



Thriving in Babylon / Book of Daniel
Wk. 3 "The Fate of the World's Kingdoms"
By Pastor Jody May

Daniel 3:31-49 ESV

Daniel Interprets the Dream

³¹ "You saw, O king, and behold, a great image. This image, mighty and of exceeding brightness, stood before you, and its appearance was frightening. ³² The head of this image was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its middle and thighs of bronze, ³³ its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. ³⁴ As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. ³⁵ Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

³⁶ "This was the dream. Now we will tell the king its interpretation. ³⁷ You, O king, the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, and the might, and the glory, ³⁸ and into whose hand he has given, wherever they dwell, the children of man, the beasts of the field, and the birds of the heavens, making you rule over them all—you are the head of gold. ³⁹ Another kingdom inferior to you shall arise after you, and yet a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. ⁴⁰ And there shall be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron, because iron breaks to pieces and shatters all things. And like iron that crushes, it shall break and crush all these. ⁴¹ And as you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, it shall be a divided kingdom, but some of the firmness of iron shall be in it, just as you saw iron mixed with the soft clay. ⁴² And as the toes of the feet were partly iron and partly clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly brittle. ⁴³ As you saw the iron mixed with soft clay, so they will mix with one another in marriage, but they will not hold together, just as iron does not mix with clay. ⁴⁴ And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever, ⁴⁵ just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure."

Daniel Is Promoted

⁴⁶ Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face and paid homage to Daniel, and commanded that an offering and incense be offered up to him. ⁴⁷ The king answered and said to Daniel, "Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery." ⁴⁸ Then the king gave Daniel high honors and many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon. ⁴⁹ Daniel made a request of the king, and he appointed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego over the affairs of the province of Babylon. But Daniel remained at the king's court.



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Thriving in Babylon... Where are we headed?

For all of Chapter 2 we said last week there is an overarching main point:

God's Wisdom and Power is what supervises all of History.

Today's sermon answers the question proposed by that statement, "To what end and how?" Where is God's Providence taking history? What are the means that He uses to get there?

BTW this is a big deal because in our culture there is a sense that things work together for a purpose, **everyone has a destiny to find**, and if you believe in a destiny then someone had to make the plan. So, in our culture we are always on the hunt to try to find the meaning of life.

Our stories reflect man's quest to try and decipher a destination to history and a reasoning for wars and rumors of wars. 20 years ago, westernized culture produced the trilogy of Movies based on a super-computer-generated world called the *Matrix*. It attempted to explain what a Messianic figure looks like, how his work was controlled by a greater power, all for the purpose to begin a cycle of life again for the human race. In this story, all of history and life pointed to a reincarnation/recreation of that world in a never-ending cycle. It combined Judao/Christian narratives with Eastern Mysticism + the threat of what some thinkers believe is our doom; that is AI or Artificial Intelligence and its' becoming self-aware. It was generation's 'X' attempt to answer where might history be headed.

This desire to know the future hasn't changed in the last 2 decades it was just replaced with the *Mockingjay Trilogies* for a new generation. Instead of offering an answer for our tomorrows there were several copycat stories that spun off those stories and here's why. **The SMALLER the world seems through media AWARENESS, the more HEIGHTENED we become to its' FALLENESS and the more DESPERATE we become in trying to make sense out of all of it.**

Friends, let me tell you, I know who can make sense of it, and I know how it ends, and I know that it will get better, and I know evil will be repaid, and I



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know some will be saved, and I know all that because the Bible tells me the who, why, how, and the situations that lead up to the when.

Ephesians 1:9-10 ESV

9 (The Gospel / Ephesians 1:1-8) ... making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

The Gospel tells us the need, redemption, it tells us the how, through Christ, and it tells us the end, judgement day, it just doesn't tell us the when, but it does give us signs.

As a matter of fact, in our story today Daniel, for the first time in history, is telling someone **outside of Israel that there is more to the world than what you think**. Up to this point in history, some elect Jews have realized, through the teaching of their prophets, God has a plan, to redeem the world through direct intervention, an incarnation, because they couldn't get the job done. Daniel is given the opportunity by God to declare to the audience of the world how all of history is going to play out. This is God's direct Gospel proclamation, which is declared through Neb's dream:

- There are definite sides, and you will have to make a choice what side you will be on.
- That time is limited and there is a definite ending for all world powers.
- There will never again be another power outside God's Kingdom.

