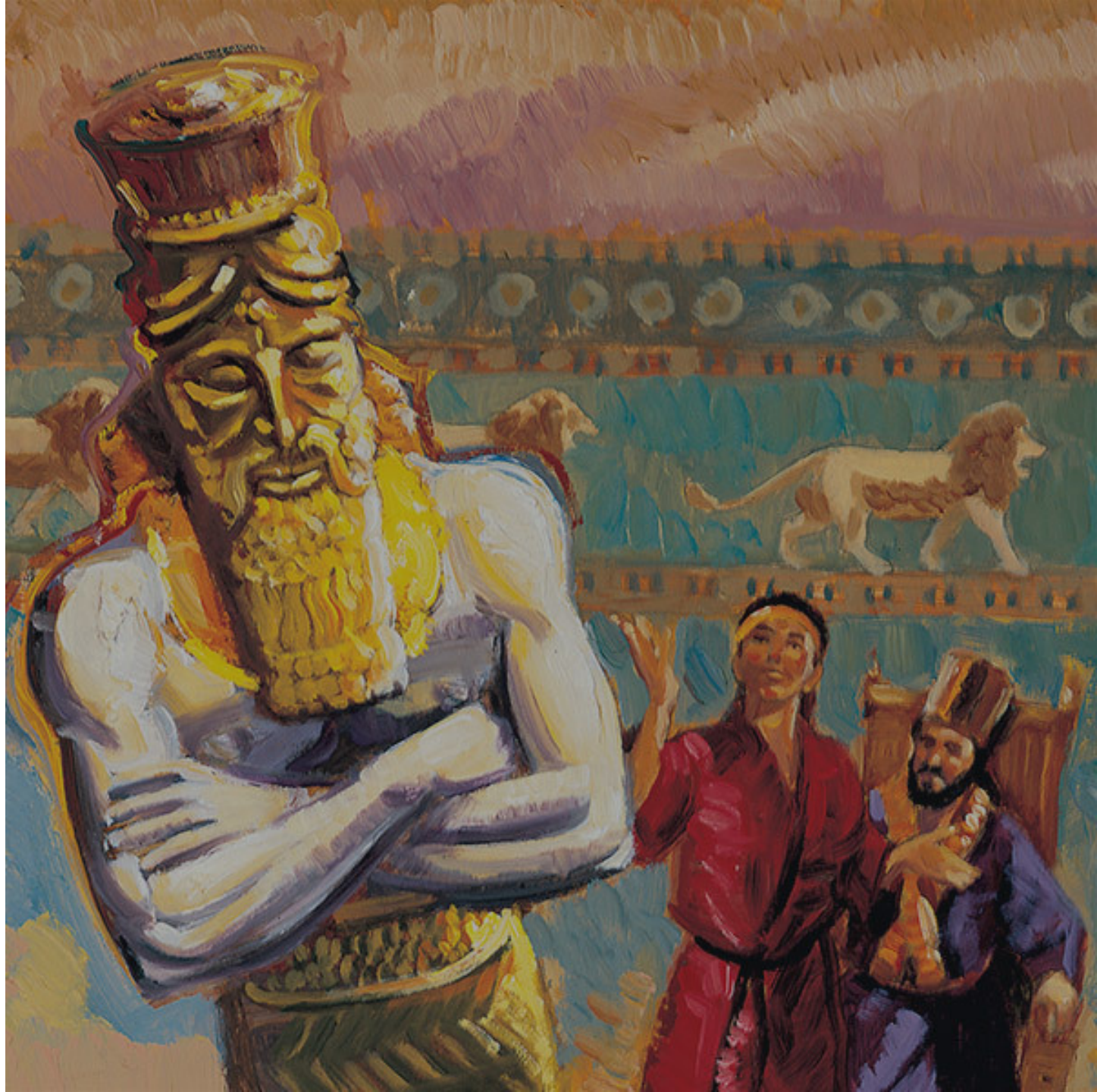


# Focus on Prophecy GUIDE 1



# 1. Bad Happens, But God Provides

- **The wind-whipped sand stung his face like a hundred needles pricking at his skin. Daniel paused and wiped the gritty sweat from his forehead.**
- **The past six weeks seemed a long blur of sandals crunching on sand, a harsh sun beating down on his beet-red neck, and eyes squinting through stinging perspiration and the shimmering heat.**
- **They kept saying Babylon was just ahead. He hoped so; he wanted this nightmare to end.**

