



WEEK 11  
02.12.17

# DANIEL: PROPHET OF THE AGES

## FOCUS VERSE

### Daniel 2:44

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.

## LESSON TEXT

### Daniel 2:1–13

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.

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.

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.

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.



## FOCUS THOUGHT

God used Daniel to reveal the kingdoms of this world but chose the church to reveal His ultimate plan for the ages: a heavenly bride.



## CULTURE CONNECTION

### Do We Still Believe in the End of the World?

In a world that seems increasingly hostile to Christians and Christian beliefs, I was astounded by a 2013 report in the *The Washington Times* about a recent Barna Group poll indicating that 41 percent of American adults eighteen years and older agreed “the world is currently living in the ‘end times’ as described by prophesies in the Bible” ([www.washingtontimes.com](http://www.washingtontimes.com)). James Fitzgerald, who commissioned the study, was shocked: “Even I was surprised by the findings. I thought the numbers could possibly be as low as 10 percent for the overall population and maybe 30 percent for Christians in general, or less” ([pressreleases.religionnews.com](http://pressreleases.religionnews.com)).

The statistics revealed some interesting religious differences. While 54 percent of Protestants and 77 percent of Evangelicals

agreed with the above statement, nearly three-quarters (73 percent) of Roman Catholics interviewed said we were not living in the end times. The poll also tracked racial differences: 39 percent of whites were convinced we are living in the end times, compared to 48 percent of Hispanics and 54 percent of blacks.

While such statistics are not much more than interesting trivia, they do serve as an important reminder that buried somewhere deep within the human heart is a sense of this world’s impermanence. This poll demonstrates the “felt need” for hope and assurance in trying times. We live in a world that is hungry for the message of the Book of Daniel: There is a God, He has a plan, and we can be a part of it.

### OUTLINE

#### I. DANIEL AMONG THE PROPHETS

- A. The Young Man Daniel
- B. The Book of Daniel

#### II. THE GREAT IMAGE

- A. Gentile Kingdoms
- B. Stone Cut Out of the Mountain

#### III. THE BEASTS AND THE SON OF MAN

- A. The Four Beasts
- B. The Son of Man

### CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

It seems that every avid fiction reader is somehow destined to have at least one friend who, while claiming to be a lover of books, insists on consistently breaking the cardinal rule of reading narrative by reading the ending first. If ever there were a cause for revoking a person’s reading privileges (if such a thing were possible), that would certainly be first on the list. To skip ahead to the

ending rather than following the plot’s development is to effectively “cheat” the story of its dramatic charm and, more so, its transforming power. Yet there are moments in some stories so dark and tense that even this writer, a connoisseur of the printed word, finds the temptation to “peek ahead” unbearable. Does the hero or heroine save the day? Is the dastardly deed uncovered in time? Does the story end well? Do they all live happily ever after?

In today’s lesson, we read the story of a prophet whose divine visions allowed him to skip ahead in the story—not just to the restoration of the Exile but to the end of human history! The story and visions of Daniel present to us an important reminder of the sovereignty and power of God to shape the human world to achieve His glorious ends.

### SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

#### I. DANIEL AMONG THE PROPHETS

The Book of Daniel holds a unique place as perhaps the most-studied yet least-

understood book of the Old Testament. What is most striking about the book is the contrast between chapters 1–6 and 7–12, clearly the two major divisions of the book. The first section concerns itself with the events of Daniel’s and his friends’ lives living in Babylonian exile; the second concerns itself exclusively with Daniel’s vision. W. Sibley Towner remarked in his article “The Preacher in the Lion’s Den”: “Frankly, the book is a bear! The problem is not with the first six chapters, those delightful narratives about Daniel and his heroic Judean friends who carry the fight for true faith in God right to the heart of the courts of Babylon and Persia. . . . No, the bear is lurking in the second half of Daniel, chapters 7–12.”

### A. The Young Man Daniel

Though the subject of the Judean exile has been discussed at length in previous lessons, it is still important to remind ourselves that Daniel and his friends were taken from Judah to Babylon as young men for the express purpose of turning them into “Babylonians.” This intention is made clear in the first chapter of Daniel:

*“And the king spake unto Ashpenaz the master of his eunuchs, that he should bring certain of the children of Israel, and of the king’s seed, and of the princes; children in whom was no blemish, but well favoured, and skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king’s palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans” (Daniel 1:3–4).*

The goal was complete enculturation and indoctrination into the pagan ways of Babylon. Not only would such a move provide mid-level management for the burgeoning Babylonian bureaucracy, but it would also crush the spirit of the parents left behind in Judah with the image of their precious sons being taught to do obeisance to Marduk and other false gods. If the Babylonians succeeded in their plan, within one generation the memory of Jehovah, the God of Abraham,

Isaac, and Jacob, and the astounding claim that He alone was the one true, living God would be wiped out.

