

The Four Kingdoms Before the Divine Kingdom
A Series on Daniel's Prophecies and Fulfillment: Part 2

Beginning with the perception and interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, Daniel was shown that there will be four kingdoms before the everlasting Divine Kingdom. Subsequently, during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar's grandson Belshazzar, Daniel personally saw two dreams / visions in his mind that elaborated on the four kingdoms that Nebuchadnezzar saw.

To gain a better understanding of these four kingdoms, a wonderful method of Bible study is to compare the various instances of a particular subject, in this case, each of the four kingdoms. In addition, the significance of the dreams / visions may be affected by the historical state of God's people and the Promised Land. For example, consider what impact knowledge of the deportations and the destruction of Jerusalem may have had upon Daniel:

605 B.C.: When Nebuchadnezzar defeated the Assyrians and Egyptians, he received the submission of Judah, and this initial peaceful deportation was limited to a number of nobility and leading youths (Dan 1:3-4). Daniel and his friends were taken at this time.

Nebuchadnezzar's dream occurs after this event. Daniel was probably in his late teens, and was divinely given the wisdom and power to know and understand Nebuchadnezzar's dream (Dan 2:19-23).

597 B.C.: Responding to the rebellion of Jehoakim and Jehoiachin, Judah was attacked and defeated. Approximately 10,000 captives were deported including the prophet Ezekiel (Ezek 1:1-3; 2 Ki 24:8-20; 2 Chron 36:6-10).

586 B.C.: Responding to the rebellion of Zedekiah, Nebuchadnezzar laid siege and destroyed Jerusalem, the Temple and many Jews. Of the surviving Jews, numerous were deported to Babylon (2 Ki 25:1-7; Jer 34:1-7; 39:1-7; 52:2-11).

Daniel's two dreams / visions occur after Jerusalem and the Temple has been destroyed. These two dreams / visions occurred around ages 68 and 70, and he was unable to interpret them; an angel interpreted both of them (Dan 7:16; 8:15-16).

The First Gentile Kingdom

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream (Dan 2)	Daniel's Dream / Vision First Year of Belshazzar (Dan 7)	Daniel's Vision Third Year of Belshazzar (Dan 8)
You, O king, were looking and behold, there was a single great statue; that statue, which was large and of extraordinary splendor, was standing in front of you, and its appearance was awesome. The head of that statue was made of fine gold, ... (Dan 2:31-32) ... You are the head of gold. (Dan 2:38)	The first was like a lion and had the wings of an eagle. I kept looking until its wings were plucked, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man; a human mind also was given to it. (Dan 7:4)	There is no reference to the Babylonian Empire

Since the Exodus, the nation of Israel governed itself within the Promised Land and was never a vassal state. With the Neo-Babylonian conquest of the Assyrian empire, Judah voluntarily submitted itself and became a vassal state of the Babylonian empire. The Babylonian Empire was the first Gentile power to control the nation of Israel.

Correspondingly, in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, Daniel explicitly identifies the first empire as the Babylonian Empire (Dan 2:38).

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Some 50 years later and after the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, Daniel dreams of four beasts coming out of the sea (Dan 7:3). While there is no angelic interpretation of what empire each beast represents, Daniel's dream of four beasts preceding the everlasting Divine Empire (Dan 7:13-14) is like Nebuchadnezzar's dream; thus, by implication, the first beast ("lion" that "had the wings of an eagle") represents the Babylonian Empire.

Most commentators have noted that the lion symbol was found on gates and money in Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon. However, this archaeological finding of a beast associated with an empire is an exception; no similar correspondence can be made with Daniel's other beasts to their corresponding empires.

Having lived under Babylonian rule for at least 50 years, Daniel does not have any dreams about the Babylonian empire or have any questions or concerns about this first empire two years later (Dan 8).

The Second Gentile Kingdom

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream (Dan 2)	Daniel's Dream / Vision First Year of Belshazzar (Dan 7)	Daniel's Vision Third Year of Belshazzar (Dan 8)
... its breast and its arms of silver,.. (Dan 2:32) After you there will arise another kingdom inferior to you,.. (Dan 2:39)	And behold, another beast, a second one, resembling a bear. And it was raised up on one side, and three ribs were in its mouth between its teeth; and thus they said to it, "Arise, devour much meat!" (Dan 7:5)	Then I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold, a ram which had two horns was standing in front of the canal. Now the two horns were long, but one was longer than the other, with the longer one coming up last. I saw the ram butting westward, northward, and southward, and no other beasts could stand before him nor was there anyone to rescue from his power, but he did as he pleased and magnified himself. (Dan 8:3-4) The ram which you saw with the two horns represents the kings of Media and Persia. (Dan 8:20)

