

**The Babylonians**

- *Nebuchadnezzar the golden head*

**The Babylonians were the first of Daniel's four empires.** Daniel is interpreting Nebuchadnezzar's dream. The four parts of the statue represent kings and their kingdoms. Nebuchadnezzar himself is the golden head of the statue in the dream. 'You are the head of gold <sup>2:38</sup>', Daniel says.

<sup>2:38</sup>

**The Persians**

- *The empire of 'The Medes and Persians'*

**The Persians were the second of Daniel's four empires.** In his interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, Daniel says there would come a second powerful empire. 'After you shall arise another kingdom inferior to you..<sup>2:39</sup>' Later on in the Book of Daniel we discover that the empire that followed the Babylonians was the empire of 'the Medes and the Persians'. I shall simply call it 'the Persian empire'. Media was the ancient name for north-west Iran. The Medes are first known to history in the ninth century BC. Media was often linked with Persia even as far back as the eighth century BC. Later on in 550 BC, the Persian king Cyrus conquered Media and started calling himself 'King of the Medes' as well as 'King of the Persians'. The 'Medes and the Persians' (see the phrase in Daniel 6:8) together became one empire.

<sup>2:39</sup>

- *King Cyrus who conquered Babylon in 539 BC had nine successors*

The Persians became a strong nation in around 680 BC. Then after Cyrus conquered Media in 550 BC, the Persians became strong enough to attack Babylonia. On 29 October 539 BC – the night referred to in Daniel 5:31 – Cyrus conquered Babylon itself, and Cyrus's empire took over the empire of the Babylonians. Judah and Jerusalem became part of the Persian empire. Cyrus had nine successors who all ruled over Judah: Cambyses (530–522 BC), Darius I (522–486 BC), Xerxes (486–464 BC), Artaxerxes (464–423 BC), Darius II (423–404 BC), Artaxerxes II (404–359 BC), Artaxerxes III (359–338 BC), Arses (338–336 BC), Darius III (336–331 BC). Then the Persian empire was defeated by the Greeks.

**The Greeks**

- *Alexander the Great conquered the Persians between 334 and 330 BC*

**The Greeks were the third of Daniel's four empires.** The belly and thigh of Nebuchadnezzar's vision were made of bronze and represented 'a third kingdom of bronze, which will rule over all the earth'. The actual name of Greece is mentioned in the vision of Daniel 8:21 ('the rough goat is the king of Greece'), and there is further mention of Greece in 10:20 and 11:2. Alexander the Great conquered the Persians between 334 and 330 BC.

- *Alexander died 323 BC – his kingdom fragmented with two Greek dynasties emerging*

The Greek city-states arose in the ninth century. In 546 BC Cyrus conquered them, and for some decades the Greeks were under Persian rule. From about 500 BC they tried to free themselves from Persian domination, and after the Battle of Salamis in 480 BC they were more independent, but often in conflicts among each other. Philip of Macedon brought about greater unity, but it was his son Alexander who became famous. While still in his twenties in about 335 BC he set out to conquer the civilized world. He succeeded but only for a few years. By 323 he was dead. Within a few years he had established the Greek empire throughout the civilized world. After Alexander died his kingdom fragmented. Four of his generals struggled for power, but eventually two Greek dynasties became important for Israel, the Ptolemies (who controlled Israel from 301 to 198 BC) and the Seleucids (who controlled Israel from 198 to 167 BC). A crisis

- *The Ptolemies controlled Israel from 301 to 198 BC*

• Then the Seleucids controlled Israel from 198 to 167 BC

• The Maccabean rebellion

• A succession of ruling high priests – a certain amount of freedom within a Greek civilization

**The Romans**

• Legs of iron and clay

• Gradual growth from the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC onwards

• 67 BC Roman soldier Pompey invaded Judea to begin the fourth empire to rule over Israel

• The Bible’s accurate prediction that four great kingdoms will have dominion over Judah

• Jesus was born in the days of Daniel’s fourth empire

came in about 167 BC when Antiochus III (175–164 BC) started persecution in Israel. It led to an armed revolt which was instigated by Mattathias and his sons. Led by Judas Maccabaeus, and then by Jonathan and Simon, they started a fierce resistance movement. Finally Israel won a certain amount of freedom and began to be led by high priests.

Jonathan accepted the high priesthood in 152 BC. There was a succession of ruling high priests: Jonathan (152–142 BC), Simon (142–135/3 BC), John Hyrcanus (135/4–104 BC), Aristobulus I (104–103 BC), Alexander Jannaeus (103–76 BC). When Alexander Jannaeus died in 76 BC, his wife Salome took the rule of the country (76–67 BC) and appointed her son Hyrcanus as high priest. When she died Hyrcanus’s younger brother violently took over the rule as Aristobulus II(67– 63 BC). Throughout this time Greek civilization was powerful in Israel.

**The Romans were the fourth of Daniel’s four empires.** Then there is a fourth part to the statue in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. Its legs are made of a mixture of iron and clay. There is a fourth empire to arise in the distant future. ‘*And there shall be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron..*’

The city of Rome was founded in the eighth century BC. It became a republic in 509 BC. For several centuries her power gradually extended. Then from about 88 BC Rome found it necessary to become more aggressive in taking over areas that traditionally had been ruled by Greeks. In 67 BC the Roman soldier Pompey was given extra powers. It was Pompey who invaded Israel in 67 BC and Judea became a Roman province. The third empire was finished in Judea; the fourth empire had begun. The last Greek state (Egypt) was taken over by the Romans in 31 BC. Israel found itself under Roman rule.

The Bible constantly makes the prediction that four great kingdoms will have dominion over Judah. There were really only four. Philistines and Arameans troubled Israel in its early history. Assyrians destroyed northern Israel. But Jerusalem and the southern kingdom of Judah were really only conquered by four kingdoms before Jesus came: the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks and the Romans. These are the four great empires that constantly are referred to in the Book of Daniel. In the days of Roman rule a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled. Mary and Joseph went to Bethlehem, and Jesus was born – in the days of Daniel’s fourth empire.

1 2:40

1 Luke 2:1

	<p>Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His <i>Preaching Through The Bible</i> (PTTB) books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.</p>	
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