

Daniel 2: Dark Horse

INTRODUCTION

There have been many "dark horses"¹ over the years. One of the best known "dark horses" came to fame about 2600 years ago. The process is described in Daniel 2. This chapter moves very quickly through thousands of years of history. A few, short verses describe long periods of history from the time of Daniel on through our time and beyond--extending to the end of earth's history.

Daniel 2 is filled with hope. And yet, for the king of Babylon, the answers came from an unexpected source. Daniel was what we would call a "dark horse". He was an unexpected person to rise to power. And yet, through the power of God, that is exactly what happened. And through the process of explaining a mysterious dream, he was able to give us hope for our own future. There will never again be one world power. God is in control.

Read Daniel 2:1

Have you ever gone to sleep with a full stomach? This can often cause a person to have wild dreams. One night, when my brother went to sleep on a full stomach, he began to talk and to walk in his sleep. He was standing on the bed talking to me. He was dreaming that I had led him into some kind of a trap. I tried to calm him down so he wouldn't step on me. I didn't know that in his dream I was the cause of the problem. When he heard my voice, it only made him more frustrated. Fortunately, he did lie down again and no one got hurt.

But in the case of King Nebuchadnezzar, his strange dream didn't come from eating too much pizza before sleeping. The dream had been sent from God to show him something.

Read Daniel 2:2,3

¹During election years, there is a lot of attention focused on the candidates. People want to know who will be the winner of the election. The news reporters try to figure out who is most likely to be elected. But there is sometimes a complete surprise in the results. If there is a winner that no one would have guessed could win, that person is called a "dark horse."

The king was desperate for someone to explain the meaning to him. But he wouldn't tell the dream. The wise men kept promising to explain the meaning if the king would tell the dream. But he didn't tell them.

Read Daniel 2:5,6

The king was convinced that they were merely trying to stall for more time (verse 8). He had threatened them with death.

Read Daniel 2:10,11

The wise men were trying to reason with the king. But he was convinced that if he told them the dream they could merely invent an explanation. The command went out to kill all of the wise men. When Daniel heard about the command, he got a personal appointment with the king.

Read Daniel 2:16

Why was the king willing to let Daniel have more time, even though he was angry with the wise men for trying to get more time? I think that there were two reasons. First, two different words for time were used (in the Aramaic language) [see more information on this in the theological section]. The wise men were stalling in order to receive a lot more time (verse 8). Daniel only requested a short time (verse 16). Second, the wise men kept putting off an answer with no real evidence that an answer would ever be given. Daniel promised to give an answer after a short time. There was no way that the King would refuse Daniel's request. He was tormented by his curiosity, and here was a man who promised to come with answers.

Daniel had promised to do the impossible. He would tell what the dream was, and what it meant. But how could he do this?

Read Daniel 2:17,18

Daniel sought an answer from God. But he didn't come to God alone. In his hour of extreme need, he got help from his friends. We would do well to pray together when we need special help from God. He can empower us to do the impossible.

Read Daniel 2:19

Daniel received the needed information. God had not let him down. He immediately gave God the glory. The next four (4) verses are a beautiful prayer of thanksgiving to God. Daniel praises the One who has given him what he needed. Without fear, he could now approach the king. Arioch, the king's executioner, tried to claim the credit for finding a man with the answer (verse 25). But Daniel would take none of the glory. He gave all of the praise to God. He made it clear that humans were powerless to do what only God could do (verses 27,28). He then told the king the dream.

Read Daniel 2:31-35

There it was in stark brevity, yet sweeping significance. In a few sentences, thousands of years of history were revealed before the events had even taken place. In rapid succession, six eras had been revealed. --A Golden head, Silver arms, Bronze thighs, Iron legs, feet containing iron and clay, and a mighty rock . These were the basic elements.

Then Daniel began to explain the meaning behind the symbols.

Read Daniel 2:37,38

The golden head represented King Nebuchadnezzar. But the gold represented more than just one individual. It represented the whole kingdom which was ruled by Nebuchadnezzar. This was made clear in the following verse.

