

# **GOD'S PATHWAY THROUGH PROPHECY**

## **Five Empires in Prophecy:**

### **Man's Perspective**

#### **Daniel 2:1-45/LUKE 21:24**

**INTRODUCTION:** Safely traveling God's pathway through prophecy requires that we start the journey at the right place. This means the trip must commence at that very point where God's prophetic revelation begins, so that we may then follow the pathway step-by-step along the biblically paved route keeping in step with the Holy Spirit. A divinely directed dream of an ancient pagan monarch marks the only correct starting point for our journey on God's pathway through prophecy. This dream is found in the second chapter of the book of Daniel. The dream itself is fundamental and foundational to a proper study and subsequent survey along the revelational terrain of progressive prophetic truth. Until we first grapple with and grasp Nebuchadnezzar's divinely inspired, identified, and interpreted dream, we cannot move safely along God's pathway through prophecy without hitting potholes and pitfalls along the way. Any attempt to bypass this dream in a haste to move to another point along the path, leads down the slippery slope of carnal conjecture and symbolic sensationalism. The dream is essential to a proper understanding of the end times scenario. It marks the beginning of the full revelation of God's end time program for Jew and Gentile alike. For this reason, having previously established why we should study Bible prophecy, having evaluated the major issues within Bible prophecy, and having introduced the book of Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar's dream marks the first real step in our present study down God's pathway through prophecy.

It is important to grasp the broader historical and biblical context that provides the interpretive background for Nebuchadnezzar's dream. What lies behind the dream is the essential and providential governing of God among the nations of humanity identified in Scripture as "the times of the Gentiles"! Speaking of this period in which the Sovereign King of heaven executes the prophesied judgments of the Palestinian Covenant upon the Jewish people and thereby sovereignly surrenders earthly governance into the hands of Gentile nations, the Lord Jesus declares, "*And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled*" (Luke 21:24). In the sovereign and secret councils of God, He has designated a time during which pagan monarchs shall rule the earth as His chastening hand upon Daniel's disobedient people.

This period known as the "times of the Gentiles" brackets God's prophetic program for planet earth. This means that the timeframe of prophecy begins with the commencement of the "times of the Gentiles," continues with the "times of the Gentiles," and concludes with the "times of the Gentiles." The period known as "the times of the Gentiles" marks where history has been, where history is, and where history is going. It began with the providential and purposeful rise of a Babylonian pagan monarch by the name of Nebuchadnezzar. It continued with the rise of a Persian pagan monarch by the name of Cyrus. It then persisted with the dramatic conquest of a Macedonian pagan monarch known as Alexander the Great. Thereafter this period progressed to

the worldwide domination of a pagan peoples led by the Caesars of Rome. Today the times of the Gentiles continues to govern the globe by means of a God-appointed cast of carnal and corrupt political rulers. It shall end with the providential and purposeful rise of a pagan monarch by the name of Antichrist, who shall arise out of the rubble of a revived Roman Empire from the European theater. God sovereignly decreed this time. He sovereignly disclosed this time. And He will sovereignly destroy this time by means of bringing His true King to planet earth so as to establish the Kingdom of God, which shall never end. Nebuchadnezzar's dream provides a panoramic portrait disclosing this period, along with its purpose and place in God's pathway through prophecy! With this in the forefront of our mind, we are ready to board the Bible-bus and begin our journey soberly and safely as we travel from here to eternity.

## I. An EXPOSITIONAL OUTLINE of Daniel's Prophecy!

- A. The **INTRODUCTION** of Nebuchadnezzar's Dream – vs. 1-6.
- B. The **INVESTIGATION** of Nebuchadnezzar's Dream – vs. 7-18.
- C. The **ILLUMINATION** of Nebuchadnezzar's Dream – vs. 19-30.
- D. The **IDENTIFICATION** of Nebuchadnezzar's Dream – vs. 31-36.

