

THE ASSEMBLY MESSENGER

Proclaiming the Timeless Truth of the Church to a New Generation of Believers

04-68

Dear Reader

How we thank the Lord that He has allowed us to begin our eighth year of publication of the *Assembly Messenger*, sent free and without obligation to all who desire to read it about once every six weeks. It remains available on our website, www.assemblymessenger.com. Our preferred mailing address is Dearborn Heights Christian Assembly, 24570 Ann Arbor Trail, Dearborn Heights MI 48127-1780. Since it is sent without charge, there is no legal entity called "Assembly Messenger." We also want to fulfill our obligation to Thomas Nelson and Sons and tell you we use the New King James Version with their permission.

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THE WORLD EMPIRES OF SCRIPTURE

In the last issue we looked at the error of the pre-wrath Rapture and again saw the wonderful truth that the Church is about to be raptured before the Tribulation begins. This study of the times of the Gentiles or the five world empires of the Bible will help us see our present position in God's time-ways, again showing that we are very near to exciting prophetic times. We are *not in* those times because God's prophetic clock is turned off until the Church is taken away at the Rapture. So, in reality, we *never* will be in those prophetic times *as they concern the earth shortly after the Rapture*. Our destiny is heavenly, not earthly. Yes, we'll reign with Christ over the earth, but the reason we will be reigning over the earth is because *He* will be reigning, and "we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thes.4:17) after He comes for us.

Let's begin our study in that great Old Testament prophetic book of Daniel. Without this most important book, our understanding of prophetic events would be severely limited.

THE IMAGE OF DANIEL 2

King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon – the only supreme world-monarch to date – had a dream about a strange statue of a man fabricated from different metals. But he forgot what the dream was about (Dan.2:5); yet demanded his magicians to tell him both the dream and its interpretation, or else! You can imagine the upset that caused! Daniel heard about the "problem" and he and his

believing friends held a prayer meeting, and God revealed the secret to Daniel (2:17-19). Daniel was brought before the king, and after giving God the glory, told Nebuchadnezzar the following.

"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. You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were crushed together and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth" (Dan.2:31-35).

Note several things about this statue. The *quality or value* of the metals *decreases* from head to toes, but the *strength increases* until we get to the feet, to the ten toes; then it gets weaker, less cohesive. Daniel then gave the king the divine interpretation.

The Interpretation: the Time of the Gentiles

"This is the dream. Now we will tell the interpretation of it before the king. 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*" (Dan.2:36-38).

So we begin to see that the image or statue was a picture of world powers or empires in their outward glory. The Babylonian or Chaldean Empire (605-539 BC) was the first and highest quality empire of the "times of the Gentiles" (Lk.21:24) – the time when Jerusalem is trodden down by the Gentiles. Because of its sin, the house of David is set aside as God's ruler on earth until Christ's millennial reign. The kingdom of Judah ended as a sovereign nation at the hand of Nebuchadnezzar in 588 BC (2 Ki.25:1-26; Jer.39:1-10). Some 140 years later, the Persian empire *permitted* the Jews to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and live there. Many Jews continued to inhabit Jerusalem *at Gentile permission* until it was destroyed by the Roman Empire general Titus in AD 70. Although Israel again has temporary and partial custody of Jerusalem, we know from prophecy they will partially

loose it once more to Gentile armies, although only for a short time (Zech.12:2-3; 14:2-5).

Actually, the Babylonian Empire was not the first “world” empire: the Assyrian empire, covering much the same territory, had just preceded it. Yet, the Assyrian Empire is ignored in the time-ways of God because it had nothing to do with the “times of the Gentiles.” Israel itself could have been called a world empire under David and Solomon, but is ignored for the same reason.

The Babylonian Empire was not particularly large, yet God considered it to be a world empire because it had the *potential*, the power and authority from God, to conquer all (Dan.2:38). So the head of *gold* speaks about the quality, the fineness, the completeness, the value, the refinement of Nebuchadnezzar’s rule. Once Nebuchadnezzar was succeeded (in 561 BC), the empire rapidly began to decline until its sudden fall in 539 BC. Daniel then continued:

“But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours; then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters all things; and like iron that crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others. Whereas you saw the feet *and toes*, partly of potter’s clay and partly of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; yet the strength of the iron shall be in it, just as you saw the iron mixed with ceramic clay. 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. 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” (Dan.2:39-43).

The Fourth Empire

The next two kingdoms are passed over quickly (to be picked up later in Daniel 7 and 8), but the fourth kingdom is discussed in some detail. There must be something special about this fourth kingdom since God speeds us onward to it. The fourth kingdom eventually divided into two parts as seen by the two legs. The Roman Empire was divided into Western and Eastern sections which finally broke completely apart in 395 AD. In its final form it will be divided still further as seen by the ten toes.

