

Daniel Series Part 4

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[0 : 0 0] Will rivers of blood flow through the colonnaded avenues of Babylon? Will widows weep and orphans cry at the massacre of the wise men of the kingdom? Will Daniel and his friends occupy an early grave far from Jerusalem? The answers to these questions all hinge on the words of Daniel uttered in the presence of King Nebuchadnezzar. Will Daniel reveal the king's dream? Will he grant the required interpretation? It is a moment of high drama, such as the palace had never before experienced. As we spend time considering the encounter of Daniel with Nebuchadnezzar, we will do so by exploring three vivid contrasts that the unfolding drama reveals.

Two men, two kingdoms, and two responses. That is the manner in which we want to consider this part of Daniel chapter 2. Two men, two kingdoms, and two responses.

First of all, two men. And we intend to spend not a great deal of time here as we want to move on to what is really the heart of the matter, which is the two kingdoms. But there is an intriguing portrayal in the introduction to Daniel's interpretation of two men who stand in stark contrast one to another. Who are these two men? Well, they are Arioch and Daniel. We're introduced to Arioch in this chapter, and he is once again presented to us in verse 24 when Daniel went to Arioch.

And he seeks his help in securing this audience with King Nebuchadnezzar. So, we have Arioch, and we have Daniel. And these are two men who we will notice just in a moment have very different perspectives, two very different ways of viewing the world and indeed of living their lives.

One operates with a man-centered perspective, and one with a God-centered perspective. And as we consider these two men briefly, take careful note that while millennia have come and gone since this palace drama, men and women have not changed. We too must operate with one or other of these alternative and opposing perspectives. So, let's consider them. What about Arioch? Well, Arioch seems, in as much as we can take a view about him, he seems a reasonable man. He clearly had a lot of time and respect for Daniel, and he goes to considerable personal risk to facilitate the opportunity for Daniel to see the king. Arioch, it would seem, though a military man and ruthless, no doubt is not presented to us as a monster, even though he is given by Nebuchadnezzar this blood-curdling task of killing all the wise men in Babylon. And yet, Arioch is a man who operates with what we are describing as a man-centered perspective. And we see this in two ways as he plays his part in the drama.

[3 : 4 6] We find these two ways in verse 25. Notice the manner in which Arioch presents Daniel to the king. Arioch took Daniel to the king at once and said, and these are the important words for us to focus in on, I have found a man among the exiles from Judah who can tell the king what his dream means.

Now, they seem innocent enough words. He's simply describing from his perspective what has happened, introducing Daniel to the king. Surely there is not a great deal that can be drawn from these words of Arioch, but I think there is a great deal that can be drawn. First of all, notice how he begins his introduction of Daniel. I have found a man. Now, we don't know if Arioch was absolutely sure that Daniel would deliver on his promise of revealing the dream, but he certainly appears confident. This is a man who will tell the king what his dreams mean. But one thing is very clear, that Arioch will do all in his power to ensure that he emerges from this episode with his standing being enhanced. This explains his less than truthful, I have found. Of course, those of us who were here last week and were considering the first part of the chapter know very well that he had not found

Daniel. Daniel had presented himself to Arioch. Daniel had gone to Arioch and said, I am able to give the interpretation of the dream. Arioch had done nothing to find Daniel. But notice how he massages the truth in his favor. I have found this man who can reveal the mystery to the king.

I wonder if that has a familiar ring. Are we not all naturally inclined to massage the truth in a manner that enhances our reputation or contributes to our interests? The way we report events, the information we include and the information we exclude. The subtle variation determined by the particular audience or circumstance and governed ultimately by self-interest, by wanting to look good, by wanting to evade responsibility or guilt in some particular circumstance. Man-centered, me-centered. Arioch here represents what we all are in so many ways, living our lives in that man-centered way, seeking our own interests and our own advancement, and willing to massage the truth in a manner that will provide that for us. There is a second way in which Arioch's man-centered perspective is revealed in the very same sentence that we are considering there in verse 25 because Arioch says, I have found a man among the exiles from Judah who can tell the king what his dream means. This is a very dangerous moment for Arioch and for all those who are connected to the palace. And in whom is Arioch trusting? In whom is he trusting as he presents

