

Chapter II

NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DREAM

The return of our Lord Jesus Christ to this earth is an event every informed believer has looked for from the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ, at the end of His first advent, to the present time. The two men, clothed in white apparel, told the disciples as our Lord ascended into heaven, *Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven* (Acts 1:11).

The return of our Lord has been viewed as imminent by believers in every age from that day to this. The primary reason for this is found in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, recorded in the second chapter of Daniel. According to the dream, there were to be four Gentile world empires from the time of the Babylonian empire (some six hundred years before Christ) until the establishment of the Kingdom of God upon this earth. The first three empires passed from world domination before the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, and, as predicted in Nebuchadnezzar's

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dream, the fourth empire, Rome, was in power at the time of His birth.

Christ is often referred to in Scripture as *a stone, a stumbling stone, a rock, or a rock of offense*. This means *the stone, cut (out of the mountain) without hands*, of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, was a prophetic disclosure of the virgin birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. God's prophetic clock is exact. At the precise moment, established before the foundation of the world, our Lord came down from heaven (as the stone cut out of the mountain) to dwell upon the earth, and to fulfill His first advent ministry.

In keeping with this, it was during the fourth world empire that ... *there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all of the world should be taxed* (enrolled for a taxation). This was the human event which forced Joseph and Mary to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem, the city of their births, for Jesus to be born in Bethlehem of Judaea, according to the Scriptures.

Also, according to Nebuchadnezzar's dream, *the stone smote the image of the beast upon its feet*. This will occur, according to God's prophetic clock, at the second coming of our Lord. This event is known in Scripture as *the Day of the Lord*. It is an awesome day: a day to be feared. Our Lord will not come meekly, like the Lamb of God in His first advent, but will come as *King of kings, and Lord of lords*: to bring to judgment and to destroy the fourth world empire.

This will end the reign of the antichrist, who, according to the seventeenth chapter of the Revelation of John, will be the eighth ruler of the fourth world empire. Our Lord will cast the antichrist and the false prophet into the lake of fire. Thus the fourth world empire will cease to exist. Our Lord will then judge the sheep and goat nations, after which He will establish His Kingdom upon this earth.

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The Roman empire has lasted more than three times longer than the other three empires, of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, combined. No man could have anticipated this. In fact historians have separated the political empire of Rome from the religious empire of Rome, to the extent that secular history does not count the Roman empire to exist today. Even so Scripture views the political and religious empires as one empire: divided according to the legs, feet and toes of the image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

The first division of this empire was political, with two capitals: Rome in the west and Constantinople in the east. This political division became a religious division at the time of the protestant reformation movement within the Roman church: with the Roman Catholic church in the west, and the Greek Orthodox church in the east. The empire was further fractured into the two feet and ten toes, which we know as protestant churches, by this same movement. Despite these divisions (which occurred about the time Columbus discovered America), the fourth world empire has never (since its inception) ceased to exist in one or the other of its forms.

In fact all New Testament church history has occurred in this one empire. This has led believers to be expectant of our Lord's soon return throughout the days of this empire. Consequently the return of our Lord has been the hope of the believer in every age. This is not a false hope, but an ever-present reality.

At the return of our Lord, we (believers) shall experience the redemption of our bodies. John tells us, *Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure* (I John 3:2-3). And the

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apostle Paul wrote, *For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope* (Romans 8:24). Later, Paul wrote to Timothy of his impending death: *For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them that love his appearing* (II Timothy 4:6-8). From this it is plain to see: the Lord expects every believer in every age to live his life in expectation of His imminent return.

And in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar dreamed dreams, wherewith his spirit was troubled, and his sleep brake from him. Then the king commanded to call the magicians, and the astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans, for to shew the king his dreams. So they came and stood before the king. And the king said unto them, I have dreamed a dream, and my spirit was troubled to know the dream.

Then spake the Chaldeans to the king in Syriack, O king, live for ever: tell thy servants the dream, and we will shew the interpretation. The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, The thing is gone from me: if ye will not make known unto me the dream, with the interpretation thereof, ye shall be cut in pieces, and your houses shall be made a dunghill. But if ye shew the dream, and the interpretation thereof, ye shall receive of me gifts and rewards and great honour: therefore shew me the dream, and the interpretation thereof. (Daniel 2:1-6)

The wise men of Babylon protested that no king had ever required such a thing (to interpret a dream without hearing it) of *any magician, or astrologer, or Chaldean*. This enraged Nebuchadnezzar. He recognized their deceit, as well as their delaying tactics, and sentenced them all to death.

And the decree went forth that the wise men should be slain; and they sought Daniel and his fellows to be slain. Then Daniel answered with counsel and wisdom to Arioch the captain of the king's guard, which was gone forth to slay the wise men of Babylon: he answered and said to Arioch the king's captain, Why is the decree so hasty from the king? Then Arioch made the thing known to Daniel.

Then Daniel went in, and desired of the king that he would give him time, and that

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he would shew the king the interpretation. Then Daniel went to his house, and made the thing known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions: that they would desire mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret; that Daniel and his fellows should not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. Then was the secret revealed unto Daniel in a night vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven.

Daniel answered and said, Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his: and he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding: he revealeth the deep and secret things: he knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him. I thank thee, and praise thee, O thou God of my fathers, who hast given me wisdom and might, and hast made known unto me now what we desired of thee: for thou hast now made known unto us the king's matter. (Daniel 2:13-23)

After this Daniel sought an audience with Nebuchadnezzar. He did not promote himself as he stood before the king, but said, ... *The secret which the king hath demanded cannot the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, the soothsayers, shew unto the king; but there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days* (Daniel 2:27-28).

