

DANIEL 2 | *Dream of the Great Image*¹

Nebuchadnezzar's Demand

1 In the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar [603-02 bc],² Nebuchadnezzar had dreams. His spirit was troubled, and his sleep left him.³ 2 Then the king commanded that the magicians, the enchanters, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans⁴ be summoned to tell the king his dreams. So they came in and stood before the king. 3 And the king said to them, I had a dream, and my spirit is troubled to know the dream.⁵ 4 Then the Chaldeans said to the king in Aramaic (ܡܝܪܝܢ),⁶ O king, live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation.⁷ 5 The king answered and said to the Chaldeans,

The word from me is firm. If you do not make known to me the dream and its interpretation (ܡܝܪܝܢ), you shall be torn limb from limb, and your houses shall be laid in ruins. 6 But if you show the dream and its interpretation, you shall receive from me gifts, rewards, and great honor. Therefore show me the dream and its interpretation.

7 They answered a second time and said, Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will show its interpretation. 8 The king answered and said,

I know with certainty that you are trying to gain time, because you see that the word from me is firm. 9 if you do not make the dream known to me, there is but one sentence for you. You have agreed to speak lying and corrupt words before me till the times

¹ The original language of the book has switched from Hebrew in ch. 1 to Aramaic in chs. 2-7. It will switch back to Hebrew in ch. 8.

² This chapter probably takes place just after Daniel's three-year Babylonian education (Da 1: 5, 18).

³ Cf. Ge 20:3; 41:1-8; Es 6:1.

⁴ Chaldea is the name of southern Babylonia that later came to be used to denote Babylonia as a whole, especially during the Neo-Babylonian empire (626–539 bc). The Chaldeans were a semi-nomadic tribe occupying the deserts between northern Arabia and the Persian Gulf (Jb 1:17) who early settled in this area occupying Ur of the Chaldees (Ge 11:28; Ac 7:4). When Merodach-baladan, the chief of a Chaldean district, seized the Babylonian throne in 721-710 and 703-702 bc, he sought help from Judah and other Western nations against Assyria (Is 39). Isaiah warned Judah not to support the Chaldean rebels (Is 23:13) and foresaw their defeat (43:14). Since Babylon was at this time under a Chaldean king, *Chaldean* came to be used as a synonym for Babylonian (Is 13:19; 47:1, 5; 48:14, 20; Eze 23:23). When Nabopolassar, a native Chaldean governor, came to the Babylonian throne in 626 bc, he inaugurated a dynasty which made the name of Chaldean famous (Da 1:4; 3:8; 9:1). The prominence of the classes of priests who, at Babylon and other centres, maintained the ancient traditions of astrology and philosophy in the classical Babylonian languages led to the designation *Chaldean* being applied alike to priests, astrologers, and educated persons (Dn. 2:10; 3:8; 4:7; 5:7, 11)(D. J. Wiseman, "[Chaldea, Chaldeans](#)," ed. D. R. W. Wood et al., *New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 180).

⁵ The Hebrew stops here, and the Aramaic begins and goes to Da 7:28..

⁶ Aramaic was the common language of the ancient near east from the 8th century bc.

⁷ "[I]nterpretation, explanation, i.e., what something means; always in reference to dream omens or baffling apparitional revelations" James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Aramaic (Old Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

change.⁸ Therefore tell me the dream, and I shall know that you can show me its interpretation.

10 The Chaldeans answered the king and said,

There is not a man on earth who can meet the king's demand, for no great and powerful king has asked such a thing of any magician, enchanter, or Chaldean.⁹ 11 The thing that the king asks is difficult, and no one can show it to the king except the gods,¹⁰ whose dwelling is not with flesh.

12 Because of this the king was angry and very furious, and he commanded that all the wise men (חֲכָמִים) of Babylon be destroyed (אָבַד). 13 So the decree went out, and the wise men were about to be killed. And they sought Daniel and his companions, to kill them.

