

Daniel

From Mystery to Revelation

Lesson #3 for January 18, 2020

Scriptures: Daniel 2; Acts 17:28; Psalm 138; John 15:5; Deuteronomy 32:4; 1 Peter 2:4.

1. Seventh-day Adventists have used Daniel 2 as a subject for sermons and evangelistic outreaches many times. Billboards and pictures depicting the statue of multiple substances has attracted a lot of attention. What is so important about this particular statue?
2. It is not always possible to tell why certain things happen. One example might be the icebergs off the coast of Greenland. The smaller icebergs sometimes are moving in one direction, apparently as a result of surface winds; however, larger icebergs are often moving in a different direction, apparently due to underwater currents.
3. World events are like that in many ways. It is impossible for us as human beings to predict what is going to happen. But, God knows! As Ellen White stated: "Like the stars in the vast circuit of their appointed path, God's purposes know no haste and no delay."—*The Desire of Ages** 32.1. So, how was it possible for God to predict the major events in human history from the days of Daniel all the way to the end? And to do so accurately and still allow our freedom?
4. The dream that is the subject of Daniel 2 was given first to Nebuchadnezzar, a pagan king and conqueror of much of the world including God's people. Why would God do that? In his earlier years, Nebuchadnezzar was an absolute ruler. The British 19th-century politician known as Lord Acton once stated: "Power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely." If that is true, and it certainly seems like it is, Nebuchadnezzar was certainly in a position to be susceptible to corruption since he had absolute power.
5. The morning after having that dream, he called his top advisers and demanded that they tell him not only the interpretation of his dream but also the dream itself because he could not remember it! When those advisors reasoned with him that what he was asking was completely unreasonable, he exploded, saying that if they could not give him the answer, they all would be killed. Was that demand a precursor of his later overt insanity? (See Daniel 4.)
6. Daniel and his three friends had recently completed their training in the "University of Babylon." Imagine being in the position of Daniel soon after doing so well on his final exams when someone knocked on his door and, in effect, said: "The king has declared that you are to be killed!" How would you respond?
7. We need to understand the context. Dreams were taken very seriously in the ancient world. Especially if they seemed to imply some kind of terrible disaster. No wonder Nebuchadnezzar was so concerned. Fortunately for all of them, knowing that his God could reveal the dream, Daniel asked Arioch if he could have a little more time. Fortunately, Nebuchadnezzar was so anxious to find out about his dream that he was willing to grasp at any straw!
8. He was very worried because his counselors had told him: "There is no other who can tell it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh." (Daniel 2:11, *NKJV**)
9. For an emperor to declare that all of his top advisers were to be killed seems extreme to us. However, there are other examples from historical sources of something similar. Several years later, Darius I had all the magi executed. Even later, Xerxes put to death the engineers who had designed a bridge that collapsed.
10. Nebuchadnezzar seemed to be very angry when his advisors asked for more time. But, when Daniel requested more time, he promptly granted the request. Why was that? Was God in it?
11. If we believe that only the true God is the One who can reveal the future, then we must have some special connection with the true God if we want answers.