The fourth empire began very strong (iron) and ultimately will end weak in *quality* (iron mixed with clay). Note that the weakness is at the very bottom of the image, in the feet and toes. Since the image’s “height” is a time scale, then the feet and toes represent the very end of the “time of the Gentiles,” yet still part of the fourth empire. The toes are defined as ten kings in verse 44, and when the fourth empire is in the form of ten kings, it, and the whole Gentile

power structure, is destroyed by divine power. The *feet* are struck by a Stone (Christ) cut out without human intervention (Mt.21:42; 1 Pet.2:4-5). At that future time, the “times of the Gentiles” thus will end abruptly. Read on.

The Fifth and Final Empire

“And *in the days of these[10] kings* the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold; the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain and its interpretation is sure” (Dan.2:44-45).

After a sudden and great display of power against the world’s armies (Zech.14; Rev.19), ending all Gentile rule or threat to Jerusalem, Christ sets up His millennial (1000 year) reign. After 1000 years the Lord will allow the unsaved to manifest themselves (Rev.20:3, 7-9, 11-15) so they may be killed to await the fires of hell. In the eternal state the Lord will give up His kingdom to God the Father that *God* may be all in all (1 Cor.15:24-25). However, in some unknown sense we will reign with the Lord forever (Rev.22:4-5).

THE FOUR BEASTS OF DANIEL 7

In the Bible, the *sea* pictures the Gentiles – the unstable non-Jewish masses, the “peoples, multitudes, nations and tongues” (Rev.17:15). See also Matthew 13:47 and Revelation 13:1. Out of the “sea” came four “beasts” (Dan.7:2-3). We will see that these beasts speak of the same four empires as Nebuchadnezzar’s statue, but from the viewpoint of their *inward brutality*. All the beasts are vicious and wild. The Word gives the interpretation: “Those great beasts, which are four, are four kings which arise out of the earth. But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever” (Dan.7:17-18). Note: Bob Costen points out that “forever” sometimes has the thought that no other dynasty will take over.

The Babylonian Empire

“The first [beast] was like a lion, and had eagle’s wings. I watched till its wings were plucked off; and it was lifted up from the earth and made to stand on two feet like a man, and a man’s heart was given to it” (Dan.7:4).

The lion has always been the king of beasts. Babylon had that top place and the lion’s great all-around strength, along with the eagle’s swiftness of conquest. But, like the lion, Babylonia didn’t conquer for the love of conquering,

or the kingdom would have been much larger. With Nebuchadnezzar's death in 561 BC, the lion-like character ended and the kingdom quickly became weak and corrupt.

The Medo-Persian Empire

“And suddenly another beast, a second, like a bear. It was raised up on one side, and had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. And they said thus to it: Arise, devour much flesh” (Dan.7:5).

The Medo-Persian empire (539 to about 336 BC) suddenly came into prominence with a swift taking of Babylon as recorded in Daniel 5 and Jeremiah 51:11. The bear is known for its ill temper, its crushing attack, its love of conquest. The bear in the vision rose up on one side: Persia soon became the dominant power in the empire. The three ribs speak of conquered territories being devoured and broken by the power of Medo-Persia. As seen by the account of Darius the Mede in Daniel 6, the Medo-Persian rulers didn't have the absolute power of Nebuchadnezzar; hence the lower-value metal in Nebuchadnezzar's statue. But silver is stronger than gold, and the Persian Empire took huge amounts of territory in particularly the Eastern world, ranging from Greece to India, making it truly a world empire in the sense of the then-known civilized world.

The Grecian Empire

Next came the Grecian empire, beginning about 336 BC and badly broken up by 312 BC, although this broken, four-headed empire remained a force until succumbing to Rome in about 171 BC.

“After this I looked, and there was another, like a leopard, which had on its back four wings of a bird. The beast also had four heads, and dominion was given to it” (Dan.7:6).

Greece, under Alexander the Great, captured essentially the same territory as the Persian Empire in leopard-like military moves, so swift and so agile that it confounded larger and better trained armies. But Alexander died as a young man in 323 BC and his empire was divided between four of his top generals, the four “heads” of the above verse. The *bronze* in Nebuchadnezzar's image shows the great strength or power of Greece, but there was not much external “quality” that God could recognize in this empire.

The Roman Empire

Finally comes the Roman Empire. The beast is not named: it is a fierce monstrosity. Rome remained a world power till at least 400 AD.

“After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong. It had

huge iron teeth; it was devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns. I was considering the horns, and there was another horn, a little one, coming up among them, before whom three of the first horns were plucked out by the roots. And there, in this horn, were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking pompous words” (Dan.7:7-8).

The divine interpretation of the Babylonian, Medo-Persian and Grecian kingdom visions is not given here: the Lord hastily takes us to the Roman Empire, the fourth beast, specially in its final ten-kingdom form. The historical Roman Empire became *the* world power with the fall of Greece in about 170 BC, and continued until the Western section finally fell in 476 AD. The extreme strength of iron aptly fits the Roman Legions who ruled the world for some 600 years. The divine interpretation follows:

“Then I wished to know the truth about the fourth beast, which was different from all the others, exceedingly dreadful, with its teeth of iron and its nails of bronze, which devoured, broke in pieces, and trampled the residue with its feet; and about the ten horns that were on its head, and about the other horn which came up, *before which three fell*, namely, that horn which had eyes and a mouth which spoke pompous words, whose appearance was greater than his fellows. I was watching; and the same horn was making war against the saints and prevailing against them, until the Ancient of Days came, and a judgment was made in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom.”

