

THE GREAT IMAGE, GREAT BEASTS

PART I

IDENTITY OF DANIEL'S IMAGE, FOUR GREAT BEASTS

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The “great image” in Daniel chapter two (divided into four parts [2:31-43]), and the “four great beasts” in chapter seven (7:1-8), are viewed by most premillennial students of the Word as representing *four successive world kingdoms*. These four kingdoms, as seen by most, begin with Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar and end with a revived Roman Empire under Antichrist. But is this the correct way to view the matter?

Note a summary view of the four parts of the “great image” and the four “great beasts” in the preceding respect:

1) *The head of gold* (2:32, 38) and *the first great beast* (7:4) have to do with *the kingdom of Babylon* under Nebuchadnezzar and his immediate successors, extending to Belshazzar (605 B.C. to 538 B.C.)

2) *The breast and arms of silver* (2:32, 39) and *the second great beast* (7:5) have to do with *the Medo-Persian kingdom*, beginning with Darius and Cyrus, rulers of Media and Persia at the time of the conquest (538 B.C. to 330 B.C.).

3) *The belly and thighs of brass* (2:32, 39) and *the third great beast* (7:6) have to do with *the Grecian kingdom* (330 B.C. to 323 B.C. and beyond), beginning with a conquest of the Medo-Persian kingdom by Alexander the Great, who died seven years later (323 B.C.).

The kingdom was then divided into four parts, with Alexander the Great's four generals each commanding a part. And the kingdom, over time, gradually faded from existence as a world power.

4) *The legs of iron and feet part of iron and part of clay* (2:33, 40-43) and *the fourth great beast* (7:7, 8) have to do with *the Roman Empire, forming a Roman kingdom* (27 B.C. to 476 A.D.), followed by a revived Roman Empire, forming a future Roman kingdom.

This would be the position set forth in the Scofield Reference Bible footnotes for example, a position followed by most premillennial commentators.

The only part of the prophecy where the interpretation is really in question, aside from understanding that there is an inseparable connection with Babylon throughout, would be *the fourth part of the image and the corresponding fourth beast*. Viewing the great image and the great beasts together, Daniel identifies the first three parts of the image and the corresponding first three beasts as particular nations which either began in Babylon (Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom) or later came in and conquered the nation(s) ruling in Babylon (the Medes and the Persians, and then Greece). And this part of the prophecy has been fulfilled and is a matter of history (*cf.* Dan. 2:38; 5:18, 22-31; 8:3-8, 20-22).

But should the fourth part of the image (or the fourth beast) be identified as *Rome*? There are two main reasons why people interpret the prophecy after this fashion:

1) *Rome* was the next world power following Greece.

2) The words, “and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary,” in Dan. 9:26, are usually associated with *a Roman destruction in history (under Titus in 70 A.D.)* and *a Roman prince (Antichrist) in prophecy* — both connected with the fourth part of the image or the fourth beast.

Greece was the third kingdom (represented by the belly and thighs of brass on the image, or by the third beast), and the fourth kingdom (represented by the legs of iron, and in its final form by the feet part of iron and part of clay, or by the fourth beast) would, from history, appear to be *Rome*, with the final form looked upon as *a revived Roman Empire*.

Then, this interpretation would appear to be

substantiated by Dan. 9:26. In this verse, “the prince that shall come” is *Antichrist*, and “the people of the prince” are said to be *the Romans destroying Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 A.D.* Following this sequence, Antichrist is said to be *a latter-day Roman prince (“his people” being the Romans in history) who would rule a revived Roman Empire*.

Thus, understanding the interpretation of the fourth part of Daniel's image in this respect, all of the image except the feet would have a historical fulfillment. The legs would represent the Roman Empire in history, and the feet would represent the revived Roman Empire during the Tribulation.

And the same would hold true for the corresponding description set forth by the “four great beasts” in Daniel chapter seven. The first three beasts would have a historical fulfillment, and the fourth would have a partial fulfillment in history. The fourth beast would represent the Roman Empire in both history and prophecy, corresponding to the legs and feet of the image.

Is the preceding though the way Scripture sets forth that represented by the fourth part of the image and the fourth beast? Or is this an attempt to interpret Biblical prophecy through events in secular history rather than interpreting prophecy by comparing Scripture with Scripture?

The answer is easy to ascertain if one remains solely within that which Daniel and related Scripture elsewhere reveal about the matter.

One World Kingdom, in Babylon

Rather than the four parts of the great image and the four great beasts representing four world kingdoms, they actually represent *one world kingdom (Babylon) under different national powers, over time*. As previously seen, “the head of gold” has to do with *the kingdom of Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar and his successors* prior to the conquest of the kingdom by the two nations represented by “the breast and arms of silver” (2:37, 38). “The breast and arms of silver” have to do with *the Medes and the Persians* coming in and conquering this Babylonian kingdom (2:39; 5:28, 31). And “the belly and thighs of brass” have to do with *the Grecians* coming in and conquering the kingdom ruled by the Medes and the Persians (2:39; 8:5-7, 20, 21).

The mechanics of the preceding, of course, is the interpretation held in common by anyone reading Daniel. This is simply what the record in Daniel states, along with secular history.