12. So, how does God know the future? Does He control our free choices so that things will work out the way He says? Or, does He have some method that we do not understand for predicting the future, even though we have free choice? The fact that God could predict the history of our world down through those four great world empires and the nations of Western Europe to the second coming of Jesus Christ precisely and without error is surely a mystery to us.
13. When Daniel heard the words from Arioch that they were to be killed, he must have been shocked. Try to imagine the response. Daniel and his three friends knelt together in prayer, pleading with God to give them the answers they needed.
14. Do you think you could have slept that night?
15. Read Daniel 2:17-23. That very night, God revealed the mystery to Daniel. Daniel was given not only a duplicate of Nebuchadnezzar's dream but also the correct interpretation.
16. When he awoke in the morning, what do you think Daniel had to say to his three friends? Surely, they had a praise session right then.
17. In this brief story, we have two types of prayer mentioned. First of all, there was that pleading petition to save their lives. And then, there was the response of thanksgiving and praise when the answer was given to them. How often do we pray and plead with God for some answers? Do we come back later when we find the answers and thank God as they did?
18. Even under the worst of conditions, are we willing to let God do what is best for us even though it may not be what we would like to see happen at the time?
19. Read Psalm 138. In this psalm, the psalmist mentions some problems that he was concerned about and then rejoiced when God provided answers.
20. Read Daniel 2:24-30 (*GNB**). I am sure that as soon as he was cleaned up and ready and dressed in his best clothes, Daniel went to Arioch and asked to be taken to the king. Try to imagine Nebuchadnezzar's response when Daniel effectively said, "I can tell you your dream!" Then, Daniel stopped for a moment and reminded the king: "Your Majesty, there is no wizard, magician, fortuneteller, or astrologer who can tell you that. But there is a God in heaven, who reveals mysteries. He has informed Your Majesty what will happen in the future. Now I will tell you the dream, the vision you had while you were asleep." (Daniel 2:27-28, *GNB**)
21. Notice that immediately, Daniel said: "While Your Majesty was sleeping, you dreamt about the future." In our day, most of those who try to interpret the book of Daniel do not believe that even God can predict the future. But, some of the very first words out of Daniel's mouth were that this dream was about the future!
22. Read Daniel 2:31-49 to get the major content of the dream and its interpretation. Surely, Nebuchadnezzar was happy to realize almost immediately that Daniel had the correct dream. But, some of what Daniel had to say would not have been pleasing to Nebuchadnezzar. He certainly did not want to think that, one day, his kingdom would be replaced by another, and then another, and another.
23. The good news for us in this dream is that the final scene shows a rock cut out without human hands from the high mountain and it strikes the statue, grinding it to powder and growing to become a kingdom that would endure forever, leaving no trace of the others.
24. The major events portrayed in this vision given to Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel took place over a period of time from 605 B.C. down through 476 A.D. With the demise of the Roman Empire, God said that there would never again be a single world power. But, there will be a future kingdom in which people will live forever; that kingdom is open to all who are willing to follow God's plan for their lives.
25. In interpreting this dream, we must recognize up front that God's foreknowledge is complete and beyond question. Daniel 2 is not a *conditional prophecy*; it is an *apocalyptic prophecy*. And

as we have studied in previous lessons, apocalyptic prophecies reveal events that have been predicted by God and which will come to pass no matter what any human does.

26. Let us review briefly the kingdoms represented by the different portions of the image.

1. *The head of gold* represents Babylon (626-539 B.C.). Indeed, no other metal could better represent the power and wealth of the Babylonian Empire than gold. The Bible calls it “the golden city” (*Isa. 14:4*) and “a golden cup in the Lord’s hand” (*Jer. 51:7; compare with Rev. 18:16*). The ancient historian Herodotus reports that an abundance of gold embellished the city.

2. *The chest and arms of silver* stand for Media-Persia (539-331 B.C.). As silver is valued less than gold, the Medo-Persian Empire never attained the splendor of the Babylonian. In addition, silver also was a fitting symbol for the Persians because they used silver in their taxation system.

3. *The belly and thighs of bronze* symbolize Greece (331-168 B.C.). Ezekiel 27:13 portrays the Greeks as bartering bronze vessels. Greek soldiers were noted for their bronze armor. Their helmets, shields, and battle-axes consisted of brass. Herodotus tells us that Psammetichus I of Egypt saw in invading Greek pirates the fulfillment of an oracle that foretold “men of bronze coming from the sea.”

4. *The legs of iron* aptly represent Rome (168 B.C.-A.D. 476). As Daniel explained, the iron represented the crushing power of the Roman Empire, which lasted longer than any of the previous kingdoms. Iron was a perfect metal to represent the empire.

5. *The feet partly of iron and partly of clay* represent a divided Europe (A.D. 476-second coming of Christ). The mixture of iron with clay provides a fitting picture of what happened after the disintegration of the Roman Empire. Although many attempts have been made to unify Europe, ranging from marriage alliances between royal houses to the present European Union, division and disunity have prevailed and, according to this prophecy, will remain so until God establishes the eternal kingdom.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Wednesday, January 15.[§]

27. And what is the final event in this great prophecy?

Daniel 2:34-35,44-45: ³⁴ “While you were looking at it, a great stone broke loose from a cliff without anyone touching it, struck the iron and clay feet of the statue, and shattered them. ³⁵At once the iron, clay, bronze, silver, and gold crumbled and became like the dust on a threshing place in summer. The wind carried it all away, leaving not a trace. But the stone grew to be a mountain that covered the whole earth....” ⁴⁴ “At the time of those rulers the God of heaven will establish a kingdom that will never end. It will never be conquered, but will completely destroy all those empires, and then last for ever. ⁴⁵You saw how a stone broke loose from a cliff without anyone touching it and how it struck the statue made of iron, bronze, clay, silver, and gold. The great God is telling Your Majesty what will happen in the future. I have told you exactly what you dreamt, and have given you its true meaning.”—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., 2 Kings 2:34–35,44–45). New York: American Bible Society.

