

## Thy Kingdom Come

People are fascinated with the future. People love stories and movies which depict the future, or where someone travels into the future. We're all like that, to some degree. We want to know what is around the corner. In recent years, very powerful computers have been developed that are supposed to model military, economic and even environmental scenarios. They estimate the probability of what they model. Using complex mathematical formulae, and trying to factor in millions of variables, they hope to be able to say what will happen.

But of course, mathematical equations and variables can only predict a certain amount of things, because the future is largely made by the choices and decisions of free human beings, and no computer can predict that. There is only one Being who perfectly knows all the choices of all human beings, and where they will lead – God.

Over 2500 years ago, God gave a powerful Babylonian king a dream that was more accurate than the most powerful supercomputing forecaster we have today. Nebuchadnezzar received a dream that detailed the flow of human history from his time to the very end, however many thousands of years that spanned. The dream which Nebuchadnezzar had and its interpretation by Daniel is a stunning example of supernatural power over time and even over human choices.

But why should we in 2011 care about a dream that an ancient king had? Why would we be interested in studying how world history unfolded and what empire followed another? How does that help me with the daily grind, with being honest at work, with being a better spouse, with loving God, with training my children.

### **I. The Relevance of the Dream:**

Let me give you three reasons why you should care about that dream:

Firstly, God's ability to get it right about the future affects your future. If God is able to predict the future with precision, it means He is in control. That means there is no safer Being to deposit your future with.

Second, if all the parts of the vision that were fulfilled in the past took place exactly as God said they would, what should we expect about the parts that are still to be fulfilled? Since God says human history ends with Him ruling, whose side do you want to be on?

Third, if you find in your heart some longing for a place on earth where there is justice, and peace, and beauty, and meaning, then you are hoping for what only God can bring. You are hoping for the kingdom of God.

Why was this dream given? Since God usually did not give such revelation to pagan kings, why was Nebuchadnezzar given such revelation?

### **II. The Reason for the Dream:**

*29 "As for you, O king, thoughts came to your mind while on your bed, about what would come to pass after this; and He who reveals secrets has made known to you what will be. 30 "But as for me, this secret has not been revealed to me because I have more wisdom than anyone living, but for our sakes who make known the interpretation to the king, and that you may know the thoughts of your heart. 31*

Nebuchadnezzar was given the dream for two reasons. First, according to verse 29, he was thinking

about the future. He had no doubt been considering his own rise to power; how kingdoms like Egypt and Assyria had been soundly defeated, and he began to wonder how stable or permanent his own kingdom was. What would come after him? Would Babylon rule the world forever?

The second reason is that God wanted to communicate with Nebuchadnezzar. God had a specific plan for this man, and chose to extend special grace to him. He was drawing Nebuchadnezzar to Himself, and by chapter 4, Nebuchadnezzar had submitted. Through the events of chapter 1 and chapter 3, through the dreams and visions of chapter 2 and 4, God wanted this great king to know who was the King of Kings, and whom he was supposed to submit to. The dream in chapter 2 is both a comfort and a warning – you are a great king, but no king lasts forever. You should place your trust in the God who is greater than all the kingdoms of this world.

What did Nebuchadnezzar actually see in his dream?

### ***III. The Recalling of the Dream:***

*31 " 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. 32 "This image's head was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, 33 "its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. 34 "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. 35 "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. 36 " This is the dream.*

Nebuchadnezzar saw a massive statue of a man. The statue was awesome to look upon, the kind of thing that would keep you gazing at it. There were four sections to this statue: the head was made of gold; the chest and arms were of silver; the belly and thighs were of bronze, and the legs were of iron. The iron was mixed with clay at the feet.

Then a stone comes, not a carefully crafted stone, like the statue is clearly crafted by humans, but a stone that looks like a stone that occurs naturally, come flying at the image like a missile. It doesn't hit the head, the chest, the belly or the legs. It hits the feet of iron and clay. But the result is to cause the whole image to collapse and disintegrate until it is nothing more than powder being blown away. All that remains is the stone and the stone grows and grows and fills the whole world.

That's quite a remarkable dream, and we can understand why Nebuchadnezzar was confused by this dream. What did it mean? God had provided Daniel with the meaning.

