

Home at Last: Our Journey Foretold

WITH MIKE TUCKER

As we begin this evening, I'm issuing a "spoiler alert." You know what a spoiler alert is, right? That's a warning that someone is about to give away some portion of the plot of a novel you're reading or a movie you haven't watched. I'm about to give away an ending, so be prepared!

I would apologize for being a "spoiler," but the research shows that's not actually necessary. The Journal of Psychological Science reported on research done by the University of California, San Diego in 2011. That research indicates that spoilers don't actually spoil stories. In fact, their research indicates that "spoiling" the story by revealing an ironic twist or revealing the mystery actually enhances the enjoyment of the story for the vast majority of readers or viewers.

It is believed that knowing the outcome of the story in advance actually makes it cognitively easier to process the information and thereby enhances the enjoyment.

I think this is one of the reasons people enjoy biblical prophecy. God, through the prophets, "gave away" the end of the story. In so doing, God makes it easier to cognitively process the information of our own personal stories, removing doubt and uncertainty. It can actually make it easier to enjoy life when you know the end of the story.

I once heard a story, probably a legend, of a great general in ancient times whose army was facing a terrible battle. The opposing army vastly outnumbered the general's forces, and they were rumored to have superior weapons. A feeling of doom permeated the camp. The fighting spirit was gone.

Seeing this, the general called his army together before the battle was to begin and announced that he had in his possession a "prophetic coin." By flipping this coin he could tell the outcome of a battle. The coin had never failed him in its magical powers of prophecy. So, he announced that he would flip the coin in their presence in order that they might know the outcome of the battle before it began. "Heads" meant victory, while "tails" meant defeat.

The army stood in absolute silence as the general tossed the coin in the air. They held their collective breath, watching the coin flip over and over. When it landed, the officers looked at the coin and shouted, "Heads"!

The army shouted in triumph. Victory was assured!

The battle ensued, and the victory was won that day just as predicted by the prophetic coin. It was only after the battle that the General showed the coin to his officers. Both sides of the coin were heads! The coin toss was fixed!

What is the moral of the story? Assurance of victory emboldens the soldiers!

The same is true of biblical prophecy. It's like a two-headed coin purposed to give us courage. The biblical prophecies all say the same thing. Each prophecy may be presented in a different format and may deal with a different setting and may even appear to be quite unique from every other prophecy. However, it is still true that every prophecy of the Bible gives essentially the same message. The message is this: God wins! And all who are on God's side win as well.

With that in mind, I'd like to play spoiler for you with biblical prophecy. The biblical prophets tell us what to expect in the future. We know we can trust their word because

Home at Last: Our Journey Foretold

WITH MIKE TUCKER

they've been accurate in their past predictions. We will see that in tonight's prophecy. This particular prophecy revealed earth's history up to this point in time before it happened and did so with amazing accuracy. It also goes on to give us hints as to when and how this earth will end and how we will eventually be "home at last."

I invite you to open your Bible to the Old Testament book of Daniel. If you are new to the Bible, you will find a table of contents in the front of the book that will give you page numbers for the various books contained in the Bible. As you look that up, let me tell you a bit about the Bible.

The Bible is the basis of the Christian Faith. That is, it is the one, reliable source of information upon which we base all of our beliefs. It is a book that is divided into two major sections: the Old Testament and the New Testament.

The Old Testament, also known as the Hebrew or Jewish Bible, is a collection of 39 books that were written before the birth of Jesus. The youngest of those books was written some 450 years before Jesus was born. The New Testament is a collection of 29 books that were written after the death of Jesus.

An easy way to put these two sections of the Bible in perspective is to remember that the Old Testament foreshadowed and foretold the coming of Jesus, while the New Testament tells us the story of Jesus' life and predicts His eventual return to earth. In other words, the Bible from Genesis to Revelation is all about Jesus. That is the Christian perspective.

Perhaps you've been told that the Bible has been proved to be a book of fables. Well, that is not true. In fact, the most esteemed archeologists will tell you that not one archeological finding has ever controverted the Bible on any point! Also, properly understood, not one biblical prophecy has ever been wrong.

No other work of antiquity has been so faithfully translated or so accurately preserved as the Bible. It is by far the most accurately preserved work of antiquity in the world.

While all of this is true, my faith in this book is based more on how it has changed my life and the lives of countless millions of people throughout the history of the world.

With that in mind, let's turn to the book of Daniel, the second chapter. And as you find chapter two, allow me to give you just a bit of background.

This is a story that comes to us from the Babylonian Captivity of Israel. Babylon was located in modern day Iraq. When Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, invaded and overthrew Israel, he dispersed much of the population to other portions of the world. But he also selected young boys of royal birth to accompany him back to Babylon. These were boys who were either just about to enter or who just had entered puberty. The boys were emasculated and educated in the language and culture of Babylon in order that they might be of service to the King. Daniel and three of his friends were among the young men who were thus taken away from their homeland.

Think of the impact this would have on a young boy. Daniel witnessed the destruction of the capital city of his beloved homeland. The temple of Jehovah was

Home at Last: Our Journey Foretold

WITH MIKE TUCKER

ransacked, the walls of the city breached, and the leadership was either slaughtered or taken captive.

