

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

Intro: When we live in a time of war, there is always uncertainty about how events may unfold. Surely the Israelites in the face of the Babylonian invasion must have felt that same and even a greater uncertainty. Perhaps the faithful asked in face of the powerful and devastating invasion of the Babylonians, "What hope is there for us? How will God's kingdom ever be established in the face of such a great and powerful empire so hostile to God and His people?" Ironically, the answer to their question came in the bedroom of the ruling Babylonian monarch who had just carried them into captivity—King Nebuchadnezzar. Let's consider one of the great prophecies of the OT (Daniel 2).

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

Just a few years after the first Israelite captives arrived in Babylon God gave to Nebuchadnezzar a mysterious and troubling dream. He called together his wise men to interpret the dream; but threw them a curve ball! In order to be certain as to its explanation he not only required that they interpret the dream; they must also use their wisdom to know the content of the dream itself.

Of course, such a request was beyond any human skills and it appeared that all of those in Nebuchadnezzar's court would experience the threat of death if the dream and its interpretation were not forthcoming. However, to Daniel God revealed the dream and its interpretation.

"You, O king, were looking and behold, there was a single great statue; that statue, which was large and of extraordinary splendor, was standing in front of you, and its appearance was awesome. The head of that statue was made of fine gold, its breast and its arms of silver, its belly and its thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. You continued looking until a stone was cut out without hands, and it struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay, and crushed them. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were crushed all at the same time, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away so that not a trace of them was found. But the stone that struck the statue became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. (Daniel 2:31-35)

Daniel's Explanation (Five kingdoms)

By God's power Daniel revealed to Nebuchadnezzar the course of world history in broad lines to the end of time on earth.

God first revealed the course of human government. Starting with the Babylonian government Daniel predicted that four kingdoms would arise.

The first kingdom

This was the dream; now we shall tell its interpretation before the king. You, O king, are the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, the strength, and

the glory; and wherever the sons of men dwell, or the beasts of the field, or the birds of the sky, He has given them into your hand and has caused you to rule over them all. You are the head of gold. (Daniel 2:36-38)

The second kingdom

And after you there will arise another kingdom inferior to you... (Daniel 2:39)

The third kingdom

then another third kingdom of bronze, which will rule over all the earth. (Dan. 2:39)

The fourth kingdom

Then there will be a fourth kingdom as strong as iron; inasmuch as iron crushes and shatters all things, so, like iron that breaks in pieces, it will crush and break all these in pieces. And in that you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, it will be a divided kingdom; but it will have in it the toughness of iron, inasmuch as you saw the iron mixed with common clay. And as the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of pottery, so some of the kingdom will be strong and part of it will be brittle. And in that you saw the iron mixed with common clay, they will combine with one another in the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, even as iron does not combine with pottery. (Daniel 2:40-43)

Though details here are sketchy, further reading of Daniel's prophecies fills out the details of this general introductory outline. Before Daniel completed his prophetic work, a dramatic and detailed picture of human government in the next few centuries would be outlined in amazing detail! Summarize with chart.

God then revealed the establishment of His kingdom and the overthrow of these world kingdoms!

And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever. Inasmuch as you saw that a stone was cut out of the mountain without hands and that it crushed the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold, the great God has made known to the king what will take place in the future; so the dream is true, and its interpretation is trustworthy." (Daniel 2:44-45)
Summarize with chart.

The Historical Fulfillment

Babylon was the contemporary power; so Daniel's interpretation started with Babylon.

After Babylon's rule of approximately 70 years, Cyrus the Mede united his people with the Persians and overthrew the city of Babylon in 539 BC establishing his rule over the entire world for the next two centuries.

In 338 BC Phillip II of Macedon extended his rule over the city states of Greece. His son, Alexander, beginning in 332 BC led an expansive military campaign resulting in the establishment of a huge empire reaching from Western Asia to Egypt in the south to Persian in the east. Upon his death his kingdom was divided among its generals and continued for be ruled by their successors for the next couple of centuries.

By the third century BC the power of Rome was gaining ascendancy around the Mediterranean with the defeat of Carthage in the Punic Wars and the gradual overthrow of the countries around the Mediterranean. The ferocity of this empire is well known to students of history. The territory conquered by the Roman legionnaires came ultimately came under the rule of a single man, Julius Caesar, in 45 BC. The power of the mighty Roman Empire was felt over the world for centuries to come.

