

DANIEL

Week 8, chapters 2 and 3

We will finish up Daniel chapter 2 and get started on chapter 3 today.

We're still examining King Nebuchadnezzar's dream-statue that consists of 4 parts, each a different metal representing a series of empires. Although the bible will more often than not refer to these empires as kingdoms, I will switch back and forth between using the terms kingdom and empire because the mental picture we are meant to have best fits the Western concept of an empire. An empire is a large land mass that consists of a composite mixture of nations and kingdoms, small and large, which have been conquered by a dominant power. Even though it is typical that these various nations and kingdoms that form the empire will have their own kings and governors over them (often the same king that was in power when his kingdom was conquered), these potentates all give their allegiance to the central government of the empire.

Please indulge me as we get a little academic and technical to begin today's lesson; I think it is needed as it will add necessary context to our study of Daniel. It is important to remember that the dream-statue of Nebuchadnezzar represents a series of gentile controlled empires. The Aramaic language these passages were written in, the language of the gentile empire, reveals information that tells us that gentiles will be in control over the earth indefinitely. And because the statue is of a human, and because the various metal portions morph one into the other (from gold to silver to bronze to iron), we are to see the statue as a whole. Therefore what we have is one empire merely taking control of the one previous to it. It is not unlike a human development cycle in which a newborn human will go through many stages in its lifespan. We don't definitively end one stage, and go to the next, essentially starting over and becoming a different person at each point. Rather we flow from one stage into the next, usually growing larger among other changes that represents each stage of maturation. So each succeeding gentile empire is not really a newly created one in the sense that it has never before existed; rather what is being represented is the stages of development of human history. And it is a development that is dominated by gentile humans as opposed to Hebrew humans. The world government is administered by gentile kings and emperors.

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Another thing we need to keep in mind as we go along is that there is a variety of theological viewpoints as to which ancient empire we ought to assign to each of the 4 portions of the statue. And these viewpoints can be summed up, in general, into 3 categories that have been labeled Amillennial, Post-Millennial, and Pre-Millennial. We studied these in some depth back in our 2nd lesson on the Book of Daniel, and I'll not repeat that today. But the idea is that these 3 categories are each born from Christian Systematic Theology, and they each address the Systematic Theology subject of eschatology, which is the study of the end times. If you have been a member of a Christian denomination, whether you know it or not your denomination adhered to one or another of these 3 categories. And none of these categories are compatible with the other.

But in addition to those 3 eschatological doctrinal viewpoints regarding the make-up of Nebuchadnezzar's dream-statue, there is yet another viewpoint that is held by the so-called school of Bible Criticism, which is the most prevalent line of scholarly thinking regarding the bible for the past 100 years. The major difference between the viewpoints of bible criticism and those of the Amillennial, Post-Millennial, and Pre-Millennial Christian doctrines is that the bible criticism viewpoint comes from a fundamental belief that there are no such things as miracles, predictive prophecy, or the supernatural. Amillennialism, Post-Millennialism, and Pre-Millennialism all accept the possibility of miracles, predictive prophecy, and the supernatural. So these 3 categories arrive at their differing end-times doctrines because other elements of their particular systematic theology essentially force them there. And the end result of insisting on designing a coherent theological system is that the Scriptures have to be twisted, turned, allegorized, some passages ignored while others are given more weight, and in some cases passages are literally removed or added to the bible to make it work.

But in modern times it has become even more complicated because the Pre-Millennial category has been divided into two viewpoints called Dispensational and Historic Pre-Millennialism. I'll not get into the details. The point I'm making is this: Daniel has become the battleground for all this and over time no doubt you have heard many different end times doctrines, or sound bites of end times doctrines, that supposedly comes about due to the Book of Daniel. And the reality is that many of these viewpoints were created to support the overall doctrinal creed of one's denomination in order to arrive at a predetermined agenda.

Thus what we're going to do in our study would seem like heresy to many Christian denominations. We are simply going to follow wherever the Scripture leads us, and then also look back in verifiable human history and see if and where the two connect. We'll not be using any labels, adopting any denominational creed, and I won't be teaching one end times doctrine over another even though no doubt you'll recognize some elements of whatever doctrines you have been introduced to up to this point in your life.

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We ended our last lesson by my pointing out that Daniel chapters 7 and 8 tell us of a couple of visions that Daniel had that was parallel to the one that King Nebuchadnezzar had in chapter 2. That is while God used a dream of a human image made up of 4 metals to communicate the future to King Nebuchadnezzar (in chapter 2), later the Lord gave Daniel 2 visions of animals to represent the succession of future gentile empires. Thus we can equate a band of metal with a certain animal. And the Lord even went so far as to tell us in Daniel chapter 8 that the Ram with 2 horns represented Media and Persia, while the shaggy goat represented Greece.

