

Chapter 2 **The Times of The Gentiles – The Great Image**

This second chapter has well been called "The A, B, C of prophecy." I suppose it contains the most complete, and yet the most simple, prophetic picture that we have in all the word of God. And you will notice that it is in the form of a dream given to a heathen monarch.

Nebuchadnezzar was at this time the ruler of the greater part of the known civilized world, and of a great deal of that which was given over to barbarism. We speak of this as a world-empire, though, of course, in one sense of the word, it was hardly that: there were tribes and nations beyond the outskirts of his dominions that were not subject to Nebuchadnezzar those upon the northern shores of the Mediterranean Sea, for instance, and portions of southern Egypt and the regions beyond. But God had given him the title to rule over all nations. This authority was given to Nebuchadnezzar because of the rejection of Israel as God's kingdom upon earth. Had they been faithful to God, had they always been obedient to Him, royalty never would have departed from Judah; but because of their disobedience and their manifold sins God gave their glory to the stranger, and dominion passed to the Gentiles in the person of Nebuchadnezzar. This was, in fact, the beginning of the distinctive period designated by the Lord Jesus in Luke 21:24 as "the Times of the Gentiles," which will continue until all derived power is overthrown and

" Jesus shall reign where're the sun
Doth his successive journeys run;
His kingdom spread from shore to shore,
till moons shall wax and wane no more."

In the book of Jeremiah, as also in Kings and Chronicles, we read of Nebuchadnezzar coming up against the land of Palestine, in the reign of King Jehoiakim; though at that time at least, at the time of his first invasion he " he was not the emperor, but his father sat upon the throne of the Babylonian dominion, and Nebuchadnezzar was vice-king. But when our chapter opens, he had been reigning alone for two years. The glory of God had departed from Jerusalem, and the people of Judah became captives in the land of Shinar: " By the rivers of Baylon they sat own and wept, when they remembered Zion. "Now God was pleased to reveal an outline of His ways to this heathen monarch. We learn from Daniel's address to him that this great king had been concerned about what was coming on the earth. Look at the 29th verse: " As for thee, O king, thy thoughts came into thy mind upon thy bed, what should come to pass hereafter," Nothing could be more natural Nebuchadnezzar was the most powerful monarch the world had ever known; and as he lay upon his bed that night, he began to ponder and to wonder what would come to pass in afteryears. He knew he could not stay here forever. He would have to pass away as other potentates had done before him. What would follow? It was not unwise for him to consider these things. Would that all men were more concerned about what the future has in store. The great business of the men of to-day seems to be just to secure wealth and pleasure for the present life; and the majority seem utterly indifferent about what is to come to pass afterward. Now God has not left us in ignorance as to the future. He has given us the prophetic word to shed light on what is to come. If people were but willing to stop long enough to seriously read His book, in subjection to its holy Author, they would find that in it the whole course of human events, right up to the Great White Throne, has been clearly revealed; so that any one, who earnestly desires it, may know the truth of God's ways right on to the end.

Nebuchadnezzar was wiser than many nowadays; for he was exercised in regard to these things. As he lay upon his bed, he had an impressive dream; but in the morning it had gone from him. It still swayed his mind, however; he could not throw it off; he found it impossible to overcome the impression made upon him; and yet, when he tried to recall what it was, he had dreamed, he could not do so. So, according to the custom of his times, he sent for his wise men the soothsayers, astrologers, and magicians. To them he said, " I have dreamed a dream, but it has gone from my mind; and I want you to tell me my dream, and then tell me the interpretation of it."

Miserable charlatans that they were, they pleaded the absurdity and impossibility of this; declaring, what was possibly true enough, that no king or ruler had ever asked anything so difficult of his wise men; and they assured the king that if he would but relate the dream, they would explain its meaning. But he declared that if they had skill enough to interpret dreams, they ought to be able to tell him the dream also; and he threatened that if after a limited time they did not accede to his demand, they should all be put to death; and not only they, but all the wise men in his kingdom, which, of course, included Daniel.

