

The witness of fulfilled Bible prophecy

2. The God of heaven will set up a kingdom

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It was the year 605 B.C. and the day had finally arrived. The Babylonians swept into Jerusalem and made Jehoiakim a vassal. Daniel, as one of the 'good figs', was carried away captive knowing that God had promised to bring the captives back to their own land again (Jer. 24:5-7). But for the time being we find Daniel sharing in Israel's seventy-year captivity in Babylon.

IN HIS SECOND YEAR, King Nebuchadnezzar could not sleep. He had dreamed a dream and wanted to know what it meant, and to add to his problems he could not even remember what the dream was! Well, who to turn to? Having learned that Daniel and his three friends were ten times better than his magicians and astrologers (Dan. 1:20), Nebuchadnezzar nevertheless strangely called for his 'wise' men to tell him the dream and the interpretation. As expected, none of them could answer the king's rather demanding request, and they declared that "There is not a man upon the earth that can shew the king's matter" (2:10). But the God of Israel was at work; God through Daniel was about to accomplish a remarkable thing.

Daniel, with full confidence in his God, came boldly forward and proclaimed to the king that he could show him the interpretation, but needed time. That night Daniel and his three friends prayed to the God of heaven, and the interpretation was duly given to Daniel by God. The

following day Daniel stood before the king, and in great humility declared that "there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days. Thy dream, and the visions of thy head upon thy bed, are these . . ." (v. 28). The dream was then explained to Nebuchadnezzar.

Daniel now appreciated why God had given him skill and understanding in "all visions and dreams" (1:17). Though they were in captivity, God was ever near to His faithful servants, preparing them for their work.

Dream and interpretation

God revealed to Daniel that Nebuchadnezzar had seen a great image, "whose brightness was excellent . . . and the form thereof . . . terrible" (2:31). The details of the image are summarised in [Table 1](#) below.

This image stood before Nebuchadnezzar in his dream. A stone that was cut out of the mountain without hands then smote the image on the feet, and the whole image was broken to pieces. The tiny pieces were driven away by the wind and no place was found for them. In other words, they were totally destroyed and gone; they had disappeared. The stone that smote the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

Table 1				
Body part	Metal	World power	Fulfilment	Daniel 7 beasts
Head	Fine gold	Babylon	606–539 B.C.	v. 4 – lion
Breast and arms	Silver	Media and Persia	539–331 B.C.	v. 5 – bear
Belly and thighs	Brass	Greece	331–330 B.C.	v. 6 – leopard
Legs	Iron	Rome	30 B.C.–397 A.D.	vv. 7, 19 – diverse beast
Feet	Iron and clay – not mixed	No single power	397–present day	vv. 7, 19 – diverse beast

Table 2	
Nebuchadnezzar's dream	Daniel's dream
The setting: 2:1-30	The setting: 7:1
The dream: vv. 31-35	The dream: vv. 2-14,21,22
The interpretation: vv. 36-45	The interpretation: vv. 15-26
The results: vv. 46-49	The results: vv. 27,28

What did this dream sent from God really mean? What was its message and interpretation? As [Table 1](#) indicates, Daniel went on to explain the interpretation exactly as God had revealed to him that night. The metals represented different nations and world powers that would control and dominate God's Land of Israel.* This was a remarkable prophecy spanning approximately 2,600 years.

The interpretation begins with Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon as the head of gold (v. 38). But how can we be so certain that the other nations are correctly identified in [Table 1](#)? Daniel 5:28 reveals that the successor to Babylon would be the Medes and Persians. Daniel had the wonderful blessing of witnessing the Medes and Persians taking and destroying Babylon (as prophesied in Jeremiah 50), fulfilling that part of Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

Daniel 8:20,21 and 11:2 tell us that the next power was to be Greece, and a look at history will show that the next empire to control Israel after Greece was Rome. The present-day situation is that there is still a Roman presence in Israel, but it is not a sole dictator or empire; this ties in nicely with the feet of iron (Rome) and miry clay. The clay is described as the "seed of men" (2:43). The iron and clay are mixing but not cleaving to one another, and the tension in Israel today testifies to this: the iron and clay are not cleaving to one another.

To boost this understanding of Daniel 2, a brief look at the beasts of Daniel 7 is required. Table 1 indicates which metal in Daniel 2 matches up to which beast in Daniel 7. Daniel 7:3 reveals that there are four beasts, matching the four metals of Daniel 2. This link between Daniel 2 and Daniel 7 also appears in the structure of the vision/dream chapters ([Table 2](#) above).

Gold/Lion: Babylon

In Jeremiah 50:17 Babylon is described as a lion. Archaeology and history testify that the lion was the symbol of the Chaldean empires of Babylon

and Assyria. Both the head of gold and the lion represent Babylon.

Silver/Bear: Medes and Persians

The bear was raised up on one side. History records that the Persians were the dominant partner in their relationship with the Medes. The detail also states that the bear had "three ribs" in its mouth (Dan. 7:5), answering to the "three presidents" (6:2) that Darius the Mede set up over his kingdom.

