

Study Guide #6: God vs. the Image

Introduction

Daniel 2 tells the story about the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar, who had a dream that troubled him, but that he couldn't remember. Dreams in ancient times were especially viewed as important pictures of future events or experiences, making it vitally important for Nebuchadnezzar to know and understand his dream. After threatening to execute all his wise men and counselors for not being able to reveal and interpret the king's dream, the Jewish prophet Daniel, who was one of his advisors, prayed and God gave him Nebuchadnezzar's dream and its interpretation (Daniel 2:2 onward). This Study Guide shows what this pagan king's dream meant and offers a revealing glance into God's sovereign power and future plans, at least in broad outlines.

Question #1: What was Nebuchadnezzar's dream?

Answer: Read Daniel 2 before proceeding any further. The dream consisted of a large image of a man, with different metals on different parts of his body. (a) His head was made of gold, (b) his arms and chest were made of silver, (c) his belly and thighs were made of bronze, (d) his legs were of iron, and (e) his feet and toes were made of iron mixed with clay (vv. 32-33). Finally, a stone came and struck the metal image on its feet, crushing it and scattering its pieces, before becoming a mountain that filled the whole earth (vv. 34-35).



Daniel 2's Image

Question #2: What do the different parts of the image's body represent?

Answer: According to Daniel 2:37-38, Nebuchadnezzar was represented by the head of gold. Then verses 39-40 describe a series of 3 additional successive kingdoms that follow him. This tells us that the head of gold was Nebuchadnezzar as the representative of his kingdom, which we know from secular history was Babylon (technically, Neo-Babylonia). Secular history identifies all 4 successive kingdoms as follows: (1) Neo-Babylonia; (2) Medo-Persia; (3) Greece; and (4) Rome.

Not only does history tell us that Daniel's prophecy was completely accurate, even the different metals in Daniel 2 were later known to be associated with the correct kingdom. For example, we know that gold was a dominant and accurate symbol of ancient Babylon. The Medes and the Persians were known for their silver weapons and shields. The Greeks were known for their use of bronze. Even Rome was called the "iron monarchy" by the infamous critic of Christianity, the British historian Edward Gibbon, who called Rome this in his epic work entitled *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (published in 1776).

Question #3: What do the feet and toes represent?

Answer: According to Daniel 2:41-43, the feet and toes of iron mixed with clay represents the 4th kingdom that would be divided into other smaller kingdoms, **“partly strong and partly fragile”** (v. 42, NKJV). There would be concerted efforts to unite them into one stronger kingdom, even by means of arranged marriages (**“they will mingle with the seed of men, but they will not adhere to one another,”** v. 43, NKJV). European history is filled with conscious attempts by several royal families to use arranged marriages in order to keep the peace among themselves. Before British Queen Victoria’s death, she was called “the grandmother of Europe” because most of the kings, emperors, or czars of the major European nations involved in World War I were all related to her. So much for blood being thicker than water! The prophecy clearly declared, **“they will not adhere to one another”** (v. 43). Political leaders like Charlemagne, Napoleon, and Hitler attempted to unite Western Europe, but their efforts were either incomplete or ended in failure. Since World War II, the Council of Europe, the European Economic Community (better known as the European Common Market), and the European Union have moved Europe closer to political unity, but the prophecy remains. [NOTE: Some day there will be a temporary unity of purpose, but it will be short-lived because God’s kingdom will quickly intervene and crush it—see Questions #4, #9, and #10.]



Queen Victoria

Question #4: What happens to the image of the man in the king’s dream?

Answer: After an unspecified time during the divided kingdoms, **“in the days of these kings [the divided kingdoms from the former Western Roman Empire] the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever”** (Daniel 2:44, NKJV). God’s kingdom is represented by the stone that crushed the image of the man and **“became a great mountain and filled the whole earth”** (Daniel 2:35, NKJV).

Question #5: Would you summarize the highlights of this prophecy?

Answer: Yes. The essential points of this prophecy are outlined below:

Symbols

Head of Gold
Chest & Arms of Silver
Belly & Thigh of Bronze
Legs of Iron
Feet/Toes of Iron & Clay
Stone/Mountain

Interpretation

Babylon (Neo-Babylonia)
Medo-Persia
Greece
Rome
Divided Western Europe
God’s Kingdom

Question #6: Why do some scholars identify the 4 kingdoms differently?

Answer: Scholars known as preterists identify the 4 world kingdoms as Babylon, Media, Persia, and Greece. However, that's *not* the correct list for several good reasons. *First*, Daniel 8:20 refers to the dual



Cyrus the Great

kingdom of Media and Persia (or Medo-Persia). *Second*, secular history records that it was the dual kingdom of Medo-Persia led by Persian King Cyrus the Great that defeated and replaced Babylon in 539 B.C. *Finally*, this interpretation that divides Media and Persia into 2 separate kingdoms leaves no room for Rome, which is a huge omission. Therefore, the correct list of the 4 world kingdoms are as we listed them above—(1) Babylon; (2) Medo-Persia; (3) Greece; and (4) Rome. [NOTE: Preterists are scholars who view the apocalyptic prophecies as primarily pertaining to past events, not present or future ones.]

