

The King's Dream and the Prophet's Visions

by Sir Robert Anderson

The sermon delves into the prophetic visions in the Book of Daniel, emphasizing the transition of power from earthly kingdoms to God's eternal kingdom.

Scripture: Psalm 89:27

Topics: "Prophetic Visions", "Kingdom Prophecy"

Description

Sir Robert Anderson delves into the distinction between the Hebrew and Chaldee portions of the writings of Daniel, emphasizing the importance of understanding the visions granted to the prophet in his later years. The book of Daniel is divided into historical chapters and chapters containing prophetic visions, with a focus on the four great visions. The visions reveal the sovereignty of Judah passing to Gentile hands until the establishment of a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, symbolized by a stone cut out without hands. The prophecy foretells the rise and fall of empires, leading to the establishment of an everlasting kingdom.

Transcript

THE distinction between the Hebrew and the Chaldee portions of the writings of Daniel^[1] affords a natural division, the importance of which will appear on a careful consideration of the whole. But for the purpose of the present inquiry, the book will more conveniently divide itself between the first six chapters and the last, the former portion being primarily historical and didactic, and the latter containing the record of the four great visions granted to the prophet in his closing years. It is with the visions that here we are specially concerned. The narrative of the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth chapters is beyond the scope of these pages, as having no immediate bearing upon the prophecy. The second chapter, however, is of great importance, as giving the foundation of the later visions.^[2]

1. "The Chaldee portion of Daniel commences at the fourth verse of the second chapter, and continues to the end of the seventh chapter." -TREGELLES, Daniel, p. 8.

2. The following analysis of the Book of Daniel may help the study of it:

Chap. 1. The capture of Jerusalem. The captivity of Daniel and his three companions, and their fortunes in Babylon (B. C. 606).

Chap. 2. Nebuchadnezzar's dream of THE GREAT IMAGE (B. C. 603-2).

Chap. 3. Nebuchadnezzar's golden image set up for all his subjects to worship. Daniel's three companions cast into the fiery furnace.

Chap. 4. Nebuchadnezzar's dream about his own insanity, and Daniel's interpretation of it. Its fulfillment.

Chap. 5 Belshazzar's feast. Babylon taken by Darius the Mede (B. C. 538).

Chap. 6. Daniel is promoted by Darius; refuses to worship him, and is cast into a den of lions. His deliverance and subsequent prosperity (? B. C.. 537).

Chap. 7. Daniel's vision of THE FOUR BEASTS (? B. C. 541).

Chap. 8. Daniel's vision of THE RAM AND THE GOAT (? B. C. 539).

Chap. 9. Daniel's prayer: the prophecy of THE SEVENTY WEEKS (B. C. 538).

Chaps. 10. - 12. Daniel's LAST VISION (B. C. 534).

In a dream, King Nebuchadnezzar saw a great image, of which the head was gold, the breasts and arms silver, the body brass, the legs iron, and the feet partly iron and partly potter's ware. Then a stone, hewn without hands, struck the feet of the image and it fell and crumbled to dust, and the stone became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.[3]

3. The difficulty connected with the date of this vision (the second year of Nebuchadnezzar) is considered in App. 1. post.

The interpretation is in these words:

"Thou, O king, art a king of kings; for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength and glory. 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. And after thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee, and another third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth. And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron; forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things: and as iron that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise. And whereas thou sawest the feet and toes part of potter's clay and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; but there shall be in it of the strength of the iron, forasmuch as thou sawest the iron mixed with miry clay. And as the toes of the feet were part of iron and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken. And whereas thou sawest iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men: but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay. And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure." (Daniel 2:37-45)

The predicted sovereignty of Judah passed far beyond the limits of mere supremacy among the tribes of Israel. It was an imperial scepter which was entrusted to the Son of David.

"I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth." (Psalm 89:27)

"All things shall fall down before him, all nations shall serve him." (Psalm 72:11)

Such were the promises which Solomon inherited; and the brief glory of his reign gave proof how fully they might have been realized, (2 Chronicles 9:22-28) had he not turned aside to folly, and bartered for present sensual pleasures the most splendid prospects which ever opened before mortal man. Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the great image, and Daniel's vision in interpretation of that dream, were a Divine revelation that the forfeited scepter of the house of David had passed to Gentile hands, to remain with them until the day when "the God of heaven shall set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed." (Daniel 2:44)

