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A0511 -- Mar. 13, 2005 – Daniel 2 – World History and the Times of the Gentiles

I. Language, Interpretation, and Meaning

I want to begin with a story by Dr. Earl Radmacher concerning “language”, “interpretation”, and “meaning”. Dr. Radmacher is one of the foremost theologians of our day. He says, “Thirty plus years ago I accepted a series of random classes to teach at several colleges in the greater San Jose area. In each situation I always started with the subject matter of the course at hand and took the thinking back to biblical principles. After the classes there were always several students who would want to discuss their interests further. One such student, after expressing his appreciation for the lecture, asked if he could get an appointment with me to rap. I was glad for the opportunity and agreed upon a time and place. We were both on time and immediately got into a heavy discussion which necessitated bringing quotations from other authorities to our aid.

When I called forth help from the Apostle Paul, however, he objected saying, "Well, there are many different interpretations of that." Now even though I had only been teaching hermeneutics for a few years then, it still brought up my ire when someone departed from common sense, to use such lame and irresponsible argumentation. Thus I responded, "Wait just a minute. You asked me to get together to wrap and I don't see any presents to wrap or any wrapping paper or ribbon with which to wrap them. Now I don't know how we are going to wrap without presents or wrapping paper.

He looked at me like I had lost my mind saying, "Well, that's not what I meant," to which I responded, "But there are many different meanings to what you said. Now let's wrap!" Totally frustrated, he said, "We can't even continue this discussion." "You are exactly right," I responded. "We cannot continue until I am willing to understand what you meant by what you said. There are not many meanings to what you said. Only one! And if I refuse to find out your meaning for what you said, intelligent communication comes to a halt. We cannot go on further until I am willing to understand the single sense you have in

mind by what you have said. And I am simply insisting that you allow the Apostle Paul the same privilege that you are expecting. There are not many different interpretations. There may be forty suggested interpretations for that verse but I guarantee you that thirty-nine of them are wrong and maybe all forty. There is one, and only one, interpretation of any passage of scripture."

And, dear friends, that is the bottom line in understanding any communication. And there is no more abused principle in the history of interpretation of the Word of God than the principle of the single sense. Whether by ignorance or design, great harm has been brought to the cause of Christ by the use of *sensus plenior* or multiple senses. E. D. Hirsch is right on target in stating "if the meaning of a text is not the author's, then no interpretation can possibly correspond to the meaning of the text."ⁱ Indeed, it amounts to the banishment of the author and, in the case of the scripture, therefore, the elimination of its authority which is supplanted by the reader."ⁱⁱ

Now, if we accept the fact that language was designed for communication and we are willing to understand that what God says He actually means then we can actually get somewhere. We've got to understand that there are not multiple interpretations of Scripture. God has one intended meaning regardless of how many interpretations people suggest. So, what we're after is that one meaning and the only way we're going to get there is to accept the normal meaning of the words God says in His Bible.

II. Literal Interpretation of Scripture Reveals World History

If you consistently interpret Scripture normally then God's plan for world history can be understood. Revelation is a chronology of the final events of world history. But how can we understand the last chapters of a story if we have not read the first chapters of the story? That's a question we have to answer if we are going to understand Revelation. It is important to know the past in order to make sense of the present and to understand the future. History is not cyclical. History is not the same damn thing over and over, as Henry Ford used to say. If there is one thing you learn from today's lesson, learn this: history is the expression of God's sovereign will and history is moving to a definite conclusion and God is the one who is moving it to that conclusion. God is absolutely sovereign. So, let's back up in God's plan for world history and, interpreting Scripture literally, let's look at that plan.

III. World History from Creation to Exile

A. Creation (4,000BC)

God created the entire universe and all that is in it in the span of six day/night cycles and these days are normal days according to Exod 20:11. If we take the genealogies of the Bible seriously then we are forced to say that the universe is about 6,000 years old which would mean that God created around **4,000BC**.

B. Fall (4,000BC)

C. Noahic Flood (2,344BC)

The Noahic Flood was a universal cataclysmic judgment of God that occurred 1,656 years after man was created, or on our calendar, about **2,344BC**. Eight people lived through the flood. Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth and their wives.

