



## 1. THE LAST EMPIRE: A Hope Beyond

Throughout history various empires have dominated the development of large portions of our planet, dating right back to the days of ancient Egypt and moving through the great empires of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. The ensuing centuries have seen others rise – Mongolia, the Incas, followed by England, and in the last century the United States has dominated the world, with many suggesting that China will be the next great superpower. And the questions arise: Could there be a final empire that will dominate this planet forever, and is there any real hope for the future?

In ancient Babylon, the ruler Nebuchadnezzar II had a prophetic dream that was interpreted by a young man named Daniel. Daniel wrote about this dream in his book of the same name contained in the Old Testament Bible, making amazing predictions about future events and actually naming successive future empires through 2,500 years of history right down to our day. You can read Daniel's story in Daniel 2 and his interpretation of the great statue that King Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream, showing the great empires through the ages.

Daniel told the king that the head of gold represented Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon – a fitting symbol for this affluent empire, with Bel-Marduk, their chief god, seated on a golden throne before a golden altar beside a golden candlestick. The temple of Marduk alone was overlaid with 18 tons of gold, showing the amazing wealth of this ancient empire.

Daniel's interpretation then turned to the chest and arms of silver, representing the Medes and Persians, who, led by Cyrus, overthrew the seemingly invincible city of Babylon. Amazingly the Bible prophet Isaiah also predicted 150 years before Cyrus was even born that he would take Babylon (see Isaiah 45:1). Babylon was such a powerful empire that the late Saddam Hussein's ambition was to model Iraq on Nebuchadnezzar's rule 2,500 years before. As Jeremiah 51:64 predicted, Babylon would be destroyed and never rebuilt. Neither Nebuchadnezzar nor Saddam Hussein or anyone else has accomplished this task.

In light of the historical accuracy of the Bible, Professor Albright, one of the greatest archaeologists of our time, said, "*In the centre of history stands the Bible. Thanks to modern research we can now recognise its substantial historicity (historical accuracy). To sum up, we can now treat the Bible from beginning to end as an authentic document of religious history.*"

Daniel then predicted a third empire, represented by the thighs of brass, would arise. This was the nation of Greece, led by Alexander the Great. He led his army into battle with their bronze helmets, bronze shields, and bronze swords, so it's little wonder the Bible represents this third empire by thighs of brass. In Daniel 8, some 200 years before they came to power, Daniel named Greece as the power that would overthrow the Medes and Persians – another accurate Bible prediction.

The iron legs of the statue represented the empire of Rome that overthrew the Greek empire in 168 BC, and dominated the world right through to 476 AD.

But Daniel hadn't finished. After the legs he noticed that the feet were *partly of potter's clay and partly of iron*, meaning that no single empire would follow Rome (Daniel 2:41,42). These feet of iron and clay represented a divided Rome, invaded by Germanic tribes, which ultimately became a divided Europe. Just as iron and clay will not adhere to one another, so the many attempts over the centuries to unite

Europe have failed. Napoleon Bonaparte tried in the 1800's, but his defeat at the Battle of Waterloo prompted him to say, "*God Almighty is too much for me.*" God had predicted through Daniel 2,300 years before that *they shall not cleave one to another*, and so it was. Kaiser Wilhelm tried to make Western Europe one great super state, but he also failed. Then followed Adolf Hitler who boasted there would be *one people, one empire, one leader*. But history tells us that like the rest, he too failed. Daniel even predicted that the divided nations of Rome would intermarry in an attempt to make one nation, but then added that would fail (Daniel 2:43 RSV). Intermarriage between the European houses of royalty failed to create a united Europe. Today the European Union represents yet another attempt, but just as their economies are crumbling, so too are their dreams of a United Europe.

Daniel then went on to explain to Nebuchadnezzar about the stone that struck the image on the feet - *a stone cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces* (Daniel 2:34,35,45). It predicted the setting up of The Last Empire – God's Empire – at Christ's return. It is an empire *which shall never be destroyed*. We are living in the time of the divided nations of Europe, and soon this Last Empire will appear!

The book of Revelation gives incredible insights into the future. It reveals that in The Last Empire there'll be no tears, pain, sorrow or death. God will make all things new. To us humans, trapped in a world rapidly falling apart all around us, this is good news! These amazing prophecies tell us – yes, there is hope for a brighter future!