Daniel's Prudence

14 Then Daniel replied with prudence (עֲטָה) and discretion (טָעַם) to Arioch, the captain of the king's guard, who had gone out to kill the wise men of Babylon. 15 He declared to Arioch, the king's captain, Why is the decree of the king so urgent? Then Arioch made the matter known to Daniel. 16 And Daniel went in and requested the king to appoint him a time, that he might show the interpretation to the king.¹¹

Mystery Revealed

17 Then Daniel went to his house and made the matter known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah,¹² his companions/comrades/friends (חֲבֵרָה), 18 and told them to seek compassion (רַחֲמִין) from the God of heaven concerning this mystery (זֵר; LXX *mysterion*), so that Daniel and his companions might not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. 19 Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night.¹³

Daniel's Psalm

Then Daniel blessed (בָּרַךְ) the God of heaven. 20 Daniel answered and said:

⁸ Nebuchadnezzar is sick and tired of the gamesmanship of the wise men of Babylon. He wants real truth.

⁹ Nebuchadnezzar's demand is humanly impossible.

¹⁰ The Chaldeans speak truly.

¹¹ There is no record of God having given anyone knowledge of another's dream, without the dreamer telling him about it (Thomas Constable, *Notes on Daniel*, 42).

¹² Note the Hebrew names are used.

¹³ See *Special Revelation*.

Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom (חֵכְמָה) and might (גְּבוּרָה).¹⁴ 21 He changes times and seasons. He removes kings and sets up kings.¹⁵ He gives wisdom (חֵכְמָה) to the wise and knowledge (מַנְדַּע) to those who have understanding (בִּינָה). 22 He reveals (גִּלָּה) deep and hidden things. He knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with him.¹⁶ 23 To you, God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, for you have given me wisdom (חֵכְמָה) and might (גְּבוּרָה), and have now made known to me what we asked of you, for you have made known to us the king's matter.¹⁷

The God Who Reveals Mysteries

24 Therefore Daniel went in to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to destroy the wise men of Babylon. He went and said thus to him, Do not destroy the wise men of Babylon. Bring me in before the king, and I will show the king the interpretation. 25 Then Arioch brought in Daniel before the king in haste and said thus to him, I have found among the sons (בְּרִ) of Judah (יְהוּדָה) a man who will make known to the king the interpretation. 26 The king declared to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, Are you able to make known to me the dream that I have seen and its interpretation? 27 Daniel answered the king and said,

No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery (רִזְ) that the king has asked. 28 But there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the end of days (בְּאַחֲרֵית יוֹמֵיָא).¹⁸ Your dream and the visions of your head as you lay in bed are these. 29 To you, O king, as you lay in bed came thoughts of what would be after this, and he who reveals mysteries made known to you what is to be (מַה־תִּי לְהוֹנָא). 30 But as for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because of any wisdom that I have more than all the living,¹⁹ but in order that the interpretation may be made known to the king, and that you may know the thoughts of your mind.

The Great Image and the Stone

31 You saw, O king, and behold, a great image [of a man].²⁰ This image, mighty and of exceeding brightness, stood before you, and its appearance was frightening. 32 The head of this image was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its middle and thighs of

¹⁴ This first sentence summarises the message of *Daniel*.

¹⁵ See *God's Sovereignty*.

¹⁶ See *God's Omniscience, Knowledge, Understanding, and Wisdom*.

¹⁷ These verses have been called "Daniel's psalm."

¹⁸ This phrase occurs first in Ge 49:1 and always refers to the future. How far depends on the context. **Ge 49:1** 1 Then Jacob called his sons and said, Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you what shall happen to you in days to come.

¹⁹ **Ge 41:16** 16 Joseph answered Pharaoh, It is not in me. God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer.

