

THE PROPHETIC EMPIRES

Scripture Reference: Daniel 2:31-45

Last session we looked at the prophetic time-table of Daniel’s 70 weeks. In addition to understanding that as the basic timeline for prophecy, we also must understand another passage of Daniel as it sets the stage for the major empires that play a role in God’s people. These are known as the “Beast Empires.” We’ll discuss that a little later.

In Daniel 2, the king has a dream and needs it to be interpreted.

QUESTION?	Who is this king and over what Empire does he rule?

Let’s first set some context:

Again, where are we in Hebrew history in this passage (see chart)?

What was the attitude and hope of the Hebrew people?

Now, let’s examine portions of this passage that relates to our study. Anytime there is a dream or vision that is recorded, it is referred to as “apocalyptic” literature. Another example of this (other than passages from *Daniel*) is the book of *Revelation*. The entire book is John writing down the “vision” or the “revelation” of Jesus to him. Innate to the apocalyptic literature is a combination of actual people and places/nations with lot of figures, symbols, and creatures which are representative of real-life people or nations. The key is using the “face-value” hermeneutic.

Often times, these apocalyptic symbols are accompanied by an interpretation informing us of the symbolic nature of the passage. That is the case we have here in the passage of Daniel 2. So, let’s examine the image and the interpretation together.

IMAGE

This image’s head was of fine gold... (vs. 32)

... chest and arms of silver...

INTERPRETATION

The Babylonian Empire (vs. 38)

...another kingdom inferior... (vs 39)
The Medo-Persian Empire

... belly and thighs of bronze...

... a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. This is Greek Empire which, under the leadership of Alexander the Great conquered nearly all of the known world.

... its legs of iron...

The fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron. This is the Roman Empire.

Let's pause here. There is a lot packed in this passage about Rome that, again, reveals the amazing accuracy of Scripture. Here are Gabriel's statements to Daniel about Rome that literally come true:

- 1) *"... and like iron that crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all others..* Prior to and perhaps not since has there been a more powerful empire than that of Rome. They annihilated everyone they fought.
- 2) *"... the kingdom shall be divided; yet the strength of the iron shall be in it..."* Shortly after AD 315, Emperor Constantine moved the capital city of Rome from Rome to the city of Byzantium (renamed to Constantinople which is the modern-day city of Istanbul, Turkey). When he did this, it essentially divided the Roman Empire into East and West. Later this seeming split evolved into a formal split between the East and the Western Roman Empire. The western Empire of Rome fell in AD 500. The Eastern Empire, later known as the Byzantine Empire, did not collapse until the 1400's. So, as Gabriel told Daniel, *"partly strong, partly fragile."* Now back to the image...

... its feet partly of iron and partly of clay..."

"As you saw iron mixed with ceramic clay, they will mingle with the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay. (vs. 43). As we will see in another vision later, there is a great deal of significance to the number "10" in the period following the Roman Empire. Here, these ten toes each represent a king/kingdom that seemingly come together but do not last. One truth to note is that each of these kingdoms have the strength of Rome (iron) in them.

... a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay,

"... And in the days of these king the God of heaven will set up a

and broke them in pieces.

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.
(44) The Kingdom of God, led by King Jesus (the stone) will utterly destroy all these kingdoms.

Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors

Chaff always refers to the discarded or “unrighteous”. Jesus often discussed “chaff” in terms of judgment.

Matthew 3:12 (NKJV)

¹² *His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."*

Thus, this last reference is to the coming together at some time in the future of all these crushed empires for judgment. This must be the *Great White Throne Judgment* revealed to John in Revelation 20:11-15.

...the wind carried them away so that to trace of them was found.

Like chaff, they are disposed of burned, and blown away by the wind out of God’s presence.

And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

Reference to the reign of Christ on earth, millennium and beyond.

SO, to recap, we have the following

- Golden Head = Babylon (626 – 539 B.C.)
- Silver Breast and Arms = Medo-Persian Empire (549 – 330 B.C.)
- Bronze Belly and Thighs = Greek Empire (330 – 62 B.C.)
- Legs of Iron = Roman Empire (62 B.C.– AD 500/1400)
- Ten Toes of Iron & Clay = Unknown but derived from Roman Empire

QUESTION?	What do all these “beast empires” have in common?

