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BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Daniel 2: 1-35

"God's View of Man's History – I"

TRANSCRIPT

Father, we again thank Thee for the privilege of studying in the Scriptures, and we thank Thee for this wonderful Prophecy of Daniel, in which we are given such an exalted view of the course of human history. We thank Thee for the prophecies given to Daniel, and we thank Thee for the way in which down through the centuries the scene has been set for their ultimate fulfillment in the latter times. As we look back Lord, we marvel at the way in which Thou dost control the affairs of men so that even in the small details we see Thy hand. And we also thank Thee that we are able to see something of the grand overall purpose toward which Thou art working and which Thou shalt accomplish. Be with us in our study tonight, and also in the meetings that follow, in Jesus' name. Amen.

We turn tonight to the first of two studies in the second chapter of Daniel. Our subject is "God's Portrait of Man's History." Now, this is a very lengthy chapter, but it undoubtedly is one of the important chapters of the prophetic word and so rather than trying to cover it in one message, I want to break up our study into two and tonight deal with the vision that Daniel was able to see after Nebuchadnezzar had received it. And then next Wednesday night, the Lord willing, we will look at the interpretation of it. So this is the first of two studies under the general title of "God's Portrait of Man's History."

Oswald Spengler, in that strange book which finds the clue to history in nature, The Decline of the West, once wrote or in that book wrote, "We await today the philosopher who will tell us in what language history is written and how it is to be read." Well, what we and Spengler need is not a philosopher but a divine prophet. And fortunately in the word of God we do have such a divine prophet who has given us a beautiful and very informative and truthful picture of the general course of human history.

Daniel, together with the King of Babylon, was given a visualized portrait of Gentile dominion on earth and its catastrophic demise in the last days. Beginning six centuries before the time of Christ, Daniel's vision reaches down to the Second Advent of the Lord Jesus, and we are given in this chapter a beautiful insight into what is to transpire in that period of time, which now has stretched out to over 2500 years.

Daniel's secret, which we find in this chapter, begins in 605 B.C. when Nebuchadnezzar came and took captive those in the land. You know that he came back again and finally in 586 B.C., Jerusalem was destroyed. Down through the years, the program of God has been unfolding. Today, we are living in 1979 and so Daniel's picture of the times of the Gentiles begins in 605 B.C. It has stretched to 1979 A.D. We know from the teaching of the Book of Daniel and also the Book of Revelation that there is a future period of time of seven years called "The Great Tribulation"— half of it and then the other half, that section of time called "The 70th Week of Daniel or Israel". And we know, of course, that since that program has not begun, that there is an indeterminate time that is not within our knowledge. So, we have 605 years from the time of Babylon and the captivity to the time of our Lord. We have 1979 years to the present time. We know that in the future, there is a seven-year period of time in which there will be great judgments upon the earth. So, we can say that Daniel's view of human history stretches out to 2,500 plus years. And that is what we are looking at in Daniel chapter 2.

Daniel's great revelation requires two things for its fulfillment, and the first of these is that there should be Jewish national survival. It is clear that Daniel's prophecy could not be fulfilled if the Jewish nation did not survive down through the centuries. And so, what was required for the fulfillment of this chapter and what is required is Jewish national survival. And then what is also required is the re-emergence of the ancient gentile powers who peopled that time during the times of Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel.

Now, of course, we do not have to know anything about contemporary history to know that that is just what has transpired. Today, we have clear evidence of the survival of the Jewish nation. We have actually, an Israeli government, Israel; and so, we have the survival of Israel. And furthermore, due to the things that have happened over the past 25 to 50 years, particularly the discovery of such great sources of energy in that part of the [world], we have had the re-emergence politically of those ancient kingdoms which, when I grew up, were regarded as kingdoms of no significance whatsoever in the history of the contemporary world of which we are a part. And so, two great conditions for the fulfillment of the prophecies of Daniel and the other prophecies of the Old and New Testaments that have to do with the human history of which we are a part, these things have come to pass.

