

Daniel 2

SI: Last Sunday a church member asked me some thought-provoking questions. First, he asked me if I sensed fear among Christians about the November presidential election.

I said I did sense fear in some articles I’ve read and some comments I’ve heard—not so much at Christ Covenant, but in the broader evangelical community.

Then he asked me I was afraid and I said—No, I’m not.

I have some concerns about religious liberty, specifically as it relates to Christian higher education, but I’m not afraid no matter who is elected.

Then he asked me why I am not afraid and I told him

it’s mostly because of Daniel chapter 2, and I gave him a quick outline.

To which he said: You need to preach on that next Sunday.

So, thank you, friend. I’m following your advice.

That’s one thing I love about our church, how it’s filled with thoughtful, sober-minded believers. What a blessing to be the pastor here.

Please turn, then to Daniel 2 and let’s see what it teaches us about nations and governments and rulers and how we ought to think about those things as subjects of King Jesus and citizens of his kingdom.

Then, on Tuesday evening, November 8, after you’ve watched the election returns, you’ll remember Daniel 2, and you’ll go to bed and sleep soundly and wake up the next day with complete confidence.

I’m not going to read whole chapter, and I’m going to make comments as I read.

In the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his mind was troubled and he could not sleep. Nebuchadnezzar was the king of Babylon, modern day Iraq.

He ruled as the absolute monarch over the vast Babylonian empire.

His army was an unstoppable military machine.

His capital city of Babylon was filled with marvelous architecture and technology. It was also filled with the best minds and most skilled craftsmen in ancient world.

That’s because whenever Nebuchadnezzar would conquer another kingdom, he would take the intellectual cream of the crop back to Babylon as permanent exiles and make them ministers in his government.

The book of Daniel is named after one of those brilliant exiles.

Daniel was a young Jewish aristocrat who was taken into captivity when

Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem. He was trained for three years in the language and literature of the Babylonians and then put in govt. service. Back to the reading, Nebuchadnezzar had a troubling dream, vs. 2.

So the king summoned the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers to tell him what he had dreamed. When they came in and stood before the king, he said to them, “I have had a dream that troubles me and I want to know what it means.”

Just like all chief executives, Nebuchadnezzar had cabinet ministers whose job it was to forecast the future. They used magic and sorcery and astrology.

Today we use economics and polling data—

but it’s essentially same thing, government leaders trying to predict the future. So his advisors asked him to tell them the dream and they would interpret it.

But Nebuchadnezzar threw them a curve ball.

He said—No, this time I want you to tell me my dream, then what it means.

Why did he do that? He might have forgotten it. Had a vague memory. But he probably realized if he told them, they could give any interpretation they wanted and claim they got it from the gods. He wanted them to prove that they really were wise men.

They told him they couldn’t tell him what he dreamed, but if he told them they would interpret it. So Nebuchadnezzar did what any good dictator would do, he ordered the execution of all the wise men in Babylon—his whole cabinet. He sent the commander of the guard to round them all up.

Daniel was one of the wise men—obviously a very minor official.

He wasn’t there at the meeting about the dream but he heard about the king’s order, so he and three Jewish friends who were also wise men, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah—aka Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—began to pray.

Vs. 19

During the night the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision. Then Daniel praised the God of heaven²⁰ and said: “Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are his.²¹ He changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning.²² He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with him.²³ I thank and praise you, O God of my fathers: You have given me wisdom and power, you have made known to me what we asked of you, you have made known to us the dream of the king.”

Daniel asked to be taken to Nebuchadnezzar.

Nebuchadnezzar said: So, you say you can tell me my dream.

Daniel said: No, I can’t. No man can. But there is a God in heaven who knows

all things and he reveals mysteries when he desires to do so.
He has given you this dream about the future and he has revealed it to me.
And then Daniel told the dream.

