

LESSON 10

When we ended last week, we had just read verses 36-38 of Daniel 2, and we noted how bold Daniel was in telling Nebuchadnezzar that whatever he had had been given to him by God.

As we study the interpretation of the king's dream, we will see that the four parts of the image represent four kingdoms. Why were four *distinct* kingdoms represented by a *single* figure? What relationship does Babylon have with Rome, for example?

The answer to that question is easy if we look at the history of these four kingdoms. They together represent a sustained revolt of organized human society and government against the will of God. Babylon set the tone for the kingdoms that followed. Indeed, Babylon was another name for Rome in the New Testament.

1 Peter 5:13 — *She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings; and so does my son Mark.*

Revelation 18:2 — *And he called out with a mighty voice, Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!*

Did that revolt end with ancient Rome? Hardly! It continues to this day, but that does not mean that the kingdoms of today are being discussed in Daniel's vision. We must keep the time frame of Daniel in mind. Daniel was not just talking about kingdoms that were hostile to God (there have been many and there are many today), but rather Daniel was talking about four such kingdoms that existed in a specific order during a specific period of history, beginning with Nebuchadnezzar and ending, as we will see, with the establishment of God's eternal kingdom. If Daniel was speaking about kingdoms of today, then the eternal kingdom was not estab-

lished in the first century and may not have been established yet at all — both of which we know to be false.

King Nebuchadnezzar was himself the head of the gold. We will see in a moment that the head of gold also denoted his kingdom, Babylon. The king and the kingdom were inseparable — and that was especially true of Nebuchadnezzar. He was a true despot. The king may have initially taken this as a compliment, until he remembered what had just happened to the head of gold! It was turned to dust along with the rest of the image.

In fact, in 539 BC, Babylon fell to the Persians (as Daniel will soon witness firsthand). This downfall takes us to the second kingdom that King Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream.

Daniel 2:39-40

39 And after thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee, and another third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth. 40 And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron: forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things: and as iron that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise.

Remember what the wise men said to the king in verse 4? “O, King, Live Forever.” Notice what Daniel says to the king in verse 39 — “And after thee.” Nebuchadnezzar was just a man — he was mortal, and one day he would face the appointment of Hebrews 9:27 that awaits us all. And Daniel has the courage to remind the king of

that fact. Daniel was not afraid to speak truth to power — and he was just a teenager! Where did Daniel get that courage? We all know the answer to that question.

That the head represented both the king and the kingdom is shown in verse 39 — “After **thee** shall arise **another kingdom.**” In fact, the remaining three parts of the image are all kingdoms — the “another” kingdom in verse 39, the “third kingdom” in verse 39, and the “fourth kingdom” in verse 40. Note that there is not a fifth earthly kingdom mentioned here — which makes it surprising that so many theories about this vision include a fifth earthly kingdom.

Also, note that these kingdoms will be world empires (they will rule over the whole earth, which is just an idiom for a very large kingdom, close to one that rules over the known world). This vision showed the Jews (and should show us as well) the folly of trusting in nations whose doom is already sealed. Even the great Babylon, the jewel of kingdoms, would soon be overthrown by God like Sodom and Gomorrah (Isaiah 13:19). There is but one eternal kingdom — and that is very good thing for us to remember as well if we are ever tempted to place our trust in the earthly kingdoms of this world.

The second kingdom was Medo-Persia, which overthrew the Chaldeans about 70 years after this vision. (It is during this second kingdom that Daniel as an octogenarian will be thrown to the lions.)

Why is this second kingdom said to be “inferior” to the first? After all it defeated the first kingdom. Wouldn’t that mean that it was superior? The Hebrew word for “inferior” means “beneath you.” Thus, it may simply mean that the second kingdom was beneath the first in the image that Nebuchadnezzar saw.

A second possibility is that the second kingdom was inferior to Nebuchadnezzar in the sense that its leaders did not share the same absolute and unfettered power that Nebuchadnezzar did. Later in 6:12 we will see that a Persian ruler lacked the power to annul a law once he had made it. From this “despotic standpoint” each of these empires was inferior to the ones above it.

The identification of these kingdoms with inferior metals—silver, bronze, iron—implies gradual decline from the kingdom represented by gold.

