

LESSON 9

Today's handout (available at www.ThyWordIsTruth.com) is a little unusual — it contains a number of theories about Daniel 2, all of which are incorrect in at least some aspect. My purpose is to show you the sort of thing that comes up if you attempt to study Daniel using the Internet. We will discuss some of these errors in more detail as we proceed, but we can make a few points now.

If we ignore the time frame of the prophecies in Daniel, we will have no hope of determining their meaning. Many of the theories on the handout include events and kingdoms that are contemporaneous with our own time. Such has been the case with each generation — many have tried to map the prophecies onto events of their own time, and all have been mistaken. No one can say that he or she is living near the end because no one but the Father knows when that day will be. So when you see this giant statue mapped onto the European Union or onto the United States and Great Britain, that is an immediate clue that the interpretation has gone badly astray.

Likewise we should not read more into the vision than is warranted. Many of these incorrect theories base part of their interpretation on the ten toes of the statue. Yes, the toes are mentioned, and yes, there were likely ten of them — but the Bible does not use the number ten here. Likewise, some of the theories depend on their being two legs, and again there were likely two legs — but where is the number two mentioned in Daniel 2? If the ten toes had stood for the ten members of the European Union, and if the two legs had stood for Eastern and Western Rome (or for the Greek church and the Papal church), then wouldn't we expect to see the number ten and the number two mentioned in Daniel 2? We will see the number two

(Daniel 8:3) and the number ten (Daniel 7:7) mentioned in later visions, but we don't see them here.

Also, you will notice that some of the incorrect theories on the handout are premillennial. We will have much more to say later about premillennialism, but let's deal with one issue right now — does it matter? Does it matter what people believe about the end of the world? Does it matter if someone believes Jesus will reign on earth for 1000 years?

Carroll Osborn, the Carmichael Distinguished Professor of New Testament at ACU, wrote a book entitled *The Peaceable Kingdom* in which he grouped premillennialism among items that are just matters of opinion on which we should just agree to disagree. (On the same list he placed the issue of whether baptism is for the remission of sins or because of the remission of sins.) He is very badly mistaken. And you don't have to just take my word for it. Listen to someone who at one time was the leading premillennialist in the world, John Walvoord:

If premillennialism is only a dispute about what will happen in a future age which is quite removed from present issues, that is one thing. If, however, premillennialism is a system of interpretation which involves the meaning and significance of the entire Bible, defines the meaning and course of the present age, determines the present purpose of God, and gives both material and method to theology, that is something else. It is the growing realization that premillennialism is more than a dispute about Revelation 20. It is not too much to say that millennialism is a determining factor in Biblical interpretation of comparable importance to the doctrines of verbal inspiration, the deity of Christ, substitutionary atonement, and bodily resurrection.

It does make a difference what we believe about this subject. The premillennialist doctrine has consequences that run counter to the very heart of the gospel.

Premillennialists teach that the Levitical priesthood is going to be restored during the millennium despite what we read in Hebrews 10:12, 18.

Premillennialists teach that bloody sacrifices for sin will be restored during the millennium despite what we read in Hebrews 10:17–18 and Galatians 2:21.

Premillennialists teach that the new covenant of Jeremiah 31:31 is not yet in force and that it will not come into force until the millennium despite what we read in Luke 22:20, Hebrews 9:15, and 2 Corinthians 3:5–6.

Premillennialists deny the complete Lordship of Jesus. They insist he is not presently ruling over Israel despite what we read in Ephesians 1:21, Revelation 2:26–27, and Psalm 110, which is quoted many times in the New Testament as having been already fulfilled.

It matters very much what we believe on these topics, and the premillennialists will be the first to agree that it matters. The only ones who don't believe it matters appear to be professors in our Christian colleges, and I suppose their undiscerning students.

We owe a great debt to Foy E. Wallace for keeping premillennialism out of the Lord's church. Foy Wallace (then the editor of the *Gospel Advocate*) debated Charles Neal (minister of the Main Street Church of Christ in Winchester, Kentucky) in 1933 about the 1000 year reign. He was largely responsible for keeping that false doctrine from infiltrating the church. Some in the church today have an "anti-debate" attitude seemingly for fear we might offend someone by our knowledge and conviction, but I am certainly glad that was not the attitude back when Foy Wallace was preaching (and when the church was growing!). Christians of his generation were much more interested in pulling perishing people into the boat than they were about not rocking that boat — and many of us are here worshipping in spirit and truth today because of the faithful gospel preaching that occurred in that day.

Daniel 2:20-23

20 Daniel answered and said, Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his: 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: 22 He revealeth the deep and secret things: he knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him. 23 I thank thee, and praise thee, O thou God of my fathers, who hast given me wisdom and might, and hast made known unto me now what we desired of thee: for thou hast now made known unto us the king's matter.

