

Chapter 2 - The Statue Dream

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

Now in the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; and his spirit was so troubled that his sleep left him. ² Then the king gave the command to call the magicians, the astrologers, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans to tell the king his dreams. So they came and stood before the king. ³ And the king said to them, "I have had a dream, and my spirit is anxious to know the dream."

⁴ Then the Chaldeans spoke to the king in Aramaic, "O king, live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will give the interpretation."

"[T]he second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign" would date this to around 603BC when, evidently, he started to dream weird things. This was not as unusual as we are led to understand when this story is told to us as children. Until very recently, monarchs were believed to rule by divine right and dreams were one way that the gods spoke to them. In this case, Nebuchadnezzar naturally calls in "*the magicians, the astrologers, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans*" to explain his dream and its meaning. As we discussed last chapter, the Chaldeans, who are given a special mention here, were both a separate and highly mystical culture. While priests might be too strong a term for them, part of their role was to interpret the mystical for the monarch, and explain the messages of the gods.

Nebuchadnezzar makes, what seems to him to be a simple request. Explain my dream. His anxiety will be explained as we examine its content, but his request is not unreasonable, nor is his expectation that his 'spiritual advisors' will know it without being told; after all, they commune with the gods more regularly than he does. The king intentionally does not tell them what he is dreaming as he expects that the gods will have given them some explanation for him.

On the other hand, to our modern reading, the request that the king would explain the dream to the advisors seems equally as reasonable. It is not generally accepted that

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God speaks to people today through dreams, at least in the majority of the populace. While dreams are very often forgotten when one wakes up, if the king is anxious about this one in particular, he should have some memory of it, so again, this is a reasonable request.

5 The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, "My decision is firm: if you do not make known the dream to me, and its interpretation, you shall be cut in pieces, and your houses shall be made an ash heap. 6 However, if you tell the dream and its interpretation, you shall receive from me gifts, rewards, and great honor. Therefore tell me the dream and its interpretation."

7 They answered again and said, "Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will give its interpretation."

8 The king answered and said, "I know for certain that you would gain time, because you see that my decision is firm: 9 if you do not make known the dream to me, there is only one decree for you! For you have agreed to speak lying and corrupt words before me till the time has changed. Therefore tell me the dream, and I shall know that you can give me its interpretation."

10 The Chaldeans answered the king, and said, "There is not a man on earth who can tell the king's matter; therefore no king, lord, or ruler has ever asked such things of any magician, astrologer, or Chaldean. 11 It is a difficult thing that the king requests, and there is no other who can tell it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh."

Both Nebuchadnezzar and his advisors started out acting in good faith toward each other. The king expects his wise men to get answers from the gods to explain what he saw, and the advisors expect the king to tell them his troubles. Nebuchadnezzar's anxiety clearly gets the better of him, demanding an immediate explanation and leaving them no room to "*gain time*". He even raises the stakes to have them not only explain the interpretation of the dream, but to also "*make known the dream to*" him. He wants to make sure they don't just make some stuff up and say "this is what the gods told us".

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Daniel is trying to give the impression that the king is impulsive, a little paranoid and untrusting. He promises wild rewards for his wishes to be fulfilled and threatens death if they are not; classic dictatorial attitudes we have seen in our own recent times. He clearly does not trust these advisors and an argument could be made here that he is, in fact, trying to give himself an opportunity to eliminate cultural invaders.

The Chaldeans reply is very bold, astonishingly so to a king that has just threatened their death. They are not begging for their lives by saying that the gods alone speak with the monarch, instead they boldly inform the king that *“There is not a man on earth who can tell the king’s matter; ... no king, lord, or ruler has ever asked such things of any magician, astrologer, or Chaldean.”* To matter-of-factly say that his request is impossible demonstrates that these Chaldeans were either a bold group who calculated that Nebuchadnezzar would not try to attack them, or that they were resigned to their fate. In the latter case, telling the truth is not a bad decision although it would make no difference.

¹² For this reason the king was angry and very furious, and gave the command to destroy all the wise men of Babylon. ¹³ So the decree went out, and they began killing the wise men; and they sought Daniel and his companions, to kill them.

Daniel and his friends were still in training as this is only the 2nd year of Nebuchadnezzars’ reign and we learned in the last chapter that the training period was 3 years. This is a fact that is often missed in reviewing the book of Daniel. These four were a part of the group of magicians and astrologers, even if just training, so it was certainly reasonable that they be put to death by the king’s command. Again, this reinforces Daniels view of Nebuchadnezzar as insecure and paranoid if he would even kill the wise men in training.