Omitted from Daniel's account are four Neo-Babylonian kings (Evil-Merodach [ruled 562-560 BC], Neriglissar [ruled 560-556 BC], Labashi-Marduk [ruled 556 BC] and Nabonidus [ruled 555-539 BC]) who ruled between Nebuchadnezzar (ruled 605-562 B.C.) and Belshazzar (ruled 552-539 B.C.). Belshazzar was the son of Nabonidus who, as many scholars believe, was married to Nebuchadnezzar's daughter Nitocris; thus, Belshazzar was the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel's recording of a father / son relationship was a customary reference of ancestry that can also apply to a grandson. Named as vice-regent, Belshazzar was seen as the ruler of Babylon, because his father Nabonidus left for the conquest of Tema in Arabia and established this city as his royal residence; Tema was an important oasis and transit point for trade. This view explains how Daniel is considered the "third ruler" of Babylon (Dan 5:29).

Explicitly identified in Daniel's second vision, during Belshazzar's third year of reign (Dan 8:20), and historically narrated (Dan 5:30-31), Cyrus the Great's Medo-Persian Empire conquers the Babylonian Empire.

In Nebuchadnezzar's dream (Dan 2:32), the Medo-Persian Empire was portrayed as the statue's chest and arms made of silver. While the Medo-Persian Empire was geographically larger than the Babylonian Empire, Nebuchadnezzar's rule was historically considered stronger, because there was considerably less internal struggle for the succession of subsequent emperors. Cyrus the Great would not have the same historical association with the Medo-Persian Empire as Nebuchadnezzar with the Neo-Babylonian Empire.

In Daniel's dream during the first year of Belshazzar's reign (Dan 7:5), the Medo-Persian Empire appeared "resembling a bear" with "three ribs in its mouth." Many academic theologians see the "three ribs" as three principle nations conquered by Cyrus the Great: Lydia, Babylon and Egypt.

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In Daniel's vision during the third year of Belshazzar's reign, the Medo-Persian expansion of Cyrus the Great was portrayed as a ram with two horns (Dan 8:20). The longer horn that came "up last" aptly describes Persia's subsequent dominance of the initial Medo-Persian federation. From a military perspective, Cyrus the Great's conquest went westward, northward and southward. His military campaigns were nearly invincible, and he was known as: King of Persia, King of Media, King of Babylon, King of Sumer and Akkad, and King of the Four Corners of the World.

The Third Gentile Kingdom

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream (Dan 2)	Daniel's Dream / Vision First Year of Belshazzar (Dan 7)	Daniel's Vision Third Year of Belshazzar (Dan 8)
<p>...its belly and its thighs were of bronze. (Dan 2:32) ... then another third kingdom of bronze, which will rule over all the earth. (Dan 2:39)</p>	<p>After this I kept looking, and behold, another one, like a leopard, which had on its back four wings of a bird; the beast also had four heads, and dominion was given to it. (Dan 7:6)</p>	<p>While I was observing, behold, a male goat was coming from the west over the surface of the whole earth without touching the ground; and the goat had a conspicuous horn between his eyes. He came up to the ram that had the two horns, which I had seen standing in front of the canal, and rushed at him in his mighty wrath. I saw him come beside the ram, and he was enraged at him; and he struck the ram and shattered his two horns, and the ram had no strength to withstand him. So he hurled him to the ground and trampled on him, and there was none to rescue the ram from his power. Then the male goat magnified himself exceedingly. But as soon as he was mighty, the large horn was broken; and in its place there came up four conspicuous horns toward the four winds of heaven. Out of one of them came forth a rather small horn which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the Beautiful Land. It grew up to the host of heaven and caused some of the host and some of the stars to fall to the earth, and it trampled them down. It even magnified itself to be equal with the Commander of the host; and it removed the regular sacrifice from Him, and the place of His sanctuary was thrown down. And on account of transgression the host will be given over to the horn along with the regular sacrifice; and it will fling truth to the ground and perform its will and prosper. (Dan 8:5-12)</p> <p>The shaggy goat represents the kingdom of Greece, and the large horn that is between his eyes is the first king. The broken horn and the four horns that arose in its place represent four kingdoms which will arise from his nation, although not with his power. In the latter period of their rule, when the transgressors have run their course, a king will arise, insolent and skilled in intrigue. His power will be mighty, but not by his own power, and he will destroy to an extraordinary degree and prosper and perform his will; he will destroy mighty men and the holy people. And through his shrewdness he will cause deceit to succeed by his influence; and he will magnify himself in his heart, and he will destroy many while they are at ease. He will even oppose the Prince of princes, but he will be broken without human agency. (Dan 8:21-25)</p>

Explicitly identified in Daniel's second vision, during Belshazzar's third year of reign (Dan 8:21), the third empire that controls the Promised Land is Alexander the Great, the "king of Greece."