- 1. Head of Gold
- 2. Breast and Arms of Silver
- 3. Belly and Thighs of Bronze
- 4. Legs of Iron
- 5. Feet of Iron and Clay
- 6. Stone from Heaven

**NOTE:** This dream provides a panoramic view of that period that Jesus called "*The Times of the Gentiles*" (Lk. 21:24). It represents a period which has now extended for more than 2500 years. A period during which Gentile powers have been and shall continue to exercise dominance over the earth under the sovereign supervision of the God of Heaven. This period began in 605 B.C. with Nebuchadnezzar, the first and greatest of all the Gentile kings within this chain of prophetic kingdoms. It began with the overthrow of Jerusalem followed by the subsequent Gentile domination throughout the land of Palestine. It will persist until the Son of David, restores and rules over the throne of David, from the City of David, over the House of David.

- E. The **INTERPRETATION** of Nebuchadnezzar's Dream – vs. 37-45.

- 1. The **Timeframes** of his dream –

- a. **Historically** – "*And in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar*". His first year began on April 4<sup>th</sup> 604 B.C. His dream therefore occurred in the year, 603 B.C. This means that the prophecy came 64 years before Medo-Persia became an empire, 269 years before Greece rose to power, and 281 years before Rome. Thus, Daniel's prophecy was supernatural and

futuristic. This futuristic aspect is stressed by the prophetic time indicators of the text itself.

b. **Prophetically** – Four statements signify the time focus of the dream:

- 1) “*what shall be in the latter days*” – v. 28
- 2) “*what should come to pass hereafter*” – v. 29
- 3) “*what shall come to pass*” – v. 29
- 4) “*what shall come to pass hereafter*” – v.45

**NOTE:** Nebuchadnezzar’s dream takes us from Daniel’s day, marking the commencement of the times of the Gentiles, to our day, marking the climax of the times of the Gentiles. Much of what was futuristic prophecy for Daniel is now historical prophetic fulfillment for us. It must be stressed that all of the past fulfilled features were literally and historically fulfilled. This strongly suggest that all remaining future aspects should be expected to be literally and historically fulfilled in real space-time-history. Since the prophecies of the Babylonian kingdom, the Medo-Persian kingdom, the Grecian kingdom, and the Roman kingdom were literally fulfilled upon this planet, even in there relations to the land of Jerusalem; prophetic logic would rightly assume that the coming Kingdom of the Lord Jesus relative to Jerusalem shall also be fulfilled literally.

2. The **Truths** of his dream –

a. The Head of Gold – Babylon: 606 B.C. – 539 B.C.

- 1) Given a kingdom
- 2) Given power
- 3) Given strength
- 4) Given glory
- 5) Given world domination

b. The Breast/Arms of Silver – Media-Persia: 539-334 B.C.

- 1) Comes *after* the first kingdom
- 2) Will be *inferior* to the first kingdom
  - a) In worth
  - b) In weightiness

c. The Belly/Thighs of Bronze – Greece: 334 B.C. – 323 B.C.

- 1) Another third kingdom
- 2) Shall bear rule over all the earth

d. Legs of Iron – Imperial Rome: 322 B.C. – 1453 A.D.

- 1) Strong as iron
- 2) Breaks and subdues
- 3) Bruises

e. Feet and Toes of Iron/Clay – A yet future and final Western League of Gentile Rulers who shall rise out of the ancient boundaries of the old Roman Empire.

- 1) Will be divided
- 2) Will have the strength of iron
- 3) Will be composite – It will consist of distinct parts, but these various parts comprising the coalition will not be cohesive any more than iron adheres to clay.

f. The Stone – Jesus Christ the Lord!!! See Psalm 118:22; Luke 20:18; Mark 12:10; Romans 9:32-33; Isaiah 28:16.