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¹⁴ Then with counsel and wisdom Daniel answered Arioch, the captain of the king’s guard, who had gone out to kill the wise men of Babylon; ¹⁵ he answered and said to Arioch the king’s captain, “Why is the decree from the king so urgent?” Then Arioch made the decision known to Daniel.

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There appears to be a piece missing from the book of Daniel at this point. Arioch, one of the senior officers of the king seems to be in the middle of a conversation with Daniel for Daniel to answer him “*with counsel and wisdom*”. The impression we are given here is that Arioch has simply arrived to put these men to death and Daniel wants to know the story. In this case, Arioch explains to him what has happened rather than simply putting him to death.

This could indicate that, even still in training, Daniel's qualities were already becoming known to the court. Within the 'beneath stairs' circles of the stewards and guards, the story of Daniel and the vegetables may have become known, and Arioch here want to do his duty with full dignity to his intended victim.

Alternatively, Arioch recognised the value of keeping the Judean hostages alive considering, at this time, the Kingdom of Judah was a contented vassal state that had little reason to rebel against Babylon. Putting these men to death would not only have upset the Jews but would also have sent a very bad message to the other nations who had hostages in Babylon.

Again, Daniel is demonstrating Nebuchadnezzar's impulsive and paranoid nature.

¹⁶ So Daniel went in and asked the king to give him time, that he might tell the king the interpretation. ¹⁷ Then Daniel went to his house, and made the decision known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions, ¹⁸ that they might seek mercies from the God of heaven concerning this secret, so that Daniel and his companions might not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.

Daniel and his friends come to the king after he has had time to settle and relax. He would probably not have gone directly to the King in this situation, but rather asked Arioch to intercede on his behalf, to give his people time to seek God's guidance. Arioch, ignorant of Jewish ways, could easily have spoken to Nebuchadnezzar and explained that these are only advisors in training, they need time to do their own rituals and they were not part of the conversation with the king when he woke up. Arioch may also have not said anything to the king and simply slept on it; if Daniel asked the king through Arioch or Ashpenaz or anyone else, he was still “*asking the king*” and the meaning of the text is not lost. Similarly, a broader appeal by Ashpenaz

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is plausible on the grounds that these men in training were not lumped with the others and would fair better if given time. These are all plausible interpretations that don't detract from the story.

Irrespective, there is a clear air of secrecy here as this is, technically, treasonous on all fronts. Their death was instructed by the king and the king is not recorded here as giving any type of reprieve. If Arioch or Ashpenaz were involved in delaying the executions, they were putting their lives at risk just as much as Daniel and his companions. Clearly, this is why Daniel only "*made the decision known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions ... concerning this secret*". It was obviously a risk, and it is for this reason that I believe Arioch was the only person outside of the Jews that knew of the decree at this time. This also makes sense as, after the secret is revealed to Daniel by God, that he presents himself to Arioch in verse 24.

19 Then the secret was revealed to Daniel in a night vision. So Daniel blessed the God of heaven.

20 Daniel answered and said:

*"Blessed be the name of God forever and ever,
For wisdom and might are His.*

*21 And He changes the times and the seasons;
He removes kings and raises up kings;
He gives wisdom to the wise
And knowledge to those who have understanding.*

*22 He reveals deep and secret things;
He knows what is in the darkness,
And light dwells with Him.*

*23 "I thank You and praise You,
O God of my fathers;
You have given me wisdom and might,
And have now made known to me what we asked of You,
For You have made known to us the king's demand."*

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Daniel's reaction is to pray a prayer of thanks when God gives him a vision that explains the dream. His prayer is broad and adds much to our interpretation of the book, so it's certainly worth examining in detail.

To say that “*Daniel blessed the God of heaven*” is a little misleading; after all, what good is a human blessing to God? What Daniel means is he acknowledged and thanked God for revealing the secret to him; in turn giving him a chance to save himself and his friends and promote his God to his Babylonian overlords.

Daniel again uses the word “*answered*” strangely, as if he is answering God giving him the answer to the king's dream. His reply, although gushing, is well chosen in its language.

“Blessed be the name of God forever and ever,
For wisdom and might are His.
²¹ And He changes the times and the seasons;
He removes kings and raises up kings;”

Daniel begins by acknowledging God as the source of all “*wisdom and might*”. The story of Daniel 2, like most of the book, revolves around warfare and conflict. Daniel, so quickly after his nation has been humiliated by the pagan Babylonians, acknowledges that all power and all understanding are in his God's hands. He goes further than this to stipulate that God oversees the twisting of “*the times and the seasons*”, drawing on his ancient brethren's experience watching God manipulate the natural world. Hezekiah's experience watching the sun turn backwards was only about a century earlier than Daniel's birth and would have been a story that he was brought up on, as well as the experiences of Joseph going into Egypt because of the famine. The experience of Joseph and the Israelites going into captivity would have been especially important to Daniel as both experienced the prescience of God's revelation.

