



AN INTRODUCTION TO BIBLE PROPHECY

The Dream of Empires

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Daniel 2 The Dream of Empires

1 ¶ And in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar dreamed dreams, wherewith his spirit was troubled, and his sleep brake from him.

2 Then the king commanded to call the magicians, and the astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans, for to shew the king his dreams. So they came and stood before the king.

3 And the king said unto them, I have dreamed a dream, and my spirit was troubled to know the dream.

4 Then spake the Chaldeans to the king in Syriack, O king, live for ever: tell thy servants the dream, and we will shew the interpretation. *{O king...: (Chaldee, to the end of chapter seven)}*

5 The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, The thing is gone from me: if ye will not make known unto me the dream, with the interpretation thereof, ye shall be cut in pieces, and your houses shall be made a dunghill. *{cut...: Chaldee, made pieces}*

6 But if ye shew the dream, and the interpretation thereof, ye shall receive of me gifts and rewards and great honour: therefore shew me the dream, and the interpretation thereof. *{rewards: or, fee}*

7 They answered again and said, Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will shew the interpretation of it.

8 The king answered and said, I know of certainty that ye would gain the time, because ye see the thing is gone from me. *{gain: Chaldee, buy}*

9 But if ye will not make known unto me the dream, there is but one decree for you: for ye have prepared lying and corrupt words to speak before me, till the time be changed: therefore tell me the dream, and I shall know that ye can shew me the interpretation thereof.

10 The Chaldeans answered before the king, and said, There is not a man upon the earth that can shew the king's matter: therefore there is no king, lord, nor ruler, that asked such things at any magician, or astrologer, or Chaldean.

11 And it is a rare thing that the king requireth, and there is none other that can shew it before the king, except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh.

12 For this cause the king was angry and very furious, and commanded to destroy all the wise men of Babylon.

13 And the decree went forth that the wise men should be slain; and they sought Daniel and his fellows to be slain.

14 ¶ Then Daniel answered with counsel and wisdom to Arioch the captain of the king's guard, which was gone forth to slay the wise men of Babylon: *{answered...: Chaldee, returned}* *{captain...: or, chief marshal: Chaldee, chief of the executioners, or, slaughtermen}*

15 He answered and said to Arioch the king's captain, Why is the decree so hasty from the king? Then Arioch made the thing known to Daniel.

16 Then Daniel went in, and desired of the king that he would give him time, and that he would shew the king the interpretation.

17 Then Daniel went to his house, and made the thing known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions:

18 That they would desire mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret; that Daniel and his fellows should not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. *{of the God: Chaldee, from before God}* *{that Daniel...: or, that they should not destroy Daniel, etc}*

19 Then was the secret revealed unto Daniel in a night vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven.

20 Daniel answered and said, Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his:

21 And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding:

22 He revealeth the deep and secret things: he knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him.

23 I thank thee, and praise thee, O thou God of my fathers, who hast given me wisdom and might, and hast made known unto me now what we desired of thee: for thou hast now made known unto us the king's matter.

24 ¶ Therefore Daniel went in unto Arioch, whom the king had ordained to destroy the wise men of Babylon: he went and said thus unto him; Destroy not the wise men of Babylon: bring me in before the king, and I will shew unto the king the interpretation.

25 Then Arioch brought in Daniel before the king in haste, and said thus unto him, I have found a man of the captives of Judah, that will make known unto the king the interpretation. *{I have...: Chaldee, That I have found}* *{captives...: Chaldee, children of the captivity of Judah}*

26 The king answered and said to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, Art thou able to make known unto me the dream which I have seen, and the interpretation thereof?

27 Daniel answered in the presence of the king, and said, The secret which the king hath demanded cannot the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, the soothsayers, shew unto the king;

28 But there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days. Thy dream, and the visions of thy head upon thy bed, are these; *{maketh...: Chaldee, hath made known}*

29 As for thee, O king, thy thoughts came into thy mind upon thy bed, what should come to pass hereafter: and he that revealeth secrets maketh known to thee what shall come to pass. *{came: Chaldee, came up}*

30 But as for me, this secret is not revealed to me for any wisdom that I have more than any living, but for their sakes that shall make known the interpretation to the king, and that thou mightest know the thoughts of thy heart. *{but for...: or, but for the intent that the interpretation may be made known to the king}*

31 ¶ Thou, O king, sawest, and behold a great image. This great image, whose brightness was excellent, stood before thee; and the form thereof was terrible. *{sawest: Chaldee, wast seeing}*

32 This image's head was of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, *{thighs: or, sides}*

33 His legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay.

34 Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. *{without...: or, which was not in hands}*

35 Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth.