It is unnecessary here to discuss in detail the earlier portions of this prophecy. There is, in fact, no controversy as to its general character and scope; and bearing in mind the distinction between what is doubted and what is doubtful, there need be no controversy as to the identity of the empires therein described with Babylonia, Persia, Greece, and Rome. That the first was Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom is definitely stated, (Daniel 2:37, 38) and a later vision as expressly names the Medo-Persian empire and the empire of Alexander as being distinct "kingdoms" within the range of the prophecy. (Daniel 8:20, 21) The fourth empire, therefore, must of necessity be Rome. But it is sufficient here to emphasize the fact, revealed in the plainest terms to Daniel in his exile, and to Jeremiah in the midst of the troubles at Jerusalem, that thus the sovereignty of the earth, which had been forfeited by Judah, was solemnly committed to the Gentiles.[4] The only questions which arise relate, first to the character of the final catastrophe symbolized by the fall and destruction of the image, and secondly to the time of its fulfillment; and any difficulties which have been raised depend in no way upon the language of the prophecy, but solely upon the preconceived views of interpreters. No Christian doubts that the "stone cut out without hands" was typical either of Christ Himself or of His kingdom. It is equally clear that the catastrophe was to occur when the fourth empire should have become divided, and be "partly strong and partly brittle." Therefore its fulfillment could not belong to the time of the first advent. No less clear is it that its fulfillment was to be a sudden crisis, to be followed by the establishment of "a kingdom which shall never be destroyed." Therefore it relates to events still to come. We are dealing here, not with prophetic theories, but with the meaning of plain words; and what the prophecy foretells is not the rise and spread of a "spiritual kingdom" in the midst of earthly kingdoms, but the establishment of a kingdom which "shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms." [5]

4. Cf. Daniel 2:38, and Jeremiah 27:6, 7. - The statement of Genesis 49:10 may seem at first sight to clash with this: "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a law-giver from between his feet, until Shiloh come." But, as events prove, this cannot mean that royal power was to be exercised by the house of Judah until the advent of Christ. Hengstenberg has rightly interpreted it (Christology, Arnold's trans., Ch. 78): "Judah shall not cease to exist as a tribe, nor lose its superiority, until it shall be exalted to higher honor and glory through the great Redeemer, who shall spring from it, and whom not only the Jews, but all the nations of the earth shall obey." As he points out, "until not unfrequently means up to and afterwards." (See ex. gr. Genesis 28:15.) The meaning of the prophecy, therefore, was not that Judah was to exercise royal power until Christ, and then lose it, which is the lame and unsatisfactory gloss usually adopted; but that the pre-eminence of Judah is to be irrevocably established in Christ - not spiritually, but in fact, in the kingdom of which Daniel prophesies.

5. To believe that such a prophecy can ever be realized may seem to betoken fanaticism and folly, but at least let us accept the language of Scripture, and not lapse into the blind absurdity of expecting the fulfillment of theories based on what men conjecture the prophets ought to have foretold.

The interpretation of the royal dream raised the captive exile at a single bound to the Grand-Vizier-ship of Babylon, (Daniel 2:48) a position of trust and honor which probably he held until he was either dismissed or withdrew from office under one or other of the two last kings who succeeded to Nebuchadnezzar's throne. The scene on the fatal night of Belshazzar's feast suggests that he had been then so long in retirement, that the young king-regent knew nothing of his fame.[6] But yet his fame was still so great with older men, that notwithstanding his failing years, he was once more called to the highest office by Darius, when the Median king became master of the broad-walled city.[7]

6. This appears from the language of the queen-mother, Daniel 5:10- 12. But chap. 8:27 shows that Daniel, even then, held some appointment at the court.

7. Daniel 6:1, 2. Daniel cannot have been less than eighty years of age at this time. See chron. table, App. 1. post.

But whether in prosperity or in retirement, he was true to the God of his fathers. The years in which his childhood in Jerusalem was spent, though politically dark and troubled, were a period of the brightest spiritual revival by which his nation had ever been blessed, and he had carried with him to the court of Nebuchadnezzar a faith and piety that withstood all the adverse influences which abounded in such a scene.[8]

8. It is improbable that Daniel was less than twenty-one years of age when placed at the head of the empire in the second year of Nebuchadnezzar. The age to which he lived makes it equally improbable that he was more. His birth would thus fall, as before suggested, about B. C. 625, the epoch of Nabopolassar's era, and some three years later was Josiah's passover, the like of which had never been held in Israel from the days of Samuel (2 Chronicles 35:18, 19).

The Daniel of the second chapter was a young man just entering on a career of extraordinary dignity and power, such as few have ever known, The Daniel of the seventh chapter was an aged saint, who, having passed through the ordeal scathless, still possessed a heart as true to God and to His people as when, some threescore years before, he had entered the gates of the broad-walled city a captive and friendless stranger. The date of the earlier vision was about the time of Jehoiakim's revolt, when their ungovernable pride of race and creed still led the Jews to dream of independence. At the time of the later vision more than forty years had passed since Jerusalem had been laid in ruins, and the last king of the house of David had entered the brazen gates of Babylon in chains.

Here again the main outlines of the prophecy seem clear. As the four empires which were destined successively to wield sovereign power during "the times of the Gentiles" are represented in Nebuchadnezzar's dream by the four divisions of the great image, they are here typified by four wild beasts.[9] The ten toes of the image in the second chapter have their correlatives in the ten horns of the fourth beast in the seventh chapter. The character and course of the fourth empire are the prominent subject of the later vision, but both prophecies are equally explicit that that empire in its ultimate phase will be brought to a signal and sudden end by a manifestation of Divine power on earth.

