

Genesis **1:26-28**

COVENANT RENEWAL

Matthew **28:18-20**

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COVENANTAL NIGHTMARE (The Covenantal Structure of Daniel Two)

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Dispensationalism has found its strength in popular prophetic appeal. Inaccurate as it has been, it has still used its mishandling of Bible passages to apply prophetic ones to current affairs. In this way, it has performed a sort of coup on evangelicalism. Since most evangelical don't really know the Bible all that well – just ask them to tell you a few Bible stories if you doubt what I'm saying – Dispensational teachers have captured the evangelical mind by appearing to be Biblical and relevant in a sort of irrelevant prophetic way. Seeming to be relevant, they have taught an approach to the Bible that is destroying its true relevancy.

How can Dispensationalism appear to be relevant when in reality it is irrelevant? Or, why do I say that they are irrelevant? Think about it. The futurist view of the Bible puts the prophetic portions, that Dispensationalists say have to do with the Rapture, totally in the future; they are not actually happening but as Dispensationalists like to say, "Prophetic events are about to happen"; these prophetic events are not happening at present and can only potentially happen in the distant future. Nevertheless, it cannot speak with certainty, making prophesy irrelevant and giving by its approach the illusion of relevancy. Such is the popular prophetic appeal of Dispensationalism.

The revival of Theocratic Postmillennialism is also gaining popular appeal by speaking to relevant current affairs in a much different way, an ethical as opposed to a speculative bent. It argues that Christ will not return until the nations of the earth have become Christ's disciples, measured by their willingness to keep His commandments (Matthew 28:19-20). It conveys by this emphasis a distinct ethical character in its teachings. It does not apply the Bible in terms of fancy hermeneutical footwork, referring strange prophetic passages to events that only have the potential of supposedly fulfilling the passages under consideration. Rather, it is increasingly appealing to evangelical by putting the **whole** Bible to use in Christians's lives. Remember, it argues for the nations to be disciplined according to that which Christ commanded. Yet, it also maintains that Christ's commandments brought the Old Testament forward and that they were not done away. This whole-Bible approach has led to another advantage.

Theocratic Postmillennialism can truly speak of a Christian worldview because it believes the entire Bible applies to life and society, whereas the Dispensational-anabaptist-New-Testament-only tact can't forcefully argue for a world and life view because the latter isn't "playing with a full deck." Theocratic Postmillennialism goes even further than simply talking about a world and life view in other words. It defines its view in terms of the historic Church, which has always believed the whole Bible applies to life and

society,¹ fleshing out a position that speaks to every area of life. So by using the whole Bible and being able to speak to all areas of a man's, woman's and child's personal and societal life, it has gripping appeal. And so it should.

One among many passages to show the contrast between a speculative as opposed to an ethical approach to the Bible is the second chapter of the Book of Daniel. This portion of the Bible has been used to teach that the "rapture" of the Church from earth is near because of the presence of a Common Market in Europe, a ten nation confederacy matching the image of ten toes on the giant man described in Daniel two. This is absurd. The passage has great application to the modern man but not this way. The true relevance can only be discovered as we see this chapter as a development of the Biblical covenant.

Daniel

Daniel was a Sixth Century prince, not a prophet. He is often considered a prophet because of all of the prophesy in his book. He wasn't. He was a second Joseph who dreamed dreams, prophetic ones. He did not ask for them. He was given them at a time when God's people needed the direction that they provided. Before he was given dreams, however, he was covenantally tested several times.

Daniel was taken captive as a young man by the mighty King of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar. He was tested in his commitments from the outset. He (along with his friends) was approached by this king to be part of his household. To become a member, he was asked to eat the king's sacred food. He wouldn't, for eating at the king's table involved the ratification of a covenant and becoming one with the king: food creates oneness (1 Corinthians 10). This was a covenantal test to see if he would live under two covenants. He remained faithful to his first covenant, eating only kosher food since he was still under the Old Covenant. He was preserved by God and gained favor before the king so that he became a trusted advisor.

