

DANIEL

Week 7, chapter 2 continued (2)

We're still in Daniel chapter 2, and we will today look at Daniel's interpretation of King Nebuchadnezzar's dream. To review briefly: Daniel has told Nebuchadnezzar the dream that the King had dreamt but has yet to tell him what it means except in the broadest sense. The King had demanded that before he was willing to let someone give him their interpretation of his dream, first they had to tell him the precise content of the dream as proof of their ability as a seer. All of the Chaldean seers in Babel admitted that they had no such ability, and when Daniel approached the King he, too, confessed that he was incapable. However, the God of Israel knew the King's dream because it was He who had implanted it in the sleeping King's mind. And this God decided to tell Daniel the dream's details as well as the secret of its meaning because the Lord wanted King Nebuchadnezzar to understand it.

Secondarily, because the King had ordered all seers in the capital city of Babel to be executed (he saw them as fakes for their inability to tell him his dream), the divine revelation of the dream by God to Daniel saved not only those Chaldean seers lives, but also the lives of Daniel and his 3 Jewish comrades.

The dream consisted of a fearsome statue in the image of a man. The head of it was gold, the chest and arms were silver, the belly, hips and thighs were of bronze, the legs were made of iron, and the feet were a mixture of iron and clay. It stood motionless, lifeless in the king's dream as suddenly a large stone appeared and it crashed into the feet of the statue, disintegrating it in to fine particles, which were blown away in a wind.

We learned that the stone was of divine origin, as it was cut out of something (what that "something" is we're not yet told) but the "cutting out" was not accomplished by human hands. We also learned that Nebuchadnezzar was not a wicked man in God's eyes, but rather was God's servant. In fact as Daniel's speech to the King reveals, Yehoveh had gone so far as to give Nebuchadnezzar dominion over the land, people, birds, domesticated and wild animals, which formed the Babylonian Empire. And this circumstance had been foretold by the Prophet Jeremiah

in Jeremiah 27 and 28. But there was a caveat: that dominion enjoyed by Nebuchadnezzar would only last for 3 generations. After Nebuchadnezzar, his son and then grandson had ruled, his dynasty would end and then a series of other kings would rule over Babylon. Once the grandson's rule ended, God would begin to turn His wrath away from the exiled Jews and towards their conquerors, Babylon.

There was an important God-principle we discussed that I want to reinforce today, and it concerns the term "the latter days". The reason we're going to revisit this is quite simple: do you want to truly understand what lies just ahead as human history winds its way to a close? Then unraveling the Daniel mystery is pivotal; and to misread, misuse, or misapply it gives us false expectations. We must NOT read into Daniel things that some branches of the modern church have established as unassailable traditions, but are in fact often little more than opinion and speculation that validates a certain agenda. This is why we are approaching the Book of Daniel as we are, and why we're going to have several detours to explain some pertinent history and a handful of crucial God-principles that establish the proper context.

In Hebrew the term for "the latter days" is *acharit-hayamim* and it literally means "in the latter part of the days". This term is really only used for one thing in the bible, and that is to refer to Messianic times. That is, times immediately approaching, during, and shortly after the appearance of God's Messiah. Thus when studying the Bible we need to grasp a couple of foundational concepts about the latter days. First, there are **two sets** of latter-days times. The first "latter days" occurred in the decades leading up to when Yeshua was born to the virgin Miriam (Mary), during His adult life as He taught and revealed His identity, and finally as He was crucified and rose from the grave. The second "latter days" is ahead of us. It will happen in the days leading up to when Yeshua returns (the 2nd coming), and then when He fights the Battle of Armageddon and begins to reign on earth as a worldwide king. We may or may not be in those latter days right now (although it is my opinion that we are, and the main sign of that is that Israel has returned to its ancient homeland, as prophesied). Such a thing can only be determined with certainty in hindsight.

So when the Hebrews who lived prior to Jesus' birth spoke of the "latter days" (even those who lived many centuries before that day), they were mainly pointing ahead to the era of His advent, death and resurrection (even though they didn't grasp that this is what they were looking for). Thus everything that we read in the Old Testament about the latter days was looking forward to not one but **two** separate and distinct periods of "latter days" events. But until Yeshua came and went that fact could not have been known. And even then that understanding of a 2nd latter days only began to be revealed when the Lord spoke to the Apostle John some years after the Temple was destroyed by the Romans. And that conversation is recorded in what we call the Book of Revelation. This process of the "unfolding" of prophecy is the very essence of progressive revelation, which is epitomized by the Book of Revelation.

