

Daniel 2:31-45 (Part II)

Introduction

We know that in some areas, Christians interpret the Bible differently. This is especially the case with respect to the “end times” and therefore this is especially the case with respect to the book of Daniel. While there are many different interpretations of Daniel, there’s a sense in which we could divide all interpretations of Daniel into just two “simple” categories. If you want to give these two categories names, they would be the reformed or covenantal category and the dispensational category. If those names don’t mean anything to you right now, that’s fine. Maybe they’ll mean a little more to you in a moment.

I didn’t anticipate talking about this at all during our series on Daniel. I started this week studying and preparing for Daniel three, but when I began writing the introduction, I felt I needed to go in a different direction. My desire is to preach positively the meaning of the text as I understand it without getting bogged down in all the differences that sincere Christians have. But I think it would be good for you to know where I’m coming from and also where I’m *not* coming from – and *why*. I’ve been praying that this will give you a greater insight into the book of Daniel and a fuller and richer understanding of the meaning of Daniel.

Review

Last week we learned about Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. He dreamed of a great and mighty image of exceeding brightness and frightening appearance. This great and mighty image was composed of four metals (gold, silver, bronze, and iron). Each of these metals represents four successive kingdoms or world empires (Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome), but taken all together these “four” kingdoms represent the whole kingdom of fallen man. There’s a sense in which this kingdom of man is “great” and “mighty” and even has a certain terrifying glory. But for all this power and glory the image that Nebuchadnezzar saw was fundamentally compromised – the feet were made of iron mixed with clay. All the great world empires seek to unite as one all the peoples of the world under their rule, but they’re no more successful in this attempt than the attempt to mix clay with iron. The kingdom of man as a kingdom is *always* fundamentally compromised because it’s never truly one.

In Nebuchadnezzar’s dream he saw a stone cut out from a mountain by no human hand. This stone struck the image on its feet of iron and clay and broke in pieces the entire image – “the iron, *the bronze, the clay*, the silver, and the gold” (v. 45). These four metals (and the clay) “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” (v. 35). The kingdom of man is always ready to fall because of its fundamental weakness (Babylon fell to the Medes and Persians, the Medo-Persian empire fell to the Greeks, and the Greek empire fell to the Romans), and yet in the end the whole kingdom of man finally falls not because of its own weakness but because of the power of the stone to shatter and break in pieces and then even turn those pieces to chaff that blows away on the wind. In Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, it’s this stone that then grows into a great mountain and fills the whole earth. Daniel explains:

- Daniel 2:44 — In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people [who come after]. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms [Babylon, Greece, Medo-Persia, Rome] and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever.

This kingdom that fills the whole earth will truly unite as one a “people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation” and so it will never be left to “another people” and it will never be destroyed.

The “Problem”

If the fourth kingdom in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream is the kingdom of Rome, then we can see how it was in the days of the Roman Empire that the God of heaven began setting up that kingdom which shall never be destroyed when He sent His only Son, Jesus, into this world. Jesus *is* the stone that crushes all that it falls on and that causes all those who fall on it to be broken to pieces (Mat. 21:42-44). And yet two thousand years later, we see that the kingdom of man is still here – still existing right alongside of the kingdom of God. What are we to make of this?

Proposed Solution – A “prophetic gap” (Dispensational)

There are some brothers and sisters who would suggest that we’ve already gone astray in our interpretation. They would suggest that the stone has “*not yet*” struck the image and that there is no sense at all in which the kingdom prophesied by Daniel is “already” here. In other words, when it comes to that kingdom prophesied in the Old Testament (and specifically here in Daniel chapter two), everything is still “not yet”; there is no “already.” So these brothers and sisters speak of two *different* kingdoms. Yes, there is a “spiritual” and “heavenly” kingdom *now* that Christ is building through His church. But this kingdom that Daniel was speaking of is a fundamentally different “kingdom” that’s still entirely future – without any “already.” As opposed to the more “spiritual” and “heavenly” kingdom that’s centered in the church, this future kingdom is more “physical” and “earthly” and centered in the nation of Israel.

