

In Search of the Prophesied Ten Kings—Part One: The Rise of Empires and the Fall of the Commonwealth of Israel

Did Nebuchadnezzar's vision reveal a future confederation of ten kingdoms? Who were the ten kings of Daniel's vision? What about the "beast" that John saw in his vision, was it symbolic of a coming world government or a league of governments that will bring the world into conflict?

With the defeat of an invading Mesopotamian confederation the patriarch Abraham expectedly gained a measure of political influence among the leaders and rulers of the city-states of Canaan. Observing that historically Abraham's political influence in Canaan began at an earlier time when he continued his journey from Haran and came into a land of promise, a land that is biblically ascribed to be the capital state of the people of ancient Israel.

Leading us to also say that—in the national sense—the people of ancient Israel became a political influence in the land of promise not long after the tribal groupings journeyed out of Egypt. Noting in particular that national Israel's political presence in the region of Canaan was apparent—for the most part—from the early period of the tribal settlements until the Commonwealth of Israel came to an end in AD 70. Concluding then that the promise of a landed inheritance was foundational to the political influence of Abraham and the people of ancient Israel in the Middle East for the greater part of 1900 years.

However, even though the commonwealth was eventually broken up and scattered, something important remained, and that was the

promise given to Abraham.

But something else also remained.

That was the political nature of the promise.

Having then political implications for the nation-state of Israel today.

And here is why.

The promise of a landed inheritance established the context for Abraham's sojourn in the land of Canaan, and it also established the context for the formalized covenant that God made with national Israel. This meant that the continuance of the promise was subject to stipulations for national Israel that were foundational to the covenant established at Mt. Sinai. The evidence for this is found in the works of the prophets and the apostles who forewarned of national consequences—regarding the promise—should the nation of Israel reject the covenant respective to the law of God (Deut. 4:1-40; Jer. 11:1-5; Mt. 24:1-2).

Which is what they did.

The nation of Israel did reject the first covenant and the political consequence was the removal of the commonwealth from the land of inheritance, implying that by reason of their disobedience to the moral law of God the right of inheritance was forfeited by national Israel.

Importantly, then, with this in mind, we should also consider that the messages of the prophets and the apostles cast the complete fulfillment of the promise forward to a time when a second covenant would be established with the Commonwealth of Israel.

Something that was understood by Jeremiah the prophet who wrote that: "the days come, saith Jehovah, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of

Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was a husband unto them, saith Jehovah. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith Jehovah: I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people [nation]" (Jer. 31:31-33, ASV). (See also, Jer. 31:1-6.) [Author's emphasis throughout.]

This, of course, affirms the continuance of the promise in a coming new covenant that will reestablish the Commonwealth of Israel in all the lands promised to Abraham and his descendants through Isaac, beginning with the return of Christ (Jer. 32:40-41).

Bringing us then to a conclusion regarding modern-day Israel.

That is the modern nation-state of Israel cannot use the covenant by promise as an entitlement to claim a landed inheritance in Palestine today.

Significantly, then, the political nature of the promise gives us a context for understanding current territorial conflicts in the region of Palestine, and it also gives us a context for understanding future prophesied events, because the inherent political nature of the promise is related to the symbolism of some prophetic visions found in Scripture. This is particularly so for those visions that portend to a time when a confederation of nations will be in opposition to the establishment of the kingdom of God at the return of Jesus, who is the surety of the promise given to Abraham.

Which brings us to examine three politically relevant prophetic visions found in Scripture.

One of which was given to a king of Babylon, and another to a prophet at the king's court in Babylon, and still another

vision was given to a disciple of Christ, who attested to the resurrection of the one who is destined to be the final heir to the throne of David. Making it necessary to examine these biblical prophecies from both an historical and a political perspective in order to understand their future applications, and we begin this examination with a look at the first of five successive empires—the Assyrian Empire—that initiated the diaspora of the people of ancient Israel.

Now, the Assyrians were a militarily dominating power in the Middle East by the time of Sargon II, and during Sargon's reign he effectively dismantled the remaining confederated states of the northern kingdom of Israel. Sargon also repressed the kingdom of Judah and his successor Sennacherib further weakened the commonwealth as captives were taken from the kingdom of Judah and dispersed within the Assyrian Empire.

Then with the collapse of the Assyrian Empire came the rise of the Neo-Babylonian Empire under Nabopolassar who founded a Chaldean dynasty while expanding his empire into the Middle East after the defeat of the last notable Assyrian king, Ashurbanipal. This opened the way for Nebuchadnezzar II to enlarge the Babylonian Empire, and to eventually overthrow the Davidic government and the kingdom of Judah, leaving in ruins the city of Jerusalem.

Then after seventy years of Babylonian domination came three more empires in succession—the Medo-Persian Empire, the Greco-Macedonian Empire and the Roman Empire—and each of these empires in their times created a greater fragmentation of the commonwealth tribes, which effectively made it impossible for the Commonwealth of Israel to reestablish itself in what is now known as the geographic or geopolitical region of Palestine. (The Assyrians and Babylonians also displaced many other Middle Eastern peoples in their conquest of the Middle East and Southwest Asia.)

This also has implications for the nation-state of Israel

today.

Because even though the promise made to Abraham would appear to be concluded from an historical and geopolitical view, it is still valid from the biblical perspective because certain prophetic visions tell us there is a future fulfilment, beginning after a time of unprecedented world conflict that will require and culminate with the intervention of Christ.

