

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream: Meaning of the Gold, Silver, and Bronze Kingdoms

In this study we are going to discover the content of king Nebuchadnezzar's dream. We are also going to begin to understand the interpretation of that dream. Our study is about the sovereignty of God, the invisible hand behind history. He raises up kings, and He pulls them down. Our study is also about Jewish history.

The dream is about events that began in 605 B.C. and is continuing even into our future. Almost 2,620 years have already occurred in the period of the world's history known as the times of the Gentiles, and we are still counting. That is the name Jesus gave to this period of time according to Luke 21:24. It is also interesting that the Apostle Paul uses the same term in Romans 11:25-26. So we are talking about something very special. Some people have said, "The book of Daniel is about the history of the world." But that is not correct. It is not about the history of the world. It is about Jewish history. It is also about four nations that have dominated and controlled the land of Israel. The fifth kingdom, or maybe the sixth kingdom, depending on how you want to count, will also control Israel. So, this dream and our study is about Jewish history.

King Nebuchadnezzar lived in the city of Babylon. The city was located about thirty miles south of the city we know now as Baghdad. Today, Babylon is actually in the suburbs of Baghdad. The king worshiped idols.



The empire of Babylon was known as the Land of Idols—lots of idols! What is interesting is that God tells the king about the future of Israel. Now, why would God tell a man who worshiped idols, other gods, about Israel's future? Why did God not tell one of His own prophets? Why did God tell a heathen, unbelieving king, somebody who worships the wrong god? Why did God tell him about the future? We would think that God would have told somebody who believed in Him, but God gave the dream to a man who worshiped other gods. Our study is also about a young man who did not realize that he would become a prophet. This young man rescued the lives of some wise men.

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream. We saw in our last study that King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream. That was the first part of chapter 2. We discovered that the king summoned the wise men of Babylon and said, "I want you to tell me the content of my dream, and then its interpretation." If you recall from our last study together, the wise men said in effect, "Hey, king, you tell us the dream, and we will give you the interpretation." He did not tell them the content of the dream. He

said, "If you do not tell me the dream and the interpretation, I am going to pull your limbs off and make your house a manure pile." That is the literal Aramaic. Then the wise men replied, "King, no other great king has ever asked us to

do anything like this. It is impossible. You have to be kidding!” Then the king repeated his threat. But they could not do as he had requested. So the king ordered that they all be killed and their houses demolished and made into a manure pile.

Apparently his plans to kill the wise men began to be carried out. Daniel heard about it and asked, “What is this all about?” Daniel discovered what had happened, went in to the king, asked for time, and then he prayed to God. God gave him the content of the dream, and its interpretation.

God is Honored. That brings us to our study which starts with verse 24. Verse 24 says,

Therefore, Daniel went in to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to destroy the wise men of Babylon; he went and spoke to him as follows: “Do not destroy the wise men of Babylon! Take me into the king’s presence, and I will declare the interpretation to the king.”
Daniel 2:24 (NASB)

We are told that Daniel now knows the dream and the interpretation of the dream. He has thanked God according to verse 23. In verse 24 we are told,

Daniel went in to Arioch.

Did you notice the little word “in”? Just little words, sometimes in scripture, are important. The little word “in” implies that he went into some place. Where did he go? Apparently Arioch had an office in the city of Babylon. He is the captain of the king’s bodyguard. Apparently, verse 24 is telling us is that Daniel goes into the office of Arioch where a side comment is made that Arioch was appointed to destroy the wise men. We can think of him as an executioner at this point. His job was to execute all of the wise men. So we are told that Daniel spoke to him and said,

Do not destroy the wise men of Babylon!

In reality, that was what Daniel was concerned about. I was amazed as I was thinking about Daniel’s response. The reason

that Daniel went to the king was that he was concerned for the wise men. We have discovered that the wise men were involved in the occult. Yet, Daniel is concerned about these wise men. May I put it this way? He was not concerned about the followers of God. He was concerned about these men who were involved in the occult. That was Daniel’s heart. I could not help but think about Daniel’s heart. Sometimes we are very indifferent to those who are not Christians. We can be indifferent to those who do not believe as we believe. Watch this: these wise men did not believe as Daniel believed, but Daniel was concerned about them! I am sure he was also concerned about himself and his friends, Meshach, Shadrach, and Abednego. That was the reason he went to God and asked for the dream and the interpretation, and that is why he was now back. He said,

Do not destroy the wise men of Babylon! Take me into the king’s presence, and I will declare the interpretation to the king.