Daniel before the king? Well, his trust is deposited in Daniel. I have found a man who is able. I have identified a man who is wise. I am trusting in this man, Daniel, who will provide the answers for the king and so prevent the bloodbath that is about to occur. Arioch, a reasonable man. Not, it would seem, though we don't know enough to come to definitive conclusions, a gratuitously wicked man, but a man who is operating in this man-centered way, seeking his own interests and depositing his trust in another man to provide answers to his own difficulties and circumstances. Does that not also have a familiar ring to us? How many today, how many of us place our trust in other men? Perhaps our trust in one whom we love and around whom we build our lives, a wife or a husband, children whom we worship and adore and who are the center of our existence. Some put their trust in those who can provide them with a promotion or financial advancement. And many simply trust in themselves and live for themselves. Their trust is deposited in man. Arioch, a man-centered perspective, but there is another man with another perspective. Daniel operates with a God-centered perspective. Note how he addresses the king and highlight, or we will highlight two crucial expressions that he uses there from verse 27 as he has opportunity to speak. Daniel replied to the king, no wise man, and he goes on. And we can simply begin there with the very words with which Daniel begins. It eloquently describes his God-centered perspective. The contrast with Arioch is very marked. You see, Arioch comes before the king and he says, here is a man. This man will solve the problem. This is the man we were looking for. And what does

[9 : 31] Daniel say? The very first thing he says, no man, no wise man, no enchanter, no magician, no man is able to solve the problem. No man is able to reveal the mystery. And he goes on humbly to very explicitly recognize his own limitations and lack of wisdom. Then in verse 30, as for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because I have greater wisdom than other living men. There's nothing in me that would provide an answer to your problem. Not only is Daniel conscious of man's inherent incapacity, but he also makes no attempt to personally profit from the knowledge that he has been granted by God. Daniel does know the mystery, because God had told him the mystery. But there is no attempt by Daniel to profit from that and to claim any credit for it. You see, his perspective is so different to the perspective of Arioch. But of course, Daniel does not simply limit himself to recognize that the absence of wise men. But of course, he contrasts that with what he goes on to say in verse 28. No wise man indeed, but there is a God in heaven. But there is a God in heaven. This is the crux of the matter. And this is the truth that governs and informs Daniel's perspective. There is a God in heaven. There is a God in heaven who knows the future. And there is a God in heaven who knows what will come to pass, because he determines what will come to pass. The only way it would be possible to know what will come to pass is if one has control over what comes to pass. If you do not have control over what comes to pass, you cannot know what will come to pass. You see, you don't have the power to know, because it's not within your power. But this God in heaven, he is able to reveal what will come to pass, because he determines and governs what will come to pass. There is a God in heaven. And so you have this first contrast in these two men, these two men, Ariok and Daniel. And so I ask you this morning, what is your perspective? And take a moment to examine yourself, not only here as we were gathered in this building, but perhaps at the close of this service, as you go your way, you go home, you engage in conversation with others, just take some time to think about what you're saying and why you're saying it. To recognize if you are guilty of Ariok's perspective of life, on saying things in a manner that makes you look good and that isn't concerned with really the truth coming out, but with you knowing some advantage. Examine your motivations, examine what you say and what you choose not to say, and ask yourself, well, why did I say that? Or why did I not say that? And I suspect that many of you, as is true of myself, will discover that so often what is the driving force will be a man-centered perspective, your own interests, your own profit in one way or another. But also in whom do you trust?

In whom have you deposited your truth, your trust? Is your trust in a man? Or is your trust, as with Daniel in the God who there is in heaven? These two men and the contrast between them serve as an intriguing and revealing introduction to the following contrast, which is the contrast of the two kingdoms, the two kingdoms that are described for us in the dream and in the interpretation of it.

And we turn now to the dream and its interpretation. It's an interpretation that Daniel explicitly states in verse 28, and verse 28, concerns what will happen in days to come. And so very clearly it is being explained that this is what we could call predictive prophecy. What is going to happen in the future, beginning in the present certainly, but moving in to a future and indeed distant future.

And what we have revealed in the dream and in its interpretation is a story or a presentation of two contrasting kingdoms, a kingdom of man and the kingdom of God, represented in turn by a statue and by a rock or by a stone. Let's think of each in turn. The kingdom of man represented by the statue of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. This statue represents what we might generically call the kingdom of man.