Thus we are to rejoice both at God’s miraculous power and Daniel’s astounding bravery: “But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s meat, nor with the wine which he drank” (Daniel 1:8). To us it seems like a minor decision, an ineffective protest, an empty gesture of resistance, when in fact it was a momentous stance of refusal to surrender a religious and ethnic identity that took courage and faith!

### B. The Book of Daniel

The first half of the book relates a series of events demonstrating the immense pressure to conform that Daniel and his friends faced. Tremper Longman (*NIV Application Commentary*) pointed out that across this narrative cycle, the “danger of death” came closer and closer to Daniel: first in the young Hebrew men’s adoption of “starvation rations” instead of the king’s food (Daniel 1:12), then in the king’s threat to assassinate all the wise men of Babylon (Daniel 2:12), then in the king’s attempt to assassinate the friends when they refused to bow to the king’s image (Daniel 3:19–20), and finally in the king’s throwing Daniel into the den of lions (Daniel 6:16). Yet, in each circumstance, through divine intervention Daniel and his friends were saved.

What is often forgotten in studies of the Book of Daniel is that the stories of Daniel 1–6 provide the literary and historical context for the visions of Daniel 7–12. Many commentators treat Daniel 7–12 as if those chapters could be an entirely separate book. However, those who take seriously the inspiration of Scripture’s design should ask themselves these questions: What would these visions in chapters 7–12 mean to a person who had grown up in the circumstances described in chapters 1–6? What would it matter to Daniel to have God pull back the curtain of time to reveal events Daniel would never witness even if he lived a thousand years? (See Daniel 12:4.)

## II. THE GREAT IMAGE

Given the importance of Daniel’s dreams, it is intriguing to notice that the first dream

recorded is not Daniel's. Rather, it is a divine vision given to a heathen king. The placement of the story makes it an illustration of the conclusion of chapter 1:

*"And the king communed with them; and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: therefore stood they before the king. And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm" (Daniel 1:19–20).*

Furthermore, the story also highlights the irascible nature common to tyrants that makes life in their service so deadly. King Nebuchadnezzar set for his advisors an impossible task. Not only did he demand that they interpret the dream, but he also demanded that they tell him what he had dreamed—under penalty of death by dismemberment (Daniel 2:5).

Thus, what we are first drawn to notice in this text is the human impossibility of Daniel's feat of interpretation. Daniel's ability to interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream was not the product of his Babylonian training or of his superior intellect. Daniel's ability was a gift from God as even the king's soothsayers acknowledged: "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" (Daniel 2:11).

## A. Gentile Kingdoms

The vision itself is relatively easy to visualize: a great statue with a head of gold, torso and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron, and feet of iron mixed with clay. The statue represented four major world empires, but here the debate begins. The identity of the "head of gold" is not debated; it was Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian empire (Daniel 2:38). For the majority of church history, Persia was thought to be the second (silver) kingdom, Alexander's empire the third (bronze), and Rome the fourth (iron), which would later be revived ("iron mixed with clay").

However, another interpretation has gained popularity among contemporary commentators. This alternate timeline sees the "silver" empire as referring to the Medes, the "bronze" as referring to the Persians, and the "iron" as referring to Alexander the Great's world conquest, with the "iron mixed with clay" an indication of the division of his empire into four pieces after his untimely death.

The various arguments that accompany these differing sequences of world domination are fascinating and worthy of full exploration, each having its own coherence both with the text and the events of world history. This is one of those areas of biblical interpretation where we all must confess we "see through a glass, darkly" (I Corinthians 13:12).

Perhaps more important than naming the exact sequence is to notice there is an inverse relationship in the statue's structure between the various metals' value and their strength. The head of the statue (that is, the beginning of the timeline) was of gold, a metal to this day of great worth but malleable, while the legs of the statue (that is, near the timeline's end) are of iron, an ugly element with much less worth but with great endurance. We are presented here, then, with a very specific picture of these powers that rule the world. Daniel foresaw a pattern of human domination that was increasingly ugly and tyrannical, that increasingly diminished in value as it simultaneously increased in strength.