Now, when we think about the history of Israel, of course, we are thinking about things that are very strange. I know that some years ago, when I was home and was not feeling too good and was confined to my bed, I determined to read a philosophy of history written by a very contemporary philosopher. In the course of it, I ran across a quotation by Nicholas Berdyaev, the Russian philosopher, and he said in this quotation, "I remember how the materialist interpretation of history, when I attempted in my youth to verify it by applying it to the destinies of peoples, broke down in the case of the Jews, where destiny seemed absolutely inexplicable from the materialistic standpoint. And indeed according to the materialistic and positivistic criteria, these people ought long ago to have perished. Its survival is a mysterious and wonderful phenomenon demonstrating

that the life of these people is governed by a special pre-determination, transcending the process of adaptation expounded by the materialistic interpretation of history. The survival of the Jews, their resistance to destruction, their endurance under absolutely peculiar conditions and the faithful role played by them in history, all these point to the particular and mysterious foundations of their destiny." We certainly see that here.

So, when we turn to Daniel chapter 2 and we see so many things in our own contemporary life that make it easily understandable to us today how this ancient prophecy could be fulfilled. What we see proclaims with thrilling power that the end of the age may not be quite as far off as we may have thought.

Now, let's turn now to the revelation of the dream which will take us through verse 23. And what I would like to do after a few words of introduction to this is to read through the section, the 23 verses, and make a few comments and then we will look at the unfolding of the vision of Nebuchadnezzar itself. Someone has said, "If revelation is the XYZ of Bible prophecy, then Daniel chapter 2 is the ABC of Biblical prophecy." So, it is a good place to begin in the study of the prophetic word. You know the occasion if you have read Daniel recently, Nebuchadnezzar was out of sleeping tablets. He had a case of royal insomnia and very disturbed over the future of his kingdom. He lay upon his bed troubled, and his sleep left him.

Now, he evidently was thinking about the future of Babylon. He was one of those rulers who did have some genuine concern for the future of his country. We read in verse 29, "As for you, O King, while on your bed your thoughts turn to what would take place in the future; and he who reveals mysteries has made known to you what will take place." So, he was tossing and turning unable to sleep and thinking about the future of his kingdom and in response to this, God gave him this wonderful vision. I am sure that those rulers who have a genuine concern for their country can identify very well with Nebuchadnezzar. I know that Mr. Churchill thought very deeply over Hitler and the V-2 and all of the other things that the echelon was developing.

Now Mr. Nixon, no doubt, when he was president, had a great deal of thoughts about Red China. And I am sure that the man in the White House at the present time has given some serious thought to the implications of SALT II for the future of the United States of America. And I know that many of our senators are giving a great deal of thought to it as well. Senator Byrd has been giving the kind thought to it that's not too good. He has determined that the radio and TV coverage of the forthcoming SALT II debate will not be broadcasted because he, quote, according to United States News and World Report, "Whereas that broadcast would expose the Senate to public ridicule." The editors of the *Richmond News Leader* commented, "The Majority Leader is a very perceptive fellow."

So, here is a king then who was thinking rather seriously about the future of his country. Now, he didn't do what our king has done. He did not go up and have a summit on the mountain at Camp David, but he was concerned. I have been very interested in the things that had been said about this Camp David Summit. In fact, I have been very interested, I must say, in the things that the newspapers have been saying about Mr. Carter. One of the funniest things, I think, was said by a Britisher. He said it is amazing to him that so many Americans are thinking about possibly having Senator Kennedy succeed Jimmy Carter. He can't understand that. Then he goes on to say that so many Americans should favor such a man whose only claim to fame is dynastic. Infamy is all that he has achieved for himself is deeply depressing and disturbing.

And then this line, which I really have liked, "Could it be that having made the mistake the last time of choosing a phony saint, they are determined to correct the balance next time with a genuine sinner?" Mr. Carter, also, it was pointed out in the *New York Times*, because of his Camp David Summit and the desire to speak to the nation on Sunday night pre-empted part of the program of *Moses, the Lawgiver*. And I think it was the session of the story when Moses comes down from the mountain with the Ten Commandments. And one of the commentators has said that Mr. Carter was clearly out of

his league. Isn't it interesting that our president calls together for consultation about 150 different people, many of whom do not have any possibility of giving us any worthwhile advice?

