

Nebuchadnezzar's Vision of a Prophetic Clock—Part One

Why does it seem that so many events, no matter how trivial they may be, are thought to have some prophetic significance? The tendency to over focus on the details of current events has caused some people to make a religion out of watching world events, rather than to understand the world from the perspective of the Bible.

According to what Jesus said there is good news coming, but we are without a doubt having many troubles in the world today. With thoughts running unrestrained about disease pandemics, global economic problems, terrorist activities, nuclear weapons upscaling, and many other issues, there are those who look at all these events and attempt to relate them to biblical prophecy and claim that Jesus' return is imminent.

And, indeed, it is expectedly soon relative to the timeline of human history.

But it is not imminent.

There is much yet to occur before the return of the Christ.

Now, a common practice within Christianity is to make reference to the visions recorded in

the Bible and to interpret them in the light of current world events, and a notable vision that gets a lot of play in this regard is the vision given to the ancient king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar II.

However, there are misunderstandings about Nebuchadnezzar's vision that has caused "prophecy watchers" to magnify current issues to a biblical scale while predicting the nearly immediate return of the Christ. The assumption is that Nebuchadnezzar's vision is simply a large overview of world history given in advance, while also assuming that some of these events are occurring even at this time.

These are false assumptions, and each needs to be addressed.

Now, human civilization is usually traced back to the land of Sumer, the biblical Shinar. There we find the supposed origin of civilization, of language, of writing and of empires. In this context of origins, we also find that there is a biblical record coinciding with secular history that relates to the area known as Sumer. The biblical record, however, deals with a perspective that brings the related events of Nebuchadnezzar's vision forward, in type, to explain some—but not all—events of the future.

From this part of the ancient world, we see the development of the first “empire,” and an empire usually encompasses a large area, even nations and peoples, and it is usually ruled by a single individual. The word “empire” has the same root word that gives us the word “emperor.”

Now, students of the Bible have been known to say that Babylon was the first world-ruling empire. But the term “world-ruling” does not correctly convey what would be helpful in understanding the course of world events. When we consider what an empire is from an historical perspective, we will have to come to the conclusion that the first world-ruling empire was hardly Babylon.

Historically, some consider that Sumer was the starting point for empires of which Assyria was a part. Following its collapse, there were city-states that each, in turn, dominated the others. In time, the Babylonians under Hammurabi created a transitory Babylonian Empire. Then we find that the Assyrians began to conquer lands starting near the beginning of the 13th century. After many conflicts, over many years, it became a powerful military empire by the time of Sargon II.

We might recall from the biblical account that under Sargon's reign, he completed the subjugation of the northern ten-tribed house

of Israel, many of whom were taken into captivity and dispersed into the southern regions of Central Asia and in the Near East.

Eventually the Assyrian Empire began to collapse by 612 BC with the capture of the city of Nineveh by the Medes (and Scythians) and Babylonians. Up until this period, the Assyrian Empire dominated the city of Babylon.

What followed the fall of Nineveh was the rise of Babylon.

Nabopolassar, the founder of the neo-Babylonian, or Chaldean Dynasty, expanded the kingdom, and later his son Nebuchadnezzar II became ruler of the Babylonian Empire. It was under his reign that Jerusalem was essentially torn down and its inhabitants taken into captivity like the other tribes of Commonwealth of Israel.

This is where we find an intriguing part of the Babylonian story in the Bible.

The biblical account tells us something about the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II in relationship to a man named Daniel. Many are familiar with the book of Daniel and the miraculous events that surrounded his life and the lives of his friends. Also familiar are the visions recorded by Daniel that occurred while he held an official position in the government of Babylon.

However, not every vision recorded in the book was given to Daniel. One important vision was given to Nebuchadnezzar.

This vision was about a tall image that had a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, a belly and thighs of brass, legs of iron, and feet that were a mixture of iron and clay, and it was destroyed when it was struck on the feet by a stone that enlarged to the size of a mountain, and in the end the winds blew the pieces of the image away. (Nebuchadnezzar had more than one dream as noted in Scripture he “dreamed dreams” related perhaps to this same vision.)

Now, in his haste to have the dream interpreted Nebuchadnezzar found that no one in his immediate court could help him. Then through a set of trying circumstances the prophet Daniel was quickly brought before the king to recall the vision and give its interpretation. The account in Daniel tells us that the head of gold represented the kingdom of Babylon starting with Nebuchadnezzar II.


After his kingdom, other kingdoms would arise to dominate, but would be inferior in some ways to the Babylonian Empire. Each empire in its turn would conquer and subjugate peoples, but the focus of the Bible is the Commonwealth of Israel, which had already been broken by the Assyrians and Babylonians.

Typically, students of the Bible know that the successive empires are thought to be the Babylonian Empire, the Persian Empire, the Greco-Macedonian Empire and the Roman Empire.

Giving us then reason to pause and consider what is so important about these particular empires. Because history makes it clear that these were not the only empires that have ever existed. There have been others that have conquered large territories, subjugated peoples and influenced the course of history. Some examples are the Mongol Empire (largest in the world), the Russian Empire, the German Empire, the British Empire, the Japanese Empire, the Aztec Empire and the Egyptian Empire.

This is only to name a few.

Certainly, many of these empires of the world were as influential and powerful, and some even more so than the Babylonian, Persian, Greco-Macedonian and Roman empires. Even Egypt, at an early time, was the center of world civilization after Sumer.

What, then, was so important about the image that Nebuchadnezzar saw in his vision? How may we understand its significance? 

(Continued in part two of this series.)