



## DANIEL 2:31-49

31 "You saw, O king, and behold, a great image. This image, mighty and of exceeding brightness, stood before you, and its appearance was frightening. 32 The head of this image was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its middle and thighs of bronze, 33 its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. 34 As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it 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, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. 36 "This was the dream. Now we will tell the king its interpretation. 37 You, O king, the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, and the might, and the glory, 38 and into whose hand he has given, wherever they dwell, the children of man, the beasts of the field, and the birds of the heavens, making you rule over them all—you are the head of gold. 39 Another kingdom inferior to you shall arise after you, and yet a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. 40 And there shall be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron, because iron breaks to pieces and shatters all things. And like iron that crushes, it shall break and crush all these. 41 And as you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, it shall be a divided kingdom, but some of the firmness of iron shall be in it, just as you saw iron mixed with the soft clay. 42 And as the toes of the feet were partly iron and partly clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly brittle. 43 As you saw the iron mixed with soft clay, so they will mix with one another in marriage, but they will not hold together, just as iron does not mix with clay. 44 And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever, 45 just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure." 46 Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face and paid homage to Daniel, and commanded that an offering and incense be offered up to him. 47 The king answered and said to Daniel, "Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery." 48 Then the king gave Daniel high honors and many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon. 49 Daniel made a request of the king, and he appointed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego over the affairs of the province of Babylon. But Daniel remained at the king's court.

## STRUCTURE

- I. **The Kingdoms Revealed:** a glorious statue and a stone that shatters it (31-35)
  - a. *The dazzling kingdom of man:* an immense, radiant, and terrifying statue representing human empire (31-33)
  - b. *The divine interruption:* a stone "cut without hands" strikes the statue at its weakest point (34)
  - c. *The total collapse of empire:* the kingdoms of man crumble like chaff, while the stone becomes a mountain filling the earth (35)
  
- II. **The Kingdoms Interpreted:** four empires collapse before God's eternal reign (36-45)
  - a. *Babylon identified:* Nebuchadnezzar is the head of gold, reigning only by God's gift (36-38)
  - b. *The decline of earthly power:* three inferior kingdoms succeed Babylon, culminating in a brutal but divided fourth empire (39-43)
  - c. *The triumph of God's kingdom:* in the days of the fourth empire, God establishes an indestructible kingdom that shatters all others (44-45)
  
- III. **The Friends of God Vindicated:** God promotes His own in the court of empire (46-49)
  - a. *A pagan king confesses:* Nebuchadnezzar acknowledges Daniel's God as "God of gods and Lord of kings" (46-47)
  - b. *Faithfulness rewarded:* Daniel is exalted to power in Babylon's administration (48)
  - c. *Blessing shared:* Daniel secures promotion for his friends (49)

## GENERAL COMMENTARY:

Having established that Israel's God alone reveals mysteries and establishes kings (2:20–23), the next section proves these points through a divine dream given to a pagan king. Nebuchadnezzar dreams of "a great image" (2:31)—an idol of man—representing the kingdom of man. Politics have always been an idol. The kingdoms of this world stand like monuments to human glory, towering displays of power that expose our chief human impulse: to enthrone ourselves.

The idolatrous statue is glorious and immense, but also fragile. It comprises four materials, representing four successive kingdoms: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome (for commentary on this interpretation, see below). The materials diminish in value from gold to silver, to bronze, to a mixture of iron and clay. Mankind has always

imagined that his political ambitions trend toward progress—that if we build the right systems and pass the right laws, we might finally create heaven on earth. Nebuchadnezzar's dream shatters that illusion. The image's worsening materials reveal the kingdom of man—not progressing—but regressing in splendor. Its only real "progress" is in brutality, which explains why the base of the statue consists of iron and clay. Iron is stronger than gold, yet less glorious. The fourth empire, Rome, will crush the world with its advanced military, but the kingdom will be brittle like clay, struggling to unite its disparate parts. Despite how impressive earthly empires may be, a statue with a fragile base is destined to fall. The kingdom of man inevitably does.

