

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:

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## Daniel 2:31-45 “The Rise & Fall of Human Government”

Intro. The Book of Daniel, like Revelation, is an example of apocalyptic literature. Apocalyptic literature has a lot of symbolism and is not easily interpreted. Apocalyptic prophecies would appear in the biblical period to help answer the mysteries of the rise of evil when it seemed that God was remote and unwilling to stop the rise of evil. By the time of this prophecy in chapter 2, Jerusalem had been conquered by the Babylonians, and Judea had become a subject nation. In just a few more years, the nation and its temple would be destroyed. Therefore, God’s people would ask: “Has God forsaken His people forever? Are all the promises lost?” And the prophecy of Daniel 2 says no. God will intervene in the future, and fulfilled His promises of restoration.

Israel had been crushed by Babylon, an ungodly empire. But we see here in this prophecy that *it* would fall. The other empires of world history that would follow were also ungodly and evil, but though they would prosper for a season, they too would also fall. So though the ungodly seem to prosper, we can be assured that it will not last for long. America can probably survive a few decades living in ungodliness, but we would be fools to think that we are somehow exempt from God’s judgment. A common pattern for nations has been the following: From bondage to spiritual faith; from spiritual faith to great courage; from courage to liberty; from liberty to abundance; from abundance to selfishness; from selfishness to complacency and apathy, on to dependency, and then back to bondage. I believe we in America are toward the end of that cycle, and only a great spiritual revival can save us.

V.29 indicates that Nebuchadnezzar was wondering what would come of his kingdom. He was now the dominant world ruler, and he was concerned about when and how it is all going to end. My friend, that is still the question today: What is this world coming to? In answer to that question, God gave him a dream, and Daniel interpreted the dream for him and for us, so that we can know what the future holds. Our God reveals “what shall be in the latter days,” as he says in v.28.

Now I want to start off with:

### I. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE DREAM

A. The Description of the Statue - Daniel says in vv.31-33, “You, O king, were watching; and behold, a great image! This great image, whose splendor was excellent, stood before you; and its form was awesome. This image’s head was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay.” In this land of idolatry, such a vision was the only language Nebuchadnezzar could truly understand. In his dream he saw a shining metal statue in a human form. This aspect would point to the fact that it was to represent *human* government. Furthermore, it was great in size, very brilliant in splendor. It was “awesome,” or overbearing, just as the world powers represented by the statue. It may have frightened the king.

The composition of the statue is noteworthy. The image consisted of a very strange assortment of metals. It was not an alloy of metals, but a multi-metallic image of four metals plus

what was probably ceramic clay. Notice that the statue started with gold at the top and deteriorated in value to silver, bronze, iron and then baked ceramic clay at the bottom.

Now as Daniel revealed what Nebuchadnezzar had seen in his dream, I can imagine him saying, "Boy, you are exactly right!" Since Daniel was able to reveal the dream, Nebuchadnezzar was prepared to listen to the interpretation. Notice a few general observations about its interpretation:

B. Gentiles will Rule the World to the Very End - Because of the failure of the house of David, God took the scepter out from the hands of the line of David and according to this prophecy, he would place it in the hands of the Gentiles. Jesus indicated this in Luke 21:24 when He said, "Jerusalem shall be trodden down by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." Israel refused to consistently follow the Lord, so they took a backseat as they went into captivity and never would return to their former glory until Jesus comes again. God warned them that they would not once again become a great power like they were under King David and Solomon. And so they should not be discouraged by what would happen to them as a nation. In fact, Israel remained under foreign control during most of its remaining history. They were a free state only for a short while. The Romans destroyed their nation in 70 A.D., killing as many as 1.1 million Jews. They were scattered among the Gentiles. Recently, Hitler killed millions more. Even today Israel does not fully control all the land God gave them. How tragic! Israel should have set the pattern as the leader of the world. Israel should have been God's messenger to the world, but Israel tragically failed. Instead, as we see here, various Gentile nations would dominate the world.