Now, I want to make a point that when Daniel said, “Do not destroy the wise men,” the Aramaic is very interesting. It is in the imperfect tense. The imperfect tense refers to something that has been happening. Daniel seems to be implying that some of the wise men have already been killed. Daniel apparently was saying, “Do not continue killing these wise men.” But since Arioch had already taken Daniel in to the king, the king had apparently put the killing of the wise men on hold.

When we come to verse 25, we learn about the first of three speeches. Arioch is the first to speak. Verse 25 states,

Then Arioch hurriedly brought Daniel into the king’s presence and spoke to him as follows: “I have found a man among the exiles from Judah who can make the interpretation known to the king!” Daniel 2:26 (NASB)

This was a classic response by Arioch. You can just imagine the picture. The king is sitting on a throne. Daniel is in front; Arioch is in front, and who knows who else is there.

Arioch says, “O king, *I found* this exile among the folks who came from Judah. He can give you the interpretation of your dream.” He takes credit for finding him, but he did not find him. Daniel was the one who informed him that he could do this. He had asked to see the king (v. 15-17). But here Arioch is trying to take credit for Daniel. He also makes great assumptions that Daniel is going to be able to do this. Also notice that he does not talk about the dream. He just says, “This man can tell you the interpretation of the dream.”

That leads us to verse 26, and the king speaks.

The king said to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, “Are you able to make known to me the dream which I have seen and its interpretation?” Daniel 2:26a (NASB)

Now watch what the king does. The king does not talk about the interpretation. He just asks,

... can you make known to me the dream which I have seen, and its interpretation?

The king has not changed. The king is unflinching. The king wants to know, “Daniel, can you tell me the dream, and can you tell me its interpretation?” Arioch did not mention the dream. It is almost as if the king is asking, “Daniel, can you really give me the dream and the interpretation?” The wise men had already previously offered to give the interpretation, but they could not give the dream. They wanted the king to tell them the dream. What a perfect setup! “You tell us the dream, and I can give you some creative interpretation.” How would the king know it is the right interpretation? Anybody can give an interpretation, but if you can tell the king’s dream, then he knows that you can give the interpretation.

So the king asks, “Daniel, are you able to do this?” And before we go on to the next verse, did you notice that Daniel was also known as Belteshazzar? I find it ironic that Belteshazzar is a name that ties Daniel to one of the gods in Babylon. Yet, he is a servant of the Most High God. The servant of the living God is standing before this king, and this king does not understand. This king is clueless. Daniel is not related to his gods at all. Daniel is the servant of the living God! Verse

27 then says,

Daniel answered before the king and said, “As for the mystery about which the king has inquired, neither wise men, conjurers, magicians nor diviners are able to declare it to the king. Daniel 2:27 (NASB)

By the way, the Aramaic word for “mystery” means “secret.”

Here we learn that Daniel just wanted to make sure the king understood that no one can tell the king the secret—the dream and the interpretation. Daniel was preparing him for the truth in verse 28, where Daniel said,

However, there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will take place in the latter days. This was your dream and the visions in your mind while on your bed. Daniel 2 :28 (NASB)

Now this is fabulous! Daniel said, “There is not a wise man, conjurer, a magician, or anyone, who can tell you the secret. No one can reveal these secrets to you, but there is a God in heaven.” It is important to think about God in heaven—not Nebuchadnezzar’s idols down on the ground or there in Babylon. There is a God in heaven, and oh, by the way, He is not a dead god! He is not a lifeless god. He is not a god of idols. He is the living God! Daniel said,

There is a God in heaven who reveals secrets.

Did you notice what he said? Daniel said,

He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will take place in the latter days.

Is it not interesting that our God gives this unbelieving king mysteries about the future, something that you and I would love to know about? We would love to have more detail than what Scripture has already told us. Daniel says, “God has given it to you!” You may ask, “Why?” Let us keep reading. Verse 29 says,

As for you, O king, while on your bed your thoughts turned to what would take place in the future; and He who reveals mysteries has made known to you what will take place. Daniel 2:29 (NASB)

When did God do this? God did it when King Nebuchadnezzar was on his bed. That was discovered in our first study. The dream was repetitive, and we are told at one point that “his sleep left him.” The literal Hebrew was “his sleep was destroyed.” He could not sleep; so he finally just got up. We have all had that happen to us. We wake up in the middle of the night. We try to go back to sleep, but our sleep has been destroyed. So we just get up out of bed rather than lie there and waste time. Apparently this king was thinking about the future. Maybe he was wondering about his kingdom. Have you ever wondered what your life is going to be like in two years, three years, four years, five years, ten years, twenty years, forty years? The king was thinking about the future. God said, “Okay, I am going to tell you.”