Do you see how with the introduction of two different kingdoms, there’s no longer any *tension* between an “already” and a “not yet” (see chart on p. 10)? When people today speak of the “already” and the “not yet” they’re referring to the “already” and the “not yet” of the kingdom prophesied in the Old Testament. But now we see that this tension has just completely gone away. When we do this – when we deny any sense in which that kingdom prophesied in the Old Testament is “already” here) what we’re forced to do is insert a “gap” into Daniel’s prophecy. Let me try to explain. These brothers and sisters believe that the kingdom that God sets up will follow immediately after the fourth kingdom in Daniel’s vision – after all, the stone strikes the feet (the Roman Empire; see chart on p. 10). And yet Rome has already fallen and according to this view the kingdom of God has “not yet” been set up – it’s still entirely future. So what does this require us to do? It requires us to insert in Daniel—and all throughout the Old Testament—what’s called a “prophetic gap.” In other words, the “kingdom” that we’re part of today is not the kingdom prophesied in the Old Testament, but a different “kingdom” never

foretold by the Old Testament prophets. Therefore, what we're living in now is this "prophetic gap" in which—when it comes to the kingdom prophesied in the Old Testament—*nothing is "already"* and everything is still "not yet." Are you feeling the weight of this? So when the prophesied kingdom does finally come, how can it be said to replace the Roman empire if the Roman empire has already fallen long ago? Now that we've inserted this prophetic gap, we must also assume that at the end of this "gap" the Roman Empire will be "revived" so that it will actually be this revived Roman Empire that's ruling the world when Christ returns (see chart on p. 11). It's in connection with this Dispensational "gap" view that we then have a lot of speculations about the two legs of iron representing the division of the Roman empire into east and west and the ten toes of iron mixed with clay representing a confederation of ten nations that grows out of the territory once covered by the Roman Empire (Steinmann). It's "in the days of *those [future ten] kings*" (cf. 2:44), say these brothers and sisters, that God will set up His kingdom and therefore there is no "already" for this prophesied kingdom of God, but *only* "not yet." One common result of this is that there can be a lot of speculations about the European union and the end times and the war in Iraq and the end times and the "deep state" and the end times and every modern geo-political event and the end-times, and y2k and the end times, and also every manner of "conspiracy theory" and the end times. Basically what the Dispensational "gap" theory often results in is attempts to explain current events and how they're all working and aligning together for that "revived Roman Empire" (prophecy conferences; interpreting the "signs of the times"; the surprise treaty between Germany and the USSR in 1939 was viewed by many dispensationalists as the beginning of the fulfillment of the Bible's supposed prophecy about a treaty between Gog and Magog).

Connected very intimately with this "gap" view or this "two-kingdom" view is the belief in a rapture of the church that's separate from Christ's visible, second coming in glory (a "secret" rapture). Before the prophesied second kingdom can come, the first kingdom must be gotten out of the way. The "secret" early rapture is not ultimately rooted in any passage of Scripture, but in this Dispensational system. Also intimately woven together with this "prophetic gap" view is the belief that in this prophesied kingdom that's still entirely "not yet" God will be *pleased* with a rebuilt physical temple, and also *pleased* to be worshiped once again with animal blood sacrifices.

I believe there are fatal flaws in this view – flaws that worked out consistently are ultimately fatal to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is not an attack on my brothers and sisters in Christ, but it is a wholehearted rejection of these particular views and it's also a strong, earnest warning against these particular views.

Focusing just on our passage in Daniel, we see that Daniel never mentions "two" legs (representing the division of Rome into east and west) any more than he mentions "two" thighs or "two" arms (2:32-33). Also, while we may assume there are ten toes (just like we may assume there are ten fingers), Daniel never mentions "ten" toes. If there was significance in the number of toes, Daniel would have mentioned that number. This is what I mean by "divination." I'm not trying to be unkind, but I do believe that we can be guilty of a certain form of "Christian divination." What often happens is we go beyond the text, adding our own uninspired

interpretations to the inspired interpretations that have already been given to us in the book of Daniel.

Not only does Daniel never mention two legs or ten toes, but most importantly he leaves no room for inserting any prophetic “gap.” The image in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream is a single, indivisible whole. Daniel is careful to say that the stone cut out from the mountain by no human hand strikes the image “in the days of those kings” (the kings of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome) and that it will break in pieces “all these kingdoms... the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold.” Not only is there no prophetic gap in the text, but the text rules out even the possibility of such a gap.

