



Revelation 14:14

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*Hope for the Christian is the imminent return of Jesus.
Nothing more, nothing less, nothing else.*

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Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

If Bible prophecy has a foundation it is the book of Daniel, and if that foundation has a cornerstone it is the second chapter. Arguably if Christians would choose to study and accept the message that God gave to Nebuchadnezzar, a pagan king who reigned 2500 years ago, there would be far less confusion regarding what is happening in the world right now along with what is about to happen. In a general sense there would be less anxiety and more peace in the face of global turmoil, and in a narrower sense we Americans would be better able to understand what is happening socially, politically and religiously in our own country.



Ruins of ancient Babylon

Daniel was a boy of about 17 years of age in 605 BC when he was taken from his home in Jerusalem to live and die as an aged exile in a far-off place called Babylon, the ruins of which are still to be found in modern Iraq. Little did he know on that day that God would elevate him to a place of phenomenal importance not only to a line of heathen monarchs, but to his own nation of Israel and to a yet future group of people that would become known as the church.

The clarity and historical soundness of the prophecies recorded in the Old Testament book of Daniel have caused it to become one of the most hated books of the Bible. For, if both the secular and the religious anti-God crowds that are so aggressive today are to be successful in their efforts to malign God's sovereignty, dismantle Israel and deconstruct the church then the book of Daniel must, at all costs, be neutralized. That statement, folks, is no gross exaggeration. When the prophecies of Daniel are distorted the result is that all unfulfilled prophecy becomes so undefinable that a student will struggle just to find something firm to stand upon.

The first thing noticed in a study of Daniel 2 is that God chose a Gentile pagan king to be the one through whom He would first reveal His overall plan for the world. Though this might seem peculiar it does have precedent. God did a similar thing once before when He used a dream to show another heathen monarch, Pharaoh, what He was about to do (Genesis 41:25). But, what is really interesting is that in both cases He used young Hebrew slaves to interpret their dreams.

The book of Daniel was written in both Hebrew and Aramaic (not Arabic!). The Aramaic portion begins in 2:4 and continues to 7:28. It is not known why God wanted it written this way, and though such a question does not bear upon the substance of the book it is nevertheless something of interest. Some students believe the reason has to do with the importance of the book's message being understood by the Gentile world, the language of which at that time was Aramaic. In that vein it could be said that the Gentile church of today would do well to take note of the book's message. Unfortunately, it obstinately refuses to do so.

Now, to briefly examine Daniel chapter 2. It all began one night when Nebuchadnezzar, troubled in spirit, could not sleep well and had bizarre dreams. Later we are told that he was lying on his bed thinking about the future and what it

might hold. He had been a great general with many victories under his belt, and had even unwittingly put an end to the semi-theocracy of Judah. Still, he wondered.

Perhaps as the world's most powerful monarch he was pondering his next move, or maybe trying to determine the identity of his next foe. In any case, while in the course of the night's restlessness, he saw a great statue whose description is given in detail. If there had been nothing else to the dream maybe Nebuchadnezzar would not have been so troubled, but there was more. A stone that came from nowhere struck the statue on its feet, destroyed it completely and became so large that it filled the entire earth. Now, that captured his attention! Nebuchadnezzar sensed that there was a message of some kind in the dream that went beyond the surface and he had to know what it was. It seems he viewed it not just as a matter of curiosity, but as a matter of responsibility.



The drama of the event involves faith, intrigue, court conspiracy, life-risking trust and fear. This was all spawned by the demands of a king who was not only nobody's fool, but had no qualms whatsoever about killing anybody who tried to make him into one, including his court advisors. It seems that Nebuchadnezzar might have longed suspected that the advice of his occult advisors was all hogwash anyway. Maybe he had tolerated their presence as a form of court protocol, but whatever the truth might have been he knew that their business-as-usual type of royal advice would not be sufficient for the matter at hand, and he had no desire to hear any excuses. Clearly their insistence on knowing the dream before they could interpret it left no doubt as to their fakery, and this infuriated the king. The way Nebuchadnezzar handled them emphasizes the importance he put upon this dream, and it appears that God had a hand in moving his conscience to that end.