So we have Daniel 2:38 tell us directly that the 1st and current empire was Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon, and then Daniel 8:20 tells us that the next empire was Media-Persia, and then Dan.8:21 tells us that the one following was Greece. Pretty straightforward.

And yet especially the modern bible commentators who mostly align with the school of bible criticism say that while it is true that the Scriptures do tell us that fact, Daniel has it wrong. Their reasoning? Since predictive prophecy doesn't exist, then the Book of Daniel had to have been written around 165 B.C., around 4 centuries after the exile to Babylon. And thus the 4 parts of the statue also had to be explained with only the empires that had already come and gone by 165 B.C... So the bible criticism scholars decided that either the order of gentile kingdoms was: Assyria, Babylon, Media-Persia, and then Greece or (more commonly) that it was Babylon, then Media, then Persia, then Greece. In other words, the Book of Daniel bore no truth to the matter at all. In fact bible criticism scholars say that ancient and even modern historians are wrong in saying that there was no such thing as an Empire of the Medes, that was a world power that ruled by itself. They disagree that the only known Empire involving the Medes was one they co-ruled with Persia. And this is because unless they can somehow make the one unified Median-Persian Empire into two (a Median Empire that is later followed by a Persian Empire), their theory of world history and of when the Book of Daniel was written falls apart.

I reiterate that I choose to believe the bible and that every reasonable proof is that Daniel was written in the 6th century B.C., and it is accurate, and hindsight proves that it lines up squarely with verifiable history. Thus we will merely accept the Holy Scriptures telling us forthrightly, without the need for allegory or interpretation, that the 1st empire (the head of gold) was Babylon; the 2nd empire (the arms and chest of silver) was Media-Persia; and the 3rd empire (the belly and thighs of bronze) was Greece. There is no mention in Daniel of the Roman Empire by name as being the 4th empire, and we have to be honest about that. However the next empire to come into existence after Greece was the Roman Empire; that is an unassailable fact of history and the symbolism of the statue with the legs of iron showing a definite division of the empire into two at some point precisely fits what happened with the Roman Empire. However the modern bible critics can't

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accept that the 4th kingdom was Rome because their belief that Daniel was written in 165 B.C. doesn't allow it since Rome didn't take over the Greek Empire until 146 B.C. And of course even if one accepted the late date of 165 B.C. as the date of its authorship (which has no empirical evidence to back it up), 146 B.C. is still 20 years in the future and the writer of Daniel, they say, could not possibly have known the future.

I hope this brief preface to begin today's lesson helps you to understand what a serious bible student faces in modern times when we endeavor to examine Holy Scripture, and untangle systematic theology and especially the matter of systematic eschatology. It is a loaded game that makes arriving at whatever truth God has made knowable to us quite difficult to apprehend because if one chooses to believe the Word of God as it is given, and to examine it in its ancient Hebrew context, then one is often labeled a kook, heretic, or member of a cult because it either doesn't agree with most denominational systematic theologies or with the views of the modern bible commentators.

Let's re-read a short portion of Daniel chapter 2.

RE-READ DANIEL CHAPTER 2:40 – end

What we know of the 4th empire of iron is that it is the largest, most powerful of them all. It can destroy at will. We also see in the statue image that it is the legs that are made of iron, and as we move down towards the feet and toes the iron doesn't change to another metal but rather it starts to have clay added to it and so forms a mixture that we discussed last time. It is an unstable mixture because iron and clay don't combine; rather the iron particles merely become suspended in the clay. And further while the 4th empire is divided into two (as symbolized by the legs and feet); it eventually divides even further as symbolized by the 10 toes. Let's address right here the issue of the 10 toes made of the iron and clay mixture. First, there are those who say that the number 10 cannot be assumed because nowhere do the Daniel passages refer to the feet as having 10 toes. But in my opinion that is a red herring; the statue is decidedly human, bearing every other human attribute. To think that the number of toes has to be specifically called out as 10 is not reasonable. After all, when the Scriptures speak of the arms and legs of the statue, we're not told that there were two arms and two legs and there seems to be no academic controversy over that issue. It goes without saying that since the image was human there would be two of each. So we can safely assume that the number of toes were 10.