While human beings operate on the idea that we get better and stronger with time, God’s vision undercuts our understanding, informing us that the opposite is true. Gold gives way to silver, which then becomes bronze, iron, and a weak mixture of clay and iron. A statue that starts out in grandeur and beauty ends in weakness. Indeed, the expression “feet of clay” has become an idiom in our language for a point of weakness in an otherwise strong person or institution.

Also, while the great statue appears man-made, the great stone is not made with human hands. What obliterates these human kingdoms is *not* another human kingdom!

As we mentioned earlier, Daniel does not consider the Medes and Persians to be separate kingdoms, but instead explicitly considers them to be a single unified kingdom — which agrees with what historians tell us. This empire began with Cyrus the Great, who conquered Babylon in 539 BC and died ten years later. His older son, Cambyses, conquered Egypt and died in 523 or 522. He was succeeded by an upstart who claimed to also be a son of Cyrus. This upstart was quickly assassinated, and Darius (not the Mede) came to power and established a new dynasty. This empire ruled for about two centuries, but was never able to completely subdue the Greeks on its western border. Darius’ son invaded the Greeks but was defeated, and his successor tried to set the Greek city-states against each other.

The third kingdom that would rule over all of the earth was Greece, which conquered the Persians under Alexander the Great. Alexander the Great invaded Persia in 334 BC and completely defeated it in 331 BC. At one point, Alexander ruled an area from Yugoslavia to India, the largest empire of ancient times. After Alexander died young in Babylon in 323 BC, his kingdom was split into four pieces ruled over by his former generals. We will see some remarkable prophecies about the Greeks and Alexander the Great when we get to Chapters 8 and 11.

Daniel 8:8 — *Therefore the he goat waxed very great: and when he was strong, the great horn was broken; and for it came up four notable ones toward the four winds of heaven.*

Daniel 11:3-4 — *And a mighty king shall stand up, that shall rule with great dominion, and do according to his will. 4 And when he shall stand up, his kingdom shall be broken, and shall be divided toward the four winds of heaven; and not to his posterity, nor according to his dominion which he ruled: for his kingdom shall be plucked up, even for others beside those.*

Now you see why the liberals hate this book so much! If they take the early-date view, then they must admit that the Bible is from God — and this they cannot do!

Eventually most of the Greek empire was annexed by Rome, the fourth kingdom in Nebuchadnezzar's vision. By 146 BC, Greece was permanently subdued. Egypt became a Roman province in 31 BC.

The fourth kingdom is described in greater detail than either the second or third. The fourth kingdom has greater strength than the previous kingdoms, so it will crush and break all the others (v. 40). But since clay and iron do not bond together (v. 43), this kingdom is (or, more precisely, will become) intrinsically weak. Clay and iron don't mix well together, and this fourth kingdom will likewise try to unite elements that will not coalesce. The fourth kingdom (strong as iron) was Rome, which overthrew Greece.

The mighty Roman empire started out as a dusty village on Italy's Tiber River in the 8th century BC. Rome was always fortunate in that it confronted its enemies one at a time rather than all at once. That way it was able to grow and strengthen with each victory. By 270 BC Rome had control of the Italian peninsula, and begin to look elsewhere for new worlds to conquer. After the Punic Wars and the defeat of

Carthage, Rome turned its sights toward the East — attacking Philip V's Macedonia and Antiochus III's Seleucid empire (both successor states of Alexander the Great).

Without giving any of the intervening details, let's jump ahead to consider a question that has intrigued historians for centuries: Why did Rome fall in AD 476? There are many theories.

I have a book entitled *The Fall of Rome: A Reference Guide* that lists 260 different theories about the fall of Rome including:

- the decline of agriculture (22)
- failed tax policies (25)
- soil exhaustion (48)
- a general decay in intelligence (76)
- lead in the diet of upper class women and long hot bathing by men (86)
- a large infusion of alien races (97)
- slavery (108)
- deforestation (112)
- climate change (114)
- malaria (121)
- rats and fleas (154)
- unions and legislation on prices and wages (179)
- crudity (230)

Gamaliel Milner, in his 1931 book *The Problem of Decadence*, wrote:

The general impression that we receive from the story of Rome's fall is that vast cosmic forces were at work which frustrated the counsels of the wisest statesmen, and rendered nugatory the skill and valour

of the greatest generals; ... if ever in human history we can discern the working of destiny or inevitable fate, it is here.