Brass/Leopard: Greece

The rapid pace of the leopard reflects the rapid conquests of Alexander the Great. The leopard had "upon the back of it four wings of a fowl" (7:6), and history confirms that Alexander split his empire into four sections. The beast also had four heads: Alexander set a general over each part of his empire. The generals who controlled the four areas of Alexander's empire are referred to in Daniel 11:4. They were Cassander (Macedonia and Greece), Lysimachus (Thrace and Asia Minor), Seleucus (Syria and North Persia) and Ptolemy (Egypt). As an aside, two of these generals were destroyed, leaving just two powers, which became the king of the north (Seleucus) and the king of the south (Ptolemy).

Iron/Fourth Beast: Rome

This beast was "dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly" (7:7). It had great iron teeth, linking it to the iron of Nebuchadnezzar's image. This image had two iron legs, answering to Eastern and Western Rome. This fourth beast had ten horns, matching the ten toes of Daniel's image, which represent the era we are presently living in, the final era of the kingdom of men, the feet stage of the image.

It is evident that the metals give a broad outline of history and the beasts give more detail. It is a worthwhile exercise to study Daniel 7, 8 and 11 and see how the history fits into this interpretation. The book of Revelation picks up the theme

* Most expositors identify the image as the kingdom of men (as Dan. 4:17) in opposition to the Kingdom of God. Israel ceased to be the Kingdom of God in the first century, but, as God's witnesses, now resident in the Land, present a challenge to those strong and weak nations which form the feet phase of the image and which will be destroyed by the establishment of the Kingdom of God at Jesus' return.—E.D.M.

The four kingdoms

Critical scholars claim that Daniel believed an *independent* kingdom of Media succeeded the Babylonian Empire. This is key to the interpretation of the visions in Daniel 2 and 7, because the four empires would then be:

- 1 Babylon
- 2 Media
- 3 Persia
- 4 Greece.

Conservative scholars, however, believe in the 'Roman' interpretation, that is:

- 1 Babylon
- 2 Medo-Persia
- 3 Greece
- 4 Rome.

Brother Thomas Gaston has weighed up arguments of scholars for and against these views.* He directs attention to the vision of Daniel 8:20, which states that the ram with two horns, one higher than the other, "are the kings of Media and Persia". The significant point is that Medes and Persians make up one unified kingdom, *represented by a single animal*. He concludes:

- "1) There is no explicit reference in the book of Daniel to an independent Median kingdom as successor to the Babylonian kingdom.
- 2) There are strong indications that the Medo-Persian Empire was regarded by Daniel as a single unit, a) legally, b) militarily, c) symbolically."

* Thomas E. Gaston, *Historical Issues in the Book of Daniel* (2009), pp. 106-10, Taanath Shiloh; ISBN: 978-0-9561540-0-2; taanathshiloh@yahoo.com

of the Roman beast and expands upon its religious development. Daniel 11:36-39 is surely a reference to the Eastern Roman Empire and the power of the pope; there is no space to expand on this here. Out of Rome came "a mouth speaking great things" (7:8), representing the religious development of Catholic Rome and the pope, who claims to be 'God on earth'.

From this very brief look at the image we can identify the various powers and nations that have controlled the Land of Israel right from Daniel's day down to ours. This is a remarkable prophecy with a very accurate fulfilment. These predictions were made in the days of Babylon and span the following 2,600 years of history. Here is clear evidence that the Bible is inspired and accurate to the very last and minor detail, surely strengthening and confirming our faith in "the God of heaven" and in His Word, the Bible.

The dream and the interpretation span from Daniel's day, when the head of gold ruled over Israel, to the present day, where there is no single dictator in Israel but rather a tense situation of many nations and powers coming together but not cleaving in unity together.

But the story is not over just yet.

What next?

"The God of heaven [will] set up a kingdom". We are still within the time span of this image, and there are some things yet to be fulfilled. The stone is about to smite the image, and God's Kingdom will fill the whole earth. Many passages show that the stone represents the Lord Jesus Christ (Isa. 28:16 and Mt. 21:42,43, for example). Armageddon (Rev. 16:14,16) will witness the smiting of the image by the stone power, and subsequent to that the Kingdom of God will gradually spread and fill the earth, until at the end of the Millennium (Rev. 20:7-15) all the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord (Num. 14:21).

All of the empires in the dream have come and gone, but the Stone Kingdom "shall never be destroyed . . . it shall stand for ever" (Dan. 2:44). This is the greatest of all kingdoms, God's Kingdom! Our hope is that the year 2010 will mark the epoch of this new era, the end of the feet stage.

Final point

In the context of Babylon taking Jerusalem, Jeremiah declares, "when the word of the prophet shall come to pass, then shall the prophet be known, that the LORD hath truly sent him" (28:9;

see Deut. 13:1-5; 18:15-22). The reader can truly believe that “the God of heaven [will] set up a kingdom”, and that the final stage of the prophecy of Daniel 2, the stone smiting the image, will happen. The words of Daniel have come to pass, and from this we know that God sent him and his words are true. The complete accuracy of this prophecy proves beyond doubt that these are the words of God, and they will come to pass.

God was in complete control; He gave Nebuchadnezzar a dream, He told Daniel what the dream was and its interpretation. God was telling

us what would happen from the time of Babylon right through to our day and beyond. God was proving to us beyond any doubt that He is the true and living God, and that His Word is truth, and will come to pass.

Only one question remains to be asked: When the day comes that the stone will smite the image, where will you be? Will you be with the stone that smote the image, or will you be destroyed by it? A study of Nebuchadnezzar’s image requires a personal response by each of us as we wait the day when the God of heaven will set up His Kingdom.