

# Daniel Interprets Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

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*Daniel 2:31-45*

## **TEXT:**

“You saw, O king, and behold, a great image. This image, mighty and of exceeding brightness, stood before you, and its appearance was frightening. The head of this image was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its middle and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

“This was the dream. Now we will tell the king its interpretation. You, O king, the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, and the might, and the glory, and into whose hand he has given, wherever they dwell, the children of man, the beasts of the field, and the birds of the heavens, making you rule over them all—you are the head of gold. Another kingdom inferior to you shall arise after you, and yet a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. And there shall be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron, because iron breaks to pieces and shatters all things. And like iron that crushes, it shall break and crush all these. And as you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, it shall be a divided kingdom, but some of the firmness of iron shall be in it, just as you saw iron mixed with the soft clay. And as the toes of the feet were partly iron and partly clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly brittle. As you saw the iron mixed with soft clay, so they will mix with one another in marriage but they will not hold together, just as iron does not mix with clay. And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever, just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure.” (English Standard Version).

## **NOTES:**

- A. Statues such as the one Nebuchadnezzar saw have been discovered by archeologist in Assyria-Babylon. Notice that the metals goes from the most to the least precious as one goes from the head to the feet.
- B. The original suggests that Nebuchadnezzar kept staring at the statue; it was something from which he could not turn his gaze. There are several reasons for this.
  1. The rarity of these metals likely impressed on Nebuchadnezzar just how important this statue was.
  2. Because of these metals, there must have been a brilliance about this statue.
  3. The statue must have been quite an imposing sight.
- C. Most of the visions in Scripture have some precedent either in the culture of the day or in some previous divine revelation.
  1. E.g., Throughout the Book of Revelation, the visions are firmly rooted in Old Testament imagery.
  2. But, this vision doesn't seem to have any precedent.
    - a. Granted, the statue would likely have looked like other Assyrian-Babylonian statues, but those statues didn't use all the different metals used in this vision.
    - b. This demonstrates that God is revealing something new & different to Nebuchadnezzar.
- D. A stone was cut by supernatural means & struck the statue on the feet.
  1. We're likely to presume that this stone was cut from a mountain; if that's the case, a mountain both begins & ends this vision.
  2. In both testaments, a “stone” is an appropriate symbol of God's kingdom.
    - a. In the Old Testament, God is often referred to as a “Rock.” E.g.—
      - 1) “But Jeshurun grew fat, and kicked; you grew fat, stout, and sleek; then he forsook God who made him and scoffed at the Rock of his salvation” (Deut 32:15).
      - 2) “Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness, you who seek the LORD: look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug” (Is 51:1).
    - b. In the New Testament, Jesus is a “Rock.”

- 1) “On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Mt 16:18).
  - 2) The Jews in the wilderness all “drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ” (1 Cor 10:4).
3. This stone hit the statue at its feet, which was the most vulnerable part because of its composition.
- a. The rest of the statue was smashed to pieces, presumably by falling over at the destruction of its feet.
  - b. One might presume that the statue would be smashed to large pieces.
    - 1) But, it is smashed to dust & the wind blows it away.
    - 2) The original suggests that the blowing was so complete that not even a little speck of dust was left.
- E. The climax of the dream is that the stone that originally struck the statue grew to a large mountain. The mountain is so great that it fills the earth.
- F. Now that Daniel has told Nebuchadnezzar the dream he had, he now begins to interpret the dream.
1. The dream makes clear that the kingdom of God is going to overtake the kingdoms of the earth.
  2. God is the One with ultimate power & he will establish his unshakable kingdom at a set point in human history.
- G. Nebuchadnezzar is the first part of the statue, the first part of world domination.
1. Other prophets spoke of Nebuchadnezzar in a similar manner.
    - a. “It is I who by my great power and my outstretched arm have made the earth, with the men and animals that are on the earth, and I give it to whomever it seems right to me. Now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, my servant, and I have given him also the beasts of the field to serve him. All the nations shall serve him and his son and his grandson, until the time of his own land comes. Then many nations and great kings shall make him their slave” (Jer 27:5-7).
    - b. “For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will bring against Tyre from the north Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, king of kings, with horses and chariots, and with horsemen and a host of many soldiers” (Ezek 26:7).
  2. Gold was a fitting symbol for the Babylonian Empire.
    - a. Herodotus, who was in Babylon about 90 years after Nebuchadnezzar’s reign, was amazed at the amount of gold in the sanctuary of Bel. He also records these instructions of Nebuchadnezzar: “The walls of the cell of Merodach must be made to glisten like suns, the hall of his temple must be overlaid with shining gold, . . . and alabaster; and the chapel of his lordship which a former king had fabricated in silver, Nebuchadnezzar declares that he overlaid with bright gold.”
    - b. In the smallest temple was a table of gold.
    - c. In the temple below was a statue of the great “god” completely of gold.
    - d. Outside the temple was an altar made completely of gold.
  3. The image, while referring to the Babylonian Empire, is made personal—It is the emperor himself who embodies the Empire.
- H. It is important to notice that Daniel does ***NOT*** specify what these other kingdoms are.
1. Therefore, we cannot pinpoint them with absolute certainty.
  2. While I am certain, for example, that the second kingdom is the Medo-Persian Empire, the Bible doesn’t say that.
- I. The chest & arms of silver.
1. The Medo-Persian Empire was the only truly universal kingdom after the Babylonians.
    - a. The Aramaic word for “silver” can also mean “money.”
      - 1) Silver, of course, was the currency in the ancient world.
      - 2) Peter said to Simon the sorcerer, “May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!” (Acts 8:20).
    - b. The imagery likely intended here is that the second kingdom exchanged the outward show of gold for taxation & the hoarding of wealth.
    - c. There could also be in this imagery the idea of hoarding wealth for times of war, i.e., “building up the muscles.” Notice that it’s the chest & arms that are silver.
  2. Darius Hystaspes (r 522-486 BC) is well-remembered for his economic policies.
    - a. He fixed the coinage & introduced the golden the golden Daric. The Daric is known for its high gold quality (about 95.83%).
    - b. He developed commerce within his empire & trade with kingdoms outside of it. Thus, industry

flourished during his reign.

