

UNIT 3 PART 1

BF232 OUR FUTURE HOPE

In this session, we're going to continue our study of Our Future Hope by looking at

THE BOOK OF DANIEL.

THE MESSAGE OF DANIEL IS THAT GOD WILL FULFILL HIS PLANS THROUGH THE SON OF MAN.

Now, one of the major things that Daniel communicates is that

GOD RULES OVER THE NATIONS.

This was an important message for Israel because the Babylonians had conquered them and taken them into captivity. God reminded His people that even though they were far away in another land, God was still God; and He still ruled over the nations.

Nebuchadnezzar was the king of Babylon who had conquered the Jews in 605 BC. He had taken some captive in 605, others in 597 BC and others in 587 BC. This same king had a dream that bothered him. If you've read the book of Daniel, you may be familiar with the fact that Daniel and his friends, Hananiah, Azariah and Mishael (or we know them as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego), were part of the wise men that the king of Babylon used to ask questions to. He looked to these men to give him counsel.

Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that bothered him, and he determined to kill all of his wise men if they could not tell him what he dreamed and interpret the dream for him. He didn't want to just tell them the dream and let them interpret it. This is because he knew that they might make something up. So, this was a very real danger for Daniel and his friends. Since they were part of the king's wise men, they would also be killed if they could not answer the king. Well, God had given the dream to Nebuchadnezzar, and He gave the interpretation to Daniel. We read about this dream in Daniel chapter 2. This is what Daniel said to King Nebuchadnezzar,

Daniel 2:29-30 "While Your Majesty was sleeping, you dreamed about coming events. He who reveals secrets has shown you what is going to happen. And it is not because I am wiser than anyone else that I know the secret of your dream, but because God wants you to understand what was in your heart."

Now, I'm going to stop there for a moment. This is amazing because Daniel lets him know that these events are going to happen. The dream was a prophetic dream. Daniel also said, "He who reveals secrets has shown you". The fact that God shows Nebuchadnezzar what is going to happen means that God is in control of what is going to happen, not King Nebuchadnezzar. God was showing His authority over the nations. Daniel wanted the

king to know that this wisdom did not come from Daniel. It came from God. God Himself wanted King Nebuchadnezzar to know what was going to happen. I'll continue. Daniel said,

Daniel 2:31-35 "In your vision, Your Majesty, you saw standing before you a huge, shining statue of a man. It was a frightening sight. The head of the statue was made of fine gold. Its chest and arms were silver, its belly and thighs were bronze, its legs were iron, and its feet were a combination of iron and baked clay. As you watched, a rock was cut from a mountain, but not by human hands. It struck the feet of iron and clay, smashing them to bits. The whole statue was crushed into small pieces of iron, clay, bronze, silver, and gold. Then the wind blew them away without a trace, like chaff on a threshing floor. But the rock that knocked the statue down became a great mountain that covered the whole earth."



This picture is the way some people have drawn this statue to give a visual illustration of what Nebuchadnezzar's dream looked like. You have the head of gold, the breast and arms of silver, the belly and thigh of brass, the legs of iron and feet and toes of clay. Each of these parts of the statue represent kingdoms of this world. I'll read the interpretation in just a moment, but I'll go ahead and tell you that these are four kingdoms that come, one after the other.

The first kingdom is Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian empire. After his days, another kingdom would come, the King of the Kingdom of the Medes and the Persians. After that kingdom, the Macedonian empire would come with Alexander the Great bringing his kingdom. After Alexander the Great, would come Rome. It would be described as legs of iron. Then, that kingdom would slowly be divided like 10 toes; and it would eventually be collapsed.

Now, since these parts of the statue represent different kingdoms, God was telling Israel that

THE KINGDOMS OF THIS WORLD WOULD FALL UNDER THE POWER OF THE COMING KINGDOM OF GOD.

This was an important message for them because God started a kingdom with Israel at Mount Sinai. You remember that from our earlier lessons. God promised that David's kingdom would last forever. Well now, with the Babylonian captivity, David's kingdom had crumbled. David's kingdom had been moved to Babylon where the Babylonians ruled

over the Jews. If God keeps His promises, and He always does, then God would restore His kingdom to Israel. Once again, the Kingdom of God would rule over the earth. So, Daniel interprets the dream.