Now, let's look at another vision interpreted by Daniel that pertains to some of these "Empires." (See Daniel 7:1-8)

This vision involves four "beasts". Unlike the previous dream Nebuchadnezzar had, this vision has no revealed interpretation in Scripture. So, using our hermeneutic of Scripture explaining Scripture, we see that this vision actually coincides with Nebuchadnezzar's dream. Let's look at each "beast."

- 1) _____ The "winged-lion" was the symbol for the nation of Babylon. The "plucking of the wings" and being made to stand "like a man" and with "a man's heart" accurately describes what God accomplished in Nebuchadnezzar when God caused him to lose his mind and live like a wild animal for some time resulting in Nebuchadnezzar being humbled and believing in God. (Daniel 4).

- 2) _____ This bear, a symbol of Persia, was "*raised up on one side.*" The Persian empire was much stronger than the Medes and thus conquered them (one side raised over another.) The three ribs in the bear's mouth most likely refers to Babylon, Egypt, and Lydia – the three nations conquered by the Medo-Persians.

- 3) _____ This leopard, Alexander's symbol (more accurately a powerful panther), flown on his flags. Several amazing accuracies here. Most scholars hold the "four wings of a bird" refer to the vastness and rapidity of Alexander's conquests of the majority of the known world. Even more accurately, the phrase, "*the beast had four heads, and dominion was given to it.*" Upon Alexander's death, he left no heir, so the kingdom of Greece was evenly divided among his four generals: Casander, Lysimachus, Seleucus, and Ptolemy.

- 4) _____ Notice, there is no specific animal mentioned, just a "dreadful and terrible" beast. The first mentioning is the "iron teeth" so we have the parallel of iron and see its intense aggression. Rome was different than all the previous in its pomp and glory. It was (and is) the greatest empire to date. Then Daniel sees the "ten horns." These ten horns refer to the same future events as the ten toes of Daniel 2. These ten toes and horns refer to either rulers,

kingdoms, or nations that exist at the same time – again derived from Rome. In this vision, Daniel goes a little further and sees a “little horn” coming up and uprooting the first three. He describes this little horn as having eyes like a man and a pompous mouth. This “little horn” refers to the Antichrist. With the word “uprooting” we see that through violence, Antichrist conquers three of these nations. Then, most scholars assume the other 7 follow by peacefully surrendering their rule to Antichrist.

So far, these two visions seem to fit together with amazing precision. But, there is one more vision at which we must look! (Read Revelation 17:3, 7-12)

Again, let’s go through the different elements of this vision:

- 1) The _____ As per verse 5, we see this “woman” refers to Babylon. There are various thoughts as to whether this refers to the world political system, a literal nation of Babylon, etc. Babylon is often used to refer to the godless world and its ways, but most believe there is more to this “Great Babylon” than simply a world system. We’ll cover this more in Session 16.
- 2) The Scarlet _____ “Scarlet” denotes royalty and power; thus this “beast” will rule many. The “names of blasphemy” lead us quickly and accurately to conclude this is a reference to the Antichrist.
- 3) Seven _____ A lot of discussion on this one. Verse 9 sheds some light on it by claiming that these 7 heads are 7 “mountains” or “hills.” Many historians immediately claim this is a reference to Rome, a city that was built on 7 hills, which as we have seen from other visions, is already intricately involved with end-time events. Other scholars say that this refers to seven kingdoms and kings linked to the Roman Empire. Of course, the very next verse (vs. 10) discusses the 7 kings. Most translations say, “They are also seven kings...” instead of the KJV / NKJV rendering, “There are also...” Thus, most likely the 7 heads refers to these 7 kingdoms and kings.