Vs. 31

You looked, O king, and there before you stood a large statue—an enormous, dazzling statue, awesome in appearance.³² The head of the statue was made of pure gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze,³³ its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay.³⁴ While you were watching, a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them.³⁵ Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were broken to pieces at the same time and became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth.³⁶ This was the dream, and now we will interpret it to the king.³⁷ You, O king, are the king of kings. The God of heaven has given you dominion and power and might and glory;³⁸ in your hands he has placed mankind and the beasts of the field and the birds of the air. Wherever they live, he has made you ruler over them all. You are that head of gold.³⁹ After you, another kingdom will rise, inferior to yours. Next, a third kingdom, one of bronze, will rule over the whole earth.⁴⁰ Finally, there will be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron—for iron breaks and smashes everything—and as iron breaks things to pieces, so it will crush and break all the others.⁴¹ Just as you saw that the feet and toes were partly of baked clay and partly of iron, so this will be a divided kingdom; yet it will have some of the strength of iron in it, even as you saw iron mixed with clay.⁴² As the toes were partly iron and partly clay, so this kingdom will be partly strong and partly brittle.⁴³ And just as you saw the iron mixed with baked clay, so the people will be a mixture and will not remain united, any more than iron mixes with clay.⁴⁴ In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever.⁴⁵ This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands—a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces. The great God has shown the king what will take place in the future. The dream is true and the interpretation is trustworthy."

The episode ends with Nebuchadnezzar so overwhelmed that bowed before Daniel and said: Your God is the God of gods, the Lord of kings, revealer of secrets. He made Daniel the head of his cabinet and governor of province of Babylon, and Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were Daniel's chief administrators.

For you note-takers, let's look at this under three headings:

1. The meaning of the statue
2. The meaning of the rock
3. The meaning of the end of the story

MP#1 The meaning of the statue

Daniel explains that these four metals in the statue are four successive empires.

The first one, the head of gold, is Babylon.

So what are these other three empires the dream predicts?

Bible teachers have historically identified the silver chest as the Medo-Persian empire, the bronze belly the Greeks, and the iron legs with clay feet the Romans. But let's hold on to that question and deal with it when we get to the rock.

Let's look at the statue itself. First, why is there just a single statue?

Think about it. Historically speaking, these were four very different empires.

They had very different laws and customs. In some cases were bitter enemies. But in the dream all these empires together form a single statue—they are all one, they are all part of the same thing.

Which means that the imagery of this statue is intended to reveal truths to us about not just the Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans—about all the nations and governments and kingdoms of men.

This statue tells us things about the United States of America.

Things we have to remind ourselves of on November 8th.

A statue is crafted by human hands.

Unlike the rock in the dream that was not cut by human hands, get to in a minute—all governments are creations of men.

They aren't divine. They aren't eternal. They aren't the ultimate authority.

They aren't to be worshipped.

They aren't to be feared, in the sense that God is feared.

But there is always a tendency and temptation to worship human government because it can be so impressive and powerful.

The dream itself shows this.

The statue is described as enormous, dazzling, and awesome in appearance.

This dream was not a product of Nebuchadnezzar's imagination.

Daniel says that God himself sent the dream.

This is God's assessment of human governments.

God himself acknowledges that the kingdoms and empires of mankind can be dazzling and awesome. They are the pinnacle of human achievement.

Even pagan empires ruled by cruel kings—like Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon—can still produce a golden ages and great civilizations where there is learning and law and prosperity and peace imposed by overwhelming military power.

But what happens to the golden age?

The next metal in the statue is silver. Silver tarnishes. Not as valuable as gold. And then after the silver comes bronze—even less valuable.

Then after that comes iron—which is the least valuable metal of all.

The point is that however dazzling and awesome a nation or government may be—because it is a human creation and not divine—it will decline.

The gold will become silver, and the silver will tarnish, and eventually everything that made it great will be corrupted and lost.

And there's another side to this downward progression in the statue.

The metals not only become less valuable, they become harder.

Gold is soft, bronze is hard, iron is harder still.

As Daniel says—Iron breaks and smashes everything.

And so there is this tendency also in the governments of mankind—to become more assertive in their power, more demanding, more restrictive, more repressive.

The last thing to note about this statue is that it has feet of clay.

Actually, iron mixed with baked clay—and as Daniel notes, they don't mix.

The rock smashes these brittle feet and the whole thing collapses and falls to pieces, crumbles to dust, and blows away like chaff.

There are so many historical examples of this that wise unbelievers acknowledge it.

Empires, even whole civilizations, fall and are buried in the sands of time.

Unless Jesus returns first, the American Empire will be a chapter in a history book, some day, like Babylonian Empire.

I'm not going to try to apply all this specifically to America.

I don't know enough history, and even if I did, that's not how this dream is to be put to use. It's intended to make us look at the big picture.