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In Nebuchadnezzar's dream, this empire was represented as the statue's bronze belly and thighs (Dan 2:39). Daniel sees this empire as ruling "over all of earth", and historically Alexander the Great, undefeated in all of his military battles, created one of the largest empires of the ancient world.

In Daniel's dream during the first year of Belshazzar's reign (Dan 7:6), the third beast that came from the sea looked "like a leopard" and had "four wings of a bird" and "four heads." With the hindsight of history, Alexander the Great conquered the Persian Empire in a mere three years, and the "four heads" and "four wings of a bird" appear to symbolize the four main generals of Alexander the Great's army: Ptolemy, Seleucus, Lysimachus, and Cassander who would later carve up Alexander's empire when he dies.

In Daniel's vision during the third year of Belshazzar's reign, the male goat is identified as the "king of Greece" and the "large horn" as the "first king" Alexander the Great (Dan 8:21).

"The broken horn and the four horns that arose in its place represent four kingdoms which will arise from his nation" allude to the four general-emperors that divided Alexander the Great's empire (Dan 8:22). This imagery is consistent with Daniel's earlier vision of a leopard like beast with four heads and four wings (Dan 7:6).

Introduced for the first time, the angel Gabriel reveals that "a king will arise, insolent and skilled in intrigue" (Dan 8:23), "he will destroy" (Dan 8:24-25), "he will magnify himself in his heart... even oppose the Prince of princes" (Dan 8:25).

This evil king is elaborated upon roughly 10 years later when Daniel has another vision during the first year of Darius the Mede's reign (Dan 11). In light of details found in Daniel 11:21-35 and with a view of historical events, the identity of this evil king is believed to be Antiochus IV Epiphanes who arose from the Seleucid Empire.

Although he was not next in line for the throne, Antiochus IV Epiphanes seized the throne through murder and intrigue. Of all the Seleucid rulers, Antiochus IV Epiphanes does fit the description as the "despicable person" (Dan 11:21), because of his brutal persecution of the Jews, oppression of Judea, and desecration of the Temple.

Antiochus IV Epiphanes would perish from illness and not by "human agency" (Dan 8:25).

The Fourth Gentile Kingdom

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream (Dan 2)	Daniel's Dream / Vision First Year of Belshazzar (Dan 7)	Daniel's Vision Third Year of Belshazzar (Dan 8)
... its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. (Dan 2:33) Then there will be a fourth kingdom as strong as iron; inasmuch as iron crushes and shatters all things, so, like iron that breaks in	After this I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrifying and extremely strong; and it had large iron teeth. It devoured and crushed and trampled down the remainder with its feet; and it was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns. While I was contemplating the horns, behold, another horn, a little one, came up among them, and three of the first horns were pulled out by the roots before it; and behold, this horn possessed eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth uttering great boasts. (Dan 7:7-8)	There is no mention of the fourth empire

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Nebuchadnezzar's Dream (Dan 2)	Daniel's Dream / Vision First Year of Belshazzar (Dan 7)	Daniel's Vision Third Year of Belshazzar (Dan 8)
<p>Continued from page 4 pieces, it will crush and break all these in pieces. In that you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, it will be a divided kingdom; but it will have in it the toughness of iron, inasmuch as you saw the iron mixed with common clay. As the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of pottery, so some of the kingdom will be strong and part of it will be brittle. And in that you saw the iron mixed with common clay, they will combine with one another in the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, even as iron does not combine with pottery. (Dan 2:40-43)</p>	<p>Continued from page 4 Then I kept looking because of the sound of the boastful words which the horn was speaking; I kept looking until the beast was slain, and its body was destroyed and given to the burning fire. (Dan 7:11) Then I desired to know the exact meaning of the fourth beast, which was different from all the others, exceedingly dreadful, with its teeth of iron and its claws of bronze, and which devoured, crushed and trampled down the remainder with its feet, and the meaning of the ten horns that were on its head and the other horn which came up, and before which three of them fell, namely, that horn which had eyes and a mouth uttering great boasts and which was larger in appearance than its associates. I kept looking, and that horn was waging war with the saints and overpowering them until the Ancient of Days came and judgment was passed in favor of the saints of the Highest One, and the time arrived when the saints took possession of the kingdom. (Dan 7:19-22) Thus he said: "The fourth beast will be a fourth kingdom on the earth, which will be different from all the other kingdoms and will devour the whole earth and tread it down and crush it. As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings will arise; and another will arise after them, and he will be different from the previous ones and will subdue three kings. He will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law; and they will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time. But the court will sit for judgment, and his dominion will be taken away, annihilated and destroyed forever." (Dan 7:23-26)</p>	<p>There is no mention of the fourth empire</p>

Of the four part statue dreamt by Nebuchadnezzar, the fourth empire that controls the Promised Land is never identified in any of Daniel's dreams or visions.