Daniel is clearly connecting what he will tell the King with what his people have already experienced, again highlighted by the fact that he acknowledges God's authority to “*remove[s] kings and raise[s] up kings*”. The experience detailed in the last chapter; with the destruction of Assyria and the elevation of Nebuchadnezzar himself, falls clearly within the understanding of the multiple empires that Daniel will discuss in his

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revelation. If God is the source of all might, he can, naturally, elevate or eliminate Kings and, in turn, empires.

“He gives wisdom to the wise
And knowledge to those who have understanding.

²² He reveals deep and secret things;
He knows what is in the darkness,
And light dwells with Him.

²³ I thank You and praise You,
O God of my fathers;
You have given me wisdom and might,
And have now made known to me what we asked of You,
For You have made known to us the king’s demand.”

Daniel continues by putting his God at the very centre of all things; both secrets and public knowledge and recognises that it is His authority to decide who is given that knowledge. He thanks God for permitting him to have access to that knowledge to illuminate and do the will of a pagan king. He recognises his reliance on his God and that through this revelation, Daniel is now able to go to the king and tell him what he was asking.

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²⁴ *Therefore Daniel went to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to destroy the wise men of Babylon. He went and said thus to him: “Do not destroy the wise men of Babylon; take me before the king, and I will tell the king the interpretation.”*

²⁵ *Then Arioch quickly brought Daniel before the king, and said thus to him, “I have found a man of the captives of Judah, who will make known to the king the interpretation.”*

²⁶ *The king answered and said to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, “Are you able to make known to me the dream which I have seen, and its interpretation?”*

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Daniel did not attempt to push his way into the king's court or abuse his position; rather he approached Arioch and petitioned him for an audience with Nebuchadnezzar. Arioch must have felt relieved that the reprieve he had given to these Jews would be rewarded by giving the king his answers. Arioch brought Daniel before the king "*quickly*" indicating his anxiety of the monarch's temper. He presents Daniel in a rushed manner, indicating that he had "*found a man of the captives of Judah, who will make known to the king the interpretation*" ignoring the fact that this was one of those he was to execute. One can believe that this was intended to sound to the king as if "while I was putting some magicians to death, this guy came and told me he could help so I brought him here..." trying to isolate Daniel from the magicians himself.

The fact Arioch connects him with "*the captives of Judah*" is intended to further isolate Daniel from the magicians by isolating him from the Chaldean culture also. The King explicitly called for "*the Chaldeans to tell the king his dreams*" and it was the Chaldeans who had disappointed him. Arioch wants Daniel to have a chance at pleasing his king, and therefore removes him from his teachers.

Nebuchadnezzar's question to Daniel; "*Are you able to make known to me the dream which I have seen, and its interpretation?*" betrays his anxiety over the matter. He does not react harshly to his officer who had overstepped his bounds, nor does he hold himself to the execution decree that was probably being carried out at that very moment. Instead, he begs Daniel for some relief to his stress. But he is not so desperate as to forget his conditions; he asks Daniel to both "*make known to me the dream which I have seen*" and "*its interpretation*". The teenager, regardless of his absolute faith in his God, must have had a moments pause with these words.

²⁷ Daniel answered in the presence of the king, and said, "The secret which the king has demanded, the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, and the soothsayers cannot declare to the king. ²⁸ But there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. Your dream, and the visions of your head upon your bed, were these: ²⁹ As for you, O king, thoughts came to your mind while on your bed, about what would come to pass after this; and He who reveals secrets has made known to you what will be. ³⁰ But as for me, this secret has not been revealed to me because I have more wisdom

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than anyone living, but for our sakes who make known the interpretation to the king, and that you may know the thoughts of your heart.

Daniel, in effect, says “no”. Without including himself in the group of wise men, he reinforces the Chaldean’s statement that “[t]here is not a man on earth who can tell the king’s matter”, but he quickly adds his acknowledgement of his “God in heaven who reveals secrets”. This bold statement by Daniel ameliorates his human inability to do what is asked of him, but also would have made a quick enemy of the Chaldeans who he is demonstrating superiority over. He is making clear that his God is superior to both the Babylonian and Chaldean ones that he is in training to learn of.