Governments and empires can be dazzling and awesome.

And it isn't just sparkle—there really can be golden ages of human achievement.

In fact, there can be such peace and prosperity, and the promise of more, that people are tempted to worship human governments as divine.

But they not divine.

Political entities cannot be the object of our worship, our trust, or our fear because they are merely human and passing away.

We are part of something eternal. That brings us to the second point . . .

MP#2 The meaning of the rock

Daniel says the rock that smashes the feet of the statue is God's kingdom.

The dream foretells that God will establish it at a specific point in history—during fourth human kingdom, the legs of iron.

You have to try to put yourself in the shoes of Daniel and the other believing Jews. The strategy of the Babylonians was to turn these Jewish exiles into Babylonians—to get them to adopt the values and lifestyle and religion of Babylon, forget Israel. They were even given Babylonian names. Daniel was given name Belteshazzar.

So these believers under intense pressure from a powerful pagan government and culture to conform.

But the Lord sends a dream to Nebuchadnezzar.

And this dream announces that a time would come when God establishes his kingdom in this world and brings the kingdoms and empires of men to nothing. Even though believing Jews like Daniel knew they would be dead long before it happened, God's promise gave them hope.

We know the rest of the story. That fourth empire was Rome.

And during the reign of Caesar Augustus a baby boy was born in a town five miles south of Jerusalem—the little town of Bethlehem, David's town.

That child was the Son of God and the Messiah of Israel.

Jesus Christ did exactly what the dream foretold.

He brought down the Roman Empire and is bringing down all nations of men.

Through the preaching of his Apostles people all over the Roman Empire began to bow their hearts before the risen King Jesus and enter his kingdom.

By the end of the third century, Christ was known throughout the Roman world. Before Jesus ascended into heaven, he told his disciples to take the good news of his kingdom not just to the Jews and the Romans, but to all the nations.

And that's what has been happening these past 2,000 years.

People from every tribe, language, people, and nation have come and are continuing to come under Christ's dominion.

His kingdom is that rock growing into a huge mountain, filling the whole earth.

You might say: But I don't see that. I don't see the reign of Jesus Christ.

You might even look at the coming election on November 8 and think you see the opposite—the ascendancy of anti-Christian forces in America.

It might seem to you kingdom of man growing and Christ's kingdom shrinking.

Here's where the symbolism of the dream is so helpful to us—two things.

First, the rock is the least valuable substance in the entire dream.

It's certainly less valuable than gold or silver, bronze and iron more valuable.

Even clay can be molded and fired and made into something useful.

According to the value systems of the empires of men,
the substance of Christ's kingdom is worth almost nothing.

We buy into that system which makes it hard for us to see Christ's kingdom.

What is his kingdom? It's people who believe in him.

And around the world, most of his followers are humble, ordinary people.

Sometimes Jesus saves great people, sometimes he saves powerful, important people, people who have the sort of influence the world notices.

But not often. It's mostly ordinary people, oftentimes poor people.

They don't look like much compared to the dazzling, awesome appearance of the empires of this world. But don't be fooled.

Because every time you see followers of Christ and people coming to a saving knowledge of Christ and bowing to him, pledging allegiance to him—you know he is supernaturally at work. He is reigning, building his kingdom.

There's a portion of a letter in the bulletin from jfjfj and fjfjf in fjfj China.

Tell how Chinese government is becoming rapidly more repressive towards

Christianity in a number of different ways. Indications are this is not temporary.

Actually facing possibility might end work of their organization, in China 35 years.

Look at the letter and read last sentence I printed.

“While these things can drain our energy and seek to wrestle our gaze away from His face, we are reminded that he is still sovereign and ruling . . . “

Here's how they are reminded. I didn't have room for it in the bulletin.

Tell of case after case of Chinese people coming to faith in Jesus.

One man they mention a life-long, committed Buddhist, and others.

You only have to look at history of church in China over last 60 years to know that Christ's kingdom is alive and well.

That's the second detail that should encourage you. It's alive.

Unlike the statue which is static, always crumbles, it starts small and it grows.

That's not just true of Christ's kingdom as a whole, it's also a pattern that is repeated over and over again. Small beginnings are the way in Christ's kingdom.

Yes, it often is small compared to human empires, but remember every one of them will come to an end, just as Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome have.

Christ's kingdom is alive, it's growing, and when Jesus comes, will fill the earth.