D. Noahic Covenant (2,343BC)

The Noahic Covenant provides stability of nature. It is the basis of all science. Apart from God's promise here there is no uniformity in nature. This is an unconditional covenant made with Noah and all flesh (animals, birds, fish, etc...) where God promised He would never destroy all flesh again as He had done in the Flood.

E. Tower of Babel (2,343-2,200BC)

Man rejected God's covenant promise of stability in nature and united forces against God by building a Kingdom of Man to create peace and national security. The center of the Kingdom of Man was a city known as Babel. God judged man for building a Kingdom of Man by confusing the language. Now men could not communicate and were forced to scatter and populate the earth. It was during this time after Babel, that pagan man, because he was depraved, took the revealed truth of God and distorted it, turning it into what we know as mythology.

F. Call of Abraham (1,950BC)

Because of the distortion of truth by the pagan mind God graciously elected one man, Abram, and deposited His truth in this one man and promised him a Land (Real Estate), a Seed, and Worldwide Blessing.

G. Exodus (1,440BC)

Abraham's people grew in number in Egypt over a period of ~400 years and came out of Egypt as the nation of Israel.

H. Mt. Sinai (1,400BC)

God gave Moses the Law for Israel on Mt. Sinai. Blessing was promised if they obeyed the Law and cursing was pronounced if they disobeyed the Law.

I. Reign of King David (1,010BC)

J. Golden Era of Solomon (970BC)

Israel's culture reached its high-point under King Solomon. They enjoyed great wealth, advanced technology, wisdom, and engaged in studying every area of life from botany to engineering. This culture was the highest developed biblical culture ever known in history

K. Kingdom Divided (930BC)

Solomon's rebellious son Rehoboam caused a civil war which divided the Kingdom into the Northern and Southern Kingdoms of Israel and Judah. This sent the nation into decline.

L. Kingdom Decline (930-605BC)

The high culture of Israel plummeted over the period of 325 years. The northern kingdom going into captivity to Assyria in 722BC and the southern kingdom lasting until the time of Daniel where I want to center the rest of today's lesson.

So, I've shown you how a literal understanding of Scripture results in a world history that progressed through thirteen great events which must be classed in two major stages. 1) Gentile World History (Gen 1-11 (pre-Abraham)) and 2) Israel's World History (Gen 12 – Daniel 1 (post-Abraham)).

IV. World History of the "Times of the Gentiles"

But then the Nation of Israel went into Exile in Babylon and this is where world history takes a turn and moves into a 3rd major stage, the "Times of the Gentiles". Turn to Luke

21:23-24 to find this phrase “the times of the Gentiles”. Now, we are in a tribulation context here which as Futurists we place totally in the future. These things have yet to come to pass and these things have to do with the people of Israel.

Luke 21:23-24 ²³ "Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days; for there will be great distress upon the land and wrath to *this people* [Israel]; ²⁴ and they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

So, “the times of the Gentiles” began with Israel’s exile in Babylon in 605BC. From that point forward Israel would be under the power of Gentile nations until those times are fulfilled. So, the “times of the Gentiles” began in 605BC and will extend until the 2nd Coming of Christ when “the time of the Jews” begins. This is another reason the Antichrist can’t be a Jew, because he will rule during the “times of the Gentiles”, therefore he has to be a Gentile ruler (also cf. Dan 11:36; Rev 13:1). The “times of the Gentiles” will be fulfilled only when the Jewish Messiah, Jesus Christ, returns to set up His kingdom on earth. Now, let’s look at God’s outline for “the times of the Gentiles”. It comes in four stages or kingdoms. This was all prophesied in the 6th century before Christ and it has gradually been fulfilled.

Turn to Daniel 2. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, is about to have a dream. And in that dream he sees a prophetic forecast of four Gentile kingdoms portrayed by a great statue. But Nebuchadnezzar doesn’t understand the dream so Daniel, by God’s grace, reveals the dream and the interpretation of the dream. So, we have a dream that forecasts the future course of Gentile kingdoms. Let’s read the account of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and Daniel’s interpretation of the dream beginning in verse 1 and reading until verse 45.

V. Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream of the Great Metallic Image (603BC) (Dan 2)

A. The troubled spirit of Nebuchadnezzar (2:1-3)

Now in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; and his spirit was troubled and his sleep left him. ² 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. ³ The king said to them, "I had a dream and my spirit is anxious to understand the dream."

B. Nebuchadnezzar tests his servants (2:4-12)

⁴ Then the Chaldeans spoke to the king in Aramaic: *[it is very interesting to note that Daniel's writings switch from Hebrew to Aramaic and remain in Aramaic until Daniel 7:28. This is the largest section of Aramaic in the OT. Why do you think Daniel wrote this in Aramaic? Because Aramaic was the common language of the day, like English is the common language in our day. And since the dream charts the course of Gentile history it is written in Aramaic so the Gentiles can understand it.]* "O king, live forever! *[this is kissing up to the king. oh king you're the best, your kingdom will endure forever; ironically, the interpretation of the dream says the kings dynasty will not live forever!]* Tell the dream to your servants, and we will declare the interpretation." ⁵ 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. *[the king wants them to not just tell him the interpretation but he also wants them to tell him what he dreamed]*" ⁶ "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." ⁷ They answered a second time and said, "Let the king tell the dream to his servants, and we will declare the interpretation." ⁸ The king replied, "I know for certain that you are bargaining for time, inasmuch as you have seen that the command from me is firm, ⁹ 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 its interpretation." *[see, the king had been suspicious for some time about these characters and this was his test to see if they were legitimate]* ¹⁰ The Chaldeans answered the king and said, "There is not a man on earth who could declare the matter for the king, inasmuch as no great king or ruler has *ever* asked anything like this of any magician, conjurer or Chaldean. ¹¹ "Moreover, the thing which the king demands is difficult, and there is no one else who could declare it to the king except gods, whose dwelling place is not with *mortal* flesh." ¹² Because of this the king became indignant and very furious and gave orders to destroy all the wise men of Babylon. *[the king realizes that they had been pulling his leg all this time, making up stuff]*

C. Death decreed (2:13)

¹³ So the decree went forth that the wise men should be slain; and they looked for Daniel and his friends to kill *them*.

D. Daniel's request for time (2:14-16)

¹⁴ 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; *[Daniel was calm, poised, and exercised great caution and discernment before the executioner]* ¹⁵ he 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. ¹⁶ 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.

E. Daniel's request for the interpretation (2:17-18)

¹⁷ Then Daniel went to his house and informed his friends, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, about the matter, ¹⁸ so that they might request compassion from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his friends would not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.

F. God reveals the mystery (2:19)

¹⁹ Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a night vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven; *[Daniel blessed God before he even told the king the dream and interpretation. Daniel trusted the Lord. He did not wait until he found out of the dream was right to bless God]*

G. Daniel exalts God Almighty (2:20-23)

²⁰ Daniel said, "Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever, For wisdom and power belong to Him. ²¹ "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. ²² "It is He who reveals the profound and hidden things; He knows what is in the darkness, And the light dwells with Him. ²³ "To You, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, For You have given me wisdom and power; Even now You have made known to me what we requested of You, For You have made known to us the king's matter."

H. Daniel claims that God reveals mysteries (2:24-30)

²⁴ Therefore, Daniel went in to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to destroy the wise men of Babylon; he went and spoke to him as follows: "Do not destroy the wise men of Babylon! Take me into the king's presence, and I will declare the interpretation to the king." ²⁵ Then Arioch hurriedly brought Daniel into the king's presence and spoke to him as follows: "I have found a man among the exiles from Judah who can make the interpretation known to the king!" ²⁶ The king said to Daniel, whose name was Beltshazzar, [his Babylonian name] "Are you able to make known to me the dream which I have seen and its interpretation?" ²⁷ 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. ²⁸ "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. ²⁹ "As for you, O 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. ³⁰ "But as for me, this mystery has not been revealed to me 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.

I. The dream (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. ³² "The head of that statue *was made* of fine gold, its breast and its arms of silver, its belly and its thighs of bronze, ³³ its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. [the characteristics of these four metals have importance, see footnoteⁱⁱⁱ] 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. ³⁵ "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.

