



THE CHRISTIAN HOPE

QUEST LESSON E-1

The Problem: Just before His death Jesus promised His disciples that He would return to earth again (John 14:1-3). But His second coming would be very different from His first. The first time He came to live the life of an ordinary human being, struggling against sin as we must and getting victory by relying upon His Father for spiritual power. The second time He will come as a conquering King to take His waiting, believing people to heaven, and to put to death those who are refusing to believe in Him.

There are many passages of Scripture that speak of the second coming of Jesus. Matthew 24 records some of the signs that Jesus predicted would occur just before His appearance in the sky with all the holy angels. He said that there will be wars, persecution of Christians, earthquakes in various places, famines, and almost universal wickedness on earth. He predicted that false prophets and false messiahs would arise, teaching the people erroneous ideas and trying to win popularity for themselves. Just before His second advent there will be a time of terrible tribulation, that will be more serious than anything this world has ever known (verse 21).

Right down through the centuries since Christ's day Christians have been looking for the second coming of Jesus. Many have thought that His coming would be in their day and were disappointed when it did not occur. Often people could point to wars, earthquakes, and persecutions in their own day, and they thought that these were the signs that Jesus was speaking of in Matthew chapter 24.

How can we know for sure that we are living at the end of time and that Jesus will soon come to deliver His faithful people? Are there any indications in Bible prophecy that certain historical events would occur after which Jesus would come? Can we identify about when the earthquakes, famines, wars, and persecutions occur, which are the ones immediately preceding the second coming of Jesus? In other words, where are we now in the stream of history, and in relation to the second advent of Jesus?

Certainly anyone can see that the wars of the twentieth century have been more destructive than any other wars in history. And anyone can know that earthquakes have been more frequent in recent years than in earlier times, and that famines, pestilences, and wickedness are much more prevalent worldwide than ever before. It is very apparent that many false Christs and prophets have arisen in recent decades. The state of our world spiritually, economically, socially, and politically lines up dramatically with the predictions of Jesus.

But what does prophecy have to say about history? Did the Bible prophets foresee the rise and fall of nations? Can we trace in prophecy the events of the Christian era, observing that Jesus will come after certain major historical occurrences? The fascinating thing about Bible prophecy is that it outlines for us the history of civilization from very early times until immediately before the second coming of Jesus. The book of Daniel in the Old Testament and the book of Revelation in the New Testament focus on the coming of our Lord, but they also give an outline of the sweep of history in the centuries before His coming. This is why we can know for sure that the terrible things happening in our world today are the fulfillment of Jesus' predictions in Matthew 24 and the fulfillment of many other prophetic passages of the Bible.

Let us turn to the book of Daniel and study the first great prophecy of the book, noting how history is outlined for us and how Daniel foresaw the end of our world. It is important to understand that the book of Daniel is like a set of theorems in geometry. Theorem 1 is very simple. The following theorems build on theorem 1 and become more and more complex. Just so, in the book of Daniel each succeeding prophecy gives a little more detail about the history of our world

culminating in the second coming of Jesus. We will begin with the first and simplest of Daniel's prophecies (Daniel 2), and we will discover where we are today in the great stream of history that was to occur before Jesus would come back to our world.

Objectives

First, we notice what Daniel records about Nebuchadnezzar's dream and the embarrassment of the wise men of Babylon.

Second, we see how Daniel was given the same dream in response to earnest prayer.

Third, we discover what the dream was.

Fourth, we learn the interpretation of the dream as given by Daniel to Nebuchadnezzar.

Fifth, we will observe how history has fulfilled all but the last part of the dream.

Sixth, we will relate Daniel's prophecy to Jesus' predictions of His coming, and the apostles prophecies of His second advent.

I. Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

Daniel was a young man of royal Jewish blood, about 18 years of age who, along with a number of other young men, was taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar in his invasion of Palestine in 605 B.C. Daniel and his companions were trained for three years in the University of Babylon, and when they were tested at the end of their training they were found to be more intelligent and learned than any of the other candidates. (See Daniel 1). They had obeyed the laws for healthful living that God had given to His people, and they had refused to be defiled by the pagan ways of their captors. Hence, God blessed them and gave them great success in all that they did. At the end of their three-year training, an event occurred that tested their characters and brought Daniel to the fore as a true servant and prophet of God.

The Word

1. Why was Nebuchadnezzar so disturbed by his dream? What did he threaten to do to the wise men if they did not tell him both the dream and its interpretation? Daniel 2:1-11.
2. What decree did Nebuchadnezzar enact? How were Daniel and his companions affected? Daniel 2:12-13.
3. What was Daniel's reaction when he learned what was to happen? What request did he make of King Nebuchadnezzar? Daniel 2:14-16.