When Daniel learned of the decree, through Arioch the captain of the guard, he went in and besought Nebuchadnezzar to grant a brief respite, that he might seek the face of God regarding the matter. Communicating the seriousness of the situation to his three friends, they together made supplication to the God of heaven.

I want you to notice that title, " The God of heaven." Nothing shows the divine source and verbal inspiration of the Scriptures more clearly than the way in which the names and titles of the Deity are used throughout the Bible. Unspiritual and ignorant men have sometimes tried to make capital out of the diversity of divine names, supposing different gods to be meant, and arguing therefrom a piecemeal arrangement of some of the books. But the fact of the matter is that all these names and titles are used in a most exact and careful manner. For instance, in the entire Old Testament, Jehovah is always used in one particular sense, and Elohim (God, plural form) in another. When it is the Creator that is brought before us, then we have the Hebrew word Elohim, implying the Triune God, now revealed in three persons as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. When it is a question of God's covenant with His people, of His having to do with the men whom He has made and taken into relationship with Himself, then it is Jehovah. It is not only in Genesis, but throughout the Bible, that this holds good.

Now as to this expression, " The God of heaven," there are three books in the Old Testament where it is used, and one in the New Testament, the Revelation. The three Old Testament books are Ezra, Nehemiah, and Daniel. All refer, practically, to the same period, when God had scattered His people among the nations, because of their sins. He had forsaken His throne at Jerusalem. The glory had gone up to heaven, and He was no longer called the Lord of the whole earth. He was now the God of heaven, and, so far as the world is concerned, that is still His title. He will never again be owned as the Lord of the whole earth until the Millennium.

And so, Daniel and his friends entreated the God of heaven. He answered their cry, and revealed the secret. Then we read, " Daniel blessed the God of heaven." You will notice that we have three things here: First, prayer " They desired mercies of the God of heaven." Then there is

divine ministry God revealed the thing unto Daniel in a night vision. And the result of that was worship "They blessed the God of heaven." Where God is speaking, it stirs the hearts of His people, and it leads them out in worship and praise back to Himself. People have very low ideas about worship nowadays: they talk about worshiping God no matter what religious exercise they may be engaged in. But let us remember that even prayer is not worship, and ministry is not worship. Prayer is asking of God; ministry is when God gives something to man. But when man has asked, and God has given till the heart is full and it overflows in adoration back to God, this is worship.

My wife and I stood one day looking down on Niagara Falls. How our hearts were stirred as we watched that mighty cataract pouring its tremendous volume of water over the great cliff unceasingly. But soon we noticed that from below a mist or fine spray rose up that actually reached the point where we stood on the ledge above the Falls. I said to my wife, " This is like Worship, God's mighty love and grace pouring down upon us, and then our love and praise rising up and ascending back to Him, the source of all our blessing."

The Father is seeking worshipers; but people have to be born again ere they can worship Him. How can a poor guilty sinner, who has never been brought into the family of God, never been converted, be a worshiper in spirit and in truth? Yet we hear often of " public worship "; but the fact of the matter is, the public, as such, cannot worship in the Christian sense.

But to turn back to Daniel. He comes in before the king, and tells him that he is able to reveal the secret. He makes it plain that it is not through any superior wisdom of his own that he is able to do this; but he tells Nebuchadnezzar, "There is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days." It was of God that this great king was brought to the end of all human resources. If he had been able to remember his dream, he never would have realized that he had to do with God. He had first to be brought to the end of all human wisdom; he had to learn his own nothingness and ignorance, and the nothingness and ignorance of all his wise men, in order that the matchless wisdom of God might be revealed to him. And the same lesson must be learned by us. If we are ever going to have to do with God, we have to learn the poverty of our own resources first.