# 1. Bad Happens, But God Provides

- **During more than one cold desert night, as he lay wrapped in his blanket under the star-swept sky, he must have jolted awake, shaking with fear, imagining what Nebuchadnezzar might do to his friends and family. In a few short months horrifying scenes would occur. King Nebuchadnezzar's vast Babylonian army would sweep into Judah. Soldiers would lay siege to Jerusalem.**
- **The Hebrews would succumb to gnawing hunger, fear, and despair. Battering rams would slam against the city gates. Wave after wave of soldiers would pour into the city after they crushed the main gate into splinters. The terrible screams of friends and families of the captives would be heard and their bodies sprawled along Jerusalem's streets.**

# 1. Bad Happens, But God Provides

- **These images haunted Daniel as he marched along with other captive Israelites on their way into exile. Every morning as the roosters crowed in neighbouring villages, buglers roused their Babylonian escort. Daniel would have to struggle to his feet, shove his feet into worn, dew-covered sandals, and prepare for another fifteen-mile desert trek, knowing there would be many more. It was a thousand-mile journey to Babylon.**
- **Above all the thoughts running through Daniel's mind, must have been the question—why? Why this tragedy? What had he done to deserve it? What possible purpose could God have in Israel's utter humiliation? Back home in Judah, Daniel had belonged to a loving family who gave him the best life had to offer. He faced a bright future as one of Jerusalem's elite. Now he had nothing. The future seemed dark. Would he ever again see his country, his home, his mother and father? Would he spend his days as a slave to a treacherous king in a foreign country?**
- **Read Daniel chapter 1 before proceeding.**

# 1. Bad Happens, But God Provides

- **“Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand. . . . [Nebuchadnezzar] instructed Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, to bring some of the children of Israel and . . . some of the nobles, young men in whom there was no blemish, but good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand . . . whom they might teach the language and literature of the Chaldeans” (Daniel 1:1-4).**
- **Daniel was taken captive when Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, attacked Judah and its capital, Jerusalem.**
- **When the Babylonians overcame their enemies, they often carried off certain young men who were in excellent physical and mental condition. They taught them the language and customs of Babylon and trained them to serve in its government.**
- **“Now from among those sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. To them the chief of the eunuchs gave names: he gave Daniel the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abed-Nego” (vss. 6, 7).**
- **THOUGHT QUESTIONS: It was a thousand-mile journey From Jerusalem to Babylon. (True or False)**

## 2. Faithfulness to God

- **William Wilberforce was facing his biggest decision since being elected to England's Parliament in 1780. He'd just read a clergyman's impassioned account of the horrors of the slave trade. What was he going to do about it? Everything in his upper-class life of privilege might have led him to ignore this unpleasant problem that was enriching the British Empire. But Wilberforce had made a commitment to Christ and wanted to live out the principles of the Bible.**
- **So he decided to take a stand. He began pouring out his powerful oratory on behalf of the black men, women, and children who were bleeding, starving, and suffocating to death in the holds of British ships. The opposition marshalled its forces. Many powerful people rose to attack Wilberforce and his position.**
- **They warned that two-thirds of England's commerce would disappear if the slave trade were abolished. And their voices carried the day.**



## 2. Faithfulness to God

- **But Wilberforce wouldn't give up. He distributed thousands of pamphlets, spoke at public meetings, circulated petitions, and organized a boycott of slave-grown sugar. He kept bringing up the slave question for a vote year after year in parliament. He kept on fighting, encouraged by a note from John Wesley, which he kept in his Bible: "Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils, but if God be for you who can be against you?"**
- **Finally, after years of frustration, a bill banning the slave trade passed on February 4, 1807. Wilberforce had helped to change history. He'd made a difference in the world by sticking to what he knew was right. He'd won against the overwhelming forces of self-interest. William Wilberforce felt wonderfully blessed by God.**