These very important facts, this gospel, is told in a dream, so without being too fancy we are breaking up this dream in three simple sections that I believe will help us cope with what is coming in the future: what the King saw, what Daniel interpreted, and what was their response.

1. What the King saw

³¹“You saw, O king, and behold, a great image. This image, mighty and of exceeding brightness, stood before you, and its appearance was frightening.

³² The head of this image was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its middle and thighs of bronze, ³³ its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay.



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³⁴ As you looked, a stone was cut out **by no human hand**, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. ³⁵ Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

Now we see what has had Neb so upset and sleepless. If you remember from last week this dream in particular was disturbing enough that what he could remember made no sense, but the impact of it was lasting even after he woke up. And it was a reoccurring dream, and he was having it enough, that it made him make a major proclamation of his own: Unless the wise men; the enchanters, astrologers, and court magicians tell him what he dreamt and what it meant he would tear them literally limb from limb and he would tear down their homes, making them public latrines.

Daniel first tells him here what he saw, which is an extraordinary feat, as the wise men told us last week that absolutely NO ONE could do this, no one that is on this side of heaven, it was a task that only the gods could accomplish. The image is a statue of a man, and in our minds we most likely equate greatness with size, for we have a great statue in our land, you know her as *Liberty*. But in our story, there is no inclination towards its' size. No, what makes this statue great is what it means by the collection of what it is made up of. We will get to more of that in point 2.

What we want to notice in what the King saw here is three different things. First, that the text in Aramaic calls it an **image/idol** meaning it was there to represent or to stand for something demanding reverence. In the Bible Idols were symbols made out of wood, stone, or metal that represented different gods. They were usually small, you could take them with you when you moved, and the middle east full of these figurines representing the deities of the day.

Secondly, the appearance of this idol was exceedingly greater than any idol Neb had ever seen. The stature of this representation of a man was frightening, it caused in him, **reverence**. It stirred in him the sense of awe and remember it would take a lot to bring this man to awe, Daniel called him the



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king of kings, he is full of himself. It is no short thing to make him revere something when he believed it was himself that should be revered above all.

Then lastly, to complete his anxiety that caused his insomnia, we look in v.34: **As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces.**

A stone that has no shape, no physical beauty, no grandeur to it, comes out of nowhere and destroys without warning this idol that should be worshipped. A hunk of stone with no man-made carved shape obliterates this beautiful man-made image and, in its' place, takes over the landscape by growing into a mountain, so that the statue could never be erected again. **That which was to take the place of all other idols, to be worshipped above all, in the end really held no special place at all.**

One of the **chief fears of men**, that which keeps us all up at night, is to come to learn that which we thought was to be held in high esteem, that which we thought was to be revered more than other things, that which we believed had the capability to save us, was **in the end finite**, short-lived, and lacked the power to save you.

This reality first hit me when I realized the toughest man I knew was going to die and in dying would leave me without a defender. But **NOTHING prepares you more for the gospel than to hear that your idol can't save you**, and to understand that what you once revered was not worthy to be worshipped

Maybe for you that was a parent, or a job, a wise teacher, a therapist, a mentor, or world-view (pacifism, vegan, environmentalist, activist, etc) or even a form of government. All in this world is finite, all will fail you, but like I said in the beginning **there is good news for all of us for in this dream there is something that is greater than a man-made a man-contrived idol.**

2. What Daniel Interpreted

You (Neb, king of kings into whose hand God has given all things to rule over) are the head of gold. ³⁹Another kingdom inferior to you shall arise after you, and yet a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. ⁴⁰And



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there shall be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron, because iron breaks to pieces and shatters all things. And like iron that crushes, it shall break and crush all these. ⁴¹And as you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, it shall be a divided kingdom, but some of the firmness of iron shall be in it, just as you saw iron mixed with the soft clay.

Ok, here comes the interpretation, **Babylon** represents the **Golden Head**, the purest of the kingdoms, the most efficient, the most beautiful. Next, we have a chest and arms of **Silver** which represents the **Medes/Persians** that will come and take Babylon and all she controls to the east. They are stronger and larger but not as efficient, not as lovely. It is this empire though that sends the Jews home in 70 years but not before they made a nasty enemy. The **middle thighs of Bronze** are a mixture of metals, stronger than the first two and represents the **Greeks**. This empire is larger and takes over the known world through Alexander the Great's efforts, but it too will fade. Next, we have the **legs of Iron**, the strongest metal, a metal that can break other metals, it is the least prettiest and the most cruel in design, it represents **Rome**. But Rome brings strength and good strong legs to rest upon, but it brings stability through war and fear.

