

What is the meaning of Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2?

At certain times, God has used dreams to communicate with people. One of those people was [King Nebuchadnezzar](#) of Babylon. [Daniel 2](#) tells how Daniel interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream, in which God provided an overview of world events in the millennia yet to come.

Character Backgrounds

King Nebuchadnezzar reigned from 605 to 562 B.C., greatly expanding the Babylonian Empire, conquering Jerusalem and deporting the Jews in the process. Daniel was one of those deported from Israel and granted an education in the king's palace. When God granted Daniel the wisdom to interpret the king's dream, it launched Daniel's long career as a political leader, trusted adviser, and well-known prophet.

Nebuchadnezzar's Threat

One night, Nebuchadnezzar awoke frightened by a dream. The king called for his magi to interpret the nightmare. This was standard procedure in a culture that placed a high importance on dreams and their meaning. However, he added an unprecedented requirement: "Tell me what my dream was and interpret it" ([Daniel 2:5](#)). So, not only did the royal wise men have to provide the interpretation of the dream, they had to recount the dream itself. The penalty for failure was death: every magician, enchanter, sorcerer and astrologer in the kingdom would be executed. The worried magi replied, "What the king asks is too difficult. No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among men" ([Daniel 2:11](#)). When Daniel heard of this, he was determined to prove God's power to the king ([Daniel 2:18](#)).

Daniel's Response: The Dream

Daniel asked the king for some time to discover the dream, and then he proceeded to pray all night with three of his fellow exiles. God revealed the dream to him, and Daniel and his friends praised God ([Daniel 2:19-23](#)). The next morning, he went to the king and told him about the dream.

The dream featured a huge, glorious statue of a man. Its head was "made of pure gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay" ([Daniel 2:32-33](#)). Then a rock cut "not by human hands" ([Daniel 2:34](#)) hit the foot of the statue, and the whole image "became like chaff on a threshing floor," while the rock "became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth" ([Daniel 2:35](#)). This vision, by the way, gives us our modern idiom "feet of clay," meaning "a hidden fault or

weakness.”

Daniel's Response: The Interpretation

Daniel's interpretation, given to him by God, explains that the statue represents a series of kingdoms, each less glorious than the one before, as indicated by the decreasing value of the metals. Daniel identifies Nebuchadnezzar as the head of gold, stating that God had given Nebuchadnezzar much power ([Daniel 2:37-38](#)). The next kingdom to arise will be inferior to Babylon, as will the next. “Finally, there will come a fourth kingdom, strong as iron. . . . It will crush and break all the others” ([Daniel 2:40](#)).

Finally, the feet of mixed clay and iron “will be a divided kingdom” ([Daniel 2:41](#)). During the time of this final world empire, the “rock” will smash them all to bits, a prediction that “God . . . will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed” ([Daniel 2:44](#)). All previous earthly kingdoms will be brought to an end.

The Dream 2,500+ Years Later

The first four kingdoms have been identified as the Babylonian, Persian, Greek and Roman Empires. This identification has come from the workings of history matching further prophecies. Daniel already said that Babylon, specifically Nebuchadnezzar, was the head of gold ([Daniel 2:38](#)). Babylon fell to the kingdom of the Medes and the Persians ([Daniel 5:26-31](#)). Greece became the successor to the Medo-Persian Empire ([Daniel 8:20-21](#); [10:20 - 11:14](#)). The “iron” empire can only be Rome.

Opinions differ on the fifth empire. Some have tried to identify various periods in Europe's history as the clay-and-iron feet; others claim the feet represent the divided remnants of Rome before supposedly being “conquered” by Christianity. Still others believe that the clay/iron empire is yet to come: the kingdom of the [Antichrist](#) will be a “revived Roman Empire.” The last theory seems to be the best. We know, according to [Revelation 17:12-13](#), that the Antichrist will lead a coalition of ten nations (the statue's ten toes?). And we know that Christ will defeat the forces of the Antichrist ([Revelation 17:14](#)). After that, Jesus will set up His kingdom—the rock smashes the image—and the kingdoms of this world will “become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever” ([Revelation 11:15](#)).

Many scholars have contrasted Nebuchadnezzar's dream in [Daniel 2](#) with Daniel's vision in chapter 7. Both passages reveal the coming world kingdoms, but the symbolism is strikingly different in each. The pagan king sees the kingdoms of this world as a towering work of art, impressive in size, value, and grandeur (albeit with feet of clay). God's prophet sees the same kingdoms as bizarre, unnatural beasts, terrifying in aspect and behavior. It's a difference of perspective: where man sees a stately, glittering tribute to himself, God sees a menagerie of aberrations. “Let us not be desirous of vain glory” ([Galatians 5:26, KJV](#)).

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Daniel 2



1) Babylonian Empire

2) Medo-Persian Empire

3) Greek Empire

4) Roman Empire



Messiah's Kingdom

Daniel 7

