

Study on Daniel
Chapters Two and Three
Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the image and the stone
The golden image and the fiery furnace

Read chapter 2 verses 1 – 19

We are now in the second year of Nebuchadnezzar reign (2nd year doesn't necessarily mean two years in Babylonian terms. They didn't count the years in a twelve month time span. For example, if Nebuchadnezzar began his reign in August of one year by March of the following year they would count this as year two since half is in one year and half is in another) The dreams started and the king had a dream that troubled him. This was to become a training ground for Daniel for Daniel was to go on later and interpret more complex dreams.

To get the true meaning of the dream Nebuchadnezzar did not relate the dream to the wise men and the Chaldeans but expected them to **know** what the dream was about. When they were unable to relate the dream, the king flew into a rage as the despot he was, and threatened them with all sorts of violence. The wise men tried to buy some time - verse **8** but it didn't fool the king and only served to make him even more angry.

In his rage he didn't think of the consequences of his actions, he just wanted all the wise men and Chaldeans, dead - possibly believing that the Chaldeans (the original tribes of Babylon) were plotting against him. Daniel and his friends were unaware of the crisis until Arioch, the commander of the king's guard, arrived to tell them he was there to kill them by order of the king.

Daniel spoke to him in a very wise and polite way inquiring why the king had ordered such a severe punishment. On hearing the story of the king's dream Daniel begged an audience with King Nebuchadnezzar that he might show an interpretation of the dream.

Returning to his friends Daniel asked them to pray to the God of heaven so that the mystery of the dream might be revealed. That night Daniel had a vision in which the dream was explained by God. On waking he blessed God (**Read Verses 20 – 23.**) Before rushing to Arioch with the news, Daniel took time to give God credit for all wisdom and power, thanking God for answering his request.

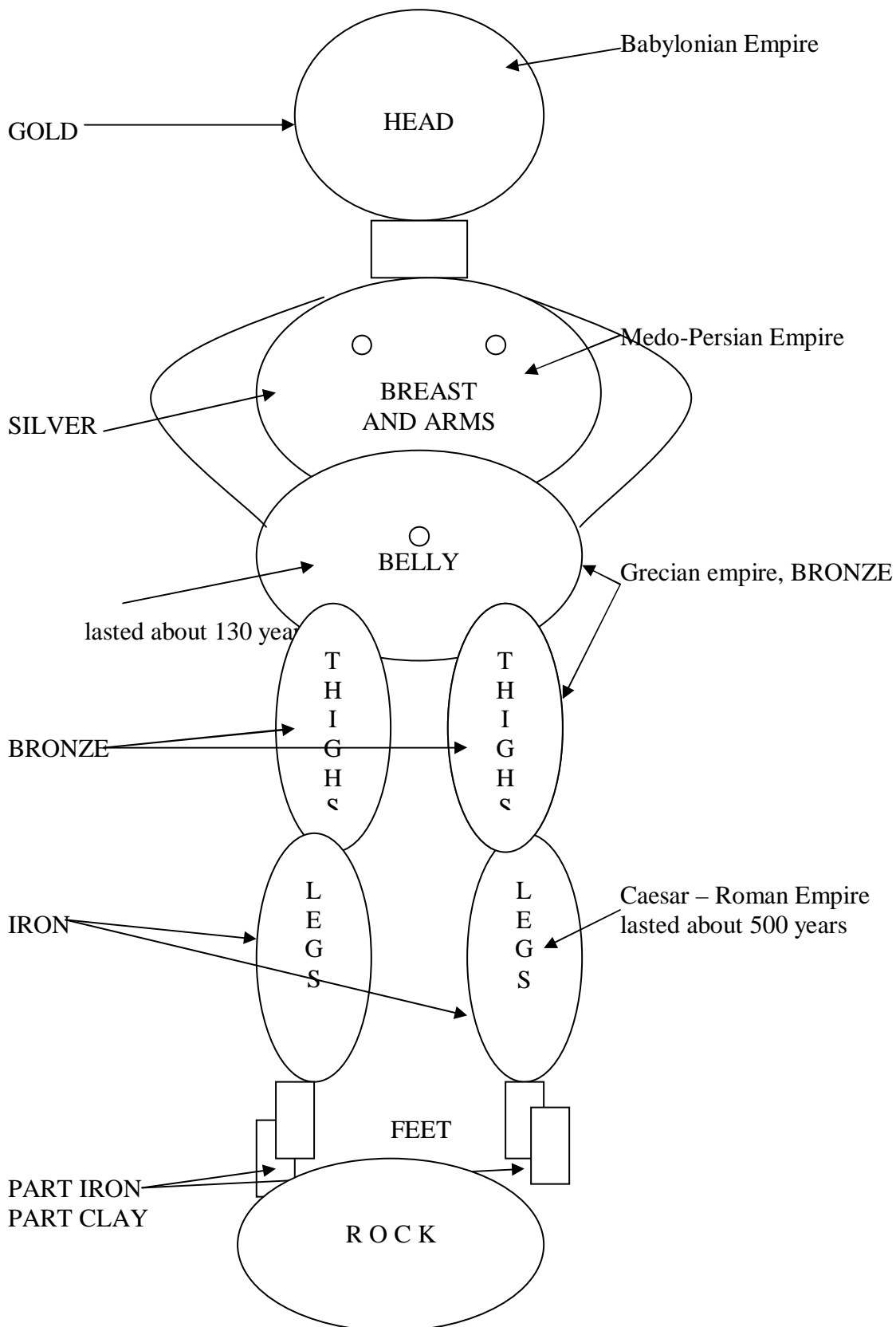
How do you feel when your prayers are answered, - excited, surprised, relieved? There are times when we seek God in prayer and after having been answered dash off in our excitement, forgetting to give God credit for the answer. Match your persistence in prayer with gratitude when you receive an answer