The next covenantal test involved interpreting the king's dream, a very dangerous business; to fail meant certain death. But Daniel lived by God's covenant. He had been faithful at the king's table and he now found himself involved in another test. In the midst of it, a dramatic covenantal prophesy is given. Before we can understand the prophesy, however, we must track the covenantal flow of the passage. For, the prophesy, as we shall see, is itself covenantal in nature.

The Covenant Structure of Daniel Two
The Book of Daniel as a whole is covenantal in nature

1. If there is any doubt in the readers mind, ha (she) should read Augustine on the Psalms as well as his *Anti-Manichean writings*.

and structure. Daniel two especially follows the pattern of the Biblical covenant. As we have done before, we will show how this chapter walks through the Deuteronomic structure, proving the covenantal sense of this material, as well as demonstrate the strict pattern of continuity in Scripture.

The benefit of knowing the covenant structure of Daniel two is twofold. First, the covenantal design helps us to understand the purpose of the story about Nebuchadnezzar's nightmare: a covenantal transaction occurs during sleep as a result of this dream-turned-nightmare. Second, it helps us to understand properly the prophesy involved in the dream: a larger covenantal transaction is prophesied, which is why Nebuchadnezzar was anxious.

Transcendence (Daniel 2:1)

Now in the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; and his spirit was so troubled that his sleep left him.

Using Deuteronomy as the covenantal model, the author of the book, Moses, introduces with a statement about the Lord of the covenant. He follows the normal pattern of making an opening comment about the unique character of God, pointing to His distinct role as Suzerain. He specifically refers to the revelational character of God, pointing out that the Lord Himself is the source of the revelation concerning the covenant document of Deuteronomy. He names the Lord as the originator of the words of the covenant. In so doing, he follows the beginning of beginnings of a covenant document, the Book of Genesis, which opens by identifying the origin of the world as the Word of God. Thus, revelation or an explanation concerning the source of revelation often forms the transcendence section of the covenant.

The second chapter of Daniel clearly begins on the revelational theme of transcendence, when the text first speaks of Nebuchadnezzar's frustration at not being able to understand his dreams. These dreams were a specific form of revelation being given to him. He was expected to be able to understand. He was not simply a king; he was a **divine** king, and proof of his kingship was his ability to receive revelation in the form of dreams. To be empowered for the arrival of this information from the pantheon of gods, he slept in the temple each night where dream-revelation would be received, a common practice among kings of the ancient world. In other words, he was the primary recipient of new revelation in the form of dreams, and this process was all part of his divine image. His passivity in receiving revelation by dreams proved that he was part of the divine connection, the great chain of being.

It is not hard to see why any disruption to this process alarmed Nebuchadnezzar. The dream, as it is in Scripture, is **covenantal** in design, meaning it served covenantal purposes. A dream would be obviously given during sleep, meaning the source was God not man, and certainly not implying chain of being as in the case of paganism, but the opposite; since man has no direct control over dreams, they are a picture of man's being distinct from God in the dream process.

Second, a dream was often given in the form of a covenant (as was Nebuchadnezzar's) for the purpose of renewing the covenant bond. It was never given simply to impart information, although new information was always involved. Rather, it contained information to accomplish a specific **covenantal** end: covenant renewal.

Third, a dream was revealed to communicate specific sanctions about to occur. It was therefore designed to provoke repentance or realignment to the proper covenantal leadership.

For example, the classic dreams of Joseph teach all

of these **covenantal** purposes. They described a change in the patriarchy of Israel, such as the dreams about stalks of wheat, sun, moon and stars bowing to him, implying that he would replace his father Jacob and not Reuben. Or, they spoke of specific sanctions about to fall on the great civilization of Egypt when they described fat cows coming out of the Nile and being eaten by the lean cows (referring to seven years of feasting followed by seven of famine). These dreams were to enable Joseph to re-establish God's covenant; they were not just for information's sake to make Joseph into a sort of "super Shaman." Of course, this was the pagan view of dreams, which created a problem for Joseph. He was made into the head wizard. In effect, however, he did become the covenantal head of Egypt, which was the goal anyway. But even this created a problem for Israel, for when it was forced into Egypt there was no way for a Gentile to become a member of the covenant without being a Jew. Nevertheless, Joseph's dreams did serve covenantal purposes. He did replace Jacob through his sons, and he did temporarily become the new head of Israel in Egypt.

