

The Middle East & Prophecy #5

by: Ronald L. Dart

What can be done to reform the Arab world? That was the cover of a Newsweek magazine. What could be done to reform the Arab world? I couldn't believe that they put that title on the cover. Inside, they changed the title of the article to "How to save the Arab world." It wasn't that I thought that the Arab world needed reforming or saving, but what surprised me was the condescending tone of the title that Newsweek would put on the cover of their magazine.

When one speaks of the Arab world one is tacitly speaking of Islam, even though many of the people who hold to Islam are not Arabs. But Islam is an Arabic religion. The Koran is written in Arabic, and according to the faithful, it can only be rightly understood in Arabic.

So Newsweek was talking about reforming well over 1 billion people. That is some reform project!

The article was really about U.S. foreign-policy and it didn't shed a whole lot of light on the problem. The reason that we're in the mess that we are in is that the world has been trying to bring the Arab world into the 21st century and the Arab world doesn't want to go. Oh a lot of the leaders want to move forward, but the great mass of their populations, don't!

The Islamic faith rose in the deserts of Arabia, and it took root because it was suited to the people, the place, and the time. The faith, if one can call it that, was spread throughout much of the known world by armed conquest. The Muslim system of belief has not adapted well to the modern world. It is still the fastest growing religion in the world, but it is at war with the world at the same time. The bad news for Islam is that the world has been winning and what I mean by that is the economic system and the cultural structure of the rest of the world has been steadily encroaching on some of the most basic ideas of the Koran.

This is terrifying to the mullahs of Islam who have been unable to make the adaptation that the modern world requires. How does one become well-to-do financially and still remain a good Muslim? What happens when a Muslim society sprouts a McDonald's restaurant? All of these things are cultural issues that become critically important in a religion that really hasn't made a lot of progress in many parts of the world economically for its people.

A Strategy for Living

Now Christianity also tells us 'not to love the world nor the things that are in the world', but Christianity and Judaism still have a strategy for living in the world, no matter where the world goes. Islam seems not to have a strategy quite like that.

If the world goes to war, the Judeo-Christian religions adapt and flourish. If the world is at peace and prosperity, the Judeo-Christian Bible tells us how to live in that world too.

Individual Freedom

When I think about the fundamental differences between Islam, Judaism and Christianity, I have to conclude that one of the greatest differences is the emphasis on individual freedom in Christianity and Judaism, an emphasis that seems strangely missing in Islam as practiced. Islam is not a religion that is well-suited for individual liberty. And as the desire for freedom and self-determination continues to spread throughout the world, Islam will continue to find itself threatened by Western religion and Western values. And the world will continue to find itself at war with Islam, whether it wants to be or not.

Prophecy and the Last Days

And that leaves us to wonder how the battle will ultimately play itself out. The Bible doesn't tell us as much as we would like to know about the future, but it does address the future, all the way to the last days of this age of man.

It may well tell us more than we think it does.

To often people open the Bible and try to read the future or interpret the prophecy without first understanding the past, and that's why we have been talking about who owns the land of Palestine and who the people are that we read about when we do open the Bible to the prophecies of the last days.

Up till now we have concerned ourselves solely with the descendants of one Abraham and how the history of those descendants of Abraham affects the conflicts going on in the Middle East right now. The next question has to do with the other major players in the prophecies in the Bible, the ones who are not related to Abraham. There's quite a lot in the Bible about these people, ranging from the early times all the way to the end time.

A Skeleton for Prophecy and History

There is one remarkable prophecy in Daniel, in one chapter, that provides the skeleton upon which all future prophecy and history will be built. This prophecy, in that one chapter, covers human history, from the days of Daniel to the return of Christ and the establishment of the kingdom of God.

Along about 605 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon besieged Jerusalem and took the city. Jeremiah the prophet had been telling them what was coming for over 20 years but no one really listened to Jeremiah. When Nebuchadnezzar came in, he didn't take everyone captive or everything out of the city, he just made Jerusalem tributary. He took some of the accouterments of the Temple home with him and put them in his own Temple.

Ark of the Covenant

It is of passing interest that there is no mention made here of the 'Ark of the Covenant', when Nebuchadnezzar took these things with him. The Ark was not taken to Babylon, or that would have been recorded in the Bible, nor would he have failed to take it to Babylon if it had been there for him to take. Which leads us to believe that the Ark had been hidden before the city was taken. And since that time, the Ark has passed into legend. Presumably the priests who hid it have all died without passing on the secret to anyone.