### ***IV. The Revelation of the Dream***

*36 " This is the dream. Now we will tell the interpretation of it before the king. 37 "You, O king, are a king of kings. For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory; 38 "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. 39 "But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours; then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. 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. 41 "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. 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. 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. 44 "And in the days of these 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. 45 "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."*

Here is the big picture: the image teaches Nebuchadnezzar and us, how the world will be run by various empires. It is a visual representation of what world history is going to look like from Nebuchadnezzar until the very end. It shows a continuous series of world kingdoms, without any gaps in between. There are four kingdoms, which really blend into each other, until the fifth kingdom comes and destroys them all.

What are these four kingdoms? Daniel tells us what the first one, the head of gold is:

*37 "You, O king, are a king of kings. For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory; 38 "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.*

Nebuchadnezzar himself is the head of gold. Nebuchadnezzar was an absolute monarch, so he and the kingdom of Babylon are one and the same thing. Babylon is Nebuchadnezzar; Nebuchadnezzar is Babylon. God had apparently given Nebuchadnezzar unparalleled authority. Had he wanted to, he could have ruled any people on the face of the globe. Babylon was a kingdom that loved its gold.

**Jeremiah 51:7** <sup>7</sup> *Babylon was a golden cup in the LORD's hand, That made all the earth drunk.*

Babylon reached its zenith under Nebuchadnezzar, but the empire lasted until 539 B.C. It was then conquered by another kingdom.

*39 "But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours; then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth.*

Babylon was conquered by the kingdom of Medo-Persia. We'll come across the name Cyrus later on in our study of Daniel, but in 539 B.C., the Persian king Cyrus entered Babylon and defeated it. He took it over with hardly a fight, so in one sense, the kingdom of Babylon simply merged into the kingdom of Medo-Persia. The Medes and the Persians loved their silver coins and taxed everyone so that the kingdom flowed with silver coinage. This kingdom lasted from 539-331 B.C.

Daniel explains that this kingdom will, in turn, be replaced by a third kingdom. Realise, that this is prophecy about 300 years in advance. Picture someone explaining to you which nation will rule the world in the year 2311.

What was that kingdom? It was the kingdom of Greece, under Alexander the Great. Alexander's father, Philip, had managed to unite the city-states of Greece into a federation. Alexander set out with an army of 35,000 soldiers and managed to defeat countries stretching from Egypt, all the way to India. His empire defeated the Persians, and became the third world power that God was revealing to Nebuchadnezzar. By the way, if you have ever seen pictures of Greek soldiers of this time, what was their armour made of? Bronze.

The fourth kingdom is given more explanation than the other three combined.

*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. 41 "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. 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. 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.*

We know from history which world empire took over from Greece. It was Rome. And according to the dream, Rome would be a brutally strong nation, as strong as iron that crushes. This is an apt description of Rome. Rome's military tactics were ruthless and merciless. The discipline and hardness of their legions were legendary, and the reason for their military dominance. At one point, the Roman empire stretched from Great Britain through all of Europe, include parts of Africa, and reached the edges of India. Images of Roman legions clothed in iron armour, iron helmets, armed with iron swords and spears and shield is something all of us have seen at some point.

But the dream clearly says that this kingdom would be divided. Rome ended up divided into a Western Roman empire and an Eastern Roman empire, the West ruled from Rome, the East ruled from Constantinople. According to Daniel this kingdom ends up with both having its original strength, but with the brittleness and fragility of clay. In its final form, this world empire would be both strong and weak, united but also divided.

When did the Roman empire end, and who replaced it? Well, that's the really difficult question, because no one is agreed on when or if that really ever happened. Certainly the city of Rome was sacked in 410, and a Goth proclaimed himself emperor in 476, but that didn't mean the end of Rome. The Eastern Roman empire continued on until 1453, but there are significant ways in which Western societies have a strongly Roman character to them. Our law courts are very much based on Roman law. Our political democracies find much of their origin in Rome. Much of the way we plan our modern cities comes from Rome, with their emphasis on parks, public libraries, and plazas, signage, underground pipes and sewage. The obsession with entertainment and big stadium sports and events really finds its home in Rome. Our architecture has been strongly influenced by the Romans. If you have ever learned any Latin, you will see how much of the Roman language is the basis for many of the Western European languages. The Roman Catholic church perpetuated much of what was Roman. When did Rome die? Many would argue that it hasn't died; it's been mingled and mixed with weaker elements, but it's still with us.