36 This is the dream; and we will tell the interpretation thereof before the king.

37 Thou, O king, art a king of kings: for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory.

38 And wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the heaven hath he given into thine hand, and hath made thee ruler over them all. Thou art this head of gold.

39 And after thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee, and another third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth.

40 And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron: forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things: and as iron that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise.

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

42 And as the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken. *{broken: or, brittle}*

43 And whereas thou sawest iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men: but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay. *{one...: Chaldee, this with this}*

44 And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. *{the days: Chaldee, their days} {the kingdom: Chaldee, the kingdom thereof}*

45 Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure. *{without...: or, which was not in hands} {hereafter: Chaldee, after this}*

46 ¶ Then the king Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face, and worshipped Daniel, and commanded that they should offer an oblation and sweet odours unto him.

47 The king answered unto Daniel, and said, Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, seeing thou couldest reveal this secret.

48 Then the king made Daniel a great man, and gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon.

49 Then Daniel requested of the king, and he set Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, over the affairs of the province of Babylon: but Daniel sat in the gate of the king.

The Dream Search for an interpreter

Dan 2:1

- 1 ¶ And in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar dreamed dreams, wherewith his spirit was troubled, and his sleep brake from him.

An inhabitant of Babylon regarded a dream as equivalent to reality, so that to see a god in a dream was equivalent to seeing him in real life (Contenau). Dreams were important, and it was quite natural that the king should seek to discover what it portended. He therefore summons help.

Dan 2:2

- 2 Then the king commanded to call the magicians, and the astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans, for to shew the king his dreams. So they came and stood before the king.

The book of Daniel suffered severely at the hands of critics who can in no way accept the conclusion that must be drawn from the wonderful prophecies of this book. It is noteworthy that when we look at a verse such as this that before the discovery and understanding of cuneiform texts we had no knowledge of the specialised branches of divination, magic and medicine and the classes that then existed. However it has been established that in these words of Daniel we have a contemporary record of the circumstances which existed in Babylon. They need not detain us now, but we must make the point that the authenticity of the narrative has been endorsed.

Dan 2:3

- 3 And the king said unto them, I have dreamed a dream, and my spirit was troubled to know the dream.

Clearly some shadow or trace of the dream remained in the mind of the king, so that he could not be deceived by any pretensions.

Dan 2:4

- 4 Then spake the Chaldeans to the king in Syriack, O king, live for ever: tell thy servants the dream, and we will shew the interpretation. *{O king...: (Chaldee, to the end of chapter seven)}*

This illustrious group respond in Aramaic, the language of the court, with the usual stereotyped formula, and make their request to be given some details.

Nebuchadnezzar however is a mighty tyrant, the most powerful person on earth, accustomed to the satisfaction of every whim, and demands on pain of death and destruction, an answer to his original demand

Dan 2:5,6

- 5 The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, The thing is gone from me: if ye will not make known unto me the dream, with the interpretation thereof, ye shall be cut in pieces, and your houses shall be made a dunghill. *{cut...: Chaldee, made pieces}*
- 6 But if ye shew the dream, and the interpretation thereof, ye shall receive of me gifts and rewards and great honour: therefore shew me the dream, and the interpretation thereof. *{rewards: or, fee}*

Recent translators have taken an ambiguity in the words "the thing is gone from me" as referring to the word or decree of Nebuchadnezzar, i.e. "I am resolved". Our opinion is that the traditional meaning, the dream is gone from me is to be preferred. Once again the colourful language shows a very accurate acquaintance with Babylon, and the chronic insecurity of the nobility is clear elsewhere, e.g. in chapter one, where the first thought of the prince of the eunuchs is that any deviation from the king's word puts his head in danger. The slightest misdemeanour and they were subject to cruel and violent punishment. So here was a dilemma.

Dan 2:7

- 7 They answered again and said, Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will shew the interpretation of it.