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However, does 10 toes mean that this empire (Roman or not) will eventually divide into precisely 10 parts governed by 10 kings? Not necessarily. Biblically speaking the number 10 is the number of completeness, but on the other hand it is often used as a round number as opposed to a precise number. Ten could merely be a representative number that indicates that there will be several parts to this empire, each governed mostly independently, as time marches on. We must remain aware that this passage is written in a gentile language (Aramaic) about a gentile statute representing 4 gentile kingdoms and this dream-statue was designed by the Lord to be in terms that this gentile king could comprehend. And the Babylonians (so far as we know) didn't have the same symbolic interpretation of the number 10 that the Hebrews did. Yet it certainly can't be ruled out that indeed the 10 toes means that the empire (probably the Roman Empire) will become divided into exactly 10 smaller kingdoms. So we'll just have to leave this matter of the number of toes until we get more information.

Verse 43 is worth looking at more closely. The CJB as does most other popular bible translations say that the iron mixed with clay means that alliances by intermarriage will occur to form this iron and clay mixture. And intermarriage by definition means marriages between people of unlike societies. For instance, no one would speak of marriage among Jews as "intermarriage" but rather as merely "marriage". However that is NOT what the Hebrew Scriptures say. Rather the words are that "they shall mingle themselves by the ***zera enosh***". Those Aramaic words translate to seed of men. Now the end result probably is intermarriage. But to those who have studied the Torah an important piece of information gets provided when we study this Daniel verse in the more literal translation. We are told in the Law of Moses that seeds of two or more varieties are not to be planted in the same field. To mix seeds of different species is forbidden; the mixing of different seeds on the same piece of land is (says the Lord) an illicit mixture. And we are taught that an illicit mixing of anything prohibited by God creates ***tevel*** (confusion). So this mixing of clay and iron brought about by the mixing of the seeds of men is speaking of an illicit mixing, a prohibited mixing, and it is symbolic of the mixing of people who ought not to be mixed, and the end result is confusion. And it is this confusion that leads to chaos that creates the conditions for the downfall of this 4th empire.

Now to be quite clear: this is not referring to a mixing of races as we would think of it today. Rather this is referring to a mixing of various nations, cultures and societies. It could even mean a mixing of weak nations with strong nations (as we have seen with the European Union). Or perhaps like we see happening in the West, a mixing of Islamic cultures with their unique, backward and often opposite values, with those cultures based on traditional Judeo-Christian foundations. This kind of mixing that is today hailed by secular humanists as politically correct diversity has become quite problematic in the West and indeed could be the harbinger of the chaos and societal failure that this prophecy is predicting. But that is only my speculation.

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Now things really start to get interesting as verse 43 makes a bold prediction that it is in the days of those kings (those toes made of clay and iron) that what is about to be described happens. And what happens is obviously Messianic in nature, and it therefore is part of the ***acharit-ha'yamim*** (latter days) scenario. But as we have discussed at length, hindsight and especially the Book of Revelation help us to discover that there are two sets of latter days: the 1st latter days is associated with the birth and subsequent crucifixion of Christ, and the 2nd latter days is associated with His future return after living for centuries at the right hand of God in Heaven. So which latter days is verse 43 speaking to? Because it states that by divine intervention God Himself will set up a Kingdom entirely different in every way from the one represented by the gentile dream-statue. And this divine Kingdom will never end, and once established, unlike the series of 4 gentile empires that pass from one people to another, this Kingdom will never pass from the ruler and the people who initiate it.

The evangelical Christian view today that has been made popular mostly by Hal Lindsay, Chuck Smith, and Tim LaHaye is that this passage is speaking of the 2nd latter days and not the 1st. Therefore, they say, there must be a revived Roman Empire first before this Messianic Kingdom of God can be established, and in fact they say that we are watching that revived empire forming now, in our time.

However other scholars such as Edward J. Young say that this is untenable. He says that we are not expressly told that the statue has 10 toes, so we can't associate them with the 10 kings of Daniel 7, and besides the stone not quarried by human hands that strikes and demolishes the statue is said to hit the statue's 2 feet not its several toes. Therefore the only possible conclusion is that the kings of this Daniel chapter 2 passage have to be kings **not** of a "revived" Roman Empire but of the ancient historic Roman Empire.