After the long march east, Daniel saw the most magnificent city of the ancient world. Babylon was seemingly impregnable; surrounded by two massive, concentric walls. The walls were so thick that two chariots could be driven side-by-side around the top. The Euphrates flowed through the city, supplying water for all inside. Inside the city were the famous hanging gardens.

The Babylonians were polytheists, worshiping several gods, and chief among those gods was Ishtar. Ishtar was the goddess of fertility, love, and war. Her cult was the most important in Babylon. A temple to Ishtar was a prominent feature of the city.

The Ishtar Gates and the mall leading up to the gates were magnificent and must have been overwhelming to young Daniel and his friends. The mall and the Ishtar Gates that Daniel walked through have been reassembled in a museum in Berlin. I've been privileged to see that exhibit. Three thousand years later, they are still impressive!

King Nebuchadnezzar was considered to be more than just a king. He was a god to be worshipped, and he had a palace that was breathtaking.

Everything Daniel had been taught about the world and about God was challenged by the Babylonian invasion and captivity. Yet, these spectacular sights and new realities did not intimidate this young teenage boy. Daniel and his three friends remained faithful to Jehovah, the God of Heaven.

Now let's look at the story in Daniel chapter 2, beginning with verse 1.

Daniel 2:1-4

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. So they came in and stood before the king. 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."

"Chaldeans" was a name given to a class of people who were the wise men of Babylon. These are people who supposedly had knowledge of hidden secrets. They were supposed to be able to tell the future. Evidently, Nebuchadnezzar had forgotten the dream, or maybe he was losing confidence in the Chaldeans and wanted to test them.

Look at what he says to them:

Daniel 2:5-6

The king replied 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 from limb and your houses will be made a rubbish heap. 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."

Home at Last: Our Journey Foretold

WITH MIKE TUCKER

Nebuchadnezzar put the supposed wise men to a humanly impossible test. When they were unable to tell the king his dream, Nebuchadnezzar ordered that these astrologers should be put to death, along with their students, which included Daniel and his friends.

Daniel and his friends had been excluded from the original meeting, so they now asked for time and declared that they could do that which the King expected.

Arioch, the commander of the king's guard, listened to them and granted the request for more time. The young men began to pray – earnestly asking for God's help. After a night of prayer, God revealed the dream and its interpretation to Daniel. The next morning Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, all praised God.

Daniel 2:20-22

*Daniel said, "Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever,
For wisdom and power belong to Him.
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.
It is He who reveals the profound and hidden things;
He knows what is in the darkness,
And the light dwells with Him.*

That day, Arioch brought Daniel before Nebuchadnezzar and announced that he had found a Hebrew who could reveal the king's dream and its interpretation. Daniel, who was still a teenager, stood boldly before the most powerful man on earth. We find it in verse 26.

Daniel 2:26-28

The king 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 before the king and said, "As for the mystery about which the king has inquired, neither wise men, conjurers, magicians nor diviners are able to declare it to the king. However, 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. This was your dream and the visions in your mind while on your bed.

Daniel distanced himself from the other royal advisors and enchanters, while making certain the king knew that the information he was about to receive came directly from God. Daniel was careful to give all glory to God and God alone. But before Daniel revealed the king's dream, he added another unsolicited piece of information that would add a note of authenticity to that which was to follow.

Daniel 2:29

Daniel said, "While you were in bed waiting to fall asleep, you began to wonder what was to become of this great kingdom you have built."

Home at Last: Our Journey Foretold

WITH MIKE TUCKER

The king had to be impressed! Daniel had told him what was on his mind just prior to the dream. I would imagine a cold chill went up the king's spine. Next, Daniel described the king's dream in detail:

Daniel 2:31-35

"You, O king, were looking and behold, there was a single great statue; that statue, which was large and of extraordinary splendor, was standing in front of you, and its appearance was 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, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. 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. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were crushed all at the same time and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away so that not a trace of them was found. But the stone that struck the statue became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

Daniel's telling of the dream was accurate in every detail. Whether the king had forgotten the dream and now had a sense of déjà vous as Daniel accurately relayed the details, or whether he had purposely kept the particulars secret as a test for his so-called advisors, I'm certain Nebuchadnezzar got chill bumps as it became clear that Daniel knew the king's thoughts and dreams. No doubt, Daniel had the king's attention – and his confidence.

Next, Daniel gave the interpretation of the dream. Nebuchadnezzar was fond of saying that his great kingdom, Babylon, would last forever. The dream, however, predicted that Babylon would not last, but would be replaced by an inferior kingdom. Daniel, the teenager, told the king:

Daniel 2:37-38

"You, O king, are the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, the strength and the glory; and wherever the sons of men dwell, or the beasts of the field, or the birds of the sky, He has given them into your hand and has caused you to rule over them all. You are the head of gold."

Babylon was the head of gold! Nebuchadnezzar must have liked the sound of that. It was a good dream so far. Indeed, Babylon was a kingdom that was rich in art, literature, culture and military might, but a kingdom that would not last forever.