Daniel 2:36-44 "That was the dream. Now we will tell the king what it means. Your Majesty, you are the greatest of kings. The God of heaven has given you sovereignty, power, strength, and honor. He has made you the ruler over all the inhabited world and has put even the wild animals and birds under your control. You are the head of gold.

"But after your kingdom comes to an end, another kingdom, inferior to yours, will rise to take your place. After that kingdom has fallen, yet a third kingdom, represented by bronze, will rise to rule the world. Following that kingdom, there will be a fourth one, as strong as iron. That kingdom will smash and crush all previous empires, just as iron smashes and crushes everything it strikes. The feet and toes you saw were a combination of iron and baked clay, showing that this kingdom will be divided. Like iron mixed with clay, it will have some of the strength of iron. But while some parts of it will be as strong as iron, other parts will be as weak as clay. This mixture of iron and clay also shows that these kingdoms will try to strengthen themselves by forming alliances with each other through intermarriage. But they will not hold together, just as iron and clay do not mix.

"During the reigns of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed or conquered.

Now, I'm going to stop there for just a moment. Maybe you remember that when you read the Gospel of Matthew and you open the text, that John the Baptist and Jesus tell their listeners, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand".

The Kingdom of Heaven speaks about the kingdom that the God of Heaven will set up. Daniel said, "In the days of those kings, the God of Heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed." Just like in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, this rock hit the toes of the Roman Empire and the whole thing crumbled. Well, that's speaking about the coming Messiah. And so, he says that that is the meaning of the rock cut from among the mountain, though not by human hands, that crushed to pieces the statue of iron, bronze, clay, silver and gold. The great God was showing the king what will happen in the future. The dream is true and its meaning is certain.

Now, we can read this and maybe not think about how significant it is. Daniel was a slave. He was serving the king of Babylon. The king of Babylon had great honor, and Daniel was just a servant. But Daniel, speaking on behalf of God, was very bold to tell the king that God is showing Nebuchadnezzar what He's going to do. It is certain, and this is a reminder to Nebuchadnezzar and to God's people that God is the one who rules over the nations. That was God's message in the days of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon.

After King Nebuchadnezzar, the next Babylonian king to rule was King Belshazzar. We read about him in Daniel chapter 7. We're going to find the same message in that section. So, this is a generation later. Nebuchadnezzar is gone; and now, his descendant is reigning in his kingdom in his place. God still rules over the nations.

THE KINGS OF THIS WORLD COME AND THEY GO. BUT GOD REIGNS FOREVER.

So, in the days of Belshazzar, King of Babylon, God gave Daniel a dream this time. Daniel is the one who had the dream. God revealed His plan to restore His kingdom on the earth. Just like in the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, God gave Daniel a dream that there would be four kingdoms that would rule the earth before the Messiah comes to establish the Kingdom of God. What God showed Daniel is that

GOD WOULD FULFILL HIS PLANS THROUGH THE COMING OF THE SON OF MAN.

So, let's look at the text in Daniel chapter 7.

Daniel 7:1-8 Earlier, during the first year of King Belshazzar's reign in Babylon, Daniel had a dream and saw visions as he lay in his bed. He wrote down the dream, and this is what he saw.

In my vision that night, I, Daniel, saw a great storm churning the surface of a great sea, with strong winds blowing from every direction. Then four huge beasts came up out of the water, each different from the others.

The first beast was like a lion with eagles' wings. As I watched, its wings were pulled off, and it was left standing with its two hind feet on the ground, like a human being. And it was given a human mind.

Then I saw a second beast, and it looked like a bear. It was rearing up on one side, and it had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. And I heard a voice saying to it, "Get up! Devour the flesh of many people!"

Then the third of these strange beasts appeared, and it looked like a leopard. It had four bird's wings on its back, and it had four heads. Great authority was given to this beast.

Then in my vision that night, I saw a fourth beast—terrifying, dreadful, and very strong. It devoured and crushed its victims with huge iron teeth and trampled their remains beneath its feet. It was different from any of the other beasts, and it had ten horns.