- 1) Cut out without hands – Refers to the self-existent, self-sufficient, and supernatural nature of the Stone; emphasizing Jesus’ divine nature as the Messianic King.
- 2) Shall come again *during* the ten toes coalition.
- 3) Shall utterly destroy all forms of Gentile rule
- 4) Shall establish His earthly kingdom of righteousness
  - a) Shall never be destroyed
  - b) Not left to other people – The Jews will now reign as the “Apple of God’s eye”
  - c) Shall break in pieces and consume Gentile dominance
  - d) Shall stand forever

3. The **Trustworthiness** of his dream –

- a. “the dream is certain”
- b. “the interpretation thereof sure”

**NOTE:** Application – History has already proven the literal fulfillment of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream regarding the first four kingdoms of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. Since these have been literally fulfilled to the letter as prophesied by Daniel, we have every reason to believe with firm confidence and biblical conviction that the remaining aspects of Gentile rule and its ultimate conquest shall soon be fulfilled with the same literal accuracy. Literal interpretation should extend to the coming of the rolling Stone from heaven, and the establishment of His Kingdom upon earth.

## II. An EXEGETICAL OBSERVATION of Daniel's Prophecy!

**NOTE:** The following observation is not intended to be exhaustive, but rather seeks to highlight key aspects of the prophetic narrative necessary for personal understanding and proper interpretation of the inspired text which will lead to proper and personal application for the individual Christian and the corporate Church.

Vs. 1 – “*And in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar*” – His first official year began on April 4<sup>th</sup> 604 B.C. making this sometime after that date in 603 B.C.

“*Nebuchadnezzar*” – The son of Nebopalassar, who had founded the dynasty in 626 B.C. and later destroyed the Assyrian Empire in 612 B.C. In 605 Nebuchadnezzar defeated the Egyptians at the battle of Carchemish and Babylon emerged as the masters of the ancient world. He then assumed the throne from his father and became the dominant Babylonian monarch.

“*dreamed dreams*” – Literally, “repeatedly dreamed a dream”. There were not many dreams, but one dream that continued to dominate his mind.

“*his spirit was troubled*” – Literally, “his spirit was struck”. The Hebrew verb means “to strike with a hammer.” It provides a colorful word-picture denoting the impression or engraving made upon an object by a master craftsman who wishes to leave his mark. God made certain that his dream made an indelible impression on the mind and heart of His subject so as to assure that he could not and would not ignore its message.

Vs. 3 – “*I have dreamed a dream*” – Confirms that the dream was singular. While the dream was repeated again and again, the content and connotation of the dream was one. Grammatically “a dream” and “the dream” stress the fact that the dream was singular. This is designated by the definitive use of both the singular form and the articles.

“*to know the dream*” – Nebuchadnezzar desired to understand the meaning of the dream. He understood that it contained an important message which he was compelled to comprehend.

Vs. 4 – “*in Syriack*” – Literally, “in Aramaic”. From Daniel 2:4-7:28 the book of Daniel is written in Aramaic rather than Hebrew. This may have been for at least four reasons: 1) because God's glory had departed from the Temple in Jerusalem and from the nation (Ez. 9:3; 10:4, 18; 11:23) which would have been depicted by the Hebrew tongue being replaced by a Gentile tongue, 2) He had now become known as “*the God of Heaven*” (Dan. 2: 18), a title restricted to the books of the captivity, 3) Aramaic was a Gentile language and reflected the dawn of the “times of the Gentiles”, 4) this section deals with Gentile world domination which persisted up to and through the

times of Jesus. It is widely held that Jesus Himself commonly spoke in Aramaic rather than Hebrew.

*“the interpretation”* – The clear meaning. The king knew what his dream was, but he did not know what his dream meant. He was clear as to its content, but unclear as to its connotation. Thus, while he could vividly recall the dream, he longed for its full revelation via supernatural interpretation.

V. 5 – *“The thing is gone from me”* – The articulated noun “thing” (Heb. *millah*) does not refer to the dream, but to the decree concerning the wise men. The term actually means “word, utterance, command.” It finds its referent in the king’s command to disclose the dream or die!

The literal expression means, “the matter or decree is gone from me”. He was not referring to his dream, but to his command that the wise men must reveal the dream or pay the price.

