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THE PANORAMA OF EMPIRES--BABYLON AND THE MEDES AND PERSIANS

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF DANIEL
NUMBER 5
DANIEL 2:31-32

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DANIEL 2:31-32 "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. This image's head was of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass,"

Brief Review

We have been studying Chapter 2 of Daniel and we have seen Daniel and his companions under tremendous pressure, pressure so severe they were about to lose their lives. But during this period of pressure they claimed the promises of God and were relaxed and happy. They formed a group prayer meeting and as a result of their group prayer God revealed to Daniel the information they desired. King Nebuchadnezzar, the ruler of the Chaldean Empire, had this dream. He understood the content of the dream but he could not put it together and thereby get the intent of the dream. He had a dream of this tremendous and terrible image and yet to him it was meaningless. When Nebuchadnezzar went to the men in his state department, he was very cagey with them. He told them to tell him both the dream and the intent of it, for he knew his state department was excellent in the field of double talk. He knew if he told them the dream that they would come up with something and he was not sure that that something would be correct. Now actually, there was only one man in all the empire of Babylon who could handle this particular dream and that is because he had Bible doctrine in his frontal lobe. He was loaded down with doctrine. He had been studying Isaiah and Jeremiah and later on in this book we will see the result of his study of the Book of Jeremiah. He was a prepared man because of his devotion to doctrine. In our last study we looked at "Who gets the credit?" We saw that Arioch, the head of the State Department of Babylon, tried to take the credit. Then Nebuchadnezzar tried to give Daniel the credit but Daniel refused to take the credit but Daniel also refused to let the State Department take the credit. So it all boiled down to the fact that God always gets the credit.

DANIEL 2:31 "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." We must go very slowly in this study to absorb many of these details, so we may know what Daniel said to this king and why God revealed the information to him. Here is a 19 or 20 year old man standing before the most powerful king of his day, and yet he had perfect poise. He was not afraid of death and he was not impressed with the pomp and splendor of the VIPs of his day. Please notice that he does not cater to the king. If he had been trying to cater to the king, he would have said, "O King, live forever!" But instead he just said, "Thou, O king, sawest." This great image Nebuchadnezzar saw is going to give us a panorama of empires. This is the ebb and flow of empires as far as God was concerned. In the activities and events of history we see that both for individuals and nations volition is involved. They exercise volition as they seek to gain power and ascendancy over one another. They exercise volition in order to form international organizations. So volition is exercised by individuals and nations. But when we exercise volition contrary to the will of God, then this causes chaos and trouble for all concerned. One wrong decision brings on another and as a result the whole course of individuals and nations are changed. Decisions, both personal and national, change the course of history. That is the principle we will study here. We are going to study a brief survey of history and see how God has been carrying forward his plan in and through history. This particular vision of Nebuchadnezzar was designed to give cohesiveness to history and to show that all historical events, even though they involve millions of human volitional decisions, all fall in together as a part of the plan of God. He knew millions of

years ago every volitional decision we would ever make and his design of history took these volitional decisions into account. In spite of man's decisions, God moves right on to accomplish his plan and to make it possible for every man to have a chance to be born again and be regenerated and live forever. This great image will be used to communicate the rise and fall of great empires during the administration of the fourth and fifth cycles of discipline to Israel. Remember, all history is connected with Israel in some way. The fourth cycle of discipline means that a foreign nation has invaded Israel and rules them as captives. In 721 B.C. Assyria administered the fifth cycle of discipline to the ten northern tribes and at the same time administered the fourth cycle of discipline to the southern tribes. The southern tribes were under the fourth cycle of discipline until 586 B.C. when at that time Babylon administered the fifth cycle of discipline to them for 70 years. After that 70 year discipline period, from 586 B.C. to 516 B.C. the Jews were permitted to return to Jerusalem the rise of the Persian Empire allowed them to return to their land when they had their golden age from 516 B. C. to 323 B. C., which is the date of the death of Alexander the Great. This was the golden age of the Jews. This is the only golden age they will know until the Millennium when Christ will call them back to their land and give them freedom and peace. They had their golden age because they followed Biblical principles and a maximum number of Jews received Christ as Saviour. With war all around them, they had peace. With nations all around them starving, they had plenty and it all came about because they were true to Bible doctrine. The cycles of discipline set in again in 63 B.C. when Pompey the Great came from Rome and conquered them and this was the beginning of the fourth cycle of discipline and it continued until 70 A.D. At that time Rome came in and destroyed Jerusalem and scattered the Jews and they have been under discipline ever since and will be until Christ returns and calls them back to their land. During this time when the Jews are set aside and neutralized, we have the rise and fall of great Gentile empires and what we will study these several Sunday nights about the rise and fall of great empires, will explain much of the remainder of Daniel, and as a matter of fact, will explain about two-thirds of the Book of Revelation.

