

# Daniel Chapter Two

There is no other chapter in the Bible that presents such a concise picture of Gentile government. Nebuchadnezzar's dream reveals the full extent of the 'times of the Gentiles' (Luke 21.24) – a period of Gentile domination over Jerusalem. *It was a period when God, because of their sin, could not be publicly identified with His people (Israel) or His city (Jerusalem).* Such dominion will continue until He shall come, whose 'right it is' to reign (Ezekiel 21.27). Though Judah had come under the yoke of Babylon, the dream reveals that Gentile rule and dominion was not permanent. This was not the end. God will never fully and finally forsake His people or forget Jerusalem; He will keep His covenant and fulfil His promises. *DR Davis: There is a God who knows and orders the course of history down through the rise and rubble of nations until the days when he sets up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed. I can only say that if I didn't believe 2.44, I couldn't find the energy to place one foot in front of another.*

## The Sleepless King [v.1]

**v.1:** The 'second year' of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar equates to the *third* year in Jewish reckoning (603-602BC) as the Babylonians did not officially reckon the accession year (September 605BC to March/April 604BC). Daniel was taken captive in May-June 605BC and so had recently completed his three-year training and entered government service (1.5, 18-20). With the future of his kingdom evidently weighing on his mind (cf. v.29), Nebuchadnezzar 'dreamed dreams' (was in a state of dreaming) suggesting the reoccurrence of the same dream. The dreams of pagan kings were considered especially important as communications from their gods. The dream deeply disturbed the king, causing sleepless nights and his 'spirit' (heart) to be 'troubled' (to *pound* or *strike* as with a hammer).

## The Summons of the Wise Men [vv.2-13]

**v.2:** Nebuchadnezzar summoned the entirety of his wise men, from 'magicians' (scholars and/or fortune tellers) and 'astrologers' (stargazers) to 'sorcerers' (spiritualists) and 'Chaldeans' (leading class of wise men or priests) to 'remove the veil' and 'exhibit' (shew) the dream. **v.4:** The response of the Chaldeans signals a switch to the Aramaic language in the original text. This was the international language used throughout the multilingual Babylonian empire and beyond. The change in language is fitting for a part of the book that deals predominantly with Gentile nations. Ironically, the king would not 'live forever', neither would his kingdom, the very subject of which the dream addresses. The wise men had every confidence they could interpret the dream as they possessed 'dream manuals' which recorded the dreams and subsequent experiences of many individuals. Such records allowed these men to apply their principles of analysis and derive an interpretation. **v.5:** But Nebuchadnezzar was a shrewd operator. Many of these 'wise men' were likely inherited from his father's court and did not have his confidence. This afforded a great opportunity to put them to the test. 'The thing is gone from me' may mean he had forgotten the specifics of the dream but could also be translated 'my decision is firm' (NET). If they could not tell the king his dream, and interpret, they would be dismembered, and their homes reduced to a public rubbish dump. **v.6:** Alternatively, great 'reward' (singular) and 'honour' was guaranteed for the one who could 'shew' the dream. **v.7:** The repetition of the wise men's request suggests Nebuchadnezzar had not forgotten the dream. **v.8:** Their request was just an attempt to gain time that they might collude together to sell the king a lie, hoping the 'time (situation) would change' and the king's anger subside (**v.9**). Nebuchadnezzar was clearly most cynical about the ability of the wise men! **v.10:** In desperation, the Chaldeans betrayed their false religion. There was not a 'man upon the earth' that could reveal such a thing – because truth comes from *heaven*, and they were *earthbound*. The person who can reveal such secrets must be in touch with the God of heaven. **v.11:** This was 'beyond human ability' (rare) and could only be revealed by the 'gods' who do not dwell with men (flesh). The gods of the heathen are far removed and impotent in matters of such difficulty. God had given the dream, and only an omniscient God could reveal it. The demonic empowered *intelligencia* of Babylon were of no help. *DR Davis: By depicting the helplessness of paganism the writer wants to say: 'Don't you see? Paganism is nothing but a religious cul-de-sac. It can give no sure word from outside.'* **v.12:** The admission of failure on the part of the wise men caused Nebuchadnezzar to fly into a violent rage and command the execution of all the wise men of Babylon, including Daniel (**v.13**).