Daniel told the king his dream. He told him he had dreamed of a great image with a head of gold, breast and arms of silver, a belly and thighs of brass, and legs of iron, and feet of iron and clay. He told him he dreamed of a stone, that was cut without hands, which smote the image on its feet. He told him that after the image was smitten on its feet, the stone became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. *This is the dream; and we will tell the interpretation thereof before the king.*

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.

And after thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee, and another third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth.

And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron: forasmuch as iron breaketh in

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pieces and subdueth all things: and as iron that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise. And whereas thou sawest the feet and toes, part of potters' clay, and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; but there shall be in it of the strength of the iron, forasmuch as thou sawest the iron mixed with [brittle] clay.

And as the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken. And whereas thou sawest iron mixed with [brittle] clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men: but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay.

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 for ever. Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure. (Daniel 2:36-45)

The Apostle John tells us in Revelation chapter nineteen, ... *for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy*. This means, in all of Scripture, all prophecy ultimately relates to the Person and the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. This prophecy in Nebuchadnezzar's dream is also linked to the Person and the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. Nebuchadnezzar's dream is one of those prophetic overviews we mentioned in our previous chapter. It takes us from the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, some six centuries before Christ, through the Babylonian, Medo Persian, Greek and Roman empires.

Early in the fourth world empire, the dream speaks of the virgin birth of Christ as a *stone cut without hands*. Also, at the end of the fourth world empire, the dream speaks of the establishment of the Kingdom of God upon this earth: when the *stone becomes a mountain and fills the whole earth*. These two events, in the same empire, have implied the imminent return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In a companion prophecy (in the seventh chapter of Daniel), Daniel saw a vision of seven

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beasts rising up out of the sea. The sea is the Mediterranean. The beasts are four Gentile world empires which arose from the Mediterranean world. The first beast was a lion, the second a bear, the third a leopard and the fourth was a beast dreadful and terrible. These beasts correspond to the same empires represented by the different metals of the image of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. The lion was Babylon; the bear was Medo Persia; the leopard was Greece (under Alexander the Great); and the beast, dreadful and terrible, is the Roman empire.

The fourth empire is described as being *diverse* from the other empires. The Hebrew word translated *diverse* can mean *different*, but its primary meaning is *to change*. This empire took on world-dominating status under Julius Caesar. After about five hundred years of the rule of the Caesars, Rome's political power began to decline. Nevertheless there has been a succession of Roman rulers from the days of Julius Caesar (who was born about 100 B.C.) to 480 in the West and 1453 A.D. in the East. Almost simultaneously with the political power of Rome, there has been the power of the Roman Catholic church. It claims a succession of popes dating from Peter (64 A.D.) to pope Benedict XVI (who entered the papacy in 2005).

The fourth world empire has existed, in its various forms, for more than two thousand years. This fact has enabled this empire to see more changes than all of the other empires which preceded it. Remarkably the last one hundred years of this empire have produced more changes than the preceding nineteen hundred years.

This empire has seen changes in every phase of man's existence; from the chariot, spear, sword and bow to all sorts of small arms, machine guns, cannons, laser and satellite-guided munitions and nuclear bombs; from transportation by camel, horse, oxen and perilous sea vessels

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to the automobile, the train, the super liner, the airplane, the supersonic transport and the space shuttle; from the scribe and herald to the newspaper, telegraph, telephone, computer, data processor, word processor, the internet and world-wide communication systems of radio, television and cell phones. There have been so many changes during the span of this empire, it is impossible to enumerate them all. In this regard, the angel of the Lord said, *But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased* (Daniel 12:4).

This empire did not cease to exist, as suggested by secular historians, but changed, as the word *diverse* suggests, from a political empire to a religious empire. According to the book of the Revelation, the fourth world empire will be a political empire once again under the reign of the antichrist: when he counterfeits the second coming of Jesus Christ to this earth.

In the seventeenth chapter of the book of the Revelation, John has given us additional information about this unique empire in his description of the antichrist and the harlot Babylon.

The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.

And here is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth. And there are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space.

And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition. (Revelation 17:8-11)

The harlot Babylon is the Roman empire. John described her as ... *that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth*. In the first century of this era, the city that reigned over the kings of this earth was Rome. John further identified this city as Rome, when he wrote, *And here*

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is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth. And there are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space. And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition (Revelation 17:9-11).

If we use man's secular divisions of history, we will find it very difficult to identify these kings. Man divides history far differently than God divides history. For example: most modern historians begin the Roman empire with Augustus, not Julius. This is because of a difference in the political structure of Rome, with the rise of Augustus. Even so, it was Julius Caesar who made Rome a world dominating power, after the reign of the Greeks. Thus it is Julius who is counted, by John, as the first of these seven kings. This means, at the writing of the book of the Revelation, the five kings who were fallen (dead) were Julius Caesar, Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula and Claudius. The one who is, was Nero, and the one who was yet to come was Vespasian.

Once again there is a deviation between John's account in the book of the Revelation and secular historians. John jumps from Nero to Vespasian and does not consider three minor claimants to the Roman throne, Galba, Otho, and Vitellius. None of these three reigned more than six months, and none of them had anything to do with the nation of Israel. The eighth king over the fourth world empire will be the antichrist. In our next chapter, we will observe the reason (with so many Roman rulers and Popes) God only counts seven kings to have reigned over the fourth world empire, with one yet to reign.