**Stephen Elliot, in an online article entitled "The Most Violent Century," shared the following:**

**"While it has been impossible to arrive at accurate counts, and estimates by historians vary widely, Stalin is thought to have been responsible for the deaths of 20 million and Lenin tens of millions in the Soviet Union; Mao's rule resulted in the deaths of several tens of millions of Chinese; Pol Pot killed 20 percent of the population of Cambodia; and that pattern was reflected elsewhere in Southeast Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe, the Balkans, Mexico, and Central and South America. Each regime couched their objectives in honorable terms such as**

liberty, freedom, democracy and ‘the greater good’ to justify their murderous and wanton actions. But all too often the real motivations involved tribal, religious or cultural conflicts; or greed for supreme god-like power or wealth” ([www.vision.org](http://www.vision.org)).

## B. Stone Cut Out of the Mountain

Thankfully, Nebuchadnezzar’s dream did not end with the feet of “iron mixed with clay.” After carefully describing the statue, Daniel related to the king what happened next:

*“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. 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” (Daniel 2:34–35).*

It is a little difficult to visualize a “stone cut out without hands,” but the basic meaning of the phrase is that it was a boulder. Unlike the statue, this boulder had not been shaped by human ingenuity or will. However, this boulder was not simply a natural object for it possessed the very “unrocklike” ability to grow. After pulverizing the statue into wind-borne chaff, the boulder grew to be an earth-filling mountain.

As with the head of gold, Daniel left no uncertainty as to what that uncut, growing stone represented:

*“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” (Daniel 2:44).*

The coming kingdom of God will not be shaped or designed by human intellect or will; it will arise purely by God’s creation and purpose. The coming Kingdom will not be the product of our wishes for a better world; rather it will be a divine reality that smashes into the degrading reality of human tyranny and oppression, replacing it with that which is truly lasting and beautiful and the ultimate source of all human gifts. (Gold, silver, bronze, iron, and clay are all mined from mountains.)

When we understand Nebuchadnezzar’s vision in this manner, the question of whether the sequence is Babylon-Persia-Greece-Rome or Babylon-Media-Persia-Greece is rendered something of a moot point. In the end, all human efforts to govern the world will fail and will be replaced by the eternal kingdom of God in that grand and glorious final Day of the Lord!

## III. THE BEASTS AND THE SON OF MAN

As mentioned above, many readers of Daniel have been tempted to see the book as two largely unrelated “halves,” bound together by not much more than the appearance of the person of Daniel. In light of this, it is important to point out the positioning of Daniel’s vision of the four deadly beasts in relation to the positioning of Nebuchadnezzar’s vision of the statue. These texts stand at the “beginning” of each major section, and whatever else may be said about Daniel’s vision of chapter 7, it must at least be noted that it delineates the same sequence of imperial world history. Daniel’s vision in chapter 7 serves to confirm Nebuchadnezzar’s vision in chapter 2.

### A. The Four Beasts

Once again, there is much speculation about the exact identity of these awful beasts. Unlike the relatively straightforward vision of chapter 2, the images presented here obviously press Daniel’s powers of description to their breaking point: an eagle-winged lion, a flesh-eating bear, a four-headed leopard, and another beast so awful that Daniel seemed only able to recall its great iron teeth (Daniel 7:7). The most obvious interpretive issue

here is whether this sequence of beasts is meant to represent the same sequence of world empires presented in Daniel 2 or another, later sequence. In fact, some recent Apostolic interpretive work on Daniel 7 has highlighted the fascinating ways in which the symbolism of these beasts resonates with the national symbolism of contemporary nations. The answer to these puzzling but important questions is more easily clarified by taking a step back.

First, each of these beasts arose from “the sea” (Daniel 7:3). Throughout the Old Testament and the ancient Near East, the sea was a symbol of chaos and the forces of evil at work in the world. In Genesis 1, for example, the Creation of the world began with God’s powerful forming of order out of “the deep”: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters” (Genesis 1:1–2).