²⁰ "The world-power is in all its phases one, therefore all these phases are united in the vision of one image" (Kliefoth, quoted by Keil, 102).

bronze, 33 its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay.²¹ 34 As you looked, a stone was cut out [from what?] by no human hand [by a divine hand?],²² and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces.²³ 35 Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces,²⁴ and became like the 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 image became a great²⁵ mountain and filled the whole earth. 36 This was the dream.

The Four Kingdoms of Man

Now we [Daniel and God? Daniel and his friends?] will tell the king its interpretation. 37 You, O king, the king of kings,²⁶ to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, and the might, and the glory, 38 and into whose hand he has given, wherever they dwell, the children of man, the beasts of the field, and the birds of the heavens, making you rule over them all²⁷—you [and your empire] are the head of gold.²⁸ 39 Another kingdom inferior to you shall arise after you [the Medo-Persian empire], and yet a third kingdom of bronze [the Greek empire], which shall rule over all the earth/land (אָרֶץ). 40 And there shall be a fourth kingdom [the Roman empire],²⁹ strong as iron, because iron breaks to pieces and shatters all things. And like iron that crushes, it shall break and crush all these.³⁰ 41 And as you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, it shall be a divided kingdom, but some of the firmness of iron shall be in it, just as you saw iron mixed with the soft clay. 42 And as the toes³¹ of the

²¹ The description of the image starts with the head and proceeds to the toes. The metals decrease in value but increase in strength (the specific gravity of gold is 19, silver 11, brass 8.5, and iron 7.8). The feet of iron and clay imply instability. The image is top-heavy and seems easy to push over.

²² The stone comes from elsewhere. It's cut out by no human hand, a hint of Messiah's virgin conception and God-manness. The messianic kingdom will be a supernatural kingdom. **Jn 18:36** 36 Jesus answered, My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.

²³ The stone strikes the feet, specifically.

²⁴ The striking of the feet results in the entire image being broken.

²⁵ The "great mountain" destroys and replaces the "great image" (v. 31).

²⁶ In the Bible, only Nebuchadnezzar (Eze 26:7), Artaxerxes (Ezr 7:12), and Jesus (1 Ti 6:15; Re 17:14; 19:16) are called "the king of kings."

²⁷ The source of Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom, might, power, glory, and rule over man, beast, and bird is God. **Je 27:6-7** 6 Now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, my servant, and I have given him also the beasts of the field to serve him. 7 All the nations shall serve him and his son and his grandson, until the time of his own land comes. Then many nations and great kings shall make him their slave. The idea of a world empire originated at the tower of Babel, so it is appropriate that Babylon is the head of gold (Thomas Constable, "Notes on Daniel," 51).

²⁸ In what way is Babylonia superior to Persia (silver), Greece (bronze), and Rome (iron)?

²⁹ The Babylonian empire lasted 88 years, the Medo-Persian empire 208 years, and the Greek empire 300 years. Rome's empire lasted from 31 bc to ad 476 (western) and ad 1453 (eastern).

³⁰ The two iron legs may symbolise the western and eastern divisions of the Roman empire.

³¹ The toes are not discussed in detail here. They will be in ch. 7.

feet were partly iron and partly clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly brittle.³² 43 As you saw the iron mixed with soft clay, so they will mix with one another in marriage,³³ but they will not hold together, just as iron does not mix with clay.³⁴

The Kingdom of the Stone

44 And in the days of those [iron/clay] kings³⁵ the God of heaven will set up a kingdom³⁶ that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever,³⁷ 45 just as you saw that a stone³⁸ was cut from a mountain³⁹ by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the

³² Is this a picture of the Romans (iron) and Germans (clay)? Or the Roman empire (iron) and Roman democracy (clay)? The ten-toe stage seems not to have happened yet and is therefore probably future to us. It implies the Roman empire will be some sort of federation rather than a powerful single realm (Thomas Constable, "Notes on Daniel," 59). Probably, the iron represents the Rome of the past. The iron and clay toes represent the Rome of the future, just before Jesus' second coming.

³³ The iron and clay intermarrying suggests the iron is the Romans and the clay is the Germans.

