



My Bible School Lessons

Exploring the Word of God

Lesson #3: "The King's Mysterious Dream"

SCRIPTURE READING: DANIEL 2

Memory Verse: "But there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days." Daniel 2:28.

Nebuchadnezzar, ruler of the Babylonian Empire, was one of the greatest of ancient kings. During his reign, he extended the boundaries of Babylon to include much of the territory we know today as the Middle East and Egypt. In the course of his conquests, many smaller countries fell. Members of the royal families of these subdued nations were made captives at the Babylonian court. Thus we find Daniel and his friends, princes from Palestine, land of the Hebrews, captive in Babylon at the time when God gave King Nebuchadnezzar the remarkable dream recorded here. Because of Daniel's faithfulness, God used him to interpret the dream. Let us turn now to the details of the prophecy.

1: WHO ALONE KNOWS THE SECRETS OF THE FUTURE?

Isaiah 46:9-10: "Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure,"

When the Babylonian king was perplexed about the future of his kingdom and the meaning of his dream, Daniel encouraged him with these words:

Daniel 2:28: "There is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days."

During the First World War, the Prince of Wales visited a hospital filled with hundreds of war-mangled men. As the prince walked slowly from bed to bed a stabbing cry quieted the faint rumble of conversation. "O God! Is there a God?" The probing question came from a youth lying upon a bed. He had eyes, but they did not see. He was blind. His chest was deep, his shoulders broad, but his sleeves dangled limp and empty on the pillows. He had no arms. He had a powerful form; but, from his trunk to the foot of the bed, the covers lay perfectly flat upon the mattress. He had no legs, no sight, no arms! This youth was destined to a life of unutterable anguish unless he had faith in God; and, from his aching heart, burst the bitter words, "Is there a God?" The Prince of Wales, his heart filled with pity, stooping over, kissed the youth upon his forehead.

Is there a God? A young Hebrew prince spoke for God before the mighty Nebuchadnezzar some 2,500 years ago. Down the long corridor of time his words of faith come echoing back to us: "There is a God in heaven." However gloomy the day, dark the night, or rough the way, remember, "There is a God in heaven." And He knows the future and reveals it to men.

2: WHY WAS THE DREAM GIVEN TO NEBUCHADNEZZAR?

Daniel 2:28: "There is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days."

Daniel 2:29: "He that revealeth secrets maketh known to thee what shall come to pass" (verse 45).

3: WHAT PART DOES GOD PLAY IN THE AFFAIRS OF NATIONS?

Daniel 2:20-21: "Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are His: and He changeth the times and the seasons: He removeth kings and setteth up kings: He giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding."

The God of the universe presented to Nebuchadnezzar a picture of events to come in order to show him that a power greater than himself was at work in the world. This fact is still true today. Indeed, all rulers are subject to God's decrees.

One writer has said: "The power exercised by every ruler on earth is Heaven imparted; and, upon his use of the power thus bestowed, his success depends. To each the word of the divine Watcher is, 'I girded thee, though thou hast not known Me . . . Break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor; if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity.'" The divine Watcher said to Nebuchadnezzar, "That the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will" (*Daniel 4: 17*).

The great image which King Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream, which Daniel then interpreted, is pictured on the preceding page. The stone, cut out without hands, will strike the image on its feet.

BABYLON - 605 B.C. - 538 B.C.

PERSIA - 538 B.C. - 331 B.C.

GREECE - 331 B.C. - 168 B.C.

ROME - 168 B.C. - A.D. 476

DIVIDED - A.D. 476 - NOW

4: HOW DID DANIEL DESCRIBE NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DREAM?

Daniel 2:31: "Thou, O king, sawest, and behold a great image. This great image, whose brightness was excellent, stood before thee; and the form thereof was terrible" (verses 31-35).

This great image of a man, made of metal and clay with the great stone striking the feet, represented the rise and fall of empires from Nebuchadnezzar's day down through the centuries of the past to our own day and on into the future. Let us trace the scenes in this vivid prophetic picture.

5: WHAT KINGDOM WAS REPRESENTED BY THE HEAD OF GOLD?