All these pretenders might very well predict the future without risk of immediate contradiction; but to tell the nature of someone else's dream was beyond their power. And yet if they had any powers the one would have been as easy as the other. And yet still people in much more recent times have resorted to, for example spiritualists who would just as easily be confounded by the demands of Nebuchadnezzar. Well Nebuchadnezzar's blood pressure rises again.

Dan 2:8,9

- 8 The king answered and said, I know of certainty that ye would gain the time, because ye see the thing is gone from me. *{gain: Chaldee, buy}*
- 9 But if ye will not make known unto me the dream, there is but one decree for you: for ye have prepared lying and corrupt words to speak before me, till the time be changed: therefore tell me the dream, and I shall know that ye can shew me the interpretation thereof.

It's getting desperate, the wise have been taken in their own craftiness, they are forced to describe their limitations.

Dan 2:10,11

- 10 The Chaldeans answered before the king, and said, There is not a man upon the earth that can shew the king's matter: therefore there is no king, lord, nor ruler, that asked such things at any magician, or astrologer, or Chaldean.
- 11 And it is a rare thing that the king requireth, and there is none other that can shew it before the king, except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh.

Some things they could do in collaboration with the lesser gods, but rare things were restricted to the superior gods whose dwelling is not with flesh.

The pride of absolute power was not interested in sweet reasonableness, and it was not much of a showing for those who practised divination. The god Shamash was one of the gods regarded as a 'lord of divination'. As the sun god, it not only saw everything, it also knew the future. The diviners didn't seem to be on very good terms with it somehow! So Nebuchadnezzar finally flips.

Dan 2:12,13

- 12 For this cause the king was angry and very furious, and commanded to destroy all the wise men of Babylon.
- 13 And the decree went forth that the wise men should be slain; and they sought Daniel and his fellows to be slain.

The slaughter had probably commenced, but Daniel, probably hitherto uninvolved because he was merely being inducted and serving apprenticeship, obtains a stay of execution.

Dan 2:14-16

- 14 ¶ Then Daniel answered with counsel and wisdom to Arioch the captain of the king's guard, which was gone forth to slay the wise men of Babylon: *{answered...: Chaldee, returned} {captain...: or, chief marshal: Chaldee, chief of the executioners, or, slaughtermen}*
- 15 He answered and said to Arioch the king's captain, Why is the decree so hasty from the king? Then Arioch made the thing known to Daniel.
- 16 Then Daniel went in, and desired of the king that he would give him time, and that he would shew the king the interpretation.

Daniel's conduct was the reverse of the prevarications of the astrologers. Daniel straightforwardly and honestly asks for time, time which is suitably exercised in fervent prayer and petition to the one and only God who could answer the demands of the King

Dan 2:17-23

- 17 Then Daniel went to his house, and made the thing known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions:
- 18 That they would desire mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret; that Daniel and his fellows should not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. *{of the God: Chaldee, from before God} {that Daniel...: or, that they should not destroy Daniel, etc}*
- 19 Then was the secret revealed unto Daniel in a night vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven.
- 20 Daniel answered and said, Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his:
- 21 And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding:
- 22 He revealeth the deep and secret things: he knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him.
- 23 I thank thee, and praise thee, O thou God of my fathers, who hast given me wisdom and might, and hast made known unto me now what we desired of thee: for thou hast now made known unto us the king's matter.

Now perhaps quite importantly here we see the source of the true prophetic word. It does not lie in man, and all the pretensions of men to the power of the spirit of God are shown for what they are in the absence of the ability to declare the purpose and the mind of God.

Only the supreme God of heaven holds under his dominion times and seasons, subdivisions of time. He is not dependent on the "lucky" days of the Chaldean astrologer; he manipulates events, otherwise prophecy would never be fulfilled

Verse 24

- 24 ¶ Therefore Daniel went in unto Arioch, whom the king had ordained to destroy the wise men of Babylon: he went and said thus unto him; Destroy not the wise men of Babylon: bring me in before the king, and I will shew unto the king the interpretation.

Here we have the court etiquette elaborated. Daniel approaches Arioch to arrange an audience, and in verse 25 we find Arioch's formal courtly language in presenting him.

Verse 25

25 Then Arioch brought in Daniel before the king in haste, and said thus unto him, I have found a man of the captives of Judah, that will make known unto the king the interpretation. *{I have...: Chaldee, That I have found}* *{captives...: Chaldee, children of the captivity of Judah}*

Notice the manner of the king's courtier who, with good news to tell, ascribes to himself the ability of finding the man, when of course it had been Daniel that had taken the initiative - human nature does not change. The man of God however is only too careful to disclaim all merit, attributing the honour to the God of heaven.