Since Biblical dreams have transcendent covenanted purposes, Nebuchadnezzar's dream did the same. For one, it was from God to communicate something about God's covenantal design for the nations of the world, especially his. For another, Nebuchadnezzar did not know the God of the covenant and for this reason neither he nor his priests could interpret it, bringing us to the second part of this covenantal transaction by sleep.

Hierarchy (Daniel 2:2-30)

Then the king gave the command to call the magicians, the astrologers, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans to tell the king his dreams. So they came and stood before the king. And the king said to them, "I have had a dream, and my spirit is anxious to know the dream." Then the Chaldeans spoke to the king in Aramaic, "O king, live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will give the interpretation."

The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, "My decision is firm: If you do not make known the dream to me, and its interpretation, you shall be cut in pieces, and your houses shall be made an ash heap. However, if you tell the dream and its interpretation, you shall receive from me gifts, rewards, and great honor. Therefore tell me the dream and its interpretation." They answered again and said, "Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will give its interpretation."

The king answered and said, "I know for certain that you see that my decision is firm: if you do not make known the dream to me, there is only one decree for you! For you have agreed to speak lying and corrupt words before me till the time has changed. Therefore tell me the dream, and I shall know that you can give me its interpretation." The Chaldeans answered the king, and said, "There is not a man on earth who can tell the king's matter; therefore no king, lord, or ruler has ever asked such things of any magician, astrologer, or Chaldean. It is a difficult thing that the king requests, and there is no other who can tell it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh."

For this reason the king was angry and very furious, and gave the command to destroy all the wise men of Babylon. So the decree went out, and they began killing the wise men and they sought Daniel and his companions, to kill them. . . . So Daniel went in and asked the king to give him time, that he might tell the king the interpretation.

Then Daniel went to his house, and made the decision known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions, that they might seek mercies from the God of heaven concerning this secret, do that Daniel and his

companions might not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. Then the secret was revealed to Daniel in a night vision. . . .

Then Arioch quickly brought Daniel before the king, and said thus to him, "I have found a man of the captives of Judah, who will make known to the king the interpretation." The king answered and said to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, "Are you able to make known to me the dream which I have seen, and its interpretation?" Daniel answered in the presence of the king and said, . . . "But as for me, this secret has not been revealed to me because I have more wisdom than any one living, but for our sakes who make known the interpretation to the king, and that you may know the thoughts of your heart."

The second part of the Deuteronomic covenant explains the hierarchy of Israel for resolving problems (Deuteronomy 1:5-4:49). This hierarchy consisted of layers of representatives who worked under Moses, advising and carrying unresolved problems to him. It was effective first and foremost because these representatives were ordained by God through Moses. To oppose them was to stand against God and Moses, sedition that was met with discipline. The retribution, however, was supposed to come from God. Sometimes, Moses persuaded God not to judge His rebellious people. Once, Moses tried to carry out the judgment himself, when he struck the rock twice. God applied the judgment that would should have been given to the people to him. Even so, the second section of Deuteronomy tells of the effectiveness of the Biblical hierarchy in sewing Moses, the prophet of God.

The second part of Daniel two turns to the issue of hierarchy. Nebuchadnezzar called for his priests and shamen. He wanted them to interpret the dream, but he was not so foolish as to tell the dream. Remember, he believed in chain-of-being theology. He presumed that all of the created world was in continuity with his gods – what I believe is best illustrated for this culture in the form of the Indian totem pole. Since his priests were just beneath him in the chain of being, making them in continuity with the source of the dream, he knew that they would also be able to see the dream, that is, if they were true priests of his god (probably Merodach); if they were involved with his god then they would know and understand his god's **dream/revelation**. So his own being theology and practical common sense told him to demand that the true priests know the dream as well as its interpretation.

The priests of Nebuchadnezzar tried to negotiate with him. First, they appealed to the fact that they are his servants (2:7), only provoking the king to frustration by giving him the impression of wanting to stall for more time (2:8). Second, they argued for the impossibility of any human to tell the dream and its interpretation, angering the king to call instantly for their death.