He spends a great deal of time...there's nothing wrong with being a machinist, by the way, but he spends a great deal of time with a machinist and his wife, and a Marine major, retired and 17 of their friends, and he calls together all others that are a rather strange group of people, including the image builder and the others of like associations with him, and we are expected to believe that out of this group of men who have failed us up to this time, we shall have some new incentives.

Well, this was one of Nebuchadnezzar's problems because after we read in the first verse, "Now, in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; and his spirit was troubled and his sleep left him. Then, the king gave orders to call in the magicians, the conjurers, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans to tell the king his dreams." This, I could not help....this did remind me of those that were called to the Camp David Summit and I can just think of the things that they must have said to him. There were the magicians there. There were really the scholars and so we did have scholars at Camp David. And so out of the scholars we were expected to receive some significant information. The conjurers, all those were the ones who were smart enough to call up the dead by incantations, and the sorcerers, they are the ones who practice witchcraft and black magic, and then the Chaldeans, which may be a name that encompasses them all, or probably in this case, is a reference to those who were very skilled in astrology. And so, as the result of calling together these men he was hoping that possibly he would be able to find out what the dream was from them and receive an interpretation of it. Mr. Carter called together his magicians, and conjurers, and sorcerers, and Chaldeans and came back with the same old message that, "The oil companies are at fault, and if not the oil companies, OPEC."

Well, now let's notice what follows. Verse 3, "And the king said to them, I had a dream and my spirit is anxious to understand the dream." Incidentally, we will see in a moment that the king is not an unintelligent man. He really understands a great deal more than they think he understands, so bear that in mind. "And the king said to them, I had a dream and my spirit is anxious to understand the dream." Then the Chaldeans spoke to the king in Aramaic, "O king, live forever! Tell the dream to your servants and we will declare the interpretation." Now, when we start out by saying, "O king, live forever," I think the translation of that is, "May you win again in 1980." "Tell the dream to your servants and we will declare the interpretation." The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, "The command from me is firm. If you do not make known to me the dream and its interpretation, you will be torn limb for limb and your houses will be made a rubbish heap."

Now, today it will be "hand in your resignation"; we are not quite as violent as these, but nevertheless, it is the same kind of thing. "But if you declare the dream and its interpretation, you will receive from me gifts and a reward and great honor. Therefore, declare to me the dream and its interpretation." They answered the second time and said, "Let the king tell the dream to his servants, and we will declare the interpretation." The king answered and said, "I know for certain that you are bargaining for time, inasmuch as you have seen that the command from me is firm." They were just stalling. "That if you do not make the dream known to me, there is only one decree for you. For you have agreed together to speak lying and corrupt words before me until the situation is changed. Therefore, tell me the dream, that I may know that you can declare to me the interpretation." So, he is no fool. He knows that if they can tell him the divine interpretation of the dream and that he is to rely upon the accuracy of it, then they should have the authority, and power, and the ability to tell him what the dream is itself.

So, if he is to believe their interpretation, he demands some evidence that they really have some powers: "Tell me what the dream is. If you can tell me the dream, then

I'll listen to your interpretation. But if you cannot tell me the dream, why should I listen to your interpretation.' He is very smart. The Chaldeans answered the king and said, 'There is not a man on earth who could declare the matter for the king, in as much as no great king or ruler ever has asked anything like this of any magician, conjurer or Chaldean.' Moreover, the thing which the king demands is difficult. Some of the texts or this word has been translated as 'rare'. The thing which the king demands is difficult or rare. And there is no one else who could declare it to the king except gods, whose dwelling is not with mortal flesh. Because of this, the king became indignant."

