

The Rise and Fall of the World, Part 3

Scripture: Daniel 2:44–49

Code: 27-09

INTRODUCTION

The city of Jerusalem has been a focal point of the world for many years. Even those who don't understand its significance can't help but be amazed by that. The Bible says that Jerusalem is a special place-- there's no city like it in the world. Throughout history it has been at center stage in the drama of redemption.

The context of the book of Daniel is the Babylonian Captivity, when the Jewish people were captives in the land of Babylon. Psalm 137:5-6 shows their devotion to Jerusalem: "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy." The people would sacrifice anything before losing their love for Jerusalem.

What accounts for such commitment to a city? What motivated Nehemiah to return after seventy years and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (Neh. 1- 6). Why have so many Jewish people immigrated to the land in recent years?

A. The Historical Past of Jerusalem

1. Its duration through the years

a) In the days of Abraham The first time Jerusalem is mentioned in the Bible is back in Genesis 14:18. At that time the city wasn't called Jerusalem, but Salem. Salem, which means "peace," was most likely an ancient name for the city. Later it became known as Jerusalem. Mount Moriah, a famous mountain in the middle of the city, was where Abraham prepared to sacrifice his son, Isaac, before God intervened and provided a ram. How fitting it is that before the city became the center of redemption, God established it as a place where He had provided a sacrifice. b) In the days of Joshua The first specific reference to Jerusalem is in Joshua 10. Joshua had led the children of Israel into the Promised Land. To them Jerusalem was just one more city to conquer, like Ai and Jericho. But God set His affection on that city and had great plans for its future. Jerusalem is situated on a plateau, surrounded on three sides by valleys three to four hundred feet deep. As such Jerusalem had its own natural defenses. With only its north side on the same level as the surrounding topography, it was a relatively easy city to defend since there was only one way an enemy could attack it. It eventually became the possession of the Israelites. c) In the days of David Not much is said about Jerusalem until David became king. Having reigned seven years in Hebron, about twenty miles south of Jerusalem in a valley that was difficult to defend, David decided to move the capital to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 5:7). Jerusalem became the royal capital where David reigned for another thirty-three years. Also known as Mount Zion because of the hill on which the city of David stood, Jerusalem became the political, economic, religious, and social center of Jewish life. d) In the days of Jesus Jerusalem became the center of God's redemptive plan from the birth of Jesus. Just down the road from Jerusalem is Bethlehem, the place of the Messiah's birth. And just outside the city walls He died and rose again. At His return He will descend from heaven just next to Jerusalem on the Mount of Olives. Then He will enter the city and establish His throne.

2. Its destruction by the Babylonians

a) The cause Unfortunately the city God chose as the center for redemptive history became the object of misdirected zeal. When Israel departed from faith in God and was taken into captivity, it

became obvious that the people had done well in remembering Jerusalem but had done poorly in remembering what made Jerusalem great. They recalled their love for the city, but had forgotten the place of God in their lives. That's why God allowed the city to be destroyed and its people to be taken into captivity. b) The consequence Nebuchadnezzar, the powerful monarch of the Babylonian Empire, completely destroyed Jerusalem, making captives of its citizens as well as people in Judah. Jeremiah 52:12-15 records the overthrow of Jerusalem: "In the fifth month, in the tenth day of the month, which was the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came Nebuzaradan, captain of the guard, who served the king of Babylon, into Jerusalem, and burned the house of the Lord, and the king's house; and all the houses of Jerusalem, and all the houses of the great men, burned he with fire. And all the army of the Chaldeans, that were with the captain of the guard, broke down all the walls of Jerusalem round about. Then, Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard, carried away captive certain of the poor of the people, and the residue of the people who remained in the city, and those who fell away, who fell to the king of Babylon, and the rest of the multitude." However the captain left a few vinedressers and farmers to make sure the king received some product out of the land (v. 16). Nebuchadnezzar obviously had two objectives in mind: By destroying the Temple, he assumed he could break the back of the Jewish religion. And by destroying the palace he nullified Judah's political order. In 586 B.C. he succeeded, and so ended a great era.