This image takes you the reader, through the timeline we see in scripture. What you are seeing is a window into the past that the elect, of the Jews, would see over the years when God's revelation through prophets would grow quiet. Faith was preserved because God's people witnessed the story told in Daniel unfold. They saw the Persians send them home, then under the Greeks they were Hellenized and learned a unifying language, philosophy and numbering system, and under Rome they were rewarded with order that came from the sword. All of that history prepared them to **say goodbye and not put hope in a system of religion** but to look for a Messiah which brought them to an awareness they were to be looking not for the next BIG thing but a man. **We witnessed God's wisdom and power supervising and orchestrating all of history** for this moment, the incarnation of His Son, Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ.

Now in the dream there is one more image, there is the image of Iron mixed with Clay, and we see a stone that crushes the feet of the idol, bringing down the whole structure, turning it to dust and scattering it to the four winds.



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First, let me give the interpretation of the things I know for sure today, that at this point 99% of theologians agree if they have half a brain. The stone represents Jesus Himself; He is the stone that takes over with force the empire and He is the mountain, His Kingdom, that overtakes the whole world. Psalm 118 is a Messianic Psalm and in v.22 the Psalmist describes the function of the stone, the Messiah in Jewish culture ([see also Psalm 2](#)).

Psalm 118:22 ESV

²² The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone

Paul testifies to this fact that indeed Jesus is this stone:

1 Corinthians 10:4 ESV

⁴ and all (the Jews in the OT) drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.

Peter reiterates it's Jesus, that is this stone.

1 Peter 2:6-8 ESV

⁶ For it stands in Scripture:

“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone,
a cornerstone chosen and precious,
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

⁷ So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe,

“The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone,”

⁸ and

“A stone of stumbling,
and a rock of offense.”

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

What you do not see in the text though is the completion of the prophecy. **The stone has not yet come.** It has not yet struck for the last time the kingdoms of this world, it has not set up an everlasting kingdom yet that will never be removed replacing all others, this prophecy is speaking of **Jesus' second incarnation, His second coming** ([Rev. 1:7](#); [Heb. 9:28](#); [Mat.24:30](#)). Which puts us, the church, all in this neat space just like our ancestors, we are living in an actuality of the Gospel, **the already but not yet.** It has started, the redemption,



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but it is not complete. We all wait in anticipation and groan with desire for it to be fulfilled ([Romans 8:22-24](#)).

You should know that this chapter in Daniel along with chapter 7 is something that theologians' debate over a lot and I need to fill you in on it **NOT so you make a decision today**, but that you can start somewhere to begin to form your own position on eschatology/end times.

Some see the Iron legs and the clay toes as the Roman empire intermingled through marriage with other worldly kingdoms. For theologians this is where it gets interesting because we all are not quite 100% sure of what time period this is because the stone/Jesus has not returned so the image is not yet completed. So, the debate that has been happening for while is are we seeing the mixing of minor kingdoms, sharing the power of Rome, during the Millennium or after the Millennium? The Millennium is a time where God's influence spreads and at the end of it is the actual judgment of all of creation. ([Revelation 20:1-6](#)).

Some Christians believe that through the work of the church, through an invisible spiritual kingdom, Christians will come to control the world overtaking the last kingdom (mixture of Iron and Clay), perhaps through influence that is ultimately rejected bringing in the Final judgment by Christ those are of the **Amillennial position**. Some believe over time this picture shows the church overcoming the world through its' efforts bringing in the reign of Christ, the **Postmillennial position**. While still others see this as a physical takeover, it is the manifested might of Jesus through a theocracy, it is the church evolved into a political power, that is more of the **Premillennial persuasion**. I have read a lot of arguments for each side over the last week and there are several things I have learned.

- First, don't put all your eggs in one basket until you study thoroughly all the baskets.
- Secondly, all Christians, agree that Jesus is the stone, and that His second coming is for judgment.
- Thirdly, you are not commanded to understand eschatology to be saved.
- Fourthly, BUT your eschatology will affect how you live.



