

The Book of Daniel

2:31- 3:7

October 19, 2016

Nebuchadnezzar's dream of Chapter 2 concerns not Daniel's people, the Jews, but present and future Gentile empires. Israel's destiny now becomes intertwined with the affairs of mighty empires.

An empire is not a single country but a group of distinct nations brought under a single authority. Man's act of combining nations would appear to run counter to God's intentions in breaking mankind into nations of different languages and scattering them over the face of the earth after the tower of Babel. It is no coincidence that the first empire is Babylon, the heir of Babel.

The four historical empires of Nebuchadnezzar's dream are summarized below. We might not think of the first two as true world empires but it was a smaller world then. Many historians consider the Medo-Persian empire under Cyrus to have controlled an incredible 44% of the total world population at the time, the highest proportion of all empires including those of Rome and Britain.

Why would God bring His chosen nation into contact with and under the subjection of these gentile nations? Let's see what resulted from each of the four periods:

- Israel was conquered by **Babylon**, the capital of idolatry to purge her of her own idolatrous unfaithfulness.
- A chastened and purified Israel was permitted by a **Medo-Persian** king to return to the holy land and rebuild Jerusalem.

- The **Greek** empire put Israel in touch with the wider world culture of learning, enabling educated Jews to write in Greek.

- Under the **Roman** empire our Lord was born and crucified and through its western successors was proclaimed throughout the world.

We can see that all these empires served the divine plan that runs through all scripture: to set apart and consecrate a people devoted to God, so that in their midst His Son could be born and die to save men from their sins. *"This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Eph. 3:11).

Notes on 2:31 – 3:7

2:31 Daniel does what the king had requested and the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and Chaldeans had declared impossible: He describes what the king had seen in his dream.

2:34 The stone that shatters the image is not cut by human hands. In the law God mandated the same for His altar: *"If you make me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stones, for if you wield your tool on it you profane it"* (Ex. 20:25). The stone that breaks the power of empires is a prophecy of the Lord Jesus. His work of salvation should not be profaned by any claims of human effort. *"Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame"* (1 Peter 2:6).

Empire	Daniel 2	Daniel 7	Daniel 8	Date
Babylon	Head of gold	Lion		626 BC
Medo-Persia	Chest and arms of silver	Bear	Ram	539 BC
Greece	Middle and thighs of bronze	Leopard	Goat	331 BC
Rome	Legs of iron	Fearsome beast		63 BC
<i>Gap of time</i>				
Revived Roman empire	Feet or iron and clay	Ten horns and little horn		

2:37 Daniel tell Nebuchadnezzar that he himself is the head of gold but makes it clear that his power and kingdom have been given to him by God. The head therefore represents the neo-Babylonian empire which defeated Assyria around 615 BC and controlled what today is called the Middle East.

2:38 The Medo-Persian empire (known to historians as the Achaemenid empire) conquered Babylon in 539 BC. Based in Persia (modern day Iran), the empire grew to encompass parts of Eastern Europe, most of the middle east, and central Asia into parts of India. King Ahasuerus (Xerxes in Greek) of the book of Esther was one of its rulers.

The statue's two arms may symbolize the empire's dual cultures, the Medes and the Persians.

2:39 The first two kingdoms were represented by the precious metals gold and silver. The last two are bronze and iron, less valuable and beautiful but tougher and more durable.

The bronze kingdom would be the Greek-Macedonian empire ruled by Alexander the Great. He is considered one of the most successful generals in history, having never suffered a defeat. Through a series of quick conquests he overran the Medo-Persian empire and struck deep into India. Alexander died at a young age and his kingdom broke into four parts – more on that later.

Alexander's tutor in his youth was the great Greek philosopher Aristotle. Much of what we now consider western science and learning was introduced to peoples under Alexander's rule. The Greek, or Hellenistic, influence persisted until the time of the gospels. The Sadducees were the Hellenized party, more skeptical and rational, while the Pharisees were the religious party. The two parties, the Jew and the Greek, were reconciled only in the church through the blood of Christ (Gal. 3:28, Eph. 2:14-11-22).

2:40 The Roman empire at its greatest extent included all the previous kingdoms and far more territory in western Europe and north Africa. The Roman republic was founded around 63 BC. It split into eastern and western domains with capitals in Rome and Constantinople (previously Byzantium, now Istanbul) in A.D. 330. The two legs of the statue may represent these halves. Rome fell in A.D. 476, Constantinople in 1204.

2:40 The feet of the statue appear to represent something other than the classic Roman empire. The most common interpretation is that they represent the revived Roman empire that achieves world dominion during the tribulation under the rule of the antichrist. The ten toes represent ten kingdoms, pictured as ten horns in Daniel 7:7 and mentioned again in Revelation 17:7.

The feet of the statue are an amalgam of iron and clay. These probably symbolize some unnatural mixture. One possibility: The alliance in Revelation 17 between the beast and the false religious system (Babylon) that falls apart in verse 16.

The stone is Christ, who will come with His saints, conquer all opponents, and establish His kingdom throughout all the earth.

2:47 Nebuchadnezzar pays lip service to God but seems more intent upon honoring Daniel than glorifying the God who gives Daniel his ability.

3:1 While Nebuchadnezzar is pleased to have learned the interpretation of his dream, he has not learned from it that all kingdoms, including his, will pass and God controls all. The statue has a head of gold like the one in the dream. But Nebuchadnezzar seems to want to replace the kingdoms that follow his with a perpetual extension of his own rule; that is, gold all the way down. He does not acknowledge that only one throne lasts forever: *But of the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom.* (Heb. 1:8).