

The Vision of the Great Image in Daniel 2

The second chapter of Daniel contains the first long prophecy in the book. Since it is much simpler and far less detailed than the later prophecies it provides an excellent introduction to their study. Its principal features are presented in rather general terms and it is questionable how much information from later chapters or from the study of later history should be read back into them. It is better first to see what can be learned from this chapter, taken by itself, and then to use this knowledge as a foundation in approaching the later, more complicated visions.

The story in this chapter is well known. Nebuchadnezzar called upon his so-called "wise men" (or "Chaldeans") to describe to him a dream that he had had and then to interpret the dream. They all declared that such a demand was impossible, saying that if he would tell them the dream they would be glad to interpret it. In great anger the king commanded that all the "wise men" should be killed. Hearing of this order and knowing that their own lives were now in jeopardy, Daniel and his friends prayed that God would deliver them. Then he went before the king and correctly described the king's dream, and also gave the divine interpretation.

In ancient times belief in signs, omens and dreams as means of predicting the future was very widespread. The Babylonians thought they could predict the future by examining the entrails of sacrificial animals. Hundreds of clay tablets have been found describing the condition of the livers of animals that had been sacrificed just before some