Daniel 2:39

"After you there will arise another kingdom inferior to you, then another third kingdom of bronze, which will rule over all the earth."

Just as silver is of lesser value than gold, so the kingdom that would overthrow Babylon would be of lesser quality and strength. This was a bit of a slap in the face to the

Home at Last: Our Journey Foretold

WITH MIKE TUCKER

King. It refuted his claim that Babylon would last forever. In reality, Babylon as a world empire lasted less than 100 years, beginning about 605 BC until it's overthrow in 539 BC.

The kingdom of silver was the kingdom of the Medes and Persians, or modern day Iran.

Just as Daniel predicted, Persia, or modern day Iran, overthrew Babylon. King Cyrus established an empire that lasted for over 200 years from 539 to 331 BC. Persia is viewed as being inferior to Babylon in many ways, especially in the areas of art, literature, and culture.

Each part of the image represented successive kingdoms that would follow. God did not reveal to Daniel or to Nebuchadnezzar who these kingdoms might be, but history tells the story. Notice again the last part of verse 39:

Daniel 2:39

*"After you there will arise another kingdom inferior to you, **then another third kingdom of bronze, which will rule over all the earth.**"*

Next followed Greece, the bronze kingdom. The Greeks, led by Alexander the Great, overthrew Persia in 331 BC and ruled the world for over 150 years. It is of note that most of the swords and shields used by the Greek soldiers under Alexander the Great were made of bronze. Greece: the bronze kingdom.

Then came Rome, the iron monarchy. Not only were their implements of warfare made of iron, but Rome had an iron will. They might not win every battle, but they would keep coming. They continued to move against their foes until they literally crushed them.

Daniel 2:40-43

"Then there will be a fourth kingdom as strong as iron; inasmuch as iron crushes and shatters all things, so, like iron that breaks in pieces, it will crush and break all these in pieces. In that you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, it will be a divided kingdom; but it will have in it the toughness of iron, inasmuch as you saw the iron mixed with common clay. As the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of pottery, so some of the kingdom will be strong and part of it will be brittle. And in that you saw the iron mixed with common clay, they will combine with one another in the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, even as iron does not combine with pottery."

Eventually, even Rome fell as a world empire. It's rule came to an end around 476 AD, and it was divided into what we know today as the nations comprising Europe. Some of these nations are as strong as iron, while others are as weak as clay. Throughout history, every attempt to unify the nations of Europe as one nation has failed. Today we see the European Union as another such attempt, but even it has fallen on hard times and is yet extremely limited in just how much unity it has been able to bring to the nations of Europe.

Home at Last: Our Journey Foretold

WITH MIKE TUCKER

We can see that history confirms every part of this prophecy so far. But it is during the days of the kingdoms of Europe that the most important part of the prophecy will be fulfilled. Remember the stone Daniel mentioned in last part of the dream? Let's look back at verse 34:

Daniel 2:34

"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 came during the time of the feet of iron and clay. That means that, while much of the prophecy has already been seen in history, we have yet to see the stone and its results. Daniel's interpretation continues:

Daniel 2:44-45

"In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever. 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."

A rock is a common metaphor for God. Jesus referred to Himself as a rock. He is identified in scripture as the Cornerstone. So, this part of the prophecy refers to the future return of Jesus in power and glory – His second coming. This time He will come to destroy the governments of the earth, eradicate evil, sickness, and death, and establish a righteous Kingdom which will last forever.

Daniel 2:46-47

"Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell on his face and did homage to Daniel, and gave orders to present to him an offering and fragrant incense. The king answered Daniel and said, "Surely your God is a God of gods and a Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, since you have been able to reveal this mystery."

Today, we see that the vast majority of this prophecy has been fulfilled. Only one thing remains, and that one thing will take place during the time when the nations of Europe stand. Jesus will come and establish His Kingdom, a Kingdom that will last forever.

This prophecy tells us that we are not to look for another world power. While we are yet in the days of a divided Europe, Jesus will come to take us home to Heaven. Every other portion of the prophecy has happened just as predicted; therefore, we can have confidence that the last event will happen as well.

The good news is that soon, we will be home at last!

Home at Last: Our Journey Foretold

WITH MIKE TUCKER

I remember the story of a couple that had spent 40 years serving as missionaries in Africa. After years of difficult labor, disease, and privation, they were finally ready to return home to America and retire.

They traveled by ocean liner and when their ship docked, a big brass band was playing in honor of a diplomat who was on board the ship and was returning home after a few years service.

As the missionary watched the band and the large crowd assembled on the dock to welcome the diplomat home, he realized that no one had come to welcome the two of them home after four decades of tireless service. He complained about this to his wife, who simply said, "Sweetheart, you're not home yet!"

Her words were true. You and I are not home yet. But the prophecies all say that one day soon, Jesus will return for us and take us home. The angels of heaven will sing songs of triumph as we are ushered in to our one true home. I am looking forward to that day, aren't you?

In the meetings ahead, we will discover how to ensure that we can be a part of that great day. We will learn how to plot our course for home.