Read Verse 39

After Babylon, there would be another KINGDOM. Not merely another KING.

Read Daniel 2:40

The key element to the fourth kingdom was that it would be powerful. It would break the competition into pieces.

Read Daniel 2:41-42

Even the strong kingdom would be divided. In the end, there would be no solid connection between the divided nations. They would mingle with each other. But they would not stick together.

Read Daniel 2:44

During the time of divided kingdoms, God would establish His own kingdom. There would never be any end to God's kingdom. Later visions in the book of Daniel would add a lot more detail to this picture. But in these few, short verses, God had revealed the basic course of history before it even happened. And the events of history have taken place as predicted. There has been a succession of different kingdoms. We have seen the rise and fall of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. We are now living in the time of the divided kingdoms. Though there have been many attempts to unite the nations, these have met with limited success. The nations mingle with each other but they don't really stick together very well.

This gives me confidence. I am excited to see how things have happened just as God said they would happen. It gives me the courage to face the future without unnecessary fear. As the previous part of the dream has come true, the last part will also come true. There will not be any more world power that controls everything.

God will establish the next world power. Jesus is coming soon. He will put an end to our problems. He will take us to live with Him in His home--heaven.

THEOLOGICAL TOOLS

Time and date

The second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign would have been in late 603 B.C. or early 602 B. C. Some have questioned the accuracy of the book of Daniel based on what seems to be a discrepancy between the time of Daniel's training and the time of the king's dream. Daniel was in training for three years (Daniel 1:5, 19) But the dream came to the king in the second year of his reign (Daniel 2:1). If Daniel had already interpreted the king's dream in the second year, why would it be necessary for him to be tested in the third year? There are two possible ways to understand this.

First, it would not be impossible that Daniel first interpreted the dream, and at a later time came to the conclusion of his formal education. Even the brightest students in a class will still give objective evidence of their progress through some kind of formal examination.

Second, it is very possible for the data to fit together so that the final exam happens before the interpretation of the dream. This becomes visible when you take into account the way dates were kept in ancient times. There are three principles that can clarify our understanding in this matter.

1. *Spring to spring years and fall to fall years.*² Our modern calendar follows the Roman pattern of beginning a new year each January. But things are different in other countries and at different times in history. In Judah, the new year started in the fall for civil events. The new year started in the spring for religious events. In Babylon, the new year started each spring.
2. *Accession year reckoning.* When a king died and a new king came to the throne, the rest of that year was not counted as the first year of the new king's reign. It was called the accession year. When the next spring came, the new year would be called the first year of the new king's reign. Babylon followed this system of reckoning years.
3. *Inclusive reckoning.* This form of measuring time is already visible in the way Jesus' three days in the tomb were counted. Simply stated, if any portion of a year was involved, it was counted as a year. If two Americans were to meet on the 4th of July of a particular year and then meet again on the 4th July the following year, they would

²See the explanation in C. Mervyn Maxwell, *The Message of Daniel: God Cares, Vol. 1* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1981), 46.

consider that they had been apart for one year. But there were parts of two years involved, so a Hebrew would have considered this to be two years.

And so we can put the pieces together like this. Nabopolassar died on 15 August 605 B.C. His son, Nebuchadnezzar, took the throne 7 September of the same year. What followed of 605 B.C. and the first part of 604 B. C. would have been counted as his accession year. And yet, based on inclusive reckoning, Daniel would have counted that as his first year of training. The next year would have been the first year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, and yet it would have been the second year of school for Daniel and his friends. The next year would have been the second year of the king's reign, but Daniel would have considered it to be his third year of training. And so it is likely that the king had his dream shortly after Daniel and his friends had completed their "three years" of education.