The appointed executioner of the priestly hierarchy was Arieh, whose name means lion-like. Arioch was the killer for the king, the next phase of the hierarchy. He took over when the priesthood failed, spelling the end of Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom. He began to kill all the king's representatives, bringing him to Daniel, since the young man was in the wise man category.

Daniel asked for time, stalling the execution process. In the meantime, he went to God and rested in Him. He slept in the Lord for the dream was revealed in the form of a night vision. He promptly gave thanks and told Arioch to take him to the king. Upon arriving before the king, he was quick to point out that God is the interpreter of dreams, not him. He is not wise but merely in covenant with the God who reveals all, concluding on the proper hierarchical emphasis.

This section is a contrast of hierarchies. Nebuchadnezzar's priests could not reveal the contents of the dream because they did not know the God who imparted them; they were not in covenant with God, so they could not function as good representatives for the king. Daniel on the other hand knew God and was therefore proven to be a better servant of Nebuchadnezzar. The king, however, did not understand this because he ends up worshipping Daniel; he thinks Daniel is a god instead of seeing him as a **covenantal** representative of God.

Ethics (Daniel 2:31-45)

"You, O king, were watching; and behold, a great image! This great image, whose splendor was excellent, stood before you; and its form was awesome.

"This image's head was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

"This is the dream. Now we will tell the interpretation of it before the king. You, O king, are a king of kings. For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory; and wherever the children of men dwell, or the beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven, He has given them into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all – you are this head of gold.

"But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth.

"And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others. Whereas you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; yet the strength of the iron shall be in it, just as you saw the iron mixed with ceramic clay. And as the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile. And as you saw iron mixed with ceramic clay, they will mingle with the seed of men; but they will adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay.

"And in the days of these kings the god of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold – the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure."

The third part of the Deuteronomic covenant has a specific **word/fulfillment** pattern (Deuteronomy 5:26). Moses begins this part of his covenant document by re-stating the Ten Commandments (Deuteronomy 5:6-21). He then expounds these commandments in the next twenty chapters. As he does, he reveals new information about the commandments, content that had become specifically relevant, whereas previously in the desert it had not been, because the people of God were about to possess the land. Moses' exposition of the Ten Commandments provides an excellent guide for understanding the Old and New Testaments. Between the first and second giving of the law was the death of Moses and the resurrection of a new leader, Joshua. Be-

tween the first and second covenant is the Death and Resurrection of Jesus. The parallel should be unmistakable.

The relationship between the word/fulfillment pattern of the third part of Deuteronomy and third section of Daniel two should also be obvious. Daniel first states the king's dream and then interprets. He moves from word to **fulfillment**. As he does, he tells of a covenantal prophecy concerning five kingdoms, the first three culminating in the fourth and the fourth being crushed by the fifth and final kingdom, clearly a structure that also fits the covenant pattern.

The first kingdom is described in transcendent language. It is none other than Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar's realm, where he is referred to in language similar to God Himself: "king of kings" (2:37), yet, it is a derivative power. Nevertheless, it is a kingdom of completeness: "wherever the children of men dwell, or the beasts of the field or the birds of the heaven . . . you are this head of gold" (2:38). Nebuchadnezzar is the head.

The second kingdom is the Medo-Persian Empire, simply described as inferior. This subordinate description, even though the Medo-Persians conquered Babylon points to the hierarchy theme of the covenant.

The third kingdom is the Greek Empire. It is also described in few words. According to Daniel, it shall not be the head like Babylon but it shall have "rule over all the earth," or dominion (2:39). This dominion emphasis is one of the major themes of the third part of the Biblical covenant. Of course, God's covenant teaches dominion through obedience or faithfulness. Alexander the Great, the leader of this third empire, was anything but obedient to God. Yet, the theme of this third kingdom matches the theme of the third part of the Biblical covenant.

The fourth kingdom is the Roman Empire. It is characterized as "crushing" all the rest. In other words, it has the power to pass judgment on them all. This is the **sanction** theme that appears in the fourth part of the Biblical covenant (Deuteronomy 27-28).

