

# Nebuchadnezzar's Dream Image of World Empires

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In the sixth century before the birth of Christ the people of Israel were in their forced captivity in the country of Babylon. They had been carried there by the powerful army of the Babylonian Emperor, Nebuchadnezzar because their accumulated sins had finally exhausted God's longsuffering. But while they were in captivity God placed His prophetic calling upon the young Israelite, Daniel, and gave him some wonderful visions about the future.

Chapter two of the Book of Daniel contains the account of a dream at King Nebuchadnezzar had one night that powerfully affected him, even though he could not remember what it was about. So he called in his staff of prophets and wise men to recall the dream for him and to interpret its meaning. After much failure on their part, the Hebrew Daniel finally arrived at the court among the other advisors. He and his friends promptly prayed for the answer, and God gave him the same detailed dream that Nebuchadnezzar had. By the Bible's own chronology, the year was 524 BC. This dream had a purpose, and in his interpretation Daniel stated that God was showing to the king things that would be coming to pass in the latter days.

In his dream the king saw a great image that was made of several different materials. The head was gold, the chest and arms were silver, the stomach brass, the legs iron; and the feet were made of a mixture of iron and clay. Daniel told the king that his great government of Babylon was represented by the head of gold. The interpretation that God gave to Daniel went on to show that this magnificent image represented the passage of time, beginning with the head and progressing downward to the feet. Daniel also was shown that each of the different materials of which the image was made represented powerful, world class empires which would be successively rising and falling through time after the Empire of Babylon was ended.

To many readers of the Bible this is only so much dry, ancient history. However, our interest in these bygone events can suddenly perk up when we realize that they can tell us a lot about our own time and where we ourselves stand in God's prophetic plan.

### **The Meaning of the Image**

Bible commentators are generally agreed about the meaning and application of the materials that made up the image. The head of gold represented the great, shining Babylonian Empire. After that fact is understood it is not difficult to see how the other materials correspond directly to several world empires that arose and fell after Babylon was fallen and gone.

Next, came the Medo Persian Empire, represented by the metal silver, whose army entered and took the formidable city fortress of Babylon on the night of Belshazzar's feast (Daniel 5). In time, after the Persian Empire declined, it was conquered by a rising power from northern Greece. This was represented in Nebuchadnezzar's dream image by the belly and thighs of brass. Then, in 323 BC this Greek Empire of Alexander the Great came to its end when that great conqueror died.

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This is the point when the Romans entered the picture, it being generally agreed that the Roman Empire is represented by the legs of iron which were below the thighs of brass. And the two iron legs may show symbolically how the Roman Empire became divided into its Eastern and Western divisions.

In the year 800 AD the old, decayed Roman Empire was given new life under a new emperor named Charlemagne, and it came to be called the Holy Roman Empire. But nationalism as we know it today slowly began to sprout within the vast lands of the empire, and different regions of the European continent started to seek more independence both from the empire and from the Roman Catholic Church.

### **The End of Rome**

Finally, the competition between the archaic empire system and the emerging independent states of Europe came to a final head in the year 1648 with The Treaty of Westphalia, the last major treaty to be drawn up in Latin, the language of the Romans. The time of the legs of iron on Nebuchadnezzar's image had finally ended. It was not that people were tired of the idea of world empire, or that the dream of having one world government was dead. It certainly is not dead today. But the time had come when realities in the western part of the world had greatly changed. Columbus had already accomplished his voyages to the New World by that time, and the Portuguese had discovered how to sail around the tip of Africa to the Orient.

The whole American continent, Africa and all of the Middle and Far East were up for grabs. The great race had started that pitted each European state against the others to see which one could claim the greatest part of the newly discovered world. For the next three hundred years the world witnessed the art of empire building being developed to its greatest peak in history. We now call it the colonial period.

### **The Last Age of Empire**

How much of the world was affected by the building of these huge colonial empires? Well, the whole of the American continent was carved up primarily by Spain, Portugal, England and France. Almost all of Africa was gobbled by Britain, France, Germany, Portugal and Italy. Britain also got Australia, India, and parts of the Orient. And on and on it went.

Now, how does this historic phenomenon fit into King Nebuchadnezzar's prophetic dream? Historically, the legs of iron that were part of his dream image ended with the death of the Roman Empire system in 1648. The next and last part that made up the image was the feet and toes which were made of a mixture of iron and clay. What do we have here? The iron clearly represents the very hard and durable spirit of conquest and rule that was the backbone of the great Roman experience -- the dream to rule the world.

Symbolically, the iron appears again in the feet and toes that we see here representing the colonial era of world history. The iron was left over from Rome, and it endured within Europe, which is the very

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geographic area that had made up the bulk of the Roman Empire. This iron was essentially the tenacious will and desire that remained in the hearts of the European people to rule as the Romans had ruled.

### **But the Clay**

However, by this point in time a new element had entered the picture. It was the equally intense desire on the part of every one of the emerging European nations to keep their own independence separate from the other states. We call it nationalism. Therefore, this conflict of ideals that existed between the strong iron and the brittle clay set the scene for three hundred years of bloody conflict that saw one European nation after another trying to grab all of the world it could get, just as the Romans had done, but none willing to be under subjection to any other.

Some of the notable efforts at re forging the iron of empire were made by the country of France under Louis XIV and later under Napoleon, also by Germany during World War I under the Kaiser ("Kaiser" means Caesar in German) and Hitler during World War Two. The Russian word "Czar" also means Caesar, and the Czars played their important part in the fray. Russia's greatest effort at making world empire was, however, under their communist regime during the Cold War.

It was a glorious time for the many conquering nations while it lasted, but the colonial period has presently almost run its course. There are not many colonial possessions left in the world now. Since World War Two, the ensuing cold war and nuclear standoff, the major powers of the world have generally conceded that this game has become too dangerous to play. Russia did, of course, extend their efforts to rule the world up until about 1990.

### **The Empire of Christ**

Before this Colonial Era will have completely ended, God has made it clear that one more empire will be forming and will break suddenly into the historic picture. It will not be an empire of man's making, and it was not even represented in the panorama of empires that were displayed in the image that King Nebuchadnezzar saw.

After the king had finished viewing the image that was before him, he saw something remarkable. He saw a stone that was cut out without hands which came to the image, struck it upon its feet of iron and clay and broke them all to pieces. The entire image was shattered and destroyed, while the stone grew into a great mountain and filled the whole earth. God gave Daniel the interpretation of this part of the dream also. Here it is in verse 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 forever.

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It is clear that the phrase, "in the days of these kings," does not refer to all of the kingdoms represented by the image, because they ruled successively one after the other. It is important to note that the stone struck only one part of the image -- the feet -- and that was the period of colonialism.

We see pictured in this great shattering stone the entrance of the millennial kingdom of Lord Jesus Christ. He is coming, and He will reign together with His saints over this whole planet that we live on - as is shown in Daniel 7:13-14. That world empire of Christ will last for a thousand years, as stated in Revelation 20:4.

After that, the ungodly will be judged at the great white throne and consigned to a lake of fire forever. Then there will be revealed a new heaven and a new earth as shown in Revelation 21:1, and after that Christ and His saints will still be reigning. It will never end!

So there is not much time left. The age of iron and clay is not quite finished, but it seems to be very close to its end.

*- Loren Wilson (This article may be copied freely.)*