Explanation: The second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign over the Neo-Babylonian Empire was from Nisan (March-April) 603 B.C. to Nisan 602 B.C. (Daniel 2:1). So Daniel was not a personality living in the second century B.C., as many people think. He was a young prince of Judah who lived in the late 7th century B.C. and early 6th century B.C. The book of Daniel was written in the first half of the 6th century B.C. The wise men of Babylon (magicians, astrologers, sorcerers, and Chaldeans) were supposed to receive communications from the gods. They claimed occult powers that should have made it possible for them to tell Nebuchadnezzar what he had dreamt and what the dream was intended to teach. Nebuchadnezzar could not recall the dream, but he knew that it was of great significance because of the emotions it had aroused in him.

Daniel and his young companions were not present when Nebuchadnezzar's request was made to the wise men. When they learned of their fate, they immediately turned to the Lord for guidance and requested time. Daniel's courageous act of appearing before Nebuchadnezzar to plead for time reveals great faith in God. He knew that if the Lord did not reveal to him the dream and its interpretation, his life would be taken.

Relevance: If our lives are in God's hands and, by His grace, we are doing His will, we can appeal to Him in times of stress and danger, knowing that He will do that which is best for us. If He allows the calamity to come upon us, there is a reason for that (Romans 8:28). If He delivers us from it, our faith is strengthened because we know that only God could save us from that situation. We must trust the Lord implicitly as Daniel did. Then we can have peace of mind knowing that our future is provided for by heaven.

II. The Dream Given To Daniel

What happened next was God's response to the prayer of faith.

The Word

4. Who did Daniel tell of Nebuchadnezzar's plan to destroy the wise men? Daniel 2:17.
5. What did Daniel ask his companions to do? Daniel 2:18.
6. How did Daniel react when the dream was made known to him just it had been to Nebuchadnezzar? Daniel 2:19-23.

Explanation: Daniel's first act was to arrange a prayer meeting with his companions. They all knew that only God could save them, and they trusted that, if they prayed earnestly to Him, He would hear and answer. They were not disappointed! The Lord gave Daniel the same dream that He had given Nebuchadnezzar, and He revealed to Daniel what the dream meant. Then Daniel prayed one of the most beautiful prayers recorded in the Bible. He poured out his heart in gratitude for the love and mercy of God. He acknowledged that it is God who reveals secrets and who establishes monarchs and dethrones them. Daniel gave full credit to God for the miracle that had occurred.

Relevance: Prayer is the answer to all our problems. It must be a surprise to the Lord and to the angels of heaven that we pray so little, when God is so willing to come to our aid if we ask Him. When the Lord answers our prayer and special blessings are given us, we must be sure to thank Him as Daniel did. Nothing could be a more tragic evidence of ingratitude than to take credit to ourselves for that which God has done for us.

III. The Dream Given To Nebuchadnezzar And Daniel

When we read Daniel's description of the dream given by God to him and Nebuchadnezzar, we realize why Nebuchadnezzar was so anxious to recall it. It was such a rational and dramatic depiction that it is no wonder Nebuchadnezzar awoke feeling a sense of awe and concern. Although he could not remember what he had dreamt, he knew it was something of tremendous importance.

The Word

7. After receiving the dream and its interpretation from God, to whom did Daniel first go? Daniel 2:24-25.
8. What humble attitude did Daniel adopt as he informed Nebuchadnezzar that he could reveal the secret? Daniel 2:6-30.
9. Describe the great image that Nebuchadnezzar had seen in the inspired dream? Daniel 2:31-33.
10. What eventually smashed the image? Then what happened? Daniel 2:34-35.

Explanation: Nebuchadnezzar had dreamt of a great metal image of a man that had five parts: the head was of gold, the chest of silver, the belly and thighs of brass, the legs of iron, and the feet partly of iron and partly of clay. Anyone having such a dream would want to know why the image was divided into those various parts. Then he saw a great stone "cut out without hands" (verse 34) strike the image and crush it to pieces. The pieces were blown away by the wind, and the great stone then filled the whole earth.

Relevance: Most of our dreams do not come from God. Usually they are quite irrational. But when God gave dreams to the prophets, they were very coherent and rational. Nebuchadnezzar must have been sitting on the edge of his seat waiting for Daniel's interpretation of the dream.

IV. The Interpretation Of The Dream

In the interpretation of the dream given to Daniel by God, we have an outline of world history from his day to the end of time. There can be absolutely no question about the accuracy of this outline as we shall see when we study how history has fulfilled the prophecy.

The Word

11. What kingdom was represented by the head of gold? Daniel 2:36-38.
12. What were represented by the chest of silver and the thighs of brass? Daniel 2:39.
13. What was symbolized by the legs of iron? Daniel 2:40.
14. What did the feet and toes partly of iron and partly of clay represent? Daniel 2:41-43.
15. What event was forecast by the smashing of the great image by the great stone which filled the whole earth? Daniel 2:44-45.