Can we find some way to reconcile these two distinctly opposite views, or is the one right and the other wrong even though they are both based on sound Scriptural evidence? Before we get to that, I want to look at verse 45 that tells us more about this mysterious stone that is cut-out without human hands; the one that destroys the succession of 4 gentile kingdoms. Generally, without much theological disagreement, this stone is identified as Yeshua, Jesus the Christ. Thus the destruction of the gentile controlled world empires marks the moment of the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth and it is accomplished by God's Messiah. In fact an interesting tidbit is that when are told where the stone was quarried from, unlike many bible versions that say from "a" mountain, in fact it is the definite article used in the Aramaic so it is "the" mountain. Not just any generic mountain, but the stone is cut from a very specific mountain. It must be speaking of the mountain of Zion, probably Mt. Moriah. This conclusion is warranted because we read this in Isaiah 2:

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Isaiah 2:1-3 CJB

CJB Isaiah 2:1 *This is the word that Yesha'yahu the son of Amotz saw concerning Y'hudah and Yerushalayim:*

2 *In the acharit-hayamim the mountain of ADONAI's house will be established as the most important mountain. It will be regarded more highly than the other hills, and all the Goyim will stream there.*

3 *Many peoples will go and say, "Come, let's go up to the mountain of ADONAI, to the house of the God of Ya'akov! He will teach us about his ways, and we will walk in his paths." For out of Tziyon will go forth Torah, the word of ADONAI from Yerushalayim.*

So this passage from Isaiah establishes just what “the mountain” is speaking about; it is the mountain of Zion, Mt. Moriah.

But here is where our understanding of the 3 categories of systematic eschatology also pops up again. Pre-Millennialists see this event of the Messianic stone cut from the mountain of Zion smashing the gentile world empire and destroying it and setting up the Kingdom of God as being fulfilled in Messiah's 2nd coming (a future event to us) as they say the 10 toes equate to the 10 kings of a revived Roman Empire. But Amillennialists and Post-Millennialists see that event as ALREADY having been fulfilled at Messiah's 1st coming. And therefore the Kingdom of God is already established on earth. And further that the gentile Christian Church (to the exclusion of all Israel and the Jewish people) are the exclusive people of this kingdom. Therefore the concept of Replacement Theology has its roots here. The Church and the Kingdom of God are one in the same, established upon the 1st advent of Christ. Let me be clear: the Amillennial and Post-Millennial position is that the stone in Nebuchadnezzar's dream has already struck and destroyed the 4 gentile empires. This is sometimes also known in Christian-eze as the Kingdom Now theology. And part of this theology is that the victory is already complete, and it is up to the Christian Church to keep perfecting this world until it is pure and clean and only then does Messiah come to take over this already established and purified Kingdom of God.

I'm not going to engage, today, in the rightness or wrongness of any of these end times theological doctrines. My purpose for now is to merely explain the differing positions and why they each believe what they believe. Further, through Daniel chapter 2 we simply don't have enough information yet to draw much in the way of conclusions. So to be true to our method of study by simply taking the Scriptures for what they say and not adding or subtracting or allegorizing we'll leave this growing bundle of mysteries for now and move on.

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Let's remember that all that we've been discussing is within the context of Daniel standing before King Nebuchadnezzar as he interprets the king's troublesome dream. And he concludes by saying without equivocation that the dream is of real events of the future that WILL happen, and the interpretation is 100% accurate. The king can take it to the bank. To say that Nebuchadnezzar was impressed is an understatement.

The king was dumbfounded; he was so in awe at the accuracy and authority of Daniel's pronouncement that he literally prostrated himself at Daniel's feet and worshipped him. He also pronounced that Daniel's God is indeed the God of gods and Lord over all kings and gave Daniel and his 3 Jewish comrades' high positions in the Babylonian government. This gives me an opportunity to explain something about how the Oriental mind thought about the world of the gods and how the gods interacted with humans in that era. By no means was Nebuchadnezzar's pronouncement concerning the God of Israel a statement of monotheism nor that the king had dumped his gods in favor of Yehoveh. Rather, at best, he elevated Yehoveh to the position of Chief God of the Babylonian Empire; the El. The highest God of the many gods. Nebuchadnezzar still worshipped his traditional Babylonian gods and goddesses but he recognized, for the moment, the superiority of the God of the Jews at least as it involves revealing mysterious secrets. On the other hand, obviously from a war standpoint, Babylonia's gods were superior to the Jews' God because Babylon was the victor and the Jews were the captor.

It was no problem for the Middle Eastern mind to accept that not only one's own personal gods but also one's national gods existed and played a role in their lives. And further they had no problem accepting that other people had their own personal gods, and other nations had their own set of national gods. This wasn't tolerance, it was reality to them. But just like in the modern world where a nation's power and status will ebb and flow, but that nation continues to exist, so it was with the gods. The power and status of the various gods changed, but they didn't cease to exist nor did they lose their power altogether. The pecking order of the gods merely got reshuffled from time to time. For the moment Nebuchadnezzar honored Israel's God as the El, the highest god.