Have you ever noticed where the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified? It was at Golgotha, the place of a skull. If you were ever saved, you began at the place of a skull. That is not very nice for human pride; for it is the place of death, and the end of all human wisdom. You cannot reason it out; all the wise men of the earth cannot teach it you; you have to be brought to the place of an empty skull, the helplessness of death, where you realize that God is writing confusion on all the wisdom of this world. And so, this great king had to be brought to the place where he learned that " man's extremity is God's opportunity." Then it was that the God of heaven, through His prophet, revealed to him the dream and its interpretation.

Daniel says: " Thou, O king, sawest, and behold a great image. This great image, whose brightness was excellent, stood before thee; and the form thereof was terrible. This image's head was of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, his legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay. Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and break them to

pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, 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" (vers. 31 to 35). At once the king recognized the fact that it was indeed the dream he had forgotten. Daniel then proceeded with the interpretation. The image properly represents the whole period of the Times of the Gentiles; but it will be noticed that on the chart the feet of the image have been separated from the legs of iron. The reason for that is this: During the present age, while it is true that the Gentile times are still running on, prophecy has to do, not with this age, but with the period that closed at the cross, and another brief season which will commence after the Church has been caught up to be with the Lord. God's special work in this day of grace is the taking out from among the Gentiles a people to the name of His Son. He is not now dealing with nations as such, but with individual souls, whom He is saving, and, by the baptism of the Holy Spirit, forming them into one body to be the bride of the Lamb in the ages to come.

Daniel shows that the Times of the Gentiles began with Nebuchadnezzar. He is declared to be the head of gold of this "man of the earth" (Ps. 10:18). It is *not* that he alone is the fulfilment of this picture, but he represents the Babylonian empire, which began with him and was to close with the downfall of Belshazzar his grandson.

"After thee," says Daniel, "shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee, and another third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth." We do not need to go outside of Scripture to find out the names of these empires. In chapter 5: 31 we read, "Darius the Median took the kingdom." From the book of Esther, we learn that the Persian rulers bore rule over all the earth. Darius is generally supposed to be Cyaxares II., the last king of Media; or, as some think, Gobryas, the general who led the assault on Babylon under instructions from Cyaxares and Cyrus the Persian, who united Media and Persia in one great empire. Daniel elsewhere shows us that this Medo-Persian dominion, after existing for several hundred years, would be overthrown by a mighty Grecian warrior. This was fulfilled, as we know, by Alexander the Great.

A fourth kingdom was to follow, which should be strong as iron, "forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things: and as iron that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise." This can be no other than that great world-power which was in existence at the birth of the Lord Jesus, when "there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed." Under this empire our Lord was crucified. After His death it continued to exist for something like five hundred years, though eventually divided into two parts, the eastern and western empires. Of this division the two legs may be meant to speak, though one could hardly insist on this as strongly as some do, because, from the beginning, Rome is represented by the legs of iron.

We do not have to go to history therefore to find out what these four great empires are; we find them all brought before us in Scripture, just in the order in which they were revealed to the king of Babylon. All this is confirmed by history, as every student knows, and is thus a remarkable proof of the inspiration of the Bible. At this time that Nebuchadnezzar dreamed his dream the Persian kingdom did not exist. Persia was but a Babylonian satrapy. A Grecian empire might have seemed an utter impossibility. The Hellenic states were a lot of warring tribes

and kingdoms, giving little promise of their future greatness. The city of Rome was just being founded an insignificant little village on the banks of the Tiber. How did Daniel portray with such accuracy the future history of all these powers if unaided by the Holy Spirit of God?