Dan 2:26-28

26 The king answered and said to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, Art thou able to make known unto me the dream which I have seen, and the interpretation thereof?

27 Daniel answered in the presence of the king, and said, The secret which the king hath demanded cannot the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, the soothsayers, shew unto the king;

28 But there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days. Thy dream, and the visions of thy head upon thy bed, are these; *{maketh...: Chaldee, hath made known}*

The revealing of prophecy is unique to the God of heaven; he alone knows what shall be both, hereafter and in the latter days. The Chaldeans spoke of gods many but Daniel directs Nebuchadnezzar to one God. The one true God may be a God of heaven, and yet he did reveal to the sons of men his secrets.

Dan 2:29,30

29 As for thee, O king, thy thoughts came into thy mind upon thy bed, what should come to pass hereafter: and he that revealeth secrets maketh known to thee what shall come to pass. *{came: Chaldee, came up}*

30 But as for me, this secret is not revealed to me for any wisdom that I have more than any living, but for their sakes that shall make known the interpretation to the king, and that thou mightest know the thoughts of thy heart. *{but for...: or, but for the intent that the interpretation may be made known to the king}*

Daniel provides a natural explanation of the origin of the dream as being the king's thoughts agitating him. Here he was a monster of a monarch yet denied rest. He was at the dawn of his power; schemes of conquest and ambition were being gloriously

fulfilled, what should happen in the future?

This irreligious tyrant was vouchsafed the dream, not because he deserved it, but that the God whose house at Jerusalem he had destroyed might be glorified, and that God's servants in captivity might have relief and consolation.

The dream bore the stamp of the living God and so although it was given to the king, his lips were not permitted to tell it, but only to wonder and give heed to the wisdom which comes from above.

What a contrast these two men make, the egocentric Nebuchadnezzar and the pious man of God, disclaiming all pretensions to wisdom and honour.

The Dream Itself

Nebuchadnezzar's dream was of a great image (the word translated image itself is employed on an Assyrian obelisk to describe what is of vast proportions) and we can do nothing better now than to get the picture from scripture

Dan 2:31-45

- 31 ¶ Thou, O king, sawest, and behold a great image. This great image, whose brightness was excellent, stood before thee; and the form thereof was terrible. *{sawest: Chaldee, wast seeing}*
- 32 This image's head was of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, *{thighs: or, sides}*
- 33 His legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay.
- 34 Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. *{without...: or, which was not in hands}*
- 35 Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth.
- 36 This is the dream; and we will tell the interpretation thereof before the king.
- 37 Thou, O king, art a king of kings: for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory.
- 38 And wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the heaven hath he given into thine hand, and hath made thee ruler over them all. Thou art this head of gold.
- 39 And after thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee, and another third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth.
- 40 And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron: forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things: and as iron that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise.
- 41 And whereas thou sawest the feet and toes, part of potters' clay, and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; but there shall be in it of the strength of the iron, forasmuch as thou sawest the iron mixed with miry clay.
- 42 And as the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken. *{broken: or, brittle}*



- 43 And whereas thou sawest iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men: but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay. *{one...: Chaldee, this with this}*
- 44 And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. *{the days: Chaldee, their days}* *{the kingdom: Chaldee, the kingdom thereof}*
- 45 Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure. *{without...: or, which was not in hands}* *{hereafter: Chaldee, after this}*

Here then in the representation of an image was a figure of unity, yet there was diversity in the construction as it was comprised of various metals.

There was a head of gold, breast and arms of silver, belly and thighs of brass, legs of iron and feet of iron mixed with clay.

Notice how unstable this image was. The heaviest metals at the top gave way to metals of a lower density at each stage. It was fundamentally unstable, yet it appeared to the idolater splendid and awesome, representing some mighty power.

What better could have typified the dominions of man? The whole was nothing but showy power, flamboyantly exhibited by he who, at the root, is nothing but a handful of clay.

The Interpretation

The kingdoms, being numbered, and the first being so plainly designated as Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon, we shall find no difficulty in the interpretation.



