

Daniel 2



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Daniel 2.*

Memory Text: “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*).

A young man, struggling with questions about God, confronted a Christian and said, “I’ll give you an hour to prove to me that God exists!” The Christian, without hesitation, took him through Daniel 2. When he was finished, the young man confessed, “Now I know there is a God in heaven!”

Those who know Daniel 2 can understand what happened. Here was this book, written in the sixth century B.C., laying out the history of the world from Daniel’s time through ours, and even beyond. It’s hard to see how any rational person, after studying Daniel 2, could come away unimpressed by the prophecy and the God who has revealed Himself in it. In fact, so powerful is Daniel 2 (as well as other parts of the book) as a witness for the Christian faith that, in early centuries of the church, opponents already argued that Daniel was written in the middle of the second century B.C., after the events it talked about, a view still held by many today. This theory, though, is not only unsubstantiated but doesn’t explain how the chapter could predict events long centuries beyond the supposed second-century B.C. date of its composition.

This week we’ll look at this fascinating prophecy, which helps form the foundation for our study this quarter on the judgment and the gospel.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 15.*

The Big Picture

Read Daniel 2:1-25 and then answer the following questions:

1 Why did the king's servants want him to tell them the dream?

2 What were the only two possible fates all the wise men of Babylon faced with the king's decree?

3 How did Daniel's actions reveal the utter helplessness of his situation from a human standpoint alone?

4 Why was Daniel so confident (*vs. 24*) that he could reveal to the king this secret?

Daniel's prayer of thanksgiving in many ways reveals the main message of the whole book: Despite outward appearances, the Lord is Sovereign, even to the point of removing or setting up kings. Though we, with our limited view of things (*1 Cor. 13:12*), may feel overwhelmed by events, we can have the assurance that God is ultimately in control.

Even more important, what this first section of the chapter shows is that not only is God in control of the big picture, He's close to us as individuals. Look at how He came to Daniel in a "night vision" and revealed to him what he needed to know. Talk about intimate contact! Though Daniel was only a foreign captive in a massive world empire, the Lord of all the earth (*Josh. 3:11*), the Creator of the heavens and the earth (*Gen. 1:1*), the One who holds the stars in their paths (*Job 38:31*), manifested His power and His care to this simple Hebrew lad.

And, lest we forget—this is the same God whom we worship and serve today.

When was the last time you were in a "hopeless" situation? In what way did the Lord manifest His power and care to you at that time? If willing, share your answer with the class.

Secret Revealed

Read Daniel 2:26-45 and write out a summary of the dream and the interpretation. To the best of your knowledge, what are the four earthly kingdoms represented here?

1

2

3

4

Here's Daniel, six centuries before the birth of Christ, laying out the history of the world. The head of gold, of course, is named as Babylon (*vs. 38*). The next kingdom, the one depicted by the breast and arms of silver (*vss. 32, 39*), was the Medo-Persian Empire. The next one, symbolized by the belly and thighs of brass (*vss. 32, 39*), was Greece; and the fourth kingdom, symbolized by the iron in the legs (*vss. 33, 40*), was the Roman Empire, which eventually led into the nations of modern Europe, symbolized by the feet, part of iron and part of clay (*vss. 33, 41-43*).

This is not some Adventist scenario: Jewish and Christian Bible students for many centuries have long interpreted Daniel 2 in this manner.

How does the prophecy end? What kingdom is ultimately established? And what does that answer reveal about the whole range and sweep of this chapter?

Daniel 2 unfolds a sweeping panorama of history, an unbroken succession of world powers beginning more than five centuries before Christ and ending sometime in the future, when God's eternal kingdom will be established after Christ's return. Thus, Daniel 2 takes us to the end of the world as we now know it. Those who limit it and its prophecies to events prior even to the first advent of Christ are severely misinterpreting a foundational teaching of the chapter, not to mention (as we'll see) the entire book. Daniel, without question, is a book that unfolds events right up to the second coming of Christ, and beyond. It truly is, as it says in other places, dealing with the time of "the end" (*Dan. 8:17, 19; 12:4, 9, 13*).

