

# THE GREAT IMAGE

## Daniel 2:29-49

***Please do not read these comments until you have read the Scriptures for this lesson. Begin by letting the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.***

### Summary and Historical Background

King Nebuchadnezzar had received a dream from God, but he did not know what it meant. He called for his wise men to tell him the dream before they could give their interpretation of it. None of them could tell what the dream was so he ordered all of them to be killed. When Daniel heard about this, he told the king that he would tell him his dream and its interpretation, but he needed a little time to receive this information from God. He and his three friends prayed to God for the dream and its interpretation and God gave it to Daniel. After a brief prayer of thanks and praise of God for His answer, Daniel was ready to meet with the king and tell him the dream that God had given him and its interpretation.

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

#### A. The Dream – 2:29-35

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

The dream and visions that God gave Nebuchadnezzar were the result of some thoughts he had had about the future as he lay upon his bed. Daniel did not simply tell the king his dream, but, indeed, he told him why he dreamed it!

2:29 – The Lord caused the dream. It seems that when the king lay down to sleep, the question of the future (“hereafter”) entered his mind. So God used this occasion to show Nebuchadnezzar the future in far greater proportions than the king could ever have hoped or imagined.

2:30 – The Lord revealed the interpretation of the dream for two reasons: (1) that the king might know the meaning of the dream and (2) that he might know the thoughts of his heart concerning the future.

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

Daniel gave the facts about the king’s dream in fulfillment of Nebuchadnezzar’s first requirement.

2:31 – The dream centered on a great image or statue, full of brightness or splendor and awesome in its form.

2:32-33 – 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. Each metal was assigned by the Babylonians to a different god: Gold = Enlil (Marduk); Silver = Anu; Brass (Bronze) = Ea; Iron = Ninib.

2:34-35 – An unusual stone destroyed the image. (1) This stone was cut out of the mountain – (cf 2:45) without the use of human hands. (2) It struck the feet of the image first and crushed them along with the rest of the image so that it was ground to powder and blown away by the wind like the worthless chaff of the summer threshing floor. Finally, (3) this stone grew into a great mountain so that it filled the whole earth. It is no wonder the king wanted his dream interpreted.

#### B. The Interpretation – 2:36-45

2:36 – Now Daniel turns his attention to Nebuchadnezzar’s second requirement and tells him the meaning of this unusual dream. The segments of the image represented kings and kingdoms of world history (cf. Daniel’s prayer (2:21)). Even though there were other great kingdoms in the world during this time, such as China and India, God did not include them in this dream because they did not rule over Israel. Each of these kingdoms have ruled over and abused Israel, which God has chosen to be a blessing to the world. God used holy men in Israel to record His words, so all people could know Him. He used Israel to bring His Son, Jesus, into this world to redeem those who believed and received His message. In the future, God will set Jesus on His throne in Jerusalem to rule the world for 1000 years.

### 1. The Kingdoms of Men – 2:37-43

The identity of these kingdoms comes from history and a comparison of Daniel 2, 7 and 8. At this time Daniel clearly identifies Nebuchadnezzar (Babylon) as the first kingdom. History identifies the kingdoms that follow Babylon as Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome.

2:37-38 – **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) and these times would last until Christ would return to destroy the kingdom of Antichrist during the Tribulation. Babylon kept the Jews in bondage about 65 years.

Nebuchadnezzar was a unique king. (1) He was called the “king of kings” (2:37). (2) His authority was described as a “kingdom, power, strength, and glory,” all of which came from God (2:37). (3) His dominion was over all men, beasts and fowl (compare this with the mandate given to Adam – Gen. 1:28; to Noah – Gen. 9:2; and to Christ – Ps. 8:6). God made Nebuchadnezzar a great king over a great nation (cf. Jer. 27:5-7), but he did not learn until later that the glory was God’s, not his (cf. Daniel 4). Nebuchadnezzar was an absolute monarch. He gave an account to no one, except God, and to no law, except to God’s laws

2:39 – **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).

Cyrus defeated many countries, including Babylon in 539 B.C. Its territory was much larger than Babylon, but the Medo-Persian empire was “inferior” to the glories of the Babylonian empire (compare “gold” with “silver”). Nebuchadnezzar was an absolute monarch, whereas Cyrus was subject to a small body of powerful leaders (the Medo-Persian empire was a monarchical oligarchy – cf. Esther 1:13-14). He also was subject to the law of the “Medes and Persians.” Medo-Persia ruled over the Jews almost 210 years.

2:39 – **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. 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 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.

2:40 – **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 is “the seed of men,” which says some of these kings are strong as iron and some are weak as pottery and easily broken (2:43). (More details concerning these kingdoms will be studied in later chapters of Daniel.)

