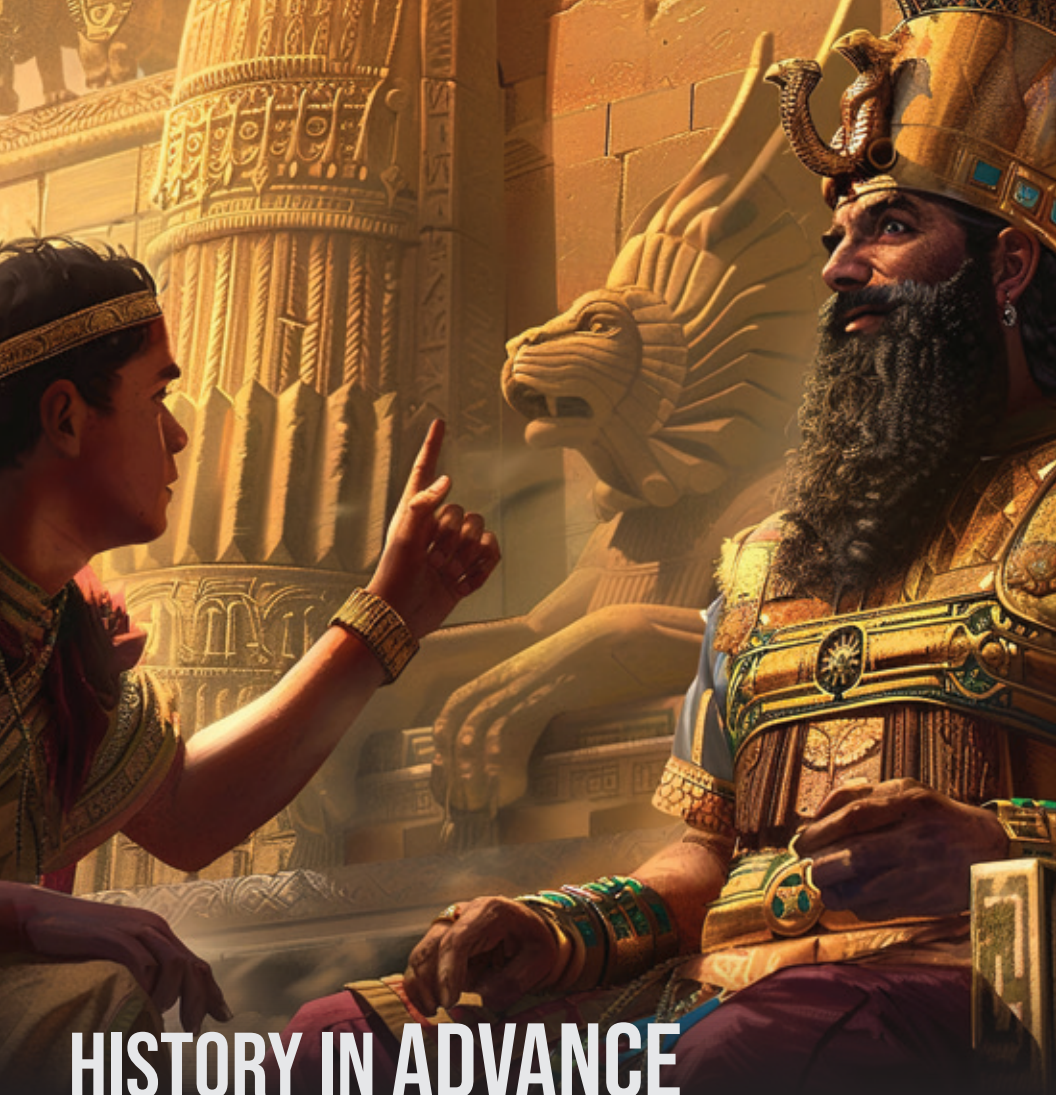




 **3ABN** BIBLE STUDY GUIDES
Searching Deeper

HISTORY IN ADVANCE



HISTORY IN ADVANCE

It was just one midnight dream, but its message still echoes through the world today. Nebuchadnezzar, the powerful young king of the rising empire of Babylon around 605 B.C., awoke from a startling dream that rattled his nerves and captured his undivided attention. His dream seemed to pull back the curtain on the future, and this inquisitive king demanded to know what it meant—immediately. However, there was a catch—the dream had come in the night, but was gone from his mind in the morning. If his educated advisors couldn't prove their wisdom by both recounting his dream *and* interpreting its meaning, then every last one of them would be doomed to execution. They might have died that day had God not given the same prophetic dream—and its interpretation—to the young Hebrew captive named Daniel, who listened to God's voice. The king's dream plunges us into the middle of a drama much bigger than one man's mighty kingdom. This ancient record of a 2,500-year-old dream traces the past, describes the present, and reveals God's plan for the future.