And it doesn't take much—just a tiny stone brings the whole thing down. The stone represents God's kingdom, God's temple, and God's Son. Throughout the Old Testament, God's kingdom and temple are united concepts because wherever God dwells (temple), He also reigns (kingdom). These images coalesce in Jesus, who is the king of God's kingdom and the cornerstone of a new temple. Jesus is the stone made "without hands" for He is not the uncreated Son of God—the Second Person of the Trinity.

Jesus entered the world during "the days of those kings"—the fourth empire, Rome. Nebuchadnezzar's dream foretold the end of the kingdom of man and establishment of the kingdom of God. Jesus inaugurated God's kingdom, announcing, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." Through His life, death, and resurrection, He triumphed over Caesar and Rome, turning their instrument of destruction—the Cross—into the very means by which God's kingdom was established on the earth. King Jesus rose above "the powers that be," occupying a higher throne than all of them. Reigning from the Father's right hand, He now waits for His enemies to be made His footstool (Ps. 110:1). Gradually throughout this age, with every conquered heart, God's kingdom fills the earth like the mountain of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. When Christ returns, heaven and earth will be one. The kingdom of man was decisively defeated at the first advent; it is finally replaced at the second advent—at Christ's return.

When Daniel reveals both the dream and its interpretation, Nebuchadnezzar confesses the supremacy of Israel's God. As the next chapter reveals, this does not mean the pagan king was converted. As a devout polytheist, he was quite willing to add Yahweh to his pantheon. Still, he acknowledges God and promotes Daniel, who in turn requests the promotion of his Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Even if the kingdom of man continues along its wicked course, it is destined to fall. The vindication of Daniel's friends foreshadows the triumph of God's kingdom.

## VERSE-BY-VERSE COMMENTARY:

**31 "You saw, O king, and behold, a great image. This image, mighty and of exceeding brightness, stood before you, and its appearance was frightening. 32 The head of this image was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its middle and thighs of bronze, 33 its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay.**

—"great image":

- Not just a statue, but an idol.
- Later we learn that the idol represents a sequence of nations—collectively, the kingdom of man. The kingdom of man is itself an idol. This reaches back to the original city and tower of Babel. From the beginning, mankind has worshiped his own political project.
- As we will observe repeatedly throughout this Study Guide, the four kingdoms of Daniel 2 parallel those of Daniel 7. In Daniel 2, they are a spectacular statue; in Daniel 7, they are devouring beasts. The images convey reality from different perspectives. From our perspective, the kingdom of man is impressive like an immense statue. From God's perspective, the kingdom of man is a predatorial beast. In either case—the beast, the statue—man's kingdom is temporary.

—"mighty... exceeding brightness... appearance was frightening":

- We idolize the kingdom of man because it is immensely powerful. We fear disavowing our allegiance because empires consume dissenters. We pledge total allegiance because it rewards us with the benefits of empire.
- From Nebuchadnezzar's golden image (Dan 3), to Roman emperor worship ("Caesar is Lord"), to ideological loyalty under regimes like Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, empires have repeatedly demanded public acts of allegiance—rewarding conformity and punishing dissent.

—"head... of fine gold... chest and arms of silver... middle and thighs of bronze... legs of iron... feet partly of iron and partly of clay":

- The material **diminishes in stability** from top to bottom. We will soon see that Babylon is the golden head—the most glorious and splendid of the successive empires. Yet the statue descends toward feet "partly of clay," a mixture that does not hold together. However magnificent the upper portions appear, a statue with fragile feet is not stable. The mightiest empires are destined to fall.