28. There are several important things to notice about the components of this image. The ultimate focus is still in the future—in the days when God will establish His eternal kingdom.

29. The main components of the image are all things which human beings could produce and mold

into almost any form they want. But, the rock which was carved out of the mountain without hands and which destroys the great metal and clay image and grinds it to powder, symbolizes a kingdom established by God Himself.

30. There are many places in Scripture where God and His kingdom are represented by a rock. See, for example, Deuteronomy 32:4; 1 Samuel 2:2; and Psalm 18:31.
31. The Messiah Himself is represented as a stone in places like Psalm 118:22 and 1 Peter 2:4,7.

Some argue that the stone kingdom was established during Jesus' earthly ministry, and that the propagation of the gospel stands as an indication that the kingdom of God has taken over the entire world. Yet, the stone kingdom comes into existence only after the four main kingdoms have fallen and human history has reached the time of the divided kingdoms, represented by the feet and toes of the image. This fact rules out the fulfillment during the first century, because Jesus' earthly ministry took place during the dominion of Rome, the fourth kingdom.

But the stone gives way to a mountain. That is, "the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth" (*Dan. 2:35, NKJV*). A mountain such as this evokes Mount Zion, the place where the temple stood, the concrete representation of God's earthly kingdom in the Old Testament times. Interestingly, the stone cut from the mountain becomes a mountain itself. This mountain, which according to the text is already in existence, most likely points to the heavenly Zion, the heavenly sanctuary, whence Christ will come to establish His eternal kingdom. And in the Jerusalem that will come down from heaven (*Rev. 21:1-22:5*), this kingdom will find its ultimate fulfillment.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Thursday, January 16.[§]

32. It is important for us to notice that Nebuchadnezzar's dream as interpreted by Daniel has been fulfilled in every particular, so far. Is there any reason to doubt the truthfulness of the final action?
33. Notice these two comments about the inevitability of God's predictions about the future.

Although "to the unaided human eye, human history may appear to be a chaotic interplay of forces and counterforces . . . Daniel assures us that behind all of this stands God, looking down upon it and moving within it to achieve what He sees best."—William H. Shea, *Daniel: A Reader's Guide* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2005), p. 98.—[as quoted in *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Friday, January 17].[§]

In the annals of human history the growth of nations, the rise and fall of empires, appear as dependent on the will and prowess of man. The shaping of events seems, to a great degree, to be determined by his power, ambition, or caprice. **But in the word of God the curtain is drawn aside, and we behold, behind, above, and through all the play and counterplay of human interests and power and passions, the agencies of the all-merciful One, silently, patiently working out the counsels of His own will.**—Ellen G. White, *Education** 173.2.[†]

34. Does it make you feel more comfortable to know that God is ultimately in charge?
35. We have noted that:

Some have argued that the stone cut out without hands refers to the spreading of the gospel to the world. That can't be right for a number of reasons, including what Daniel 2:35 says, which is that the stone will crush the previous nations and that "the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found" (NKJV). That did not happen after the Cross.

Furthermore, some attempts to identify the stone kingdom with the church fail to note that the stone kingdom replaces all other forms of human dominion. It is a kingdom that encompasses the whole world. Therefore, only Jesus' second coming can set in motion the process portrayed as the climax of this prophetic dream. Why, then, is the second coming of Jesus the only sensible interpretation of what the stone does in the end of days?—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide for Friday, January 17. [Bold type is in the source.]^{†§}**

36. There is a very interesting section in Isaiah 40-55 where the prophet under God's guidance talked about how one can identify the true God. There are two main things he focused on: (1) His ability to predict the future far in advance, and (2) His ability to create out of nothing. (Read Isaiah 41:26 and 46:8-10.) Why do you think God gave that dream to Nebuchadnezzar, a selfish, pagan king? Couldn't He have just given it to Daniel?
37. We need to think about three major issues in connection with this story: (1) What were the circumstances surrounding the giving of the dream? (2) What was the significance of the dream? (3) What was the scope of the dream? When you think about Daniel 2, how does it impact you personally? Do you feel that you can trust a God who knows thousands of years ahead of time exactly what is going to happen? Does it bother you that He presents that information in a symbolic way, using images and stones?
38. One issue that we must deal with in talking about Daniel 2 is the question about the date. We are told that Nebuchadnezzar had his dream in the second year of his reign which would have been 603 B.C. Remember that we are told in Daniel 1 that Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah during the first year of his reign; but, Daniel and his three friends attended the "University of Babylon" for three years. So, it might seem at first glance that there is a conflict because how could he have finished his three-year training that began in the first year of that king when he was in his second year? The answer is shown by the following table from the *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 40.