Babylon

All the glory that was Nebuchadnezzar's shone in the head of gold. Georges Contenau in his "Everyday life in Babylon and Assyria" has this comment on metals: 'Generally as the names which they gave their metals show, the inhabitants of Mesopotamia gave pride of place to gold 'the strong and shining and durable'. Next came silver 'the shining white'. In the period of the Babylonian empire an examination of contracts reveals the ratios of gold to silver. In the 4th year of Nebuchadnezzar we find that gold was 15 times the value of silver, but that this declined in the later reign of Nabonidus to between 8 and 12 times the value of silver.'

Copper is similarly shown to be of much reduced value and iron a lesser value still.

Nothing expressed the delight in an ostentatious display of might and wealth of Nebuchadnezzar with his altars of solid gold, than a head of this most cherished metal. The following chapter, chapter 3, indicates how superficial the King's appreciation of Divine ways really was, for in verse 1 we read that he erects an image entirely of gold. Herodotus, the Greek historian, visited Babylon some ninety years after the reign of Nebuchadnezzar and describes his astonishment at the amount of this precious metal lavished on the sacred temples of the city.



Medo-Persia

There is a contrast between Babylon and its show with the hoarding of currency in the state treasury for transactions between countries and the payment of mercenaries. The Persians had gold and silver currency, and values were often expressed in terms of the silver shekel. (See also Esther 3:9). It may be noted that the original word selected for breast is that used for animals rather than humans – such is the divine estimate of the superficial magnificence of the vision! The duality of the figure indicates the joining of Medes and Persians.



Greek

The Greeks were workers in bronze, golden and bright. Bronze hammer and cast work were important crafts of ancient Greece. (Brit) (Ezekiel refers to the Javan people, Asiatic Greeks, who traded with Tyre for vessels of brass. Ez 27:13)

This was aptly representative of the brassen coated Greeks. Bronze was the most frequently used metal for body armour in Hellenistic times. The head was protected by a bronze helmet, and the body with a bronze cuirass, (i.e. close fitting armour) the thighs being loosely protected by labels hanging from the cuirass, the shins being protected by bronze, what we might call shin pads, shaped to the leg, and a large shield with a bronze covering was carried in the left hand. (Brit)

Remarkably enough the 7th edition of Liddell and Scott's Greek lexicon has one hundred and sixty four words containing the root chalc (brass) while there are only eighty four compounds containing the word silver and seventy one for iron, clearly showing the supremacy of this metal in the third kingdom.



Roman

We may contrast with the brazen coated Greek the Roman legionary with his round iron helmet and his cuirass of iron plates on leather backing, his iron sword, his javelin with its iron head and sandals of leather with iron studs in the soles (The Romans - MacDonald)

This fourth kingdom was indeed as strong as iron, in every way. Gibbon in the decline and fall of the Roman Empire accepts the language of the prophecy as aptly describing the triumphant march of Rome. "The arms of the Republic, sometimes vanquished in battle, always victorious in war, advanced with rapid steps to the Euphrates, the Danube the Rhine and the ocean; and the images of gold, of silver, of brass that might serve to represent the nations and their kings were successively broken by the iron monarchy of Rome.

Behind the iron strength lay an iron nature, a stern self control, a fearfully strict military discipline for any deviation from orders received. The choice of the metal lay in its power as an instrument of destruction. Just as iron "breaketh in pieces" by beating or crushing, "subdues all things" by hammering and beating thin, so Rome should break in pieces and bruise.

It was a solemnly held destiny which Virgil, in some lines captures

But Roman, thou do thou control
The nations far and wide
Be this thy genius - to impose
The rule of peace on vanquished foes
Show pity to the humblest soul
And **crush** the sons of pride

Thus was Carthage blotted out, a city in flames for 17 days with 700,000 souls exterminated. While there must obviously be variations in the duration of the empire, nevertheless one has spoken of the blood-drenched soil of Roman glory summing up Roman history in two words "ravage and destruction". "It was", he says, as if the iron-footed god of war, Aradivus, so highly revered of old by the people of Romulus, actually bestrode the globe

Although it was one dominion, it is nevertheless represented as twofold. In the second dominion we see two arms welded into one breast, so was the history of the Medo Persians. However the Roman power was to be reversed. The two parts were to separate. Once again the outworking of history shows that it became twofold, being divided into East and West. After the year 395 the empire was never ruled again by a single emperor (Brit) but by two or more colleagues, one in the east and one or more in the west, all with equal rights. In theory and in many ways in practice the empire remained a single unit, until the western empire was overthrown in 476 by the barbarian invasions throughout Europe. The Eastern part survived until the capture of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453.