3. Its domination by the Gentiles

a) Jesus' prophecy (1) Luke 21:24--The Babylonian Captivity was the beginning of what our Lord called "the times of the Gentiles." Specifically He said, "Jerusalem shall be trodden down by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." Jerusalem was initially trodden down by Nebuchadnezzar. Jesus said it will remain downtrodden until the times of the Gentiles comes to an end. (2) Matthew 23:37-39--Jesus here reiterated the same prophecy: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them who are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." The Lord was saying that Jerusalem would remain desolate until the Jewish people recognize Him as their Messiah when He returns to set up His Kingdom. The times of the Gentiles end with the return of Christ. The people will look upon Him whom they have pierced, and "mourn for Him, as one mourneth for his only son" (Zech. 12:10) and say, "Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Matt. 23:39). That is why I believe there will be a tremendous revival among the Jewish people during the Great Tribulation prior to Christ's second coming (Rev. 7:4-8; 14:1-3). b) The Jewish presence (1) After the Babylonian Captivity Some of the people returned to Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity during the reign of the Medo-Persians, and tried to rebuild the city. But they never had the freedom and autonomy they had before. After the Medo-Persians Israel fell under the control of the Greeks, represented by the Seleucids and Maccabees, under whom they experienced a small degree of liberty. But they lost that liberty when the Romans took charge and made them a vassal state. Even their Idumean kings, the Herods, were nothing but servants of Rome. (2) After the Roman destruction In A.D. 70 Titus, the son of Emperor Vespasian, brought his Roman legions into Jerusalem and destroyed it again. The first-century Jewish historian Josephus said that the Romans killed 1.1 million Jews in that massacre (Wars 6.9.3). Yet after that devastation the surviving Jews continued to pray for the restoration of their city. They congregated at the ruins of the Temple, meeting in the morning, afternoon, and evening. It became such a familiar place of prayer that it was named "The Wailing Wall." Since then the city has been controlled by different Gentile peoples: Romans, Arabs, Turks, and the British. (3) After the Six-Day War Although Israel became a nation in 1948, they never recovered full access to Jerusalem until they broke through Jordanian resistance on Wednesday June 7, 1967 during the Six-Day War. When they arrived at the Wailing Wall and began to shout and pray, it could be said that the Jewish people had prayed two thousand years for that moment.

Have the Times of the Gentiles Come to an End?

Some people believe Gentile dominion over the Jewish nation has ended because Israelites head the government. However the Jewish people do not believe they have absolute autonomy in their land; they feel the burden of Gentile oppression, symbolized by restraints imposed by the United Nations. One of the symbols of continuing Gentile dominion is the Dome of the Rock mosque that sits where the Temple once stood. But the Jewish people can't do a thing about replacing it without escalating a war in the Middle East.

B. The Prophetical Future of Jerusalem

Clearly Israel is not free from Gentile dominion. And in the future there will be a Gentile invasion of Israel.

1. Zechariah 12:2--The Lord said, "Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of trembling unto all the peoples round about, when they shall be in the siege both against Judah and against Jerusalem."

2. Zechariah 14:1-4--"Behold, the day of the Lord cometh, and.... I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then shall the Lord go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle. And his feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall cleave in its midst toward the east and toward the west." That is a description of the second coming of Christ. But prior to that the nations will gather against Jerusalem. As a result of the ensuing battle, the blood will be as deep as horses' bridles for two hundred miles (Rev. 14:20).

The peace of Jerusalem has not yet come. And the peace of Israel awaits the peace of Jerusalem.