³⁴ Ch. 7 reveals more about Rome in its future ten-toe form.

³⁵ Some believe the Roman empire will be revived. Others believe the Roman empire has never really stopped existing (the image's legs are really, really long). The toes seem to be kings.

³⁶ The mountain is the future messianic kingdom. God's eternal kingdom differs from the future messianic kingdom.

³⁷ **2 Sa 7:16** 16 And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever. No wonder the Jews of Jesus' day were expecting the messiah to come.

³⁸ The stone is Jesus. A Jew living in the Roman empire justifiably would be looking for this stone, a stone from the line of David, to come and destroy the Roman empire and inaugurate the messianic kingdom. **Ge 49:24** 24 ... [Joseph's] arms were made agile by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob (from there is the Shepherd, the *Stone* of Israel)... **Ps 18:2** 2 Yahweh is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. **Ps 118:22** 22 The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. **Is 8:14** 14 And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. **Is 28:16** 16 ... Therefore thus says Lord Yahweh, Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: Whoever believes will not be in haste. **Zec 3:9** 9 For behold, on the stone that I have set before Joshua, on a single stone with seven eyes, I will engrave its inscription, declares Yahweh of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of this land in a single day. **Mt 21:44** 44 And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him. **1 Pe 2:4-8** 4 As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, 5 you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Messiah. 6 For it stands in Scripture: Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame. 7 So the honour is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone, 8 and A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense. They stumble because they disobey the word [by not believing in the stone], as they were destined to do.

³⁹ The stone is cut from a mountain and because a great mountain (v. 35). Cf. Dt 32:18; Ps 18:2; 31:2-3.

gold.⁴⁰ A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this.⁴¹ The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure.⁴²

Daniel Honoured

46 Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face and paid homage to Daniel and commanded that an offering and incense be offered up to him.⁴³ 47 The king answered and said to Daniel, Truly, your⁴⁴ God is God of gods, Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries,⁴⁵ for you have been able to reveal this mystery.⁴⁶ 48 Then the king gave Daniel high honors and many great gifts and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon.⁴⁷ 49 Daniel made a request of the king,⁴⁸ and he appointed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego⁴⁹ over the affairs of the province of Babylon. But Daniel remained at the king's court.⁵⁰

⁴⁰ This prophecy hasn't yet been fulfilled. It was not fulfilled at Jesus' first coming, though it might have been. It will be fulfilled at Jesus' second coming. The messianic kingdom, "the great mountain," isn't here yet. The church is not the great mountain. The messianic kingdom, which it comes, will finally and completely destroy and replace man's kingdom. Everything is heading towards a grand finale. **Ps 2:4-6** 4 He who sits in the heavens laughs. The Lord holds them in derision. 5 Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury saying, 6 As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill. **Re 11:15** 15 Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven saying, The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he shall reign forever and ever. "History will not reach its promised goal by means of the processes that are within it. It will reach its goal by supernatural action from outside earth altogether. The Stone will fall" (John C. Lennox, *Against the Flow*, 118).

⁴¹ God gave Nebuchadnezzar this dream to inform him and all humanity about the latter days, to assert he is in charge of history, to give a panorama of the times of the Gentiles.

⁴² This is an unconditional prophecy, not a conditional one.

⁴³ By ch. 4, Nebuchadnezzar will have learned it is the God of Daniel he is to worship, not Daniel (cf. Ac 10:25-26; 14:11-13).

⁴⁴ God is Daniel's God, but not Nebuchadnezzar's God, at this point.

⁴⁵ We started with a great image, proceeded to a great mountain, and end up with a great God.

⁴⁶ God's ability to reveal mysteries, past, present, and future, is one important way we know he is really God. Nebuchadnezzar is learning about the God of Israel, but he is not a believer yet. He will be by ch. 4.