## The Supplication of Daniel and the Secret Revealed [vv.14-23]

**v.14:** Daniel was a man for a crisis. Arioch (mighty lion) was the king's executioner to whom Daniel spoke with 'counsel' (discernment) and 'wisdom' (taste). He had total confidence in God and His sovereign will. **v.15:** Even at such a young age he had gained the respect of the mighty Arioch who took the time to explain the 'hasty' (harsh) commandment of the king. **v.16:** With great courage, Daniel sought an audience with Nebuchadnezzar to ask for 'time', the very thing he would not give the wise men (v.8)! Truly, the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord (Proverbs 21.1). **v.18:** Daniel's gift (cf. 1.17) and confidence in God did not take away the necessity of prayer. Thus, the four friends sought the 'mercies' (tender love and compassion) of God in united prayer. They prayed to the 'God of heaven', a title used primarily in exilic

and post-exilic books. It presents God as creator, outside and apart from created things though in sovereign control of the affairs of earth. It is an obvious contrast to the Babylonians who worshipped the sun, moon and stars. **v.19:** The 'secret' (mystery) of Nebuchadnezzar's dream was revealed to Daniel in a direct vision from God during the night (cf. 7.1; 8.2; 9.2; 10.2). Perhaps he had been praying all night. Such revelation caused Daniel to bow his knees in worship and praise (bless) God. **v.20:** He adores the 'name' (revealed character) of the eternal God, praising His wisdom and power (might). **v.21:** Nebuchadnezzar's dream and its interpretation had revealed God as the one who controls the events of history (times and seasons), both deposing and establishing kings as He will (cf. v.37). He gives 'wisdom' and 'knowledge' to those who seek after Him, i.e. those who are spiritually 'wise' and 'discerning' like Daniel (cf. 12.3). **v.22:** God reveals those things that are inaccessible to man, matters that are beyond his ability to uncover or understand – like the hidden dream of the king. *Light* (in the context of knowledge and wisdom) is the essential character of God (1 John 1.5) and as such He even knows what resides in the 'darkness' of the unregenerate king's mind. **v.23:** With his life at risk, Daniel still finds time to thank the 'God of his fathers' (who had condescended to honour him as He had them) for a collective (note the use of 'we' and 'us') answer to prayer.

#### The Shewing of the Dream [vv.24-35]

**v.24:** Daniel was not so occupied with his own importance so as to forget others. Reflecting the character of his God (Ezekiel 33.11), he compassionately requested the lives of all the wise men that they too might come to an appreciation of the one true God. **v.25:** Arioch immediately brought Daniel before Nebuchadnezzar, claiming credit for having 'found' (implying an exhaustive search) 'a man' who could 'make known' the interpretation of the king's dream. **v.28:** Daniel is quick to elevate his God above the whole pantheon of Babylonian idols. 'There is a God (*Elah*) in heaven!' Though Nebuchadnezzar claimed to be the personal representative of 'Bel' (the patron god of the city of Babylon) and spokesman for the supreme Marduk, Daniel represents the true God of heaven. Daniel was respectfully intimating the worthlessness of pagan religion and worship. What an encouragement to believers today. There is still a God in heaven who has revealed himself in the person of His Son. This God may be called upon to supply strength and wisdom far beyond what is available on earth. This God, in His grace, had revealed the secrets of the 'latter days', obviously a matter which weighed heavy on the king's mind (**v.29**). 'Latter days' is something of a technical term which refers to the closing portion of the time under consideration. For example, Genesis 49.1 refers to the closing stages of the history of the tribes of Israel. Here, 'latter days' refers to the closing period of Gentile rule on earth preceding the millennial reign of Christ (cf. 10.14). **v.30:** No glory attaches to Daniel. He is merely the instrument through which God will act and speak. Nothing has changed in the day and age in which we live (2 Corinthians 4.5)! **v.31:** Nebuchadnezzar had seen a 'great (immense in size) image' in the form of a man. It shone brilliantly before Nebuchadnezzar as if reflecting sunlight with dazzling splendour. Its form was 'terrifying' (awe-inspiring). The image comprised five parts: a *head* of fine gold; *chest* and *arms* of silver; *belly* and *thighs* of bronze (**v.32**); *legs* of iron; and *feet* of part iron, part clay (**v.33**). 'Clay' (*hasap*) refers to clay baked as pottery which would be brittle and offer a bluish tinge to the dark (almost black) of the iron. **v.34:** Finally, Nebuchadnezzar saw a 'stone' cut out of the mountain (v.45) 'without hands', suggestive of divine (not human) activity. The stone smote the image on the feet, breaking them to pieces and consequently destroying the whole image which became as little pieces of worthless chaff blown away by the wind at summer harvest (**v.35**). The stone that smote the image became a great mountain which filled the whole earth.