Young Men Taken From Jerusalem To Babylon

The king also took some of the best and brightest young men from Jerusalem to educate in the language and the culture of Babylon. Among them was a prophet named Ezekiel, whom we have met, and a man named Daniel. The prophet Jeremiah was left behind in the conquered city.

Now these were all very young men and at the beginning of their ministries. I don't know why I hadn't focused on it until recently but every prophet, it seems like, was at the beginning of his ministry, and very, very young. Samuel was just a boy, and Isaiah himself because of the length of time that he prophesied, around 50 years total, had to be a young man when he started. Jeremiah refers to himself as a child. Ezekiel was about 30 when he started prophesying and Daniel and his companions were young as well

Nebuchadnezzar Had a Dream

About two years into this captivity Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that was so vivid it woke him up, and he couldn't go back to sleep. So he did the logical thing that a king would do, he woke everyone else up. He had all those magicians and astrologers and sorcerers brought in and he told them about his dream.

We take up the story in Daniel chapter 2 verse three, "And the king said to them, I have dreamed a dream, and my spirit was troubled to know the dream. Then the Chaldeans spoke to the king in Syriack, O king, live for ever: tell your servants the dream, and we will show you the interpretation."

Now the king was no fool. He knew that any artful fortuneteller could make up a story to fit a dream easily. You could do that, couldn't you? A friend tells you his dream and you could sit down and figure out some meaning to it, and tell him, "This is the significance of your dream my friend" and interpret his dream for him.

"The king answered and said to the Chaldeans, "Well, the thing is gone from me: if you will not make known to me the dream, and the interpretation, you shall be cut in pieces, and your houses shall be made a dunghill. If you show me the dream, and the interpretation, you shall receive of me gifts and rewards and great honor: so show me the dream and the interpretation."

"You can't just tell me what the dream means. I want to know that you know what you're doing, so I can know that you have some powers here. I want you to tell me what the dream itself was." Now I really don't think he'd forgotten his dream. It might become a little faint, but the fact is, this dream was so vivid that he was never going to forget it, but he didn't want tell them that he knew.

"They answered again and said, Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation of it. {8} The king answered and said, I know of a certainty that you are stalling for time, because you see the thing is gone from me. {9} But if you will not make known to me the dream, there is just one thing for you: you have prepared lying and corrupt words to speak before me till the time be changed, therefore tell me the dream, then I will know that your interpretation is valid."

There are some heavy politics going on here. The king wants his dream interpreted correctly, but he would just as soon have these men dead. There can be very little doubt that these magicians were a politically powerful class in Babylon at that time and Nebuchadnezzar was seizing an opportunity to remove them from the scene. Obviously, he said, you're stalling for time, till the time be changed. There was some event and we are not told what it was. There was some event in the future that they were stalling for and he wasn't going to let them get away with it.

"The Chaldeans answered before the king, and said, There is not a man upon the earth that can show the king's matter: therefore there is no king, lord, nor ruler, that asked such things of any magician, or astrologer, or Chaldean" (Daniel 2:10). Of course not. They couldn't do it anyway, they were fakes and so nobody had ever asked them for that.

They said, "It is a rare thing that the king requires, and there is none other that can show it before the king, except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh. The king was furious and he commanded to destroy all the wise men of Babylon." "Kill them all" said the king.

Now I can't help but believe that the king was looking for an opportunity to get rid of a political class of enemies, pure and simple, and he thought he had them.

Daniel 2:13 "The decree went forth that the wise men should be killed; and they looked for Daniel and his fellows to be killed along with them because Daniel was among the wise men of Babylon."

"Then Daniel answered with counsel and wisdom to Arioch the captain of the king's guard, which was gone forth to slay the wise men of Babylon: Why is the decree so hasty from the king? Then Arioch made the thing known to Daniel. {16} Then Daniel went in, and desired of the king that he would give him a little time, and that he would show the king the interpretation."

He didn't come in there and say give me a little time, and I'll tell you what it means. He said I will show you the whole thing, as you have asked."