REVIEW

I. THE DREAM RECEIVED (vv. 1-30)

II. THE DREAM RECALLED (vv. 31-35)

III. THE DREAM REVEALED (vv. 36-45)

A. Babylon (vv. 37-38)

B. Medo-Persia (v. 39a)

C. Greece (v. 39b)

D. Rome (vv. 40-43)

LESSON

E. The Kingdom of God (vv. 44-45)

1. Its establishment (v. 44a)

"In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom."

The commentaries on Daniel that I read agree that this verse describes the founding of the kingdom of God. They express different opinions about how it happens, but it's clear that God is setting up His kingdom. The phrase "in the days of these kings" refers to no specific kings since the only king mentioned in the context is Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 2:37). That there doesn't appear to be an obvious antecedent for the kings is handled differently by the two main eschatological perspectives.

a) Amillennialism Those who do not believe that Jesus Christ will return to earth and reign in a literal thousand-year kingdom are called "amillennialists." They claim that Daniel 2:44 refers to a spiritual kingdom of Christ set up in the hearts of men before the end of the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek, and Roman kingdoms. Although Christ did come while Rome was still in existence, the amillennial view has an obvious problem: Nebuchadnezzar's dream dealt with kingdoms, but the Aramaic word translated "kings" (*malkayya*) is different from the one translated "kingdoms" (*Aram*.

malkwata).b) PremillennialismThe context reveals that the kings must be the ten toes of the statue's feet (vv. 41-42), which represent ten kings in the final form of the Roman Empire. I believe verse 44 is Daniel's interpretation of the toes in Nebuchadnezzar's dream. That is supported elsewhere in Scripture.(1) Revelation 17:12--"The ten horns ... are ten kings." The apostle John records similar imagery of ten kings, but they are represented by ten horns.(2) Daniel 7--Verses 7 and 20 refer to ten horns. Verse 24 interprets them: "The ten horns out of this kingdom are ten kings that shall arise." Daniel saw Gentile world power finalizing itself in a ten-king or nation confederacy. So "in the days of these kings" means that while those ten leaders are in power God will set up His Kingdom.Verse 44 doesn't make sense if it refers to the other four kingdoms. God didn't set up His earthly Kingdom during the time of the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek, or Roman kingdoms. God's kingdom has yet to be established on the earth, although in a spiritual sense His Kingdom was established during the last of the four empires. However, since the image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream is a political picture of actual earthly kingdoms, I believe the final kingdom must also be political and earthly. It's not unlikely that a spiritual kingdom would be introduced into a prophecy that deals with actual historical kingdoms.The economic community of Europe has already been established into a multi-nation confederacy. Given that and the world's indifferent and antagonistic attitude toward God, there's only one thing that must happen before Christ returns: the voice of the archangel with the trump of God (1 Thess. 4:16).

2. Its character (v. 44b)

"A kingdom, which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever."

Unlike other kingdoms, the earthly kingdom God establishes will never be destroyed, fade away, or be taken over by another kingdom. On the contrary, it will consume every kingdom as well as the remnants of past kingdoms.

Some people have taught that this kingdom is the church. But it can't be the church because the Roman Empire continued for centuries after the church began. Also the church didn't destroy a ten-nation confederacy in Rome. In fact, the Roman Empire lasted longer after Jesus' death than the other empires lasted from the time of Nebuchadnezzar to Jesus. The church didn't bring a dramatic end to anything.

Daniel 2:34-35 tells us the stone of God's kingdom smashed the image and blew it away like dust. Then the stone filled the whole earth. The church certainly didn't destroy all the nations of the earth. The church didn't put an end to the times of the Gentiles. In spite of the presence of the church, the Roman Empire continued to dominate, especially in A.D. 70 when it destroyed Jerusalem. The kingdom of God as referred to in Daniel 2:44 can't be the church because the church has never overcome Gentile world power. That's why I believe Daniel was referring to the literal, physical, earthly kingdom that God will establish as the times of the Gentiles come to an end (Rev. 20:4-6). The Old Testament has many references to God's physical, earthly kingdom. It says that Jerusalem will be rebuilt (Zech. 14:9-21), Israel will be restored to the land (Jer. 23:8), and the curse will be lifted (Isa. 11:7-9). There will be an abundance of food (Joel 2:21-27), and health as well as healing (Isa. 29:18). The topography will change and a new Temple will be built (Ezek. 40-48). Those elements indicate a literal, physical Kingdom, although it certainly will have a spiritual reality to it.