Question #7: Why does this prophecy ignore other world kingdoms or empires, such as those in China and India?

Answer: Bible history is concerned with God's *professed* people, and the nations they interact with. During most of the Biblical era, this was the physical descendants of Abraham, which became the nations of Israel and Judah. By their geographical location, the nations that interacted with them were also located in the Near East and Mediterranean area—nations such as Philistia, Edom, Moab, Midian, Syria, Assyria, Egypt, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and the Roman Empire. Thus, Daniel could speak of the 4 kingdoms/empires that he did as comprising rulership “**over all the earth**” (Daniel 2:39, NKJV; cf. Daniel 7:23), without speaking in literal geographical terms. But that didn't mean that God is *not* concerned about other civilizations, such as the Chinese and Indian civilizations, which were great in their own right.

Question #8: How could Daniel have known the precise order of Near East and Mediterranean kingdoms that would follow Babylon?

Answer: As a human being, he could not have known the sequence of the kingdoms that followed Babylon. No one in the 6th century B.C., almost 1,100 years before the fall of the Roman Empire (as of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, Daniel 2:1), could possibly and naturally have predicted with any degree of accuracy the sequence of kingdoms that would arise after Babylon. It's true that Daniel lived to see the rise of Medo-Persia as a replacement for Babylon (Daniel chapters 6-11), if anyone wants to argue that he didn't write his book until after that event. However, he couldn't have predicted the successive dominant rise of Greece or Rome, or that Rome would be the last dominant power in that entire region of the world. Preterists believe that since Daniel could not have accurately predicted the future, that some Jewish scribe finished Daniel's book in the 2nd century B.C. after the Maccabean Revolt successfully ousted the Syrians from Jerusalem. But even if that were true, that doesn't account for his prediction of the 4th empire (Rome) or of a divided government in the West after the fall of Rome. Of course, if we believe that an eternal, timeless God exists, there's no trouble at all to believe that He gave the information about the future to Daniel. Moreover, Jesus Himself identified the prophet Daniel as the author of the book that bears his name

in Matthew 24:15, when He said, **“Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet...”** (NKJV; cf. Mark 13:14). People in Jesus’ day knew what Daniel had said because they had the book of Daniel. In this way, Jesus validated Daniel as the book that bears his name. For Christians, that ought to be a sufficient reason to believe that Daniel wrote the *entire* book, and that God gave him the information about future kingdoms.

Question #9: What is the focal point of the prophecy in Daniel 2?

Answer: When Daniel introduced Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and interpretation of it to the king, he told the king that God **“has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days”** (Daniel 2:28, NKJV). At the end of the dream, **“in the days of these kings [of the divided era of the feet and toes, v. 27] the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever”** (Daniel 2:44, NKJV). Therefore, the focal point of the prophecy in Daniel 2 is the end-time, when God’s kingdom will replace all human kingdoms. [NOTE: Any attempt to identify **“the latter days”** in verse 28 as the latter days of Nebuchadnezzar or Babylon ignores the large sweep of history in the prophecy and the emphasis on God’s everlasting kingdom.]

Question #10: What is the precise nature of God’s kingdom?

Answer: Amillennialists and some post-millennialists teach that the Stone Kingdom is God’s Kingdom of Grace in which He reigns through His Church on earth—which will gradually fill the earth as the Christian Church influence gains in strength and scope. Premillennialists teach that it’s God’s literal Kingdom on the earth. It cannot here represent the Church that will gradually fill the earth as some claim because the expression used in Daniel 2:34, 44, declares that the stone was cut out **“without hand.”** This phrase refers to activity that explicitly excludes all human participation (Job 34:20; Lamentations 4:6) and implicitly means that God did it directly without human participation. The Church was established by Jesus, but certainly not without human assistance and participation. *Second*, the stone struck the image of the man on its feet and toes (2:34), during the time of the divided Roman Empire, while Jesus’ kingdom of grace was launched at the 1st coming of Jesus in the 1st century A.D. during the Roman Empire (the legs of iron). *Finally*, Daniel 2:44 says that when God sets up His kingdom, it will destroy all human kingdoms and replace them. But the kingdom of grace operates through the Church when it coexists with human kingdoms. Therefore, in sequence, this Stone Kingdom refers to that which begins at the Second Coming of Jesus. [NOTE: See Explorer II, Study Guide #26 for further information about the millennium and the different positions on it. That Study Guide will show you that the Bible teaches that the 1st 1,000 years after the 2nd Coming of Jesus, His literal Kingdom is one in which He will reign in heaven, and then it will move to Planet Earth, where it will exist permanently.]

