

God's Master Plan In Prophecy

Lesson 5 – Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream, the False Prophet, & the Mark of the Beast

Key Scriptures: Daniel 2:1-49 and Revelation 13:11-18

Introduction

The lessons that we have studied so far have all presented a broad view of the historical events leading into Daniel's seventieth week and the Great Tribulation. To be thorough, before we move on to studying the specifics of the events of the future, there are two other panoramic, prophetic visions that also need to be understood. The first, a dream that Daniel interpreted for the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, presents the end-time events from the viewpoint of authority. This lesson will cover that vision. The second vision that we will study in the next lesson is a vision that John recorded in the 4th and 5th chapters of Revelation that presents the end-time events from the viewpoint of redemption. Both provide additional information that helps us fully paint the revelation of God about the future of humanity.

King Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream

In the 2nd chapter of Daniel the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar knew that he had dreamt a dream from God but the next morning he could not remember the details of the dream. The king called in all of his magicians and so-called "spiritual advisors" and asked them to first tell him what the dream was and then the interpretation. These pagan pretenders, of course, could not tell him the dream and so Nebuchadnezzar ordered all of the men who claimed to be advisors to him in future events to be killed; this included the prophet Daniel. When the men came to collect Daniel and told him that he was going to die, Daniel was told the story of what had happened. Daniel asked the king for time to seek the face of his true, living God and promised that his God was the one that had given the dream and that also knew the interpretation. God did reveal to Daniel the dream and the interpretation and, as a result, Daniel and his Hebrew friends were elevated to higher positions in the government. Of course, all of the "spiritual advisors" who would have been killed were spared making Daniel, at least temporarily, a popular guy! Let's look at the dream itself:

Dan 2:31-33 "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. 32 "The head of that statue was made of fine gold, its breast and its arms of silver, its belly and its thighs of bronze, 33 its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay.

The king had seen a tremendous statue of a man in his dream. The statue shown with a bright light and was very powerful looking to behold. The image's head was of pure gold; the chest and arms were made of silver; the belly and thighs were made of brass; the legs were made of iron; the feet were a strange mixture of iron and clay.

Dan 2:34-35 "You continued looking until a stone was cut out without hands, and it struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and crushed them. 35 "Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were crushed all at the same time and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away so that not a trace of them was found. But the stone that struck the statue became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

In the dream, a stone that was cut out of rock "without hands" rolled into the image shattering it into thousands of fragments. The pieces and fragments of the statue were blown away by the wind so that no visible remains of the image was left, and then the stone became a great mountain that "filled the whole earth."

Dan 2:36 "This was the dream; now we will tell its interpretation before the king.

Luckily, we do not have to guess at the meaning of the image as Daniel gives us the correct interpretation. As we go through, notice the similarity between the initial fulfillment of the four beasts of the 7th chapter of Daniel.

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Dan 2:37-38 "You, O king, are the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, the strength and the glory; 38 and wherever the sons of men dwell, or the beasts of the field, or the birds of the sky, He has given them into your hand and has caused you to rule over them all. You are the head of gold.

Nebuchadnezzar had been given dominion over the known world unlike any other ruler had ever had, so the kingdom of Babylon was represented by the head of gold.

Dan 2:39 "After you there will arise another kingdom inferior to you, then another third kingdom of bronze, which will rule over all the earth.

The second kingdom that arose after the Babylonian empire that ruled "over all the earth," was the Medes and the Persians. Babylon fell to the Persians around 539 B.C. The silver chest and arms represented the Medes and the Persians. When Alexander the Great began conquering the world with the Grecian army, one of the empires that he attacked was the Medes and Persian empire. He defeated it completely in 331 B.C. Alexander the Great also ruled the entire known world and was thus the fulfillment of the belly and thighs of brass.

Dan 2:40 "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 pieces, it will crush and break all these in pieces.

There are great similarities between Daniel's interpretation of the fourth kingdom here and the fourth beast that Daniel saw in the visions of the beast.¹ Both are described as strong and both are said to "break in pieces" the earth.¹ The next world power that conquered the Grecians was the Roman empire. The Romans began conquering the world around 63 B.C. and are the fulfillment of the legs of iron.

Dan 2:41-42 "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. 42 "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.

