

A Dream of a Statue

This article on Daniel 2 is taken from the Ligonier Ministries

God's sovereign rule as the determiner of history is the warp and woof of Scripture, but some books reveal this truth more plainly than others. Daniel is one of those books, as texts such as today's passage leave no doubt that the Lord alone controls all things.

The setting is the Babylonian court shortly after Nebuchadnezzar had a troubling dream that led to insomnia (Dan. 2:1). Ancient Babylonians strongly believed in supernatural forces, and looked for omens in the stars, dreams, and even the shapes of animal livers. Nebuchadnezzar saw his dream as a message from on high, but he could not read the message, so he called his "magicians ... enchanters ... sorcerers" and other wise men to help him understand his vision (v. 2). Nebuchadnezzar normally relayed his dreams' content to these advisors, but he was so alarmed by the dream that he wanted to be absolutely sure of its meaning. Anyone could invent a meaning they could attach to the dream's symbols, but to give the dream itself without help from the dreamer was a sign of clear inspiration by God. That is why Nebuchadnezzar demanded to hear both the dream and its meaning (vv. 3–11).

When no Babylonian wise man could help him, Nebuchadnezzar threatened to kill all of his wise men, including Daniel and his friends. After the prophet prayed, however, God revealed the dream to him. Daniel returned thanks, noting that the Lord could give the true sense of the dream because He makes kings rise and fall (vv. 12–24). John Calvin notes that what we often regard as the unpredictable rise and fall of kingdoms is meant to direct our confidence towards our Creator. He comments, "God, I say, so changes empires, and times, and seasons, that we should learn to look up to him." The sudden rise and fall of powers and even the changes in our own lives prove that the Lord alone is our security.

In any case, Nebuchadnezzar's dream concerned the empires that would succeed Nebuchadnezzar. Most likely, we are to understand the kingdoms represented by the various part of the statue as follows: head of gold—Babylon; chest and arms of silver—Media- Persia; middle and thighs of bronze—Greece; legs of iron and feet of iron mixed with clay— Rome (vv. 25–43). But the end of the dream is the most remarkable part—a rock not cut by human hands would destroy all these kingdoms and become a mountain so large as to fill the whole earth (vv. 44–45). God's kingdom, not established by human initiative, would rise victorious during the Roman era. Here we have a clear prediction of Jesus Christ.