V. 11 – *“Whose dwelling is not with flesh”* – This marks a key point in the book of Daniel. In ancient paganism it was believed that “the gods” did not dwell among, or deal with mere mortals. They were disconnected from, and unconcerned with mankind. As “the gods” they were far too busy to bother themselves with the affairs of human activity on earth. Much like modern day deists, ancient pagans believed in “the gods,” but they also believed that they were distant and disconnected. Through Daniel, God’s people are shown that the one true God not only dwells among all men, even the heathen, but that He also deals with men; including using heathens as His unwilling instruments to accomplish His providential purposes throughout human history according to His good pleasure.

V. 14 *“Arioch the captain of the king's guard, which was gone forth to slay the wise men of Babylon”* – The Aramaic name, “Arioch” means “lion-like”! As the captain of the king’s guard he was sent out as a roaring lion seeking to devour all of the wise men of the day, including Daniel and his Hebrew fellows. He stands as a type of the true anti-type, Satan. The Devil is the true roaring lion who is this very hour roaming about seeking to devour the true wise-men who seek to love God and live for God in the midst of enemy territory. One of his most sinister and seductive ploys is to keep God’s people ignorant of God’s prophetic program. Through such ignorance, the mass majority of God’s people are groping and even faltering. Just like Daniel, we too stand in desperate need of understanding Divine Revelation through the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

V. 19 – *“Then was the secret revealed”* – In the LXX “secret” is (Gk. *mysterian*) referring to “a sacred secret once concealed but now revealed”. The dream was part of God’s eternal council which had up to this point been kept hidden within the secret councils of the Triune Godhead. But now, at the divinely appointed time, the secret was being disclosed through His prophet. God is so gracious to reveal His plans and

purposes to His people before He actually performs them. Earlier the prophet Amos proclaimed, “Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets” (Am. 3:7). Such sacred secrets are beyond the capacity of mere human cognition through reason or rationality. There are some things which man cannot and will not ever know apart from supernatural revelation. These things include the origin of the universe, and the conclusion of the universe. Such sacred secrets demand Divine disclosure. Thus, the secret was “revealed” (Aram. *gelah*) denoting “an unveiling, a making known by means of revelation.” This is the supernatural and sovereign work of God alone. Divine revelation speaks of the sovereign act of God whereby He makes known what otherwise could not and would not be known by men.

V. 21 – “*And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings*” – One of the major purposes of the book of Daniel is to make known to mortal man, Jew and Gentile alike, the majesty and supremacy of the Almighty. This statement encapsulates the whole of the book of Daniel, the times of the Gentiles, the ever-escalating eschatological ages and authorities, and the very dream of the first end time monarch that dominates this chapter. The One True God, who alone is God, sovereignly rules the times and seasons of the past and prophetic ages, along with the political powers who rule and reign for the periods and purposes which He alone has predetermined for the full and final fulfillment of His prophetic program. And it is He alone who can conceal these plans and purposes as He pleases, and then reveal these plans and purposes when He pleases, to whom He pleases, for His pleasure. This is the very point which Daniel’s praise progresses to proclaim, “He revealeth the deep and secret things: he knoweth what *is* in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him” (v.22). Nebuchadnezzar’s dreaming of the divinely determined dream, his inability to understand his own dream, his compulsion to comprehend the dream, and Daniel’s supernatural enablement to apprehend it, analyze it, and announce it, proves God’s person and power as the God of all prophetic revelation. In short, God’s sovereign rule over times and thrones, as well as His supernatural revelation of sacred secrets, shows that He alone is God, “But there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days” (v.28a).

V. 28 – “*But there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets*” – Revelation is consistent with God’s character because He is the God of Heaven “who knoweth what is the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him” (v.22). By His very nature God is pure light (1 Jn. 1:5), and as Light He delights to disclose His prophetic program to His people who have an ear to hear what the Spirit is supernaturally saying in and through His instruments and servants.

V. 29 – “*What should come to pass hereafter; ...what shall come to pass*” – Nebuchadnezzar’s dream was about the future program of God for mankind. It was purely prophetic and supernatural in nature. It must ever be remembered that while the

events of this prophecy have largely been literally, and historically fulfilled; at the time of Daniel they were entirely predictive and futuristic.