The parallel with Daniel's four beasts and the first four kingdoms of Nebuchadnezzar's dream is obvious, but notice the parallel of the last kingdom symbolized by the feet of iron and clay and the great beast that John saw in the 13th chapter of Revelation. Daniel made a point to mention the toes of the image, and even though the scriptures do not give the number, the normal ten digits are implied. These correspond perfectly to the ten heads of John's beast. That beast represented a one-world government from which the Antichrist would arise and here we are given additional information. The kingdom would be divided in the way that iron and clay can be mixed but never completely unite together, therefore the kingdom would be somewhat strong but also inherently weak.

Dan 2:43 "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.

Here we have the interpretation of the clay: it represents a human element. The iron represented the Roman Empire. So the kingdom that is represented here is a curious, unstable mixture of the Roman Empire and the desires of men.

In history there is a kingdom that arose after the Roman Empire that matches perfectly with this description. It is called the "Holy Roman Empire." Although their names are similar, there is a vast difference between the Roman Empire and the Holy Roman Empire. The Roman Empire was primarily a political and military empire. Its cohesiveness and military unity fell around A.D. 300. The emperor after this fall, Charlemagne, realized that he needed more than military might to hold his kingdom together and began to try to initiate a national "church" with a common creed. The Roman Catholic church² can trace its roots and beginnings to the many church councils throughout this time of history. Unfortunately, much of the Apostolic doctrine was changed throughout this era because the majority of ministers cared more for establishing a creed that everyone could agree to, than for interpreting the Word of God correctly. This period of time marked a time of transition from the Roman Empire to the Holy Roman Empire and as the Catholic pope grew in power, it became increasingly obvious to the rulers of the day that they needed the support of the Catholic church to be able to rule their kingdom.

¹ Daniel 7:7, 23-24.

² By simple definition, the word, "catholic" means "universal."

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In A.D. 800, Pope Leo III crowned a man named Charlemagne and proclaimed him to be the "first emperor of the Holy Roman Empire." What this was supposed to mean was that the emperor and the pope would rule in tandem, with Charlemagne being the governmental leader and the pope being the spiritual leader. In modern terms, it was supposed to be a perfect blend of "church and state." So the difference between the Roman Empire and the Holy Roman Empire is that the Roman Empire was primarily a secular government based upon political agendas and military might with one leader, but the Holy Roman Empire was a union of two leaders: the current pope and the current emperor. In theory, the pope was to use his spiritual influence to reinforce the emperor and the emperor was to use his political influence to reinforce the desires of the pope. Symbolically speaking it was a union of iron and clay: they were somewhat mixed and yet it never really worked because the concept of the Holy Roman Empire sounded good in theory but always failed after a period of time. Eventually, the political desires of the emperor would outweigh the pope and the church would become extremely political in nature, or the pope's agendas would outweigh the emperor's desires and the government would begin to enforce religious beliefs through might. The Middle Ages (A.D. 600- A.D. 1500) were characterized by the rise and fall of the Holy Roman Empire. At the time of writing of this lesson, it has not yet been revived.

Dan 2:44 "In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever.

The last stone represented the kingdom of God that would be set up and never destroyed – the coming kingdom of God will break down and rule all of the other kingdoms and will stand forever!

Dan 2:45 "Inasmuch as you saw that a stone was cut out of the mountain without hands and that it crushed the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold, the great God has made known to the king what will take place in the future; so the dream is true and its interpretation is trustworthy."

The stone that was "cut out of the mountain without hands" represents Jesus Christ.³ That the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands represents the fact that it is a spiritual work of God.⁴ Daniel also said that the stone would rise up into a mountain that would fill the earth. Notice the similarity between this prophecy and the following one in Isaiah:

Isa 2:2 Now it will come about that In the last days The mountain of the house of the Lord Will be established as the chief of the mountains, And will be raised above the hills; And all the nations will stream to it.

There are hundreds of other scriptures that bear out the fact that the last kingdom to be established on earth will be the Lord's kingdom! Hallelujah: we are on the winning side!⁵ The interesting point of this dream is that the Holy Roman Empire will be the kingdom in power immediately before Jesus Christ returns the second time to set up His kingdom. For that to be true, it would have to mean that the Holy Roman Empire will rise again in some form.