What makes this even worse is that Daniel makes clear that the “God in heaven... has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days”. The king’s dream concerned “what would come to pass after this;” God had told Nebuchadnezzar “what will be.” This is a rather outrageous way of demonstrating his God was superior. In all ancient religious comprehension, each managed a specific experience of set of natural law and kept to their little area. Daniel, on the other hand, is here making clear that his God is in charge of **all** the elements that would control empires and even time itself. While the pantheons of Gods in the ancient world generally had hierarchies, no one god controlled all the events that would change the world, and most ancient tales are about the gods working together; or against each other, to accomplish or prevent some goal.

Daniel is also being very careful in how he explains this to the king; he puts Nebuchadnezzar at the centre of the Babylonian world. While we today often refer to these events as a way for God to show dominance over the world and over the king, Daniel puts Nebuchadnezzar in the superior place. God, “who reveals secrets[,] has made known to **you** what will be.” Daniel is implying here that Nebuchadnezzar need not make this known to the wider world; it is a revelation for him. Daniel goes so far as to say that “this secret has not been revealed to me because I have more wisdom than anyone living, but for our sakes who make known the interpretation to the king, and that you may know the thoughts of your heart.” Daniel explains that his God gave the king the dream for him to understand, and the only reason Daniel knows is because of Nebuchadnezzar’s anxiety and intent to kill the wise men. Daniel, according to his

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own words here, should not have been told what the dream means; a subtle dig at the king's impulse to slaughter his wise men. Daniel is also, subtly, putting himself in a very powerful but also very dangerous position. He is trying to make the king the conduit between the gods and everyone else, but he is also putting himself as the interpreter of that relationship. Even the smallest slip up and Daniel has his own head on the chopping block.

31 "You, O king, were watching; and behold, a great image! This great image, whose splendor was excellent, stood before you; and its form was awesome. 32 This image's head was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, 33 its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. 34 You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which 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 were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

The dream is explained by Daniel in a clear and concise manner. A large image, evidently of a man is seen; *"head was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, 33 its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay."* A large stone smashes the image in its feet breaking the entire image which is then crushed and powdered and blown away with the wind. The stone becomes a huge mountain that fills all the earth.

This is the classic story, and all Christians recognise it well. The only notable element that is often missed is the detail that the *"stone ... cut out without hands ... struck the image on its feet of iron and clay"*. This detail is important to the timeframe of the story. Other writers have made much about a degeneration of metals; Gold more precious than silver, which is more valuable than bronze etc, but as the history is explained in the next section, I have an alternative theory on these details.

As we go through the dream, I will address the elements as it relates to the text here. In a separate essay I have explained the great empires that have interacted with God's people, and I have explained the narrative of these empires and how they relate to the

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book of Daniel in another essay. This analysis will focus more specifically on the symbols and their meaning to the narrative in this chapter – the King’s vision.

36 “This is the dream. Now we will tell the interpretation of it before the king. 37 You, O king, are a king of kings. For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory; 38 and wherever the children of men dwell, or the beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven, He has given them into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all—you are this head of gold.

“*we*”? Who is “*we*”? That is an open question. It could represent Daniel and his 3 friends who knew of the problem, or Daniel could be grouping himself with God to explain the vision. He could also be simply talking about the language interpreter, assuming there was one. This type of a slip would help to indicate the authenticity of the book; a forger would not have any reason to include such elements. This is all speculation so let’s get into the interpretation.

Daniel opens his presentation to the king with the elaborate flattery that he would expect. The Babylonian empire, by this time, had conquered Assyria, the northern Israelite Kingdom and defeated Egypt. Daniel and his friends were in Babylon as hostages to keep the vassal Judean king in order as we had stated. Nebuchadnezzar truly was “*a king of kings*”, what we would today call an emperor. Furthermore, the power and influence of Babylon spread far and wide into areas that Nebuchadnezzar himself did not control. His defeat of Pharaoh Necho II meant he could order the Egyptians to his will, within reason. Nebuchadnezzar’s identification as the head was quite apt.

The head also refers to the intellectual approach that the Babylonians pioneered. Although Egypt is usually given the lion’s share of credit, Babylon concurrently and both collaboratively and independently developed a system of math and astronomy that rivalled anything else that had come before it. The Babylonian Mysteries, which will be dealt with in Chapter 8, was a combination of spiritual and scientific research that became the template for math and science from then to the renaissance some 2,000 years later when these became separated from spiritual matters. Not enough modern credit is given to Babylonian inventiveness and research but the world would look a very different place without it.

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In addition to this, it can also refer to the Babylonian autocratic system of government. Nebuchadnezzar was an absolute dictator like few others in history and certainly no like the other governments that succeeded it. Media and Persia were mixed cultures, Greece was a collection of city states, Rome had a senate and two leaders which, when it became an empire, simply laid that individual over the top of government. While power was delegated to more local officials, Babylonian government was autocratic; held at the will of the king and exercised under his authority.