J. The interpretation (2:36-45)

³⁶ "This *was* the dream; now we will tell its interpretation before the king.

1. Babylonian Empire is head of gold (2:32, 37-38)

³⁷ "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; ³⁸ 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.

See how the Bible is its own best interpreter? It tells us that Nebuchadnezzar is “the head of gold”. Here, of course, king Nebuchadnezzar is the representative of the Babylonian Empire. The head is the only part of the image which signifies a united whole.^{iv} The Babylonian Empire began in 605BC and terminated in 536BC. A period of 70 years to make up for 490 sabbatical rests the southern kingdom of Judah had ignored (Lev. 25:1-7, II Chr. 36:20-21, Jer. 29:10).

2. Medo-Persian Empire is arms and breast of silver (2:32, 39)

³⁹ "After you there will arise another kingdom inferior to you, then another third kingdom of bronze, which will rule over all the earth.

The second empire is composed of silver and is signified by the arms and chest of the image. Silver is inferior to gold in terms of preciousness and atomic mass. This empire is the Medo-Persian Empire, which ruled from 536-336BC. The arms show the division of the empire. One arm standing for the Median portion of the empire and the other arm standing for the Persian portion. Here the division between the Mede and Persian Empires is a *nationalistic division*, not a *geographic division*. Together the two nationalities find unity symbolized by the chest of the image. Even so, the Medo-Persian Empire was larger geographically than the Babylonian Empire.

3. Greek Empire is belly and thighs of bronze (2:32, 39)

³⁹ then another third kingdom of bronze, which will rule over all the earth.

The third empire is signified by the belly and thighs and is composed of brass. This is the Greek Empire set up by Alexander the Great who died at the young age of 33 after rapidly conquering the Medo-Persian Empire in just 12 years. After Alexander’s death in 323BC the Greek Empire was divided among his four top generals: Ptolemy I Lagos seized Egypt, Lysamichus ruled Thrace, Seleucus I ruled Babylon, and Cassander controlled Macedonia and Greece.^v The two thighs of the image probably represent the two strongest *geographic*

regions within the Greek Empire, namely Syria (Seleucus' region) and Egypt (Ptolemy's region). Obviously the bronze is significant in that it is a much harder metal signifying a stronger military. Alexander's powerful takeover of the entire Medo-Persian Empire and beyond demonstrated the powerful military of Greece.

4. Roman Empire Has Two Stages

A. Legs of Iron (2:33, 40)

⁴⁰ "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.

The fourth empire is signified by the iron legs and iron mixed with clay feet. This is the Roman Empire traditionally said to have been founded supposedly by Remus and Romulus in 63BC.^{vi} The distinction between the legs of iron and the feet of iron mixed with clay indicates that there are two forms of the Roman Empire. At the time Daniel penned the Book of Daniel around 536BC both forms were prophetic. Looking from today's standpoint the Roman Empire as described by the iron legs is *historic*.

The iron signifies Rome's great military power that crushed all the other empires. Though Rome became a Republic in 200AD, it wasn't until 63BC that Rome officially became the world dominating Empire. Again we see two legs signifying the division between two geographic regions of Rome. In the west Rome was the capital, but in 395AD Constantinople became the capital in the east. Thus, the Roman Empire was divided into western and eastern regions. In 476AD the western capital of Rome fell to invading northern tribes. However, the eastern region of Rome (Byzantine) remained until 1453AD when the city of Constantinople fell to Muslim Turks and Arabs. Though the two branches of Roman civilization have fallen their ideologies, culture, politics, and military aspects have not disappeared. They are still present in of the Roman Empire are present in our "modern world".

B. Revived Roman Empire is feet of iron and clay (2:34, 41-43)

⁴¹ "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. ⁴² "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. ⁴³ "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.

The iron mixed with clay feet is the yet future re-birth of the Roman Empire. This is the second form of the ancient Roman Empire that must be resurrected prior to Christ's 2nd Advent (signified by the stone cut out without hands). The ten toes are significant in that they depict ten kings which will intermingle with the world politically, economically, culturally, ideologically, religiously, socially, and with increasing technology possibly even linguistically. However, the Revived Roman Empire is internally weak. The feet composed partly of iron and partly of clay turned brittle and hard show how easily Revived Rome will fall apart! Man cannot unite as one without God. The attempt at a one-world system apart from God was tried millennia ago at the Tower of Babel in Gen. 11. But man just will not learn his lesson. Man, with all his intellectual genius, is doomed to failure. For man to exalt himself before God is a cosmic joke!