When we come to the New Testament we see that the New Testament writers all rejoiced to see that they themselves were living in the “last days” of eschatological fulfillment – even then. They taught and they preached constantly that we are living in the days of fulfillment in so far as the kingdom prophesied in Daniel chapter two, and in all the rest of the Old Testament prophets, has “*already*” come (we’ll see some examples of this in a moment).

The “Problem” (take 2)

But now we’re back to where we started. If, contrary to the Dispensational “gap” theory, the stone has “already” struck the feet of the image and if God has “already” set up His kingdom that shall never be destroyed, then why is the kingdom of man still here? Why has it not yet become chaff and blown away on the wind so that not a trace of it can be found?

Proposed Solution – An “already” / “not yet” tension (Reformed/Covenantal)

While the Old Testament does rule out a prophetic gap (as does the New Testament), what the Old Testament does not rule out is the “already” / “not yet” *tension* that’s taught so clearly in the New Testament. There is only *one* kingdom-of-God/kingdom-of-heaven/messianic-kingdom. And that kingdom is *both* “already” here *and at the same* time that kingdom is “not yet” here (see chart on p. 11). This is the mystery that was hidden in the Old Testament. When Jesus gave His parables of the “kingdom” in Matthew 13, the kingdom He “assumed” and that all His hearers “assumed” was the kingdom prophesied in Daniel and Isaiah and the Psalms, etc. Jesus said to His disciples, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven” (Mat. 13:11) – the previously unrevealed mysteries of that kingdom that will never be destroyed or be left to another people. And what are these mysteries?

- Matthew 13:31–32 — The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.

Today we understand that just like a mustard seed growing gradually into a tree, so also the stone’s growth into a mountain that fills the whole earth takes place gradually over a period of at

least 2000 years. This was a previously unrevealed mystery. When asked to explain another parable of the wheat and tares, Jesus answered:

- Matthew 13:37–43 — The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

Today, we understand that while in one sense the stone has already struck the image, yet the final fall of “the four kingdoms” of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome still awaits the second coming of Christ. In the meantime, just like the tares growing in the same field with the wheat so also the kingdom of man continues to exist alongside of—and even in the midst of—the kingdom of God. This also was a previously unrevealed mystery. And what both of these mysteries have in common is that wonderful tension between the “already” (the *gradual growth* of the seed and the *mixture* of the tares and the wheat) and the “not yet” (the full-grown tree and the tares finally separated out from the wheat).

Maybe now you can see that whenever we use the language “already” and “not yet” what we’re saying “*negatively*” is that there is no prophetic gap, there are not two different kingdoms of God, there will not be any revived Roman Empire, there will be no secret rapture separate from Christ’s public coming in power and glory, and there will be no physically rebuilt temple where God is pleased to be worshiped again with animal blood sacrifices. All of this is what’s assumed in the biblical teaching on the “already” and the “not yet.” All of this is what we mean whenever we speak of the “already” and the “not yet.” Let’s just take two examples (out of many) of prophecies in the Old Testament and their fulfillment “already” in the New Testament.

- Amos 9:11–15 — “**In that day** I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old, **that [Israel, My covenant people] may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name [mystery!]**,” declares the LORD who does this. “**Behold, the days are coming,**” declares the LORD, “when the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant them on their land, and they shall never again be uprooted out of the land that I have given them,” says the LORD your God.

There’s a very real sense in which this Messianic kingdom is still “not yet.” And yet there’s also a very real sense in which this same kingdom is “already” here. We read in Acts chapter fifteen:

- Acts 15:13–18 — After they finished speaking, James replied, “Brothers, listen to me. Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name. And *with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written*, ‘After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, **that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord**, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things known from of old.’”