Gold is a little more complicated. Today we look at gold as the cornerstone of value, but this would not have been quite the same in late Mesopotamia. Currency was based much more on food staples and the 'gold' referred to here could related to the yellow grain that was the standard of money. This, however, does not match up to the other metals in the statue, nor to the fact that silver was the higher valued specie at the time.

In addition, all these empires exist during the Iron Age. Some commentators have drawn out the different metallurgical ages experienced by mankind, categorised by the types of tools used by ancient man. Earliest tools would, naturally, be made of stone as it was the hardest immediately available substance. Experimentation in different types of stones produced flint tools, progressing to metal ores and then to forging actual tools out of those ores. Copper is the easiest and most available ore and became the first metallurgical tool to be used by the ancients followed by alloys of Brass and Bronze. As techniques were refined, different metals would have been experimented with until the invention of Bellows allowed sufficient heat to be generated to work Iron. Owing to its tough crystalline structure, Iron dwarfed all other tools and by the 12th century BC, Iron was the dominant metal for tools and weapons. As stated previously, Daniel and the other hostages were brought to Babylon around 604BC, well into the Iron Age.

Commentators that try to put the golden colour of Copper into this selection have to answer 2 issues. First, as stated, why does this not match the actual, historical timeline and second what does silver, the next metal, refer to? These questions make this style of interpretation an impossibility.

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It should also go without stating that Gold is too soft to be used for weapons and tools, and nowhere near enough has been mined in the entirety of the world history for an empire of Babylon's size to make weapons out of Gold. While Silver was valued higher than gold as a form of wealth, Gold was still recognised for its beauty and ability to withstand tarnishing, making it a metal of the elites and not the common soldier.

The question that is often drawn out of the context is could gold refer to God's Word or the people of God. This is highly plausible as the people were taken into captivity in as pure a form as they could be and in a state that they would never be able to achieve again. This purity can refer to the security of God's Word that degraded as time and the pagan influences that plagued the Jewish nations. There are two issues with this. First, as stated in Chapter 1, the Jews had apostatised multiple times before their arrival in Babylon. Second, the nations that captured the Jews cared little or nothing with their religion directly. Although both the Greek and Roman Pantheon held a shrines and altars to the 'unknown Jewish God', this was a part of their cultural appropriation. They did not adopt or, until rebellion required it, suppress worship of the Jewish Divinity. The word of God, although impacting the events of these civilisations, did not influence the broader religion of the people living in them. Furthermore, after Darius freed the Jews, they became an independent, albeit subservient, nation and the treatment of the Jewish people was much more dependent on the politics of nation and not of captive peoples.

Gold must refer to influence, strength, and power; how Babylon ruled the world.

Although it is a convenient connection to make, it is highly unlikely that the "*head of gold*" refers to the golden statue of the next chapter, if for no other reason that this would be a self-fulfilling prophecy. It is much more likely that Nebuchadnezzar's statue was a result of the dream and not that the dream was pointing to the statue.

39 But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours;

Following Babylon, the Persian Empire with Media as its support arose. Babylon itself fell in 539BC to Cyrus the Persian by diverting the Euphrates River that flowed under its gates, allowing a strike force to invade and capture key elements before opening the main city gates. Daniel Chapter 5 relates this night to being the same night as

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Belshazzar's feast and the famous writing on the wall which we will discuss in future chapters.

That this kingdom was inferior is known to history in several ways. The 'unity' of the Persians and Medes built weaknesses into the arrangement as all coalitions do, and multiple names and titles for the same individual have plagued history writers to this day. Darius the Mede, for example, is unknown to history, but in another essay I have laid out my conclusion that Darius is the Median name for the Persian King Cyrus, known as Cyrus the Great. While both Persia and Media had strengths of their own, it did not take long for infighting to bring conflict between them and cause the downfall of both.

Daniel omits a reference to the metal, simply saying it is 'inferior' to the Gold kingdom. Indeed, silver would draw inferences to money as it was the known specie for the time, but there was little special about silver or money by either of these kingdoms. 'Money' as we use it today; a common system to define the value of goods and to act as a universal exchange for goods, was well established by this point. Herodotus states in Histories that the Lydians, modern North East Greece, "were the first men whom we know who coined and used gold and silver currency", specifically referring to an alloy of gold and silver called electrum. Many 6th Century samples exist indicating that the coin industry was very well in hand and it is noteworthy that, prior to his capture of Babylon, Cyrus the Great conquered the Lydians.

then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth.