- c. Weights & measures were standardized, something vital for economic growth & stability.
- d. The taxation began under Cambyses II, the son of Cyrus the great, but Darius Hystaspes greatly perfected the system.
  - 1) The taxes were paid in *silver* talents.
  - 2) The lone exception was that the Indian satrapy, the richest of the 20 satrapies, paid in gold dust. But, when Herodotus, gives the measurement of their taxes, he tells his readers how much it was in *silver*.
3. The biblical account demonstrates that the Medo-Persian Empire was greatly concerned with taxation.
  - a. Those who attempted to stop the rebuilding of the walls in Jerusalem wrote a letter to Artaxerxes. In that letter, they wrote, “Now be it known to the king that if this city is rebuilt and the walls finished, they will not pay tribute, custom, or toll, and the royal revenue will be impaired” (Ezra 4:13).
  - b. When the returning Exiles confess their sins, they pray, “And its rich yield goes to the kings whom you have set over us because of our sins. They rule over our bodies and over our livestock as they please, and we are in great distress” (Neh 9:17).
  - c. The Book of Daniel informs us that Xerxes would be a very wealthy king. “And now I will show you the truth. Behold, three more kings shall arise in Persia, and a fourth shall be far richer than all of them. And when he has become strong through his riches, he shall stir up all against the kingdom of Greece” (Dan 11:2).
4. Xerxes could never have invaded Egypt & marched into Europe were it not for the financial system developed by his father Darius I. In fact, Darius was so concerned with taxes & wealth that Herodotus says that his subjects said that he was “one who looked to making a gain in everything.”
- J. The middle & thighs of bronze.
  1. The third kingdom certainly seems to have been the Greek kingdom.
  2. This kingdom ruled over the world to an even larger extent than the previous two.
  3. The power the Medo-Persians amassed through wealth was overcome by the sheer force of the Greek kingdom.
  4. The Greeks wore bronze when they went into battle.
  5. The thighs begins at the torso as a single unit & then split into the legs. Some believe this illustrates the splitting of the Greek kingdom into two parts—Egypt & Syria.
- K. The fourth kingdom is represented by iron.
  1. Iron is a very fitting representation of the Roman Empire.
    - a. The Roman poets Virgil & Lucretius said that bronze represented the weapons of an earlier era.
    - b. Iron was known well before the Roman Empire, but it was not in widespread use until that time.
    - c. In the Roman infantry, soldiers carried a spear with a long iron neck fitted to a wooden shaft.
  2. The Roman war machine was much more destructive than any of its predecessors. The special feature of the Roman military was its totally destructive power.
  3. The best proof that the Roman Empire was this fourth kingdom is its duration.
    - a. Babylon lasted 70 years, the Med-Persians lasted 200 years, the Greeks lasted 130 years.
    - b. The Roman Empire lasted 500 years & the Eastern Roman Empire did not fall until 1453.
  4. The main emphasis of the passage is the eventual division & weakening of this kingdom.
    - a. Iron & clay will not fuse.
    - b. The kingdom has something of the firmness of iron, but it is not cohesive like the clay.
  5. “They will mix with one another in marriage” (v 43) in the ESV is literally “by the seed of men.”
    - a. It is difficult, if not impossible, to know precisely what Daniel means here.
    - b. Paul Butler, writing in the College Press Bible Study Series, says that this “probably refers to the migration of barbarian hordes who came in countless myriads from the Germanic forests and central Europe and intermarried with Roman peoples (especially in the royal and ruling families) as a sort of melting-pot experiment to attempt to bring some inner unity to the expansive Roman empire.”
    - c. John Calvin said, “They shall be neighbours [*sic*] to others, and that mutual interchange which ought to promote true friendship, shall become utterly profitless.”
- L. The important thing to remember about this vision is that the kingdoms together represents dominant world powers.
  1. It is a battle of man’s rule over man versus God’s rule over man.
    - a. God has indeed, established governments to rule over man (as the Book of Daniel itself demonstrates).

- b. However, as the Book of Daniel also demonstrates, these kingdoms often attempt to supplant the reign of God.
- 2. The final kingdom is both of divine origin & eternal in duration.
  - a. The Lord Jesus will not be over the kingdom for eternity.
    - 1) “Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (1 Cor 15:24-26).
    - 2) Therefore, when death is no more, Jesus will no longer reign over the kingdom.
  - b. Yet, the kingdom shall not cease to exist, for he will deliver “the kingdom to God the Father.”
- 3. Notice also that the kingdom God intended to establish cannot be a millennial kingdom, for the text says, “The God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed” (Dan 2:44).
- 4. It was also in “the days of those kings” (Dan 2:44, ESV) that God would set up his kingdom, i.e., in the days of the Roman Empire.
  - a. The point is that in the days of the Roman Empire, God would supplant the kingdoms of the world with his own kingdom.
  - b. The establishment of God’s kingdom did, in fact, involve a conquering.
    - 1) “He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him” (Col 2:15).
    - 2) While in context, “the rulers and authorities” of Colossians 2 certainly seem to be demonic forces, it remains a fact that Jesus conquered, thus allowing “the God of heaven” to establish his kingdom.