If we step back and look at the image, we see an interesting increase and decrease at the same time. On the one hand we see a decrease in value. From gold, to silver, to bronze, to iron and clay. Given that Nebuchadnezzar was the absolute ruler of Babylon, this probably shows how each kingdom became less and less centralised. Babylon was ruled by an absolute king. Medo-Persia was more like an oligarchy, power was spread to various rulers. Greece was even less centralised, with power spread through various military generals. And finally, Rome was a republic, an autocratic democracy.

On the other hand we see an increase in strength. Silver is stronger than gold, bronze is stronger than silver, and iron is stronger than bronze. This shows that each kingdom was becoming progressively more powerful and more brutal in warfare. Each kingdom conquered the other.

But what's interesting to realise is that in many ways, each kingdom blends into the next. They take part of the old and adopt it. So that the system we use today of counting in sixes – a dozen this, twelve inches to a foot, 24 hours, 60 minutes – this comes from the Babylonians. Our mathematics and much of our philosophy comes from the Greeks. We've mentioned how Roman our society is. Each kingdom absorbed and brought down elements of the old empire into the new.

So the question we have to ask ourselves is, since we have all these remnants of all these empires with us, has the stone which destroys these kingdoms already hit?

That leads us to the climax of this dream – the kingdom of God.

## V. The Resolution of the Dream

*44 "And in the days of these 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. 45 "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."*

Look at several things about this kingdom:

- 1) It will begin during the days of these kings. Which kings? Well, it seems to be the kings of that final kingdom – Rome.
- 2) It will begin by God's power, not man's "God of heaven will set up a kingdom". This kingdom is not a dual work of God and man. This kingdom comes purely by the hand of God.
- 3) It will endure against all foes "which will never be destroyed". There will never be an overthrow, a rebellion, or even a slow decay and decline of this kingdom.
- 4) Its citizens will never change "not be (passed on) to another people". Those who belong to this kingdom will have a permanent citizenry.
- 5) It will destroy all Gentile dominion it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms. This will not be like the other kingdoms which came out of and slowly took over and absorbed the previous ones. When this one comes, it leaves nothing of the others. Man's self-rule, begun at Babel and attempted throughout history comes to a total end.
- 6) It will be eternal "and it shall stand forever"

God wants Nebuchadnezzar to know, Gentile, unbelieving dominion over the world is temporary. Its future destruction is certain. The only kingdom that will remain will be God's kingdom – the same God who is giving him the dream.

There is little doubt that this last kingdom is the kingdom of God. The debate is over how this kingdom arrives, and what form it takes. The real question we want to answer is: when does this kingdom come? Daniel tells us that the kingdom comes during the days of those kings, which means it takes place during the Roman empire.

Some people believe that since Jesus came and died during the Roman empire, his death and resurrection was the event of a stone hitting the image, and slowly but surely, the gospel grows and takes over the whole world. Others would say that while the cross is primary for the establishment of Christ's kingdom, Christ's death does not correspond to the details of Daniel's prophecy, and it sees the event as Christ's second coming to set up a literal, earthly kingdom. Christ's second coming happens during the days of a future Rome.

Either we believe in a spiritual kingdom that began with Christ's first coming, and will grow through the preaching of the gospel to take over the world, or we believe in a literal kingdom which will come at Christ's second coming and take over the whole world.

To answer that question, let's ask three questions of this dream: First, how does the kingdom of God arrive? Think of the stone hitting the image. Does it arrive slowly, quietly, almost imperceptibly? Does it arrive gently, unnoticed and then become prominent? Or does it arrive suddenly, remarkably and catastrophically? It arrives in a sudden, catastrophic fashion. It certainly does grow;

it grows to rule the whole world. But what is clear is when this kingdom arrives, it arrives catastrophically. Does this sound like a kingdom that arrived 2000 years ago when the gospel began to be preached? Does it sound like a kingdom that began when 12 men began preaching in Jerusalem? No. There is nothing in the first coming of Christ or in the establishment of the church that corresponds to a catastrophic, sudden, destructive arrival of the kingdom. Instead, the events of Revelation 19 sound a lot more like this event, a massive battle, Christ coming on a white horse.

**"Revelation 19:14-15** <sup>14</sup> *And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses.* <sup>15</sup> *Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.*

Then in chapter 20, we have a kingdom on earth that goes on for at least a thousand years, with saints reigning with Christ.