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. Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon killed many Jews, destroyed Jerusalem, demolished its temple and took some of the Jews out their land and brought them to his land as captives where they stayed throughout Babylon’s rule. However, Nebuchadnezzar, the head of gold, humbly submitted himself to God and blessed Him for disciplining him (Dan 4:29-37). During his reign many Jews prospered in Babylon and decided to stay after they were set free by Cyrus, the Persian ruler. Several Persians, depicted by silver, helped the Jews. Cyrus was called God’s servant and allowed the Jews to return to their land and build their temple. Xerxes married Esther and she along with Mordecai spared the Jews from being destroyed by Haman, who made a decree that all of the Jews be destroyed. Instead, he, his family and his followers were destroyed. Soon afterward, Artaxerxes permitted Nehemiah to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Alexander, the Greek, as first ruler of the bronze empire, spared Jerusalem from destruction as a result of a vision he had received from God in Macedonia. He also was favorable to the Jews when the chief priest showed him the Scriptures in Daniel 8 that he would defeat the Persians. In the later years of the Greek kingdom, however, the strength of the bronze metal is revealed in Antiochus Epiphanes, a ruler of the Greek Seleucid kingdom. He corrupted the Jews with the Greek idolatry and immorality and persecuted those that resisted his efforts with the slaughter of many faithful Jews. He is a type of Antichrist in his wickedness (Dan 8). The strength of iron in the Roman empire is seen in its crucifixion of Christ, the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple and the massacre of thousands of Jews that were hunted down like wild animals until they were scattered to all parts of the world to survive. Antichrist and his ten allied kings of the revived Roman Empire, the feet of iron and clay, will be the worst persecutors of the Jews during the last 3½ years of the Tribulation. He will have the full authority of Satan in his attempt to destroy Jerusalem and every Jew on the earth. All of the rebellion against God of these earlier kingdoms is present in this final kingdom that goes to battle against the Jews. Jesus called the rule of the Gentile nations over the Jews as “the times of the Gentiles” (Luke 21:24).

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).

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

2:44-45 – 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\* (2:44). These “kings” may refer to the ten kings of revived Rome, because the toes are specifically mentioned in 2:41-42, which relate to the ten horns in 7:24. But the revelation about the ten kings in 7:24 did not come until 50 years later. It is more likely the kings in the context of Daniel’s interpretation refers to the kings in the kingdoms of gold, silver, bronze, iron and clay that are ground up by the Stone at the end of the Tribulation (2:35, 45).

(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 (2:44).

(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 these things to Nebuchadnezzar (and to us) so that he might know the things that He has planned for His glory in the future. God revealed these things to Nebuchadnezzar for his benefit so he might turn to Him from his false gods. They could not reveal His dream, so they were of no value to him about knowing the future of the world or of his own life. He needed to trust in the true God who knew

the future because He planned the future. Daniel told him the dream was true and its interpretation was trustworthy. As such God has revealed the future for the benefit of all people who will heed its message.

### C. The Stone

Daniel 2:34-35 and 2:44-45 are critical 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

### A. His Testimony Acknowledged – 2:46-47

2:46 – Nebuchadnezzar humbled himself before Daniel (literally, he "fell on his face and did homage to Daniel"), and honored him with the burning of incense.

2:47 – Nebuchadnezzar recognized, however, that it was Daniel's God Who had performed the miracle, as Daniel himself had attested. It is very doubtful, though, that this pagan king began to worship Daniel's God exclusively. He simply added Him to a prominent place with his other gods. But He is the "God of gods," the only true God.

### B. His Position Advanced – 2:48

2:48 – Beside the great gifts, Nebuchadnezzar also gave Daniel two positions: (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's wisdom was proverbial by 587 B.C. when Ezekiel referred to him in his prophecy (Ezk. 28:3). Ezekiel prophesied against Egypt on January 7 and June 21, 587 B.C. (Ezk. 29:1; 31:1ff).

### C. His Friends Awarded – 2:49

2:49 – 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 chief counselor (sitting "in the gate of the king").

# NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DREAM OF AN IMAGE

## BABYLON

### GOLD

Nebuchadnezzar was the head of the image

## MEDO-PERSIA

### SILVER

Two arms [Medes and the Persians] united in the breast [one empire]

## GREECE

### BRONZE

Belly [one empire] and 2 thighs [2 Greek nations attack Israel: Egypt and Syria]

## ANCIENT ROME

### IRON

Two legs represented the Eastern and Western divisions of the empire

## FUTURE ROME

### IRON & CLAY (pottery)

Feet (10 toes) represent the future Roman Empire led by Antichrist. It will have the strength of iron and weakness of pottery

## MESSIANIC

### STONE

It will be set up in the days of the 10 kings.

It will be set up by God.

It will never be destroyed; it will stand forever.

It will not be passed on to others.

It is cut out of the mountain (God's Kingdom).

Is cut without hands (a work of God, not men)

Stone pulverizes the image.

Stone becomes a mountain that fills the earth,