The False Prophet and the Mark of the Beast

In our most recent lesson, we studied the first ten verses of the 13th chapter of Revelation and how that they had described the Antichrist's rise to power through a one-world government. Now that we understand the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, let's go back and cover the last few verses of John's vision:

Rev 13:11 Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb and he spoke as a dragon.

A second person rose in leadership along with the Antichrist, and the two main characteristics of this person was that he had "horns like a lamb" and yet "he spoke as a dragon." The contrast in symbolism should be fairly obvious to anyone who is familiar with the scriptures, for the lamb in the Old Testament was a common sacrifice which foreshadowed Jesus

³ Genesis 49:20 prophesied that the Messiah would be the shepherd, the "stone of Israel." Psalms 118:22, I Peter 2:4-8 refer to Jesus Christ as the chief "corner stone." Jesus referred to Himself this way in Matthew 21:42, Mark 12:10, and Luke 20:17. Peter also applied the concept of the "stone" being represented by Jesus Christ in Acts 4:11.

⁴ See 2 Corinthians 5:1.

⁵ We will study this coming kingdom of the Messiah more thoroughly in future lessons about the Millennial Reign.

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Christ, the lamb of God,⁶ and the dragon, as we learned in the previous chapter, represents Satan. In every vision that we have studied, horns have represented authority and kings. This man appeared to look as if he had authority with Jesus Christ, but in actuality spoke with the voice of Satan so he is referred to by scholars as “the false prophet.”

The rise of the Antichrist and this second leader, the false prophet, coincides with the Holy Roman Empire perfectly! The one world-government will have two leaders working in tandem, one a political leader and one a spiritual leader. They will use each other’s gifts to support the other. This explains how that the Holy Roman Empire will be the last kingdom ruling the earth when Jesus Christ comes again to set up His kingdom: the one-world government of the Antichrist will be a revived “Holy Roman Empire” with a blend of church and state. The first time the Holy Roman Empire began the Pope of the Roman Catholic Church was the “spiritual leader.” It is then very probable that whoever is the Pope at this time will also be the false prophet that appears to have the authority of Jesus Christ, but in fact speaks for the dragon!ⁱⁱ

Rev 13:12 He exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence. And he makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed.

The False Prophet uses all of the political power of the Antichrist and decrees that all of the earth should worship him and in this way, the Antichrist will use the Roman Catholic Church to cause the world to give him credence. Many people would not be fooled just because a political leader were to call himself deity, but if the Pope agrees with him, millions of people who trust in the Catholic church will be deceived!

Rev 13:13 He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down out of heaven to the earth in the presence of men.

Even more convincing, the False Prophet will be able to perform great miracles and wonders from heaven, even calling down fire from heaven in public! Remember at first the Antichrist will come in peace for three and a half years and many people will not be able to resist a supposed man of peace who is supported by a miracle working prophet. But the true church of God will not be deceived, because they will know that any man that exalts himself as God, is of Satan!

Rev 13:14 And he deceives those who dwell on the earth because of the signs which it was given him to perform in the presence of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who had the wound of the sword and has come to life.

The false prophet will use his power to convince people to listen to him and then tell them that they should make an idol replica of the Antichrist. Idolatry is in direct rebellion to the teachings of scripture.⁷ The Catholic Church has made the worship of saints and idols so common place today, that few people will realize the seriousness of what they are doing: the false doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church are paving the way and desensitizing people to the doctrine of the Antichrist which is to come!

Rev 13:15 And it was given to him to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast would even speak and cause as many as do not worship the image of the beast to be killed.

Not only will the False Prophet lead the people into idolatry, but he will be able to somehow cause the image to come to life and speak.ⁱⁱⁱ Not only that, but he will use the political power of the Antichrist that those who refuse to worship him or his image will be killed! Interestingly, severe persecution against those who did agree with the Catholic church’s ideology was the same result of the last Holy Roman Empire in the Middle Ages.

Rev 13:16-17 And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free men and the slaves, to be given a mark on their right hand or on their forehead, 17 and he provides that no one will be able to buy or to sell, except the one who has the mark, either the name of the beast or the number of his name.

In addition to a one-world government and one-world religion, the Antichrist will also try to set up a universal money system. Only those who are willing to receive the “mark” of this economic system will be able to buy or sell! Before we discuss this system, remember that although it will be the will of the Antichrist for everyone in the world to receive this

⁶ See John 1:29.