Second, when this kingdom arrives, what does it do to the other kingdoms? The image represents a succession of Gentile world powers: Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome. Once the stone comes, it completely destroys the image. It devastates it. It obliterates it. Let me ask you, did Gentile world dominion end in the first century? Did Gentile world dominion end when the church began? Did the church suddenly destroy the existing political world order? No. The first coming of Christ, and the establishment of the early church did not obliterate or overwhelm Gentile political power – it simply co-existed with it. If the kingdom of God is actually the church, does Daniel depict the kingdom of God existing side-by-side with other kingdoms? The answer is no. Since the first coming of Christ, human kingdoms have not been removed or catastrophically erased. As we pointed out, we still live with many Babylonian, Persian, Greek and Roman elements in our lives. Interestingly, the stone hits the image on the feet, where the Roman kingdom is already divided. In the days of Christ and the establishment of the church, the Roman empire was not divided. That only happened centuries later.

Third, were the Babylonian, Persian, Greek and Roman empires actual, historical, physical kingdoms that existed at points in human history? If each kingdom took over from the last, and if they were actual, historical kingdoms, what should we expect from the fifth kingdom? Shouldn't we expect it to be a literal, historical kingdom that takes the place of the others? Someone says, but it is made without hands. That shows it's not a physical kingdom, it's a spiritual kingdom. No, what it says is it is not made with human hands. That means, the kingdom is not of human origin. Humans didn't make it. It doesn't mean that it will not be visible, tangible and historical.

That actually raises another point. If this kingdom of God is not one made with human hands, does that sound like something which God sets up with the contributions of man? Does it sound like something he does in partnership with us? It sounds as if this is something God imposes upon the world apart from human effort. It doesn't sound like something achieved through evangelism and missions.

So for those reasons, I don't think that the event of the stone hitting the image occurred at Christ's first coming. The church did not destroy Gentile kingdoms, it didn't arrive catastrophically and the church is not a physical, political kingdom that takes over from the others.

The event would better be the day of the Lord and the return of the Lord. But that produces a problem. How could we say that the Second Coming of Jesus could happen during the days of those Roman kings? The answer to that is something we mentioned in our introduction to Daniel. When Daniel gives prophecies, he sees mountaintops of human history, often ignoring the valley of time

in-between. It would seem there is a sense in which the Roman empire does not die out, it is just diluted. There is some way in which the fourth kingdom continues to the end. We know that from chapter 7, which is really a repeat of chapter 2. Instead of four parts to the statue, there are four animals. Here an angel makes it clear to Daniel that the fourth kingdom eventually collides head-on with God's judgement.

**Daniel 7:23-27** <sup>23</sup> " Thus he 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. <sup>24</sup> 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. <sup>25</sup> 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. <sup>26</sup> ' But the court shall be seated, And they shall take away his dominion, To consume and destroy it forever. <sup>27</sup> 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.'

In other words, the arrival of the kingdom is still future. It will collide with a revived Rome, or probably better – a diluted Rome. A world empire which carried on the characteristics of the previous empires, but is most like Rome, except it is diluted with other brittle elements. This empire will in the last days be struck with the sword of the returning Lord Jesus, as He sets up His kingdom.

There will be a real, literal kingdom ruled by Christ upon this earth. A kingdom requires three things: a ruler, a realm and rulership. There will be the actual ruler – Christ the King. He will have a realm, ruling from Israel, extending over the whole earth, and he will actually exercise authority over the realm. It will be a time of previously unknown justice and righteousness. Nature will enjoy a removal or almost total restraining of the curse. Things like sickness and disease will be almost unknown. Wars will be absent. The economy, justice, agriculture, science, art, will be under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the administration of His saints.

This is the kingdom of Christ. Christ Himself is the stone. He is the one who is given permission to open the title deed to the whole world in Revelation 5. He is the King. Born of a virgin, fully God, fully man, it is He who upon His second coming strikes this thing called human self-rule, and brings the world into subjection to Himself. It belongs to him; it is a matter of time before He comes to claim it.

Christian, that should fill you with hope. When we pray, "thy kingdom come", we're not praying for something invisible. We're praying for the in-breaking of a glorious conquest by Christ. You already know how it ends – he wins, and you are one of His. Nothing can ultimately harm a believer. God is great enough to rule human history, and good enough to care for His faithful children.

If you do not know Him, then you should hear Jesus' words:

**John 3:3** <sup>3</sup> Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Kingdom citizenship begins with a new heart – being born again. It begins when you forsake your own little kingdom in which you are the king, and admit you've been rebelling against God, and then receive the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour and King. When you do that, you will be born again, and become a kingdom citizen, with the right to enter both heaven, and the kingdom when it is established.