- The material **diminishes in value** from top to bottom. Gold is more precious than silver, silver than bronze, bronze than iron, and clay is almost worthless. The kingdom of man imagines continual progress, but it actually regresses.
- I'm reminded of a quote by CS Lewis while the world unraveled during a second global war: *"If we had foolish un-Christian hopes about human culture, they are now shattered. If we thought we were building up a heaven on earth, if we looked for something that would turn the present world from a place of pilgrimage into a permanent city satisfying the soul of man, we are disillusioned, and not a moment too soon."*
- The statue **diminishes in unity**—it becomes more fragmented: from a single head, to two arms, to two legs, and finally to feet with many toes (2:43: "toes"). Empires begin unified but end divided and unstable.
- "iron" is actually very strong. Gold has a "tensile strength" of 120-200 MPa, but iron reaches levels as high as 540 MPa. Armies used iron to forge swords and armor. The fourth kingdom (probably Rome, see below) would be advanced militarily—more brutal, yet less glorious. "iron" shows how empires trend toward dehumanization.
- Again, though the materials differ, they belong to one statue—different expressions of the same "kingdom of man." The statue appears magnificent and terrifying, yet its entire weight rests on fragile feet. Human empires project invincibility, but their foundations are weak.
- We use the idiom, "feet of clay" based on this passage. It refers to someone or something that appears powerful, impressive, or even invincible, but is built on hidden weakness. Daniel's vision exposes the same truth about human empires: they may glitter like gold and march like iron, but if their foundations are fragile.

**34 As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it 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, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.**

—"a stone":

- We are not told what kind of stone this is, but it's strong enough to transform gold, silver, bronze, and iron into mere powder. This is the kingdom of God.
- It is also associated with the temple (see below). Where God dwells (temple), He reigns (kingdom). Israel imagined the wings of the cherubim as Yahweh's throne ("enthroned above the cherubim"—1 Sam. 4:4; 2 Sam. 6:2; 2 Kgs. 19:15; etc.).
- The "holy of holies" in the temple functioned as an earthly depiction of Yahweh's heavenly throne room. The kingdom of God and temple of God are bound together.
- The stone is also Jesus (see below).

—"cut out":

- Later we observe that the stone is "cut from a mountain" (2:45)—then it "became a great mountain that filled the whole earth" (2:35).
- How can it be that the stone came from a mountain only to become a mountain?
  - Mountains symbolize kingdoms (cf. Isa. 2:2/Mic. 4:1; Jer. 51:25; Zech. 4:7).
  - The second mountain "filled the whole earth" (2:35), hinting at its terrestrial domain. God's kingdom will literally and physically take over the world.
  - The first mountain says nothing about the earth. This probably suggests its heavenly domain and origin. Before the events of this vision, it has not yet "filled the whole earth."
  - Theologians have sometimes differentiated between God's "universal kingdom" and His "mediatorial kingdom."
    - The universal kingdom is His heavenly rule over all things. It is heavenly and spiritual. From the beginning of creation, God has sovereignly ruled over all.

- The mediatorial reign is His heavenly rule over all things—*through a human mediator*—Jesus. From the beginning of creation, God has intended to rule the earth through man made in His image. Humans failed to subdue creation. But then Jesus came.
- I believe the distinction between God's universal and mediatorial kingdoms helps illuminate the passage. The stone originates from God's universal kingdom—His sovereign rule over all creation. Yet that same stone becomes a mountain—a kingdom filling the whole earth—as God's mediatorial reign is established through the Messiah, fulfilling the prayer Jesus taught us: “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”
- Though the verb differs from Daniel 9:26, where the Messiah is “cut off,” the imagery invites reflection. God's kingdom ultimately arrives through a Messiah who is rejected and slain (Dan. 9:26; cf. Isa. 53:8). Moreover, throughout Scripture God advances His redemptive purposes by literally “cutting a covenant” (Gen. 15:18; Exod. 24:8; Jer. 34:18). Put together, the pattern becomes suggestive: Jesus was cut off in order to cut the new covenant in His blood (Luke 22:20). In that sense, the cut-out stone that destroys the kingdoms of the world arrives through the cut-off Messiah.

—“by no human hand”:

- This emphasizes a divine source throughout Scripture. What is “not made with hands” comes from God rather than human labor.
- Beale: “the New testament that repeatedly refers to the new, end-time temple as ‘not made with hands’ (see Mark 14:58; 2 Cor. 5:1; Heb. 9:11, 24; Acts 7:48). The Old Testament image corresponding closest to this is Daniel's stone ‘cut out without hands.’”
- Human kingdoms and temples are the product of human labor. Israel built a monarchy and hewed stones for their temples, but these were only shadows of the heavenly reality—God's heavenly reign and temple.
- The stone cut by no human hand represents God's kingdom/temple, sent from heaven to smash the kingdom man and establish this world as the dwelling place of God (temple) and the seat of His reign (kingdom), when “the kingdom of this world becomes the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ” (Rev. 11:15).
- Furthermore, the “stone” is Jesus Himself (see below). *But how can the stone be the kingdom, the temple, and Jesus?* Scripture often identifies rulers with the kingdoms they represent. In Daniel's own visions the king and the kingdom frequently merge. For example, Daniel tells Nebuchadnezzar, “You are the head of gold” (Dan. 2:38), even though the head represents the Babylonian kingdom. Likewise, the beasts in Daniel 7 symbolize both kings and their kingdoms (Dan. 7:17, 23). This blending helps explain how the stone can represent both the kingdom of God and the Messiah who establishes it. The New Testament makes the identification explicit by applying stone imagery directly to Christ. Jesus is the rejected cornerstone (Ps. 118:22; Matt. 21:42), the stone that causes stumbling (Isa. 8:14; Rom. 9:33), and the living stone from whom God builds His spiritual temple (1 Pet. 2:4–6). He is also the true temple, the place where God dwells with His people (John 2:19–21). The imagery converges because the kingdom and the temple ultimately meet in one person: Jesus Himself. He is the king who brings the kingdom, the cornerstone of the temple, and the stone that shatters the kingdoms of man.

—“struck the image on its feet”:

- The kingdom of God is not passive. It pulverizes the kingdom of man.
- Daniel seemingly alludes to the means of attack by depicting the stone as “cut out”—an apparent allusion to the cutting off of the Messiah (see above). God's kingdom does not advance by the sword. As Jesus says to Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over... But my kingdom is not from the world” (Jhn. 18:36).
- That the kingdom strikes the image “on its feet” reveals both the strategy and timing of God's advancement:
  - *Strategy*: He attacks the base, not the head, bringing down the whole kingdom of man and revealing its structural weakness.

- *Timing:* The kingdom begins its decisive advance during the reign of the fourth kingdom. Daniel 2 and 7 present parallel visions of four successive empires. Only Babylon is named explicitly (Dan. 2:38), and scholars debate the remaining three, but the traditional interpretation remains compelling: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. This fits the historical moment of Christ's advent, which occurred during the Roman Empire. Christ did not overthrow Rome through military conquest; instead, He rose to a higher throne, establishing a kingdom that replaces every earthly empire.
- *Note:* One might respond that Christ did not, in fact, destroy the kingdom of man during His first advent. For this reason, some interpreters understand the "fourth kingdom" to represent both ancient Rome and a revived Roman empire at the end of history. Others interpret it to represent the kingdom of man generally, which extends its dominion until Christ returns. On the first: This text provides no evidence of a two-stage Roman empire. On the second: generalizing the fourth kingdom as "the kingdom of man" blurs the distinction between the four kingdoms, which together comprise the kingdom of man. In my judgment, it is better to interpret the vision in light of its historical reality. The fourth kingdom is Rome. Christ conquered Rome—and the kingdom of man—at His first advent. The kingdom of man remains for a time according to God's decree (Dan. 7:12), but it is still subject to Christ's higher throne (7:13). Christ will return, not to reign—He already does!—but to remove all contest (Ps. 110:1). Until then, the "kingdom of man" remains in place under Christ's authority. But the decisive victory has already been won. Earthly rulers are subjects. Jesus is the King of the world.
- My articulation has sometimes been described as the "already/not-yet" reality of the kingdom. Christ "already" reigns by virtue of His life, death, resurrection, and ascension. Christ has "not yet" consummated His reign. This occurs at His Second Coming.

—"iron... clay... bronze... silver... gold, all together were broken in pieces":