Also recognize that ONLY among God's Hebrew people does the concept of a "latter days" even exist. This was not a concept that gentile societies of the world held, or had they created some other version of it. It is a purely biblical construction and it is entirely related to some activity or another of the biblical Messiah. So in modern times we have to be careful not to lump the "latter days" and the End Times together when we're studying the bible. Even though the two terms are related they are not synonymous. There are two latter days, but only one End Times. Unfortunately that exact thing happens regularly in Christian teaching about the latter days. Obviously, the **first** latter days (when Christ was crucified) was NOT the End Times because we're all still here, the world is still being ruled by gentile governments, and Christ is not reigning in the flesh in Jerusalem.

Stay with me, I know this is a little complicated but part of what we're doing in our study of Daniel is **UN**doing things about the latter days and the End of Days that many of you have been taught that are, frankly, biblically and factually incorrect and it leads to so much confusion and misunderstanding.

The bible has no term for what the Christians call the End Times. To put a finer point on it: the term End Times is a made-up term. Rather in Hebrew there is a term called **Olam haba**, and it means "the world to come". Thus the world to come (**Olam haba**) is what comes into being after the **Olam hazeh** (the present world) comes to an end. It is the NT Book of Revelation that puts the finishing touches on Judeo-Christian understanding of what is going to happen in the 2nd and final "latter days". But because the Jewish people do not accept the NT as valid (except for Messianic Jews of course), then for them what lays ahead in the "latter days" is that the **Olam hazeh** (the present world of **gentile** domination) gives way to the **Olam haba** (the new world of an everlasting age of a Kingdom of God that is **Jewish** dominated). And in fact, that **is** what the Book of Daniel seems to imply when we don't include the New Testament into the equation. So for the Jewish people of today and for the past 2000 years, their vision of the future is quite different than the typical vision of Christianity. The Jewish vision is generally not one of a worldwide conflagration fueled by the Battle of Armageddon. And there is no divine Messiah that returns in the clouds from Heaven; there is no Rapture of God's worshippers off this earth and into a safe place; and there is generally no earth and universe that are supernaturally annihilated by fire, and then (also supernaturally) re-formed into a new earth and new universe, just as it was at Creation.

Therefore the term "End Times" is a modern Christian label and those words do NOT exist in either the OT or NT. So in modern Christian-eze, when we speak of the End Times it is an imprecise bumper-sticker term and just what it encompasses varies from teacher to teacher, denomination to denomination, and from novelist to novelist. So let me see if I can sum this up for

the purpose of actual Scripture study as opposed to the fanciful religious debates and idle chatter of today about the End Times, which consists largely of opinion, speculation and often downright fantasy.

First: even though the Hebrew people who lived before Christ looked ahead to something like the End Times, their expectation was that the Jewish people would be led into victory over the gentile world by a charismatic human Jewish Messiah. And the end result would not involve much more than a change of human government from gentile to Hebrew (even if it was to be a righteous Hebrew government, led by the re-established dynasty of King David, and based on strict Torah observance).

Second: the Hebrews **did** expect persecution (tribulation) and bad times leading up to this moment of victory. So, for instance, the oppressive rule of the Syrian King Antiochus Epiphanies in the mid-2nd century B.C. that resulted in the desecration of the Holy Temple (this is what caused the Maccabean Rebellion) was thought to be indicative of the conditions that would mean the coming of the Messiah was imminent.

Third: for the Jews of the “Before Christ” era, the times they lived in was the ***Olam hazeh*** (the present world conditions) that would eventually lead to the ***Olam haba*** (the new world conditions) brought about by the coming Jewish Messiah. And in biblical terms, altogether this era of transition from a worldwide gentile government to a worldwide Jewish government was the ***acharyit-hayamim*** (the latter days).

Fourth: the latter days that the biblical Hebrews envisioned were only the 1st set of latter days, during which time the Messiah did come but they didn’t recognize Him. Even so He did not accomplish what the Jews of that day (not even Christ’s followers) thought would be accomplished. Mainly this Messiah did not defeat the ruling gentile government (the Romans) and set up a new Jewish kingdom. They were unaware of a future 2nd set of latter days that anticipated a 2nd coming of the same Messiah.

Fifth: ever since the birth of Christ those who accept Yeshua as Messiah (Jew or gentile), and who thus typically accept the progressive revelation offered by the Book of Revelation, we are all in one way or another looking ahead to another latter days. But unlike the 1st latter days, this time the latter days WILL involve the end of the world as we know it. There will not be a better human history with merely a change of human government at its heart; rather instead there will be an end

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to human history as we have ever known it, which is replaced by a divine kingdom as led by a divine King. And somewhere in the process even the present earth and the universe will be destroyed and replaced with something new.