Note also that all the kingdoms make up one image, which means that all the kingdoms are built and forms itself apart from God.

God revealed this ahead of time, so Israel would know that He had not failed in His promise. He will eventually restore Israel to its former glory, but that would be after many years.

C. The Trend of Civilization Is Downward - From the materials we see this. There is a decrease in value, a decrease in weight, a decrease in position, and a decrease in beauty. The whole history of the Gentile world until the coming of Christ is going to be in a constant process of deterioration until its final dissolution when it is smashed and blows away like dust in a wind. This deterioration is contrary to modern philosophy. Our viewpoint today is that we are all getting better and better every day. But Man has failed and will continue to fail to bring utopia, despite predictions to the contrary. In fact, one political movement calls themselves "progressives." The reality is far different.

## II. SPECIFIC FULFILLMENTS

Now note v.36, where Daniel says, "This is the dream. Now we will tell the interpretation of it before the king." The first kingdom represented by the image is:

A. Babylon – Daniel says in vv.37-38, "You, O king, are a king of kings. For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory; and wherever the children of men dwell, or the beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven, He has given them into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all—you are this head of gold." Gold was an apt description of Babylon. It was a city of gold. Nebuchadnezzar wanted to build a golden throne in the midst of a golden city.

He was indeed the head. He was a supreme monarch of his day, ruling over everything and everybody.<sup>1</sup> He had such authority that he was identified with the government of Babylon, unlike the other kingdoms mentioned. He was uniquely responsible for attaining and maintaining an empire status. He ruled for 43 years! His power can be seen in the fact that he could order the execution of many of the leading men of Babylon, as we see in the first part of this chapter. And why did he have such power? God raised up Nebuchadnezzar to be a chastening agent upon Israel, and when their chastening was completed, his kingdom passed out of existence (Jer. 25:12). After him, its power diminished rapidly.

Through this dream Daniel predicted the next kingdom that would arise after Babylon:

B. Medo-Persia – Daniel says in v.39, “But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours...” Of the four kingdoms, this is the only one Daniel says nothing about. I think this was done so that Nebuchadnezzar would not be constantly worrying about what kingdom was going to topple his empire. But we can say this. In Daniel 5:28 we are told the future of the Babylonian kingdom: “Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.” This happened in 538 B.C. The two arms (v.32) predict the 2-kingdom alliance of the Medes and the Persians. This was also predicted by Isaiah (44:28; 45:1-4). We can make an identification with Medo-Persia because silver or silver money was a key characteristic of that empire. They developed a vast system of taxation, which required that taxes be paid in silver. Xerxes I used the incredible silver fortune to finance his massive war against the Greeks.

As predicted, the Medo-Persian empire was followed by:

C. Greece – Daniel says in the last of v.39, “then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth.” God revealed through this dream the rise of Alexander the Great. Alexander’s army wore bronze. It was quite a sight. The Greek soldier would have had on his head a helmet of brass and on his body a breastplate of brass and before him he would be carrying a shield of brass and even a sword of brass. They conquered Persia in 330 B.C. It is interesting that Greece descends to the thighs (v.32b), because the great Greek Empire ultimately had a twofold division between the Seleucids in Syria and the Ptolemies in Egypt. Originally it was divided between his 4 generals. But only two were strong enough to maintain a kingdom for any length of time. And notice that special mention is made of the extent of his rule. He would “rule over all the earth [or land].” He ruled part of Europe, Egypt, and most of the land eastward from Asia Minor to India before he died in his 30’s.

D. Rome – Finally, Daniel says in v.40, “And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others.” More attention is directed to this fourth kingdom than to the other three kingdoms put together. Rome emerged from a long-standing republic to a world empire by 44 or 27 B.C., extending even further than Alexander’s conquests. In Daniel’s day, iron was the strongest metal known, and without question Rome was the strongest empire the world has ever known. The Roman army was known as “The Iron Legions of Rome.” Daniel mentions the destructive power of this empire in the last of v.40, “inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others.”