3. Its founder (v. 45)

"Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold, the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter; and the dream is certain, and the interpretation of it sure."

Verse 45 is Daniel's interpretation of verses 34-35: "Thou sawest until a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon its feet that were of iron and clay, and broke them to pieces. Then were the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and

became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them; and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth."

a) His identity That stone is none other than Jesus Christ--He is the only One who can put an end to the times of the Gentiles and destroy the governments of the world.(1) Isaiah 9:6--Isaiah prophesied that "the government shall be upon his shoulder." Christ alone has the right to rule.(2) Revelation 5:1-10--Angels searched heaven to find someone worthy to open the scroll of the title deed to the earth. Only Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, could do it because only He has the right to possess the earth.(3) Genesis 49:24--"From there is the shepherd, the stone of Israel." Here God is referred to as a stone.(4) Psalm 118:22--"The stone which the builders refused is become the head of the corner" (cf. 1 Pet. 2:8). Not only did the apostle Peter use this verse in reference to Christ, but also Jesus Himself quoted it (Matt. 21:42).(5) Isaiah 28:16--God said, "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation."(6) 1 Corinthians 10:4--In speaking of Israel in the wilderness, Paul said, "They drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ."(7) Zechariah 14:4--Christ is the stone that will smash Gentile dominion. At His second coming His "feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives [which] shall cleave in its midst toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley." Into that valley, called "the valley of decision" (Joel 3:14), will come Gentiles from all over the globe. There they are judged by God. After their judgment, God will set up His Kingdom in the city of Jerusalem, where Christ will reign for a thousand years before the earth is superseded by the eternal state.b) His divinity Daniel 2:45 says this Messianic stone was "cut out of the mountain without hands." That is first of all a reflection of Christ's virgin birth. This stone was not man made. Second, I believe it is a reflection of Christ's resurrection--no human agency was involved in that. His own power brought Him out of the grave (John 10:18).c) His superiority Notice verse 45 says that the stone smashes the idol's feet--the final empire and the weakest part of the statue. As a result the entire Gentile reign comes to an end. While Jesus is a crushing stone (Matt. 21:44), at the same time He is a restoring stone, for no sooner does He smash and crush than He fills the earth (Dan. 2:35). The cultural background of Nebuchadnezzar's religion highlights the superiority of the stone.(1) The great mountain According to archaeologists, Nebuchadnezzar's chief god was called "Bel Marduk," that is, "Marduk the god." Sometimes he was associated with a great mountain. That the stone in Nebuchadnezzar's dream became a great mountain (v. 35) led the king to understand that his god would be replaced by the true God.(2) A supernatural stone Nebuchadnezzar was one of the great builders in ancient history. (For example, he is credited with the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.) He would have understood the importance of a stone cut out without hands because he was familiar with the incredible effort necessary to cut out stone by hand.(3) A mighty wind Verse 35 says the wind came along after the image had been smashed and blew the pieces away. I believe that also pointed Nebuchadnezzar to the inferiority of his god. In Babylonian theology, Bel Marduk defeated Tiamat, the dragon of chaos, by sending a hurricane into its mouth and blowing it up (Will Durant Our Oriental Heritage [N.Y.: Simon and Schuster, 1954], pp. 236-37). If anyone were to doubt Daniel's recall of the dream and his interpretation, verse 45 puts those doubts to rest: "The dream is certain, and the interpretation of it sure."