Often Bible teachers point out many extraneous details in the exposition of this chapter such as the atomic weights and values of the metals, the comparative effectiveness of a dictatorship vs. an oligarchical type of government, etc., but space does not allow such an exposition here. The important thing has to do with the four empires, their continuing presence in one another—even in the feet made of the iron and clay mixture—and their ultimate destruction by a single small stone. Everything else supports this emphasis.

By God's revelation to him, Daniel was not only able to tell Nebuchadnezzar the details of his dream, but was equally able to interpret it. The fact that Daniel even knew the dream was sufficient in itself to insure to the king that his interpretation would be true. And it was this that separated him from the king's Chaldean advisors.

The first world empire represented in the statue was Babylon. Daniel told King Nebuchadnezzar that he was the statue's head of gold, the king-of-kings in context of the four empires. That meant several things, but primarily it meant that the kings that followed Nebuchadnezzar would be of lesser caliber than him in that they would not wield absolute power as he did. Unlike some of those who followed him, there were no legal or social restrictions on the exercise of Nebuchadnezzar's will. His word was final without recourse. We are not told how this aspect of the dream's interpretation affected him, but we might wonder how he accepted the fact that though his would be the greatest of legacies that would not prevent the eventual collapse of the great Babylonian Empire.

The second empire was the Medo-Persian Empire, represented by the chest and arms of silver. The first monarch was Darius the Mede as noted in Daniel 5:31. Darius was not entirely foolish, but his inability to recognize a conspiracy against his most notable advisor, Daniel, is evident in chapter 6. Evidence that he had less control over his kingdom than Nebuchadnezzar had over his is seen in his legal powerlessness to repeal an edict he had foolishly signed that was used against Daniel. Compared to Babylon, Medo-Persia fell short in historical eminence.

Third was the Grecian Empire under Alexander the Great and its division after his death. Though Alexander was a phenomenal military strategist and tactician who controlled everyone around him, he made a grave political and strategic error in alienating a number of his native Macedonian generals because he welcomed many Persian officers into his army. Further, he was unable to control his lusts, and some historians believe this played a significant role in the cause of his death at age 32. The Greek Empire left its stamp on civilization from Europe to Pakistan, but its post-Alexander instability and division left it vulnerable to a rising power known as Rome.

Rome is represented by the legs of iron. Much can be said about the Western and Eastern Empires and the demise of the Roman system, but most significant is the transition from the legs of iron to the feet that are a mixture of iron and clay. History shows that the Roman Empire as represented by the legs of iron is gone. But what is critical to see is that the final empire associated with the feet of iron and clay and the ten toes is yet to come, for no such empire has arisen since the demise of Rome. Logically it means several things: that it will be some kind of political/economic/religious system (the three major components of mega domains) that will arise in the future; that it will be associated historically or culturally or politically (or all three) with Rome, that is, it will essentially be a kind of continuation of the 4th empire of the statue; and that it will be in existence when God's kingdom will suddenly and miraculously appear to destroy it.

First to understand is that the stone-kingdom is not the church. The church has never crushed and destroyed the vestiges of the four previous kingdoms and has not imposed upon the earth some kind of theocracy. It is not even called to do those things. In fact, this kingdom that God will miraculously introduce with the 2nd Coming of Messiah (Zechariah 14:9, Acts 1:6, Revelation 19-20, etc.) will not be brought about by the work of the church! It is a gift given to Messiah Jesus by the Father (Psalm 2:8; Isaiah 9:6,7). It is the earthly reign of Messiah, some characteristics of which are enumerated in Isaiah 11; Micah 4:1-8; etc. Though the church is a part of the kingdom of God, it is not the whole. For example, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the prophets are in the kingdom of God, but they were not and never will be part of the church (Luke 13:28).

Further, the kingdom that will be established that will bring an end to all proceeding empires will come upon the scene "in the days of those kings" (vs 44), not in the days of the Roman Empire which was when the church appeared. Still further, it is obvious that the church did not destroy the Roman Empire and fill the whole earth with peace thus alleviating the Edenic curse. So, what kings was Daniel talking about? They are those 10 regents who will be Antichrist's global proxies during the tribulation. Though the details are not given, it appears that Antichrist will divide his worldwide realm into something akin to a medieval European feudal system with 10 regions having vassals overseeing them.