The third kingdom in this list is Greece, and it is appropriately related to bronze; a melting of strong and hard materials to make a stronger overall. Greece was the melting pot of ideas and ideologies on a very wide variety of subjects and types. A collection of city-states that shared some fundamental cultural elements, Greece was not a unified collective and even matters like religion and philosophy were interpreted different in different parts of the country. Only once was Greece fully unified; from 336 to 323 BC under Alexander the Great and only for the duration of his life. Prior to this as many as 1,000 city states formed what we call Ancient Greece and after his death the empire experience a four-way power struggle that saw two victorious powers.

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Compared to the other empires that came before it, Greece was the first to truly “*rule over all the earth*” with Alexander the Great extending his borders from modern-day Greece in the North, Egypt in the South to as far west as India. This was the farthest expansion of any empire until Rome and the trade and political deals went even further.

40 And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others.

Following Alexander the Great’s death, two powers; the Seleucid Syrians and Ptolemaic Egyptians, spent 200 years in constant conflict for control. The next great power to rise, and the fourth kingdom here, is Rome, the iron power that ruled the world with the short sword. Unlike other great powers, Rome never sought to conquer the world, rather it implanted itself amongst its restless neighbours and, when they became troublesome, absorbed them into their own power structure. When enemies stood against them, the power of Rome was unmatched. “... *like iron that crushes*” the power of Rome was known worldwide and was an absolute fear for all who came against it. If a Roman citizen was interfered with by bandits, the local garrison would seek them out and crucify them. If they were assaulted, a village could be decimated. Even that word; ‘decimate’ comes from what the Romans did to themselves. If a trooper showed cowardice or deserted in battle, the rest of his unit would be paraded and one in 10 killed. The Romans crushed almost every enemy that dared to oppose them, and it was only when their reliance on foreign mercenaries outweighed local troops that the empire started to crumble.

The comment that “*iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything*” relates to several qualities of the Roman Empire beyond their destruction of opposing armies. When Rome incorporated territory into its boundaries, it tried to follow tribal and cultural barriers but also destroyed anything that opposed it or that could be considered against its rule. In Israel, for example, while temple services were permitted to continue, the members of the Sanhedrin and the office of High Priest especially, were either appointed or approved by the Roman Authorities; the High Priest’s office

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actually auctioned off by the Roman Governor. This approach to local custom was in addition to introducing Roman religion, and especially emperor worship, alongside and over time supplanting local customs.

Not only did the Romans take slaves in their initial conquest; ‘shattering’ families and community groups, but any infraction not punished with death or mutilation would generally lead to slavery. The text says, “*that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others*” and Rome certainly met that description, choosing to conquer rather than ally and destroy rather than protect.

That is not to say that Rome simply used war to achieve all their ends. As will be relayed in Chapter 11, when Gaius Popillius Laenas met Antiochus IV ‘Epiphanes’ his approach was respectful if verging on curt, but did offer a diplomatic, if threatening, proposal. That this was backed up with a military threat was natural for the time, but the fact that his diplomatic approach included a requirement to hand over conquered territory clearly demonstrated that, even in diplomacy, Rome was able to crush opponents and break their forces.

Other interpretations add to this that the two legs could represent East and West Rome, the two consuls that ruled the Empire under the Pincus or even the dichotomy in culture with the Romans absorbing all other cultures into their own to demonstrate a superiority. These are valid theories and I won’t contradict them, but they add little to this analysis. The only thing to make clear is that all theories that have any validity point to Rome; no other power fits.

⁴¹ Whereas you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter’s clay and partly of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; yet the strength of the iron shall be in it, just as you saw the iron mixed with ceramic clay. ⁴² And as the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile. ⁴³ As you saw iron mixed with ceramic clay, they will mingle with the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay.

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Following the Roman Empire, Europe split into tribal states, never again to be united under one force. Although many have tried, the states of Europe have never reformed under one flag.

- The Holy Roman Empire lasted just over a thousand years from Charlemagne's coronation in 800 to its dissolution in 1806. It primarily consisted of Germany and parts of France and Austria.
- The French Monarchy expanded several times but rarely beyond the borders of Spain and Germany.
- The French Empire under Napoleon expanded to take much of Western Europe but did not conquer all of Spain or the Balkans. It also ignored most of the Mediterranean Islands and failed to hold Egypt or its limited middle east holdings for long.
- Nazi Germany, the last to attempt conquest of Europe, made no attempt to conquer its Spanish, Italian or Balkan allies although it exerted much influence over these.
- The latest attempt is through the European Union that has also left out most of the Balkan states, Switzerland and both Africa and the middle east. The diplomatic union has also been extremely loose, and Brexit demonstrates that such union is only of convenience and not permanent.