Think about the apostle Paul. In the book of Acts, we are told that Paul went to the city of Athens and discovered an idol to the unknown god. The God in heaven was the unknown God to King Nebuchadnezzar. So the God in heaven chose to reveal Himself to the king.

Verse 30 tells us how Daniel replied,

But as for me, this mystery has not been revealed to me for any wisdom residing in me more than in any other living man, but for the purpose of making the interpretation known to the king, and that you may understand the thoughts of your mind. Daniel 2:30 (NASB)

Daniel says, “This mystery has not been revealed to me because I am a . . .” What? “... a wise person.” Remember Arioch in verse 25 tried to take credit for finding Daniel. He said, “I have found this man....” when he had not. Daniel’s response was that, “There is nothing wise in me. The reason I am able to tell you the dream and the interpretation is not because I am a wise person.”

There are some adults who think they know everything. Daniel said, “There is nothing wise in me; there is no reason

why I should be able to give you the dream and its interpretation.”

Why God Revealed the Future. But the dream has been given to him by God. Why? “So that you can know, king.” God wanted this king to know the future. I want you to think about this for a minute. Why do you think God gave this king knowledge about the future? I believe it reveals that God has a heart of love for Gentiles and unbelievers. We struggle sometimes about whether or not God really knows and cares for us. Is God going to meet my financial needs? Is God going to heal me? Is God going to save my marriage? Is God even going to give me a wife or a husband? We struggle with all kinds of issues. Think about it. This king is an unbeliever. But God cares enough about this man that He tells him about the future. He did not tell the prophet Daniel first. He did not tell Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and Zachariah, but God gave the dream to the king!

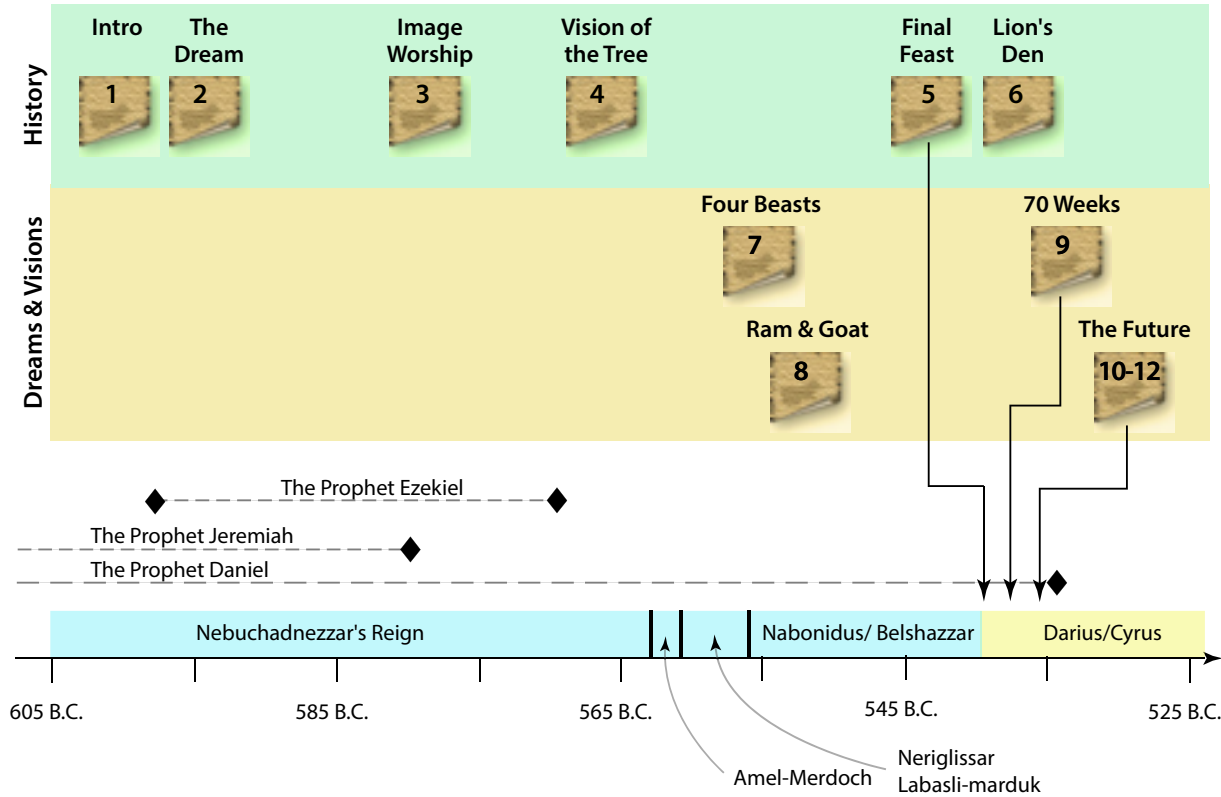
King Nebuchadnezzar was given the future for the nation of Israel from 605 B.C. to the end of time. The king was given a prophecy about what Jesus and Paul referred to as the times of the Gentiles. He was given the panoramic sweep of Jewish history! God did that for a Gentile. That tells me something very important: If God cares enough about the Gentile unbelievers, then He greatly cares for you and me! Is that not true? We are clueless sometimes. We struggle. We experience trials, and somehow think that God does not really care because situations are not working out the way we wanted them to work out. This tells us that God cares for all of us.