The two feet with the ten toes indicates outward and thus distinctive markers in Antichrist's realm. We do not know what those might be. But, more important is the internal division marked by the inability of iron and clay to mix. Some aspects or segments will be strong, but others will be brittle as one might imagine a mixture of iron and clay. A study of verse 41 shows that the tone of the Hebrew words means an unnatural or violent division arising from internal disharmony and strong discord. Again, we are not told what will be the source of that discord, but it could be religious, geographic, economic or something else, or a combination of things. This is one reason Antichrist will resort to severe measures like his compulsory mark in order to track and control the population. It appears clear that the American government could be very close to not only having but exercising, to some degree, a similar kind of technology this very day.

The final thing to note is verse 44. God's kingdom will never be destroyed and will thus never be taken over by a future despot with messianic dreams, nor will it ever be assimilated into a future Gentile Reich of some kind.

Folks, the book of Daniel is much more than children's stories about a lion's den and a fiery furnace. As children grow through years of Bible instruction so should their understanding. If that happens they will progress from singing about the man in "Dare to be a Daniel..." to understanding that the book is the key to understanding Bible prophecy, that it is history pre-written. It seems those Christians who are part of official denominations and who are adrift in a sea of confusion regarding the prophecies found in Daniel are there because their teachers and preachers have never gone against the grain of their convention's dogma and allowed the book to speak for itself.

A final word on Nebuchadnezzar...what was it about him that prompted God to make this revelation to him? That question has been asked often and there are some serious answers out there. But, I think it is really a misplaced question. The real thought has to do with the sovereignty of God and that He will do what He wants through whom He wants whether we can presently understand His actions or not. That thought applies in a special way to modern America.

God alone sees the beginning from the end, but at some point in the future we will be able to stand back and see the tapestry from the front; to finally understand that every stitch and every knot that looked so irregular and unsettled from this side had its own place in making the final picture a project of unspeakable beauty for the honor of His name and the blessing of His people. When it was all over the great Persian (Iranian) king fell on his face at the feet of the young Jew. A preview, perhaps? DLM



What Do We Really Know?

I am not a fan of what is commonly called “social media” because, in my opinion, mostly what appears there can be likened to boring, time-wasting, brain-dead trivial information that has no connection whatsoever to anything of importance. I personally do not really care to see a picture of what someone is having for supper — just eat it and be grateful. The sight of four people at the same table in a restaurant each “checking Facebook” is enough to add another octave to my scream of, “Maranatha!”. And yes, I know I am living in the wrong century. That said, I also understand social media is a quick means of keeping up with people I love and care so much about. Maybe it has become so important to most folks because nobody wants to visit or even use a telephone anymore.

But recently I was very surprised to read the post of a person, an evangelical Christian, who did not know what happens when a Christian dies. Those who responded were also unsure. Unfortunately, these folks are representative of many Christians who know all about the NFL draft, the stock market, how to perform coronary grafts, who can take 2000 acres of Mississippi delta bottom-land and grow food enough for multitudes, etc., but whose biblical knowledge is so limited they don't know what happens to a person at death.

Not wanting to be unduly critical, it is very clear that our view of life's important truths is severely out of focus. In fact, it leads to the question of, what do we really know? Is it that Jesus loves us, or that He walked on water, or that He rose again? Is that it? Paul admonished the Corinthians about their lack of knowledge; he admitted they had some grasp of the basic stuff, but they were woefully ignorant of those things fit for mature Christians (1 Corinthians 3).

Perhaps the most intriguing thought to come from this is the question, if Christians do not know much about what happens when a believer dies, then are they really at peace when they lose a loved one, or when they are facing death themselves? Or, is their only solace to be found in the general clichés that some preacher will say at the funeral?

When Jesus said that the truth will set us free He was not talking about physical bonds (John 8:31ff). To “continue in His word” is to know things that dispel life's fears. To know those things is to be free from the apprehension of national and global events. To know the truth is to be aware that we are in the season of Jesus' return for us. And when Christians progress from the pabulum to the meat they are no longer unsure about what happens when (if) a Christian dies.