Daniel's Training	Nebuchadnezzar's Reign
First year of captivity in Babylon	Accession year (invasion of Judah)
Second year	First regnal year
Third year	Second regnal year (the dream)

39. Nebuchadnezzar was very busy during his first year as emperor. First of all, he had to make sure that there were no significant challengers. He also had to make sure that there was no nation under his control that was trying to rebel by taking advantage of this transition of power. He defeated Egypt and Judah that year. Under such circumstances, it is not surprising that Nebuchadnezzar was disturbed by this dream. The Babylonians made a great science of dream interpretation. They put together large collections of books, describing how the interpretation of dreams should be done. The king kept a group of experts who were supposed to be able to interpret dreams. Notice this comment:

"In the ancient Near East, the diviners were the academic and religious leaders of the day. As Berossus's *History of Babylonia* relates, Mesopotamians believed that the gods had gifted people with knowledge, but they did not give them all knowledge. Divine knowledge remained inaccessible, except through encoded messages that required the expertise of diviners. If the account of Enmeduranki can be taken seriously, Mesopotamians believed that diviners were only able to decode messages because the gods gave them the interpretations."—Wendy Widder, *Daniel, Story of God Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan,

2016), vol. 20, p. 47.—[as quoted in *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** page 40].[§]

40. But, although God had chosen to give Nebuchadnezzar this important dream, He also arranged it so that Nebuchadnezzar could not remember the dream! That gave God an opportunity to introduce Daniel.
41. One thing that appears almost immediately about the significance of the dream:

In the history of nations the student of God's word may behold the literal fulfillment of divine prophecy. Babylon, shattered and broken at last, passed away because in prosperity its rulers had regarded themselves as independent of God, and had ascribed the glory of their kingdom to human achievement. The Medo-Persian realm was visited by the wrath of Heaven because in it God's law had been trampled underfoot. The fear of the Lord had found no place in the hearts of the vast majority of the people. Wickedness, blasphemy, and corruption prevailed. The kingdoms that followed were even more base and corrupt; and these sank lower and still lower in the scale of moral worth.—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings** 501.3-502.0.
42. Clearly, this massive statue was something which was somewhat familiar to Nebuchadnezzar. After all, it was not long before he tried to put up a massive statue on the plain of Dura, one made completely of gold. (See Daniel 3.)
43. It was also known that even prior to the days of Nebuchadnezzar that different metals were used to represent different historical epochs. For example, see Hesiod (ca. 700 B.C.).
44. But, one aspect of the dream was completely new to Nebuchadnezzar; that was the rock being carved out of the mountain without human hands which destroyed the image and filled up the whole world.
45. And what is the scope of the dream? We need to note that the dream portrayed an image representing the history of the world from Nebuchadnezzar's day down until the second coming of Jesus and even later. But, God did not allow Nebuchadnezzar to remember the dream so that his dream interpreters could not try their hand at interpreting it. Then, Daniel was introduced into the sequence, reminding us that only God is able to predict the future.
46. It might seem that much of what was represented by this gold, silver, bronze, iron, and clay image is still present in our world. But, a more careful look will remind us that we are past the toes, and we are awaiting that stone to come from the mountain.
47. Finally, we need to recognize that Daniel's prayer of thanksgiving with his three friends as recorded in Daniel 2:20-22 is really the focal point of the chapter. **It is God who is in charge throughout history.**
48. Do you think God has ever communicated anything to you in a dream? What is the cause of most of our dreams? Is it possible to know if a dream has come from God?
49. Could one of us fulfill an important mission in the history of our world as Daniel did in his day? Can we trust the predictions that have been given about the history of our world even though they were given so many years ago? How could those ancient dreams have importance now?
50. Are there challenges facing the Adventist Church or even us as individuals that require God-given wisdom? Are we comfortable asking God for direct guidance? Why? Or, why not? Does understanding Daniel 2 help you to live a Christian life more comfortably?

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