

# Daniel 2:39

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*Nebuchadnezzar's dream reveals that after Babylon, an inferior kingdom will rise to prominence (Medo-Persia), and then a third kingdom will rise (Greece), ruling over all the earth.*

*After you, Daniel tells the king, there will arise another kingdom inferior to you. This is the Medo-Persian empire represented by the chest and arms of silver. The two arms represent the two nations (Media and Persia) that conquered Babylon in 539 B.C. While the first five chapters of Daniel are during the Babylonian empire, chapters 6, 9, and 10-12 are during the Medo-Persian empire.*

The last Babylonian king was Belshazzar, grandson of Nebuchadnezzar. In Daniel 5, God writes a message on the wall which Daniel translates for Belshazzar, essentially saying, "You have been weighed and measured, and found wanting. Your kingdom will be divided and given to others." That night Belshazzar was killed by the Medo-Persian army besieging the city of Babylon. Authority over the city of Babylon was given to Darius the Mede, who was possibly a governor under the reign of King Cyrus, or possibly another name for Cyrus himself. Cyrus's Persian empire was even greater in scope than the Babylonian empire. Cyrus himself is remembered as a tolerant king who adapted to or allowed cultures to thrive rather than crush them. The Bible speaks well of him. God calls Cyrus His anointed and declares that because of Him, Cyrus is able to conquer and accumulate great wealth, which is ultimately for the sake of God's people (Isaiah 45).

God's purpose with Cyrus was to complete His punishment of the Jewish people, to bring them home from exile, and to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple:

"It is I who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd!  
And he will perform all My desire.'  
And he declares of Jerusalem, 'She will be built,'  
And of the temple, 'Your foundation will be laid.'"  
(Isaiah 44:28)

This was fulfilled within the first year of Cyrus's reign over the conquered Babylon and the Jewish exiles therein (Ezra 1:1-4). Cyrus sent a proclamation throughout his kingdom that God Himself had appointed him to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, thus he allowed the Jews to return to Judah and fulfill this restoration. Cyrus even commanded the neighbors of the exiled Jews to help them on their way, "'let the men of that place support him with silver and gold, with goods and cattle, together with a freewill offering for the house of God which is in Jerusalem'" (Ezra 1:4). Furthermore, he gives back the plundered Temple plates and cups which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from Jerusalem during his conquest, which were stored in Babylon and used inappropriately by Belshazzar the night of his death (Ezra 1:5-11, Daniel 1:2, Daniel 5:2-4).

However, Nebuchadnezzar's dream saw this kingdom of the Medo-Persians as silver compared to the golden head which represented the Babylonian empire. Daniel outright says that this kingdom will be *inferior* to Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom. This is thought by some to mean it was morally inferior, since the empire itself was large and powerful. None of the Persian kings acknowledged God as the true Sovereign over all of creation, as Nebuchadnezzar did (Daniel 4:34-35).

However given the emphasis on the description of Nebuchadnezzar's absolute authority, it seems likely God is referring to the extent of imperial power, noting that Nebuchadnezzar's power was substantially greater than his successors. Nebuchadnezzar was an absolute authority, having the power of life and death. The Persian empire was known for its vast bureaucracy. As we shall see, King Darius will not be able to unravel a law he agreed to in the episode of Daniel and the lion's den (Daniel 6). Cyrus's rule did not last long, certainly not as long as Nebuchadnezzar ruled Babylon. Furthermore, the line of succession after him was a bloody, chaotic one. Internal conflict was prevalent among Mede and Persian rulers. Division would follow even in the Greek empire which conquered the Persian empire, where Alexander the Great led a stunningly victorious campaign, but died soon after. His family was killed by his generals, and his empire divided into four parts. Again substantially inferior in power to that of Babylon.

The lust for kingship brutally divided Medo-Persia. After Cyrus came his son Cambyses II, and then the brief reign of another son, Smerdis. Darius the Great succeeded the sons of Cyrus, possibly assassinating Cambyses and almost certainly killing Smerdis, the legitimate heir. Darius and other conspirators claimed that Smerdis was already dead, and that an imposter ascended the throne, and thus was justifiably slain by the conspirators. Darius the Great went on to rule the Persian empire and increase its territory for many years. He was responsible for creating the Behistun Inscription, an impressive carving on the side of Mt. Behistun in modern-day Iran, boasting of Darius' ancestry, the rebellions he defeated, and the lands he ruled over, including Greece. Greece rose up against him again toward the end of his life, and while planning his campaign to subdue the rebellion, Darius died of an illness.