Explanation: Daniel's interpretation of the dream involved the prediction that the Neo-Babylonian Empire, in which he was living, would be succeeded by three other great nations. The fourth of these nations would be divided into several smaller parts which would never again be united into one great empire. All kinds of attempts would be made to unite these divided nations, but all would fail. "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed" (verse 44). The stone "cut out of the mountain without hands" (verse 45) represents the Kingdom of God that will destroy all earthly kingdoms, fill the whole world, and stand for eternity.

Relevance: Under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, Daniel predicted that the fourth great empire after Neo-Babylonia would be divided, and that after many attempts to unite those divisions, God would break into history, smashing all earthly nations and establishing His eternal Kingdom. From the perspective of the twentieth century, has the prophecy been fulfilled so far?

V. History Has Fulfilled All but The Last Part Of The Inspired Dream

Let us take a quick look at the outline of world history since Daniel's day and discover if his predictions were correct.

An Outline of History

1. The head of gold. The Neo-Babylonian Empire (605 B.C. to 539 B.C.), that ruled the territory east of the Mediterranean, was the most powerful nation in the area. It included Babylonia, Assyria, Syria, and Palestine. There were three other nations in existence close to Babylon, but they were very much subordinate and unable to resist her power. They were Media to the east, Lydia to the north-west, and Egypt to the south-west. The chosen people of God (Israel) were completely controlled by the Neo-Babylonian kings. This explains Daniel 2:38. Wherever God's people were to be found, they were under the rulership of the Babylonian kings. And no neighboring nation was able to resist Nebuchadnezzar's power.

Gold was a fitting symbol for Neo-Babylonia. According to the ancient historian Herodotus, gold was used very lavishly in the city of Babylon. Even the robes of the priests were interlaced with gold. The Old Testament prophet, Jeremiah, compares Babylon to a golden cup (Jeremiah 51:7).

2. The chest and arms of silver. The Medo-Persian Empire (539 B.C. to 331 B.C.), usually referred to simply as the Persian Empire, came into being when Cyrus, the Persian prince, conquered his Median grandfather and united Persia and Media. Then he conquered Lydia (547 B.C.), and Babylon (539 B.C.). His son, Cambyses II, conquered Egypt in 525 B.C. The Persians ruled an empire of much greater extent than Neo-Babylonia. They ruled the territory from the Ionian coast of Asia Minor to the borders of India, including Syria and Palestine. But in terms of luxury and magnificence the Persian Empire was inferior to Babylon.

3. The belly and thighs of brass. The Greek Empire (331 B.C. to 168 B.C.) began when Alexander the Great conquered the Persian Empire at the battle of Arbela. The story of Alexander's conquest of the Persian Empire, beginning in northwest Asia Minor and ending at the borders of India, is one of the great sagas of ancient history. After Alexander's death at Babylon in 323 B.C., his kingdom was divided into four parts (Egypt, Syria, Pergamum, Macedonia), but Greeks still ruled until the beginning of the Roman period. Rome conquered Macedonia at the battle of Pydna in 168 B.C. and divided it into four republics. In 148 B.C. Rome crushed a rising in Macedonia and made it a Roman province. Thus the Greek empire finally came to an end.
4. The legs of iron. The Roman Republic followed by the Empire (168 B.C. to the 5th and 6th centuries A.D.) is very fittingly represented by iron. It was, indeed, an iron power that crushed somewhat unmercifully all opponents. Gradually Rome absorbed all the eastern Mediterranean nations that had once ruled by Alexander the Great: Macedonia, Pergamum (western Asia Minor), Syria-Palestine, Egypt. In 30 B.C. Egypt became a Roman Province and Rome ruled the entire Mediterranean area, both east and west. The story of the dismemberment of the Roman Empire by the barbarian tribes from the north and east is very well-known ancient history. From the 4th to 6th centuries various tribes took possession of territories previously ruled by Rome.
5. The feet of iron and clay. The divisions of the Roman Empire still exist today. We can identify seven modern nations of Europe which rule over territories that once belonged to Rome. Those nations and the tribes that preceded them can be listed as follows: England (Anglo-Saxons), France (Franks), Germany (Alemanni), Switzerland (Burgundians), Italy (Lombards), Spain (Visigoths), Portugal (Suevi). Other tribes such as the Heruli, Vandals, and Ostrogoths were completely wiped out in military battles and vanished from history. From the 7th century A.D., the eastern Mediterranean was dominated by Arab Muslims, and from the 14th century by the Ottoman Empire.