Whatever method we use to date the fall of Rome (and we will consider several), two things are certain: (1) Rome fell, and (2) Rome fell because God determined that it would fall — and God did so centuries before that fall occurred. Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar why Rome fell! Listen to what he says starting in verse 41.

Daniel 2:41-43

41 And whereas thou sawest the feet and toes, part of potters' clay, and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; but there shall be in it of the strength of the iron, forasmuch as thou sawest the iron mixed with miry clay. 42 And as the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken. 43 And 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.

This fourth kingdom would in some sense be a divided kingdom — clay mixed with iron. In verse 42, the “toes” of the image are finally mentioned, but the toes alone do not cause the weakness in the fourth kingdom. The weakness is caused by the clay that is mixed with the iron. The number ten is not mentioned at all.

Was all of this true of the mighty Roman empire? Did Rome have feet of clay? Yes! Revelation 13 and 17 also tell us that Rome fell partly because of inner strife and disintegration. And this fits very well with what history also tells us about Rome.

Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* gives four primary reasons why Rome fell: external invasion, inner decadence, inner strife, and the injury of time and nature.

The inner strife was due in part to the client kingdoms that Rome set up to rule the borders of its empire. Here is how Michael Grant in his book *The History of Rome* describes the client kings.

The client kings were tied to the service of Rome in order to defend its frontiers and serve as listening posts to the outside world. In return, they were supported by the Romans against internal subversive movements and allowed a free hand inside their own countries.

Grant describes what eventually occurred with these client kingdoms.

In 382, Theodosius I took the revolutionary step of allowing whole German tribes to reside in Imperial territory as separate, autonomous, allied or federate units committed to serving in the Roman army, though under the command of their own chieftains. Thereafter the practice continued and increased, until such federates became a regular and widespread feature of the life of the Empire.

Did these groups contribute to the fall of Rome? The Visigoths were the first group to receive federate status, and they sacked the city of Rome in AD 410 marking the first time in 800 years that the city had been taken by a foreign invader.

Why did Rome fall? Because God wanted it to fall. Because the first century Christians prayed that it would fall. The fall of Rome was a divine judgment. The church triumphed. Its bitter enemy Rome did not.

By the way, don't fall into the trap of thinking that Rome became a Christian nation under Constantine. Rome did much more damage to the church by embracing it than it had by persecuting it. Yet still the one true church survived, and the Roman Empire did not.

Why are the legs of iron, but the feet of iron and clay? As we move down the statue from the head to the feet, we are moving forward in time. The head is Nebuchadnezzar, the legs and feet are Rome, with two other kingdoms in between. That the legs are iron and the feet are iron and clay just means what we already know — that Rome began its history with great strength but that strength declined over time until Rome finally disintegrated. We do not need to look for a fifth earthly kingdom to find the feet of clay as many commentators do. All we need to do is study the history of the fourth kingdom — Rome.

One issue we will need to address as we move through the later prophecies in this book is not whether the fall of Rome is in view — but *which* fall of Rome is in view.

The imperial period of ancient Roman history began in 27 BC when Octavian, later called Augustus, became the first emperor of Rome and ended in AD 476 when the last Western Roman emperor, Romulus Augustulus, was overthrown. The Roman empire continued in the East for another 1000 years until the invasion by the Ottoman Turks in the 15th century.

In addition, there were two falls in the first century — not of the Roman empire but of the ruling dynasties of Rome (and we have already seen how Daniel sometimes uses “kingdom” to refer to the “king” and vice versa). The Julio-Claudian Dynasty included the first five emperors of Rome (Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero) — and that dynasty fell with the death of Nero in AD 68. Nero was a terrible persecutor of God's people. The Flavian Dynasty included the three emperors (Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian) who followed the three Civil War emperors (Galba, Otho, and Vitellius). Vespasian and Titus destroyed Jerusalem in AD 70, and Domitian was another terrible persecutor of God's people — in fact, he was

called Nero Redivivus (Nero Reborn). Both of those persecuting dynasties fell in the first century.

So how do we know that the four kingdoms are Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome — and not one of the many other theories that has been proposed?