"Then Daniel went to his house (verse 17), and made the thing known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, who were his companions." These, by the way, are the young men, whose Babylonian names were Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

The Dream Revealed to Daniel

Daniel asked his three friends, "That they would desire mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret; that Daniel and his fellows would not have to die with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. Then was the secret revealed to Daniel in a night vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven."

Now I wouldn't be fair to Daniel if I didn't read to you his response to what God had given him. In verse 20 of Daniel 2 he answered and said, "Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his: And he changes the times and the seasons: he removes kings, and he sets up kings: he gives wisdom to the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding: He reveals the deep and secret things: he knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with him. I thank You and praise You, O God of my fathers; who have given me wisdom and might, and have now made me know what we asked of You, For You have now made known to us the king's matter."

Daniel Reveals the Dream

It was terrific for Daniel and it was a marvelous thing that God showed him, so Daniel went to the captain of the guard, and he said "I have the answer for the king. Take me to him. I will show him the interpretation. Now when Daniel came in before the king, the captain said to the king, "I have found a man of the captives of Judah, who will make known to the king the interpretation." The king answered and said to Daniel, "Are you able to tell me the dream and the interpretation? Or are you here just like the rest to tell me what it means and to makeup a story. Daniel answered in the presence of the king, "The secret which the king has demanded cannot be shown by the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, or soothsayers" (verse 28) , "But there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and makes known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. Your dream, and the visions of your head upon your bed, are these."

I can imagine the king's eyes are getting wide by this time, because Daniel is making the opening statement to tell him what he actually dreamed, when there was obviously no way that Daniel could've known that. Only God could have revealed it.

Verse 29: "As for you, O king, your thoughts came into your mind while you were on your bed, about what would come to pass after this."

He was lying in bed at night, pondering, probably his own political situation, probably considering his enemies, considering what he might do and worrying about what the future might hold.

"And He said, God reveals secrets and makes known to you what shall come to pass. Now I want you to understand this, king Nebuchadnezzar, the secret has not been revealed to me for any wisdom that I have, it is for their sakes, that shall make known the interpretation to the king, and that you may know the thoughts of your heart."

The Great Image

And then follows the vision, the dream, that Nebuchadnezzar had.

Now Daniel says in chapter 2 and verse 31, ""You, O king, were watching; and behold, a great image! This great image, whose splendor was excellent, stood before you; and its form was awesome. "This image's head was of fine gold, its breast and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of brass, its legs of iron, its feet part iron and part clay." By this time, I imagine Nebuchadnezzar's jaw has dropped open, because Daniel is telling him what he actually saw in his dream.

Verse 34, "You watched till a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image on its feet that were of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. "Then the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, all were smashed and crushed, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floor; the wind blew the whole thing away so that no place was found for them. And the stone that smote the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth." What in the world did that mean?

Daniel Interprets the Dream

Daniel said, that's the dream and we will tell the interpretation thereof before the king. "Hear O king is what this vision really means."

So in his dream Nebuchadnezzar had seen a great big statue with a gold head, breast and arms of silver, belly and thighs of brass, legs of iron, and feet of iron and clay. And he watched a huge stone smash the thing into powder and saw it get blown away with the breeze. What did it mean?

Daniel explains in Daniel 2 and verse 37, ""You, O king, are a king of kings. For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory."

Who gave Nebuchadnezzar power and strength in Babylon? God did!

"Wherever the children of men dwell, or the beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven, He has given them into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all." Nebuchadnezzar was a great world ruling emperor!

"You are this head of gold." Now if Daniel had stopped interpreting this dream, right here, I think you and I could sit down and figure it out. Well, okay, the breast and arms are of silver, silver is inferior to gold so what's going to follow Nebuchadnezzar is going to be of an

inferior quality, perhaps his son, perhaps someone who would follow him on the throne would be a lesser man. That would make sense wouldn't it? But Daniel said "No, not exactly. It would be an inferior kingdom that's going to follow you, Nebuchadnezzar."

Daniel says in verse 39, "After you shall arise another kingdom inferior to you; then another, a third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth." This thing is going to be big as it comes.

Now historically, we know what happened. We know that the kingdom that followed Babylon was the Persian Empire and it was a great empire in its own right, but nothing quite like Babylon. The next inferior kingdom was Greece, as Alexander conquered virtually the whole known world. All the kingdoms of Babylon and Persia, along with everything else that got in his way. He finally sat down and wept because there were no more worlds to conquer.