## 2. Faithfulness to God

- Like Wilberforce, Daniel experienced the joy of seeing how faithfulness to God brings blessings. When you choose to follow God no matter the cost, He will honor your faithfulness! There may be difficult times. Daniel faced difficulties. There may be heartache, pain, and suffering. Daniel experienced those. But if we keep our eyes and hearts focused on God, He will turn our darkness into light and our pain into joy!
- This first chapter in Daniel sets the stage for the entire book. In fact, it also sets the stage for the book of Revelation. These two prophetic books are inseparably linked. Both give us a big picture of the struggle between good and evil, the conflict between God and Satan, from the beginning of sin until the eradication of sin. The curtain rises on this great controversy in the chapter just studied.
- In 605 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, led a ruthless attack against Jerusalem. These two cities represent two ideologies. Babylon, with its occult practices and pagan gods, represents a counterfeit system of worship, rebellion against God, and apostasy. Jerusalem, the city of Daniel, represents faithfulness, obedience, and loyalty to God. This contrast between Babylon and God's people is repeated in various ways throughout the books of Daniel and Revelation.



# 3. Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

- It was nearly midnight when sixteen-year-old Adolf Hitler and his friend, Gustl Kubizek, stepped out of the opera house in Linz, an Austrian city on the Danube River. They had just watched a performance of Richard Wagner's *Rienzi*, the fairy tale of a poor boy in ancient Rome who became the ruler of a vast empire.
- The two young men walked silently through the cobbled streets until they reached the countryside. Adolf then led the way up a hill. At the summit they looked down on Linz glimmering in the moonlight.
- Adolf seized the hands of his friend and, staring into his face, said excitedly, "Something important has happened to me tonight, Gustl. As I watched the story of *Rienzi* unfold, I seemed to be seeing my future. I, too, am a poor boy like *Rienzi*. I, too, will rise to become the ruler of a great empire. You will hear much about me in the future, my friend."
- The two then walked down the hill to separate destinies. Hitler and his friend met again thirty years later, "Remember that moonlit night on the Feinberg?" Adolf asked. Gustl nodded. "In that hour it began," Hitler said.
- Hitler probably never studied the prophecy of Daniel 2. If he had, he might have realized that his obsession with world dominance could never become a reality. That's because God had said so!
- Sometime after Daniel's arrival in Babylon, King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream which troubled him very deeply. He was haunted by it. And yet he couldn't quite remember the details. What exactly had he seen that so disturbed him?

# 3. Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

- Nebuchadnezzar summoned his “wise men.” These individuals had been trained in astrology and prophetic readings and interpretations; they knew the rituals that were supposed to keep the gods happy. They believed that every event in a person’s life—even the most trivial—was determined by some natural force such as the position of a star.
- They saw omens in the livers of sheep, the path of birds in flight, and the shapes of oil on water. Their theory was that, by understanding and responding to these forces, they could solve problems, reverse failures, and guarantee success in life.
- But these wise men came up short when it came to telling Nebuchadnezzar what he’d dreamed. They could come up with an interpretation quickly enough. But to get inside a man’s head—that was impossible.
- So the king ordered them all executed. News of this reached Daniel, and he went to Nebuchadnezzar, requesting a delay in the death sentence. Granted some time, Daniel hurried home and gathered his friends for a prayer session. That night God revealed to Daniel exactly what the king had dreamed—and also exactly what the dream meant.
- In the king’s throne room the next morning, a court official named Arioch wanted to claim full credit for discovering “a man of the captives” who could unravel Nebuchadnezzar’s secret.
- But Daniel gave full credit to God: “There is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days” (Daniel 2:28). Daniel wanted the king to know that the God of heaven was revealing to him events that would take place at the end of Earth’s history—that is, the “latter days.”

