

THE GREAT IMAGE

Daniel 2:29-49

PLEASE do not read these comments until you have read the Scripture for this lesson. First let the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.

Introduction

King Nebuchadnezzar made Babylon into a powerful empire that ruled over many countries, including the land of the Jews. When he was thinking of the future before going to sleep, God gave him a dream about the future of his kingdom and that of three other kingdoms that would rule over the Jews during the “times of the Gentiles.” These times would span the time from the rule of Nebuchadnezzar to Antichrist. In this lesson Daniel will tell the king what he dreamed, which was his proof that the interpretation was accurate, then he will interpret the dream for Nebuchadnezzar.

Aim of the Lesson

Interpret Bible prophecy as literal as possible so you can witness with certainty the future plans of God.

Daniel told the king, “The dream is certain and the interpretation of it is sure” (Dan 2:45).

Outline of the Lesson (Use the Study Notes to add to this lesson plan as the Spirit leads you.)

I. Prophecy of Four Kingdoms – 2:29-45

A. The Dream – 2:29-35

1. The Occasion of the Dream – 2:29-30

When the king was thinking about the future while lying on his bed, God gave him a dream starting with the near future going on to the distant future. Daniel did not take credit for knowing these things by his wisdom, but God revealed it to him that the king might understand what will happen in the future.

We greatly benefit from this prophecy if we interpret it as Daniel did for Nebuchadnezzar.

2. The Content of the Dream - 2:31-35

Daniel proceeded to tell the king what he had dreamed. This would convince him that the interpretation would be trustworthy. The dream centered on a great image or statue, full of brightness or splendor and awesome in its form. The image was divided into four sections composed of four metals plus clay. (1) The head was of fine gold; (2) the breast and arms were of silver; (3) the belly and thighs were of bronze; and (4) the legs were of iron and the feet were of iron mixed with clay. A stone cut without hands completely destroyed the image. The stone grew into a great mountain so that it filled the whole earth.

B. The Interpretation – 2:36-45

Daniel then gave the interpretation of this unusual dream. The segments of the image represented kings and kingdoms that would rule over Israel. Some of the kingdoms were a blessing to Israel at some period of its history, but all of them abused Israel at some point in their history.

1. The Kingdoms of Men – 2:37-43

Babylon. The gold head of the image represented Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar (cf. v. 38), the first empire in his dream (605-539 B.C.). His conquest of Jerusalem marked the beginning of the “times of the Gentiles” (Lk 21:24) which would last until Christ destroys Antichrist’s kingdom at the end of the Tribulation. Babylon kept the Jews in bondage about 65 years. Nebuchadnezzar was a unique king. Read more about him in the Study Notes.

Medo-Persia. The silver breast and arms represented Medo-Persia, the second empire (539-331 B.C.). Cyrus would establish this empire as a dual power of the Medes and Persians (symbolized by the two arms). God gave this empire to Cyrus, which God revealed to Isaiah more than 150 years earlier, even calling him by name (cf. Isa. 44:24-45:4). He liberated the Jewish captives and gave them permission to return to the land promised to them by God. Esther, Ezra and Nehemiah lived and worked successfully under the Persian rule. Zechariah, Haggai and Malachi prophesied during this time. Medo-Persia ruled over the Jews almost 210 years. Read more about Cyrus and how he and his kingdom differed from Nebuchadnezzar and his kingdom in the Study Notes.

Greece. The bronze belly and thighs of the image represented Greco-Macedonia, the third empire (331-63 B.C.). Alexander the Great conquered Medo-Persia rapidly and founded the third great empire. He crossed the Hellespont into Asia Minor, Syria, Palestine, Egypt and then pushed eastward all the way to India. He treated the Jews well as a result of a vision that he had received from God in Macedonia. He also was impressed by the Scriptures in Daniel 8 that were shown to him by the chief priest, which said he would be victorious over the Persians. The Grecian Empire was a military aristocracy. Even though Alexander was a military genius, he died in 323 B.C. at age 32/33. His vast kingdom, somewhat larger than Medo-Persia, was divided by four of his generals as their personal possessions. The events of only two of those divisions are recorded in Daniel 11: Syria and Egypt. The Seleucid kingdom (Syria) was to the north of Israel and the Ptolemy kingdom (Egypt) was to the south, and one or the other of these kingdoms controlled Israel. The thighs of the image represented these two divisions. Politically, Syria was of the East (Asia), while Egypt was aligned with the West (Europe). The Greeks ruled over Jews and Jerusalem about 270 years. The cruelest among them was Antiochus Epiphanes, who will be exposed in Daniel 8 and 11. He is a type of Antichrist.

