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Daniel: Historical & Chronological Comments (IV)

by James B. Jordan

5. The Second Battle (Daniel 2)

(continued from February issue)

Commentators usually say that the **progression from** gold to iron indicates a decline. Actually, though, the Persian empire was larger and more powerful than the Babylonian. The Greek empire, though it split up almost immediately, was even larger and brought about a profound cultural change in its entire area, creating the culture we call **Hellenism**. Finally, the Roman empire was greater still, and far more powerful and long lasting. As we shall see in a moment, there is a decline from one stage to the next, but not in such political terms.

In fact, the statue's metals come, as we noted, from the Tabernacle complex. The Tabernacle complex was, in part, a **model** of the **human** person, for each of us is a temple of the Holy Spirit. The **innermost** part, the Tabernacle proper, **signifying** head and heart, was golden. The shoulders of the Tabernacle were silver sockets into which its golden boards were placed. The belly of the Tabernacle was the bronze courtyard altar, inside of which (**not** on top of which) the sacrifices were consumed. Finally, the Tabernacle was set in earth, of which iron is the hardest form.

Thus, by itself the statue does not indicate any passage of time. Rather, it is a static picture that communicates the nature of the Restoration era that is **coming** into being. The house in which Israel had resided from Moses to Samuel was the Tabernacle. The kingdom house was the Temple. Now the house in which they lived would be the world empire. **The** world empire would be the new Tabernacle/Temple, the

context in which God would be served and worshiped. This is indicated by the fact that Daniel **2:35 lists** the metals in reverse order and says that the statue was demolished all at once, not one part **after** another.

At the same time, the four metals are sequential also, and verse 39 says that the second is inferior to the first, implying a decline **all** the way down. We must see this decline in religious, not political terms. It is not a matter of each empire's being less cohesive, or less **powerful**, than the preceding one. Rather, the progression is designed to show that as men move away from the time that God initiates a covenant with them, they wander farther and farther from Him. Thus, the book of Judges shows a decline from the golden Tabernacle until finally, in the time of Eli, the Tabernacle was dismantled. Similarly, a generation after Solomon built the Temple, its gold had to be replaced with bronze because of the sin of the people (1 Kings **14:26-27**).

Thus, the meaning here is that the fear of God, which made Nebuchadnezzar golden, would lessen with time. **Belshazzar** fell away **from** it, but was not given long to manifest his apostasy. Cyrus and Darius were evidently faithful to God, but they were succeeded by several Persian monarchs who, over a much longer time, did not fear God. Shortly **after** Alexander's death the Jews became subject to the kings of the North and South (Dan. 11), neither of which feared God much at all. In fact, their incessant wars might be seen as forming a fiery bronze altar-belly in which Israel was tested and refined. Finally, the iron Romans never had any fear of God at all to begin with, though their point man, Herod, pretended to.

The sequence of decline, then, is in no sense political. Rather, it has to do with the decline of true

religion and the Restoration Covenant, which would make the caning of the New Covenant necessary.

6. The Elevation of Daniel and Its Meaning for History

Daniel was made ruler of the province of Babylon and chief prefect over the wise men of Babylon. Since Daniel would have to spend time at the King's gate, the supreme court of the King, he asked that his three **friends** be made administrators of the province of Babylon when he was away.

Since the implications of this event are not often understood, we need to reflect on it, however briefly. Starting in Nebuchadnezzar's second year of rule, one of his chief advisors was Daniel. Daniel was Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the **Neo-Babylonian** empire. This means that *every time Nebuchadnezzar invested Jerusalem, Daniel was his right-hand man. The Jews must have hated Daniel with consummate passion, regarding him as the ultimate Quisling, the ultimate Benedict Arnold. Daniel, siding with God, encouraged Nebuchadnezzar to bring Jehoiakim back under Babylonian rule, encouraged Nebuchadnezzar to deport the rebellious Jehoiachin, and encouraged Nebuchadnezzar to sack and destroy Jerusalem when Zedekiah revolted. Of course, whatever mercy was shown to the rebellious Jews-and a great deal of mercy was indeed shown to them-can also be ascribed to Daniel.*

Thus, when Daniel's **friend** Ezekiel wrote that the three most righteous men that ever lived were Noah, Job, and Daniel, this must have galled his Jewish hearers (**Ezk.** 14).

Secondly, however, Daniel's position in Babylon meant that each time Jews were taken into captivity, they had a "soft landing." Daniel and his friends had "gone ahead to prepare a place for them." When Ezekiel and his associates were transported, gently, to Babylon, at the time **Jehoiachin** was taken into captivity, they were protected by Daniel (**Ezk.** 1:1-2). Then, of course, the community created by Ezekiel's work also provided a pillow for the far more severe deportation that came eleven years later, after the destruction of Jerusalem.