The Roman Empire

When you read Daniel 2, you'll notice something:

What metal was used for Babylon? _____ What metal was used for Media-Persia? _____ What metal was used for Greece? _____ What metal was used for Rome? _____

Babylon is compared to a metal, Media-Persia is compared to a metal, and Greece is compared to a metal. In contrast, in verses 33, 34 the iron that comes up after Greece (representing Rome) stays there until the stone cut out “without hands” (*vs. 34*) destroys everything. The iron that arises after Greece remains until the end, though in the feet it becomes mixed with clay. In the interpretation of that part of the vision, the metal representing the fourth power, iron, remains until the end, as well, though it's depicted as mixed with miry clay (*vss. 40-44*). The point is unmistakable: The fourth power arises after Greece and remains until the end, even though it is manifested in a different form. In Daniel, the fourth power, the power rising after Greece, stays the same power (for it's iron all the way through, unlike the previous powers whose metal disappeared when a whole new empire arose), though at some point it changed form. Thus, it's Rome from the time of Greece until the end of the world. Amazingly enough, Rome still exists today as a worldwide power, though its form is radically different from when it first arose after Greece.

Many centuries ago, one of England's greatest political thinkers wrote: “If a man considers the origin of this great ecclesiastical dominion, he will easily perceive that the papacy is no other than the ghost of the deceased Roman empire, sitting crowned on the grave thereof.”— Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*. How does that quote help us understand what Daniel 2 teaches about the Roman Empire?

Think for a few moments about how amazing this prophecy is, how so many centuries ago such an accurate prediction could be made. How should this give you more confidence to trust in the Bible and the promises made in it to us?

Multiple Fulfillment?

In Daniel 2, five kingdoms are depicted, though the chapter itself specifically identifies only two: the first, Babylon (*vss. 37, 38*), and the last, God's kingdom (*vs. 44*). However, as we'll see in greater detail later, Daniel 7 and Daniel 8 cover much of the same ground, only from different perspectives. Also, in those two chapters, two more of the five kingdoms are named.

Read Daniel 8:20, 21. What two kingdoms, already discussed in yesterday's study, are specifically named?

If we were to chart the kingdoms depicted, *and specifically named*, in Daniel, the outline would look like this:

Babylon (*Dan. 2:37, 38*)
 Media-Persia (*Dan. 8:20*)
 Greece (*Dan. 8:21*)
 Fourth kingdom
 God's eternal kingdom (*Dan. 2:44*)

Read Daniel's own interpretation of the vision (*Dan. 2:37-45*). Do you see anything there indicating that these prophecies can have different meanings in different times? Defend your answer.

Though the fourth kingdom is not named, only one power can possibly fit (more on this later). However, of the five kingdoms depicted, four are named. The prophecy says absolutely nothing about their having multiple fulfillment; that is, the kingdoms symbolizing one thing in one era, another thing in another. Considering what's named—massive empires immovably and immutably rooted in world history itself—the idea that we can somehow give these specific prophecies here in Daniel different fulfillment in different eras certainly doesn't arise from anything in the texts themselves. In short, there is absolutely no justification for the idea that this prophecy is open to different fulfillment in different times in history.

We live in a world in which things are, inherently, unstable. The ground, in an instant, can crumble beneath our feet. The past, though, is unchangeable, immovable. Look at how solid a foundation God has given us with this prophecy. How can you use what's been depicted here to strengthen your own faith?

Antiquity to Eternity

One point should, by now, be very clear regarding our study of Daniel 2, and that is—it is, in many ways, a historical study. Though some of the prophecy leads into our time and beyond, its foundation is based *in history*.

Read again Daniel 2:37-45. Summarize, on just two lines, the basic message of this text.

This prophecy begins in antiquity and follows a continuous sweep of world history that extends unto “the time of the end” (*Dan. 12:9*); that is, beyond us and into the future world of God’s eternal kingdom.

More than anything else, these verses reveal, too, the method for how we should interpret the prophecies in Daniel. Daniel 2:37-44, by interpreting the dream, contains the key to understanding the prophecies, because *the texts themselves interpret the prophecies*. This proves that the historicist approach to interpretation (of which Adventists remain almost alone in still adhering to) is what the text demands. The historicist approach teaches what Daniel 2 teaches, that these prophecies follow the sweep of human history from antiquity to eternity and that they are not focused solely on events in the far past or solely on events in the future but cover the scope of world history from the past into the future. Thus, in the first prophetic section of Daniel, we are given the key to understanding its prophecies.