It could be charted as follows:³

	605 B. C.	604 B. C.	603 B. C.	602 B. C.	601 B. C.
-----	Nabopolassar dies 15 Aug.				
	Nebuchadnezzar reigns	-----	-----	-----	-----
King's reign:	Accession year	"First" Year	"Second" Year	"Third" Year	"Fourth" Year
Study time:	Year One	Year Two	Year Three		
graph of study time:	-----	-----	-----		

Shift in language

As mentioned before, the language used by Daniel changes suddenly. This is very natural for a bilingual person. When it came time to quote the words of the wise men, Daniel used their actual words in their own language--Aramaic. And then he kept on writing in Aramaic until he needed to write in Hebrew (Daniel 8:1). And so Daniel 2:4b until Daniel 7:28 is written in Aramaic. The KJV calls this language Syriac since that is what it came to be called at a later time in history.

³Remember that the B. C. dates begin in January. The other dates begin in the spring.

Time to interpret the dream

The wise men requested to have more time to interpret the dream (Daniel 2:8). The king was very angry about this. Daniel wanted to have more time to interpret the dream (Daniel 2:16). The king was happy to permit this. Why would the king allow Daniel to have more time after being angry about giving more time to the other wise men? There are two reasons for this:

DIFFERENT WORDS FOR TIME ARE USED

The king accused the wise men of trying to get more יָדָן ['idan]. This is a fairly long period of time (Daniel 2:8). Daniel requested that he might be granted זְמַן [z^eman]. This is a shorter period of time (Daniel 2:16). יָדָן ['idan] can also be used to describe a period of time. זְמַן [z^eman] can also be used to describe a point in time. So the wise men seemed to go on endlessly with their efforts to work out an answer. Daniel only needed a fairly short period of time to connect with God and to find the needed answer.

DIFFERENT OUTCOMES ARE EXPECTED

Notice that the expected outcomes were very different. The wise men finally admitted that there was no way that a human could provide the answer which the king was demanding (Daniel 2:10, 11). Daniel, on the other hand, let the king know that he would provide the needed answer (Daniel 2:16). The king was unwilling to put up with endless delays that offered no answer. But he was willing to wait if it meant that the desired answer would actually be provided.

The basics of the dream

The dream was very simple in its basic outline. It included a few basic elements which represented great time periods. It portrayed an image which included:

A head of Gold	Daniel 2:32
Chest and Arms of Silver	Daniel 2:32
Thighs of Bronze ⁴	Daniel 2:32
Legs of Iron	Daniel 2:33
Feet of iron and clay	Daniel 2:33
A stone which becomes a mountain	Daniel 2:34-35

⁴The KJV uses the word, Brass with its old meaning which was equivalent to our modern word, Bronze.

The meaning

It is important not to rush ahead with the meaning. We already know what the different sections stand for because we have compared this dream with the dreams which follow. If we look ahead, we can establish the following series of kingdoms:

BODY PART	METAL	KINGDOM	DATE
Head	Gold	Babylon	605-539 B. C.
Chest and Arms	Silver	Medo-Persia	539-331 B.C.
Belly and Thighs	Bronze	Greece	331-168 B.C.
Legs	Iron	Rome	168 B.C. - A. D. 476 ⁵
Feet	Iron and Clay	Divided Kingdoms	A.D. 476 to the end of time

But it is only possible to establish these facts after comparing the details of this dream with the details of other dreams and visions.

Notice that the answer is no human invention. Daniel got the meaning of this dream from God (Daniel 2:28). Only the books of Daniel and Zechariah provide interpretation directly from God. We will build on the parts which are explicitly interpreted by God (as reported by Daniel). This will serve as a safeguard for interpreting the dreams and visions.

In this dream, there are several things which can be established conclusively: First, the dream represented a time period which would begin at the time of Nebuchadnezzar and would continue into the future (Daniel 2:37, 38, 45). Second, after Nebuchadnezzar there would arise another kingdom. Notice that the word is KINGDOM and not merely the word king (Daniel 2:39 etc.). This was more than a succession of kings. It was a glance at a series of four successive kingdoms. Third, there would only be four successive kingdoms as the last one is called the fourth one (Daniel 2:40). Fourth, after the four kingdoms, there would be a period of time where there were divided kingdoms. No one kingdom would have absolute dominion. Fifth, at some time future to the fourth kingdom, God Himself would set up His kingdom (Daniel 2:44).