We are citizens of the eternal kingdom of Jesus that is alive and growing—
undermining the kingdoms of men, smashing their feet of clay—

and they can't even see it because they are blinded by their value systems. But God has given us eyes to see it and hearts that beat for it until the day Jesus comes and makes it visible and glorious. There is so much more to say about this point which is so encouraging. We have to move on to the third point.

MP#3 The meaning of the end of the story

Nebuchadnezzar was so overwhelmed that bowed before Daniel and said: Your God is the God of gods, the Lord of kings, revealer of secrets. He made Daniel the head of his cabinet and governor of province of Babylon, and Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were Daniel's chief administrators.

A very practical note.

Nebuchadnezzar was a lot worse than Hillary or Donald or Barak Obama.

He was an absolute dictator, unfettered by any laws or system.

Yes, here he is bowing down and declaring God of Israel the God of gods and honoring these believing Jews with positions of authority.

But do you know what he does in the very next chapter?

Makes a gold statue like the one he saw in his dream, orders everybody to worship it, and when Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused, ordered them to be burned to death in a furnace. You know how that turned out.

This was a bad, anti-Christian, repressive government—and here's my point—Daniel worked for it. He didn't withdraw from Babylonian society.

He didn't curse it and say—there's nothing good here—he worked for its good. Which is exactly what the prophet Jeremiah told all the exiles they should do in a famous letter he sent them. It's in Jeremiah 29. Let me read you a portion.

This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."

The Lord is telling them to affirm life in all its goodness—work, build, love.

Do it all for the glory of God. And pray for and seek the peace and prosperity of this particular human government under which I have placed you.

If Daniel and the believing Jews could do that in the heart of Babylonian Empire, we can do it no matter which political party is in power in Washington.

What do you do the morning of November 9?

You get up and kiss your wife to the glory of God. And you go work to the glory of God. And when you come home, you mow the grass to the glory of God, And go to the Friday night football game to the glory of God. And you pray—Lord, bless this land in which you have placed your people.

Now the big picture. The Lord raised up the Babylonian Empire for a purpose. It was to discipline his people Israel.

The prophets had warned them for generations to quit worshipping idols. But they just wouldn't put away their images of Baal and Asherah. So God sent Babylon to tear down Jerusalem and even tear down his Temple.

But guess what happened to the Jews during 70 years of captivity?

They were cured forever of idol worship. They came out of exile realizing the preciousness of their heritage and God's word and his worship.

When they were ready to go back, God brought down Babylon and raised Persia.

The Persian foreign policy was the reverse of Babylon.

It was to repatriate all these nations the Babylonians had exiled. God used the Persians to return the Jews to Israel, rebuild the Temple, and reconstitute Jewish life in preparation for something important.

He then used the Greeks to challenge the world with the deep questions of life, and to give the ancient world a common language. God was getting things ready.

And then he raised up the Romans who brought stability and peace and those famous Roman roads that traversed empire and made travel so easy.

What was all this for?

It was to prepare just the right time in human history for Jesus Christ to be born.

A time when the Jews devoted to preservation and teaching of Scriptures.

A time when the Gentile world was looking for answers to life.

A time when the followers of Jesus, merchants and missionaries, could travel widely and spread the good news.

As Paul says: When the time had fully come, God sent his son.

God orchestrated the empires of men over centuries to set the stage perfectly.

As Daniel says in his prayer:

He changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them.

Daniel's God is our God. He works the same way today.

We don't know exactly how he is using this or that government.

After almost 20 years of relative religious freedom in China, the Lord put communist officials in power who repressing the church.

I don't know what the Lord's strategy is. Sometimes it's perplexing.

I'm sure the Jewish exiles wondered that too

But he's kind enough to show us in Daniel that he does have a big plan that encompasses the sweep of human history, and that the governments of men are just tools he uses to accomplish his grand purpose.

What is that purpose?

One of my favorite expressions of it is Revelation 11:5. On front of bulletin.

When I read this, I hear the Hallelujah Chorus in Handel's Messiah.

The kingdom of this world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ—
and he shall reign for ever and ever.

King of kings, Lord of lords. Hallelujah, Hallelujah.

And not to beat a dead horse.

But if that King and that Lord can bend the greatest empires of antiquity to his will,
and move them like chess pieces to play his game—
then don't you think he can do the same with this election?