Read Daniel 2:34, 35 and its interpretation in verses 44, 45. What do they tell us about the nature of this last kingdom in contrast to the fate of all the kingdoms before it? What do we find in these texts that proves this kingdom has not yet been established?

As we can see, Daniel was correct about all the kingdoms he predicted would rise and fall. His predictions about Europe have come true with painful accuracy. How much reason, then, do you have to trust him on the promise of the establishment of God’s final kingdom?

Further Study: “Some will take the truth applicable to their time, and place it in the future. Events in the train of prophecy that had their fulfillment away in the past are made future, and thus by these theories the faith of some is undermined.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, vol. 2, p. 102.

As we’ve seen this week, Daniel 2 presents a powerful case for our trust in the inspiration of the Word. How someone six centuries before Christ could have outlined world history as accurately as he did is something that defies a purely natural explanation. That point is so obvious, in fact, that some people have claimed that the prophecy is *vaticinium ex eventu* (prophecy after the event), that the book of Daniel was written in the second century before Christ and that it was about only past events, events prior to it being written.

This view falls apart on a number of counts.

First of all, Christ’s words in Matthew 24:15 prove that Jesus believed some of Daniel’s prophecies were yet future.

Second, even if one were to reject Daniel’s own words about when he lived (*Dan. 1:1, 2:1, 7:1, 9:1*) and date the book in the second century before Christ, how does this explain the amazing accuracy with which he predicted not only the world dominion of the Roman Empire (which hadn’t happened yet) but its breakup into what became the nations of modern Europe, which—in its present state—is exactly as Daniel had written? Not bad for a man writing centuries before some of these events unfolded. In short, there is no reason whatsoever that we should accept the second century B.C. date for Daniel, especially when the idea was originated by people who wanted to discredit Christianity to begin with. As Christians, we must take the Word for what it says, as opposed to what humans say instead.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ As a class, talk about your answers to Sunday’s final question.
- ❷ In what ways can the prophecy of Daniel 2 be a powerful witnessing tool, especially for those who are skeptical even about the existence of God?

The Greatest Physician

Elvie Velasco

Felix was too busy enjoying life to think about God. Then he got sick. We helped him get from his mountain home in southern Philippines to the hospital several hours away. After examining him, the doctors told Felix that he had cirrhosis of the liver and probably would die within the month. “Go home,” they urged.

Back home Felix lay on his mat, too weak even to sit up. Every day my student-missionary partner and I visited him and prayed for him. Felix could hear the village children singing songs during morning worship. He heard us tell Bible stories. One day Felix said, “I heard you tell the children that your Jesus healed a man who could not walk. Can your Jesus heal me too?”

We assured Felix that Jesus can heal if it is His will.

“How do I ask God to heal me?” Felix asked. We explained that he must believe that Jesus could heal him and be willing to give his life to God and follow Him.

“But how do I keep the Sabbath?” Felix asked. “I am too weak to attend church or even to sit up,” he said, his voice choked with tears.

We explained that God had set aside the Sabbath as a day to worship, and Felix could worship God on his sick bed by praying and by listening to God’s Word spoken from the church.

“I will do that!” he promised. We prayed with Felix and encouraged him to trust in God.

On Sabbath we were surprised to find Felix sitting in the church long before services started. “How did you get here?” we asked.

“Every day I prayed to Jesus to heal me. I promised to keep His Word and obey His commandments. Today my wife helped me sit up. It was painful, but I made it. Then she helped me stand and slowly walk to church.”

We praised God for healing Felix in body and in soul. Today Felix walks around the village without help, stopping to tell people how his friend Jesus, the greatest Physician, healed him. Felix and his wife will be baptized as soon as a minister can climb the mountain to their village.

Our mission offerings help support Mountain View College and the student-missionary program there that has reached thousands of people in southern Philippines.

Elvie Velasco was a student missionary (SULAD) from Mountain View College, in southern Philippines.