So we know basically and historically what happened, and the significance of Daniel's vision was Babylon, followed by Persia and followed by Greece.

Let's continue in verse 40, "The fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, forasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and subdues everything; and as iron breaks all of these, it shall break in pieces and bruise."

If you are a student of history, you will recognize right a way that this fourth kingdom is the Roman Empire as the old system moves steadily west from Babylon, to Persia, to Macedonia, to Greece, all the way to Rome.

Now, continuing the interpretation of the prophecy in verse 41, "Whereas you saw the feet and the toes, part of potter's clay and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; yet the strength of the iron shall be in it, just as you saw the iron mixed with miry clay. And as the toes of the feet were part of iron and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly broken."

Now there's not much of an explanation of the details here. There's a lot of things that we would like to know, things of significance, but that is not the point of this prophecy. The point of this prophecy is to give us a skeleton upon which ultimately the flesh and sinews, and everything will be built later. This is a broad outline and for some reason he doesn't just merely take us to the feet. He takes us all the way to the toes of the feet.

Continuing in verse 43, ""Whereas you saw iron mixed with miry clay, they will mingle themselves with the seed of men; but they will not cleave to one another, even as iron does not mix with clay."

This is still the Roman Empire because the iron is still there, but it is cheapened and mixed and weakened still further. What does that mean? And where will he go? We know the direction that the Empire has been moving. It is been moving steadily west until it came to Rome. We know that Rome moved on into the rest of Europe as time passed.

The Kingdom of God

Now comes the fascinating climax to this vision, "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."

Now, if you've read the book of Revelation or if you have listened to Handel's Messiah, something should come back to memory connected with this. It is found in the 11th chapter of Revelation and in verse 15, just as the last of the seven angels, who blows the last trumpet of the seven trumpets that are to be sounded.

"Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were great voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!"

Plainly Daniel's vision was about the same time, because this is obviously about the establishment of the kingdom of God. The destruction of all the kingdoms of this world and all the great ones are all blown away like chaff in the wind, and one is left, the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ.

Daniel continues with Nebuchadnezzar's vision, in verse 45, "Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God has made it known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter, and the dream is certain, and its interpretation thereof sure."

One Great Image Instead of Four

Now, one of things that I find especially interesting in this passage is that there were not four images here representing four kingdoms that were coming in the future. It was one image, one great statue that was at its greatest, with Nebuchadnezzar and then went into a very long decline, but think about it, what is it that makes the kingdoms of Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome, one system instead of four? Why one great image instead of four? Well it can't be ethnic because they are not all the same people at all, but the underlying religious system is the same. The names of the gods change as you go from culture to culture, but the gods and who they stand for and what they're like, it's all the same all of the way across from Babylon to Greece to Rome.

The Roman system got Christianized early in the fourth century, but Christianity got Romanized at the same time and the mixture of the Babylonian religion and Christianity would make an interesting analogy to the feet mixed with iron and clay.

But even the Babylonian system was not Islam. Islam is monotheistic, rigidly monotheistic. The Babylonian system was not! The image of Daniel two represents kingdoms, moving steadily to the West. Rome eventually moved into Europe and has dominated Europe ever

since. But what a lot of modern readers don't understand is that throughout that period of time from the fourth century on down to today, there has been repeated kingdoms in Europe that call themselves the Holy Roman Empire. It was that combination of the Roman Catholic Church and the Roman Empire that actually held sway and controlled Europe all the way through the Protestant Reformation, and it has had great influence to this day.

So we look at the Middle East and we find the Israelis, the house of Judah in fact, and in biblical usage we find them, the worshipers of Yahweh. We find the Arabs worshiping Allah and overlooking all this, we have Europe.

What is left of Daniel's great image? The feet and the toes and it is Europe where that great stone cut without hands will finally crush into powder that system, and establish the kingdom of God. In case you missed it, that's why so many interpreters of biblical prophecy, pay so much attention to Europe.

When you read the Old Testament prophets, it is really surprising how much attention they pay to the last days. I think in most cases they thought the events that they were prophesying, and many of which would take place during their lifetime, would lead up to the last days. How little they knew about how long it would be.

The Old Testament prophets are a rich source of knowledge about the end time, but that'll have to wait. Until next time, I'm Ronald L. Dart.

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