdued all the East from the Aegean Sea to the River Indus and thus erected the most extensive empire that up to that time had ever existed. But it was inferior in wealth, luxury, and magnificence.

In the ever-changing political kaleidoscope, Grecia (Greece) now comes into the field of vision, to be the third of the great universal empires of the earth.

Upon the death of his father, Philip of Macedon, Alexander the Great assumed his mantle and began the most successful military campaign this world has ever seen. Beginning with the unification of Grecia, he then moved eastward through the Balkans, conquering wherever he went. Though aware of Alexander's encroaching military presence, Darius for a time did not take him seriously enough to mount a campaign against him. Alexander finally attacked Persia directly on the field of Arbela and prevailed in the year B.C. 331. He continued into India, where, in the year 323 B.C., at the age of 32, he died after extensive binge-drinking.

40 And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron: forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things: and as iron that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise.

What kingdom succeeded Grecia in the empire of the world? For the legs of iron denote the fourth kingdom in the series. One kingdom did this, and one only, and that was Rome. It conquered Grecia; it subdued all things; like iron, it broke in pieces and bruised. The historian Gibbon, following the symbolic imagery of Daniel, describes this empire in this way: "The arms of the Republic, sometimes vanquished in battle, always victorious in war, advanced with rapid steps to the Euphrates, the Danube, the Rhine, and the

ocean; and the images of gold, or silver, or brass, that might serve to represent the nations or their kings, were successively broken by the iron monarchy of Rome.”

At the opening of the Christian era, this empire took in the whole south of Europe, France, England, the greater part of the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the south of Germany, Hungary, Turkey, and Greece, not to speak of its possessions in Asia and Africa. Well, therefore, may Gibbon have said of it: “The empire of the Romans filled the world. And when that empire fell into the hands of a single person, the world became a safe and dreary prison for his enemies. To resist was fatal; and it was impossible to fly.”

It will be noticed that at first, the kingdom is described, without qualification, to be as strong as iron. And this was the period of its strength, during which it has been likened to a mighty Colossus, bestriding the nations, conquering everything, and giving laws to the world. But this was not to continue.

41 And whereas thou sawest the feet and toes, part of potters' clay, and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; but there shall be in it of the strength of the iron, forasmuch as thou sawest the iron mixed with miry clay. 42 And as the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken.

The element of weakness symbolized by the clay pertained to the feet as well as to the toes. Rome, before its division into ten kingdoms, lost that iron strength and tenacity it initially possessed. Luxury, with its accompanying degeneracy—the destroyer of nations as well as of individuals—began to corrode and weaken its iron sinews and thus prepared the way for its subsequent decline into ten kingdoms. The iron legs of the image terminate in feet and toes.

The ten barbarian tribes which invaded the Roman Empire over a span of years and were most instrumental in breaking it up may be enumerated as follows: The Huns, Ostrogoths, Visigoths, Franks, Vandals, Suevi, Burgundians, Heruli, Anglo-Saxons, and Lombards. The connection between these and some of the modern nations of Europe is still traceable in the names as England, Burgundy, Lombardy, France, etc. Time and again men have dreamed of welding the nations of modern Europe into one mighty kingdom. Charlemagne tried it. Charles V tried it. Louis XIV tried it. Napoleon tried it. More recently, the European Union has tried it. But none have succeeded. A single verse of prophecy was stronger than all their hosts. Their own power was wasted, frittered away, destroyed. But the ten kingdoms did not become one. “Partly strong, and partly broken” was the prophetic description. And such, too, has been the historic fact concerning them.

43 And whereas thou sawest iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men: but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay.

Just as with oil and water, iron and clay do not mix. God said, “They shall not cleave one to another.” The nations that would follow Rome would never fully unite.

44 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 for ever. 45 Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure.

The kings, or kingdoms, in whose days the God of heaven is to set up His kingdom, are evidently those kingdoms which arose out of the Roman Empire—the nations of modern Europe. The stone that smites the image is, without hands, cut out of the mountain. It is a work which the Lord does by His own divine power, without any human agency.

46 Then the king Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face, and worshipped Daniel, and commanded that they should offer an oblation and sweet odours unto him. 47 The king answered unto Daniel, and said, Of a truth *it is*, that your God *is* a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, seeing thou couldst reveal this secret.

48 Then the king made Daniel a great man, and gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise *men* of Babylon. 49 Then Daniel requested of the king, and he set Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, over the affairs of the province of Babylon: but Daniel *sat* in the gate of the king.

The soothsayers and astrologers waited in silent awe and wonder as Daniel revealed what God had shown him—the future of Babylon and the kingdoms that would follow. For His part, God elevated Daniel and his cohorts to the highest ranks of rulership in Babylon—for as long, that is, as it would last.