⁷ Exodus 20:3-6; Leviticus 26:1; Deuteronomy 27:15; I Corinthians 6:9-10; 10:7, 20; I John 5:21; Revelation 21:8; 22:15 are just a few of the many scripture that forbid idol worship.

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mark and worship him, we have seen in previous lessons that he is not in complete control of the entire world. There, no doubt, will be individuals and possibly even nations that refuse to receive the system.

There has been much speculation about what the "mark of the beast" will be. Keep in mind a couple of points as we give suggestions: it will take more than seven years to register the entire world – of six billion people plus – into an integrated economic system; the system will have to make logical sense for people to cooperate; anyone who takes the mark will also have to worship and pledge allegiance to the Antichrist as we just studied.

The interpretation of the "mark of the beast" that makes the most sense is an imbedded computer chip system that carries all pertinent information about an individual including bank accounts, birth information, and medical history. Because the chip would have to be able to be scanned through the skin, it would need to be placed in an area where the skin is relatively thin and both the back of the hand and the forehead are such places. Even today, chips are already being injected into pets such as registered dogs to identify their pedigree and owners. There are several companies that have experimented with implanting chips within humans, but the idea has not yet been fully implemented. Today, most people use a "debit card" which with a simple scan will deduct the money from one's account electronically and many credit card companies are beginning to use "smart cards" with an imbedded chip on the card with financial information and credit histories of the consumer. The military for years has used such a card and chip on its identification cards to keep track of soldier's medical histories, drug allergies, and personal information such as next of kin. After the tragedy of the World Trade Towers, many articles appeared throughout the country expressing the need for people to have such chips implanted. "The bodies would have been so much easier to identify," was the way that one article put it. These things in themselves are not the "mark of the beast," but show that we are undoubtedly getting closer and closer to such a system.^{iv} The technology is now available and the idea of a cashless society makes perfect sense, in that it will eliminate tax fraud, money laundering, bad checks, and severely hamper drug sales.

Rev 13:18 Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for the number is that of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty-six.

Our only other clue to this system is that the "number of the beast" will be the "number of a man" and will be 666. I have heard many wild theories as to what is the fulfillment of this number. Rather than try to give you a list of wild theories of how somebody's name has three names of six letters, let me give you my opinion:

In our society almost everyone has a social security number. It is the way that the IRS and the government keeps track of us. If a person does not have a social security number, then they cannot get a job, enroll in college, or get a loan and they officially do "not exist." The problem with the social security number is that the system is limited to how many people it can number. It is a system of 3-2-4, in that every number has three numbers followed by two numbers followed by four numbers. A typical social security number might be something like 513-34-6424. Even if alphabet letters are used, one day soon we will run out of numbers. The Antichrist will not believe that he will lose power in just seven years, and in his mind, his kingdom will last forever so he will prepare a system that will be able to last much longer than a few thousand years. I think the economic system of the mark of the beast will be a numbering system that replaces the social security numbers which uses a 6 number - 6 number - 6 number system. In other words, a typical number might look like 534672-997331-833521. It will not need to be memorized as it will be stored on the implanted chip! It is the "number of a man" because it will be the number that identifies a person as a functioning member of the new-world society! To realize the importance of becoming a part of this system and taking this mark, we need only to fast forward to the fate of those who take it:

Rev 14:9-11 Then another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, 10 he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. 11 "And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name."

Everlasting damnation awaits those who take the mark and worship the beast! Even though it will sound harmless and even though the false prophet will be convincing, we must not be deceived! We must also take this knowledge and warn people against joining themselves to this system – the revived "Holy Roman Empire" will be anything but "holy" and will serve to usher in the will of Satan into the world!

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Conclusion

Before we end this lesson, let's go back to the 7th chapter of Daniel and discuss the remaining verses. We learned about what the four beast represented and that the "little horn" represented the Antichrist. We ended at verse 21:

Dan 7:21-22 "I kept looking, and that horn was waging war with the saints and overpowering them 22 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.

Notice the parallel here between the Rock that comes and destroys the Holy Roman Empire in Nebuchadnezzar's dream and the "Ancient of Days" which destroys the reign of the Antichrist! Both are references to the coming kingdom of Jesus Christ! Both the vision of the 2nd chapter of Daniel and the vision of the 7th chapter are the same basic story with different details.

Dan 7:23-24 "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. 24 '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.

