

## **8. The Image with the Head of Gold**

### **What was king Nebuchadnezzar shown in his wonderful dream?**

"Thou, O king, saw, and behold a great image." Daniel 2: 3 1.

In these words the prophet Daniel recalled to the heathen king, Nebuchadnezzar, the dream which had so fascinated him, yet which he found himself unable to bring back to mind. In so doing he opened up the first great panoramic prophecy of world history, for under the symbolism of this great image there was to be revealed to the gaze of the astonished king a view of the destiny of the empire which he had built up, and the course of all succeeding empires right on to the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth. Surely, to adapt a famous Churchillian phrase, never was so much for so many comprehended in so few words!

It may seem strange at first that a heathen king should be chosen for such an epochal revelation, yet the choice was not without reason or without precedent. When the children of Israel were in captivity in Egypt, God gave warning of approaching famine in a dream to Pharaoh and gave the interpretation to his servant Joseph. (Genesis 41: 1, 5, 25.) Now Israel is again in captivity, and God desires to reveal to His faithful people the course of Gentile supremacy, that they may be assured of His overruling in the affairs of the nations and of the certain re-establishment of His kingdom. What then could be more appropriate than that the first Gentile world-ruler should be 'shown the latter end of his earthly line'?

No symbol could have been more familiar to the king than an image, for his temples and palaces were replete with monster statues of gods, men, and beasts. An image would immediately arrest and hold his attention.

### **In what form was the great image that the king saw?**

It was the image of a man.

That the dream-image should be in the form of a man was particularly appropriate as it was to represent the kingdoms of men as distinct from the kingdom of God, the rule of man in contrast to the rule of God. It symbolized nations and kingdoms which would be built up by human strength, the product of human intellect and human passions. And the period of history it was to cover was "the times of the Gentiles" (Luke 21: 24) or "man's day." 1 Corinthians 4: 3 (margin).

### **What two characteristics at once impressed the king?**

"This great image, whose brightness was excellent, stood before thee; and the form thereof was terrible." Daniel 2: 31.

The image's brightness was "excellent," for in the eyes of men the empires which they built up would be objects of admiration and glory. In a later vision these same empires are seen from God's viewpoint as wild and ravaging beasts. (Daniel 7)

Secondly, the form of the image was "terrible." Its colossal stature, powerful limbs, and threatening features marked it as an object of awe and fear. In this respect, also, it fitly represented the military monarchies of the future, whose foundations would be laid upon the ruins of conquered nations and the bodies of their dead.

### **Of what diverse materials was the image fashioned?**

"This image's head was of fine gold, his breast and his arms of Silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, his legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay." Daniel 2:32,33.

While the image was one continuous figure revealing the essential unity of spirit in all earthly empires, it was composite in character to illustrate the changes of human government.

These four metals represented four successive world powers which should arise, the transference of rule from one to the other corresponding to the overturning referred to by the prophet Ezekiel. (Ezekiel 21: 27.) These successive powers would be as diverse from one another as gold, silver, brass, and iron, yet all would come "from the earth"; all were to be essentially human governments.

The descending value of the metals in the image indicated that, in spite of outward glory and achievement, there would be a steady degeneration in these kingdoms of men until at last God would sweep them all away. It portrays the "decline and fall" not of one but of all human empires.

### **Beginning his interpretation of the symbolism of the image, of what did Daniel remind**

### **Nebuchadnezzar?**

"Thou, O king, art a king of kings: for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory. And where so ever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the heaven hath He given into your hand, and hath made thee ruler over them all." Daniel 2:37, 38.

In his inscriptions Nebuchadnezzar attributes his elevation to "his god" Merodach. Daniel corrects this erroneous idea by telling him that he had received it by the favor of the "God of heaven." Not merely had he received a kingdom from God, he had been given the kingdom or exclusive dominion as it is more correctly translated in the Revised Version.

### **From what ancient beginnings had the kingdom of Babylon developed?**

"Cush begat Nimrod: . . . and the beginning of his kingdom was Babel (margin 'Babylon'), and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar." Genesis 10: 8-10.