⁴⁷ What a place of influence! Daniel was a light in a dark place. He brought the biblical worldview into the top echelons of the Babylonian government. **Ps 56:13** 13 For you have delivered my soul from death, yes, my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of life.

⁴⁸ Wise disciple look for other wise disciples to elevate.

⁴⁹ Daniel's discipleship group is intact. Note the use of Babylonian names (cf. v. 17). The three friends likely worked directly under Daniel as he ruled the province of Babylon.

⁵⁰ Just as God established Joseph in Egypt so he could welcome his brothers to Egypt during the seven years of famine, so God established Daniel and his three friends in Babylon so they could welcome many Jews in Babylon during the 70 years of exile (esp. in 597 and 586 bc). Did Daniel oversee construction of the famous hanging gardens?

Overview

1. This chapter is all about the times of the Gentiles (Lk 21:24).
2. In v. 1, Daniel begins using Aramaic, the common language of the world in which he lives.
3. Chapters 2-7 have a chiastic structure:
 - a. Prophecy of image concerning four Gentile empires and their end (ch. 2).
 - b. Persecution and supernatural deliverance of Daniel's friends (ch. 3).
 - c. God's revelation to the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar (ch. 4).
 - d. God's revelation to the Babylonian king Belshazzar (ch. 5).
 - e. Persecution and supernatural deliverance of Daniel (ch. 6).
 - f. Prophecy of animals concerning four Gentile empires and their end (ch. 7).
 - g. "Chapters 2 and 7 explain the succession of four gentile empires that would exert control over Jerusalem and the Jews until God's kingdom is established. Chapters 3 and 6 warned the Jews of the persecution they would face during this period and exhorted them to remain faithful to God. Chapters 4 and 5 encouraged the Jewish remnant by reminding them that a time would come when even the gentile rulers would acknowledge that the God of Israel rules over the nations."⁵¹
4. This chapter presents the broadest sweep of world history God gave any prophet. It is the big picture, "the alphabet of prophecy." It is a simple yet comprehensive framework of future events. It is world history in outline with special reference to Israel. It is crucial to the interpretation of biblical prophecy.
5. Nebuchadnezzar is chosen to receive this dream because he is the head of gold who ended the Israelite theocracy and began the times of the Gentiles.
 - a. "The world-power must itself learn in its first representative, who had put an end to the kingdom of God [the Israelite theocracy], what its own final destiny would be, that, in its turn overthrown, it would be for ever subject to the kingdom of God."⁵²

Application

1. Promises to claim:
 - a. A stone will strike the image and become a great mountain (v. 35).
 - b. God will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed (v. 44).
2. Examples to follow:
 - a. Reply with prudence and discretion (v. 14).
 - b. Seek mercy from God concerning mysteries (v. 18)
 - c. Bless the name of God forever (v. 20).

⁵¹ Dyer, 704.

⁵² Auberlen, quoted by Keil, 85.

3. Knowledge of God to reflect on:
 - a. God gives wisdom to the wise (v. 21).
 - b. God's the revealer of mysteries (vv. 22, 28-29, 47).
 - c. God is God of gods and Lord of kings (v. 47).

*Above All*⁵³
Sophia Coleman

Blessed be the name of God forever and ever,
To whom belongs wisdom and might.
He changes times and seasons,
He gives wisdom to the wise.

Above all,
Above all.

He removes kings and sets up kings.
He gives knowledge to those who have understanding.
He reveals deep and hidden things,
He knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with him.

Above all,
Above all.

Ozymandias
Percy Bysshe Shelley

I met a traveller from an antique land,
Who said—"Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. . . .Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed;
And on the pedestal, these words appear:
My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;
Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away."

"Judgment in history falls heaviest on those who come to think themselves gods, who fly in the face of Providence and history, who put their trust in man-made systems and worship the work of their own hands, and who say that the strength of their own right arm gave them the victory."⁵⁴

⁵³ Based on Daniel 2:20-23.

⁵⁴ Herbert Butterfield, *Christianity and History* (1957), 82.