Again, please be careful not to say more than the dream was meant to say. More information only comes when more dreams are given. For example, there is no

⁵As a point of interest, notice that the correct way to enter B.C. dates is with the numbers preceding the B.C. The correct way to write A.D. dates is with the numbers following the A.D. This is due to the meaning of these abbreviations. A.D. stands for *anno Domini*, which means, "In the year of the Lord." B.C. stands for *before Christ*. If you say the whole phrase in your mind it quickly becomes obvious which words should come before the number and which words should come after the number.

significance in the fact that there were 10 toes on the image. There were also ten fingers. There is no significance in the fact that there were two legs on the image. There were also two arms and two ears. We must be careful not to move ahead of the dream. When we get more information, we will be able to compare it with this dream.

A few other points to notice are the fact that as you move from the head of gold to the legs of iron, two things happen. The metals are progressively stronger, and they are progressively less valuable--Daniel used the word, "inferior" (Daniel 2:39). It is also significant that the iron did not end with the legs. It continued on into the feet and toes. There would be some kind of continuity in moving from the period represented by the legs into the period represented by the feet and toes.

In summary, Daniel could absolutely confirm these details for the time being.

BODY PART	METAL	KINGDOM	DATE
Head	Gold	Babylon	605 B. C. until ?
Chest and Arms	Silver	a second kingdom	future
Belly and Thighs	Bronze	a third kingdom	future
Legs	Iron	a fourth kingdom	future
Feet	Iron and Clay	Divided Kingdoms	future

This would be followed by a kingdom that God would establish. It would never end. But it would bring an end to all of the other kingdoms.

The Stone

There are several identifying features which can help us recognize the meaning of the stone (Daniel 2:43-45):

1. It is cut out without hands (there is no human instrumentality).
2. It strikes the statue on the feet of iron and clay. This puts it at the end of history as portrayed by the dream of Daniel 2.
3. The stone crushes the whole image.
4. The kingdoms are "broken together". They are destroyed at the same time. This is INSTANT. It is not a prolonged process.
5. These parts of the image become like chaff. This is imagery from the harvest. Chaff is present at the end of the agricultural year.
6. The wind carried them away. There would be no trace remaining.
7. The stone becomes a mountain.
8. It fills the whole earth.
9. This action begins "in the days of those kings" (Daniel 2:44). God's kingdom will be set up then.
10. God's kingdom will never be destroyed.
11. It will not be left for another people.

12. The kingdom will crush ALL kingdoms. It will put them to an end.
13. This kingdom will endure forever.

Putting all of these facts together, it can be seen that the stone is the kingdom at the end of time. It is the second coming of Jesus Christ. There is no other time period in history and no other kingdom that can fit all of these pieces of information.

SPIRITUAL INSIGHT / PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Prayer

When faced with an extremely serious need, Daniel prayed (Daniel 2:17-23). But he did not pray alone. He and his three friends gathered to unite their prayers for God's mercy. This is an example for us when we face extremely urgent needs. As one person put it, "Team practice" strengthens people for the conflict.⁶ It is also important to note that they acted in faith. There is never any hint of doubt that they would receive the needed answers. And God honored their request.

But Daniel did not just pray for answers. After God responded in a remarkable way, Daniel remembered to praise God and to thank Him for what He had done. His prayer is a sample of how we can give thanks to God.

In his prayer, Daniel mentions that God changes עֲדָן ['idan] and זְמַן [z^eman]. (See the discussion above in the section on theological tools). This means that God changes both the long times (KJV seasons) and the short times (KJV times). God is in control of everything. We do not need to try and push Him to follow us. We need to be in tune with His will so that we may follow Him.

Credit

I am interested in the fact that worldly people try to claim credit for any little thing that they do. They even grab credit for finding the right person for the job (Daniel 2:25). God's people, on the other hand, are very slow to claim credit for anything. Notice how Daniel gives all of the credit to God (Daniel 2:27, 28).