V. 31 – “*A great image*” – LXX renders it by the adjective (Gk. *mega*), thus “a mega image”. The image was colossal in size and while the text does not give its dimensions, if Nebuchadnezzar’s image in the following chapter (3:1) reflects the one in his dream then it stood 90 feet tall.

“*the form thereof was terrible*” – The form of the “mega image” was awe striking and caused great fear.

V. 32 – “*This images head was of fine gold*” – Gold has greater worth and weight than the subsequent metals.

“*his breast and arms of silver*” – Silver was of lesser worth and weight than the gold but more than what followed.

“*his belly and his thighs of brass*” – The Aramaic word may be better rendered “bronze” since the earliest known example of brass is a Roman coin from 20 B.C. The bronze was of lesser worth and weight than the precious metals but greater than the following ones.

V. 33 – “*His legs of iron*” – Iron is of lesser worth and weight than the other metals before it.

“*his feet part of iron and part of clay*” – Note that the feet are connected to the legs and issue out of the legs. They do not represent a new fifth kingdom, but a second or reformed phase of the fourth kingdom of iron. In this phase the iron is mingled with clay. At this stage the image has deteriorated to its lowest worth and weight.

V. 34 – “*A stone was cut out without hands*” – A self-existent, self-sufficient, and supernatural stone arising during the “feet phase” of the image. It must be clearly noted that the true “Rolling Stone” shall roll down from heaven during the days of this final federation of Gentile world powers. It must also be stressed that the times of the Gentiles can and will be fully and finally destroyed only by the return of the Rolling Stone from heaven.

“*which smote the image upon his feet*” – The stone strikes the feet at its weakest and most vulnerable point because the entire image is top heavy so that it easily falls and crumbles.

V. 35 – “*The chaff of the summer threshing floor*” – The worthless refuse of the grain. In ancient times the grain was winnowed by tossing it into the air so that the wind could blow away the chaff as mere dust.

*“and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth”* – In prophetic Scripture “mountain” is often symbolic for “kingdom”. The mountain analogy is not carnal conjecture, but Scriptural analogical comparison. This mountain represents the final and forever worldwide government/empire of the Messiah. According to Daniel the Kingdom of God is an eschatological reality that will not come in its literal phase until the times of the Gentiles is complete. The world-wide Kingdom of the Rock of Ages awaits the end of the world-wide kingdom of Gentile rule.

Vs. 37-38 – *“Thou, O king, art a king of kings...Thou art this head of gold”* – According to Daniel the head of gold represented not only Babylon, but Nebuchadnezzar’s Babylon. It is important to note that this MEGA IMAGE reveals FIVE KINGDOMS. The key however is that each kingdom finds it’s WORTH and WEIGHT valued by its KING! The King is the true embodiment of the kingdom.

V. 39 – *“After thee”* – After Babylon a second kingdom will arise.

*“shall arise another”* – The LXX renders “another” by the comparative adjective (Gk. *heteros*) meaning “another of a different kind”. It is different as to its very nature. It is of less weight and worth to the first.

*“inferior to thee”* – Just as silver is inferior to gold in both worth and weight. This marks the difference. This second and inferior kingdom was Media-Persia under Cyrus the Great. For more proof that Daniel was speaking of Media-Persia see 8:1-4, 20.

*“and another third kingdom of brass”* – Refers to Greece under Alexander the Great. For more proof that Daniel speaks of Greece see 8:5-8, 21-22.

V. 40 – *“the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron”* – Speaks of the Roman Empire as further evidenced by 9:26.

V. 41 – *“the feet and toes part of potter’s clay and part of iron”* – Just as the toes come out of the feet which come from the legs, so these ten toes refer to a yet future revived European Federation, a Ten-Member Coalition of powers linked to the boundaries of the Old Roman Empire. The ten toes symbolically represent 10 kings/political leaders who form a European League of Western Powers (v.44). Thus, the final form of Gentile World Power will be centered in Europe.

*“the kingdom shall be divided”* – The Aramaic for “divided” means “composite,” that is, “made up of distinct or differing parts. The final form of pagan world domination will be comprised of 10 different Kingdom States ruled by 10 different world leaders. These will form a One World League of Nations.