- Jesus did not just conquer sin; He conquered tyranny. He is the Prince of Peace.
- Jesus did not just conquer Rome; He conquered the whole kingdom of man.
- I don't think we focus enough on Jesus' defeat of tyranny at His first coming. We emphasize the spiritual effects of the Cross—rightly so—but we diminish its hope when we ignore its kingdom impact. Jesus didn't just die to forgive sin and take us to heaven. He suffered under tyranny to defeat all tyranny. He conquered the sword by letting it pierce Him. He swallowed our bloodlust and rose above it, ensuring that we could enjoy His eternal reign of peace. The kingdom of man devours the sons of men—but it won't always be so. Jesus defeated the concentration camp, the gulag, and the military-industrial complex. The Cross symbolized not just the wickedness of sin but the oppressions of empire. The kingdom of man silences dissent with the most powerful weapon at its disposal—death. On the third day, Jesus turned their ultimate weapon into final defeat. Citizens of the kingdom need not fear even death.
- This makes me think of Isaiah 2 and Micah 4, which like Daniel 2, envision the mountain of the Lord—His kingdom/temple—filling the whole earth. Afterward, these prophets foretell a day when "they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore" (Isa. 2:4; Mic. 4:3). The imagery is strikingly similar. Daniel sees the stone become a great mountain that fills the earth; Isaiah and Micah see the mountain of the Lord's house established above all mountains, drawing the nations into His rule. Daniel emphasizes the collapse of the kingdoms of man; Isaiah and Micah highlight the peaceful reign that follows. Together they portray the same hope—the day when the Lord's rule fills the earth and the drumbeat of war falls silent.
- This moves my heart. I long for the day when, as the Christmas carol *O Holy Night* says, "all oppression shall cease." Our hope is not escape from this world but its transformation. The prophets envisioned this planet remade—the mountain of the Lord filling the earth, swords beaten into plowshares, nations finally at peace. One day the world we inhabit, which so often feels like a dumpster fire of injustice and violence, will become a tangible kingdom where God reigns and a cosmic temple where He dwells—a "new heavens and new earth."

—“like chaff of the summer threshing floors”:

- After grain was threshed, farmers tossed it into the air so the wind would carry away the chaff—the dry, weightless husks—while the grain fell back to the ground. Daniel’s point is that the mighty kingdoms of man will prove just as weightless, blown away without a trace before the kingdom of God.
- Beale suggests an allusion to 2 Chron. 3:1.
  - The verse reads: “Then Solomon began to build the house of the LORD in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the LORD had appeared to David his father, at the place that David had appointed, on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite.”
  - The temple was built where David offered sacrifice to stay Israel’s plague.
  - If this allusion is intentional, Nebuchadnezzar’s vision subtly ties the destruction of the kingdoms of man to the rise of God’s kingdom/temple. The kingdom of man blows away like chaff on the threshing floor; the kingdom/temple of God is established in that very place.

—“not a trace”:

- Beale also sees echoes in Book of Revelation 12:8b and 20:11. Linguistically, both passages use language remarkably close to Daniel’s: Satan and his angels are expelled from heaven so that “**no place was found** for them any longer” (Rev. 12:8), and at the final judgment “earth and heaven fled away, and **no place was found** for them” (Rev. 20:11). This mirrors Daniel’s statement that the shattered statue left “**not a trace**” behind (Dan. 2:35).
- Theologically, the pattern is the same: forces opposed to God’s reign appear powerful, but when His kingdom arrives, they are removed so completely that no place remains for them.
- Revelation 12:8 links to Christ’s first advent, where there is “no place” for Satan and his warring angels to level accusations against God’s elect.
- Revelation 20:11 links to Christ’s second advent, where there is “no place” for heaven and earth to withstand His final judgment.
- Putting these together, God establishes His kingdom through Christ in two stages. Through His first advent, He initially conquers Satan and his minions. Through His second advent, He finally conquers both these and the evil they foment.

—“But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.”

- Beale: “Daniel’s picture of an expanding mountain is compatible with Ancient Near Eastern cosmogonies that sometimes portray a hillock arising amidst the chaos seas as the bridgehead of a new creation...”—In other words, the establishment of God’s temple/kingdom and His new-creation project coalesce. Through Christ, God dwells among His people (temple), reigns over the earth (kingdom), and redeems fallen creation (new creation).
- Redemption is a form of creation—it is new creation. Christ redeems the world.
- We have already discussed other aspects of the statue-striking stone and the earth-filling mountain above.