1 Before we continue the story of King Nebuchadnezzar's dream, where does the bigger story begin?

Revelation 12:7–8 “And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer.”

Behind every human struggle rages a spiritual war, and in this war the dragon is Satan (Revelation 12:9) whose ambition is to overthrow God's government of love. Satan's conflict is with Michael, who is none other than Jesus, who has the power to raise the dead (Jude 1:9), is superior to the mighty angels in power (Daniel 10:12–13, 21), and delivers God's people (Daniel 12:1).

2 When the human family became part of the conflict, how did God promise He would defeat Satan?

Genesis 3:15 “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.”

God spoke these first words of Bible prophecy to Satan—that “serpent of old” (Revelation 12:9)—when Adam and Eve sinned. [See Lesson 1 to learn how Satan fought against God by enticing the human family to sin.] He guaranteed that Satan's war would end with God's victory. These potent words proved that God had a plan to save potential sinners before Adam and Eve ever sinned. He would do this through the death of Jesus, the Seed of the woman (see Galatians 4:4), Who would be “bruised for our iniquities” (Isaiah 53:5). These brief prophetic words stretch all the way until the end, when Satan and his rebellion against God will be destroyed completely. Every Bible prophecy is connected within this all-encompassing promise of God.

3 How is Nebuchadnezzar's forgotten dream connected to God's overarching Bible prophecy of rescue from sin?

Daniel 1:1–2 “In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand”

Like the promise in Eden, God gave this prophetic dream in the midst of a conflict. His plan of rescue appeared to have been defeated when Israel was taken captive. But through this dream, God assured His people He was still in control. He even cared enough for this pagan ruler to show him a simple dream of the future; and through Nebuchadnezzar's

far-reaching influence, many within his grand empire would hear of God's future plan, as well.

4 What did God show King Nebuchadnezzar in his nighttime dream?

Only brief highlights are included here, but you can read the full story in Daniel 1 and 2.

Daniel 2:31–33 “You, O king, were watching; and behold, a great image ... whose splendor was excellent, stood before you; and its form was awesome. This image's head was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay.”

In response to his prayer for wisdom, “the secret was revealed to Daniel in a night vision” (Daniel 2:19). He reminded the king that he saw an impressive statue of a man, like the idols Nebuchadnezzar was familiar with. This tangible human form was a fitting metaphor for the progression of human history. The image was composed of four metals, each one decreasing in value. All were balanced precariously on an unsteady footing that was certain to topple.

5 What did the dream of the dazzling image mean?

Daniel 2:37–43 “You, O king, are a king of kings. ... You are this head of gold. But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours; then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron Whereas you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, the kingdom shall be divided So the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile. ... They will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay.”

God's interpretation was simple. The rise and fall of nations was made known in advance, reaching to the end of all earthly governments. As



“In response to his prayer for wisdom, ‘the secret was revealed to Daniel in a night vision’ Daniel 2:19.”

far-fetched as it seemed, Nebuchadnezzar's thriving empire would be overpowered by a weaker rival. One after another, four empires would dominate the world. And after the fourth powerful kingdom, there would never be another world-dominating power, despite all human attempts to unify the world's independent nations. Instead, just as clay is a different substance from metal, a different kind of power would emerge to mix with the competing governments and rulers.

6 How did the king's prophetic dream end?

Daniel 2:34–35 “You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.”

Nebuchadnezzar was given a symbolic glimpse of how God would interrupt the succession of human governments. In the time when divided nations struggle to unite (the time we are living in now) something from outside will replace every human government with God's perfect kingdom, which will never end. This will happen “without hands,” meaning it will be the result of God's decisive intervention, instead of a man-made crisis or solution.