Now, you can see as Daniel tells the story that the anger of Nebuchadnezzar is mounting as he sees through these magicians, and astrologers, and sorcerers. "Because of this, the king became indignant and very furious and gave orders to destroy all the wise men of Babylon." In other words, there was going to be a public execution, but it would take time to gather them altogether and so we go on to read: "So the decree went forth that the wise men should be slain; and they looked for Daniel and his friends to kill them,' because Daniel belonged to that general class of people. Then Daniel replied with discretion and discernment to Arioch, the captain of the king's bodyguard who had gone forth to slay the wise men of Babylon. He answered and said to Arioch, the King's commander, 'For what reason is the decree from the king so urgent?' Then Arioch informed Daniel about the matter. So, Daniel went in and requested of the king that he would give him time in order that he might declare the interpretation to the king. Then, Daniel went to his house and informed his friends, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, about the matter in order that they might request compassion from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his friends might not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon."

Now, you can see that Daniel's response is quite different. He says, "Just give us a little time and we will declare the interpretation." And so, he goes home and he calls together his friends, and they have a prayer meeting. That is exactly what is meant when

it says "in order that they might request compassion from the God of heaven concerning this mystery." So, they have a prayer meeting and they ask God that if it is His will, He may unfold to them the vision that Nebuchadnezzar had and the interpretation of it.

And the answer this time to Daniel's prayer was "yes". Then, the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a night vision. Then, Daniel blessed the God of heaven. Daniel answered and said: "Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever, for wisdom and power belong to Him. And it is He who changes the times and the epochs. He removes kings and establishes kings. He gives wisdom to wise men and knowledge to men of understanding." Incidentally, that is still God's activity. It is still his office, and consequently it is He who removes kings and establishes kings. He removes presidents and He establishes presidents. He gives wisdom to presidents, and some He doesn't give a whole lot of wisdom to, but knowledge to men of understanding.

I didn't say that of Mr. Carter. I am just saying that it is true that some don't have the same capacities that others have. I don't want to pass judgment on the present President. We are responsible in the word of God to support him and we want to do it, but we also want to understand and it is helpful to us as Christians to remember that Mr. Carter is not in office except by the decretive will of God. And so, we as Christians are to honor him because of the fact that God has put him there.

"It is He who reveals the profound and hidden things. He knows what is in the darkness and the light dwells with him." It is a very interesting fact that this expression "the light" here is in among many of the Jewish interpreters referred to the Messiah, "and the light dwells with him." That is rather interesting because we know that the Lord Jesus in the New Testament says, "That He is the light of the world." And consequently those that follow him shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life. The light dwells with him. Now, whether that is meant by Daniel here or not, that we cannot be sure. But, surely our Lord is the light and in that sense being the Messiah would fit in with this very well. "To Thee, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and prayers for Thou hast given

me wisdom and power. Even now, Thou hast made known to me what we requested of Thee." So, we have another illustration of the futility of seeking the mind of God apart from the Lord himself. The futility of the magicians and the astrologers, and the soothsayers and all of the other kinds of fortune tellers, the futility of seeking in it truth from Jean Dixon or Maurice Woodruff or any of the others who claim to have special powers. Daniel resorting to the Lord God is given the key to the inner meaning of the history of which he was a part.

Verse 24,

"Therefore, Daniel went in to Arioch, whom the King had appointed to destroy the wise man of Babylon. He went and spoke to him as follows: 'Do not destroy the wise man of Babylon. Take me into the King's presence and I will declare the interpretation to the King.' Then Arioch hurriedly brought Daniel into the king's presence and spoke to him as follows, 'I have found the man among the exiles from Judah who can make the interpretation known to the king.' The king answered and said to Daniel, whose name was Belshazzar, 'Are you able to make known to me the dream, which I have seen and its interpretation?' Daniel answered before the king and said, 'As for the mystery about which the King has inquired.' "

Now, I like this because this shows that Daniel is really human, I know that he could not resist getting in just a little bit of a dig directed toward the magicians and the astrologers. Now, he did not say that the Lord has revealed it to me, but he says he couldn't reveal it and didn't reveal it to these fellows. As for the mystery about which the King has inquired, neither wise men, conjurers, magicians, nor the diviners are able to declare it to the King. Now that I must confess I got a little bit of personal pleasure at that because it did remind me that Daniel was a man. And I felt also it justified occasionally the expositors of the Word of God in the Christian Church who from time to

time cannot help but say a few things negatively about others who do not believe the Scriptures, but yet hold the Bible in their hand and stand behind it in a pulpit. However, he says, "There is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will take place in the latter days."