*36 "This was the dream. Now we will tell the king its interpretation. 37 You, O king, the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, and the might, and the glory, 38 and into whose hand he has given, wherever they dwell, the children of man, the beasts of the field, and the birds of the heavens, making you rule over them all—you are the head of gold. 39 Another kingdom inferior to you shall arise after you, and yet a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. 40 And there shall be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron, because iron breaks to pieces and shatters all things. And like iron that crushes, it shall break and crush all these. 41 And as you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, it shall be a divided kingdom, but some of the firmness of iron shall be in it, just as you saw iron mixed with the soft clay. 42 And as the toes of the feet were partly iron and partly clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly brittle. 43 As you saw the iron mixed with soft clay, so they will mix with one another in marriage, but they will not hold together, just as iron does not mix with clay.*

—“king of kings”: This was an ancient title for the ruler of the kingdom of man—the one who rules a singular kingdom that dominates all others. Jews adopt this title for their Messiah.

—“God of heaven has given the kingdom”: Nebuchadnezzar does not reign because of succession and conquest, as he imagines. He reigns by God’s permission. So it is for every ruler, even the most ruthless. God allows their ascent to fulfill sovereign purposes, but He ultimately deposes them. Jesus is the last king standing.

—“beasts of the field, and the birds of the heavens, making you rule over them all”:

- This reminds us of Gen. 1:26–28, where Adam and Eve are commissioned to subdue creation, including the beasts and birds of the earth. Nebuchadnezzar is presented as a false Adam. The tyrant rules, but with an iron fist. He crushes creation rather than making it flourish as God intends.
- Gen. 1:26–28 is often called, “The Cultural Mandate.” God made man to rule the earth, making it look like God is in charge. But the development of technology, art, science, and kingdoms reflects man’s sinfulness, not God’s righteousness.
- This theme is further reinforced by the shape of the statue: a giant man. It reflects man’s view of himself—a giant in his own mind. God made man to rule in humility. The statue is a “false humanity,” a parody of God’s design.

—“you are the head of gold”: As is typical, Daniel’s visions blend the king and the kingdom. The head represents Nebuchadnezzar, but also Babylon. Likewise, the “stone” symbolizes God’s kingdom, but also its human king—Jesus.

—“Another kingdom inferior to you shall arise after you”: This is why the value of the material in each part of the statue diminishes. The kingdom of man declines before it is crushed.

—On the succession of four kingdoms: Scholars debate which four kingdoms are referenced. Traditional scholars suggest Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and then Rome. Theologically liberal scholars (and some conservatives) suggest Babylon, Media, Persia, then Greece. We cannot be dogmatic, but here are reasons why I ascribe to the traditional interpretation:

- **Daniel treats Media and Persia as a single empire.** The book repeatedly joins the two peoples into one political entity rather than presenting Media as a separate kingdom after Babylon. Babylon falls to the “Medes and Persians” (Dan. 5:28), the empire operates under the “law of the Medes and Persians” (Dan. 6:8, 12, 15), and the ram explicitly represents “the kings of Media and Persia” together (Dan. 8:20).
- **History confirms Media did not succeed Babylon independently.** The Median kingdom had already been absorbed by Persia under Cyrus before Babylon fell, making a Babylon → Media → Persia sequence historically unlikely. Daniel’s narrative fits the historical transition better if the second empire is the combined Medo-Persian power that conquered Babylon (Dan. 5:30–31; cf. Dan. 8:20).
- **“Darius the Mede” does not require a separate Median empire.** The figure called “Darius the Mede” appears in the immediate aftermath of Babylon’s fall (Dan. 5:31; 6:1), but Daniel elsewhere treats the ruling power as the joint Medo-Persian kingdom. The reference may reflect a Median title, a governor under Cyrus, or a dual ethnic identity within the same imperial structure (Dan. 6:8; 8:20).
- **Daniel explicitly identifies Greece as the third empire.** In Daniel’s later vision the goat is unambiguously named: “the goat is the kingdom of Greece” (Dan. 8:21), which defeats the Medo-Persian ram (Dan. 8:20–21). This confirms that Greece follows Medo-Persia as the third major kingdom in the prophetic sequence.
- **The fourth kingdom must extend to the time of the Messiah’s kingdom.** Daniel says God establishes His eternal kingdom “in the days of those kings” of the fourth empire (Dan. 2:44). Since the New Testament places the inauguration of Christ’s reign during the Roman era (cf. Matt. 26:64; Acts 2:33–36), the fourth kingdom naturally corresponds to Rome.
- **The fourth kingdom is uniquely powerful and different from the others.** Daniel stresses that the final beast is “terrifying and dreadful... and different from all the beasts that were before it” (Dan. 7:7, 23). This description of crushing, iron-like power corresponds well with the unparalleled military and administrative dominance of Rome (cf. Dan. 2:40).
- **The iron-and-clay kingdom describes a single empire that remains powerful yet internally divided—something Rome fits better than Greece.** Greece fragmented into separate successor kingdoms after Alexander (Dan. 8:8, 22), but Daniel describes one continuing kingdom that is simultaneously “partly strong and partly brittle,” attempting unity through alliances that fail to hold together (Dan. 2:41–43). This pattern better matches the Roman world, which maintained a recognizable imperial structure even as it fractured politically and socially, and which still existed when God established His kingdom in the days of those kings (Dan. 2:44–45; cf. Matt. 26:64; Acts 2:33–36).