*“the iron mixed with miry clay”* – This final coalition will be brittle in its strength inasmuch as the coalition itself will be weak.

V. 43 – *“They shall mingle themselves with the seed of men”* – The ancient Imperialism of Rome will be mingled with a new attempt at European Democracy as the individual rights of the people hold sway. Such a union will prove futile.

*“but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay”* – Despotic Imperialism and Democracy cannot and will not mix. This will pave the way for a coming World Leader to arise on the global scene and exercise authority.

V. 44 – *“And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven”* – The 10 Nation European Federation will mark the time of the end when the God of heaven will finally make His move. Thus, the coming indicator for God’s future work is a 10 Member League of European Nations.

*“shall the God of heaven set up his kingdom”* – Remember that “kingdom” embodies the “King”. Where the King is, there is the Kingdom. Thus, this is the same as saying that “the God of heaven shall set up his King”! This has been the promise of God’s coming program since the days of David (Ps. 2:1-9). When the Western League of Nations is in place, Jesus Christ, the Smiting Stone will roll down from heaven and God will set His Son upon His throne and He shall rule and reign forever,

*“which shall never be destroyed”* – While all other kings and kingdoms are destined to destruction, the Kingdom of Christ shall NEVER be destroyed.

*“the kingdom shall not be left to other people”* – No longer will pagan Gentiles rule the world. On that day the Jews will be restored to rule with the Messiah as the Apple of God’s eye.

**NOTE:** God’s future, final, and forever Kingdom upon earth plays a dominant part in the book of Daniel. The inspired prophet speaks of the Kingdom in chapters 2, 7, and 12. Contextually, the word “kingdom” (Aram. *Malkuw*) denotes “the Divine rule, as well as the actual realm and active reach of that rule.” In every case the Kingdom is prophetically previewed as an ALREADY, but NOT YET reality which is to ultimately be realized only AFTER the climatic conclusion of the times of the Gentiles, which shall be brought to conclusion and cut off by the rolling down of the Rolling Stone out of heaven. The Stone will begin rolling during the times of the 10 Nation Federation, and will bring a decisive and devastating blow to Gentile world dominance. Thereafter, God’s Kingdom shall come in and through the literal, physical, and visible presence of the One True King, the Rock of Ages! On that day God’s Kingdom shall be ruled by the personal presence of God’s King, the true Adamic-Vicegerent. The Kingdom will be a global Kingdom which extends throughout the four-corners of the earth and encompasses every kindred, tongue, tribe, nation, and race. The fact that the King’s coming and conquest of

His ancient Gentile foes brings about the coming of the Kingdom, strongly suggest that the coming of the King is pre-millennial!

### III. The **EXPERIENTIAL OUTCOME** of Daniel's Prophecy!

Before concluding this leg of the journey along God's pathway through prophecy we need to apply the transforming truths of Daniel chapter 2 to our heart and home. A number of applicable truths may be gleaned including the fact that:

- A. All human authority is appointed and controlled by God.
- B. God's sovereignty extends to saved and unsaved alike.
- C. Unsaved men like Nebuchadnezzar are God's instruments.
- D. Saved men like Daniel are God's servants.
- E. God has a plan and purpose for Gentile history on earth.
- F. God's Gentile plan/purpose continues until the Rock of Ages returns.
- G. God has a plan and purpose for Jewish history on earth.
- H. God's Jewish plan/purpose continues until the Rock of Ages returns.
- I. God's plan for Gentile/Jew is called the "times of the Gentiles."
- J. The "times of the Gentiles" persists until the Rock of Ages returns.
- K. Each and every aspect of past/prospective history is God's story.
- L. God wills all things and is working all things according to His will.
- M. God's will and work is to bring His King and Kingdom to earth.
- N. God's King will come to bring an end to the "times of the Gentiles."
- O. God's Kingdom will come to earth when the King returns to earth.
- P. God has a plan, and His people can know His plan.
- Q. He wills us to obey and leave the outcome in God's hand.