Now what did God do with Daniel? God used Daniel to tell the king about the dream. In the process he became a prophet. It reminded me of a song titled, “Use Me.” Here are some of the lyrics of the song.

If you can use anything, Lord, you can use me.
If you can use anything, Lord, you can use me.
Take my hands, Lord, and my feet.
Touch my heart and speak through me.
If you can use anything, Lord, you can use me.

Do you ever think you are so unimportant and insignificant that God cannot use you? Think about it. The song says, “If

Outline of Daniel



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you can use anything, Lord, You can use me.” The song continues,

I remember a story in Bible days,
 You took a man called Moses with a rod in his hand.
 And you told Moses, “Take the rod in your hand
 And stretch it forth and walk on dry land.”
 If you can use anything, Lord, you can use me.
 I remember a story, I remember it well.
 He took a shepherd boy, David, with a sling in his
 hand,
 And he took the rock with the sling in his hand
 And flung the rock, and the giant fell dead.
 And I know if you can use anything, you can use me.
 Take my hands and my feet, Lord.
 Touch my heart and speak through me.

I hope you realize that God can use anything, and if He can use anything, then He can use you. He can use me. God used Daniel in this man’s life.

There is probably another reason why God gave this king a dream. Do you remember all the “gaves” in chapter 1? “And God gave Jehoiakim into the king’s hand. And God gave Daniel favor. And God gave Daniel wisdom and knowledge.” I think there is another reason why God was giving. He wanted to put Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar together so that the king, who did not believe in God, could discover that there is a true God. It was God giving the king an opportunity to believe in God.

Description of Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream.

Verse 31 was the beginning of the dream, the great statue. The verse says,

You, O king, were looking and behold, there was a single great statue; that statue, which was large and of extraordinary splendor, was standing in front of you, and its appearance was awesome. Daniel 2:31 (NASB)

Daniel used many different terms, but the important thing is that he talked about a single great statue. This is important, especially if you are living in the land of idols. Then we are told that it was large. That probably means it was tall. When we are told the statue had “extraordinary splendor,” that probably means it was dazzling. The statue may have glistened in the sun because of all the metal. It was probably spectacular. At the end of the verse, Daniel said it was awesome. The word “awesome” in the Aramaic implies “fearful,” so that gives us a sense that this statue was fearfully awesome in some way.

Verse 32-33 says,

The head of that statue was made of fine gold, its breast and its arms of silver, its belly and its thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. Daniel 2:32-33 (NASB)

Now it is important to understand that the head is gold. The chest and the arms are silver. When it says the “brass of the belly,” the New American Standard says “belly.” Some of your Bibles might say the “waist.” Then the verse refers to the thighs. That would be the stomach area and the thighs. Then from the knees and down was iron. The feet were iron and clay and mixed together. The clay was probably between the toes.

Verse 34 says,

You continued looking until a stone was cut out without hands, and it struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and crushed them. Daniel 2:34 (NASB)

Now we are told there was a stone hurdling downward. Some people want to know what kind of stone it was. The Aramaic word for stone just means something that was carved out. So when Daniel says it was cut out without hands, that

is literally what it was. It could have been a very huge stone. But, whatever the size of stone, it was not made by men. The implication is that God made it. The stone smashes the feet of the idol.