9. The following is the vision as recorded in Daniel 7:2-14:

"Daniel spake and said, I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of the heaven strove upon the great sea. And four great beasts came up from the sea, diverse one from another. The first was like a lion, and had eagle's wings: I beheld till the wings thereof were plucked, and it was lifted up from the earth,

and made stand upon the feet as a man, and a man's heart was given to it. And, behold, another beast, a second, like to a bear, and it raised up itself on one side, and it had three ribs in the mouth of it between the teeth of it: and they said thus unto it, Arise, devour much flesh. After this I beheld, and, lo, another, like a leopard, which had upon the back of it four wings of a fowl; the beast had also four heads; and dominion was given to it. After this I saw in the night visions, and, behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly; and it had great iron teeth: it devoured and brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with the feet of it: and it was diverse from all the beasts that were before it; and it had ten horns. I considered the horns, and, behold, there came up among them another little horn, before whom there were three of the first horns plucked up by the roots: and, behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of man, and a mouth speaking great things. I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. the judgment was set, and the books were opened. I beheld then, because of the voice of the great words which the horn spake: I beheld even till the beast was slain, and his body destroyed, and given to the burning flame. As concerning the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away: yet their lives were prolonged for a season and time. I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed."

The details of the vision, though interesting and important, may here be passed unnoticed, for the interpretation given of them is so simple and so definite that the words can leave no room for doubt in any unprejudiced mind. "These great beasts, which are four, are four kings" (i.e., kingdoms; compare verse 23), "which shall arise out of the earth; but the saints of the Most High shall take the kingdom and possess the kingdom for ever." (Verses 17, 18)

The prophet then proceeds to recapitulate the vision, and his language affords an explicit answer to the only question which can reasonably be raised upon the words just quoted, namely, whether the "kingdom of the saints" shall follow immediately upon the close of the fourth Gentile empire.[10] "Then," he adds, "I would know the truth of the fourth beast, which was diverse from all the others, exceeding dreadful, whose teeth were of iron, and his nails of brass; which devoured, brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with his feet; and of the ten horns that were in his head, and of the other which came up, and before whom three fell, even of that horn that had eyes, and a mouth that spake very great things, whose look was more stout than his fellows. I beheld, and the same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them; until the Ancient of days came, and judgment was given to the saints of the Most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom."

10. Certain writers advocate an interpretation of these visions which allots the "four kingdoms" to Babylonia, Media, Persia, and Greece. This view, with which Professor Westcott's name is identified, claims notice merely in order to distinguish it from another with which it has been confounded, even in a work of such pretensions as *The Speaker's Commentary* (Vol. 6., p. 333, Excursus on the Four Kingdoms). The learned author of the *Ordo Saeculorum* (Ch. 616, etc.), quoting Maitland, who in turn follows Lacunza (Ben Ezra), argues that the accession of Darius the Mede to the throne of Babylon did not involve a change of empire. These writers further urge that the description of the third kingdom resembles

Rome rather than Greece. According to this view, therefore, the kingdoms are 1st Babylon, including Persia, 2nd Greece, 3rd Rome, 4th a future kingdom to arise in the last days. But as already noticed (p. 32, ante), the book of Daniel expressly distinguishes Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece as "kingdoms" within the scope of the prophecy.

Such was the prophet's inquiry. Here is the interpretation accorded to him in reply.

"The fourth beast shall be the fourth kingdom upon earth, which shall be diverse from all kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, and shall tread it down, and break it in pieces. And the ten horns out of this kingdom are ten kings that shall arise: and another shall arise after them; and he shall be diverse from the first, and he shall subdue three kings. And he shall speak great words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and think to change times and laws; and they shall be given into his hand, until a time and times and the dividing of time. But the judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and to destroy it unto the end. And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him." (Daniel 7:19-27)[11]

11. Daniel 7:19-27. On this vision see Pusey, Daniel, pp. 78, 79.

Whether history records any event which may be within the range of this prophecy is a matter of opinion. That it has not been fulfilled is a plain matter of fact.[12] The Roman earth shall one day be parceled out in ten separate kingdoms, and out of one of these shall arise that terrible enemy of God and His people, whose destruction is to be one of the events of the second advent of Christ.

12. The state of Europe at or after the dismemberment of the Roman Empire has been appealed to as a fulfillment of it, ignoring the fact that the territory which Augustus ruled included a considerable district both of Asia and Africa. Nor is this all. There is no presumption against finding in past times a partial accomplishment of such a prophecy, but the fact that twenty-eight different lists, including sixty-five "kingdoms," have been put forward in the controversy, is a proof how worthless is the evidence of any such fulfillment. In truth the historical school of interpreters have here, as on many other points, brought discredit upon their entire system, containing, as it does, so much that claims attention (see App. 2. Note C).

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