IV. DANIEL REWARDED (vv. 46-49)

A. The Praise (vv. 46-47)

"Then the king, Nebuchadnezzar, fell upon his face, and worshiped Daniel, and commanded that they should offer an oblation and sweet odors unto him. The king answered unto Daniel, and said, Of a truth it is that your God is the God of gods, and the Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, seeing thou couldest reveal this secret."

Why would the king worship Daniel? He didn't know Daniel's God, so he figured the only way to get

to him was through Daniel. In verse 47 Nebuchadnezzar offered praise to Daniel's God. But his was shallow commitment based on the emotion of the moment because he abandoned it in the next chapter.

B. The Promotion (vv. 48-49)

"Then the king made Daniel a great man, and gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon. Then Daniel requested of the king, and he set Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego over the affairs of the province of Babylon; but Daniel sat in the gate of the king."

Daniel was promoted to prime minister of the Babylonian Empire. When Daniel received his new position, he had his three friends raised into strategic places to be used by God. Some have denied the authenticity of the book of Daniel on the basis that kings don't bow to their captives. But kings do bow to God. The book of Daniel is the Word of God revealed to Daniel, and Nebuchadnezzar knew it.

CONCLUSION

The book of Daniel gives us an important principle: you never have to scheme to acquire the position or ministry you desire. Simply obey God. He will open doors and use you in a way far beyond what you ever dreamed (Eph. 3:20-21). Daniel simply obeyed God in every situation He took him through. Daniel became the prime minister of Babylon because God put him there. Since he didn't put himself there, he didn't have to worry about staying there. God would keep Daniel there until he had served His purpose. Don't seek to promote yourself; let God direct your path as you obey His will.

Focusing on the Facts

1. According to Psalm 137, how did the captives of Babylon feel about Jerusalem?
2. What is the first apparent mention of Jerusalem in the Bible?
3. What is significant about a particular mountain near the ancient city in the days of Abraham?
4. What did Jerusalem become under David?
5. Why did God allow Jerusalem to be destroyed and its people taken into captivity?
6. What were Nebuchadnezzar's two objectives in destroying Jerusalem?
7. What period began at the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar?
8. According to Jesus, how long will Jerusalem remain desolate (Matt. 23:37-39)?
9. When did the Jewish people finally regain control of Jerusalem?
10. Why have the times of the Gentiles not yet ended?
11. What do amillennial scholars believe regarding the kingdom of Christ?
12. What do the kings of verse 44 seem to refer to?
13. Why is it logical to assume that the final kingdom must be a political and earthly one?
14. What will the kingdom God establishes be like? Why can't it be identified with the church?
15. What identity of Christ in Scripture corresponds with Daniel 2:45?
16. What is significant about the great mountain and wind in Nebuchadnezzar's dream?
17. How was Daniel rewarded for his interpretation?

Pondering the Principles

1. Many Jewish people made a sad mistake by retaining their love for Jerusalem without continuing to love God. Christians are no different. Revelation 2 records a rebuke of the church at Ephesus, which had left its first love--Jesus Christ (v. 4). Evaluate your own spiritual life. Do you hunger and thirst for righteousness and seek to know Christ intimately? Have you retired from seeking to please God and be an imitator of Christ? Be refreshed by Paul's zeal to "win Christ" by reading Philippians 3:4-14.
2. It is well known that those who seek success must learn to pay the price. However in the the

spiritual realm we often fail to implement that same principle, expecting immediate success without sacrifice and struggle. But such success does not exist. Consider Daniel's promotion granted to him by God. What price did he pay? Consider Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane as recorded in Luke 22:41-44. What attitude did He manifest in the struggle He had with going to the cross? What happened as a result in verse 43? The principle of submission before success is a paradox. If you find yourself saying, "Help me through, Lord, and then I'll obey" you have reversed God's order for success. Identify areas in your own life where there is a lack of success or accomplishment. If you find those areas are rooted in a lack of submission to God's revealed will and the subjective leading of His Spirit, commit yourself to obeying God first and trusting Him with the results.

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