The next day Daniel went to Arioch and asked him not to destroy the wise men but to take him into the king where he would give an interpretation of the dream. There he tells the king that no one, - astrologer, wise men or Chaldean, can interpret dreams only the God of heaven who reveals mysteries. (**Read verses 24 – 30**)

Daniel interprets the dream as follows: See below

The king had seen a great image, exceedingly bright and awesome in appearance. The head was of fine **gold**, its breast and arms were of **silver**, its belly and thighs of **bronze**. Its legs of **iron**, its feet partly of **iron** and partly of baked **clay**. While you were watching a **rock** was cut out, but not by human hands – it struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were broken into pieces at the same time and became like **chaff** on the threshing floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace but the rock that struck the statue became a **huge mountain** and filled the whole earth.

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The interpretation

The **chaff** is symbolic of the kingdoms that are going to be swept away and also the image of the ugly, as they shall be dealt with at the judgement.

The **stone** is symbolic of the Messiah and the kingdom of God that will pervade the whole earth. Daniel then explains that Nebuchadnezzar in all his glory and with all his powers and his Babylon Empire is the head of Gold of the statue but after you shall arise another inferior kingdom which is portrayed by the breast and arms of silver – The Medo-Persian Kingdom.

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The belly of bronze and the thighs would be the Grecian Kingdom ruled by Alexander the Great that would rule over the whole earth. That kingdom lasted about 130 years. The legs of iron depicts the Roman Empire - the Caesars- lasting about 500 years. The Romans annihilated all the rest of the kingdoms. (Iron crushes everything else).

Just as you saw that the feet were partly clay and partly of iron so this will be a divided kingdom – partly strong and partly brittle – the people will not remain united any more than iron mixes with clay. This represented the breakup of the Roman Empire that divided into a mixture of strong and weak nations.

The type of metal in each part depicted the strength of the political power it represented and the rock cut out of the mountain depicted God’s Kingdom that would be ruled entirely by the Messiah, the King of Kings.