None of these ever came close to the absolute dominance or scope the Roman Empire enjoyed, and their unification has been either loose or fleeting. From the fall of the Roman Empire, never again did a force arise that matched Rome, nor did the portions of Europe ever cleave together.

A great deal of ink has been spilt trying to identify the '10 toes', an important endeavour as it is clearly related to the 10 horns of Daniel 7:7, 20, 24 and Revelation 13:1. Several different interpretations have been proposed for the breakup of the Roman Empire, each using different criteria to judge what should and shouldn't be included. Often these split the larger Frankish and Gothic tribes into their own units and often these ignore the Eastern Empire altogether. I will cover the idea of these '10' states when we get to Daniel 7 as it is much more relevant there. In this chapter, the number 10 is not referenced; only the idea of toes and the clay and iron not mixing

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together. For the purpose of analysing this chapter, the fact that Rome's separation did not meld together makes any more depth irrelevant.

What is more important is the fact that unity will not form amongst the resulting groups of the breakup of Rome. Nebuchadnezzar "*saw iron mixed with ceramic clay*" and adds that "*they will mingle with the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another*". The families and cultures of Europe would, and do, mix together and drawing borders in that continent is extremely difficult because of the cultural jumble. Even amongst languages there is no real unification, as French has at least 28 dialects; mostly arranged geographically, and German has about ten times as many again. English is considered to have more than 160.

The strength of Iron does not fuse well together with soft clay, which is why it is used in hardening the blades of knives and swords. The clay mentioned twice in this passage is an interesting type: "*ceramic clay*", the clay used when smelting iron or other metals. It can withstand exceptionally high temperatures, and the more heat it endures, the stronger it becomes, but at the same time the more brittle it can be. This is a clear reference to the fact that, although the melting pot of cultures will try to fuse states together, "*they will not adhere to one another*" in the way that Iron does not stick to the clay. Indeed, anyone that works smelting knows that, when the clay cools down it separates from the hardened metal.

44 And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.

"...in the days of these kings" indicates that the setting up of God's new kingdom happens throughout the reign of all these kings. From roughly 600BC through to around 500 AD, God's Kingdom is established, a kingdom "*which shall never be destroyed[;] and ... [a] ... kingdom [that] shall not be left to other people*". This kingdom of God will be established during the time-period of these kings, but it will itself not be destroyed nor will it be left outside of God's authority. Indeed, this kingdom will "*break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever*" dividing and absorbing all the other nations on the earth.

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So, what kingdom is this?

As Chapter 1 introduced, Israel apostatised and rejected the covenants between them and God. This led to their enslavement at the hands of Babylon and subsequent subjugation or vassalage by other powers. They had rejected their birthright. The independence of Israel was never again absolute and even today lives in constant fear. But during this time the groundwork was built for Jesus' presence and work on Earth.

A remnant was preserved.

Israel was smashed and Judea enslaved by the Babylonians. The Babylonian education of the Jewish cognoscenti, such as Daniel and his companions, was intended to influence their religious and cultural practises to the dominant power's benefit. As we have seen and is historical record, Daniel and his friends were made senior officers in the Babylonian court, as were members of other conquered powers, but this privilege came at the cost of their personal culture. The adoption or imposition of foreign names, especially ones that related to their foreign Gods, and the adoption of both foreign languages and worship of foreign Gods could do nothing but limit their own cultural practices and influence their cultural experience.

This foreign influence forever tainted the experience of the Jewish nations. From the loss of the Ark of the Covenant, replaced with a white cube of marble, to the perversion of the sacrificial system, Israel in culture and life never recovered. But, in part through the book of Daniel itself, the groundwork for the awaiting of the Messiah was more firmly established. Daniel 7 promises an individual that would free the Israelites from their bondage like Moses and Elijah before them. This expected individual had been awaited by generations before, but now that enslavement was again the lot of the Jews, this expectation again became physical.

With their captivity released by Cyrus the Great, known to the bible as Darius the Mede, the Jewish nation returned to their destroyed homeland with their ideologies and philosophies tainted through their captor's culture, to a place overwhelmed by what they saw as traitorous Samaritans. The 70-year captivity is at least 2 full generations who lived in Babylonian and Persian exile, and the pure scriptures never

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recovered. Alliances with foreign powers; Egypt, Greece, the Seleucids and Romans, again contravening God's command to "*not associate with these nations that remain among you*", simply invited more influence into their culture, and the new Israelites quickly traded away their independence and liberty for security.

However, the promise of Daniel 7, added to the earlier expectations of Isaiah, kept Israelites hope alive, waiting for their Messiah to free them from all foreign influences. Had the Jews recognised Him, studied the timeline given in Daniel, like some groups did, and accepted His arrival in both the divine manner and the declared way that He said He had arrived, their experience would have been very different; and the world would have had a very different result.