7 What is the meaning of the stone that destroyed the image?

Daniel 2:44 “And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.”

The stone represents Jesus, and His kingdom will never end. He is the “living stone” (1 Peter 2:4). Jesus rescues us from the tyranny of sin and the oppression of human rulers “without hands” (Daniel 2:34). He was born of a virgin (Matthew 1:22–23), laid down His own life, and took it up again (John 10:18), and will return to save us (Revelation 1:7) without any assistance from us.

8 Has the king's dream come true?

Daniel 2:45 “... The great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure.”

History confirms the accurate fulfillment of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. The wealthy kingdom of Babylon, represented by the **head of gold**, ruled from 665–539 B.C.

The fulfillment of Nebuchadnezzar's dream



BABYLON

MEDO-PERSIA

GREECE

ROME

DIVIDED EUROPE

THE LIVING STONE
JESUS!

The chest and arms of silver depicted the two-part kingdom of Media and Persia (Medo-Persia) that overthrew Babylon in 539 B.C. and ruled until 331 B.C.

The belly and thighs of bronze foretold the vast territories of Greek civilization established by the conquests of Alexander the Great from 331 B.C. until they were absorbed by Roman culture.

The powerful long legs of iron predicted the lengthy and mighty rule of Rome as both a republic and an empire, rising in the second century B.C. until its complete collapse in A.D. 538.

The fulfillment of the iron and clay feet that would not unite is still visible today. Following Rome, the nations of Europe have remained permanently divided, forming no governing empire. Instead, a different kind of power emerged. Over the past 1,400 years, Christian church leaders have attempted to influence the course of Europe's many competing nations.

9 How did the king respond to God's promise that all his work would one day be destroyed?

Daniel 2:47 "The king answered Daniel, and said, 'Truly your God is the God of gods, the Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, since you could reveal this secret.'"

There was a lot to take in, but it all boiled down to one issue: Trust in God, or resist Him. For a moment, the king accepted God's words. But

read Daniel 3 and 4 to learn how he reverted to his old ways before truly accepting God's plan for his kingdom—and his life. Everyone who hears God's prophetic plan today will face the same question: Will we trust God? Unlike King Nebuchadnezzar, we can see that the records of history show that God's predictions have all come to pass. We are now anticipating the one event from the dream that remains in the future: Jesus' Second Coming—"without hands."

10 What prophetic dream did God give Daniel to expand what He revealed to Nebuchadnezzar?

Years after God showed Nebuchadnezzar's dream and its interpretation to Daniel, He outlined the future in even greater symbolic detail. The same sequence of four powerful governments was depicted to Daniel in a vision as carnivorous, mutated beasts who arise one after another (Daniel 7:1-3). "Those great beasts ... are four kings which arise out of the earth" (Daniel 7:17).

VERSE	KINGDOM/GOVERNMENT
Verse 4 "The first was like a lion, and had eagle's wings. I watched till its wings were plucked off; and it was lifted up from the earth and made to stand on two feet like a man, and a man's heart was given to it."	BABYLON - Like the lion and eagle, Babylon ruled supreme. Its walls were adorned with winged lions. But the strength of the kingdom and its haughty king was to be stripped away (see Daniel 4 and 5).
Verse 5 "And suddenly another beast, a second, like a bear. It was raised up on one side, and had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. And they said thus to it: 'Arise, devour much flesh!'"	MEDO-PERSIA - The lopsided alliance of Media with the mightier Persia conquered three nations: Egypt, Lydia, and Babylon.
Verse 6 "After this I looked, and there was another, 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."	GREECE - Four wings represent its swift conquest under Alexander the Great. When he died, Greek territory was divided under four leaders or "heads."
Verse 7 "... a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong. It had huge iron teeth; it was devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet..."	ROME - With overwhelming force, Rome conquered, subdued, and enslaved every nation it encountered.

11 What came after the fourth beast that represented Rome?

Daniel 7:7 "[The fourth beast] was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns."

“In Bible prophecy a horn represents political power.”



Rome differed from the first three empires in that its influence would continue on through the symbol of horns. In Bible prophecy a horn represents political power (Jeremiah 48:25; Zechariah 1:18–21). These horns represent the divided political powers in Europe that would arise to take the place of Rome when it collapsed. ““The ten horns are ten kings who shall arise from this kingdom...”” (Daniel 7:24).