Before rushing off to the court, Daniel prays again—this time not a petition for help, but a prayer of thanksgiving. Daniel did not forget to thank God for answered prayer, which is another lesson for us. We should always remember to be grateful for God's blessings (Luke 17:17-18). Here Daniel expresses his gratitude to God for answering his prayer and saving him from certain death.

This is one of the most beautiful prayers of the Bible.

This little psalm is a model of thanksgiving. No word is merely repetitive. ... The symmetry and beauty of the poetry make their own contribution to the praise of God.

In his prayer, Daniel highlights two aspects of God's character that play a pivotal role in this chapter, and indeed throughout the book.

God is powerful. Nebuchadnezzar himself is a king because God is the One who "sets up kings and deposes them" (2:21).

Isaiah 46:9-10 — *Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.*

God controls history. God controls nature. God created the universe and keeps it operating. God is the creator, sustainer, and sovereign of the universe. Yet at the same time God knows our every thought and our every dream, and God counts the hairs on our head. We worship a God who maintains galaxies yet knows when a sparrow falls.

God is wise. We like to think we are wise, but any wisdom we have comes from what God has told us or given us. Although we have certainly progressed in our knowledge of the world, any honest scientist will tell you that we still know virtually nothing about how it all works. Remember what Paul wrote:

1 Corinthians 1:25, 30 — *Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. ... But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.*

In verse 21, Daniel touches upon a major theme in the book: It is God who changes times and seasons, who removes and sets up kings, and who gives wisdom and knowledge. Despite how things might look, God is in control. His people are in exile only because he wanted them to be in exile and because he allowed Nebuchadnezzar to take them into exile. When God no longer wants them to be in exile, then they will return — and in fact that will happen soon under King Cyrus.

Men today look at the world, see a mess, and say that God is dead. But throughout the Bible, we see that God is always working — especially when things look the worst. Was the world in bad shape before the flood? Yes. Was God in charge? You bet he was! (Psalm 29:10 tells us that God sat enthroned over the flood. God was reigning while it was raining!)

From a human perspective, could things have looked any worse than they did at the cross? Yet God was at that very moment working out the culmination of a plan that he had formed before the foundation of the world!

We must always try to see things the way that God sees them! Daniel did, and you can see what the result was. We need spiritual vision, and that comes from a spiritual diet of and a spiritual focus on God's word.

Note that Daniel was not a fatalist. He knew that men could make real decisions and affect history. Daniel never lost his free will. Daniel did not see himself and the Babylonians as puppets.

Verse 21 says that God sets up and removes kings.

Psalm 2:1-4 — *Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh.*

Does God just set up the good kings, or does he set them all up? Although we may have trouble understanding it, the Bible says that God sets them all up and we must honor and show respect to them all as Daniel did with Nebuchadnezzar. But, of course, at the same time we must obey God rather than man (Acts 5:29), which Daniel also did. Daniel was polite and respectful to the one who had deported him because he knew that whatever power Nebuchadnezzar had was given to him by God.

Listen to what Paul and Peter have to say about this:

Romans 13:1-5 — *Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. 2 Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. 3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: 4 For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. 5 Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.*

1 Peter 2:13-17 — *Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; 14 Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. 15 For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: 16 As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of malicious-*

ness, but as the servants of God. 17 Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.

Were Peter and Paul just speaking of good Roman emperors? How could they be! There were no good Roman emperors! These men were imprisoned and killed by Nero, who was the emperor when Romans and 1 Peter were written!

On the other side of the coin, it is certainly permissible to pray that evil rulers be removed. The Christians did this in Revelation, and God answered their prayers by judging the same Roman emperors that Christians were commanded to honor.

Are we then supposed to honor a ruler who we think is wicked? Well, read 1 Peter 2:17 again. The answer is clearly yes. Any attack against authority is ultimately an attack against the ultimate authority — God.

In verse 23, Daniel called God the God of his fathers. Daniel trusted God because he knew what God had done. As Isaiah 28:16 says, God is a tried stone. He has never forsaken his people, and he never will.

Notice that Daniel is absolutely sure that he knows the king's dream even before he tells the king about it. God told him what the dream was, and Daniel knew that what God told him was true. There was no doubt in his mind at all. Daniel was thanking God in advance for his deliverance—the king had not yet spared his life!

In verse 23, Daniel said that God had made it known “to me” what “we” asked of him. Again, we are reminded of the power of combined prayer. Daniel asked his friends to pray with him, and he did not forget their contribution when he thanked God.

The “deep” things and “hidden things” both denote matters inaccessible to or beyond human knowledge.

Deuteronomy 29:29 — *The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong*

unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.

One has written that:

The great existential questions of life and death continue to be insoluble to the worldly wise. Without divine revelation, there is only conjecture and subjective opinion. Only in the God of Scripture is ultimate truth to be found.