The fifth kingdom is the Kingdom of God. It is the kingdom of a "stone cut without hands." Yet, the theme of this kingdom is inheritance. It plunders the other kingdoms but it will not "be left" to anyone else because it will never die; it will go on forever, clearly inheritance language.

The covenant structure of this prophecy establishes that the fifth kingdom immediately follows the fourth. John Walvoord, the noted Dispensationalist and one of my former teachers, has argued (consistent with Dispensationalism) and said that there is a gap within the fourth kingdom itself. He argues that the toes on the statue represent ten divisions within the fourth kingdom and that these divisions have never occurred; hence, the fourth kingdom has two phases: the first Roman Empire and a revived Roman Empire.

This kind of interpretation has several problems. First, the text does not call attention to the toes, indicating that there are not two phases.

Second, this interpretation forces the grammar of the passage beyond belief. The grammatical connection between verses forty-one and forty-two will not allow for a gap.

Third, Dr. Walvoord completely misunderstands the "stone" in the fifth kingdom. This stone is Christ, being likened to the stone that killed Goliath; indeed the same Hebrew root is used. He is the rock that is "cut without human hands" (2:45). He is the One who destroys the fourth kingdom, the Roman Empire. Yet, Dr. Walvoord erroneously begins to argue that it was the Church that brought down the Roman Empire:

The principal difficulty is that as a matter of fact Christianity was not the decisive force that broke the Roman Empire. The main reason was its internal decay and the political conditions which surrounded it. Further, the decay of the Roman Empire extended for more than a thousand years.²

Granted, Walvoord is interacting with another commentator, whose interpretation of the kingdom is the Church, but Walvoord uses this view to oppose with his own. The point is that Christ did destroy the Roman Empire. Notice that I said, "Christ." How did He do it? He did so by judging Rome for persecuting His Church. Yes, Rome collapsed internally, but it did so because of its continued rejection of the Gospel. This interpretation greatly differs from saying the Church physically caused the downfall Rome. Undoubtedly God's people prayed imprecatory psalms against the pagan leaders who persecuted them, but the prayers would have been calling for Christ to avenge them.

Thus, the details of the grammar of Daniel two indicate that the fifth kingdom that was brought about by the coming of the stone immediately came after the Roman Empire. There could not have been a gap between the toes of the fourth kingdom. The final kingdom has come and there will never again be the kind of world-wide empires such as the first four kingdoms of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. The dream prophesies of a covenanted **transaction**, a dramatic changing of the guard.

Oath (Daniel 2:46-47)

Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell on his face, prostrate before Daniel, and commanded that they should present an offering and incense to him. The king answered Daniel, and said, "Truly your God is the God of gods, the Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, since you could reveal this secret."

The fourth part of the Biblical covenant involves an oath, where the person (people) swears allegiance to the suzerain (Deuteronomy 27-30). In Daniel two, Nebuchadnezzar pays homage to Daniel by means of the oath. The statement, "Your God is the God of gods, the Lord of kings, and revealer of secrets," was a way of acknowledging the gods of the ancient world. In addition, he offers sacrifice and incense. Of importance, however, he does not pay a tithe. He is recognizing Daniel's God but he is not fully submitting. He is paying honor without full submission. This later causes problems for Daniel.

Succession (Daniel 2:48-49)

Then the king promoted Daniel and gave him many great gifts; and he made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief administrator over all the wise men of Babylon. Also Daniel petitioned the king, and he set Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego over the affairs of the province of Babylon; but Daniel sat in the gate of the king.

The final part of the covenant describes succession in the covenant (Deuteronomy 31-34). In the last part of Daniel two, succession occurs. Daniel is promoted above all the other wise men of Israel, and his friends are elevated in society as well. He has become the king's chief advisor. Thus, the covenant in Daniel two comes to an end. A transition as well as a transaction has taken place. God's people in Babylon had already begun to displace the wicked.

2. John Walvoord, *Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation* (Chicago: Moody Press, [1971] 1972), p. 74.