According to James, the “tent of David” and the ruins of Jerusalem have “already” been rebuilt. If this weren’t so, then God would not yet be taking from the Gentiles a people for his name. According to James, Israel even now possesses the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by God’s name. Think about it this way. If the kingdom tension between the “already” and the “not yet” was a mystery in the Old Testament, then so also was the uniting of Jews and Gentiles in one body by the Spirit. So when the Old Testament prophesies this mystery, it uses language like “possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name.” But when Christ comes, *in whom* we find the fulfillment of all prophesy, we see that Israel’s *possession* of the “remnant of Edom” is fulfilled when the “remnant of mankind” *seeks the Lord by faith and is granted membership with believing Jews in the church as one body*. The church is the *visible* expression “already” of the prophesied kingdom of God. James, the Apostle, allows no room for a “prophetic gap” to be inserted into Amos chapter 9 (or Daniel 2 or anywhere else in the Old Testament), but he does leave room for that wonderful tension between the “already” and the “not yet.” We read a similar prophesy in Isaiah chapter fifty-four:

- Isaiah 54:1–3 — “Sing, O barren one, who did not bear; break forth into singing and cry aloud, you who have not been in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her who is married,” says the LORD. “Enlarge the place of your tent, and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out; do not hold back; lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes. For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left, and your offspring will possess the nations and will people the desolate cities.”

There’s a very real sense in which all of this is still “not yet.” And yet there’s also a very real sense in which all of this is “already.” We read in Galatians chapter four:

- Galatians 4:26–27 — The Jerusalem above is free, and she is *our* mother. *For it is written*, “Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband.”

According to Paul, Israel’s children are “already” more than those of the one who has a husband. According to Paul, Israel is “already” enlarging the place of her tent and letting the curtains of her habitations be stretched out. Israel is “already” spreading abroad to the right and to the left – already possessing the nations and peopling the desolate cities. Paul can say this because he sees now that all prophesy must be understood today in the light of its fulfillment *in Christ* – in the light of the Jerusalem above that is “already” here and also “not yet” come down out of heaven from God (Rev. 21). The apostle Paul allows no room for a “prophetic gap” to be inserted into Isaiah chapter 54 (or Daniel 2 or anywhere else in the Old Testament), but he does leave room

for that wonderful tension between the “already” that we enjoy today and the “not yet” that we’re still looking for with hope.

Brothers and sisters, the pervasive, emphatic, and clear testimony of the New Testament writers is that the kingdom prophesied to Israel is already here – we are living now—today—in the last days of eschatological fulfillment. The Apostle Paul preached this message to his fellow Jews who were looking for the promised kingdom:

- Acts 13:32–33 (Lk. 1:69-73) — We bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers [the Messiah’s kingdom], **this he has fulfilled to us their children** by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm, ‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you.’”

I would suggest to you that when we hold to the dispensational two-kingdom “prophetic gap” theory, it’s impossible to fully rejoice in these words. It’s impossible to embrace the wisdom and the joy of that tension between the “already” and the “not yet.” As I mentioned earlier, my deep concern with the “prophetic gap” theory is that it’s often accompanied by a certain form of “Christian divination.” It also often leads to an unhealthy—and sometimes debilitating—preoccupation with all manner of “conspiracy theories” (whether grounded in some reality or not). Seeing no “already” very often leads to an unhealthy obsession with the “end times” and a pessimism regarding the future of Christ’s church in this age. But most of all, I would suggest that this theory fails the test of that which truly edifies and builds up the church in its most holy faith. It fails to keep the true Gospel of Jesus Christ at the center of our eschatology (of our doctrine of the “last things”). In preaching through the book of Daniel, then, I will be preaching from the perspective of one who has wholeheartedly rejected the “prophetic gap” and wholeheartedly embraced with joy the “already” and the “not yet.”

Conclusion

Maybe now we can come back to last week’s conclusion and appreciate even more the teaching of these Scriptures. Remember what the angel said to Mary:

- Luke 1:31–33 — Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, **and of his kingdom there will be no end.**”

Remember the message that Jesus preached:

- Matthew 4:17 (cf. 12:28) — “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven *is* at hand.”

Jesus did not rescind this “offer” after the unbelieving Israel rejected Him. This was not an offer (you can have it if you want, otherwise, I’ll hold off...) but a statement of fact. Israel *must* repent—*or else, because* the kingdom of heaven is at hand. When the kingdom comes, those who have not repented will find themselves cut off from the covenant people (“the axe is already laid

at the root of the trees”; Mat. 3:10). Remember what Jesus spoke about with His disciples for forty days after His resurrection and before He left them and ascended into heaven:

□ Acts 1:3 — He appear[ed] to them during forty days... speaking about the kingdom of God.