The metals of which the great image was composed deteriorate from the head to the feet, illustrating the continual decrease in the absolute power and magnificence of each kingdom. Nebuchadnezzar ruled as an unlimited despot. "Whom he would he slew, and whom he would he kept alive." The rulers of the succeeding empires had their power more and more circumscribed; until in the last state of the Roman empire we find iron mixed with miry clay, or brittle pottery speaking of an attempted union between imperialism and democracy. Notice, also, that the specific gravity of the metals decreases each time, gold being the heaviest and iron the lightest, while feet of mingled iron and pottery would be lighter than all. No wonder such an image breaks in pieces the moment the Stone falls from heaven upon such feet! Gentile power may seem to be firmly settled on an immovable base; it may appear to be powerful enough to resist every effort aimed at its overthrow; but the hour is coming, and has now drawn near, when the Stone will fall from heaven, and the whole thing will collapse in a moment.

This brings us to the last form of the fourth kingdom; for the Roman empire, though at the present in abeyance, has not yet come to its end. The ten toes on the feet of the image represent (as a comparison with the ten horns on the Beast in chapter seven will make plain) ten kings who are to reign at one time? but who will form a confederacy on the ground of the ancient empire. This is something which the world has never yet seen.

The commentators generally tell us that the ten-toed condition of the empire was reached in the fifth and sixth centuries, when the barbarians from the North overran the Roman empire, and it was divided into something like ten different kingdoms. A number of different lists have been made, of ten kingdoms each; but *few* writers agree as to the actual divisions. One thing they all seem to have overlooked: the ten kingdoms are to exist *at one time*, not through a period of several centuries, and all are to form one confederation. There is nothing in the past history of the kingdoms of Europe that answers to this. They were generally warring enemies, each seeking the destruction of others. We reject utterly this interpretation, therefore, of the ten toes. What event in the centuries of Rome's decline and fall could possibly answer to the Stone falling from heaven and the institution of the kingdom of God? And how could it be said that all the dominions represented by the image have been ground to powder, when we see most of them still in existence, in some form or other?

Some tell us that the Stone fell from heaven when the Lord Jesus was born into this world, and that His kingdom has been in existence and spreading through the world ever since. But Daniel says, "In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom"; that *is*, in the days of the ten kings, that kingdom is to be established. Now the ten-kingdom condition of the empire had certainly not been reached at the incarnation. Rome remained an undivided kingdom for three hundred years after the birth of Christ; and for two hundred years more it existed as the Eastern and Western empires. Manifestly, then, the birth into this world of the Son of God is not the event here prophesied. Gentile dominion was not overturned and destroyed at that time, nor since; therefore, we look on to the future for it.

To attempt to locate the falling of the Stone in the fifth or sixth century is the height of absurdity. In what sense did the God of heaven then set up a kingdom? That was the very time when the bishop of Rome was struggling for supremacy over the Church and the nations; and it was followed by a thousand years of darkness, when the word of God was lost to the masses, superstition took the place of faith, iniquity ruled in high places, both civil and ecclesiastical, and peace seemed to be taken from the earth. Surely all this is very different indeed from Christ's predicted reign of righteousness and blessing. Manifestly then the Stone has not yet fallen from heaven, though how soon it will do so no mortal can say.

I desire to trace out a little of what Scripture has to tell us elsewhere about this Stone. It is undoubtedly a figure of the Lord Jesus Christ. Ps. 118:22 tells us, long before He came into this scene, that He would be the Stone set at naught by the builders, and become the head of the corner; and in the New Testament this verse is declared to be prophetic of Christ. When He came to earth He was indeed the Stone set at naught by the builders, the rulers of the Jews; but mark, He did not come as the Stone falling from heaven. That is the way He will come when He returns the second time. He came before to His own; but His own received Him not. He came hither as the Foundation Stone, the Head Stone of the corner; but they who should have owned His claims, cried in their unbelief and hatred, " Away with Him; crucify Him; crucify Him! " Now God has taken Him up to heaven. Yonder, in the Father's glory, the eye of faith beholds that exalted Stone. The day is coming when it is going to fall upon His enemies; and when it falls, it will grind to powder all Gentile dominion, and all those who have rejected the precious grace of God.