And finally, sixth: when Daniel told King Nebuchadnezzar that the dream and the statue and the stone destroying it was about the *acharit-hayamim*, the latter days, neither of them had any real understanding of exactly what it was that was occurring or what it would mean for mankind. Whatever it was, it was future to them; it involved a violent change in world government from gentile to Hebrew, and God was orchestrating it from on high. That's about it. When might this happen? No clue. How will this come about? Unknown.

So we are going to be fastidious about our reading of Daniel being careful NOT to read into Daniel things that aren't there, or glossing over difficult things that are. We equally have to view it from the mindset and worldview of those living in that day, but also from our modern perspective that has seen 2600 years of human history play out from the time this book was written. Thus we have much hindsight into the events following Daniel's interpretation of the King's dream. Even so, we have to be especially careful not to add some currently popular Christian speculations to the Book of Daniel that do little more than lead us down rabbit trails.

So, with that challenging task in mind, let's re-read part of Daniel 2.

RE-READ DANIEL 2:36 – end

Before we begin to dissect the meanings that Daniel gave to each part of the symbolic statue of Nebuchadnezzar's dream we need to consider the use of symbolism in the bible. Because the Word of God is essentially attempting to explain eternal spiritual principles in the context of a temporal physical world, a standard biblical technique is to make an illustration of some sort using common things with which the average person is familiar. I might say, for instance, that to compare God to a human is like comparing a human to an ant. But you wouldn't think (I hope) that I meant that God IS a type of human being, nor is a human being a type of ant. So the bible uses a number of physical symbols, metaphors, illustrations, and figurative expressions and Yeshua especially loved to use parables to get a point across. But none of these are to be taken to an extreme; these kinds of symbols or illustrations are not meant to be precise parallels because none is possible

when trying to explain spiritual principles by employing physical terms.

Thus for example when the plans for the Wilderness Tabernacle were given to Moses and it was built accordingly, it was meant as an approximate illustration of the type and order of God's throne room in Heaven; even to some extent a model of the layout of the Garden of Eden. But only to a point; it was not a perfect match.

Biblically ordained marriage between a man and a woman is yet another example; it was created as a human institution on earth in order to demonstrate the ideal type of relationship between God and His worshippers that is based on trust, faithfulness and commitment, which in reality can only occur in perfection from a spiritual perspective. Therefore we find that there is no physical marriage of the human-type in Heaven, and the concept that we will one day be Christ's "bride" and become married to Him is meant as a metaphor and must not be carried too far. In fact if one did carry it to the extreme, then we have a male (Christ) literally marrying millions of male followers, thus destroying the accepted God-principle of a marriage being only between a man and a woman. Further the centerpiece of biblical marriage is that physical consummation between the new husband and wife MUST occur or there is NO marriage. Are we to think that we shall all have a physical marriage consummation with Yeshua? Of course not.

That Christ is our High Priest also falls along the same lines. Thus we have to be careful not to envision Yeshua like we would envision Aaron or any of the long line of Levitical High Priests. While He will have many attributes that are akin to the Levitical High Priest He is also different and apart from them, and operates at an infinitely higher level. In fact we are specifically told in Hebrews 7 that Yeshua will NOT be a High Priest of the order of Aaron (the Levites) but rather of the order of Melchizedek (that mysterious man whom Abraham honored at least 6 centuries before there was even such a thing as a Levitical Priesthood). And even then, the comparison is necessarily limited so we must not take it too far.

So with that understanding we shall now approach the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream-statue. The image symbol is an approximation of the succession of gentile empires that will lead the world towards the latter days, but it is definitely not an exhaustive or precise representation by which we must find a perfect parallel at every turn.

Verse 36 says straightforwardly that the statue's head of gold is King Nebuchadnezzar. That is, the Kingdom of Babylon over which Nebuchadnezzar rules is personified by the King. Further in

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ancient times just as a god and the kingdom he presides over were considered to be organically connected, so it often was the same regarding the kingdom and its king. At the same time, Nebuchadnezzar was quite special in the Lord's eyes and could be said to be the epitome of gentile rulership in a similar way to how King David was the epitome of Jewish rulership; but it would be all downhill from there forward. Thus we see in the symbolism of the statue a descending inferiority: gold is the best and silver is inferior to gold, bronze is inferior to silver, and iron is inferior to bronze.(but only in some senses, not all).