Back in the dawn of history there sprang up along the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates, and their tributaries, a series of city states, sometimes independent, sometimes dominated by one or other of the greater kings. Those enumerated here were important cities in the different regions of the valley as far back as archeology can take us. Erech or Uruk was in Southern Babylonia, some fifty miles up the Euphrates from Ur, Abraham's birthplace, and shares with Tell-el-Obeid, which lay between them, the oldest civilized remains which have been found in the whole valley. Babel or Bab-ilu was 200 miles farther up the river, and Akkad or Agade was still farther to the north, probably very near the confluence of the two rivers. Calneh has not been identified with certitude, but may have been still farther to the north.

The Sumerian kingdom seems to have been the first considerable grouping of city states, based upon Kish, and Ur, and Uruk. Thereafter followed the Akkadian kingdom, founded by Sargon of Akkad or Agade, and a further Sumerian period in which Ur again attained great splendour. A confused epoch then ensued due to invasions from the north and west. This was brought to an end by the establishment of the first Babylonian Empire about the time that Abraham was settling in Canaan. After a century or so, the old Babylonian Empire declined and the Assyrian Empire, based upon Asshur and later Nineveh, arose. Assyria broke up with the fall of Nineveh in 612 BC., Babylon regained its independence under Nabopolassar, and the Neo-Babylonian Empire, with which we are particularly concerned, came into being, reaching its zenith under King Nebuchadnezzar.

### **What relation had Nebuchadnezzar's great empire to the dream image which he saw?**

"Thou art this head of gold." Daniel 2:38.

While the whole Neo-Babylonian dynasty was included in the golden head, to no Babylonian monarch could it have more correctly been said, "Thou art this head of gold," for his father Nabopolassar did no more than lay the foundations of Babylon's greatness, and none of the kings who followed him were of his calibre. It was he who made Babylon great and after his passing, it quickly crumbled.

Babylon was literally a golden city. Herodotus, the Greek historian, who visited Babylon some ninety years after the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, describes his astonishment at the amount of gold lavished upon the sacred temples of the city. The hall of E-sag-ila, the great temple of Merodach, was overlaid with shining gold, lapis lazuli, and alabaster. The chapel of Merodach, lined by a former king with silver, was overlaid by Nebuchadnezzar "with fine gold." The image of the god was of solid gold. It was seated upon a golden throne with a golden base. and in front of it stood a large golden table. The Chaldeans told Herodotus that there were 800 talents' weight of the precious metal in these objects. In a small upper temple was another table of gold and outside the temple was a golden altar. (See Herodotus 1, 181, 183; 111, 1-7)

Pliny mentions the vestments of the priests of Babylon as intermixed with gold, and in one of the Babylonian tablets recently unearthed which associates different metals with the various gods of Babylonia. It is a significant fact that Merodach the patron god of Babylon, was the "golden" god.

Gold not only typified the literal splendors of Babylonia, but as the chief of metals, it appropriately symbolized the greatness of Babylon in other ways. The empire was a monument to the political genius of its founder. Nebuchadnezzar consolidated his conquests and left his successors a great and prosperous empire. Berosus asserts that "he possessed Egypt, Syria, Phoenicia, and Arabia," as well as the whole Mesopotamian valley "and by his deeds he excelled all that ever reigned before him over the Chaldeans and the Babylonians!"-"Apud Joseph Contra Apion," 1, 19.

The most precious of metals further, represented the most perfect centralization of human power ever attained, for the word of Nebuchadnezzar was the only law for the whole empire. (Daniel 5: 19)

The Babylonian Empire furthermore represented a golden age of intellectual attainments. Chaldea was synonymous with all that was profound in science and sublime in human wisdom. Centuries later "wise men" came from the land of the Chaldeans to render their homage to the infant Christ. (Matthew 2: 1.)

**What rude shock came to Nebuchadnezzar as Daniel continued his interpretation of the image?**

"And after thee shall arise another kingdom." Daniel 2:39.

Nebuchadnezzar must have glowed with pride as he was told that the empire he had built up corresponded in the image to the head of gold. The shock must therefore have been all the greater when he learned that after him there should arise "another kingdom."

Perhaps it was to drive from his mind the humiliating knowledge that his kingdom would fall and to delude himself that it would continue for ever, that we find Nebuchadnezzar a little later erecting an image upon the plains of Dura entirely of gold, and commanding all the rulers of the people to resort thither to worship before it. (Daniel 3) This hope was, however, destined to be vain. The divine decree had gone forth and no earthly power could reverse it.