Verse 35 now continues the discussion about the stone, and it says,

Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were crushed all at the same time . . . Daniel 2:25a (NASB)

So when the statue was hit by the stone, the feet were hit. Then as soon as the feet were hit by the stone, the whole statue was demolished, crushed and destroyed. Notice what it says happened to all the small pieces. It says,

. . . and became like chaff . . . Daniel 2:35d (NASB)

So all the little, smashed pieces of stone are,

. . . like chaff from the summer threshing floors. Daniel 2:35c (NASB)

Have you ever been someplace where they put straw on the ground or wheat on the ground, and it was crushed by people walking on it? The result is small, fine particles. That is the idea—little fine particles that are left. Then we are told,

. . . and the wind carried them away so that not a trace of them was found. Daniel 2:35d (NASB)

Now that is a significant event. The stone completely destroyed the statue. The last part of verse 35 reads,

But the stone that struck the statue became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. Daniel 2:35e (NASB)

Now you ask, “What is the mountain? What is he talking about, ‘it become a mountain’? What does that mean?” Micah 4:1-2 tells us,

And it will come about in the last days
 That the mountain of the house of the LORD
 Will be established as the chief of the mountains.
 It will be raised above the hills,
 And the peoples will stream to it.
 Many nations will come and say,

“Come
 and let us
 go up to the
 mountain of
 the LORD

And to
 the house of
 the God of
 Jacob,

That
 He may teach
 us about His
 ways

And that
 we may walk
 in His paths.”

For from
 Zion will go
 forth the law,
 Even the
 word of the
 LORD from
 Jerusalem.

Micah 4:1-2
 (NASB)



The Great Statue

Daniel 2:36-45



Meaning of Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream. Now, if you were the king, and you saw this statue, you probably would be wondering, “What does this mean?!” That is exactly what Daniel proceeded to explain. In verse 36 Daniel said,

This was the dream; now we will tell its interpretation

before the king. You, O king, are the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, the strength and the glory . . . Daniel 2:36-37 (NASB)

At first you might say, “I thought that the title, King of kings, was only for Jesus.” Yes, but just think, this king did not live very long. This king died, so he cannot be the King of all kings. He was the King

Another reference is Isaiah 2:1-14. So what is the meaning of the mountain? It was a symbolic term for a kingdom. At this point, we have learned about the head that was gold, the arms and the chest that were silver, the waist and thighs that were bronze, the legs that were iron, and the feet that were iron and clay. Now a big stone crushes the whole statue, and becomes a big mountain or kingdom. It fills the whole earth. That is the dream.

of kings of his day. He was the most significant king of his time. His empire was the largest. That is what Daniel was saying.

Babylonians Empire. Verse 38 says,

And wherever the sons of men dwell, or the beasts of the field, or the birds of the sky, He has given them into your hand and has caused you to rule over them all.

You are the head of gold. Daniel 2:38 (NASB)

Daniel said, “You, O, king, King Nebuchadnezzar, you are the head of gold.” In the Old and New Testament, the king and his kingdom were interchangeable. You could refer to the kingdom, or you could refer to the king. Daniel said, “You, O, king, are the head of gold.” That is, he represents the Babylonian Empire. He is the head of gold. From history we find that the Neo-Babylonian Empire began in 605 B.C. and ended in 539 B.C. Jeremiah 18:1-10 says that God raises up kings and brings down kings. In 2 Chronicles 36:23, we find that King Cyrus, the king of the Persian Empire, recognized that God raises up kings. In Proverbs 8:15, we are told,

**By me kings reign,
And rulers decree justice.
Proverbs 8:15 (NASB)**

God is the reason why kings reign. Daniel was clearly telling the king that the God of heaven has given the sons of men, the beasts of the field, the birds of the sky, and everything into his control. The king had been put there by God. I wish that some of our politicians knew that. The truth is our leaders do not know that or have forgotten that. One president made this comment,

Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we have been waiting for, we are the change we seek.

Another one of our presidents, in stark contrast to that comment, said this:

Without God there would be no American form of government, nor an American way of life. Recognition of the Supreme Being is the first, the most basic, expression of Americanism. Thus, the founding fathers of America sought, and thus, with God’s help, it will continue to be.