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- Fifthly, don't spend all your time worrying about how to view end times but spend your time understanding the Gospel, and your perception of the Gospel and how it has played out through history will influence how you view end times.

Talking about understanding the Gospel let's look now at this last section of chapter 2, what does the realization of the dream mean for the world?

45 just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure."

Daniel declares the stone is divine, it comes not from human hands, it does not derive esteem because of man-made beauty, no, as a matter of fact the Bible describes Him like this:

Isaiah 53:2-3 ESV

- ² For he grew up before him like a young plant,
and like a root out of dry ground;
he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,
and no beauty that we should desire him.**
- ³ He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;
and as one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.**

The stone had no outward majesty, no reason to follow Him, nothing that would make Him like an idol, in fact the opposite is true, He was despised. God takes the stone that creation rejected, and He makes it what must be accepted in order to be in His Kingdom, He makes it larger than Everest in the Bible so that no one can ignore Him, Jesus our King.

The World says today let's make an image that you like and want to follow, the Gospel explained to us that God would draw near in flesh as one of them ([John 1:14](#)). The world says revere that which will offer you hope temporarily but



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the gospel offers us Salvation in someone who never dies, never changes, and will never quit on us.

Jesus was set apart to be thrown aside like a stone that was in the way of progress and instead He became the rock that kings and nations break upon. And if the steadiness of Jesus can get the church through 2,000 years of history, to see how three quarters of this prophecy plays out, what is there that He can't get you through today? We can rest assured according to the prophecy that not only will we endure but our Kingdom will overcome all.

If that is the Stone you know, if you see this stone as Jesus, then you should have a similar response as the King and Daniel.

3. What the response was

Daniel Is Promoted

⁴⁶ Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face and paid homage to Daniel, and commanded that an offering and incense be offered up to him. ⁴⁷ The king answered and said to Daniel, "Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery."

King Neb demonstrates what the world should consider, the only reasonable reaction that the world can have. The King bows down to Daniel, not necessarily because he worships him, but because he recognizes Daniel serves the true and living God, not some man-made idol.

Today family, let me pose to you a thought. While you may not think you are no Daniel, I would agree with you. No, you are actually modeled and developed by a Sovereign God, **after someone that is better**. You and I are being made into the image of Jesus, the great stone, to be the actual building blocks of his Kingdom:

1 Peter 2:4-5 ESV

⁴ As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, ⁵ you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.



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Are there people around you today that praise the name of God because of you? What is it we are spending time doing if it is not living for His name to be praised? For the believer our ultimate victory is not to have the clap on the back, the bonus in the paycheck, the adoring praises of our children, nor the likes on Social Media, NO, our ultimate victory is when people look at our lives, they experience the Gospel through our lives, they are just blessed by being around us, and they give God praise.

Also, let's stop letting the world tell us we're no good. It is a ploy of the enemy right now to yell at the church and demand we admit we are racist, we are unloving, and we are out of touch because once they get us to admit it, they steal our opportunity to be a part of God's Kingdom building endeavors. If we hold to our convictions, there is a reward for appropriate behavior.

⁴⁸ Then the king gave Daniel high honors and many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon. ⁴⁹ Daniel made a request of the king, and he appointed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego over the affairs of the province of Babylon. But Daniel remained at the king's court.

Family, when we are enduring, when we are thriving in Babylon, when we live with optimism, with some humility, and wisdom it can put us in the place of great influence. Daniel was able to establish his friends and himself as leaders of the kings' advisors. In turn Daniel set up the return of the Jews, preserved them, and through his efforts the stone was put into play, the Messiah would come!

As the church our job now is not to pack up and move out, but our job is to choose to help our country and our local communities even when they come against us. The way we battle our fears in an ever-changing culture is that we remember through God's Wisdom and Power **He is sovereign supervising all of history to get us to the point we can't see yet, where our king returns, our Lord is praised, and we rejoice watching the nations come to the realization He alone is worthy to be praised.**



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PRAYER

COMMUNION

BENEDICTION

Go in the name of the Father, that uses the World's glory and might to bring in His Kingdom.

Go in the name of the Son, who was and is the Stone that supplants all our enemies and brings in the Kingdom of God, ushering in our peace and rest.

Go in the name and power of the Holy Spirit, that causes the nations of the world to notice the might of God and causes rulers to make decisions for all of God's plans.