So, we have four Gentile kingdoms. The first three prophesied Gentile kingdoms have been fulfilled in Babylon = Head of Gold (605-536BC), Medo-Persia = Breast and Arms of Silver (536-336BC), Greece = Belly and Thighs of Bronze (336-63BC). The first stage of the fourth Gentile kingdom has been fulfilled in Ancient Rome = Legs of Iron (63BC-476AD Western; 63BC-1453AD Eastern). But, the second stage of the Roman Empire, known as Revived or Re-built Rome has not yet been fulfilled. This kingdom is signified by the Feet of Part Iron and Part Clay (????AD). This signifies the brittleness of this last stage of Gentile kingdoms. It will appear to be strong militarily but it will actually be on the brink of crumbling. It has appearance of strength but it is actually weak. The ten toes signify a 10 nation European Confederacy, the likes of which we have not yet seen but to which history is destined. This will be the last phase of "the times of the Gentiles" and will be the ruling Empire during the Tribulation described in Rev 6-19. After the Tribulation we have a Jewish Kingdom mentioned in vv 44-45.

5. God's Eternal Kingdom is the stone cut out w/out hands (2:35, 44-45)

⁴⁴ "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. [see, elements from each of the previous four kingdoms will have a place in the final rebuilt Roman Empire and yet all these elements will be destroyed] ⁴⁵ "Inasmuch as you saw that a stone was cut out of the mountain without hands [not a kingdom set

up by a mere man, but the God-man] 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."

VI. Literal Interpretation of World History Sets the Stage for Israel's Final Restoration

The image described in Daniel 2 is a great prophetic revelation of the future Gentile kingdoms that will rule from the time of Daniel to the yet future return of Christ (as signified by the term *latter days* in Dan. 2:28). It was given to ensure the Jewish people that God still has a future plan for Israel (Jer. 29:10-14). It was given to encourage them during this historic period of exile, dispersion, and distress. It was given to produce a longing for the 5th and final Messianic Kingdom where Christ will reign with a rod of iron over all the nations of the earth (Ps 2). God's plan for history sets the stage for understanding Revelation, the consummation of world history.

ⁱ Hirsch, E. D., Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 5.

ⁱⁱ Radmacher, Earl D., *The Nature and Result of Literal Interpretation* (paper delivered at the Pre-Tribulation Rapture Conference in Dallas, TX, December 2003), 1.

ⁱⁱⁱ Each metallic division of the image is representative of a ruling empire. The metals descend in the following order: gold, silver, brass (or copper), iron, and iron mixed with clay. These five divisions stand for four empires. The last empire having two distinct forms (iron & iron mixed with clay). The characteristics of the metals used to describe the empires can be compared in three ways. First, the metals decrease from head to toe in terms of their atomic mass: Gold (197.0), Silver (107.9), Bronze or Copper (63.55), Iron (55.85). This shows that the image is not a stable image. It is top heavy! Imagine how easy the image would topple over if a representative model of the image were made. Secondly, the hardness (strength) of the metals is just the opposite. There is an increase in metallic strength from head to toe. The gold being the softest metal of the four and the iron being the hardest metal. The hardness represents the strength of each empire, in particular, the military strength of each empire. The fourth empire is characterized by powerful iron which will break all the other kingdoms into pieces. A third aspect of the metals is their decline in value from head to toe. This *may* depict the moral decline of mankind due to his depravity imputed at the fall of man (Gen. 3:7). Gold symbolizing a high culture relative to the following cultures depicted by inferior metals.

^{iv} Walvoord, John F., *Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation* (Chicago, Ill.: Moody Press, 1971), 63.

^v Combs, Jim, *Mysteries of the Book of Daniel* (Springfield, MO: Tribune Publishers, 1994), 84-85.

^{vi} Although Rome became a Republic in 200BC.

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