Thus these beasts did not represent God’s provision for the ordering of His world; they represented forces of evil, oppression, and destruction. As Tremper Longman noted: “The beasts (with the exception of the second) are like none to be found in God’s creation. That is the point—they are symbols of forces ranged against God and his creation order. These beasts are bizarre; they are mutants, perversions of what God intended by [H]is creation. As such, they evoke not only horror . . . but also revulsion” (*NIV Application Commentary*). Again we find here a commentary on the nature and result of the human desire for conquest and power: all human attempts at self-rule and world-domination end up “beastly” mockeries of all that is true and good and holy.

## B. The Son of Man

We can thank God that Daniel’s vision did not end with these horrible snarling freaks of nature. Rather, in response to their arrival to wreak havoc on the earth, Daniel looked toward heaven and reported:

*“I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and*

*came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed” (Daniel 7:13–14).*

This One who comes in the clouds of heaven is not another beast, mighty enough to devour even that fourth unspeakable monstrosity. Rather, He is like the “Son of man,” which in another context is simply a roundabout way of saying “human.” (See Ezekiel 2:1, *passim*.) This coming Ruler is human, reflective of the divine image, given an everlasting dominion over the entire earth. Opposing all the monstrous earthly forces, this One from Heaven represents God’s truest intention for human life.

It is, therefore, not surprising that Jesus Christ, who came preaching “the gospel of the kingdom of God” (Mark 1:14) would adopt as His personal self-designation and description of His ultimate mission the Danielic title “Son of man”:

*“And the high priest stood up in the midst, and asked Jesus, saying, Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee? But he held his peace, and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked him, and said unto him, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven” (Mark 14:60–62).*

## INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

The visions of Daniel 2 and 7 point to that wondrous day when the kingdom of God will finally and fully come. It is a day as yet unfulfilled. But it is the reality toward which the church of the living God, redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ and empowered by His



Spirit, points. Today, the church stands as a beacon of hope in a “beastly” world, snatching the wounded and dying from the jaws of death and destruction.

The goal of this lesson was to suggest a way of reading the visions of Daniel 7–12 that takes seriously their connection to the narratives of Daniel 1–6. What strength, what hope, what practical wisdom could the prophet Daniel have drawn from these visions that even we have not yet seen completely fulfilled? If some today were in Daniel’s place, their slightly exasperated response at the end of chapter 7 might well have been: “Well, that is very nice to know, God, but could you please give me some direction?”

And God would probably reply, “I just did.”

This vision of the coming of God’s kingdom at the end of human history is not just *some* direction; it is the direction of the entire Creation! The coming Kingdom was God’s purpose from the moment He said, “Let there be light” (Genesis 1:3). As such, the reality of that Kingdom is the truth that should expose the deceit of our sinful world; the lifestyle of that coming Kingdom is the pattern we should follow; and the hope of that Kingdom’s soon arrival should be our

empowerment for enduring faithfulness! If we are to live successfully for God each day, we must maintain a fresh vision of God’s final purpose.



**“I was walking along Central Park South near Columbus Circle at the foot of the park when a middle-aged black woman came toward me going the other way. Just as she passed me, she spoke. What she said was, ‘Jesus loves you.’ . . . For a moment it was not the world as it is that I saw but the world as it might be, as something deep within the world wants to be and is preparing to be, the way in darkness a seed prepares for growth, the way leaven works in bread. . . . Buried beneath the surface of all the dirt and noise and crime and poverty and pollution of that terrifying city, I glimpsed the treasure that waits to make it a holy city—a city where human beings dwell in love and peace with each other and with God and where the only tears there are tears of joy and reunion” (Frederick Buechner, *Secrets in the Dark*). ■**

## REFLECTIONS

- What are some important ways parents and the church can work to help our young people cope with worldly pressure to conform? Do you think the church overall does a good job of supporting its youth? What are some key ways in which the church could do better at this?
- Perhaps you have heard someone say something to this effect: “I’m sick of people talking about biblical prophecy. It’s all just useless speculation!” How did you respond? What are the inherent dangers of such an attitude? What do you think are the three most important benefits of carefully and humbly studying biblical teachings on the end times?
- Jesus’ proclamation of the Kingdom was two-fold: He proclaimed both that the Kingdom was a future reality (“Kingdom coming”) and also that the Kingdom was a present reality (“Kingdom come”). Think of three ways in which it would be true to say that the kingdom of God has already come and three ways in which it would be true to say that the kingdom of God has not yet come. How does this dual “already and not yet” nature of the kingdom of God help us to live faithfully for God each day?