This “kingdom of God” is the same thing as the “kingdom of heaven” and the same thing as the kingdom prophesied in Daniel 2. Why was Jesus speaking of this with His disciples? Because that kingdom was about to come in His enthronement as the son of David at God’s right hand and in His sending of the Spirit at Pentecost. Remember the message that the Apostles and evangelists preached in the book of Acts.

□ Acts 8:12 (cf. Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor. 4:20; Col. 1:13) — Philip... preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ.

□ Acts 28:31 (cf. 19:8; 20:25; 28:23) — [Paul] proclaim[ed] the kingdom of God and [taught] about the Lord Jesus Christ.

And remember again what Jesus said in Luke chapter twenty:

□ Luke 20:17–18 — “What then is this that is written: ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone’? Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.”

Jesus purposefully echoes the words of Daniel so that we will see them being fulfilled “already” in Him – the stone cut out from the mountain by no human hand. And now even today that stone is growing, destined to become a mountain that fills the whole earth. Remember Jesus’ words to the apostles:

□ Acts 1:8 — You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you [the power of the kingdom], and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, **and to the end of the earth.**

The Apostle Paul speaks of how the word of the truth, the gospel, has come to the Colossians, “as indeed **in the whole world** it is bearing fruit and increasing” (Col. 1:5–6; cf. 1:23; Rom. 16:25–27). If the weakness of every human world empire is its inability to truly unite different nations and peoples as one then how amazing should it be for us to read words like this:

□ Colossians 3:11 (cf. Gal. 3:28) — Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

□ 1 Corinthians 12:13 — For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

The eternal kingdom that God sets up is “already” accomplishing what the kingdom of fallen man never could – it’s uniting under one royal scepter a “people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Rev. 5:9; cf. Isa. 2:2; 11:9). The church is the *visible* expression “already” of the prophesied kingdom of God. What should this mean for our devotion to the church and our rejoicing in Christ’s church?

But even as we rejoice in the “already” we still gladly acknowledge the “not yet.” We still pray as Jesus taught us to pray: “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Mat. 6:10). We still confess with Paul that “the Lord will rescue [us] from every evil deed and bring [us] safely into his heavenly kingdom (2 Tim. 4:18). We still speak of a *future* day when “the kingdom of the world [will have] become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.” (Rev. 11:15) We still pray with the Apostle John, “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev. 22:20)

The *reason*, though, that we are filled with such hope for the “not yet” is *because* “*already*”(!) the kingdom prophesied in Daniel and in all of the Old Testament prophets—“already,” that kingdom is *here* – the kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall [it] be left to another people. [Instead] it shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever.” This is the kingdom of which we are citizens today. And this calls for joy. This calls for courage. This calls for a true fearlessness and peace. This calls us to obedience and devotion. This calls for preaching and proclaiming *that good news*. And this calls for hope – because one day there will *only* be “*already*” and *no more* “not yet.”



Babylon



Medo-Persia



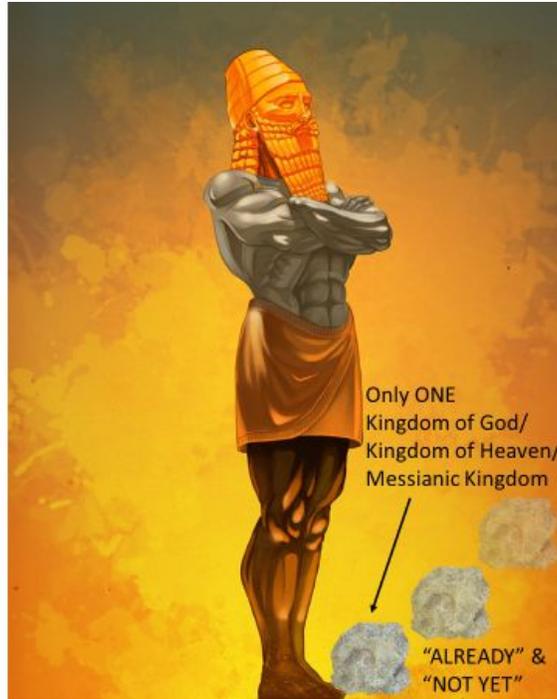
Greece



Rome







Only ONE
Kingdom of God/
Kingdom of Heaven/
Messianic Kingdom

"ALREADY" &
"NOT YET"