The Iron & Clay



Verse 41

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

The kingdom divided and of unequal strength in its parts.

Thus this territory controlled by the fourth empire was split irredeemably into fragments. It was not conquered by a single power, but simply disintegrated, and its remains in the feet and toes an outgrowth of that power. Further it has endured in fragments and will continue to do so until this preposterous image meets its doom. Despite many determined attempts, by for example, Napoleon and Hitler, these fragments cannot be welded together into a whole, at least not unless it unites temporarily to resist the stone power. The prophecy clearly indicates the absence of any further all conquering empire.

Verse 42

42 And as the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken. *{broken: or, brittle}*

The history of the **territory** of the Roman empire merits little exposition. Peace could never endure for long during the blood stained history of Europe. Repeatedly its map been redrawn for its nations, some weak, some strong.

Verse 43

43 And whereas thou sawest iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men: but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay. *{one...: Chaldee, this with this}*

Here is a difficult verse. Fitting interpretations can be suggested although it is not something we would wish to be dogmatic about in every detail.

First of all what is clear is that we have the totally inferior substance of clay introduced. Clay scripturally relates to man himself, formed from the earth. In the book of Job we find references to being formed from the clay, Isaiah incorporates the petition, "O Lord thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we are all the work of thy hand" (64:8) and again, "Woe to him that striveth with his maker. Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth." This brittle substance that mixes alongside the iron, mere pottery amply illustrates the rise of the common man. Kings and commoners would mingle and their stations would change. Autocrats might continue but the rulers would be comprised of commoners, their brief blaze of glory, not for a lifetime but for the duration of an election.

The nations would not cleave together, the forging of these nations into one unit would not happen.

Some have found a veiled allusion to the failure of the nations to cleave together in domestic harmony as well. God's requirement that a man should cleave to his wife in marriage, is of course being utterly spurned with dreadful consequences for national and family life, and their seems to be few champions today for this cause, either from King or church, as the church itself cannot cope with the spirit of the age, with its marital separation and divorce. As Clifford Longley wrote in 'The Telegraph' in 1994 a church that marries the spirit of the age ends up a widow, or in this case a divorcee.

With what blessed relief then that in the days of these kings the God of heaven shall set up a kingdom. Before we proceed to verse 44 we might well ask the significance of the debasement of the metals in the image. The kingdoms grow in size, they become stronger, so in what way can they be said to become inferior?

The reason would seem to be the change throughout this period of the history of man, the general change from autocracy to democracy and communism. Nebuchadnezzar, proud despot that he was, is described in this book of Daniel, "whom he would he slew, whom he would he kept alive." To the man of ambition who seeks absolute power, then the tyrant Nebuchadnezzar held the supreme position. In what has been termed the childhood of history it has been said all right and power centre in the monarch, who as patriarch...stands at the head.

Dan 5:18,19

- 18 O thou king, the most high God gave
Nebuchadnezzar thy father a kingdom,
and majesty, and glory, and honour:
- 19 And for the majesty that he gave him, all people,

nations, and languages, trembled and feared before him: whom he would he slew; and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he set up; and whom he would he put down.

In contrast the Roman power was circumscribed by the state and the senate, while today in the clay we see the age of the common man.

The Transience of Man

Verses 44,45

- 44 And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. *{the days: Chaldee, their days}*
{the kingdom: Chaldee, the kingdom thereof}
- 45 Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure. *{without...: or, which was not in hands}* *{hereafter: Chaldee, after this}*

There is not the slightest doubt as to the purpose of God which is outlined in the Bible that the earth is to be filled with his glory. The world is destined to experience an immensely more important and fundamental change than it has ever seen, with the establishment of the kingdom of God. The means by which this is to be achieved appears unremarkable. The king saw merely a humble stone. Yet it was not the first time in scripture that a simple stone had brought a towering champion to the ground. David who became king had by such simple and effective means toppled the massively built champion of the Philistines.

The contrast between the image and the stone must make an impression upon the thoughtful. The image is formed of the most precious metals - the stone apparently worthless - yet the earthly splendour crumbles away, while the stone becomes a mountain and fills the earth. So all worldly greatness decays, just as man himself is at best, as described by scripture, as the "flower of the field" which is particularly in the Eastern summer, "here today and gone tomorrow". "All flesh", says the prophet, echoed by the apostle, "is grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away; BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD ENDURETH FOR EVER."