# 3. Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

- God answered the earnest prayers of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in a dramatic way. He was concerned about their predicament. God has the same concern for you today. Your needs, whatever they are, matter to God. He doesn't regard them as a small thing.
- When you weep over the loss of a parent or friend, God sheds tears, too. When you feel backed against a wall because you lost a job or can't come up with the money for this month's bills, God feels your distress. When loneliness burns deep into your soul, God wants to fill that void. He longs to show how much He cares about you.
- King Nebuchadnezzar was troubled, trying to sleep. He tossed and turned, wondering what the future held. He was king of the great Babylonian empire, but what lay ahead? So God gave him a dream.
- The things God revealed to Nebuchadnezzar through Daniel are really yet another way of showing that He cares. We can look over Daniel's shoulder and see a spectacular picture of history. God wants us to know where history is heading. He wants us to feel confident and secure about the future. Let's look at the details of Nebuchadnezzar's extraordinary dream in Daniel 2:31-35.
- "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 chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay.
- You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth" (vss. 31-35).

# 3. Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

- **Picture King Nebuchadnezzar as he leans forward on his throne, gazing intently at the remarkable young man standing before him. He is desperate to remember his dream and to know what it meant. Daniel reveals exactly what the king saw in his dream.**
- **Nebuchadnezzar almost leaps from his throne. Yes, that's it! A huge metallic man. It stood over him as he slept! As Daniel continues, the king gets even more excited. This Hebrew is getting everything right, down to the minutest detail. Not a single mistake. His God must be some god!**
- **But Nebuchadnezzar still has one big question, "What does it mean?" He doesn't have to wait long for an answer. Daniel continues, "This is the dream. Now we will tell the interpretation of it before the king" (vs. 36).**
- **Daniel proceeds to show the king how each metal, each part of the statue, corresponds to an empire in history. He traces the history of nations, starting with Babylon, all the way to the second coming of Jesus Christ.**
- **Thought Question: Because he consulted God, Daniel was able to reveal to the king exactly what the king had seen in his dream—a giant statue made of different metals and clay. (True or False)**

## 4. Daniel Interprets the Dream

- **Head of Gold:** Daniel told the king that the golden head of the image represented King Nebuchadnezzar himself and his kingdom of Babylon. “You, O king, are a king of kings. For the God of heaven . . . has made you ruler . . . you are this head of gold” (vss. 37, 38). Babylon ruled the world from 605 to 539 B.C.
- It was centered in the area occupied by modern-day Iraq, a distance from Baghdad. The Babylonians worshiped one god more than any other, Bel-Marduk, made out of solid gold. Nebuchadnezzar was surely pleased that the gold of his Babylonian Empire was represented by the statue’s head. But Babylon would not last forever.
- **Chest and Arms of Silver:** Daniel went on to interpret the king’s dream. “But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours” (vs. 39).
- This kingdom was represented by the chest and arms of silver. In fulfillment of God’s prediction, Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom crumbled into ruins when Cyrus, the Persian general, overthrew the Babylonian Empire in 539 B.C. Interestingly enough, 150 years before this happened, the prophet Isaiah predicted that a man named Cyrus would be the one to overthrow Babylon (Isaiah 44:28 and 45:1).
- Later in his book, Daniel named the two kingdoms that would succeed Babylon: Medo-Persia and Greece (Daniel 8:20, 21). The Medes and Persians ruled the world from 539 to 331 B.C.

## 4. Daniel Interprets the Dream

- **Belly and Thighs of Bronze:** The bronze belly and thighs of the image, Daniel said, represented “a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth” (vs. 39). This was the kingdom of Greece.
- **The Greek ruler, Alexander the Great,** defeated the Persians at the Battle of Arbela in 331 B.C., turning Greece into the world’s third great empire. Greece dominated from 331 to 168 B.C.
- **Legs of Iron:** “And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, . . . and like iron that crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others” (vs. 40). The “iron empire” of Rome followed Greece on the world stage.
- **After the death of Alexander the Great,** his empire of Greece weakened and split into rival factions. At the battle of Pydna in 168 B.C., the Roman armies crushed Greece. Rome continued to rule the world through the time Jesus carried on His ministry here on Earth. Rome came to its end in A.D. 476.
- **Thought Question:** Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar that his dream meant that Babylon would rule the world for thousands of years until Jesus comes. (True or False)