Note that the prayer concludes on a more personal note, as Daniel uses the personal pronouns “I,” “my,” “me,” “we,” “us,” and changes from the third person “he” in verse 21 to the second person “thou” in verse 23.

We see a similar shift in Psalm 23: “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul” ... “I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”

Our God is a personal God. In earthly kingdoms, everyone knows the king, but the king does not know everyone. In God’s kingdom, everyone knows the king — and the king knows everyone!

Daniel 2:24-25

24 Therefore Daniel went in unto Arioch, whom the king had ordained to destroy the wise men of Babylon: he went and said thus unto him; Destroy not the wise men of Babylon: bring me in before the king, and I will shew unto the king the interpretation. 25 Then Arioch brought in Daniel before the king in haste, and said thus unto him, I

have found a man of the captives of Judah, that will make known unto the king the interpretation.

Incredible, isn't it? All by himself, Arioch (the Chief Butcher) has managed to solve the king's problem. Notice how he takes all of the credit in verse 25. (This may have something to do with the reward mentioned back in verse 6!)

Arioch's complete confidence in Daniel is interesting. He shows no doubt that Daniel will be able to interpret the king's dream. Daniel must have already made quite an impression on Arioch.

Think for a moment the situation that Arioch would be in if Daniel failed to interpret the dream! The executioner would likely have faced execution himself.

We are surrounded by Ariochs — people who are focused only on pleasing their worldly masters. Are we making the same sort of impression on the Ariochs in our lives that Daniel must have made on this Arioch?

Daniel's concern for others is shown in verse 24. His first words to Arioch were, "Do not execute the wise men of Babylon."

Calvin devotes some time to justifying Daniel's concern for the magicians. After all, these wise men were teaching falsehood and advocating idolatry; in Calvin's opinion, they deserved to die, even if not for the reason that motivated Nebuchadnezzar to condemn them to death.

Calvin finally appeals to Daniel's sense of honesty to justify his letting the idolaters off the hook. Daniel would have preferred their death, but not for unjust reasons.

But I think what we are really seeing here is Daniel's love for his enemies, which is not just something we find in the New Testament.

Exodus 23:4-5 — *If thou meet thine enemy's ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again. 5 If thou see the ass of him that hateth thee lying under his burden, and wouldest forbear to help him, thou shalt surely help with him.*

Daniel 2:26-30

26 The king answered and said to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, Art thou able to make known unto me the dream which I have seen, and the interpretation thereof? **27** Daniel answered in the presence of the king, and said, The secret which the king hath demanded cannot the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, the soothsayers, shew unto the king; **28** But there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days. Thy dream, and the visions of thy head upon thy bed, are these; **29** As for thee, O king, thy thoughts came into thy mind upon thy bed, what should come to pass hereafter: and he that revealeth secrets maketh known to thee what shall come to pass. **30** But as for me, this secret is not re-

vealed to me for any wisdom that I have more than any living, but for their sakes that shall make known the interpretation to the king, and that thou mightest know the thoughts of thy heart.

Notice that Daniel reminds the reader of his Babylonian name but then resumes using his Hebrew name.

And what does Daniel do? Does he come before the king and say, “I have solved your problem. I know all of the answers. Look what I can do.” No. Daniel’s response, unlike Arioch in verse 25, is not self-seeking. Daniel does not even mention himself! Instead, Daniel gives God all the glory.

Rather than say look what I can do, Daniel says look what God can do. The power was not within Daniel, and Daniel knew it. God had told him what Nebuchadnezzar had dreamed — and absent that message from God, Daniel would have been just as clueless as the magicians were.

Again, we are faced with the stark truth about astrology, magic, and fortune telling. In verse 27, Daniel says that it does not work: “The secret which the king hath demanded cannot the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, the soothsayers, shew unto the king.”

Notice how Daniel speaks to Nebuchadnezzar with great boldness. Keep in mind that Daniel was under sentence of death, yet he takes this opportunity to effectively tell the king that all of his gods are worse than useless. Instead, he tells the king that there is a God who reveals mysteries — and it is not one of Nebuchadnezzar’s false gods. If it were, then presumably one of the king’s magicians could have told him the dream.

Daniel's answer to the king in verse 28 is that "there is a God in heaven." That's a very good answer, isn't it! We should use that answer more often ourselves.

Why don't you believe in evolution? Because there is a God in heaven! Why are you against gay "marriage"? Because there is a God in heaven! Why do you live the way you do? Because there is a God in heaven!

"That there is a God in heaven, as against man-made gods and deified men, is the supreme theme of the book, even as it is the cardinal principle of the Bible."

Note also the contrast that Daniel draws between the false Babylonian gods and the one true God. The king's gods were helpless, but there is a God in heaven who is all powerful.