“Thus he [an angel] said: The fourth beast shall be a fourth kingdom on earth, which shall be different from all other kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, trample it and break it in pieces. *The ten horns are ten kings who shall arise from this kingdom.* And another shall rise after them; he shall be different from the first ones, *and shall subdue three kings.* He shall speak pompous words against the Most High, shall persecute the saints of the Most High, and shall intend to change times and law. Then the saints shall be given into his hand for *a time and times and half a time* [i.e., 3.5 years]. But the court shall be seated, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and destroy it forever. Then the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the *kingdoms* under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and *all dominions shall serve and obey Him*” (Dan.7:19-27).

The angel who spoke to Daniel through the vision dismisses the first part of Daniel's question about the fourth or Roman kingdom in one sentence and then jumps to the future final form of that empire. We are left to history to find that the two legs of Nebuchadnezzar's statue speak of the Eastern and Western divisions of the

Roman Empire. Scripture is historically accurate, but that bit of history is unimportant in God's purposes in writing this prophecy.

The ten horns refer to the same future time as the ten toes, the time just before the Lord, the Ancient of Days, comes to set up *His* kingdom and the saints of that time then possess the kingdom. World dominion is then forever taken out of the hands of the Gentiles. The ten horns, ten kings or nations, arise *from* the long-cold ashes of the fourth kingdom. The leader of the future Revived Roman Empire subdues three kings who evidently oppose his dictatorship*. This future dictator is anti-Christian, satanically-inspired and evil in manners beyond that seen in the other Gentile kingdoms. He has special dominance over the saints of that future time for 3.5 years. Remember that a *saint* is a scriptural word for a Christian, a believer in the Lord Jesus as Savior, one *set apart* (sanctified) for God.

* It is not fully clear whether the subduing of three "kings" leaves only seven nations, or if the *final* number is ten, meaning there were 13 to begin with, which is close to the present situation in the European Union. When all the references are looked at together, it seems that the *final* number – the number of the nations in the Revived Roman Empire when the Lord sets up His kingdom – is ten. It is my judgment they will be whittled down to ten as the "beast" consolidates his power by ruthlessly destroying all who refuse to give him allegiance.

Then, just as the stone fell on the feet and toes of Nebuchadnezzar's image, so here, when the Roman Empire (Western Europe) is in its ten-nation form, under a mighty and ruthless dictator, the divine *court* will execute judgment on that revived empire and the whole Gentile system. The saints then will have their kingdom and all nations will serve and obey the Most High, our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Judgment by the Ancient of Days

Daniel 7 also gives a description of the Ancient of Days about to judge, who slays the fourth beast and takes away *all* Gentile dominion (ending the times of the Gentiles), coming Himself to reign, and His kingdom shall never be destroyed. Read this description in the verses following.

"I watched till thrones were put in place, and the Ancient of Days was seated; His garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head was like pure wool. His throne was a fiery flame, its wheels a burning fire; a fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him. A thousand thousands ministered to Him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him. The court was seated, and the books were opened."

"I watched then because of the sound of the pompous words which the horn was speaking; I watched till the beast was slain, and its body destroyed and given to the burning flame. As for the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away, yet their lives were prolonged for a season and a time. I was watching in the night visions, and behold, one like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed" (Dan.7:9-14).

COMMENTS ON THE NEXT MESSENGER

We will continue our study of the Times of the Gentiles or the five world empires of Scripture in the next issue, beginning with Daniel 8 and finishing in Revelation. As with the Rapture, there is a great amount of preaching and books and magazines which simply don't rightly divide Scripture on these matters, so please be careful. Please "search the Scriptures daily" to determine whether what we tell you is true. It's your divine safeguard from being led astray.

Believers Bookshelf can recommend books on this subject. I generally would recommend commentaries on Daniel and Revelation. Commentaries by H.A. Ironside are perhaps the most readable for younger people, although somewhat difficult to obtain at this moment due to the demise of their publisher. For a very quick overview of prophecy, my little booklet, *An Outline of Prophecy* and/or my book on A.E. Booth's Chart of the Ages, might prove helpful, all available from Believers Bookshelf.

RPD

Letters

Brother Eugene Vedder commented on pg.2, column 1 of issue 03-65 regarding Barnabas. He pointed out that Paul mentioned Barnabas both in 1 Corinthians 9:6 and Colossians 4:10 (after they had parted company), at least indicating that there was respect and appreciation of each other and for their respective work, and no grudges held, even if they never worked directly together again. Eugene's letter was much longer and informative as to Barnabas, but this I trust hits the main point. Thanks, Eugene.