We can compare **these** two aspects of Daniel's elevation with the story of Joseph. Joseph dealt harshly with his brothers when they came asking for food, and refused to eat with them, preferring to eat with the **converted**, God-fearing Egyptians (**Gen.** 42-43). Yet, Joseph had gone ahead to prepare a place for them, that where he was, there they might come also. And, as we shall **see**, the history narrated in Daniel exposes many significant parallels between the exodus from Egypt and the coming exodus from Babylon.

7. The Third Battle (Daniel 3)

While Daniel was away, perhaps on a circuit court, Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold and required that everyone bow down to it. Nebuchadnezzar probably got this idea from Daniel's interpretation of his dream; at least, that is how the book of Daniel evidently connects the two events. Nebuchadnezzar figured that though his empire was not going to be permanent, yet for the present he was God's agent on the earth and therefore entitled to divine honors.

This event is undated, but the **connection** between the golden image and the dream of Nebuchadnezzar is clear, and thus this event probably happened shortly after the events of Daniel 2, perhaps in **Nebuchadnezzar's third year**.

The image was 6 cubits in diameter and 60 cubits high. These are not human proportions, and so the image was probably an obelisk of some kind. If so, it was a religious image, since an obelisk is a stylized holy mountain (a long slender pyramid). It was "of gold," that is, plated with **gold**.

Nebuchadnezzar ordered seven groups of officials to be present at the dedication of this image. **These** men were drawn from **all** the provinces of Babylon. At the appointed time, all these men were to fall down and pay homage to the image. The goal was to unite the empire in terms of one state-sponsored liturgy. Local gods might be worshiped, but Nebuchadnezzar, the appointed earthly regent of the God of gods, had to be honored as such. A seven-fold music would be the signal to worship. Anyone who refused this command was to be cast into a furnace of blazing fire.

The setting of this conflict is important. On the plain of Dura Nebuchadnezzar set up a large open-air temple complex. Like God's temple, its center was an image of gold: not the Ark of the covenant but Nebuchadnezzar's statue. Outside in front was a blazing fire, not the bronze altar of God's temple but the fiery **furnace**. As the **Levitical** orchestra played the instruments of David when the sacrifices were offered in worship of Yahweh, so Nebuchadnezzar's instruments would play as a signal to worship at his new religion.

The fire on God's altar represented His presence, for He is a consuming fire. Nebuchadnezzar's fire represented his presence, especially his wrath (w. 13& 19). The **Levitical** orchestra represented the sound of God's glory cloud; the instruments of Nebuchadnezzar made a glory cloud for his worship. God's Temple was the center of the true worship of the whole world; Nebuchadnezzar's temple attempted to unite the world in false worship.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were unwilling to participate in this idolatrous worship. This might have gone unnoticed except that certain Babylonian officials, angry over their humiliation by Daniel in chapter 2 and envious of the positions of Daniel and his friends, brought the matter to Nebuchadnezzar's attention. The governors of the very province of Babylon itself were refusing to pay homage (v. 12)!

Nebuchadnezzar was amazed and angry. After all, it was the God of **these** very Jews who had revealed to him that he was the human avatar of divinity at this stage in history. Nebuchadnezzar was God walking on the earth! If he chose to hurl the three men into the **fiery furnace**, "what God is there who can deliver you out of my hands?" Nebuchadnezzar had misunderstood the vision. God had appointed Nebuchadnezzar to be His servant and to rule the **world, but that did not mean that** Nebuchadnezzar was in some sense an incarnation of God. Nebuchadnezzar's position was a judicial appointment, not a mystical identification.

When the three men refused to accept Nebuchadnezzar's argument, the king ordered that the **furnace** be made seven **times** hotter than usual. (Note the number 7 again.) The men were tied up with their official garments still on them and cast into the fire. So hot was the fire that the men who threw them in were killed.

Nebuchadnezzar saw the **three** men walking in the fire, unbound, with a fourth, who looked like a "son of **God**." The term "son of God" can refer to the second person of the **Trinity**, but it also means God's appointed **ruler**. Nebuchadnezzar had thought that he was the son of God for this stage of history, but now he caught a glimpse of the true son of God.

Nebuchadnezzar began to understand more than he had before. He called the three men to come out, naming them "servants of God Most High," the **gentile name for the true God (see Gen. 1 4:18-22).** The men came out. All that had burned away was their bonds; their official garments were unharmed. Nebuchadnezzar could learn from this that God Most High and His true Son were allowing Their servants to continue to hold **office** in Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar then proclaimed that the God of the Jews was unique, for no other God had ever been able to do anything like this. In the future, no word of criticism was permitted to be spoken against Yahweh, God of the Jews and of the whole world. The third battle in the war had been won.

The fire is parallel to that on God's altar. The three men are sacrificed to the false god. The false **altarfire** consumes the Babylonians, but not the three servants of God. God's servants can live in the fire because the Son

of God has been (will be) sacrificed and resurrected in the fiery presence of God.

8. The Fourth Battle (Daniel 4)

The Babylonian Chronicles that have been discovered thus far only describe the political events of the first eleven years of Nebuchadnezzar's 43 years of rule. We know that in his 19th year he sacked Jerusalem. Some time after this, when he was at peace, having conquered everything he wanted to conquer, and having build a fine palace for himself, the events of Daniel 4 took place.