Rome. The iron legs of the image represented Rome, the fourth empire (63 B.C. – A.D. 476). This empire would be as strong as iron through its brutal pillaging, plundering and murdering armies. The Roman army under Pompey defeated Syria in a battle for Jerusalem in 63 B.C. Now the Jews came under the authority of Rome, even though the actual beginning of the Roman Empire was 27 B.C. Its boundaries eventually extended near the city of Babylon on the east and its western boundary reached England on the west. It controlled all the nations around the Mediterranean Sea. Rome was an autocratic democracy. The military elected the emperor and the people nominally chose him. Then he ruled as a despot. It seems best to consider the two legs of Rome as extensions of the two divisions seen in the Grecian Empire (Dan 11): Syria (East) and Egypt (West) The Roman Empire ended when Rome collapsed before the invading barbarians in A.D. 476. However, a part of the Roman Empire continued as the Byzantine Empire for nearly 1000 years until A.D. 1453, when the Turks finally conquered it. The Romans destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and the Jewish people soon fled to all parts of the world in an attempt to survive. Israel became a nation in 1948, but most of her people still live in other countries.

2:41-43 – **Rome Revived.** The feet and toes of iron mixed with baked clay represent a revival of Rome that is still in the future. More information is given about this kingdom than about any of the other kingdoms, so God puts the spotlight on this kingdom. (1) Notice the mixture of iron and baked clay shows mixture of strength and weakness (2:41). It has the strength of the iron legs, but the weakness of brittle clay. (2) The ten toes of the feet are ten divisions in this kingdom that represent ten kings ruling together. This is learned from Daniel 7:24 where a beast has ten horns representing these ten kings (cf Rev 17:12). These ten kings rule a confederacy of nations (2:42) where the Roman Empire once ruled. (3) The mixture of iron and baked clay indicates some of these kings are strong as iron and some are weak as pottery and easily broken (2:43).

The whole image represents a continuous succession of Gentile kingdoms, which Satan has used in an attempt to destroy God's chosen people. Notice the downward progression of the metals in value from the head of gold to the feet of iron and baked clay. This shows the decreasing authority of the rulers. On the other hand, there is an increasing strength of the metals from gold to iron to show the increasing strength of the nations in persecuting Israel. For examples of this see the Study Notes.

God has rescued the Jews from the jaws of death several times in the past and will do it again in the future by sending His Son to destroy all those that try to destroy His people (Ps 2:1-3). When the Stone (Christ's kingdom) strikes the feet of the image, the whole image collapses at one time. This depicts the power of the Gentile kingdoms being crushed when Christ returns to earth (Rev 19:11-21).

1. The Kingdom of Christ – 2:44-45; cf 2:34-35

The Stone represents Christ and His Kingdom, which will come from heaven to earth at the end of the Tribulation. Nine closely aligned aspects of this Kingdom are portrayed.

- (1) It will begin in the "days of these kings" referring to the ten kings of revived Rome (2:44). It comes at the end of the Tribulation to destroy these kings and Antichrist to whom they have given their kingdoms.
- (2) It will be set up by God (2:44), hence, it will be a perfect Kingdom without sin. It will glorify Him and do His will in the earth as it is done in Heaven.
- (3) It will "never be destroyed," like the Gentile kingdoms depicted in the image. It will be victorious over all its enemies (2:4).
- (4) It will not be passed on to other people (2:44). Its citizens have received Jesus Christ as their Savior and they are one with Him. He is their King and they are joint heirs with Him. No other people can replace them.

(5) It will crush and consume all the Gentile kingdoms represented in the image (2:44, 45; cf 2:35). This is mentioned twice in Daniel's interpretation, so it is a very important part of his message to the king. These kingdoms will be ground to powder and the wind will blow them away for their arrogant pride against Israel and rebellion against God.