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<sup>1</sup> The idea that his realm encompassed the beasts and the birds is simply a hyperbole showing his tremendous authority (cf. Jer. 27:5-7).

The Roman legions were noted for their ability to crush all resistance. That is how they ruled for so much longer than any other kingdom, over 500 years!

Notice what would happen to this Roman Empire. Rome became weak and fell from within. In v.41 we see that “the feet and toes [were] partly of potter’s clay and partly of iron.” The two legs of the statue (v.33) indicated its divided empire between the Eastern Roman Empire and the Western Roman Empire. The Eastern Roman Empire lasted until 1453 A.D.!

This prophecy is so accurate that liberal scholars conclude that Daniel was written some time after the rise of Alexander the Great, around 164 B.C. Even if that were true, this prophecy accurately predicts more about the Roman Empire than the author could have known 164 years or so before Christ.

### III. FUTURE FULFILLMENTS

Most of the prophecy of this dream has already been fulfilled. Daniel’s prophecy has been fulfilled with amazing accuracy. There has not been a fifth world empire to follow the Roman. Napoleon tried, but failed. Hitler tried, but failed. The Communists have tried to establish a world empire, but they have failed, just like the Bible teaches here. Islam is trying, but they will fail. China is working toward world domination, but they will fail, though Rev. 9:14-16 predicts a major military campaign toward the West in the last days by some country east of the Euphrates. So we can be certain that the remaining parts will also be fulfilled. I believe one of the greatest proofs of the Bible’s divine inspiration is the evidence of fulfilled prophecy. So what is yet in the future of the world?

A. The Development of the 10 Kings – Daniel says in v.42, “And as the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile.” What about the toes of iron mixed with clay? What does that tell us? The clay, I believe, represents the masses, the different nations of the ten toes. The iron speaks of the fact that Rome lives on in this final form of the old empire in some form. So I believe this shows us that we are going to see a revival of the ancient Roman Empire. Did you know that the Roman Empire was never really destroyed, let alone conquered? It just gradually went into abeyance. Rome is living in the great nations of Europe today. The laws of Rome live on. Her warlike spirit lives on also: Europe has been at war ever since the empire broke up into these kingdoms. In Rev. 13:12 the Bible tells us that a beast was mortally wounded but rose again out of that death. That *could* be a picture of the Roman Empire dying, but to the amazement of many, rising again. This will evidently take place just a few years before Jesus comes again.

Daniel gives specific details of what may happen in our lifetime. That revived empire will have 10 toes, symbolic of 10 kings, or a confederacy of 10 nations. Rev. 17:12 likewise says, “The ten horns... are ten kings.” Dan. 7:24 says, “The ten horns of this kingdom are ten kings that shall arise.” Europe was a major part of the Roman Empire. Europe has already united into the European Union. Today there are more than 10 member nations. In fact, at last count, there were 27! These countries cover almost all of the area of the old Roman Empire. Nineteen member states have adopted a common currency, the euro. But by the time the Roman Empire is revived, there could well be only 10 member nations, or perhaps 10 defined regions.

B. The Deficiency of the 10 Kings – Daniel says in v.43, “As you saw iron mixed with ceramic clay, they will mingle with the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, just as

iron does not mix with clay.” The feet of iron mixed with clay implies that the revived Roman Empire will be weak and vulnerable. The last of v.42 says “the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile.” This is in contrast to the original Roman Empire, which was strong in that its government was solidly organized, its armies well-disciplined, and its policies and laws well-defined. Another factor that will make the revived empire weak is that “they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men.” “The seed of men” probably refers to humans. The problem in the initial form of the revival Roman Empire is going to be that there are too many rulers involved. Thus, solidarity will be lost. The more decentralized government becomes, the more it is susceptible to internal problems. It will be a confederacy and its power will be distributed among too many people. Also, notice in the last of v.43 that “they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay.” Something will interfere with the cohesiveness of this revived empire. The influx of Muslim immigrants could be one reason. They do not assimilate as well into their new country’s culture. [Compare what is happening to America today]. This problem may lead to the rise of the antichrist, which we will learn about later in Daniel 7:8. He will be a great world ruler who will come on the scene in Europe to pull together that coalition.