[14 : 33] The dream and its interpretation do present us with a fairly complex description of the statue, and much can be and has been said about the meaning of the statue and the different constituent parts of it. In particular, interest is aroused by the identification of the kingdoms represented by the different parts of the statue. Now the traditional interpretation adopted throughout church history by the church fathers and the reformers and indeed to the present day is, to my mind, a convincing one concerning who we are to understand are represented by the different parts of the statue. The head of gold that we have read of represents Babylon. That is not something we need to interpret. Daniel explicitly states that the head of gold that the head of gold represents Babylon, in this case personified in the person of Nebuchadnezzar. But there is, of course, in the statue another, a second kingdom. And the traditional view,

I think a very credible one, is that that second kingdom represents the Medo-Persian empire that followed on from the Babylonian one. If I may just backtrack a moment and speak about the Babylonian empire as the head of the statue. And as the Babylonian empire is presented as the head of the statue, there does seem to be a sense in which the Babylonian empire is being viewed as the archetypal kingdom of man, with Nebuchadnezzar curiously granted almost Adam-like powers that extend even to the beasts of the field and the birds of the air. There's almost a throwback to Eden.

And you have Nebuchadnezzar not only as the one who governs over the human race, but as we read, even the beasts of the field and the birds of the air come under his authority. So Babylon, represented by the head of gold, the chest and arms of silver representing the Medo-Persian empire.

Then as we go down, the statue of the belly and thighs of bronze, understood to represent, I think, cogently the Greek empire, a kingdom that the dream maintains would rule over the whole earth.

And that prophecy of the Greek expansion to rule over the whole earth, finding poignant fulfillment in the reputed tears of Alexander the Great on discovering that there were no more lands for him to conquer. The story is told that as a young man in his twenties, when he had conquered all of the known world, he broke down in tears because there were no more lands for him to conquer. The Greek empire who would rule over the whole earth, as the dream indicates. And then you have finally of the kingdoms of man, the feet of iron and clay that represent the Roman empire. The empire, of course, that was current when Jesus came. A kingdom described as strong as iron that would crush all who would stand in its way.

[17 : 48] And so it was. Now, so much more could be said about this statue and about the possible meanings and nuances of meanings that the statue represents. But if we were to go down that road, for one thing, time would not allow us, but I think also to go down that road would distract us from the big story and the single most important consideration. Concerning this statue, the most important thing to grasp and to be clear on is that it is one statue and it is the statue of a man. It is one statue. It is not a multiplicity of statues.

One statue. So many kingdoms, yes. And kingdoms will come and go and there'll be the kingdoms that are prophesied in the dream, by name as it were. But there will be other kingdoms that will follow. And all of them, all of these kingdoms represent or represented by one man, by one statue, the kingdom of man.

So this statue in the dream, representing not only the actual kingdoms prophesying, but every earthly kingdom or empire or civilization or superpower, and recognizing that all of these, compositely as it were, constitute the kingdom of man. One kingdom represented by the statue. What can we say about the kingdom of man? Well, the statue gives us insight into this kingdom, characteristics of this kingdom. It is a kingdom that is impressive in appearance. We read in verse 31, you looked, O king, and there before you stood a large statue, an enormous, dazzling statue, awesome in appearance.

And is it not so? The kingdoms of this world, awesome in appearance, so impressive, so dominating, so overwhelming as we simply envisage and as we witness them as they rise to the zenith of their power. Impressive in appearance. What else can we say about this kingdom of man? Well, it is human in its origin. As Daniel explains the dream to Nebuchadnezzar, he is able to direct the word directly to him and say to Nebuchadnezzar, you are the head of gold. The head of this kingdom is a man. Those who govern in these kingdoms are men, human in its origin. But also these kingdoms are passing in their duration.

Every human kingdom. And listen clearly to this. Every human kingdom has an after this. It's a simple statement, but it's a very significant one. Every human kingdom has an after this. After this kingdom, there arose another kingdom. And after this kingdom, there arose another kingdom. And after this kingdom, there arose another kingdom. So however glorious, however impressive, however threatening, they all come to the point where in history they are described in this way. After this, there came another kingdom. So these kingdoms, the kingdom of man in its different representations, passing in their duration and limited in their power, each expression of the kingdom of man will in due course be superseded and destroyed, and in the language of the dream itself and its interpretation swept away like chaff on the threshing floor. Though at times they appear as so powerful and so indestructible, that is appearance alone, for they are limited in their power. So there is this statue that represents the kingdom of man, but there is also a stone or a rock that represents the kingdom of God, this contrasting kingdom. We've spoken of two kingdoms, the kingdom of man represented by the statue, but there is also the kingdom of God represented by this stone or rock. We've read there in verse 34, the dream, while you were watching a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them.