(6) It will be eternal, because "it shall stand forever" (2:44-45). After Christ has ruled the present earth for 1000 years, He will deliver His Kingdom to His Father (1 Cor 15:24-25) and together they will rule over the new earth forever (Rev 22:1-5).

(7) It will be cut out of the mountain (kingdom), meaning it will be taken from God's Kingdom (2:45). It will be taken from God's heavenly Kingdom, not from man's earthly kingdom. Jesus told Pilate that His Kingdom was not from this world. His Kingdom was from heaven. It is composed of born again citizens in God's Kingdom who will come from heaven to rule the earth with Jesus Christ, their King.

(8) It will be cut from the mountain "without hands," depicting that it will not be set up by the works of men, but by the decree of God (2:45). While the other kingdoms would be established by the warfare of men's hands, God has already declared that Christ will be His King to rule the earth and His word is final (Ps 2:6-9). The citizens of Christ's Kingdom likewise are made "without hands." They are not made citizens by their works of righteousness or by the sacrificial works of other men; they are made citizens by believing God's invitation to receive Jesus Christ as their Savior and King (Phil 3:20; Col 1:13). As citizens they will reign with Christ in His Millennial Kingdom (Rev 2:26-27; 3:20-21; 20:4).

(9) It will become a great Kingdom (mountain) that will fill the whole earth. Even though this aspect of Christ's Kingdom was not mentioned in Daniel's interpretation, it was a part of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, so it will be included here (2:35). Christ will be the King of kings, and He will rule the earth with perfect justice. His rule of the earth will bring the glory to God that was lost when Adam sinned and gave the earth to Satan to govern.

2:45 – God revealed the future to Nebuchadnezzar (and to us) so that he might know the things that are coming which will show that He is the ultimate Ruler of the world. God graciously revealed these things to Nebuchadnezzar so he might turn to Him from his false gods. They could not reveal His dream, so they were of no value to him to know the future of his own life, his kingdom or of the world. He needed to trust in the true God who knew every detail of the future because He planned the future. Daniel told him the dream was certain and its interpretation was trustworthy. Nebuchadnezzar and all people that listen to God's message about the future will benefit from it.

C. The Stone

Daniel 2:34-35 and 2:44-45 are very important verses about the Stone (Christ's Kingdom) in the king's dream. Here are some concluding thoughts. (1) The Stone is not the Church, or some "spiritual" kingdom in Heaven: (2) The Stone strikes the feet of the image when Rome is in the iron-clay stage, not the iron stage. The Church did not do this in the first century; Rome was in the iron stage for several hundred years. (3) The Stone strikes the image suddenly and grinds it to dust. This happens when Christ suddenly returns to earth. The union of Church and State did not strike these kingdoms suddenly, but changes were made very slowly. (4) The Stone destroys Rome when it is in the iron and clay stage with ten kings ruling at the same time. The barbarians, not the Church, destroyed Rome and it happened in A.D. 476. Furthermore, Rome did not have ten kings at the time it was destroyed by the barbarians. This is still a future event. The Gentiles are still in charge of the world. We are living in "the times of the Gentiles." (5) The Stone destroys the Gentile kingdoms and replaces them with a Kingdom that fills the earth. Jesus' Kingdom from heaven will replace the Gentile kingdoms and will rule the whole earth with justice.

II. Promotion of Daniel – 2:46-49

Nebuchadnezzar fell on his face and worshipped Daniel for revealing the meaning of the dream to him. However, he recognized that it was Daniel's God Who was responsible for this miraculous revelation. This does not mean that he began to worship Daniel's God exclusively. He simply added Him to a prominent place with his other gods and worshipped Him as the "God of gods."

In addition to this honor, Nebuchadnezzar gave Daniel two positions in his kingdom: (1) he made Daniel ruler over the entire province in which the city of Babylon was located (2:48); and (2) he made him the chief of the hierarchy of court counselors (4:48). Daniel is still a young man at this time, not older than 17, but he is made a chief ruler.

Daniel was a humble man. Not only did he give all the glory to God, but he also remembered his friends in time of prosperity and advancement. With the king's permission, Daniel awarded them with the prestigious administrative details of his first area of promotion (province of Babylon) so that he might concentrate his time in the responsibility of being the chief counselor of the king.