

## THE IMPORTANCE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT MYSTERIES

### Part IV

by Thomas Ice

The book of Daniel contains mysteries about God's plan for history that are revealed through Daniel. Daniel 2, one of the longest chapters in the Bible, contains an outline of Gentile history that has been given to the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar in a dream he could not understand. Daniel, one of his Jewish advisors, is able to pray to the Lord for insight into Nebuchadnezzar's dream and God was pleased to reveal the meaning to Daniel who in turn explained the meaning of the dream to Nebuchadnezzar.

#### THE FLOW OF GENTILE HISTORY

The mysteries of God's plan for the political flow of history that were revealed through Daniel tells us there will be successive Gentile empires, but each one will decline and be conquered by another empire. The medals disclosed in the dream of gold, silver, bronze, and iron indicate that each kingdom will decline in value but get stronger than the previous. The fourth empire, the one of iron refers to Rome. It will not be conquered by another empire; instead, it will simply decline and dissipate so that it will be revived at the end of days. The final empire of the kingdom of man was depicted as the one with "feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron" (Dan. 2:41a), which is then struck by a stone cut without hands, (meaning it is of divine origin).

You continued looking until a stone was cut out without hands, and it struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay, and crushed them. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were crushed all at the same time, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away so that not a trace of them was found. But the stone that struck the statue became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. (Dan. 2:34–35)

The kingdom of man will be brought to an end at a time future to our own day by the divine intervention of the Second Coming of Jesus the Messiah. The "times of the Gentiles" is a period beginning in 605 B.C. with Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom of gold and runs until the return of Christ (Luke 21:24). "Times of the Gentiles" means it will be a period dominated by Gentile rule, as opposed to the kingdom of God, which will be a time when Messiah rules and Israel will be the lead nation during that time, which we also know as the millennial kingdom. Daniel explains it as follows:

And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and *that* kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever. Inasmuch as you saw that a stone was cut out of the mountain without hands and that it crushed the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold, the great God has made known to the king what will take place in the future; so the dream is true, and its interpretation is trustworthy. (Dan. 2:44–45)

This statement is a prophecy about God triumphing over evil in history. One day the God of Heaven will intervene in history and destroy the legacy of evil cause by rebellious mankind by judging evil and setting up a kingdom of righteousness that the Messiah will administer from Daniel's city—Jerusalem. This is the mystery or secret that God has revealed and one day in our future it will certainly be brought to pass.

#### NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S RESPONSE

It is always important how an individual who is exposed to the mysteries of God responds to such revelation. Such a revelation and understanding of what was formerly a secret in God's plan, but now revealed, is something anyone who has exposed to will respond with worship and recognition to the God who reveals such things. This is the response of King Nebuchadnezzar as indicated by the following passage:

Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell on his face and did homage to Daniel, and gave orders to present to him an offering and fragrant incense. The king answered Daniel and said, "Surely your God is a God of gods and a Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, since you have been able to reveal this mystery." (Dan. 2:46–47)

King Nebuchadnezzar's recognition of God at the end of chapter two appears to be short-lived as the account in Daniel moves to the third chapter. In chapter three Nebuchadnezzar makes a huge golden idol and commanded everyone in his kingdom to fall down and worship when the music was played. Failure to worship would result in death to those refusing to participate in this idolatry. Such a response by Nebuchadnezzar in making the idolatrous image is a typical pagan response to a miraculous event their life. The Apostle Paul in the New Testament explains fallen man's impulse toward idolatry as follows:

For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. (Rom. 1:21–23)

The response of Nebuchadnezzar is the natural bent of fallen, unredeemed humanity. Notice also the cruelty usually associated with not falling in line with idolatry, which was death.

As we read this true story of the three Hebrew young men who refused to bow down to this false god, we see, once again, the Lord God of Israel intervening on their behalf and saving them from the fiery furnace. As a result of their bold stand, Nebuchadnezzar is once again reminded of who is the true God, which is the Lord God of Israel. Nebuchadnezzar issues another decree recognizing the Lord as the Most High God:

Nebuchadnezzar responded and said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, who has sent His angel and delivered His servants who put their trust in Him, violating the king's command, and yielded up their bodies so as not to serve or worship any god except their own God.

Therefore, I make a decree that any people, nation or tongue that speaks anything offensive against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego shall be torn limb from limb and their houses reduced to a rubbish heap, inasmuch as there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way." (Dan. 3:28–29)

### NEBUCHADNEZZAR HAS ANOTHER DREAM

Nebuchadnezzar's final dream that is recorded in the book of Daniel is found in chapter 4. This dream was about a large tree. Once again he ends up consulting Daniel as to its meaning since Daniel's God is able to reveal mysteries. (Belteshazzar is Daniel's Babylonian name.) "'O Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, since I know that a spirit of the holy gods is in you and no mystery baffles you, tell *me* the visions of my dream which I have seen, along with its interpretation.'" (Dan. 4:9) This is the famous incident in which Nebuchadnezzar's pride overtakes him again and he exalts himself above the God of Israel and the Lord uses a unique way of humbling him.

The dream is prophetic of the future about Nebuchadnezzar and his kingdom. The purpose of this mystery is to demonstrate to Nebuchadnezzar and as an example to all subsequent rulers in history that "the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whomever He wishes" (Dan. 4:25b). Immediately after Daniel discusses the dream with Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel admonishes Nebuchadnezzar to "break away now from your sins by doing righteousness, and from your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor, in case there may be a prolonging of your prosperity" (Dan. 4:27). King Nebuchadnezzar did not follow Daniel's advice. About a year later Nebuchadnezzar simply thought to himself the following: "Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty" (Dan. 4:30)? Such thoughts are so typical of countless leaders down through history and will certainly be manifest by the Antichrist during the tribulation.

The Lord did not take very long to implement what had been prophesied earlier to the king. "Immediately the word concerning Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled; and he was driven away from mankind and began eating grass like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven, until his hair had grown like eagles' *feathers* and his nails like birds' *claws*" (Dan. 4:33). Perhaps the greatest miracle in this event was the fact that no one took away Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom from him during the seven years where his constitution was changed to that of an animal. This whole situation is a clear demonstration of God's absolute sovereignty over the governments of this world. This is important to know that even during the times of the Gentiles, where God is allowing pagan Gentile rulers to dominate, the God of Israel is still in absolute control.

Apparently Nebuchadnezzar finally learned his lesson and perhaps even became a believer in the God of Israel.

But at the end of that period I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever;

For His dominion is an everlasting dominion,  
And His kingdom *endures* from generation to generation.  
And all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing,  
But He does according to His will in the host of heaven  
And *among* the inhabitants of earth;

And no one can ward off His hand  
Or say to Him, "What hast Thou done?"

At that time my reason returned to me. And my majesty and splendor were restored to me for the glory of my kingdom, and my counselors and my nobles began seeking me out; so I was reestablished in my sovereignty, and surpassing greatness was added to me. Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise, exalt, and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride." (Dan. 4:34–37)

The humiliation of Nebuchadnezzar is a preview from past history that God is able at any time, even during the time of the Gentiles, to interject His will into the affairs of mankind. This preview provides a prophetic hope that our God will do the same on a global scale when Jesus the Messiah comes to reign over all the earth from Jerusalem. Maranatha!

**(To Be Continued . . .)**

**ENDNOTES**