So verse 39 explains that after Babylon another, but inferior, kingdom (represented by the arms and chest of silver) will replace it. Let me say right now that we would be better served by using the word empire instead of kingdom because a kingdom in it's narrowest sense could be something as small as a single walled city and a few acres of land, ruled over by a petty king. But in its broader context a kingdom could be as large as worldwide. So we need to envision empires as enormous expanses of land, and huge populations consisting of many cultures and races of people, all ruled under a central government. And that is the sense of it with the 4 empires of Nebuchadnezzar's dream-statue.

These descriptions of the various empires are frustratingly brief. The one that gets the most attention is the 4th kingdom of iron. So following the 2nd Empire (of silver) will be a 3rd, the bronze Empire. Verse 40 says that there will then be a 4th kingdom, the kingdom of iron. And there is an explanation that since iron is the hardest of all the metals it can overcome any of the 3 weaker metals (gold, silver, and bronze). From a perspective of the ancient world, this symbolism makes perfect sense. Empires are built through warfare. Gold of course is not usable for weapons not only because it is so rare and expensive, but because it is so soft as to be useless. Silver is a bit harder, but also is too soft and expensive to be used for implements of war. But bronze is different. Bronze is halfway between copper and iron in hardness, and is far harder than silver. Thus bronze was used for weaponry as it could hold a sharp edge.

But iron trumped them all. An iron sword could literally break a bronze sword. The technological development of iron changed the world and it altered the balance of power among nations. So verse 40 goes on to explain that since it was common knowledge that iron could break anything (at least anything known to the ancient world), then so would this 4th kingdom crush all the previous ones. No contest.

But then we get the representation of another kingdom that some scholars call a 5th kingdom. This is the kingdom, or empire, that is symbolized by the statue's feet formed of a mixture of clay and iron. The idea is that this empire has the weak characteristics of clay mixed with the strong

characteristics of iron. What we have to envision though is not a mixture as we might think of a cake. In other words when we take flour, eggs, milk, sugar, and perhaps a few other ingredients, mix them thoroughly together and bake it, what emerges is a newly created item. The molecules of the various ingredients interact and combine and forms a new concoction altogether.

But such is not the same for a mixture of iron and clay. Rather the bits and pieces of iron become suspended in the clay, but the molecules of clay don't interact with the iron and form a new substance. Thus the mixture of iron and clay is unstable. If you smash a cake it doesn't separate back into its ingredients. However if you smash a hardened mixture of clay and iron, it DOES separate back into specks of iron and the dust of the clay. Thus the symbolism is clearly explained in verses 42 and 43. This kingdom of clay and iron consists of ingredients that don't mix properly; and further it is a divided kingdom. Thus parts of the kingdom will be strong and other parts weak because the mixture is inherently brittle. So is this actually a 5th kingdom or just an extension of the 4th kingdom of iron? Well I think it's clear that the iron and clay mixture is something that the 4th kingdom eventually morphs into, but it is questionable whether it will be viewed by the world as a separate empire. And that is substantiated by the fact that later in the Book of Daniel, Daniel will get a vision of 4 strange beasts that rise from the sea, and basically they symbolize exactly the same thing that Nebuchadnezzar's dream-stature represents.

Thus far none of what I have told you is opinion or speculation. It is clearly laid out for us; the symbolism is unequivocally explained by Daniel, we don't have to guess. So now before we go further, let's see if we can ascertain just who these empires turned out to be, which each part of the stature represents. Well, the 1st part, the head of gold, is easy because we're directly told in verse 38 that it is Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon.

But who is the 2nd kingdom? The conventional wisdom up to the 19th century was that it was the Persian Empire, or more technically correct the Media-Persian Empire. In fact because the symbolism of the animals is a precise parallel of the statue of the 4 metals, we are directly told the answer to our question in Daniel chapter 8.

Daniel 8:16-20 CJB

¹⁶ I heard a human voice calling from between the banks of the Ulai, "Gavri'el, make this man understand the vision!"

¹⁷ He came up to where I was standing, and his approach so terrified me that I fell on my face. But he said to me, "Human being! Understand that the vision refers to the time of the end."

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18 *As he was speaking with me, I fell into a deep sleep, with my face toward the ground; but he touched me, set me on my feet,*

19 *and said, "I am going to explain to you what will happen at the end of the period of fury, because [the vision] has to do with the time at the end.*

20 *You saw a ram with two horns which are the kings of Media and Persia.*

So, we learn that the 2nd of the empires (the silver empire) is ruled jointly by the kings of Media and Persia.

What about the 3rd kingdom?

