

Daniel 2:24–49 — The Great Image Interpreted (Part 2)

Daniel Before the King; How to Understand Prophecy; W. Kelly on the Spirit and Scripture; Degradation of the Metals; Democracy Not Sanctioned by God; Daniel in the Background; and the Revived Roman Empire in Revelation 17

Scripture Reading: Daniel 2:24–49; Jeremiah 25; Revelation 17:5–8

*“The secret is revealed to me, not by any wisdom that I have more than any living, but to the intent that the interpretation should be made known to the king, and that thou mightest know the thoughts of thy heart.”
(Daniel 2:30)*

“The great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: the dream is certain, and the interpretation of it sure.” (Daniel 2:45)

Daniel Before the King: Keeping Himself in the Background

When Daniel stands before Nebuchadnezzar, two things are conspicuously present. First, he says plainly that the wise men, magicians, scribes, and astrologers cannot do what the king asks — stripping any remaining credibility from the world’s accumulated wisdom. Second, he gives the full credit to God before he says a word about the dream: there is a God in the heavens who revealeth secrets. Verse 30 then makes the same point about himself: the secret was revealed to me not by any wisdom that I have more than anyone else, but that the interpretation should be made known to the king. Daniel keeps himself entirely in the background.

This is a sure sign of moral preparedness to bear testimony for God. The contrast is the man who claims publicly, and repeatedly, to know when the Lord will return, whose name becomes the story rather than the Lord's. Daniel's testimony was to Nebuchadnezzar about God — including the bold point that Nebuchadnezzar's own power had been given to him by the God of the heavens. That required courage: to stand before an absolute ruler who could end your life with a word and say, you would not have any power except that God gave it to you. The Lord Jesus said the same thing to Pilate. The courage was the same in kind.

How to Understand Prophecy: W. Kelly on the Spirit and Scripture

A note from W. Kelly addresses the question of how one arrives at a right understanding of prophecy, given that it has always been a hunting ground for men's ideas. He wrote: What explains prophecy? That which explains all scripture — the Spirit of God alone. History is not the interpreter of prophecy or of any scripture. Learning has its use, but I deny that knowing languages or understanding history gives spiritual intelligence. It is Christ that has to do with spiritual intelligence, not knowledge or learning.

Kelly continued: real entrance into God's mind in scripture supposes that a person watches against self, desires the glory of God, has full confidence in his word, and dependence on the Holy Ghost. The understanding of scripture is not a mere intellectual thing. The mind is only the vessel, not the power. The power is the Holy Ghost acting through the vessel. And there is a great difference in the measure of teaching because there is much difference in the measure of dependence upon God. The Holy Ghost can never give us anything to save us from the necessity of dependence and waiting upon God. The practical conclusion is that even a person of great learning and long acquaintance with the prophetic scriptures will not get far without simple dependence on the Lord for

everything. That is how Daniel understood what he was given: not through the Chaldean curriculum, but through a communion with God that preceded and transcended it.

The Degradation of the Metals: Weakness Going Downward

The image's materials degrade in value and in rigidity from top to bottom. Gold is most valuable; the head of gold is Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar, the only kingdom to receive its authority directly and expressly from God — verse 37 says, the God of the heavens hath given thee the kingdom, the power, and the strength, and the glory. Each succeeding empire inherited what the previous one had, by a kind of succession from failure. Silver is less valuable than gold; bronze less than silver; iron less than bronze; and iron mixed with clay has almost no structural integrity.

Each metal also has a different rigidity. Nebuchadnezzar was an absolute despot: he could change his mind freely, issue decrees and reverse them, do exactly as he pleased with no institutional check on his authority. Medo-Persia introduced the law of the Medes and Persians which altereth not — even the king was bound by his own decrees and could not reverse them. Iron, by the time of Rome, breaks in pieces and subdues everything, yet it can itself be shattered if struck the wrong way. And the iron mixed with clay — strong military force combined with rule by the people — did not cohere.

The Clay and Iron: Democracy Is Not From God

The clay mixed with iron in the feet of the image speaks of a democratic principle introduced into governmental power. Clay represents that which comes from the earth — man in his natural condition. Iron is the strength of military and imperial force. Rome had its conquering generals and its senate. Historians speak approvingly of Rome's introduction of representative government. But it was

precisely this mixing of clay with iron — this democratic principle — that did not cohere and that contributed to the eventual collapse of the Roman Empire.

There is no example anywhere in Scripture of a democracy sanctioned by God. The form of government that God expressly gave and directly endorsed was a single ruler — first Moses, then kings in Israel. Nebuchadnezzar received his authority directly from God as an absolute ruler. The idea that man can govern himself, that the people are the source of governmental authority, is a claim that does not want to acknowledge God as the source of all authority. All of human history is a demonstration of where that leads. The final form of the revived Roman Empire will have this same mixture of iron and clay — concentrated power and popular principle combined — and the Lord Jesus will smite it at its feet.

The Stone Cut Without Hands: Christ's Kingdom

The stone that smites the image was cut without hands — no human agency, no gradual growth of Christendom into the kingdom of God, no political movement. It is a sudden, sovereign, divine act. The stone strikes the image at its feet and the whole image — gold, silver, bronze, iron, and clay — becomes like the chaff of the summer threshing floors, blown away, and no place was found for them. The stone then becomes a great mountain and fills the whole earth. This is the kingdom of Christ, which shall never be destroyed.

Revelation 17:5–8 connects directly to this. The beast that carries the woman called Mystery, Babylon the Great was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss. Right now, it is not: there is no revived Roman Empire. But it will be — hence the term revived. And when it appears, it will have precisely the character of that original Roman Empire: a great political and religious power, material and physical, not hidden or spiritual, openly ruling. The same stone that Daniel prophesied of will deal with it. What Daniel saw as a single striking blow

at the end of time, John in Revelation fills in with considerable detail — the beast and the false prophet, the ten-kingdom confederacy, the religious system riding the political power. The first six chapters of Daniel have to do with the times of the Gentiles broadly; the later chapters bring in God's ways with Israel specifically. Both streams converge at the same ending: the Lord Jesus coming to fill the whole earth.

Nebuchadnezzar ends the chapter by acknowledging that Daniel's God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets. He falls on his face and commands oblations offered to Daniel. He does not yet say: I want this God to be my God. He had received something extraordinary from Daniel's God, but nothing in him yet has submitted to that God. The Lord is not finished with Nebuchadnezzar. There is more to come.

The great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: the dream is certain, and the interpretation of it sure.