[22 : 13] Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were broken to pieces at the same time and became like chaff on a threshing floor. In the summer, the winds swept them away without leaving a trace. Who or what does the rock or stone represent? Well, we don't need to speculate or opt for a best guess, because Jesus himself identifies the stone for us. We've read in the parable in Luke chapter 20, but it speaks of the beloved Son being sent, and the beloved Son is identified by Jesus with reference to Old Testament passages, be they direct references or allusions to them. And we read in verse 17 of chapter 20 of Luke's gospel, Jesus looked directly at them and asked, then what is the meaning of that which is written? The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone. They had a direct quote from Psalm 118 that we read earlier in the service, but then Jesus goes on to say, everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed. And while not a quote from the passage in Daniel, there is clearly an allusion to the language and the imagery that we find in the dream of Nebuchadnezzar. So we can state confidently and clearly that this stone, cut out not by human hand, represents the Messiah, represents Jesus Christ. He is the stone. Jesus is the beloved Son of the parable.

He is the stone the builders rejected, and he is the stone that will crush all upon whom he falls in judgment. So we have two contrasting kingdoms. Two contrasting kingdoms. But also we can say, concerning this kingdom of God, this kingdom of God who is headed by this stone, identified as Messiah Jesus. What can we say about this kingdom? Well, we are given characteristics of it just as we were given characteristics of it. We can see in parallel the characteristics of this contrasting kingdom.

This kingdom, in contrast to the kingdom of man, is underwhelming in its appearance. In verse 34, we read of it that it is a kingdom that is simply a stone that is cut out from a rock, nothing impressive in its origins, in its initial appearance. Just a stone, a stone that certainly in time will become and is becoming a great mountain, but a stone that remains largely unseen to the human eye. Not anything that would draw great attention or dismay in its appearance. But concerning its origin, there is a contrast also, because this kingdom is divine in its origin. The interpretation that Daniel gives of the dream explicitly identifies God as the one who will set up a kingdom. There in verse 44, in the time of those kings, that is all those kings and empires that have been mentioned, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed. God is the one who is responsible for cutting out the stone. It is the Father who places the Son as King of His kingdom, underwhelming in its appearance, divine in its origin, eternal in its duration. Again, in verse 44, it's described as a kingdom that will stand forever. The question does arise as to the timing of the appearance and development of this kingdom. Now, having identified, as we have, following the traditional interpretation that the fourth human kingdom is the Roman Empire, and having identified the stone as being a stone that represents Jesus, then we can say that this kingdom of God becomes visible with the coming and the work of Jesus Christ, of whom John the Baptist could declare concerning His coming, the kingdom of God is near. And yet, while we can see it becoming visible in the coming of Jesus Christ, and it is indeed a pivotal moment in the emerging of this kingdom, we can also say that it is a kingdom that in a very real sense has always existed in parallel to the kingdom of man and continues to parallel the kingdom of man that it will ultimately destroy altogether.

The kingdom of God, underwhelming in its appearance, divine in its origin, eternal in its duration, but also again in contrast to the kingdom of man, unlimited in its power. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end. Now, this is evident in the rise and particularly in the fall of every human kingdom, but it will be ultimately and definitively fulfilled when Christ returns, and when in the words of Revelation chapter 11, the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever. So, the dream presents us with two kingdoms, two contrasting kingdoms, but what are we to do with these two kingdoms? Must we choose one of them for ourselves? Now, given the description that has been provided, it would appear a no-brainer if we do have to choose. Will you choose a passing kingdom, a kingdom with limited power, or will you choose one that will endure forever and of unlimited power? But the more slightly complex reality is that we must, in a sense, belong to both kingdoms. You see, we participate in the kingdom of man just as Daniel participated in the court of Nebuchadnezzar, while at the same time representing the kingdom of God in those courts.

The key question is not so much one of participation, but of ultimate citizenship. As followers of the rock that is Jesus, we are citizens of the kingdom of God, and yet we are also, if you wish, in a subservient manner citizens of the kingdom of man. We are, to use the language of the New Testament, we are in the world, but not of the world. Our ultimate loyalty is to King Jesus, though we do owe loyalty to the kingdom of man that we are part of, to Caesar that which is Caesar's, and to God that which is God's.