Daniel 8:21-22 CJB

21 *The shaggy male goat is the king of Greece, and the prominent horn between its eyes is the first king.*

22 *As for the horn that broke and the four which rose up in its place, four kingdoms will arise out of this nation, but not with the power the first king had.*

The male goat is parallel to the 3rd empire of bronze in Nebuchadnezzar's statue. And who is the goat? Greece. So there we have it. Perfectly straightforward and spelled out: Daniel tells us that the gold head is Babylon, the silver chest and arms are Media-Persia, and the bronze belly and thighs is Greece. And looking back into history that is precisely how it went. Babylon was taken over by Media-Persia, and Media-Persia was taken over by Greece. Of course the 4th kingdom is not named, but we'll get to that.

Thus it is no wonder that Christian commentators up until the time of the Enlightenment didn't find any mystery at all in identifying the first 3 gentile world empires because the bible tells us exactly who they are. So why, today, has all that I just told you been thrown out the window? In fact, the modern bible commentators of the currently dominant school of bible criticism tell us that these verses in Daniel must be faulty. Remember what I told you some weeks ago. The modern school of

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bible scholars says that Daniel is a fraud. Their evidence? Because since their firm belief is that there is no such thing as predictive prophecy, and there is no such thing as the supernatural, then there is no possible way that Daniel (or anyone else) could have known things that were future to him. Therefore since history proves that what we read in Daniel actually happened, then the only logical explanation is that Daniel had to have been written after the fact and only pretended to be prophetic. For them there is no other explanation.

Further, to try to bolster their argument, they claim that the writer of Daniel was, among other things, a poor historian and so got some things wrong. They say that following the Babylonian Empire there was a Median Empire, and then following them there was a Persian Empire, and then after that a Grecian Empire: empires 1 through 4.

Thus for them Babylon is the head of gold, Media is the chest and arms of silver, Persia is the belly and thighs of bronze, and Greece is the legs and feet of iron. But I must tell you, history knows of no such thing as a Median Empire. The foremost living Middle Eastern historians of our day must be Anson Rainey and Steven Notley. And though they are bible skeptics, even they say forthrightly in their book *The Sacred Bridge*, that there was no such thing as a Median Empire and no such reference exists in the Scriptures or in any ancient document ever discovered. Rather, the Medes and Persians were strong partners and together they conquered Babylon and ruled over the former Babylonian Empire. Let me say this plainly: the modern bible scholars tell the academic historians that they must be wrong. The historians say that there was never a Median Empire, but the modern bible scholars say that there had to have been. Why do they insist on that? Because if there wasn't a Median Empire, then they can't redefine the symbolism of the statue to fit their unbelieving mindset.

But there is another problem with the modern bible critic's viewpoint. The arms of silver (equivalent to the Ram with 2 horns) plainly tells us of 2 entities who work together to form a single entity (the 2 arms are joined at the chest). Media provides the equivalent of just one of the arms. The same applies for the issue of Persia as the belly and thighs. Persia represents one of the two thighs, so who is the other thigh? No good answer. The modern bible critics' conclusions completely fall apart and are frankly, illogical as they try to rewrite a global history that no one else but them agrees with.

One final matter for today. We're told in Daniel 2:39 that the kingdoms that arise after Babylon will be inferior. But inferior in what way? The reality is that the Media-Persian Empire was much larger than the Babylonian Empire. The Greek Empire was larger still and the Roman Empire stretched from India to Europe. Some early commentators thought perhaps the inferiority referred to the

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declining moral condition of each succeeding gentile empire, but in fact the Roman Empire was perhaps the most moral of them all and even made Christianity the preferred religion of the empire.

The 19th century conservative bible scholar Dr. Keil believes that the inferiority Daniel speaks of is pointing towards a lack of inner unity. All empires consist of many smaller nations, so the issue of inner unity has to do with the government that rules above these many nations of the empire. The Babylonian Empire had a strong rulership with the power invested in one family: Nebuchadnezzar's. And Daniel and Jeremiah make it clear that God intended for this as He gave Nebuchadnezzar a supernaturally provided dominion over every aspect of his empire.

The Media-Persian Empire government was divided between the ruling families of the Medes and the Persians so they lacked the rock-solid inner unity of Babylon. The Grecian Empire government under Alexander the Great was in time divided into 4 provinces, each ruled by a different ruling family, and each sought to feather their own nest. And Rome was ruled by various factions, sometimes by Emperors as dictators, and other times more like Presidents of a Republic. Back and forth this went until later on in 285 A.D. under Diocletian the Roman Empire was divided into Eastern and Western empires. But even that vacillated between unity and chaos until the division was finalized in 480 A.D. So Keil might have it right.

Let's stop here and we'll deal with the meaning of Nebuchadnezzar's dream-statue a bit more next time.