#### The Significance of the Interpretation [vv.36-45]

**v.36:** In recounting the dream, Daniel had performed the first part of the king's command. Now he gives the interpretation. 'We' is either employed as an editorial plural to denote humility, or to show that Daniel speaks on behalf of God and/or his three friends (cf. v.49). Note. All this time, the king has said nothing. Perhaps his mouth was wide open in astonishment because Daniel was so accurate in his description. The image represents *four* world powers (kingdoms) that God will allow to rule over Jerusalem until He introduces His King (stone) and everlasting kingdom (mountain), 7.13-14. Note. There is a declining *value* but increasing *strength* (possibly representing military might) of metals in the image. This is suggestive of a deteriorating quality of rule, beginning with the absolute monarchy of Nebuchadnezzar (the divine ideal, cf. Psalm 8.5) degenerating to the Roman republic (democracy) and imperial form of government (from 27BC). The sovereign power of each kingdom thus *decreases*, though the extent of the empires *increased*. There may also be a declining recognition of God implied.

#### First Kingdom: Head of Gold [Babylon, 606-539BC]

**v.37:** The head of gold represented Nebuchadnezzar himself as 'a' (not 'the') 'king of kings' (Ezekiel 26.7) – he was the supreme authority in the world of his day, having been given 'power' (riches), 'strength' (authority) and 'glory' (honour) by God Himself (Jeremiah 27.6-8). **v.38:** His dominion was comprehensive, having universal authority over even the physical creation (cf. Genesis 1.26). Gold was a fitting symbol for the kingdom of Babylon. The city of Babylon itself was called 'the golden city' (Isaiah 14.14), and Marduk was called 'the god of gold'. Herodotus, a historian who visited Babylon within 90 years of Nebuchadnezzar's reign was astonished at the amount of gold that even overlaid the walls.

### Second Kingdom: Chest and Arms of Silver [Medo-Persia, 539-331BC]

**v.39:** The second kingdom is Medo-Persia, clearly named elsewhere in scripture (Isaiah 13.17; Jeremiah 51.11, 28; Daniel 7.5; 8.20). The arms of silver represent the two nations of Media and Persia that together conquered Babylon (5.31). The kingdom was 'inferior' (lit. 'earthward') to Nebuchadnezzar as the absolute authority of the king was restricted by the law of the Medes and Persians which could not be annulled once effected (6.8, 12). Medo-Persia had a decentralised administration and widespread local autonomy in the hands of 127 princes (satraps). Each satrap had nearly unlimited authority over their province (Daniel 6.1; Esther 1.1). Again, 'silver' is most fitting for an empire that developed a vast system of taxation which must be paid in silver coinage. It became known as the 'silver empire'.

### Third Kingdom: Belly and Thighs of Bronze [Greece, 331-146BC]

The third kingdom of 'brass' represents the Greek empire (8.20-21). The Persian controlled Babylon surrendered to Alexander the Great in 331BC, whose conquests extended the empire from Europe in the west to India in the east – truly a kingdom which 'bear rule over all the earth'. *Tatford: His conquests were so extensive that he commanded that he should be called 'king to all the world' and petulantly wept that there were no worlds left to conquer.* Greece includes the thighs because, on his death, Alexander's kingdom was divided between his four generals (8.22). The two most significant parts of the divided kingdom were the *eastern* Seleucid empire (Syria) and *western* Ptolemaic empire (Egypt). Geographically, the kingdom embraced two continents. Brass became a symbol of the Greek empire and its conquests, a Greek soldier having a helmet, breastplate, shield and sword all made of brass. Alexander ruled by conquest (military rule) and was strongly influenced by his generals (and army).