[29 : 21] This was understood by Paul, who when presented with a conflict of loyalties, very clearly stated that he must obey God rather than men. And increasingly, in 21st century Scotland, followers of the rock will be forced to choose and to make clear where their ultimate loyalty lies. Is it to the kingdom of man, or is it to the kingdom of God? And in this challenge that faces us, and that will increasingly face us, we can learn from our forebears. The account is given of Andrew Melville, who was a minister in the latter part of the Scottish Reformation towards the end of the 17th century and into the beginning of the 18th century. And Andrew Melville was persuaded and had good reason to believe that his king, James VI of Scotland and first of England, was seeking to usurp the authority of God, and he is recorded as having directed words to the king in these terms. Sir, we will always humbly reverence your majesty in public, but since we have this occasion to be with your majesty in private, we must discharge our duty, or else be traitors both to Christ and you. Therefore, sir, at diverse times I have told you, so now again I must tell you, there are two kings and two kingdoms in Scotland. There is King James, the Lord of the Commonwealth, and there is Christ Jesus, the King of the Church, whose subject James VI is, and of whose kingdom he is not a king, nor a lord, nor a head. And well, the discourse or the words of challenge continued addressed there to the king. Andrew Melville understood that yes, he was a citizen of the kingdom of Scotland, but his ultimate loyalty had to lie with King Jesus. And so it is with us. Yes, there are two contrasting kingdoms, and yes, it is true that in God's providence it is right that we be, in a sense, citizens of both. We are in this world, we are in this world, but our ultimate citizenship is in heaven, and our ultimate loyalty must be to King Jesus, and not to any worldly king. And when a conflict arises, there can be, there must be only one, a winner. Two contrasting kingdoms.

We are all citizens of the kingdom of man, but are we all citizens of the kingdom of God? That is a solemn matter for us to ponder on. But finally, and we conclude briefly with two responses. Two men, one with a man-centered perspective, one with a God-centered perspective. Two kingdoms, the kingdom of man and the kingdom of God, but also two responses. Now, the account that we have read gives us one response, that of Nebuchadnezzar.

It is an inadequate response. But this inadequate response then allows us to establish what would be an adequate or fitting response. What can we say of Nebuchadnezzar's response? It's recorded for us there from verse 46 and following. His response is, at face value or superficially commendable.

It evidences a measure of genuine understanding. He demonstrates great humility in his posture as he falls prostrate before Daniel. He demonstrates also a real grasp of who God is. Your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, much to be commended in what Nebuchadnezzar does and saves. And yet, he falls short in his response. You see, Nebuchadnezzar, like Ariokh before him, retains a man-centered perspective. Before whom did he fall prostrate? He fell prostrate before Daniel.

To whom did he offer incense? He offered incense in homage to Daniel. And he also attempts to keep the God of whom he does possess true knowledge at a safe distance. Notice the manner in which he speaks of God. Your God, your God, Daniel, is the God of gods and Lord of kings. Nebuchadnezzar was awed by God, but he was not converted to faith and trust in God. Nebuchadnezzar wants to have his cake and to eat it.

[34 : 01] In some measure, recognize and respect God, yet remain in charge of his own life and his own kingdom. And there are many Nebuchadnezzar wannabes today. Recognize God, believe in God, know considerable truth concerning God, have in some sense respect for God, but at arm's length. Not, we would not have that God involve himself in our lives. We would not bow down before that God. But this will not do. Before this God, you must bow unreservedly and permanently or not at all. This is the fitting response to the God who is revealed to us in Scripture. And so, I ask you this morning, have you bowed down before him? Do you bow down before him? Will you bow down before him? And if there are those who would ask the question, and I hope there are, how can I do that? Well, the manner in which you must properly respond to the God of gods and Lord of kings and revealer of mysteries has been laid out for you by God himself in his word. What you are to do is to place your trust in the appointed king, in King Jesus, in the one who came to establish this kingdom and to make you fit to be a citizen of his kingdom as he would cleanse you and forgive you and enable you to be part of the kingdom of God.

God. Arioch, if we can just go back to Arioch for a moment as we conclude. Arioch put his trust in a man from Judah. Sadly, in the wrong man. But there is a man from Judah in whom you can and must put your trust.

And you must do so because he is more than a man. He is the God-man. He is Jesus Christ. God of gods and Lord of kings. Before him you must bow and in him you must place your trust. God grant that we would all be enabled so to do. Let us pray.