We need to stop for a moment and consider the phrase "latter days" in verse 28. To what does it refer?

It could simply mean the future. That is, God was going to tell Nebuchadnezzar what would happen later. This seems to fit well with the parallel passage in verse 29 ("To you, O king, as you lay in bed came thoughts of what would be hereafter").

It could refer to the latter days of Jewish history, which ended as far as God was concerned, first at the cross, and then with finality in AD 70, and we know from Matthew 24 that some of Daniel's prophecies reached that far into the future.

Premillennialists teach that it refers to a time yet future; to a short time of tribulation preceding the "second coming" of Christ. But does this make sense? Is this what Nebuchadnezzar would have thought? "Well, I guess Daniel is about to tell me about what will happen in about 2600 years when the Chinese suddenly decide to invade the Holy Land and toss out the Arabs and fight against the troops sent by the Antichrist who will be living in Rome at the time..." Remember — if our understanding of this book lacks any message for the exiles who first heard it, then our understanding is wrong.

A survey of how the phrase “the latter days” is used in the Old Testament reveals that the expression denotes the future, but the exact time in the future must be determined by the context. Sometimes the phrase is used to speak of events in the near future.

Deuteronomy 31:29 — *For I know that after my death ye will utterly corrupt yourselves, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you **in the latter days**; because ye will do evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger through the work of your hands.*

Jeremiah 23:20 — *The anger of the LORD shall not return, until he have executed, and till he have performed the thoughts of his heart: **in the latter days** ye shall consider it perfectly.*

Here we will be given a clear historical context — the vision will begin with the present king and the present kingdom, and it will end with the third kingdom that follows (Rome). If we ignore or twist that time frame, then there is no hope that we will properly understand this vision. As Jesus reminded his listeners in Matthew 24:15 in speaking of the book of Daniel — “Whoso readeth, let him understand!”

Daniel 2:31-35

31 Thou, O king, sawest, and behold a great image. This great image, whose brightness was excellent, stood before thee; and the form thereof was terrible. 32 This image’s head was of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, 33 His legs of iron, his feet part of

iron and part of clay. 34 Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. 35 Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth.

At last the contents of the dream are revealed. What follows is one of the most amazing prophecies in the Bible.

Can you imagine the king's astonished reaction when Daniel started describing his dream? Can you imagine the astonishment (and relief!) of his wise men? (Daniel had just saved their lives. You will see later how they repay him.) Not only could Daniel reveal the *meaning* of the dream, he could reveal the *content* of the dream — something the wise men had just said had never been done, had never been asked of anyone, and never could be done! And here was Daniel (an exiled teenager!) doing it!

What did the king see in his dream? He saw a single great image of a man consisting of four parts:

- A head of gold
- Breasts and arms of silver

- Belly and thighs of brass
- Legs of iron with feet of iron and clay

But the king also saw something else — he saw a great stone. The stone smashes into the feet of the statue, which is obviously the weak link. This stone was cut without hands — that is, this stone was not of human origin. This stone smote the feet of the image and turned the whole thing into dust that was carried away by the wind.

Many commentators make a big deal out of the toes of this image. In particular, many make a big deal out of the ten toes on this image. But the toes are not mentioned at all when Daniel first describes what the king saw, although they are mentioned later in verses 41-42. Nowhere does Daniel mention “ten toes.” Certainly, we might reasonably infer that there were ten toes, but if there were some special significance to the number ten, you would think that Daniel would have mentioned the number ten.

After destroying the image, the stone became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. The nations that fight against God are also sometimes called mountains. In Jeremiah 51:25, Babylon is called a destroying mountain. The Babylonians pictured the earth as a huge mountain. In fact, they called the earth “E-kur,” which means “Mountain House.” So it is very fitting that the eternal kingdom would be pictured as a huge mountain. In Revelation 8:8, Rome is pictured as a mountain that is cast into the sea. Recall what Jesus said:

Mark 11:23 — *For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith.*

This very thing happened in Revelation! I think that Jesus had Rome in mind when he said this.

Daniel 2:36-38

36 This is the dream; and we will tell the interpretation thereof before the king. 37 Thou, O king, art a king of kings: for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory. 38 And wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the heaven hath he given into thine hand, and hath made thee ruler over them all. Thou art this head of gold.

We are not left to figure this vision out for ourselves. Daniel tells us exactly what the figures mean (and God told Daniel what they mean).

Daniel makes it very clear to King Nebuchadnezzar right from the start who is in charge here — and it is not the king! Nebuchadnezzar had been given his rule and his kingdom by God. Any power, might, or glory that he had was a gift from God.

This was a very bold thing to say to King Nebuchadnezzar! Had Daniel said that to the king under other circumstances, he would likely have been killed on the spot. But after hearing his dream, Nebuchadnezzar was now in the mood to listen to whatever Daniel had to say!