

20th Century Bible Course

Dear Friend:

Have you ever wished you could pull aside the curtain and know what will take place tomorrow, or a year, or ten years from now? Most of us have at one time or another. You decide to go to the beach with friends, so you dial the weather. Ah! Sunshine predicted! So you go. What happens? It rains!

To probe the future we make educated guesses, feed data into computers, and study the laws of probability. Pollsters take surveys and then predict, with a fair degree of accuracy, whether a fad will turn into a trend, or if some new product will take. From history, experience, evidence, intuition, we try to project results. But the fact remains: No man can really read history before it happens. With all our modern devices and weather satellites, we still cannot predict with certainty even tomorrow's weather, not to mention the day after!

Yet this is precisely what God claims to be able to do! In fact, He stakes His reputation on it. And *if* He actually can do this, then we can be sure He is who and what He claims He is! It will give us assurance that the prophets who have recorded these predictions *were*, indeed, inspired by Him, as they claimed to be. And the Book they have written-the Bible-/s what it professes to be-an inspired revelation of God's will for man and the source of his knowledge of the future.

That unique Book, its youngest chapters almost 2000 years old, claims to contain "a more sure word of prophecy" whereunto we do well to take heed (2 Peter 1:19). Seventeen of the 39 books of the Old Testament are prophecy. One whole book of the New Testament-Revelation-is also prophecy. Almost all of the other books of the Bible contain prophecies. Upon hundreds of these prophecies history has already stamped the word **FULFILLED**. What confidence that ought to give us that the few remaining prophecies will be just as certain and true.

One well-known writer has said that "in the annals of human history, the growth of nations, the rise and fall of empires, appear as if dependent on the will and prowess of man. . . . But in the word of God the curtain is drawn aside, and we behold, above, behind, and through all the play and counterplay of human interest and power and passions, the agencies of the All-merciful One, silently, patiently working out the counsels of His own will" (*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 499, 500). This lesson will provide a graphic example of this principle.

Two books of the Bible that are seldom studied and little understood are Daniel in the Old Testament and Revelation in the New Testament. Yet these were written especially for our day. As you study Daniel 2, you will find it helpful to also read chapters one, three and four. The first six chapters of Daniel are narration; the last six, prediction. Few stories have more suspense than these first four chapters of the book of Daniel.

As you pray for guidance and help in this study we know you will receive rich blessings.

Very sincerely,

Your Bible Instructor

LESSON 3

HISTORY IN ADVANCE

SCRIPTURE READING: DANIEL 2 (Old Testament)

Nebuchadnezzar, ruler of the Babylonian empire, was one of the greatest of ancient kings. In the first chapter of Daniel, we find that he and three of his friends are captives in the city of Babylon, where they had been taken when Nebuchadnezzar had overthrown the Jews. In the second chapter the king is given

a dream which impresses him very much, but which he cannot remember. He demands his counselors, who profess to be in touch with the gods, to tell him both the dream and its meaning. When they fail, the whole lot of them, including the four Hebrew captives, are sentenced to death. Because of Daniel's faithfulness, God reveals to him the dream and its meaning.

Part 1- THE SECRETS OF THE FUTURE

1. Who alone knows the secrets of the future? Daniel 2:28 _____

During World War I the Prince of Wales visited an army hospital. As he walked slowly from bed to bed a stabbing cry quieted the faint rumble of conversation. "O God! Is there a God?" This war-mangled youth had eyes, but they did not see. His shoulders were broad, but his sleeves dangled limp on the pillows. He had a powerful form, but from his trunk to the foot of the bed the covers lay perfectly flat. No sight, no arms, no legs! And from his aching heart burst the bitter words, "Is there a God?" The Prince, his own heart filled with pity, stooped over and kissed the youth upon his forehead.

"Is there a God?" A young Hebrew prince spoke for God before the mighty Nebuchadnezzar some 2,500 years ago. Down the long corridor of time his words of faith come echoing back to us: "There *is* a God in heaven," and He knows the future and reveals it to men.

2. Why was Nebuchadnezzar given this dream? (verses 28, 29, 45) _____

3. What part does God play in the affairs of nations? (verses 20, 21) _____

The God of the universe presented to Nebuchadnezzar a picture of the future to show him that a power greater than himself was at work in the world. This fact is still true today. The power exercised by every ruler on earth is imparted from heaven, and upon the use of this power his success depends.

Part 2- NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DREAM

1. What did the king see in his dream? (verse 31) _____

2. What was it made of? (verses 32, 33) Its head was of _____; its breast and arms were of _____; its thighs of _____; its legs of _____; and its feet of _____.