Again we are told that the Antichrist will arise out of this kingdom. Remember that the kingdom represented the Roman Empire, and what we are seeing is a portrait of the Holy Roman Empire.

Dan 7:25 '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.

The Antichrist will "speak out against the Most High." This harmonizes with the events of the Abomination of Desolation where he claims to be God! He shall also fight against and wear down the "saints of the most High!" As we have seen from the 12th chapter of Revelation, this refers to both natural Israel and the Apostolic Church. The phrase "times and laws" here refers to religious ordinances and so it is obvious that the Antichrist will change religious rules and doctrines at will for, after all, he will claim to speak with the authority of God! All of this harmonizes with everything that we have learned about the Antichrist so far.

Notice also how long the Antichrist will reign: "a time, times and half a time." That is "a year and two years and half a year" or three and a half years. Once again we see the reference to the final three and half years of the Great Tribulation and without a shadow of a doubt see how all of these prophecies are slightly different views of the same story and period.

Dan 7:26 'But the court will sit for judgment, and his dominion will be taken away, annihilated and destroyed forever.

God's judgment and decision will be the final victor, and God has already determined that the Antichrist will not win but will be destroyed! This correlates with the rock of Nebuchadnezzar's dream perfectly!

Dan 7:27 'Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him.'

This is a direct reference to the future time of the Millennial Reign when Jesus Christ will set up a kingdom of righteousness upon the earth: the "saints of the Highest One" will be "given" the kingdom and we will rule and reign with Him! It is a scriptural fact that the Apostolic Church will rule and reign upon the earth with Jesus Christ in the Millennial Reign and the term "saints" in this verse refers to the Church and not to natural Israel. But notice that in verse 21, the same word "saint,"⁸ is used and it is stated that the Antichrist will fight against them! If the Rapture takes place before the Great Tribulation as so many believe, then how can the Antichrist fight against a church that is not here? Remember: there is a difference between the Great Tribulation and the Wrath of God. I am not saying that the church will go through judgment and wrath from God, but that it will go through persecution from the Antichrist! If the church is not still upon

⁸ These words are the same also in the original Hebrew.

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earth at this time, then how can he "wear out the saints of the most high?" If the church is not here at this three and a half year period of tribulation, then how will Satan turn and persecute those who have the testimony of Jesus Christ?⁹ These are just some of what to me are many scriptural difficulties and questions that arise when one believes a pre-tribulational end-time view.

Dan 7:28 " At this point the revelation ended. As for me, Daniel, my thoughts were greatly alarming me and my face grew pale, but I kept the matter to myself."

The angel then ended this particular vision, but the effect of seeing and hearing these vision alarmed Daniel and forever changed him. One of the amazing things about Daniel is that he was able to stay faithful to God even living in evil kingdoms that did not fear God and I believe that one of the things that forever changed his life was the understanding of prophecy that God had given him. In short, Daniel had been shown the final events and knew that he wanted to be faithful to the winning side, and so must we must remember in times of temptations and trials that Jesus Christ is the winning side who will reign forever. To give in to the pressure to conform to this world is to allow ourselves to be numbered with the eternal losers, Satan and his future government, but no appeal of the world is worth losing out with God!

⁹ See Revelation 12:17.

Endnotes

The Roman Empire, upon conquering as much of the world as it desired, immediately split politically that conquest up into divisions or zones. Also, those lands that the Roman Empire did not want to conquer or annex were known collectively as inferior nations and so the Roman Empire literally “broke into pieces” the earth.

ⁱⁱ It is also interesting that many well-known Catholic prophecy writers predict a future evil Pope (see the many books of Malachi Martin if you are interested in this studying this subject further).

ⁱⁱⁱ When one considers the level of ridiculous “signs” that the Catholic church claims as signs that their faith is correct lately, from seeing Jesus in stains on the road, in Cheetos, and in waffles, to supposed “blood running from statues” it is easy to see how that this sign will easily deceive many of the superstitious Catholics. All of this other stuff is just getting them ready for the ultimate deception!

^{iv} The latest development is the introduction of the U.S. “National I.D. Card.” This will at first supplement other forms of identification like Driver’s Licenses and Passports, but will eventually take their place. It will have a microchip that stores such pertinent information. This is not the mark of the beast but the condensing of many forms of I.D. into one card is paving the way for a future system: we are getting closer and closer!