So it is with nations. People come and people go. Cities are built and cities crumble into dust. Nations arise and nations vanish away.

Dictators, tyrants, despots, kings and princes, it matters not how exalted their station, they have endured no more than a few brief years and after their momentary blaze of glory such shooting stars in the political firmament have fallen into the mist and darkness of time,

The whole history of mankind is comprised of events caused by continual change and turmoil with nothing permanent and all its achievements doomed at length to decadence and decay.

'Behold our progress! the Babylonian cried
- viewing beneath the brilliant blazing sky

The lofty towers, the walls of sun-baked brick, the brazen gates, the ponderous ramparts high,

The roll of chariots in the narrow ways, the glittering crowd close thronging mart and street,

The gleaming flash of spears beneath the sun, the shaking tread of conquering legions feet-

Behold our progress and enlightenment! WE are the people! We shall surely stand.

- and speaking thus they passed.'

And yet as we saw in another article:

The moon shines cold above the desert sands,
The thin winds whimper lone across the waste;

The shifting dunes long since have rolled and closed
Above dead cities ages-long effaced.

The monuments and towers are overthrown,
The tablets moulder in the sword blade's rust,

And all the glory that the past has known
Has crumbled, like the builders - into dust

Although that verse was written of the Assyrian, it applies with equal force to Babylon.

And so the poet has similarly derided the tramp of Rome and the nations of modern times, partly brittle and partly strong, but their end is appointed.

So the point to which we now wish to draw your attention is to the kingdom that is no part of the image, that owns a supernatural origin, smites the image, grinds it to powder, takes its place, blots it out of existence and fills the whole earth.

The Stone

Verse 34,35

34 Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. *{without...: or, which was not in hands}*

35 Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth.

A stone cut out of the mountain without hands is a miracle. It is a most appropriate emblem of Christ in both his miraculous birth and his resurrection.

In fact Jesus applies this symbol to himself, as we find in the gospel of Matthew chapter 21. Addressing the unbelieving Jews he asks them:

Matt 21:42

Did ye never read in the scriptures? The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner; this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes.

This is a quotation from Isaiah, and in fact the symbology of a stone applying to the Messiah is very well established in scriptures. We even have a prophecy of Jacob in Genesis which speaks of the "stone of Israel", and we could spend a very profitable study tracing through the various references.

The rejection of Jesus did indeed become to the Jews as a stone of stumbling and rock of offence, as it is described. And yet a worse punishment still was indicated by Jesus in verse 44.

Matt 21:44

And whosoever shall fall upon this stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.

When then shall this great event take place? It cannot have been at Jesus first coming, for the stone falls on the feet of the image, and no earthly monarch was destroyed by him or his disciples. On the authority of this prophecy alone we may confidently assert that Jesus is destined to fall on the nations in their present divided state prior to the establishment of his kingdom on earth.

The Breaking of the Image

The ostentatious pride, the pomp, and the power of man will be shattered by this irresistible force. Worldly politics will irredeemably crumble into dust. It will all be reduced to what is described as the chaff of the summer threshing floors.

Chaff is used in scripture as a symbol of that which is worthless. In ancient times grain was separated from the chaff by the process of winnowing. In an elevated place that which had been harvested was thrown in the air, the breeze carried away the chaff and the grain fell to the earth and was retained.

A Great Mountain

The stone power having commenced its shattering blow defeating the powers who have gathered at Jerusalem expands its territory by conquest of the whole earth.

However the detail of this we reserve for another article.

Suffice it to quote from the prophet Micah

Micah 4:1,2

- 1 ¶ But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it.
- 2 And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

Conclusion

Once again in these prophecies we come face to face with an inspiration which no honest heart will try to explain away or deny. And not only does it demonstrate the full inspiration of scripture it proves that God reigns in the earth and guides it on to good. It reminds us that, as the past has accomplished his will, so the present and future will lead to the world's salvation. The stone, miraculous in origin, cut out of the mountainside without hands, will yet smite the image on its feet and grind the whole to powder. Christ will come again, and righteousness and love and peace will bless the earth, which the dominion of man has scourged and so often destroyed. Let us echo the prayer of the Master himself, "Thy Kingdom Come".

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