"They shall mingle themselves with the seed of men: but they shall cleave one to another even as iron mixed with clay" (Daniel 2:43). Efforts to reunite the various segments of the ex-Roman Empire by conquest or intermarriage of royal families have all failed over a period of centuries. Rulers like Charles V, Napoleon, and Hitler were singularly unsuccessful in their attempts to dominate all of Europe. The phrase, "they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men," implies intermarriage between the various nations. This too has failed.

In 1914, when World War I had begun, the following description of the relationships between the royal houses of Europe appeared in print: "All the reigning princes of northern Europe are closely related in this way. Emperor William of Germany in making war on Great Britain and Russia is likewise at war with his cousins. King George V of Great Britain and Czar Nicholas II of Russia are first cousins through their mothers who were daughters of King Christian IX of Denmark. Everyone who has seen pictures of these two rulers has undoubtedly noticed their family resemblance. William II of Germany is the first cousin of George V, as his mother Victoria, was the sister of George's father, Edward VII of Great Britain. Moreover, Nicholas married another first cousin of both George and William, the Czarina's mother being another sister of King Edward VII. Finally, George, William, and Nicholas are through their fathers, great-grandsons of Charles, Duke of Mecklenburg-Strelitz, who died in 1752, and William and Nicholas are descended from Frederick William III of Prussia. Other cousins of King George and Czar Nicholas, also grandsons of Christian IX of Denmark, are Christian X of Denmark, Constantine I of Greece, and Ernst August, Duke of Brunswick, who is also the son-in-law of Emperor William II." (George H. Merritt, "The Royal Relatives of Europe," *World's Work*, Oct. 1914, (quoted by Edwin R. Thiele, *Outline Studies in Daniel*, p. 33).

Such intermarriages between members of royal families have occurred several times since the fall of the Roman Empire, but they have always failed to bring about reunion or even international peace.

The outline of history predicted by Daniel has amazingly been fulfilled. The following chapters fill in many details of events throughout the Christian era. Daniel chapter 2 indicates that we are living in the feet and toes of the great image, just before the second coming of Jesus.

VI. Daniel And the New Testament Agree

The establishment of God's Kingdom by the destruction of the unbelieving nations of the earth was not only foreseen by Daniel. Jesus and the apostles predicted the same cataclysmic end of human history.

The Word

16. How did Daniel describe the end of our world? Daniel 2:44-45.
17. What prediction of Jesus is remarkably similar to that of Daniel? Matthew 24:30.
18. How did Peter describe the same event? 2 Peter 3:10-11.
19. What prediction of the end by John the Revelator matches that of Daniel? Revelation 6:14-17.
20. What did Jesus urge His followers to do in preparation for the establishment of His Kingdom? Matthew 24:42-51.

Explanation: The message of Jesus and the apostles was that our world will end with universal calamity. Jesus and all the angels of heaven will appear in the sky and the unbelieving nations will be destroyed. Only those who have watched and prayed in preparation for His coming will be saved on that day. The smashing of the image by the great stone, which Daniel identified as the establishment of the Kingdom of God, is the next great event in the drama of the ages. Jesus related His prophecies to those of Daniel (See Matthew 24:15 ff.). The second coming of Jesus is the event to which Daniel was referring when he predicted the setting up of God's Kingdom. The New Testament adds some details not given by Daniel, but the scenario is the same. Mankind has had many centuries to learn of God's love and willingness to save through Jesus Christ. But that love has been scorned and His salvation despised. There is just a little time left in which the Lord pleads with people everywhere to repent and accept Christ as Lord and Savior. Those who respond to His appeal will be sheltered from the storms of trouble coming upon our world (Daniel 12:2-3). Those who do not respond will be among those who cry out for the mountains and rocks to fall on them so that they cannot see the piercing gaze of the Lord as He comes in the clouds of heaven.

Relevance: Where do you stand in relation to the God of all the earth? Are you giving Him the service of a loving heart, or are you living for self? It is possible to be so caught up in the effort to succeed financially and professionally that you forget the claims of Christ on your life. There is no more tragic picture in all the Word of God than people looking up in terror as Jesus comes to save His own. To be outside of Christ now and lost then is a fearful prospect. Open your heart dear soul and allow Jesus to come in by the Holy Spirit. Then you have a wonderful hope for the future. The prophecies of the Bible, instead of being fearsome omens, become the source of your joy and confidence.

Christ has great peace and salvation for you. Will you accept these blessings now by claiming Him as your Lord and Savior?

Review Questions

1. True or False
 - a. Daniel lived in the second century B.C.
 - b. The Chest and arms of silver represent the ancient Persian Empire.
 - c. Jesus never mentioned Daniel.
 - d. The great stone of Daniel 2 represents the eternal Kingdom of Christ.
2. Discuss: What are some of the things that will happen to people at the second coming of Jesus? What will happen to the believing living? What will happen to the believing living? The believing dead? The people who died not believing in Christ? The unbelieving living?