Daniel 2:37-38: "Thou, O king, art a king of kings: for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom. . . Thou art this head of gold."

The head of gold was a symbol of Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom, Babylon. He was the "head of gold."

God had spoken of Babylon as a golden city a hundred years before (*Isaiah 14:4*).

Through Jeremiah, a prophet contemporary with Daniel, God spoke of the nation as a golden cup (*Jeremiah 51:7*). Historians refer to Babylon as the "Golden City of a Golden Age." Nebuchadnezzar could not but be impressed (and not a little pleased) with the fitness of the symbol, "head of gold."

6: HOW WERE THE WORLD EMPIRES FOLLOWING BABYLON REPRESENTED?

Daniel 2:39-41—"After thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee, and another third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth. And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron. . And whereas thou sawest the feet and toes, part of potters' clay, and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided."

Each of the four empires of this prophecy was to fall and be succeeded by another ruling power. The head of gold represented Babylon; the breast and arms of silver, Persia; the thighs of brass, Greece; and the legs of iron, Rome. Let us take a quick glance at each of the passing empires.

1. The Gold Kingdom of Babylon.

Babylon was the first of what history knows as the Four Great Monarchies: Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome.

By contact with the Hebrew nation, Babylon had opportunity to become familiar with the Word of God and His will as revealed in it. Then as now, God was "not willing that any should perish," but that all should have eternal life, Jeremiah says, "We would have healed Babylon, but she is not healed" (*Jeremiah 51 :9*). As a nation, Babylon turned away from God. Because of this, all through succeeding Scriptures the term, "Babylon," is used in a symbolic way to refer to those who willfully turn away from God.

In Chapter five of the book of Daniel, the account of the fall of Babylon is given. A century before this, the man, Cyrus, leader of the Medes and Persians, was pointed out as the one who would overthrow Babylon. This he did in 538 B.C. After establishing his government, he put in action the legal processes that freed the Jews and led to the rebuilding of Jerusalem (*Isaiah 45*).

2. The Silver Kingdom of Persia.

Silver was a fitting symbol of Persia; for it was used by the Persians as a medium of exchange and in decorations, even more than the gold of the Babylonians. See Cambridge Ancient History on "Persia."

Persia, like Babylon, turned aside from the worship of the true God. The wickedness of their later leaders undermined their strength and led to their decisive defeat by Alexander the Great at Arbela in 331 B.C. The reins of power thus passed into the hands of the rising empire of the Greeks.

3. The Brass Kingdom of Greece.

The brazen armor and brass breastplates worn by the Grecian soldiers are reflected in the brass thighs of the image.

Again another great nation had opportunity to know its Creator as a Saviour; but, like the nations before it, Grecia turned away to the false philosophies of its own devising. After the death of Alexander the Great, the nation began to lose its power and unity. The growing strength of the Romans finally became too great for the Greeks who, formerly, had so nobly defended themselves at Thermopylae and Salamis. The defeat in Macedonia, at Pydna in 168 B.C. was the first of many, until the entire territory in the Middle East, formerly held by the Greeks, was under the iron monarchy of Rome.

4. The Iron Monarchy of Rome.

The iron monarchy of Rome broke in pieces, bruised, and subdued kingdoms for nearly six hundred years. Jesus was born in this era and was crucified under Rome's authority.

Hippolytus, a great theologian who died about A.D. 236, wrote, referring to Rome: "Rejoice, blessed Daniel! thou hast not been in error. . Already the iron rules." Gibbon wrote: "The arms of the republic, always victorious in war, advanced and the images of gold, or silver, or brass, that might serve to represent the nations and their kings, were successively broken by the iron monarchy of Rome" (*The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, Vol. 3, p. 365*).

7: WHAT PICTURE IS GIVEN OF THE DIVISION OF ROME?

Daniel 2:43: "Whereas thou sawest iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men: but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay."