As I was looking at the horns, suddenly another small horn appeared among them. Three of the first horns were torn out by the roots to make room for it. This little horn had eyes like human eyes and a mouth that was boasting arrogantly.

So, Daniel sees four kingdoms. These four kingdoms are the same kingdoms that Nebuchadnezzar dreamed about, but they're represented with different images.

Babylon in Daniel's dream is represented by a lion.

Medo-Persia is represented by a bear. It's interesting. In Daniel's dream, the bear is standing taller on one side than it is the other. That was God's way of saying that in the Medo-Persian empire, the Persians would become greater than the Medes.

Then, this leopard that had four wings and four heads spoke about the kingdom that would come under Alexander the Great. Just like a leopard is very swift and runs very fast, Alexander the Great would conquer the world in a very short time. We know from history, that Alexander the Great died very young. I think he was 33 years old. When he died, he had four generals. His kingdom was divided among those four. That's what's meant by the four wings and the four heads on the leopard.

God told us this detail through Daniel long before it ever happened because God knows the future. God is the one who determines the future by His plan; and God will fulfill His plan concerning His kingdom.

The 4th Kingdom Speaks about Rome. So, let's go back to the text. Daniel said.

*Daniel 7:9 I watched as thrones were put in place
and the Ancient One sat down to judge.*

He's talking about God the Father.

*Daniel 7:9-11 His clothing was as white as snow,
his hair like purest wool.
He sat on a fiery throne
with wheels of blazing fire,
and a river of fire was pouring out,
flowing from his presence.
Millions of angels ministered to him;
many millions stood to attend him.
Then the court began its session,
and the books were opened.*

I continued to watch because I could hear the little horn's boastful speech.

So, Daniel's vision goes from Heaven back to the earth. On earth, he can hear this ruler speaking evil about the things of God. It is boastful speech.

Daniel 7:11-14 I kept watching until the fourth beast was killed and its body was destroyed by fire. The other three beasts had their authority taken from them, but they were allowed to live a while longer.

As my vision continued that night, I saw someone like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient One and was led into his presence. He was given authority, honor, and sovereignty over all the nations of the world, so that people of every race and nation and language would obey him. His rule is eternal—it will never end. His kingdom will never be destroyed.

So, notice what God is saying. You have to remember that God made promises about His kingdom all the way back in Genesis. God's plan from the beginning when He put Adam and Eve in authority over His creation and told them to rule on His behalf, was that God wanted man to rule over God's creation for God and to live in perfect fellowship with God. God wanted that kingdom to fill the world. God wanted a kingdom filled with people who worship Him.

Look at where the Son of Man is going to take us. After these four kingdoms of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome, the God of Heaven would set up a kingdom just like He said to Nebuchadnezzar. Now, he shows to Daniel that that kingdom is going to come through One like a Son of Man whose kingdom rules over all the nations. Do you remember the prophecy in Genesis 49, where this lion from the tribe of Judah comes to reign over the nation's? All the world worships Him. Daniel sees a similar vision when the Son of Man comes to reign.

Well, Israel's future hope was based on the plan of God to restore His kingdom on earth, ruled by the Son of man. We've seen that

THIS WAS GOD'S PLAN ALL THE WAY FROM THE BEGINNING.

The first promise that God made after His kingdom was challenged by Satan, is that God would send the seed of the woman to crush the head of the serpent. Also, the kingdom of Satan will crumble in defeat when the Son of Man comes.

You may wonder why I call it the kingdom of Satan. Some may say, "Well, aren't we just talking about the Kingdom of Rome, or the Kingdom of Babylon, or the Kingdom of Persia?" But you have to remember that behind these world powers, is the prince of this world.

We go all the way back to the beginning. We remember that all human beings are divided by those who believe in the seed of the woman, our Savior, Jesus, or they are those who believe the lies of the serpent. Those who believe in the coming seed of the woman are part of God's family. Those who believe the lies of the serpent are part of Satan's fallen

kingdom, his counter kingdom, the Kingdom of Darkness. They will fall when the Lord Jesus, the Son of Man, comes to destroy the kingdoms of this world. Also, we find that Israel would be restored to the promised land to live forever. That's Israel's future hope. This restoration would come in the last days. That's where we'll pick up in our next session.