- a. The Kings/Kingdoms

- i. General Issues
 1. All of these “empires” referred to here are in the context of sitting on “Babylon” – meaning they are the very harlotry God abhors. This “harlotry” refers to the worship of gods other than the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – and not only committing that harlotry but being the force behind the spread of this harlotry.
 2. All of these kingdoms are used by Satan throughout the course of history against the chosen people of God.
- ii. *Five have fallen* (vs. 10) – from John’s time reference of AD 96, what five “kingdoms” or “empires” had already passed that had risen against God’s people?
 1. EGYPT – The first nation that arose against God’s people. The book of Exodus reveals how Pharaoh had enslaved the Hebrews and treated them harshly!
 2. ASSYRIA – With its capital in Ninevah, the Assyrians conquered, destroyed, and dispersed the Northern Kingdom of Israel during the reign of Hoshea in 722 B.C. King Shalmaneser of Assyria enslaved King Hoshea and treated the Israelites harshly (2 Kings 17).
 3. BABYLON – King Nabopolassar conquered the Assyrians and shortly after his son, King Nebuchadnezzar, conquered the Southern Kingdom of Judah, ultimately bringing complete destruction to Jerusalem in 586 B.C. He also enslaved the Hebrews and carried most of them off to Babylon. (Jeremiah, Daniel, 2 Kings 25)
 4. MEDO-PERSIANS – Daniel 5 records when Darius the Mede invades Babylon and seizes it from King Belshazzar of Babylon (536 B.C.) This act ushers in the Medo-Persian Empire in the lives of the Hebrew people. The Persians continue the enslavement of God’s people. Eventually, King Artaxerxes allows Nehemiah to return to rebuild the wall.
 5. GREECE – In 330 B.C., Alexander the Great conquers the Persians and ushers in the reign of Greece. Later, the Greeks would deal more harshly with the Hebrews than any other empire before it. They even defiled the Temple with abominations (recall the discussion of the Seventy Weeks). At the time of John’s writing this, Greece was the last empire to have fallen.
- iii. *One is...* - (vs. 10) – At the time of John’s writing in AD 96, the present empire was that of Rome. Rome became notorious for its persecution of Jews and Christians up until AD 315 when Emperor Constantine was himself converted to Christianity. Prior to that, under such emperors as Nero (AD 62-67), Diocletian and

Dometian – the church especially experienced unthinkable persecutions and atrocities.

- iv. *The other has not yet come, and when he comes, he must continue for a short time...* (vs. 10) – This is a reference to a future kingdom (from John’s perspective in AD 96). One note here is that John specifies that *he must continue for a short time* or *he must remain only a little while*. (ESV). This SEVENTH beast empire then is after AD 96 and only lasts a “little while.” Keep in mind this beast empire will also bear the characteristic of being oppressive and even persecuting God’s people – Israel and/or the Church.
- v. *The beast which was, and is not, is himself also an eighth and is one of the seven...* (NASU) – Here we have an eighth beast empire. This is the one under the direct rule of Antichrist. We’ll deal much more with the Antichrist in future lessons. Interestingly, he is one of the seven.

QUESTION?	How could the Antichrist be one of the seven?

This phrase could have several meanings. One is that this kingdom is merely the resurrection of one of the previous kingdoms. The second is not based on the kingdom but on the man. This would suggest that the Antichrist is the previous king of one of these seven kingdoms. Using our hermeneutic of letting Scripture interpret Scripture, we see in Revelation 13...

Revelation 13:3 (NKJV)

And I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed. And all the world marveled and followed the beast.

Antichrist seemingly recovers from a mortal wound (mortal meaning causing death). It follows that should the world see a previous king come back to life to rule, they would “marvel” and follow the beast! So, letting Scripture interpret Scripture, it is reasonable to say that the Antichrist could very well be one of the previous kings of any of the seven beast empires.

“the ten horns which you saw are ten kings...” – This is in agreement with the ten toes of Nebuchadnezzar’s vision and Daniel’s – these ten kings will receive authority for “one hour” with the beast. These will give the beast their “kingdoms” (where scholars get a “10-nation federation”). They wage war with Christ and His people for “one hour.” We’ll revisit this “one hour” in future sessions.

So, to recap, let's look at the diagram on the following page.