Barbarian invasions divided the territory of Western Rome which was divided into ten parts, 3 of which were destroyed. For instance, some of the territory once conquered by the Franks is now France, territory taken by the Alamanni is now Germany, etc. The efforts of rulers such as Charlemagne, Charles V, Louis XIV, Napoleon, Kaiser Wilhelm, and Hitler who attempted to unite these European nations under one head have all failed. The prophecy indicates that these countries will never be permanently united—"They shall not cleave one to another." The feet and toes of iron and clay show a divided situation and also the uniting of Church and State—the Iron representing civil power and the Miry Clay representing the apostate church.

8: HOW DOES GOD PICTURE THE FINAL CRISIS OF THE NATIONS?

Daniel 2:34-35: "Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them."

9: WHAT GREAT KINGDOM IS REPRESENTED BY THE STONE THAT STRUCK THE IMAGE?

Daniel 2:44: "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed."

Daniel 2:35: "The stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth."

10: WHERE ARE WE TODAY?

The kingdoms of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome have passed from the scene of action. We are now living in the last division, represented by the feet and toes of the image. The course of history is almost run. The next act, according to the prophecy, will be the coming of Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Lesson 3: The King's Mysterious Dream

"Down in the feet of iron and of clay, weak and divided, soon to pass away. What will the next great glorious drama be? Christ and His coming and eternity!"

Consideration of this prophecy brings us face to face with the most vital issue of our lives. Are we ready to enter Christ's everlasting kingdom and prepared to meet Jesus Christ, the coming King? There is nothing more important to us than to make sure of that eternal home in Christ's kingdom. Every person may have the assurance that he will be part of that kingdom if he cares to be. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Surrender your heart and life to the Saviour and let Him live in you a life of obedience.

You will recall the account of the thief on the cross who, when he was face to face with death, turned to Jesus and said. "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom." That very moment Jesus assured the penitent thief of a place in His coming kingdom. God can do that for you and me today!

DANIEL TWO: SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

"In the annals of human history, the growth of nations, the rise and fall of empires, appear as if dependent on the will and prowess of man; the shaping of events seems, to a great degree, to be determined by his power, ambition, or caprice. But in the Word of God the curtain is drawn aside and we behold, above, behind, and through all the play and counterplay of human interest and power and passions, the agencies of the All-merciful One, silently, patiently working out the counsels of His own will . . .

"God has made plain that whosoever will, may come 'into the bond of the covenant' (Ezekiel 20:37). In the creation it was His purpose that the earth should be inhabited by beings whose existence would be a blessing to themselves and to one another, and an honor to their Creator. All who will may identify themselves with this purpose. Of them it is spoken, 'This people have I formed for Myself; they shall show forth My praise' (Isaiah 43:21).

"In His law God has made known the principles that underlie all true prosperity, both of nations and of individuals. To the Israelites Moses declared of this law: "This is your wisdom and your understanding." "It is not a vain thing for you; because it is your life." Deuteronomy 4:6; 32:47. The blessings thus assured to Israel are, on the same conditions and in the same degree, assured to every nation and to every individual under the broad heavens.

"Hundreds of years before certain nations came upon the stage of action, the Omniscient One looked down the ages and predicted the rise and fall of the universal kingdoms. God declared to Nebuchadnezzar that the kingdom of Babylon should fall, and a second kingdom would arise, which also would have its period of trial. Failing to exalt the true God, its glory would fade, and a third kingdom would occupy its place. This also would pass away; and a fourth, strong as iron, would subdue the nations of the world. . .

"In the history of nations the student of God's Word may behold the literal fulfillment of divine prophecy. Babylon, shattered and broken at last, passed away because in prosperity its rulers had regarded themselves as independent of God, and had ascribed the glory of their kingdom to human achievement. The Medo-Persian realm was visited by the wrath of Heaven because in it God's law had been trampled underfoot. The fear of the Lord had found no place in the hearts of the vast majority of the people. Wickedness, blasphemy, and corruption prevailed. The kingdoms that followed were even more base and corrupt; and these sank lower and still lower in the scale of moral worth.

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"The power exercised by every ruler on the earth is Heaven-imparted; and upon his use of the power thus bestowed, his success depends." *Prophets and Kings, 499-502*