3. What struck the image, with what result? (verses 34, 35)

Part 3- THE MEANING OF THE DREAM

1. What kingdom was represented by the head of gold? (verses 37,38) _____

Any good politician would have stopped with the flattering word that the king himself was the head of gold. But Daniel went on. He must tell it as God gave it.

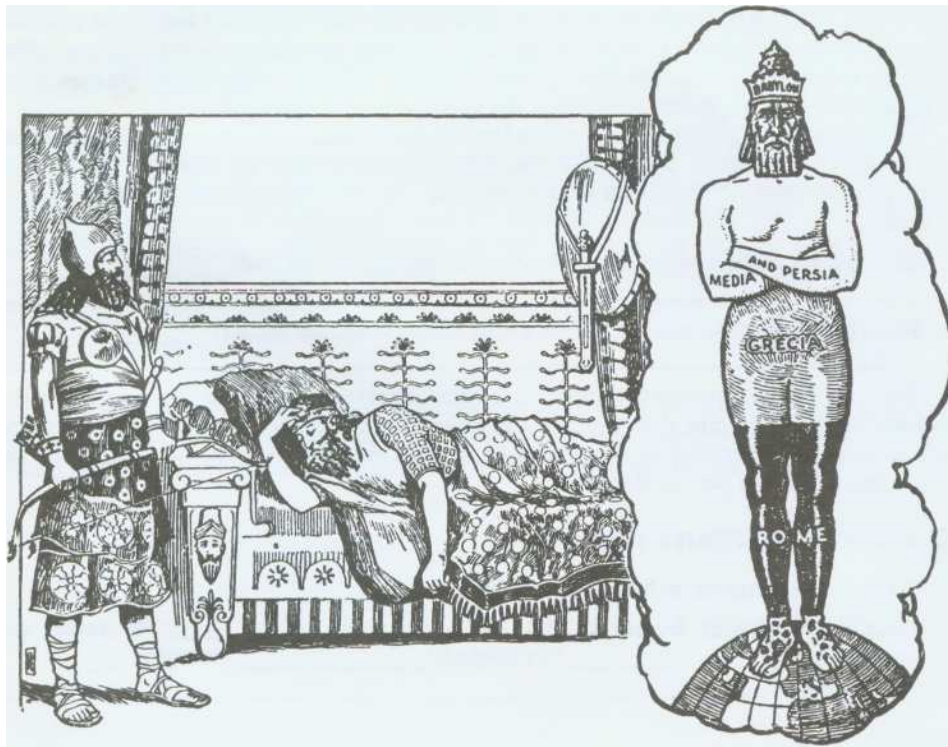
2. What was to follow Babylon? (verses 39-41) "After thee shall arise another kingdom _____ to thee, and another third kingdom of _____, which shall bear rule over all the earth. And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as _____: . . . And whereas thou sawest the feet and toes, part of potters' clay, and part of iron, the kingdom shall be _____."

Nebuchadnezzar was to be succeeded by three more world kingdoms: Medo-Persia, represented by the breast and arms of silver; Greece, the thighs of brass; and Rome, the legs of iron. Then the kingdom was to be divided. There would be no fifth world kingdom-only four. History has followed this prophecy like a blueprint. Let us take a quick glance at each of the passing empires.

The Gold Kingdom of Babylon. (the head of the statue) God had spoken of Babylon as a golden city a hundred years before (Isaiah 14:4.) Through Jeremiah God called Babylon a "golden cup" (Jeremiah 51:7). Even historians refer to Babylon as the "Golden City of a Golden Age." Nebuchadnezzar could not but be impressed (and not a little pleased) with the fitness of the symbol, "head of gold."

By contact with the Hebrews, Babylon had opportunity to become familiar with the Word of God and His will as

revealed in it. As a nation Babylon turned away from



God. Because of this, all through succeeding scriptures the term "Babylon" is used in a symbolic way to refer to those who willfully turn away from God. In 538 B.C., leading hordes of Medes and Persians, Cyrus the Great swept out of the mountains of Persia and captured Babylon. Chapter five of Daniel recounts the dramatic story.

The Silver Kingdom of Medo-Persia. (The breast of the statue) Silver was a fitting symbol of Medo-Persia, and was used by them as a medium of exchange and in decorations. Like Babylon, Medo-Persia turned aside from the worship of the true God. The wickedness of their later leaders undermined their strength and led to their defeat by Alexander the Great at Arbela in 331 B.C. The reins of power thus passed into the hands of the rising empire of the Greeks.