But note something often overlooked about the preceding. Daniel's image is seen *standing* in Babylon (2:31). *One kingdom is in view, and the kingdom represented by the image is Babylonian throughout all four parts of the image.* The powers represented by the head of gold, the breast and arms of silver, and the belly and thighs of brass *all reigned from Babylon.* Nebuchadnezzar and his immediate successors *reigned from Babylon.*

When the Medes and the Persians came in and took the kingdom in 538 B.C., *they reigned from Babylon* and were still there when Alexander the Great came over in 330 B.C., 208 years later. Then, when Alexander the Great took the kingdom, *he also reigned from Babylon.*

In other words, the image is not seen lying down, with the head of gold in Babylon, the breast and arms of silver in Media and Persia, and the belly and thighs of brass in Greece. That's not the picture at all. The image is seen *standing in Babylon. It is Babylonian in its entirety.*

This is one place where those who view a Roman Empire next in the prophecy go astray. Rome had *nothing* to do with a reign from Babylon in history. The capital of the Roman Empire was Rome, not Babylon. And Rome is not Babylon. If there were such a thing as a revived Roman Empire though, there could possibly be room for the final form of the Roman Empire to be associated with Babylon, for Babylon, back in the Mesopotamian Valley, will be the capital of the earth during the last half of the Tribulation. Such though will not be the case, for this prophecy has nothing to do with either a Roman Empire in history or a revived Roman Empire yet future.

Those viewing Rome as representing the fourth part of the image try to press secular history into Biblical prophecy at a place where it seems to possibly fit, but really doesn't. Then they further complicate the matter by a misunderstanding of the timing surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem in Dan. 9:26 (to be discussed later in this pamphlet).

The most interesting thing about the whole matter is the fact that *Daniel identifies all four parts of the image,* and he identifies the fourth part as

being *other than the Roman Empire.* Daniel, in his identity, has Antichrist coming into power following a four-way division of the kingdom after the death of Alexander the Great; and he arises out of a part of this Greco-Babylonian kingdom, not a succeeding Roman kingdom. *The kingdom under Antichrist follows the Grecian kingdom* and is represented first by the legs of iron, and then by the feet part of iron and part of clay in its final form.

As previously noted, the first part of the image is identified in Dan. 2:37, 38. Then, following this, the remaining three parts of the image are given, though not identified. The identities of the other three parts are then given in the vision of the "four great beasts" and the interpretation of this vision in chapters seven and eight. The four beasts are said to represent four kingdoms (four sequential kingdoms forming *the one Babylonian kingdom* [7:17; cf. v. 23]), and beginning with the second beast, the last three are identified in chapter eight.

For the identity of *the second,* compare verses three and four with verse twenty (cf. Dan. 5:28, 31); for the identity of *the third,* compare verses five through eight with verses twenty-one and twenty-two; and for the identity of *the fourth,* compare verses nine through fourteen with verses twenty-three through twenty-six.

Note that the identity of the second is *Media and Persia* (corresponding to the breast and arms of silver on the image), the identity of the third is *Greece* (corresponding to the belly and thighs of brass on the image), and the identity of the fourth is the *kingdom under Antichrist* (corresponding to the legs of iron and the feet part of iron and part of clay on the image). Rome is simply not in the prophecy!

Following Alexander the Great's death, the kingdom was divided among his four generals (8:8, 22). The prophecy in Daniel though does not cover events during the reign of these four generals following this division. Rather, the vision goes immediately into the days of Antichrist yet future (the "little horn" in 8:9 is not Antiochus Epiphanes [as often taught], but *Antichrist* [see parallel verses, 8:23-26]); and, though Alexander the Great's kingdom will have long since ceased to exist, Antichrist is seen coming out of one of the four divisions of this kingdom.

About three hundred years following Alexander the Great's death and the four way division of

his kingdom, Rome appeared on the scene as a world power (27 A.D.), but not as a world power connected with Babylon or fulfilling any part of Daniel's prophecy. This prophecy will not again continue to be fulfilled until Antichrist appears during Daniel's Seventieth Week. Then, and only then, will the fourth part of the image in Daniel chapter two and the fourth beast in Daniel chapters seven and eight come into existence.

The People of the Coming Prince

Now, what about "the people of the prince that shall come" destroying Jerusalem and the Temple in Dan. 9:26? Doesn't that refer to a past destruction in 70 A.D. and to the Romans being Antichrist's people in history?

Not at all! First note the expression, "the people of the prince that shall come," and compare this with a similar expression in Dan. 7:27 — "the people of the saints of the most High." *Who* will take the kingdom according to Dan. 7:18-27? Note in verse eighteen that it is "the saints of the most High," and in verse twenty-seven it is "the people of the saints of the most High." The latter is the translation of a Hebrew idiom which is equivalent to the former. And it is the same in Dan. 9:26. "The people of the prince" in Dan. 9:26 is a reference to *the prince himself.* Failure to recognize this idiom and properly interpret its usage in Dan. 9:26 has resulted in confusion.

The destruction of Jerusalem in Dan. 9:26 is not a reference to the destruction which occurred in 70 A.D. but rather a reference to a future destruction under Antichrist in the middle of the Tribulation. This is the same destruction referred to in Luke 21:20-24 (cf. Rev. 11:2). The destruction in Dan. 9:26 *must occur during time covered by the Seventy-Week prophecy,* and contextually it occurs in connection with Antichrist breaking his covenant with Israel in verse twenty-seven. Both the text and context in Luke 21:20-24 show that this section also has to do with the same time as Dan. 9:26 — the coming Tribulation, rather than with events in 70 A.D.

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