Daniel 2:38-42 tells us that four earthly kingdoms are portrayed by the giant statue. The iron feet and toes mixed with clay in verse 41 is not a fifth kingdom. Verses 41-42 tells us that the mixture of iron and clay is intended to tell us something about the fourth kingdom — that it will be divided, partly strong and partly broken. “The kingdom” in verse 41 is the “fourth kingdom” in verse 40. It is not a fifth earthly kingdom.

So, we have four earthly kingdoms that need to be identified — and this is not a difficult task. The Bible is its own best commentary, so let’s let the Bible answer this question.

Scripture identifies the first and the fourth kingdoms with absolute certainty. The Bible effectively drives two tent pegs into the ground that cannot be moved.

The first tent peg is right here in Daniel 2. Verse 38 identifies the head of gold as Nebuchadnezzar himself. That is, the first kingdom is Babylon under Chaldean rule.

The second tent peg is found in the New Testament. In Matthew 24:15 Jesus told his listeners that they were to look for the fulfillment of a prophecy by Daniel, and Matthew 24:34 confirms that that fulfillment would occur during their lifetimes. History confirms that the events Jesus spoke about occurred in AD 70 when Rome destroyed Jerusalem. In Matthew 16:18, Jesus promised to build a church that not even the gates of Hell would prevail against, and we see that church established in Acts 2. Hebrews 12:28 confirms that the church is the immovable kingdom of God. When was that kingdom established? During the days of the Roman empire. If we believe Jesus, then the fourth kingdom must be the Roman empire of the first century.

So, if the first kingdom is Babylon and the fourth kingdom is Rome, what are the second and third kingdoms? Which kingdom displaced the Chaldeans from Babylon? Medo-Persia, and so that must be the second kingdom. Which kingdom displaced Medo-Persia and was later displaced by Rome? The Greeks, and so they must be the third kingdom.

Why was Babylon defeated by Persia? How did Alexander the Great become so great so quickly? How did the Greeks defeat the Persians? How did Rome become so powerful? How did Rome defeat the Greeks? Historians argue over those questions — but not Bible believers. Those events occurred because God made them occur. They were all part of his plan to bring about and establish his eternal kingdom in the first century. Secular historians recognize the peculiar nature of these events, but absent faith in God they are unable to explain them.

Is there anyone on earth who is so narrow-minded or uninquisitive that he could fail to want to know how and thanks to what kind of political system almost the entire known world was conquered and brought under a single empire, the empire of the Romans, in less than fifty-three years— an unprecedented event? (Greek historian Polybius of Megalopolis, quoted by Robin Waterfield in *Taken at the Flood: The Roman Conquest of Greece*.)

Lying at its heart is a mystery as profound as any in the records of human civilization. How on earth did the Romans do it? How did a single city, one that began as a small community of castle-rustlers, camped out among marshes and hills, end up ruling an empire that stretched from the moors of Scotland to the deserts of Iraq? (*Rome and Her Enemies: An Empire Created and Destroyed by War*)

How indeed!

Other Theories About the Four Kingdoms in Daniel 2

Theory 1: Babylon, Media, Persia, Greece

We have already dealt with this theory. It is the view put forth by those who think that Daniel was written around 168 BC. This view must be rejected for several reasons. Daniel did not believe or teach that an independent Median empire defeated the Chaldeans. This view mistakenly suggests that Daniel thought that the Messianic kingdom would be established before the end of the Grecian kingdom (before 31 BC). Jesus quoted Daniel in Matthew 24 (during the days of the *Roman* empire) and applied a prophecy from Daniel to the near future.

Theory 2: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece (under Alexander), the Successor States.

This view must also be rejected. Daniel never treated the Greek kingdom as two independent kingdoms during and after Alexander. In fact, Daniel distinctly treated the two periods as two phases of the same kingdom. (In Daniel 8, we have one goat with four horns.)

Theory 3: Rome is the fourth kingdom, but it is split into an ancient part and a future part that has not yet arisen.

This view must also be rejected. It requires one to believe that the eternal kingdom (the church) was not established in the first century. What does the Bible say?

Mark 1:15 — *And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel.*

Mark 9:1 — *And he said to them, Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power.*

Matthew 16:28 — *Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.*

Jesus said the time was fulfilled in the first century. The premillennialists say that it was not. This view relies heavily on the “ten toes” in the image, but the number ten is never mentioned in Chapter 2! We will have much more to say about this view as we proceed through the book.