In Nebuchadnezzar's dream, Daniel describes the fourth empire "as strong as iron; inasmuch as iron crushes and shatters all things" (Dan 2:40) which alludes to a militarily strong nation. However, Daniel's description of the feet and toes of Nebuchadnezzar's statue as being "partly of iron and partly of pottery" symbolized a "divided kingdom" and one that was not uniformly united (Dan 2:41-43).

In Daniel's vision during the first year of Belshazzar's reign, the fourth beast is not identified (Dan 7:7). This is in stark contrast to the previous beasts that looked like: 1) a lion and with wings of an eagle, 2) a bear, and 3) a leopard with four wings of a bird.

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This enigmatic beast from the sea was “dreadful and terrifying,” and it was “extremely strong” with “large iron teeth” that “devoured and crushed” and “trampled down” with “its feet” (Dan 7:7).

It had ten horns. An additional horn emerged, small at first, but after removing three existing horns by pulling them “out by the roots,” became “larger in appearance than its associates.” Unlike the other horns, this one was personified with eyes “like the eyes of man and a mouth uttering great boasts” (Dan 7:8).

An angel interprets the fourth beast as “the fourth kingdom on earth,” “different from all other kingdoms,” “devour the whole earth,” and “crush it” (Dan 7:23).

Out of this fourth kingdom, “ten kings will arise” and “another will arise after them, and he will be different from the previous ones and will subdue three kings” (Dan 7:24).

With history recording the Roman Empire succeeding the Greek Empire, many commentators have assigned the fourth empire as Romanesque and have speculated the identity of the eleven kings / nations. However astute these theologians are, it should be remembered that their speculations are merely hypotheses.

When Daniel has another vision about this fourth empire, he is concerned and has difficulty understanding it. He asked, “My lord, what will be the outcome of these events?” The angel replied, “Go your way, Daniel, for these words are concealed and sealed up until the end of time.” (Dan 12:8-9)

Immediately after he sees the “little horn” with the “eyes of a man and a mouth uttering great boasts,” Daniel sees God, “the Ancient of Days” taking His seat on the throne (Dan 7:8-9).

The boastful evil horn / dictator will be most active during “time, times, and half a time” (Dan 7:25).

Because Daniel used the same Hebrew word for “time” earlier for “seven periods” (“And let seven periods of time pass over him” [Dan 4:16]), “time, times, and half a time” is understood as half of seven year period, or 3-1/2 years.

This is corroborated when Daniel speaks of the “one who makes desolate” who will “make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will make sacrifice and grain offering cease” (Dan 9:27). One week represented a 7 year period.

The angel explains to Daniel that this “little horn” will “speak out against” God and “wear down the saints” (Dan 7:25). However, “the court will sit for judgment” and the dominion of the “little horn” will be “taken away, annihilated and destroyed forever” (Dan 7:26), the “beast was slain, and its body was destroyed and given to the burning fire” (Dan 7:13).

The “burning fire” is described in Revelation as the “lake of fire,” in which a “beast” is defeated and thrown into.

And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who did the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone. (Rev 19:20)

Not only is the boastful little horn destroyed, but the entire empire it represented.

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Daniel's vision during the first year of Belshazzar's reign was his first personal vision about the future of his people. Despite seeing the "Ancient of Days" annihilating the fourth beast (Dan 7:9-11, 25-26), and the "One like a Son of Man" being presented with "everlasting dominion" and the "people of the saints of the Highest One (Dan 7:13-14, 27), Daniel was still "greatly alarmed" and in shock of the fourth beast (Dan 7:28).

Daniel's second personal vision (Dan 8), during the third year of Belshazzar's reign, elaborated upon the second and third empire.

Daniel's third personal vision (Dan 9:20-27), during the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, provided information on the timing of God's actions of fulfilling His covenant promises during the fourth empire.

Daniel's fourth personal vision (Dan 10:1-9; 11:2-12:3), during the third year of Cyrus king of Persia, gave details about the internal conflicts of the third empire and some details about the fourth empire.

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