Daniel 4 is written by Nebuchadnezzar himself as a letter to the world. It describes his humiliation before God and his full conversion. Nebuchadnezzar calls God by the gentile name, **God Most High**, and speaks of **Daniel** as one who has "the Spirit of the holy God." The chapter opens and closes with a hymn of praise to God.

Nebuchadnezzar was at ease, and he had a dream that no one could interpret but Daniel. He saw himself as a great tree that reached to the sky, was visible **all** over the earth, **and** gave shade and fired **for** all birds and beasts. Then he saw an **angel** from heaven chop down the tree, reducing it to a stump. The angel explained that Nebuchadnezzar would be insane for seven years, as a sign that God is the ruler of all. Daniel explained that the stump meant that Nebuchadnezzar would be restored **after** he had learned his lesson. Daniel advised Nebuchadnezzar to repent, do righteousness, and show mercy to the poor, and thereby avert this judgment.

Nebuchadnezzar, however, **continued** in his pride, and one day as he reflected on his power and his might and the kingdom that he had made for himself, he heard God's judgment against him. For seven years he was insane, but at the end he recognized that all his **possessions, including his kingdom, were not gotten by his** own power but were gifts from God Most High.

The tree in the vision is the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in Genesis 2. This tree signified rule and kingship. Adam had been promised that God would let him eat of it when Adam was ready, but Adam seized it, making himself a judge and king. Thus, Adam was driven from God's presence to live under the curse.

At this point in history, God had given the tree of authority and rule to Nebuchadnezzar, **making** him king of the world. Eating of that tree made Nebuchadnezzar into the tree itself. But Nebuchadnezzar did not believe that he had received rule and authority from God; he thought he had gotten it by his own power. Thus, the tree of authority and rule was removed from him, until he confessed that rule and authority come from God

alone.

The fourth and final battle for Nebuchadnezzar had been won. Nebuchadnezzar had been converted, and under Daniel's wise administration the kingdom had experienced seven years of good government, followed by good government from Nebuchadnezzar for the rest of his reign. (Compare Nebuchadnezzar's being cut down with 1 Samuel **5:4**. When the Ark was put before **Dagon** in Dagon's temple the second time, Dagon's head and hands were found broken off.)

9. The **Fifth Battle (Daniel 5)**

Once again the setting of the story of **Belshazzar's** feast is a Temple. By bringing out the gold vessels and **lampstand** from God's Temple, **Belshazzar** created an environment of holy conflict, which he was certain to lose.

Drinking wine is a symbol of kingship in the Bible. We see it when Nosh drinks wine after being told by God that the right to exercise capital punishment had now been given to mankind; in other words, kingship had been established. The priests were forbidden to drink in their place of service, but kings are always shown drinking, through Proverbs 31 warns that it is not wise to drink "much" wine. Thus, we see the cupbearer of Pharaoh in Genesis 40; Nehemiah serves as cupbearer to **Artaxerxes**; **Ahasuerus** is always **drinking** when he issues decrees in Esther; and here we find an emphasis on **Belshazzar's** drinking wine. The point of this emphasis is not to say that he was on a drunken debauch; rather, as noted above, his drinking wine on a throne was a symbolic act related to his self-coronation at the time of the emergency.

Thus, Daniel 5:1 says that he was drinking wine in the presence of the 1000 nobles. Verse 2 says that his decree, after his first ceremonial sip, was to bring out the symbols of the nations defeated by Babylon, including the golden vessels of the Temple, so that they might be used in the feast. This would remind the participants in the feast that Babylon had triumphed before, and would encourage them to believe Babylon would triumph even in this dire situation. Using Yahweh's vessels, they praised the gods of Babylon, which they wrongly believed had triumphed over Yahweh.

Suddenly the hand of God appeared opposite the Temple's **lampstand**, and wrote words of judgment on the wall. (For **an** important parallel and fulfillment of this passage, see John 8:1-12, a passage often disputed. In the **temple**, Jesus claims to be the **light** of the world, and writes on the ground with **his finger**.)

As in chapter 2, none of the Babylonian wise men could interpret the message. The queen enters the room; thus she is not **Belshazzar's** wife, who was already present (**v.2**) and probably was the queen mother. She recommends Daniel.

Belshazzar offers the aged Daniel the position of third **ruler** in the kingdom if he can interpret the words. Daniel rejects the gifts, but interprets anyway. He reminds **Belshazzar** of the events recorded in Daniel 4. He condemns **Belshazzar** for rejecting the true God. He then interprets the handwriting on the wall, explaining that the kingdom of Babylon was being handed by God over to the **Medes** and the Persians.

Belshazzar went ahead and made Daniel the third **ruler** in the kingdom. Then, that night, the Persians were welcomed by the Babylonians into the city, and **Belshazzar** was slain. Daniel emerged as the head man in Babylon. The **fifth** battle had been won.