In Isa. 8:14 Christ is prophetically described as a Stone of stumbling and a Rock of offence; and we are told that many will stumble and fall. Thus, it was when He came in lowly grace: "They stumbled at the stumbling Stone", as it is written. "They were looking for a great world monarch; and when He came in humiliation, Israel nationally stumbled over Him; and they were broken, and they remain broken to this day. Whenever you see a Jew walking the streets of a Gentile city, you may say in your heart. There is a proof of the truth of what the Lord Jesus has said; "Whosoever shall fall on this Stone shall be broken." Broken, and scattered, and peeled, they have wandered in all the lands of the earth, hardly welcome anywhere, until, in these last days, God has been turning the hearts of the nations toward them, preparatory to their being taken back to their own land. By and by a remnant will return to the Lord; so, Isa. 28:16 says, "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a Stone, a tried Stone, a precious corner Stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste." He then goes on depicting Israel's deliverance at the second appearing of this Stone of salvation. He it is who is described by Zechariah, chap. 3:9 as the Stone engraved with the engraving of a signet, upon which shall be seven eyes.

But what about the nations in that day? The message of grace has gone out to them; and what has been the result? God has been taking out from among them a people for His name, but the mass has deliberately rejected the Christ of God; and that rejected Lord Jesus is soon going to fall upon them in judgment. Then will the rest of His word be fulfilled, " On whomsoever it shall fall, it shall grind him to powder." Israel stumbled over Him, and they were broken. He is going to fall upon the Gentiles in His wrath and indignation, and they will be ground to powder, and driven away from before His face like the chaff of the summer threshing-floor.

Do you ask, " When is the Stone going to fall? " It will be when the countries once occupied by the Roman empire in Europe will make a ten-kingdom coalition, electing one of their number to be their supreme arbiter. We have him set forth in chapter 7 as the little horn rising out of the Roman empire a passage which has been often applied to the Pope, but which we shall see has no application to him at all. In that day the iron of imperial power will be mixed with the brittle pottery of socialism and democracy; but they will not cleave together.

We see this preparing at the present time. When, for instance, I read the account of the Peace Conferences, and similar conventions, I have no thought that lasting universal peace is going to be brought about in that way, while the Prince of Peace is still rejected. But I think I see the shadow on the wall of this revived Roman empire. From my study of the word of God, I quite expect one of two things: either universal war, or universal arbitration; and, as a result of either of these methods, the ten Kingdome form of the Roman empire brought about.

Ere that day arrives the Church will have been caught away to heaven; so, no believer of the present dispensation will be upon the earth when these things are in process of fulfilment. But there may be many to whom these words shall come who will still be living on this earth in the days of the feet of the image, the last solemn period of the times of the Gentiles. Awful will it be to dwell in this scene then to participate in the judgment when the Stone falls from heaven. If these words reach one who is still out of Christ, let me warn you faithfully that if you go on rejecting the Lord Jesus a little longer, if you continue to harden your heart, if you " turn away the shoulder," if you close your ears and shut your eyes to the truth of God, you may be numbered among those left behind when the Lord calls for His redeemed ones to rise to meet Him in the air; and then there will be, for you, nothing but " a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries." Think what it will mean to be thus left for the vengeance of God! If you have not yet heeded the voice of Him who pleads in grace, get down on your face before Him now, I beseech you, and cry, " I am vile, and repent in dust and ashes! " Then remember that " If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thy heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. "Thus, shall you be ready to hail His coming with joy, whose return would otherwise mean for you the end of mercy's day, the sealing of your doom.

I would remark in closing that while Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face and worshiped Daniel, and acknowledged that his God Avas a God of gods, a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, yet there is no evidence that his conscience had been reached by the revelation made to him of God's wisdom and power. He advanced Daniel to a position of trust and confidence, and at his request set Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego over the affairs of the province of Babylon; but the God of Daniel he was not yet ready to own as *his* God and the only Saviour. He was still to him *a* god, albeit greater than other deities. He was soon to know Him as *the* God who alone ruleth in the kingdoms of men.