Now we turn to the good news of the prophecy:

C. The Destruction of Gentile Rule by the Return of Christ - Man’s boast of ruling this earth and establishing a utopia will end in the dismal destruction of this so-called civilization. Notice in v.34 that the stone “struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces.” This gives the picture of sudden destruction. The reference here is to the second coming of Christ to the earth, which is depicted for us in detail in Revelation 19:11-21. The Lord Jesus Himself made it clear that He is that Stone that will come. In Matthew 21:44, He said, “And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.” So notice:

1. The Time of His Return – Daniel says in v.44, “And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom....” This prophecy gives a good hint as to when Jesus will come again. I believe we can see that the history of the world is reaching its climax. Once that 10-nation confederacy takes its form and the Antichrist establishes his rule, it won’t be very long until that Stone comes and smashes all opposition, filling the whole earth. The “times of the Gentiles” will end with the return of Christ. What a time to be alive! We may be living in the days leading up to the Second Coming!

2. Who Is Coming - This is not a mere human ruler. Notice in v.45 that “the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands.” That stone is none other than Jesus Christ. Time and time again in Scripture Jesus is referred to as a stone or rock (Psa. 118:22; I Cor. 10:4). The fact that this stone was not made with hands points to the fact that He was born of a virgin; he had no earthly father. He was raised from the dead by the power of God. Surely this rock is Jesus! He is the one who will come and put an end to human, sinful government that tries to take the place of God! When He comes, we will move from the destruction of human government to:

#### D. The Dominion of Christ

1. The Nature of His Kingdom - God’s form of government is going to be similar to that head of gold. Notice that Daniel says in v.37, “You, O king, are a king of kings.” Well, when Jesus comes again to set up His Kingdom, He will come as “King of kings” (Rev. 19:16). He is going to reign over this earth, and He is not going to ask anybody for advice about it. He will not have a Congress, and He will not be calling upon you to vote for Him. Now is the time to vote for Him by putting your trust in Him, and making Him Lord of your life. By the time He comes again,

it will be too late. Don't try to rebel against His Lordship. He created the world. He also deserves to be your Lord by virtue of the fact that He died to save you. It is well for you and me to practice bowing to Him and acknowledging Him now in this life. He is going to take over one of these days.

2. The Extent of His Kingdom – We read in the last of v.35, “And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.” Although Jesus is a crushing stone, at the same time He is a restoring stone, for no sooner does He smash and crush than He fills the whole earth. He will reign over every nation, and over every continent. No human empire has accomplished that!

3. The Endurance of His Kingdom – Notice in the last of v.44 that His kingdom “shall stand forever.” Unlike all other kingdoms, the earthly kingdom God establishes will never be destroyed, fade away, or be taken over by another kingdom.

Conclusion: If I didn't know Jesus in such days as these, I would make sure that I did! Now is the time you can be saved. You don't know about tomorrow! I hear people say, “I'll take my chances.” My unsaved friend, you may not have another chance. You are lost. You are without God. It is not easy to bow to Him and to acknowledge Him. However, either you are going to come to that Stone, or that Stone is coming to you. I'd rather come to the Stone.

Sources: Grant Jeffrey, *Armageddon* (Toronto: Frontier Research Publications, 1988), 143; John MacArthur, Jr., *An Uncompromising Life* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1983); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 2 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:30] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); Dr. Jerry Vines (notes from his sermon on this text). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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