12 What additional information did God reveal about the time that followed Rome’s collapse?

Daniel 7:8 “I was considering the horns, and there was another horn, a little one, coming up among them, before whom three of the first horns were plucked out by the roots. And there, in this horn, were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking pompous words.”

This “little horn” was a brand-new detail that captivated Daniel’s attention. It used political power because it was a horn, like the other ten horns, but it was also a different kind of power, because it had features of a human face—“like” a person intended to be in God’s image as His representative.

13 What clues can we find in God’s description of the little horn that identify what it represents?

Daniel 7:24–25 “... “And another shall rise after them; he shall be different from the first ones, and shall subdue three kings. He shall speak pompous words against the Most High, shall persecute the saints of the Most High, and shall intend to change times and law. Then the saints shall be given into his hand for a time and times and half a time.””

The power represented by the little horn would combine both political authority (warring against kings) and a religious claim of authority (speaking pompous words against the Most High). It would begin after the break-up of Rome into ten permanently divided smaller kingdoms, “coming up among them” (Daniel 7:8). Three nations would be con-

quered to make way for the little horn to exercise full authority. The little horn would be geographically “little,” and when it shows up again in Daniel 8:9, its location is northwest of the land of Israel. The little horn would persecute God’s saints, and would attempt to change God’s Law, and the times God set for man.

God even gave a time frame to establish confidence in His Word: “a time and times and half a time.” (The word “time” described a year, calculated back then as 360 days.)

$$\begin{array}{r} \text{“A TIME” (ONE YEAR)} \\ 360 \text{ days} \end{array} + \begin{array}{r} \text{“TIMES” (2 YEARS)} \\ 720 \text{ days} \end{array} + \begin{array}{r} \text{“HALF A TIME” (½ YEAR)} \\ 180 \text{ days} \end{array} = \begin{array}{r} 3\frac{1}{2} \text{ YEARS} \\ 1,260 \text{ days} \end{array}$$

In Bible prophecy, symbolic images are accompanied by symbolic time-frames, where one day signifies a year (Numbers 14:34; Ezekiel 4:6). The power represented by the little horn would operate unhindered for 1,260 literal years.

14 How have the details of the little horn been accurately witnessed in history?

As the Roman empire was collapsing, ten tribes established their dominance, many becoming the nations of modern Europe—the Franks, Burgundians, Alemanni, Vandals, Suevi, Visigoths, Saxons, Ostrogoths, Lombards, and Heruli. After these groups rose to power, the church,



“The power represented by the little horn would combine both political authority and a religious claim of authority.”

which was no longer suffering under persecution, began to grasp civil authority, as well. Armies acting in the name of religion eliminated the three Germanic tribes (the Heruli, Vandals, and Ostrogoths) that did not accept the divinity of Jesus. Then church leaders began to operate unhindered in A.D. 538. They influenced the governments of Europe from a geographically “little” location in the city of Rome, northwest of the land of Israel.

As God foresaw, the corrupted church even claimed to have authority to change God’s Law regarding His set times by substituting the seventh-day Sabbath of the fourth commandment with Sunday, the first day of the week. Common people were not permitted to read the Bible in their own language, and when the light from God’s Word was hidden away, a time of spiritual darkness began—appropriately called the Dark Ages. The few Christians who did not submit to church authority but remained loyal to God’s Word experienced harsh persecution at the hands of the church.

In 1798, Pope Pius VI, who ruled over Christians in Europe, was taken captive by a French general, and overnight the church’s claim to political power crumbled for a time—just as God showed Daniel. This was exactly 1,260 years from A.D. 538 when the corrupt church was established as a political power.

Isaiah 46:9–10 “... I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done”

15 What promise did God make about the end of the little horn?

Daniel 7:9–10, 13–14 “I watched till thrones were put in place, and the Ancient of Days was seated The court was seated, and the books were opened. ... And behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away”

Before God brings this world’s history of misused power to an end, all will receive a fair judgment. This is good news because “judgment was made in favor of the saints of the Most High” (Daniel 7:22). Even if it looks like God’s truth has been defeated and good people are suffering (as it appeared when Babylon took Daniel captive), “the court shall be seated, and they shall take away his [the little horn’s] dominion, to consume and destroy it forever” (Daniel 7:26).