I think he said it correctly. Nebuchadnezzar needed to hear

that the God of heaven put him into his position of authority. It is fascinating if you think about this for a second. Why did Daniel tell King Nebuchadnezzar that he was the head of gold? The answer is that the city of Babylon was known as a place of gold. The Greek historian Herodotus describes Babylon as a city of gold. He said that when he had visited the throne room, the room was covered with gold. The gates were gold. The idols were gold. Gold was everywhere. The city of Babylon could be symbolized by gold. In Isaiah 13:17 there was even illusion to the fact that the Babylonian Empire was super interested in gold. If you remember, when Nebuchadnezzar visited Jerusalem, he stole gold vessels from the temple in Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar was preoccupied with gold. So, when Daniel said, “You are the head of gold,” Nebuchadnezzar would have understood that. He was preoccupied with gold.

Medio-Persian Empire. Verse 39:

After you there will arise another kingdom inferior to you, then another third kingdom of bronze, which will rule over all the earth. Daniel 2:38 (NASB)

So God said that there will be another kingdom, and it will be a kingdom that is characterized by silver. Later we will find in the book of Daniel, chapter 8, that this was the Medo-Persian Empire. The Medo-Persian Empire existed from roughly 539 B.C. to 331 B.C., about 200 years. Some have noted that the silver is not as valuable as the gold. They look at the word “inferior.” Did you see the word “inferior” in verse 39? It says, “And after you there will arise another king inferior to you.” People have wondered what does inferior mean? Some people have said, “Nebuchadnezzar was the head of gold, and gold is more valuable than silver. So, this kingdom is inferior because silver is inferior to gold.” You could also say that silver is not as dense as gold, if we consider the specific gravity of metals. But the Medo-Persian Empire actually had more wealth than the Babylonian Empire. The Aramaic word that is used for “silver,” is the Aramaic word that is used for “money.” All Daniel was really saying is that the Medo-Persian Empire would have a vast amount of money. We know from history that this empire developed taxation to an art. That sounds

like modern countries: taxing everything in every way so they can get money from us. As a result, the Medo-Persian Empire became incredibly wealthy. It is also interesting to know that the Medo-Persian Empire occupied more territory than the Babylonian Empire. The Babylonian Empire occupied less territory compared to the Medo-Persian Empire. So it is wrong to think that the Medo-Persian Empire was inferior to the Babylonian Empire. It had more money, and occupied more territory. It ruled about 200 years compared to roughly 60-70 years for the Babylonian Empire.

What does “inferior” mean? Let me suggest that the word “inferior” is the wrong translation of the Aramaic word. An examination of this Aramaic word reveals that it is only translated one time as “inferior.” Guess where? Right here in this verse. The rest of the time this word is translated as “earth.” Did you notice the word “earth” at the end of verse 39? The Aramaic word that was used for “earth” is the same Aramaic word that is used for “inferior.” So one time the Aramaic word is translated as “inferior” and the next time it is translated as “earth.” Why did the translators do that? That is a good question. I think all that Daniel was thinking about was the statue. The Babylonian Empire is the head of gold. Instead of saying “the inferior kingdom,” Daniel was just saying “another earthly kingdom,” and that would be a legitimate translation. I believe that is probably the right meaning. That is the way it is translated at the end of the verse. Daniel was saying in effect, “another earthly kingdom. Oh, by the way, king, you are an earthly kingdom. But there is another earthly kingdom.” That is the setup for the stone that is going to descend from heaven and smash the statue.

Grecian Empire. Next, Daniel introduces a third kingdom. The third kingdom is the kingdom of Greece. Daniel 8 will name the second and third empires. Greece controlled almost the same area that was occupied by the Medo-Persian empire from 331 B.C. to 146 B.C. Greece was noted for its use of bronze and copper in its military. The reason the Medo-Persians were so easily defeated by Greece was that the Medes and the Persians used wood spears. The Greeks used iron-tipped spears that were covered with bronze. As a result, they just demolished the Medo-Persians. By the way, the Hebrew word for “bronze” can also mean “copper.” The

Greeks used spears, breastplates, shields—even shin guards—made out of bronze. They just destroyed the Medes in the process. So when Daniel uses the term “bronze,” it signified a unique characteristic of the Grecian empire.

Conclusion. This chapter is an encouraging chapter. It is about a sovereign God who has a master plan. God revealed to King Nebuchadnezzar His plan for the future of Israel. This chapter reveals God loved this man so much that He gave him a view to the end of time. This chapter also reveals that God loves Gentiles. God cares for unbelievers. What a beautiful, beautiful, encouraging chapter. Let us pray.