### Fourth Kingdom: Legs of Iron [Rome, 146BC-32AD]

**v.40:** Though the Roman empire is not expressly named in scripture, it was the world empire that succeeded Greece and ruled at the time of the Lord Jesus (Luke 2.1; 3.1). 'Strong as iron' is an apt description of an empire that lasted over 500 years displaying implacability and durability. Roman armies were synonymous with iron shields, swords and helmets and their ability to 'break in pieces' (i.e. crush all resistance) with an iron heel. *Jim Allen: It takes but a little imagination to hear, in this statement, the tramp, tramp, tramp of the iron-clad legions of Rome, swinging along the straight Roman highways of the empire.* After the demise of the democratic republic (27BC), the empire was largely characterised by imperial rule. Rome continued to embrace the west-east geographical split within its empire, hence the two legs. *Walvoord: The Roman Empire continued this twofold division (of the Grecian empire) and extended its sway over the entire Mediterranean area as well as western Asia. Though Daniel does not deal with the interadvent age as such, it still is true that at the time of the first advent of Christ Rome already was geographically spread over the East and the West.*

### Feet of Iron and Clay [Kingdom of Antichrist]

**v.41:** Note. OT prophecy does not concern or envisage the church, and thus the parenthesis of the present day of grace is not portrayed in the image. The prophetic clock stopped with the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus which was during the dominion of the Roman empire (9.26). The clock will not tick again until the signing of a peace treaty between the Man of Sin and the nation of Israel. This signals the beginning of Daniel's seventieth week (9.27). The conditions that therefore prevailed when the parenthetic period began will be present at the time of its conclusion (Jim Baker).

In the tribulation, a final kingdom will therefore arise which is Roman in character. The 'feet and toes' suggest this world empire will comprise a coalition of ten nations (perhaps five from the west and five from the east) who give allegiance to the Man of Sin (cf. Daniel 7.7, 24; Revelation 13.1; 17.12). The kingdom will be 'divided' in the sense that the materials of the feet are 'part' iron (strong) and 'part' clay (brittle). **v.42:** This suggests an inherent weakness, perhaps due in part to the coalition between several nations, some of which may be strong militarily, politically or economically, and others weak. Or, the clay could indicate democracy, i.e. the rule of the people, something that characterised the Roman republic before the rise of imperialism. Jim Allen suggests that the clay represents Islam, and thus the final kingdom is comprised of a number of nations that are built on multicultural societies (one of which is Islam) which are so fundamentally different that they cannot mix. Whatever the reason, the final form of the kingdom will be prevented from having real unity. **v.43:** This coalition will therefore be a mixing of peoples ('seed of men') which will not 'cleave' (adhere or unite) to one another.

**v.44:** 'In the days of these kings', i.e. those kings represented by the ten toes of the image, the God of Heaven will establish a kingdom of divine origin. This kingdom is **protected** – it shall never be 'destroyed' or overthrown, and thus conquered by another people. This kingdom is **powerful** – it will 'break in pieces' (crush) and 'consume' (bring to an end) all other kingdoms before it. This kingdom is **permanent** – it will stand forever. **v.45:** The great and mighty ruler (stone) of this kingdom (mountain) is none other than the Lord Jesus (Genesis 49.24; Psalm 118.22; Isaiah 8.14; 28.16; Acts 4.11; 1 Peter 2.4, 6). In a final word, Daniel assures Nebuchadnezzar that the dream and its interpretation has come from the 'great God' and thus is 'certain' to be fulfilled and 'sure' (trustworthy).

The Sovereign's Worship and Reward [vv.46-49]

**v.46:** Nebuchadnezzar 'fell upon his face' and 'worshipped' Daniel commanding an oblation (bloodless sacrifice) and 'sweet odours' (incense) to be offered. Clearly the king was not worshipping Daniel himself, but the 'God of gods' and 'Lord of kings' that he represented (**v.47**). **v.48:** Daniel was subsequently promoted to high office, being made administrative 'ruler' over the province of Babylon and an advisory 'chief officer' over all the wise men. **v.49:** Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were also given administrative roles in the province of Babylon, possibly working at the direction of Daniel as he sat in the 'gate of the king', i.e. served in constant attendance upon the king in the royal court itself. God in His grace was placing men in high authority who would be sympathetic to the needs of the many exiles who would soon be brought from Jerusalem.

Figure 1: From J Allen (2013), Daniel Reconsidered, Scripture Teaching Library (slightly adapted)

## IMAGE OF NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DREAM

606 BC Daniel 2:31-33 Date 603 BC