But they did not.

Despite more than 500 years of preparation time, they did not understand the importance and purpose of Christ's incarnation. Jesus did not deny his royal heritage and purpose on earth, but made clear that his kingdom was not an earthly one of violence and blood. It could not be. You cannot have multiple kingdoms existing at the same time in the same space. Kings should have the fullest possible power and authority over their people and spaces, and an alternative king is a threat. The Kingdom established during this time was a spiritual one.

Jesus made this clear himself. Speaking with Pilate who had the power of life and death over all creatures in his province, Jesus spoke plainly. "*My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.*" John 18: 36. The Kingdom established was a spiritual one, not one that could be fought for on this earth and not one that was a part of the Earth.

Throughout their captivity and oppression, a remnant of the Jewish people was protected and preserved; unsullied by the foreign influences and unwilling to bow to outside kings. These found Christ and learned at his feet, accepted his truth, and believed in his commission. They would spread the word of the new kingdom far and wide, far outside of the Jewish nation.

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In the leadup to Christ's incarnation, foreign scholars liberally researched and sought meaning amongst God's word and awaited the expected Messiah. The Magi who found him, demonstrate the clearest example that God's Kingdom was established during the half-millennium that precedes Christ's incarnation, and was not limited to the Jewish Tribes. These Magi were not Israelites but Chaldean magicians who searched the Jewish texts to find meaning as a Christian will today study Zen Kōans.

Daniel had spoken very clearly. The "kingdom... shall never be destroyed... shall not be left to other people... shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and... shall stand forever." The ambiguity in the phrase "shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms" not only could mean that it will break up the kingdoms that it is trying to consume, but also that the kingdom itself could be split but not become ununified. The kingdom of God's origins exists in several hundred tribes and today in several thousand cultures: a melting pot of interpretations and traditions. The wide diaspora of Christians around the world today has certainly seen the Kingdom of God break into pieces, but it has never fallen; and as it is the core of most western cultures, its fall is extremely unlikely. Only, only when we review Revelation 13 does any principal outside of Jesus death and resurrection become a deciding factor and only at the very moment of the end of salvation's extension; but that is for a much later analysis.

45 Inasmuch as you saw 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 has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure."

The stone that smashes the base of the statue is not the Kingdom of God. It is the Judgement of God destroying this fallen world and replacing it with a New Jerusalem where Kings and Kingdoms are no longer necessary. Politics will have no place in a heaven where there are no divisions of culture or tribe. We will be simply united.

Daniel does not explain this in his dream, he simply informs Nebuchadnezzar that "*the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this.*" Whether or not God showed Nebuchadnezzar a vision of the 2nd Coming, or the destruction of our world system is not known; and they are so far removed from us that any vision

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would have been very difficult to explain at the time. God reveals and God hides, and in this case, he chose discretion.

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46 Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell on his face, prostrate before Daniel, and commanded that they should present an offering and incense to him. 47 The king answered Daniel, and said, “Truly your God is the God of gods, the Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, since you could reveal this secret.” 48 Then the king promoted Daniel and gave him many great gifts; and he made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief administrator over all the wise men of Babylon. 49 Also Daniel petitioned 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.

Nebuchadnezzar bows down before Daniel, recognising him as a superior wise man and acknowledges his God as the lord of all gods. If this happened as stated, it was entirely hyperbole on the king's part. Whatever he kept in his heart, the political and religious world of Babylon would simply have not permitted Nebuchadnezzar to become a semitic monotheist and keep his throne. Nebuchadnezzar did, however, position Daniel in a position of authority even while learning his Chaldean work. He would still have needed cultural and language educations, but his position was now one of the highest honour and influence.

What is important to note here is that Nebuchadnezzar did not honour Daniel's God, but rather he “*commanded that they should present an offering and incense to*” Daniel himself. In effect, Nebuchadnezzar is ordering that Daniel be worshiped. He recognised the individual that God worked through and not the God that did the working. He then promotes and praises Daniel himself.

The fact that “*Daniel sat in the gate of the king*” indicates that he most likely made judgements about who had access to both the king and court. In a position such as this,

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Daniel would have been one of the first consulted on all important matters and would have been able to decide who had access to the Monarch or the court in general. What we today consider bribery; purchasing access to influential people, for most of history was simply the price of doing business, and we can guess that Daniel became both rich and influential from Nebuchadnezzar's rewards. We can further deduce that his three friends were positioned in similarly advantageous positions around the Babylonian empire. Before their training is complete, Daniel and his companions are powerful men.