Daniel is also careful in how he refers to God. When Daniel interprets the dream for the king, he calls God "the God of heaven" (Daniel 2:28). He shows that God is higher than the king (Daniel 2:45). We may be afraid to talk about God to unbelievers. But when people see the witness of our lives, they want to hear about our God.⁷

⁶Taken from a class presentation by Melusch Ueki given on 8 January 2004.

⁷Taken from a class presentation by Casey Harms given on 8 January 2007.

Confidence

When I was in the seminary, one of my professors was a man named Gerhard Hasel. A while back, he died in a car accident. But when he was alive and well, he used to tell us many stories. One of those stories was about his father, Franz. I was able to hear the story again a few years ago when I was working with Mike Hasel in Michigan. Mike is the son of the late Gerhard Hasel.

Franz Hasel was in the German army during World War II (two). He was a Seventh-day Adventist Christian at the time. He didn't believe in killing anyone. So he ended up working with the engineers. These were the people who created the roads for the army to travel on. They had a dangerous job. They had to work out on the front lines.

The company of men who worked with Mr. Hasel had an interesting practice. If they wanted to be really open with each other they would first cast off the official army approach. The men would take off their hats and shake hands with each other. When they did this, it meant that they could be open with each other. They didn't have to limit their conversation to official matters.

One day, the commander asked Mr. Hasel a question. "Do you think that the Third Reich will win the war?" Mr. Hasel recognized that this was a dangerous question. The only answer which was permitted was, "yes". But in his heart, he knew the answer should be, "no".

Mr. Hasel was a wise young man and so he answered with a question. "Is this an official question, or a private question?" The commander assured Mr. Hasel that it was a private question. They took off their hats and shook hands. Then Mr. Hasel opened his pocket-sized Bible and shared the prophecy of Daniel 2 with this commander. He explained how they were already living in the time of the divided kingdoms. He explained that there could be no more power that would conquer the entire world (though some might come close). The commander seemed to be impressed. But then, he said something frightening. "Give me your Bible." "I want you to report here tomorrow at 9:30 in the morning."

Mr. Hasel's heart sank. He realized that their practice of shaking hands and taking off their hats was not enough. He would probably be tried for treason the next day.

It was a difficult night for Mr. Hasel. He prayed that God would go with him. The next day, he reported to the commander at 9:30 in the morning. He discovered that there were other officers in the room. They sat there waiting to hear what he would say.

The commander handed his Bible back to him. "Now I want you to explain these things to me again", he said. At this point, Mr. Hasel was very nervous. He didn't want to die for something he had said. But he couldn't tell a lie either.

When he hesitated, the commander beckoned to the other officers. They all took off their hats and shook hands with him. They assured him that he could freely tell what he believed. Even though he feared it could cost him his life, Mr. Hasel explained the

matter again. Each time he mentioned a point from history, he noticed something. The commander would look at the other officers, and they would nod their heads.

When he had finished speaking, the commander said, "Now, why don't you gentlemen introduce yourselves?" One by one, they each introduced themselves. Each one had been a history professor at major city universities before the war. They had been brought into the room to verify the things that Mr. Hasel was teaching from the Bible.

The commander stood up and made a statement. "Based on the things which you have shown us, I have made a decision." "I am going to go against our normal policy." "We are not supposed to ration anything." "We are supposed to keep moving forward, depending on the reinforcements which will come from behind." "But you have shown us that, in the end, we will not win this war." "I am going to save enough food and fuel so that we can retreat someday if necessary."

And, that is exactly what happened. As they were advancing more and more deeply into Russia, things turned against them. The Russians begin to defeat the Germans. No reinforcements were able to reach them from behind. They were able to use the food and the fuel which they had saved to get back to their homeland. Other army units were defeated and the men were taken as prisoners by the Russians. Many of them died. But the men of this one unit of German soldiers were able to live because one Seventh-day Adventist soldier believed the Bible. They could live because he believed it, and he shared his faith with others.

Do you believe the promises and prophecies of God's Word? I pray that you will take the time to study it for yourself. I pray that you will be willing to share the good news with others. God can give you the strength to do this.