

# Daniel's Six Kings: Nebuchadnezzar

## Daniel Chapters 2 and 4

### **Two Dreams, One Message: God Is In Control**

Last Sunday evening I began a study on the six kings that reigned during the lifetime of Daniel. Two of them were Jewish, King Jehoiakim and King Zedekiah. They ruled when Daniel was probably a young boy before he was exiled to Babylon.

While in Babylon, Daniel served under four more kings: Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Darius, and Cyrus the Great.

The king we studied last week was King Darius. In Daniel 6 we read of governors within Darius' own administration that devised an evil plot to destroy Daniel.

The royal advisers proposed that the king make a decree, “For 30 days no one shall pray to anyone-god or man-except to Darius. And, if anyone does, he shall be thrown into the den of lions!”

They wanted King Darius to write this law and sign it which He did.

The king was delighted by their proposal, and he foolishly signed the decree into law! The folly of King Darius was evident in his pride, in his impulsiveness, and this led eventually to deep regret regarding what he had done in signing a foolish decree.

Despite the decree from King Darius, Daniel still continued to pray to the God of Heaven.

Therefore, the king, regrettably, had no choice but to sentence Daniel to death in the den of the lions.

However, despite the folly of King Darius and his decree, the Lord saved Daniel from the den of lions.

Tonight I would like to consider another proud ruler who reigned during the life of Daniel, King Nebuchadnezzar II. He ruled the Babylonian Empire from 605-562 B.C. He is the king mentioned in the book of Daniel.

He was born about 630 B.C., and died around 562 B.C. at the age of 68.

Nebuchadnezzar was the most powerful monarch of the Babylonian dynasty, and is best known for the magnificence of his capital, Babylon.

History confirms that King Nebuchadnezzar was most merciless toward his conquered enemies. By his command the Jewish exiles on their way to Babylon were not allowed to stop even for a moment, as the king feared that they would pray during their respite and that God would be willing to help them as soon as they repented.

Nebuchadnezzar did not feel safe until the exiles reached the Euphrates, the boundary-line of Babylon. Then he made a great feast on board his ship, while the princes of Judah lay chained and naked by the river.

In order to increase their misery he had rolls of the Torah torn and made into sacks, which, filled with sand, he gave to the captive princes to carry.

King Nebuchadnezzar engaged in several military campaigns designed to increase Babylonian influence in Syria and Judah. An attempted invasion of Egypt in 601 BC was met with setbacks, however, leading to numerous rebellions among the states of the region, including Judah.

Nebuchadnezzar soon dealt with these rebellions, capturing Jerusalem in 597 BC and deposing King Jehoiakim, and replacing him with the puppet ruler Zedekiah.

Then in 587 BC, due to further rebellion in Jerusalem, Nebuchadnezzar destroyed both the city and the temple, and deported many of the prominent citizens along with a sizable portion of the Jewish population of Judea to Babylon.

After he had successfully finished his wars in Syria, Egypt, Judah, and the surrounding region, and had made immense improvements to the infrastructure in Babylon, King Nebuchadnezzar enjoyed uninterrupted peace and prosperity in his palace.

As I considered what to preach on tonight from the remarkable life of King Nebuchadnezzar, two events stood out as turning points in his life. These two events consisted of two dreams he had, which are recorded for us in chapters two and four of Daniel.

Although Nebuchadnezzar had two separate dreams, the same message is seen in both of them. Therefore, the title of the message is, *Two Dreams One Message: God Is In Control*

Tonight we will consider only the first dream of Nebuchadnezzar.

## **The Dream of the Great Statue**

Read Daniel 2:24-45

Nebuchadnezzar had been worrying as powerful men do about the future. That's the irony about wealth and power, few men actually enjoy it. They spend the first part of their lives constantly working to get what they want, and then once they have it, they spend the remainder of their lives worrying about holding on to it.

The Lord showed Nebuchadnezzar in his dream what would happen to his empire, and then to all the empires that followed it.

But the king didn't understand the terrifying vision he had, and none of the so-called senior wise men could tell him what it was, or how to explain it, so in his rage, he ordered them all killed.

So it looked like Daniel and his friends, because they too were the king's wise men of Babylon were going to die.

But God had different plans. He was the one who sent the dream and now He was the one who will use it to save Daniel.

The king's death sentence on all the wise men in Babylon stirred Daniel and his friends to pray. God graciously answered their prayers.

God told Daniel both the dream and its interpretation. So Daniel was able to go to the king with something that no other servant of the king could provide: the dream and its meaning. Daniel knew the answer.

We have the answer to life. Jesus Christ.

No matter what terrible situation you are in, JESUS is the answer!