Let's notice two characteristics of this image in the dream of Nebuchadnezzar. Then we will study the image itself. The first characteristic of the image is that it is fashioned like a man. It has a head, arms, chest, belly, thighs, legs, feet and toes. It has a head of gold and feet and toes of clay. Every part of this statue has great significance. Why is this image in human form? Because this shows man's domination of man in the Devil's world. We will see these empires rise to great power and then decline. This teaches us that man's glory is transient and never abides very long. The Bible says, "What does it profit a man if he should gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" Time is just a drop in the bucket compared to eternity. (Think of the barrier of sin between man and God and how Christ makes it possible for man to break through that barrier and be saved.)

TITUS 3:5 "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;" Jesus Christ is the one who removes this barrier. We believe, but belief is a non-meritorious verb and we get no credit for believing. God gets all the credit. It is what he does that saves us and not what we do. The problem is the problem of physical birth. We were born spiritually dead and this spiritual birth can only come through the new birth when we believe in Christ. Believe is a transitive verb and has a subject and an object. We are the subject and Christ is the object and the merit for believing is in the object, the Lord Jesus Christ.

So here we have the image of a man to remind us that in the ebb and flow of history man dominates affairs of history. But man's glory and power will not carry him into eternity and give him eternal life.

The second thing we learn from the image is that from head to foot we have metals. It is shaped like a man to remind us that though man dominates affairs in history, man's efforts are transient. Look now at the metals.

The head is made of gold.

The arms and the breast are of silver.

The belly and thighs are of brass.

The legs are of iron.

The toes and feet are iron and clay.

We start with gold and end with iron and clay and this indicates there is a decline in these empires. The empires decrease in power until we get to the Revived Roman Empire of the Tribulation which will be the worst empire of all.

Daniel said that the image had "brightness." And this refers to the glamour of these empires. As empires move along toward success, they have glamour. Then the image was "terrible" and this refers to the fact that man became a beast when he got too much power. Quite often both nations and individuals fall apart when they get too much power. So here is the story of how power turns people's heads and they fall apart. Those are the characteristics of the image.

DANIEL 2:32 "This image's head was of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass." The head of the image was of fine gold and this refers to the Chaldean Empire. Possibly you say to yourself, how do you know it was the Chaldean Empire. Well, just to let you know that this is not a guess, read these two verses.

DANIEL 2:37-38 "Thou, O king, art a king of kings: for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory. 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." The Bible says of Nebuchadnezzar "Thou art the head of gold." So we are not in doubt at all about this meaning here. Now there were great empires in the world before this empire, but they were not mentioned in the dream of Nebuchadnezzar. This list of empires began with the empire that administered the fourth then the fifth cycle of discipline to Israel. We will not study here the great Hittite Empire. There were the people who discovered iron and built the first great chariot wheels and iron implements of war. Volume 1 and 2 of Cambridge Ancient History is being rewritten in order to correct the mistakes they first made in writing about the Hittites. Recent discoveries prove this was one of the greatest empires of all time. The Hittites found out they were better off if they would stop fighting and start making iron products they could sell. They learned it was better to be a living dog than to be a dead lion. They learned it was better to be alive making money than to be dead heroes. Neither will we go back and study the Mongolians. They were a tough people. About every two hundred years they would boil out of their mountains and have a big fight, then they would withdraw into the mountains again. (If you could see the butter they ate and the women they had to look at, you would understand why they had to boil out and get some fresh air about every two hundred years.) But they were warlike people and from Genghis Kahn to the Golden Horde to the Tartars and Huns they were all great fighters. We will see all this is due time in the book of Daniel. Neither will we stop here to talk about the great Empires of Egypt, or the great sea peoples, or the early empires developed in other parts of the world. But the head of gold refers to the Chaldeans. Their nation was formed from five clans. Each clan had a chieftain and they originated in the mountains of Iran. For some reason they didn't like it in the mountains so they moved down into the swamps of the Tigris and Euphrates River Valley. These clans became well organized. Then they tired of the swamps and they heard of a great city north of them named Babylon. Once they conquered Babylon they heard that there was a great empire to the north called Assyria.