# 5. The Feet and the Stone

- Think about the predictions we have just read. How could Daniel, a Hebrew living in the time of Babylon, have any idea of how empires would succeed each other hundreds of years into the future? We have a hard time figuring out tomorrow's weather or the stock market closings for next week! And yet Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome followed each other exactly as predicted, as any world history textbook demonstrates today.
- Is God in control of the future? Can we have hope on the basis of His great plan? The answer is a resounding, YES!
- Feet and Toes of Iron Mixed With Clay: In the metal image, the feet and toes were made of iron mixed with clay. This represented the fact that iron kingdom would become divided. "Whereas you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, the kingdom shall be divided . . . . The kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile" (vss. 41, 42).
- The prophet predicted, not a fifth world empire, but a division of the iron monarchy of Rome. Rome would fracture into numerous kingdoms symbolized by the ten toes. During the fourth and fifth centuries (A.D. 351 to 476), barbaric invaders from the north poured down on the decaying Roman Empire, delivering blow after blow. Almost twenty Germanic tribes gained the territory of western Rome, but eventually numerous independent nations established themselves within the boundaries of western Europe. The statue's toes of iron mixed with clay represent the modern nations of Europe. The prophecy was literally fulfilled, and history again harmonizes with what God foretold.
- Verse 43 tells us that efforts will be made to unite the post-Roman nations of Europe under one ruler. God, however, says this simply won't happen: "They will not adhere to one another." Many men down through history have tried to unite Europe. Charlemagne, Napoleon, Hitler, and Stalin invested enormous resources and countless lives in their efforts. But each one failed. History can't contradict the big picture in the Word of God. It remains accurate. And it assures us that the future is in God's hands and we can safely trust in His promises.



# 5. The Feet and the Stone

- **The Stone:** After this period in which many different nations rule separately—as opposed to combining into one world power—another great event interrupts history. “And 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” (vs. 44). Nebuchadnezzar’s dream ended when “a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth” (vss. 34, 35). Daniel told the king that this stone represents a kingdom that God Himself will set up—a kingdom that will bring all the previous kingdoms of gold, silver, bronze and iron to an end. This kingdom will last forever (vs. 44).
- **Read verse 45.:** The rock cut out without hands represents the coming of the kingdom of God. Scripture tells us that Jesus is the Rock (1 Corinthians 10:4). At the second coming of Jesus Christ, sin will be crushed for all eternity. Christ’s kingdom will be established forever. Today, we can see that all the details of Daniel’s prophecy have been fulfilled except this final act—the striking of the statue by the stone. We are approaching the grand climax, Christ’s return to our world. It will happen according to God’s timetable, not what some supermarket tabloid says. Jesus is about to end the long, bloody struggle of human history and sweep us up to live eternally with Him.

## 5. The Feet and the Stone

- **Yes, we still live among the clash of “nation rising against nation.” The world can be a frightening place. Ethnic conflicts keep flaring up. Pictures of children with distended bellies still haunt the evening news. We never know where a terrorist’s bomb may strike next. Drive-by shootings rupture neighborhoods. We continue to fall victim to age-old afflictions and new plagues like AIDS.**
- **But through all of this we can acknowledge a fact more important than these headlines—history is rushing toward one climax: a face-to-face encounter with Jesus. It’s time to prepare to meet Jesus. The same hand that guided Daniel as he condensed the millenniums of history into a few verses in the Bible, can guide you as you try to make sense out of your life.**
- **Thought question: The stone that destroyed the image represents Jesus’ Second Coming to destroy the wicked and take the righteous to heaven. (True or False)**

## 6. God Cares for You

- **Does God care about you? YES He does! Listen to these words: “Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows” (Matthew 10:29-31).**
- **Hope in a trustworthy God can make a significant difference in your life. The world may seem to be breaking up all around us, but we are never on our own. The hand of God is guiding us with each step we take. If you will come to Jesus, He will give you a faith that will see you through every storm of life—no matter how fierce the wind, no matter how big the waves. There is peace in Jesus—”For He Himself is our Peace” (Ephesians 2:14).**