Jesus referred to such a time of conflict when he spoke of "the abomination of the desolation" that would lead to a time of "great tribulation, such as was not from the beginning of the world till now, no, nor may be... And immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from the heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken; and then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in the heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth smite the breast, and they shall see the Son of Man coming upon the clouds of the heaven, with power and much glory" (Mt. 24:15-22; 29-30, YLT). (See also Zech. 14:4.)

This period of time is often referred to as the "Great Tribulation," which is not stated to last three and one-half years as is sometimes supposed, but the return of Christ—as understood from Jesus' reference to Daniel's prophecy—follows an attempted restoration at Jerusalem that echoes the nature of the promise, which will be overturned by a then existing coalition of governments that will apparently come to exercise control over the region of Palestine. Something that may be understood from the writings of the Apostle Paul who wrote of the "fullness of the Gentiles," which will occur before the return of Christ, creating a time of world conflict that has its prophetic roots in four successive empires that began with the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon (Dan. 9:24-27; Lk. 21:20; Rom. 11:25-26).

So, we should examine this issue further.

Now, King Nebuchadnezzar was a harsh and ruthless ruler, and we see this in the pending fate of his astrologers and magicians, and the others, who couldn't recall and explain the meaning of his troubling dream. Consequently, it was under these circumstances that the prophet Daniel was hastily brought before the king to recall the vision and give its understanding, which Daniel did, and he explained to the king that what he saw was this: "You, O king, were seeing. And, behold, a certain great image! That great image stood before you with a brilliant brightness, and its form was dreadful. The head of this image was of fine gold, its breast and its arms were of silver, its belly and its thighs were of bronze, its legs were of iron, its feet were partly of iron and partly of clay" (Dan. 2:31-33, LITV).

Daniel went on to explain that the head of gold represented Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom, which would precede three successive territorially related kingdoms, with each succeeding kingdom reflecting an increasing governmental instability and military rigidity compared to the Babylonian Empire.

Which gives us reason to pause and consider something.

These four successive empires are considered to be the Babylonian Empire, the Medo-Persian Empire, the Greco-Macedonian Empire and the Roman Empire, but these four successive kingdoms were not the only ancient empires that ever existed. Certainly there were other empires that were also significantly influential and powerful, all of which conquered large territories and subjugated peoples and influenced the course of history.

So, why then does the Bible address these four specific kingdoms in succession?

It is because these empires had one thing in common.

They were predominantly in conflict with the Davidic dynasty and the promise made to Abraham.

And history bears this out.

Beginning with the 70 years of Babylonian domination that led to the continued domination and scattering of the commonwealth tribes in the times of three more successive Eurasian empires. Noting in particular that the period of the final empire played a role in the crucifixion and death of Jesus, and in the demise of the kingdom of Judah when the Romans crushed a political remnant of the commonwealth at Jerusalem.

Historically, then, the political nature of the promise is reflected in the conquests of four world-ruling empires—represented by the symbolism of Nebuchadnezzar's vision—that brought an apparent end to the Commonwealth of Israel and the Davidic dynasty. Therefore, we could say that from an historical and geopolitical view, and from the perspective of Nebuchadnezzar's vision, and from the context of the promise, that the main focus of the four successive empires was the Davidic dynasty and the final heir to David's throne, Jesus.

The significance of this focus was emphasized by the angel who said to Mary that: "he [Jesus] shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end (Lk. 1:32-33). (See also, Acts 2:29-32; 15:16.)

Obviously, then, the complete fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham is yet future, and it begins at a time when the kingdom of God, and its government, will be established by Christ at Jerusalem. It is this hope of the coming kingdom of God that prompted the disciples to ask Jesus if he would in their time "restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6.) (See also, Acts 3:19-22.)

Such a question by the disciples of Jesus points to the message that is the "gospel," that is the good news, which is

geopolitically a message about the coming kingdom of God and the future reestablishment of the throne of David. Therefore, as reasoned from Nebuchadnezzar's prophetic vision, this coming government of God will be in conflict with what will then understandably be a union of governments that are characteristically related to the four successive kingdoms that historically overthrew the commonwealth and the Davidic dynasty at Jerusalem.

The sense of this is seen in Nebuchadnezzar's vision, which implies that the toes of the great image represented kings—understandably ten kings—and so we read that: “in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever” (Dan. 2:44).

Thus, the vision of Nebuchadnezzar highlights for us the continuing political nature of the promise, which is foundational to a future territorial restoration of the Commonwealth of Israel beginning with the coming establishment of the kingdom of God.

Bringing us then to examine the conclusion of Nebuchadnezzar's vision.

For the king saw in his vision a stone “cut out of the mountain without hands,” which is understandably symbolic of a future kingdom, and this kingdom is depicted as overthrowing four successive empires even though they no longer exist, which means that the political characteristics of these ancient kingdoms may be associated with a future political union of governments that will be overthrown by the establishing of the coming kingdom of God.

Consequently, we may conclude that Nebuchadnezzar's vision creates an expectation of the restoration of the Commonwealth of Israel, and an expectation of the coming kingdom of God at

the return of Christ. Which means that the current political remnant of the kingdom of Judah in Palestine will continue to look for a messiah to restore a kingdom to all Israel, while within the Christian world there will be those who continue to look for the hope that is the coming kingdom of God. Compelling the adherents of both Judaism and Christianity to consider how current global political thinking will lead to a coming political unification of governments that will be prophetically tied to four ancient empires long since gone.

Then the prophet Daniel had a dream.

It was a dream of four great beasts, and the fourth beast was dreadful and frightening, and on its head he saw ten horns, and these ten horns represented ten kings.

Who then were these ten kings? Are they the same kings of Nebuchadnezzar's vision?  (andrewburdettewrites.com)
(Continued in part two of this series.)

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