That expression in the "latter days" is very important. It is an expression. Now, of course, this section of the Book of Daniel is written in Aramaic, but the Aramaic expression is the precise equivalent of the Hebrew expression *acharit hayamim*, which is an expression that occurs about 13 times or so in the Old Testament and so far as I can tell from all of the occurrences, it is an expression that refers to the days of the Messiah. And almost always refers to the days of the second advent of the Lord Jesus. So he has made known to Nebuchadnezzar what will take place in the latter days, the days of the Messiah, the days when the Messiah will come again at the end of the times of the Gentiles.

Now notice what Daniel says. He says, "Nebuchadnezzar, is this the dream that you had?" No, he does not say that, does he? There is no question about it at all. He knows that he knows the dream. He does not say, now isn't this the dream that you had? He says: "This was your dream and the visions in your mind while on your bed. This is what you saw. This is what was in your mind." He is absolutely certain of the truthfulness of what he is going to unfold. Now, in declaring the dream here, this is, of course, effectively Daniel's stay of the execution, but notice that he is very certain about it and notice also that he has traced the unfolding of it to the Lord. "As for you old king, while on your bed, your thoughts turned to what would take place in the future. And he who reveals mysteries has made known to you what will take place?"

Now, I want you to turn over to verse 45 for a moment. As the chapter concludes and the interpretation concludes, notice these last words on how they fit with that statement. "Inasmuch as you saw that a stone was cut out of the mountain without hands and that it crushed the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold, the great God

has made known to the king what will take place in the future; so the dream is true and its interpretation is trustworthy." So when you are on the bed Nebuchadnezzar, God made known to you what's going to take place in the future. He who reveals mysteries has unfolded it. Now, verse 30: "But as for me, this mystery has not been revealed for any wisdom residing in me more than in any other living man, but for the purpose of making the interpretation known to the king, and that you may understand the thoughts of your mind."

Now in verse 31, we have the content and I want you to be able to have this in your mind because next week we want to try to interpret it. Now three principal features about this dream's or vision's content. First of all he says, "You O, King were looking." That in Aramaic is a type of construction that stresses continuous action and so the picture of Nebuchadnezzar in his mind looking for a considerable period of time as this drama was unfolded before the eyes of his mind. "You, O king, were looking and behold, there was a single great statue." A great statue of impressive size. Those of you from Alabama or Birmingham will remember the statue outside of Birmingham: a Vulcan, the statue that oversees Jones Valley in Birmingham. It was a giant majestic image that Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream. A single great statue, "That statue, which was large and of extraordinary splendor, was standing in front of you, and its appearance was awesome."

So it was impressive in size and there was something about it that made it awesome. "The head of that statue was made of fine gold, its breast and its arms of silver, its belly and its thighs of bronze..." Now I want to say just a word about a rather technical matter. You might come to me afterwards and say, "Well if the belly and the thighs are of bronze, how can the legs be of iron?" Because, well at least I think of the thighs as being part of the leg and in order to forestall that most obvious question the Aramaic expression translated here, "thighs" by the translators of the New American Standard Bible, is an expression that really means "thigh parts" that is the upper part of the thighs. So that the belly and the thigh part are referred to and they are bronze.

Then in verse 33 we read, "It's legs of iron, it's feet partly of iron and partly of clay." Now that is the first of the principal features. Notice the four metals: fine gold – the head, the breast and the arms – silver, the belly and the thigh parts – bronze, the legs – iron. So we have four metals: Gold, silver, bronze, iron. Now, that will be important in the interpretation next week, so bear that in mind.

The next of the important features is found in verse 34, "You continued looking until a stone was cut out without hands, and it struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and crushed them." The stone cut out without hands, what a strange statement. A stone evidently extracted from a great mass of rock, but done without hands; supernaturally done. So what is designed to be said by this is that the stone somehow although has a supernatural origin.