Darius's son was Xerxes. In the book of Esther, Xerxes is called by the Hebrew name Ahasurus. He chooses a Jewish girl named Esther to be his queen, who helps to undo a plot to exterminate the Jewish people (Esther 7).

Artaxerxes, son of Xerxes, played a role in sanctioning Nehemiah's efforts to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2) as well as Ezra's journey to Judah, helping to fund the spiritual reformation needed for the Jewish people who were practicing idolatry yet again in the restored city of Jerusalem (Ezra 7:21-26).

Xerxes continued his father's campaign against the Greek states, yet suffered many humiliating defeats. As mighty as the Persian empire was, its forces were defeated twice in its attempt to dominate Greece. The first Greco-Persian war was decided at the battle of Marathon in 490 BC. Darius returned to Persia to lick his wounds and devise a second invasion, but died before he could complete it. However, his plans were continued by his son Xerxes, which he would carry out a decade later, in 480 BC. This second war led to the famous battle of Thermopylae against the 300 Spartans, where the Persians were held back for several days, before defeating the

Spartans and marching into Greece. However, Xerxes was soundly defeated in the naval battle of Salamis, preventing conquest of the Greek city-states. His invasion was truly ended a year later at the land battle of Plataea. From that point on, the Greeks were able to grow in power, and were no longer on the defensive against the mighty Persian empire. The axis of world power shifted from east to west, and has been so ever since.

The Persian empire lasted roughly 200 years from approximately 539 B.C. to 330 B.C.

After conquering the Medo-Persian empire in the 330s B.C under the leadership of Alexander the Great, the Grecian empire was established. He subjugated the known world in roughly eleven years, then died of a disease while returning to Greece.

In Daniel 8, Daniel experiences a vision during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar's grandson, Belshazzar, which again points to the coming empire of Medo-Persia, and how a Greek king will conquer it (Daniel 8:3-8). Alexander the Great is famous not only for destroying the Persian empire, but for how quickly he did it (in roughly eleven years). Daniel 8:5 describes how the Greeks (represented in the vision by a goat) would come from the west (Greece is west of Persia, modern-day Iran) without touching the ground (the flying goat represents Alexander's speedy conquest). Part of his strategy involved quickly moving his army from town to town, demanding submission or death. And it worked. With "mighty wrath" Alexander conquered Persia, for the Greeks continued to despise the Persians for the past few hundred years of warfare (Daniel 8:6). He "struck the ram [Persia] and shattered his two horns, and the ram had no strength to withstand him" (Daniel 8:7).

Alexander gloried in his cunning and his military power; he claimed he was a descendant of Heracles and Achilles, he "magnified himself exceedingly," as Daniel foresaw, but "as soon as he was mighty," the large horn on the goat's head was broken, and "four conspicuous horns" grew in its place (Daniel 8:8). Alexander died at the height of his victory; his empire was barely born, his enemies defeated, Greece was avenged against Persia, and then he died at the young age of 32. It's possible he was poisoned, or merely succumbed to an illness, but he had no successor in place to rule his conquered lands. The fledgling Grecian empire was divided by Alexander's four generals, just as the four horns grew from the large broken horn in Daniel's vision.

In Nebuchadnezzar's dream, Greece is represented by the torso *of bronze*. Daniel told the king that this empire would *rule over all the earth*. This empire lasted for roughly 300 years and ruled over vast amounts of the known world at the time. Greek became a common language in all of these various countries and cultures, even into Jesus' time, which is why the New Testament was written in Greek.

Daniel is telling this history of the world to Nebuchadnezzar well before the events transpire. Because Daniel was able to tell Nebuchadnezzar his dream, as well as the interpretation, it proves Daniel's revelation is divine. The events predicted in Daniel have transpired just as described. That gives us ample confidence that the remaining events will also occur just as predicted.

## **Biblical Text**

**<sup>39</sup> After you there will arise another kingdom inferior to you, then another third kingdom of bronze, which will rule over all the earth.**