The Assyrians had whipped the Mongolians again and again and kept them bottled up in those mountains. The Assyrians were powerfully built and were great fighters and also great salesmen. The Assyrians spread west and took over all that vast area and starting with a great general named Tiglath-pileser, III and going down to Shin-Kar-Ischun for 200 years, they ruled the world and no one could whip them. Every time these Chaldeans came out of the swamps, they got soundly whipped by the Assyrians, and they would go back into their swamps with a burning desire to come out again and defeat the Assyrians. We have already studied how Merodach-Baladan tried it and failed. Then Shin-Kar-Ischun was king of Assyria. The Assyrians were dying out and he realized he was in trouble. He decided to get some help from the Chaldeans and he went down into those swamps and he hired a man by the name of Nabopolassar, a great general of the Chaldeans. Nabopolassar gathered a great army and marched into Babylon and told them to close the gates. Then he announced to the Babylonians that he was through with the Assyrians and was going to revolt against them. He rallied the Chaldeans around him and rebuilt Babylon. He built the walls 100 feet high and wide enough to have a great super highway on top of the walls. Nabopolassar had two sons, but one of them was a genius named Nebuchadnezzar. He made both of his sons day laborers and trained them well. Nabopolassar with the aid of the Medes and Cythians destroyed the Assyrians and set up the Chaldean Empire. When Nabopolassar was at the height of his power, he suddenly died in 606 B.C. while Nebuchadnezzar was in Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar picked up some of the finest of the Jewish aristocrats and brought them back to Babylon with him to train them for his State Department. Daniel and his companions were a part of this group. Nebuchadnezzar became the greatest man of his day. Now this is the head of gold.

This is the way the empire was directed.

Nebuchadnezzar-----605 B.C. to 562 B.C.

Evil-Merodach, his son--lasted from 562 to 560 B.C.

Neriglissar (had married daughter of Nebuchadnezzar---559 to 556 B.C.)

Nabonidus (Retired and went to Tema for about 20 years.)--556 to 539 B.C.

Belshazzar (co-ruler with Nabonidus)

And when Belshazzar ruled he didn't take care of the empire but was always having a party, and while the big party was going on, the newspaper report came on the wall which spelled the downfall of the empire.

Next we have the breast and the arms of silver. This refers to the Medes and the Persians. So one arm was the Medes and one arm was the Persians and united this is the Median-Persian Empire.

To the east of Mesopotamia you have high mountains. This section is divided into two parts. The northern part was ruled by the Medes and the southern part was ruled by their cousins, the Persians. (Today this is called Iran.) In the northern part there was a ruler called Cyaxares and he looked to the south and he saw a man called Cyrus. So he decided to marry his daughter off to Cyrus in order to keep his friendship. But Cyrus was so great he went up and conquered Cyaxares, his uncle and father-in-law. The world at that time was divided into four great empires--Assyria, Media, Lydia and Egypt. In one short generation all these four empires were conquered by Cyrus. So the arms and breast of the image was the empire of Cyrus the Great. One day he found Jesus Christ as his Saviour and he came into contact with Daniel and through the influence of Cyrus Daniel became the administrator of the Persian Empire. (Note--Today most history teachers play down Persia and play by the Grecian Empire. But the Greeks were morally decadent people. The Persians laid the foundation for modern medicine and mathematics. They were a very enlightened people scientifically, though not culturally. The Greeks had a philosophy built on neo-platonism, which later opposed Christianity.) Remember, it was Persia that made it possible for the Jews to have their golden age and there are millions of born again people in heaven today because of the Persian Empire.

We will continue to study the rise and fall of these empires and this will clearly show how God used these empires to prepare for the coming of Jesus to the earth in the fullness of time. In the Augustinian Age Jesus came into the world. He came when Roman peace ruled the earth and all the eyes of the world were focused on the cross. All the streams of ancient history flow into the Roman Empire and all the streams of modern history flow out of the Roman Empire. Before Rome ancient history, and after Rome modern history. (Remember, the worst morality the world has ever known was under the Roman Empire. Read such a book as "The Golden Ass" and you will be shocked. Our morality today makes us look like saints going to a Sunday School picnic compared to the Romans and their morality.)