No matter what difficult problems you may face, JESUS is the answer!

Even if you have sinned and feel unworthy to receive any help, JESUS is the answer!

Even if you have serious doubts and fears, JESUS is the answer!

For every problem in your life, JESUS is the answer!

When the king asks Daniel about how he got the answer, Daniel is quick to give all the glory to God. In fact he says that men can't know such knowledge, and its not because he himself is wiser than all men.

He says that it is because he serves the God of heaven.

What gifts do you have that weren't given to you by a gracious God?

Daniel tells the king that what he saw is what would happen in the days to come, and the vision covers a period from his empire on, but in particular it revealed the great mystery that was to come in the last days.

Which as we shall see was the coming of Jesus Christ and the growth and final triumph of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Now in Nebuchadnezzar's dream there was a single statue with 4 main parts, each different part of the statue symbolized a different worldly empire, they are connected because they succeeded one another, and because they are all part of the same worldly system.

The head was of Gold, that as we are told symbolized the Babylonian empire. It was gold because the power of Nebuchadnezzar was given directly by God and because the Babylonians had an essential unity that none of the following empires had.

The second part was the empire that destroyed Babylon and succeeded it. This was the empire of the Medes and Persians.



It is less successful and unified than Babylon and consists of two main parts, the Medes and Persians, unified – two arms one chest.

Although Nebuchadnezzar will be dead by the time they take over many years later, Daniel will still be alive, and will serve their king Darius as well.

The third part of the statue are the belly and thighs of bronze. This symbolizes the Greek empire, which after many years of war with Persia will eventually destroy it under Alexander the Great. The Grecian empire is even less unified than Persia however, being made up of many states, held together in a series of loose but constantly warring confederations.

Finally they have the legs of Iron, symbolizing the Roman republic and early Roman empire, it is appropriate that this part be of Iron, as this was the first empire that started entirely in the Iron age, and was militarily the strongest of them all.

As we travel down the statue of the legs, it becomes weaker and weaker, until the Iron is mixed with clay.

This probably symbolized the fact that in its later years the Roman empire became increasingly fractured.

The Romans tried to unify the world under one rule, but the various parts of the Empire, especially the Germans and the Barbarians in the East, refused to be unified. These tribes were brought in, but were not subdued or really assimilated, and they made Rome militarily weak and vulnerable.

Hence the strong Iron became mixed with Clay, and gradually the entire empire degenerated.

But then we have this most important image, a stone - not part of the image - and cut without hands, which symbolizes that this kingdom is not made by man, but God, comes and it strikes the last empire on its feet and breaks it into pieces and then in the end these worldly kingdoms become so much dust in the wind. Then this kingdom of Heaven that shall never end grows till it fills the world.

Now who is the stone that grinds to dust of which the dream spoke?

Turn with me in your Bibles to Matthew 21:42-44. We read, “Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.

Jesus identified himself repeatedly as that stone which the builders rejected. That stone which was scorned and rejected, which seemed so weak, that had none of the military power or wealth of the earthly kingdoms, and yet was far more powerful, the power of God and the foundation of a church that would go on to the present day and into eternity.

Christ is that Stone that crushed the worldly empire, mighty Rome tried hard to stamp out the faith, the full weight of imperial persecution fell upon His followers again and again and yet they were the ones who were broken in the end. Rome fell, but Christ's kingdom continued. And here we have a prophecy of that 603 years before his birth.

How could these things have come to pass if God were not in control of history? If he were not in control of the future?

Therefore, Christ is in control of our lives, the one who orders all of its events, who raises up kings and casts them down again.

We read in Daniel 2:21, “And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding:”

We read in Proverbs 21:1, “The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.”

Our future rests securely in Christ. That is why Christ says in John 14, “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.”

Christ brings to bear on the minds of His disciples, who were full of anxiety, perplexity, and care, the tender and beautiful truths of His gracious gospel--truths fitted to subside every fear, silence every murmur, and give every needed consolation to the soul. The truths of His constant love, grace, and control in their lives.

We can trust in Christ because He is in control of the universe, in control of our lives, and most importantly in control of our future.

In closing, Nebuchadnezzar's first dream consisted of a magnificent statue multilayered from top to bottom with gold, silver, bronze, iron, and clay. Each layer represented a great nation of the world. But in the dream there was a stone that appeared, made without hands. This Stone crushed all the nations.

The stone represented the gospel of Jesus Christ. The message of the dream was that Christ is in control of our lives and our future. From the biggest event to the minutest detail, Christ is in control. May the Lord help us to take strength and comfort from the truth that our God reigns! Let us pray.