Now without going through all of the Bible because it is one of the great themes of the Bible, it is clear that the stone is a reference to our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the stone, he is the rock. And of course this being cut out without hands is a reference to the supernatural origin of the Lord Jesus. It is true that as to his human nature, he is very man. But as to his divine personality and divine nature, he is of supernatural origin. In fact, he is the eternal son who has divine nature....stone cut out without hands. Now it is the work of the stone cut out without hands as we read, "To strike the statue on its feet of iron and clay and crush that statue," bring an end to it.

Now we know from what the Bible says about the Lord Jesus Christ and what the Bible says about history that there are really three great focal points of world history: there is the creation described for us in the Book of Genesis, there is the ministry of the Messiah about whom the Old Testament promises, and we have his birth, his life, his death, his burial, his resurrection; but we think of that as the cross as being the central feature because it was there that he brought this creation that had turned away from him in sin. And then the great event towards which we look in human history is the Second Advent. So we have the creation, the cross, and the second coming. These are three

great events of human history, and the focal point of human history is the cross of Jesus Christ. That is the center, the central feature of human history.

In fact, it is so much felt to be the central feature of human history that we speak of "B.C." Before Christ and "A.D." *Anno Domini* – in the Year of the Lord. So we actually tell time by virtue of the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. When Mr. Carter addresses a letter to Mr. Brezhnev, he dates it in accordance with the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, so that this is the focal point of history. Our newspapers are dated in accordance with this great event. So this is the central feature of human history and the fact that it was on the cross that our Lord Jesus laid down the sacrifice by which he bought for himself control of this world which Adam had lost, means that that cross is the central feature of what God is doing throughout the whole of his plan and program for us. So everything hinges around the cross.

Many of us have seen this happen, but I remember reading a story of a man who was writing about this who said that he was once watching a chess game. And as he was watching the game, he noticed that a person made a certain move and another man standing by him who evidently knew a great deal more about chess than he did said, "That's it!" Well, he said they kept on playing for a while, but sure enough, that turned out to be "it" because it was a move which made it impossible for the other person to win. Now, the cross of Jesus Christ is really God's, "That's it." In other words, when the blood was shed on Calvary's cross, when the atonement was accomplished, "That's it" for human history. Everything that is to transpire flows out of that triumphant work that he accomplished there. And when he comes again at the Second Advent, it is merely the conclusion of that which is already established by what he did when he died upon the cross of Calvary.

Now, the third thing, and I will just mention this briefly since our time is just about up. Verse 35, we read: "The stone without hands struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and crushed them. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were

crushed all at the same time." Notice that because we will be comment on that in the interpretation next week. "And became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away so that not a trace of them was found." That is a very unusual statement...."that not a trace of them was found." "But the stone that struck the statue became a great mountain and filled the whole earth." Great mountain that filled the whole earth.

The third thing is the great mountain. Mountain stands for a kingdom, not only here but in other parts of the prophetic word. Now, what can we conclude from this is just in a sentence or so. We have been told in effect that in human history from the time of Nebuchadnezzar to the time of the second advent at which there shall be a great mountain that fills the whole of the earth, a great kingdom that fills the whole of the earth, we were told that there will be only four great worldwide kingdoms: that of gold, that of silver, that of bronze and that of iron, so that we have here an inkling of the fact that there can be no more than four worldwide kingdoms in the history of the human race in spite of what FDR tried to do, in spite of the fact that Teddy may be standing in the wings waiting, in spite of any other great political man who shall come on any particular throne, we will never have another worldwide dominion except that which is the extension of that fourth Roman dominion, described later on in this book. So, the great world leaders who, since the day of the Romans, tried to establish a fifth, only failed. Charlemagne, Genghis Khan, Napoleon, Kaiser Wilhelm, Mao, Stalin, all the rest. God's hand is on history. There are these four great empires that will finally come of fifth related to that fourth, but it shall fail. Our Lord Jesus shall establish the next successful world empire. Next week, we will look at the interpretation of the remainder of the vision. Let us bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are thankful to Thee for this unfolding of the prophetic future. Guide us as we seek to find the mind of the Holy Spirit in the interpretation of the chapter for Jesus sake. Amen.