16 In God’s prophecy of the future, what is the primary opponent that attacks God’s truth?

2 Thessalonians 2:3–4 “Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.”

The unexpected message demonstrated through the little horn is that the greatest danger to God’s saints does not come from nations and kingdoms. Satan uses religion itself to attack God’s truth. Religious leaders, who claimed to be God’s representatives, persecuted His true followers and tried to change God’s Law. God warned us to watch for a widespread “falling away” from God’s commands that are written so clearly in the Bible. We can be prepared to follow the truth by studying God’s Word so we won’t be misled.

17 How does Daniel’s vision relate to the big story of God’s promise to rescue us from sin?

Daniel 7:27 ““Then the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High....””

The message of prophecy is simple. God loves His people, and His plan of rescue is proceeding as He promised. “In the days of these kings” (referring to the time we are living in), “the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed” (Daniel 2:44). This is more than just a prediction. It is the sure promise of Jesus’ soon return! It is hope for the saints of God. We can trust and obey Him today because everything He promised has happened.



“The message of prophecy is simple. God loves His people, and His plan of rescue is proceeding as He promised.”

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR MY LIFE TODAY?



1. Are you a saint of God? God's saints want to know the full truth He reveals in His Word, and they love to follow every instruction He gives.

2. When Jesus spoke of future events, He affirmed that we should study the prophecies in the book of Daniel. Speaking of the future, Jesus said, "Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place' (whoever reads, let him understand)" (Matthew 24:15). This study is a brief introduction to the big ideas in the book of Daniel. Will you ask God to help you as you continue to study Bible prophecy?

3. In Daniel's vision, the powers of the world were pictured as ferocious beasts. Our natural tendency is to be afraid. What "beasts" do you face that are stronger than you are? How can you put your trust in God's promises?

4. Nebuchadnezzar had to squarely face the question: Will you trust God? The prophecies you have studied today invite you to do the same. How can you say yes to all of God's plans for your life?

5. We are warned that Satan will use religion to compromise Bible truth. What should we do to verify the religious claims we hear from pastors and Bible teachers?

6. Who do you know that needs to hear what you have learned? "For I proclaim the name of the Lord: ascribe greatness to our God" (Deuteronomy 32:3).

Additional Notes:

WHAT IS THE GOOD NEWS FOR ME IN THE PROPHECIES OF DANIEL?



1. Bible prophecy proves we can believe God's Word with confidence. “And now I have told you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe” (John 14:29).

2. Nothing takes God by surprise; God is able to overrule evil for good and bring His plan to pass. “There are many plans in a man's heart, nevertheless the Lord's counsel—that will stand” (Proverbs 19:21).

3. God not only sees history in advance, but also knows what we need before we need it. “... For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him” (Matthew 6:8).

4. God knows the end from the beginning, and He knows just how to guide you. “I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye” (Psalm 32:8).

5. God's judgment is a blessing for those who are right with Him. “O Lord, You have seen how I am wronged; judge my case. You have seen all their vengeance, all their schemes against me” (Lamentations 3:59–60).

6. God reveals knowledge and wisdom. “... ‘The secret which the king has demanded, the wise men ... cannot declare to the king. But there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days ...’” (Daniel 2:27–28).

7. The future is bright with hope for God's loyal people. God will prevail. Every opponent who appears strong now will come to nothing. “But if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight against God” (Acts 5:39).

LESSON SUMMARY

1. God wants us to know His plan for the future so we will not be afraid.

2. Over 600 years before the birth of Jesus, God accurately foretold the rise and fall of ruling empires stretching all the way to Jesus' Second Coming.

3. As God promised, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and then Rome ruled the world, one after another.

4. Following these four kingdoms, rival nations would remain disunited until the end, as we see they are today.

5. God revealed that instead of another political world empire, a religious power would blend with political governments to fight against God, His Law, and His people.

6. Before Jesus comes, God will judge all people fairly. This means rescue for God's saints.

7. We eagerly anticipate what God promises. Jesus will return soon to establish His never-ending kingdom.

8. God's prophecies are sure. We can trust Him completely with loving obedience.

Additional Notes:



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