However during the days of Rome's rule, God began to establish once again His Kingdom in this world through the Christ prophesied in the OT.

The message of John and Jesus was the same to the Jewish people, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" (Mt. 3:2).

While the Caesars ruled in Rome, Jesus lived on earth, was crucified, and raised from the dead. Upon his resurrection, he was seated at the right hand of God, receiving the kingdom promised by the prophets with these words, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet" (Ps. 110:1). The kingdom of God of Daniel 2 had been established and began to expand throughout the world.

This stone cut without hands (i.e. made by divine rather than human effort) became a mountain that fills the earth.

if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister. (Colossians 1:23)

Until this day and until the end Jesus will rule. His kingdom will never be destroyed.

Just as Daniel predicted the fourth great world empire also met the judgment of God.

The empire that looked like it would never be conquered eventually was to crumble at the hands of its own lack of solidarity. Last year I read Michael Grant's "Fall of Rome". It is interesting that the whole theme of the book is the historical description of multitudes of divisive forces that existed in the Roman Empire that led to its demise. Here are the chapter titles:

1. The generals against the state.
The generals against the state.
The people against the army.
The poor against the state.
The rich against the state.
The middle class against the state.
The people against the bureaucrats.
7. The people against the emperor.

The people against the emperor.
Ally against ally.
Race against race.
Drop-outs against society.
The state against free belief.
Complacency against self-help.
The other world against this world.

The prophet Daniel had captured the causes of Rome's destruction in symbolism (iron and clay) and in a single phrase, "*it will be a divided kingdom*"!

Important Lessons

The Marvel of God's Spirit

The date of the prophecy was 604-603 BC and history confirms the accuracy of Daniel's prophecy.

But consider the state of things in the places from which these kingdoms would arise at the time of the prophecy. Of course Daniel could acknowledge the kingdom of Babylon since it had already developed historically; but what about the other kingdoms to come?

At the time Daniel gave his prophecy the Medes and Persians were separate peoples. The Medes had been allies with the Babylonians in the rise of Babylon's power. The events that would lay the groundwork for the joining of the Medes and Persians under Cyrus had not begun to take place.

The kingdom of Macedonia from which Alexander would eventually was in its founding stages. The Greeks existed in independent city states (hardly the makings of a world empire).

Rome itself was a conquered city under the control of Etruscan kings like Tarquin and his son (hardly a Roman Empire!) and was not to exert its military control over the countries around the Mediterranean for centuries to come.

At the time of writing, there was nothing historically to indicate that four great empires would arise. One could have pulled any number out of a hat and it would have been just as convincing!

Nor was there any indication that three great empires would arise from Persia, Macedonia (Greece) or Rome. It would have been impossible for any man to predict this unfolding of these kingdoms. And how would anyone have known what was happening in these places that were huge distances away!

The Marvel of God's Sovereignty

The message of Daniel was important warning to world leaders like Nebuchadnezzar and others who would follow him!

They needed to know that their power came from the God who created them and that their dynasties would last only as long as God desired. Nebuchadnezzar's response reveals the

attitude that rulers should have in view of the sovereign power of God. And he felt this way without being able to see the historical fulfillment. How much more those who have witnessed the unfolding fulfillment!

The message of Daniel was important to the Jews who had been taken into captivity.

Though it appeared that the kingdom of God had been destroyed in the Babylonian captivity, such was not the case. In time God would bring the Christ into the world and establish His kingdom through Him. How encouraging it must have been to Daniel to know that God was in control! Daniel marched into the office of the Babylonian king who had taken his people captive and told him that the kingdom of God which He had just destroyed would one day be re-established and rule the whole world!

The message of Daniel was important to the church under the persecutions of the Roman Empire.

Only in the book of Revelation is there a reference to the prophecy of Daniel 2 when John predicts the ultimate victory of the kingdom of God over the empire with these words: *And the seventh angel sounded; and there arose loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever." (Revelation 11:15)*

The message of Daniel is important to those who make up the kingdom of God today.

When the powers of this world seem far greater than the power of the church, we need remember the message of Daniel: "The God of heaven shall set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed". This is not a promise that there will have always been or always will be little church buildings with "Church of Christ" above the door; but it is a promise that the one we all belong to, Jesus Christ, will never lose His power until this world ends and all things now and forever will submit to His rule!!!!

Conclusion: Let us praise and thank God for the message of Daniel 2! If we are on the side of the Christ, then our triumph is certain no matter what forces Satan may raise against us!