- **Early Jewish interpreters widely identified the fourth kingdom as Rome.** Several Second Temple Jewish writings interpret Daniel's fourth empire as the Roman power dominating the Mediterranean world (4 Ezra and 2 Baruch). Long before Christian debates, the common Jewish expectation was a sequence of Babylon → Medo-Persia → Greece → Rome (cf. Dan. 2:44; 7:26–27).

—"they will mix with one another in marriage, but they will not hold together": As the kingdom of man struggles to maintain power, it forges unstable political alliances that nevertheless fail. As at Babel, the kingdom of man cannot secure an enduring dynasty.

***44 And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever, 45 just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure."***

—"And in the days of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom... [and] break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end":

- The kingdom of God would destroy the kingdom of man and establish its eternal supremacy "in the days of those kings"—during the reign of the fourth empire.
- As we have commented, Jesus achieved this during His first advent, and He consummates His conquest at the second. He came preaching, "The kingdom of God is at hand" because its king had arrived—to take over.
- Daniel's later vision clarifies that even though the kingdom of man is destroyed, it will simultaneously be "prolonged for a season and a time" (Dan. 7:12). In other words, Jesus would destroy the kingdom of man, yet it would temporarily continue, as if on life-support. When Christ returns, He pulls the plug.
- Revelation depicts this defeat and continuance of man's kingdom as a death and counterfeit resurrection. The sequence in John's visions goes like this:
  - Rev. 12:17: The supernatural tyrant who empowers earthly ones—Satan—stands on the sea and the earth, foreshadowing the rise of a "beast of the sea" (13:1-10) and a "beast of the earth" (13:11-18)—the false prophet.
  - Rev. 13:1-2: The beast of the sea bears resemblance to Daniel's four kingdoms from Daniel 7 (which match Daniel 2), all rolled into one.
  - Rev. 13:3: The beast of the sea suffers a mortal wound and is miraculously healed, causing the whole earth to worship it (see also 13:11, 14).
- Given that the beast of the sea derives from Daniel's vision of four kingdoms, we should interpret it to represent the kingdom of man—a "beast" because it devours. This beast suffers a "mortal wound," and John even uses the same Greek verb for "slain" that he uses for the Lamb (Rev. 5:12; 13:3). The imagery is deliberate. The beast imitates the Lamb's death and resurrection. Just as Jesus literally died, the kingdom of man—the devouring beast of empire—was slain by the slain Lamb. Jesus conquered tyranny on the Cross. But just as Jesus rose from the dead, the kingdom of man was "prolonged for a season and a time" (Dan. 7:12).
- Jason Parry: "John's beast, then, represents the Satan-empowered kingdoms which continue to exist after the inauguration of the Messianic kingdom (Daniel 7:12), but which no longer exercise God-given universal dominion over the kingdom of man... since this dominion now belongs to the Messiah (Daniel 7:14a; Revelation 1:5)."
- In other words, Christ seized from Rome its "universal dominion over the kingdom of man," yet Rome (and other empires since) continued to exist for a time, just as Daniel predicted. In this sense, all tyranny died but rose again; Christ's victory at Calvary was preliminary but not final. Consummation awaits His second advent.