The Brass Kingdom of Greece. (The thighs of the statue) The brazen armor and brass breastplates worn by the Grecian soldiers are reflected in the thighs of brass. With them came culture, learning, and the Greek language that later helped the spread of Christianity. After the death of Alexander the Great the nation began to lose its power and unity. By 168 B.C. the growing strength of the Romans became too great for the Greeks to withstand.

The Iron Monarchy of Rome. (The legs of the statue) This iron power broke in pieces, bruised, and subdued kingdoms for nearly 600 years. During its rule Christ was born and was crucified, and under Rome, Christianity took root and thrived in spite of many persecutions.

Hippolytus, a great theologian who died about A.D. 236, wrote of Rome: "Rejoice, blessed Daniel! thou hast not been in error. . . . Already the iron rules." And Gibbon wrote: "The arms of the republic, . . . always victorious in war, advanced . . . ; and the images of gold, or silver, or brass, that might serve to represent the nations and their kings, were successively broken by the *iron* monarchy of Rome" (*The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 5-vol. ed., Vol. 3, p. 365).

2. What are some of the characteristics of the division of Rome? (verses 42, 43) "The kingdom shall be partly _____, and partly _____. And whereas thou sawest iron mixed with miry clay, they shall _____ with the seed of men: but they _____, even as iron is not mixed with clay.

Broken up by the invasion of barbaric tribes from Europe, the Western Roman Empire was overrun at last. Out of its ruin emerged the nations of modern Europe: Saxons (English), Franks

(French), Alemanni (German), Burgundians (Swiss), Lombards (Italians), Visigoths (Spanish), Suevi (Portuguese), Vandals, Ostrogoths, and Heruli. Many attempts to unite Europe have been made through the centuries. Popes tried to cement it together under the church. Before World War I most of Europe's ruling families were related by intermarriage ("they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men"), but this, too, failed. Hitler was only the latest of a series of military conquerors who tried and failed. The prophecy said, "They shall not cleave one to another." And that's the way things have remained. Even today hope flares for unification through the Common Market. And the Communists still strive for domination of this area. But these plans, too, will founder on the rock of Bible prophecy, for God says Europe will not and cannot stick together!

Part 4- THE SETTING UP OF GOD'S KINGDOM

1. **How does God pictures the final crumbling of all nations? (verses 34, 35)** "Thou sawest till that a _____ was cut out without _____, which smote the image upon his _____ that were of iron and clay, and _____ them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the _____ of the summer threshing-floors; and the wind carried them away, that _____ for them."

2. **What does the stone represent? (verse 44)** _____

With these words this prophecy arrives at its most important prediction-that in the days of these kings-in our time-God will set up His kingdom. The high points of this prophecy are:

1. There will be no fifth world kingdom.
2. Western Europe will never be united permanently.
3. Christ will come very soon.

It has been told that this prophecy was once explained to Kaiser Wilhelm at the height of his power. Said he, "I can't accept it. It doesn't fit in with my plans!" Does it fit into yours?

Part 5- BACK TO NEBUCHADNEZZAR

Nebuchadnezzar had been greatly impressed with Daniel and Daniel's God. But he soon returned to idolatry and set up a golden image on the Plain of Dura (Daniel, chapter 3). Apparently his pride hindered him from humbly accepting what God had revealed in the dream. Daniel's three friends refused to bow down to the king's great golden image and consequently were thrown into the overheated furnace. The king watched, furious that they had dared to defy him. Suddenly he paled at what he saw in that fiery furnace.

1. **Who did the king see in the furnace with Daniel's three friends? Daniel 3:25**

These three men did not know that God would deliver them. But they trusted Him. And whether He spared their lives or not, they would not disobey Him. They honored God, and in the crisis He honored them! Think what a close companionship with their Lord must have been theirs-that He would come and walk with them in the fire!

We may need a faith like theirs sooner than we think. According to John the Revelator, those who obey God will face a similar test in the future.

2. **What crisis will God's faithful followers have to face before Jesus returns? Revelation 13:15** "And he had power to give life unto the _____ of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not _____ the _____ of the beast should be killed."

We will not go into the identity of the beast or the image in this lesson. It is too big a subject. But soon, in the final crisis, there will be another image-though this time not a literal one-and all who refuse to bow down will be faced with death. Like the three Hebrews, we shall have to choose. We shall need a faith like theirs. And if we don't stand for our Lord now, how can we be sure we will stand for Him then?

In the next lesson we will study about the coming King-how He comes, the events connected with His

coming, and what His coming means to every individual. Surely the coming of Jesus is the greatest future event in the history of the world and of our lives.