Let's move on to Daniel chapter 3.

READ DANIEL CHAPTER 3 all

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First let me remind you that this chapter, like the previous one, is written in Aramaic so it is being addressed to (and concerns primarily) gentiles.

Second let me remind you that this is all about the historical succession of gentile world empires. And the story about this golden statue that Nebuchadnezzar had constructed must be taken with that context in mind.

We don't know exactly at what point in the king's reign that he had this statue built and erected. The Greek Septuagint has words added that says that it happened in the 18th year of his reign, and apparently the editors of the Septuagint thought that this business with the huge gold statue was somehow connected with Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of Jerusalem. But there is no evidence of those two events being connected and it is only an opinion of the ancient editor of the Septuagint.

We aren't told very much about the nature of this statue. However it was of enormous size: 60 cubits in height. That would put it at somewhere around 90 – 100 feet tall. Saying it was made of gold in no way means that it was solid gold. Rather it was constructed of stone or something else and then overlaid with gold plates. However that in itself would have been horrifically costly. The location given in the Scriptures is inexact; it is in the plain of Dura in the province of Babel. There is good reason to think, however, that the location of this statue has been discovered. The archeologist Oppert found a large rectangular brick structure over 20 feet in height that, in his view, could only be the pedestal and foundation for a gigantic monument or statue. About 12 miles SSE of Hillah the place was known locally as Tolul Dura (the mounds of Dura).

Bible critics say that the mention of this statue is just more evidence that Daniel is pure fantasy. And that is because not only is the statue so illogically huge, but its proportions are all wrong. We are told in the Tanach that the statue was 60 cubits tall and 6 cubits wide: a 10 to 1 ratio. And that, says the bible critics is unworkable. However perhaps they need to travel to Washington D.C. and visit the Washington Monument. It is 555 feet high and precisely 55 feet wide at its base: a 10 to 1 ratio. However it is probable that the gold statue of chapter 3 was 60 cubits tall including its pedestal, which was around 15 cubits high, meaning the actual image itself was more like 45 cubits high and 6 cubits wide, a 7.5 to 1 ratio.

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Was this golden statue meant as a physical representation of the statue of Nebuchadnezzar's dream? Was it a stylized image of the king made to aggrandize himself? We're not told and no amount of speculation can determine the truth. The issue we need to focus on instead is its intended purpose.

Verse 2 explains that everybody that was anybody in the Babylonian government was commanded not only to come to the dedication ceremony, but to bow down to the statue. They did so. And as they stood there verse 4 says that a herald shouted out "People, Nations, Languages" when you hear the music start you must stop whatever you are doing and bow down to the golden image. And whoever doesn't will be thrown into a fiery furnace for execution. The use of the Aramaic words **am** (people), **ummah** (nations), and **lish-shan** (languages, tongues) is to make the point that every last person who lived for whatever reason in the Babylonian Empire was to show respect to this image.

The question then, was the point that the image was a god and everyone was to worship this god? That all who lived in the empire, no matter their own god system, was to worship this particular god? Was this an issue of religion, and maybe even religious persecution? The answer is probably yes and no. This image was not an idol of a certain god per se, but it was much more the symbol of the world power that was Babylon. Thus everyone in Babylon was to bow down before the symbol of the government that held sway over the world (at least from the Middle Eastern viewpoint). However because of the way gods were viewed in relation to nations and kings, there was a theocratic element involved. To worship the government and power of Babylon was to worship the King of Babylon. And to worship the King of Babylon was to worship the god of Babylon; these things were inseparable.

Thus the gist of the issue of what happens to people who refuse to bow down to the 90 foot tall statue (they get burned up in a furnace), has to do with a refusal to declare loyalty on every level (secular and religious) to the gentile world power; the one-world government that is Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon. To refuse to bow down is treason and the penalty is death. And the reality is that it wouldn't really have bothered most of the many nations and peoples who formed Babylon to do so because they were not being asked to give up or replace their gods. And it wouldn't upset their gods for them to bow down to yet another god (that was usual and customary). The people would merely be acknowledging that the power of the Babylonian gods was mightier than the power of their own personal and/or national gods; and this was already a well-established fact by means of their subjugation to Babylon.

But for the Jews, it was another matter; a grave matter. For they were obligated to acknowledge

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one God and one God alone. To do otherwise was unfaithfulness to their own God, Yehoveh. Now we have a problem.

We'll explore this some more next time.