—"stone":

- We have already commented about the stone's relationship to God's kingdom, God's temple, and God's Son—the Lord Jesus Christ.
- The New Testament makes explicit the connection with Jesus:
  - **Jesus identifies Himself as the rejected stone that becomes the cornerstone (of God's new temple).** After the parable of the tenants, Jesus quotes Psalm 118 and applies it to Himself:

"The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone" (Matt. 21:42; cf. Mark 12:10–11; Luke 20:17). This establishes the biblical pattern that the Messiah is the decisive "stone" of God's temple-kingdom.

- **Jesus describes the stone as both a stumbling block and a crushing force.** After quoting Psalm 118, Jesus adds: "The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him" (Matt. 21:44; cf. Luke 20:18). The imagery strongly echoes Daniel 2:34–35, 44–45, where the stone strikes the statue and shatters the kingdom of man.
  - The stone starts small. The kingdom is a mustard seed that grows into a giant tree; it is leaven that gradually spreads across the whole piece of dough (Matt. 13:31–35). It starts small, grows steadily, and eventually fills the earth. Likewise, Jesus as a no-name carpenter from Nazareth who died a cursed death. But His kingdom has been spreading for two thousand years. Soon, it will encompass the cosmos.
- "broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold":
- Daniel's vision makes clear that these are successive empires. The kingdom of "gold" is replaced by that of silver, and so on.
  - Yet the kingdom of God smashes them altogether. How can this be, considering that three of the four empires (Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece) would have already been gone at the time of Christ? Because they belong to the unified statue. Jesus destroys "the kingdom of man." At His first advent, He nullifies their power, taking His seat in heaven far above them. Throughout this age, He steers the kings of the earth toward their demise. At the end of the age, He returns to consume all of them.

***46 Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face and paid homage to Daniel, and commanded that an offering and incense be offered up to him. 47 The king answered and said to Daniel, "Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery." 48 Then the king gave Daniel high honors and many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon. 49 Daniel made a request of the king, and he appointed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego over the affairs of the province of Babylon. But Daniel remained at the king's court.***

—"Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face and paid homage to Daniel": Surprisingly, Daniel does not resist the king's apparent worship. In contrast, Paul and Barnabas forbid the pagans from worshipping them (Acts 14). Is Daniel sinning? I don't think so. In the next verse, Nebuchadnezzar gives credit to the "God of gods and Lord of kings" who revealed the mystery of the dream (v. 47). His "homage" is probably not intended as worshipping Daniel but rather honoring the servant of the highest God.

—Nebuchadnezzar gives credit to Yahweh, but he lacks saving faith. In the next chapter, he will erect a statue to himself, recalling the image of this chapter, and he will force citizens to worship it. Polytheists have no problem adding another god to their pantheon. As far as Nebuchadnezzar is concerned, Israel's God is one powerful god among many.

—"high honors and many great gifts... made him ruler... and chief prefect over all the wise men":

- Daniel's promotion reminds us of Joseph, who likewise interpreted a king's dream and rose in power. But Daniel surpasses the patriarch—not just interpreting the dream but revealing the dream itself.
- The parallel to Joseph foreshadows victory for the people of God. Just as Joseph's ascent resulted in Israel's salvation from famine, Daniel's rise bodes well for Israel.
- In modern times, we can celebrate when God elevates His servants into positions of power and influence. This is not an ancient version of Christian nationalism, though. God's kingdom rarely advances by capturing the throne of empire. More often it shines from the margins—like the seven small lampstands (churches) in Revelation 2–3—quiet lights flickering at the edges of imperial power. Yet when God does place His servants in positions of authority, we can receive it with gratitude and humility, seeing it as another opportunity for His light to shine within the halls of power.

—"Daniel made a request of the king":

- Daniel asks the king to promote his friends also. His attitude toward promotion reflects godly wisdom. Whatever blessing he receives, he leverages not for himself, but for the blessing of others. Israel was blessed to be a blessing (Gen. 12:1–3).

When God blesses us, we should not just revel in it. We should turn it outward, using it to bless others. Why has God blessed you? Is it just for you, or is it also for others?



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