The dream revealed Daniel’s God as the power behind all earthly kingdoms. God’s Kingdom would supersede all that had gone before. On hearing this Nebuchadnezzar fell on his face and did homage to Daniel. He acknowledged that God was king of Kings and Lord of Lords.

A Disturbing Dream Daniel 2:1–30 and 31–49

Daniel 2 is one of the most amazing prophetic passages in the Bible. It was written in 600 BC yet it predicted the future rise and fall of four great world Empires! Some of Daniel 2 may seem like so much ancient history to us, but it was all future to Daniel. This passage gives us a long look at the sovereign authority of God, who not only has a plan for human history but is also carrying out the plan perfectly.

1. It is common to feel like we are at the mercy of the people and circumstances around us. **How should a knowledge of God’s wisdom, sovereignty and power affect our view of the people and circumstances in our lives?**
2. From your study of Daniel so far, summarise the series of events that led up to Daniel’s appearance before King Nebuchadnezzar.
3. **What was it about the dream that caused Nebuchadnezzar to be troubled?** See **verse 1**
4. While Daniel does not say who the future kingdoms are, we can identify them as Medo-Persia (Silver) Greece (Bronze) and Rome (Iron.) **What does Daniel say about the relative nature and power of these kingdoms (Verses 36 – 43)?**
5. Daniel’s predictions were so accurate that some scholars believe the book is not really a prophecy but history written after the fact. **How would your response to Daniel be different if you believed it was just, as one writer put it, “A pious fraud?”**
6. **Verse 44** says that, **“In the time of those kings (the ones represented by the toes) the God of Heaven will set up a kingdom.”** **What characteristics of the Kingdom of God are described in verses 44 – 45?**
7. **What does this chapter teach us about God’s activity in the course of human history?**
8. Take time to thank God for His control over the present and the future.

Now we will look at the next episode in Daniel’s life.

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The golden image and the fiery furnace

Chapter three

Nebuchadnezzar decided to build himself an enormous statue of gold. His devotion to Daniel's God hadn't lasted long and his massive ego had taken over. Not only was the head of gold but the whole body. It was sixty cubits by 6 cubits (90feet (27 Metres high) by 9 feet (2.7metres) wide) possibly as high as a five storey building. **Read verses 1 – 14.**

Nebuchadnezzar set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon then he summoned all the dignitaries. When the music played all fell on their faces with the exception of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. They wouldn't bow, budge or burn no matter even although they were threatened with death in a furnace.

Do we have a faith like that? It was a real test for them (just as Abraham stepped out in faith, would have sacrificed his only son Isaac, Sarah being told she would have a child in old age, Mary the mother of Jesus – a virgin – being told she would bear the Messiah)

The blazing furnace was not a small oven for cooking dinner or heating a house. It was a huge industrial furnace that could have been used for baking bricks or smelting metals. The temperatures were hot enough to ensure that no one could survive. The roaring flames could be seen leaping from its top opening and a fiery blast killed the soldiers that went up to its opening **(3:22)**

Read chapter 3:15-30

The king was furious and obviously thought by heating the furnace 7 times more than was needed it would be a more painful death where in fact it would have been quicker. It also showed that the three were willing to die for their faith.

The three friends were thrown into the furnace wearing all their clothes and here we have another miracle for not only were three friends saved their clothes although made of delicate material, did not even smell of smoke. They walked up and down in the fire not leaving it but waiting for God's time to bring them out just as Jesus waited in the tomb as God's prisoner until God should let Him out **(Acts 2: 26 – 27)**

The king was amazed as he saw a fourth person walking about with the three friends, in the midst of the flames he shouted out **"servants of the Most high God come out."** He then promised that anyone who spoke against their God would be torn limb from limb. **How long would this praise of God last? Would he realise that he was dealing with the one true God or would he revert back to his man made idols of metal or stone?**

Next week we will see how Nebuchadnezzar's ego would lead to insanity and his downfall **Chapter 4.**