

Bible History and Archeology

3. Secrets in the Stones

Archaeology establishes the reliability and trustworthiness of the Bible.

It's wonderful to be able to walk the streets where the Babylonians walked, where the mighty Assyrians lived, where Alexander the Great led his victorious armies, where Darius and the Hittites and the Egyptians lived, where Abraham walked, where Daniel walked, even where Jesus Christ walked. We're going back a long, long time to the land of history.

Back over 2,000 years BC, one of the greatest, if not the greatest nation that ever pressed this Earth, was the Babylonian empire. You may have wondered where the idea of 60 seconds to the minute and 60 minutes to the hour came from; actually it came from the old Babylonians. They were the ones that discovered this. They were the ones who divided the circle into 360 degrees. Their whole system was based on the 60.

Most of us find the decimal system so much easier to use. While 10 is divisible by 2 and by 5, when you think about 60 it's divisible by 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6. The Babylonians were the ones that worked all this out thousands of years ago.

Today you can visit the remains of Babylon, about 50 miles south of Baghdad in Iraq. This city has been referred to as the golden city, and certainly it was that during the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar was campaigning in the far reaches of the Babylonian empire, when the news came through to him that Nebopolassar his father had died. So Nebuchadnezzar galloped across the Syrian Desert to return to Babylon. In those days when a king died there was always insurrection, others might try to take the throne. Nebuchadnezzar wanted to establish his claim for the throne.

He was successful and for the next 44 years Nebuchadnezzar reigned in prosperity and victory over the surrounding nations. He even invaded Egypt and besieged Tyre for about 13 years; although he wasn't successful in conquering it, he certainly put it to tribute. He conquered Jerusalem and completely destroyed it. The Assyrian power had already been in decline and so Babylon during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, known in history as the Neo-Babylonian Empire, had unparalleled prosperity and he built a tremendous city.

Nebuchadnezzar built up magnificent palaces and temples and towers; can find in Babylon today the remains of dozens of towers built by Nebuchadnezzar. Babylon became a strong and prosperous city under his golden reign. Nebuchadnezzar was intent on building a city that would last forever and he has left some magnificent ruins behind.

The interesting thing is there are no reliefs no images or statues of Nebuchadnezzar himself, but he was very intent on leaving behind a memory of himself. Nearly every brick that you pick up in Babylon today has Nebuchadnezzar's name stamped in cuneiform all over it.

The throne room of Nebuchadnezzar has been excavated and identified. The Iraqi government of antiquities has reconstructed some of these old temples of Babylon to give the tourist and visitor to Babylon some idea of what ancient Babylonian temples were like. Artists have done

their best to try and reconstruct what ancient Babylon looked like and the temple tower, the Ziggurats and the hanging gardens, which were one of the wonders of the ancient world.

When Nebuchadnezzar's father Nebopolassar conquered Nineveh with Cyaxeres, they did what was often done in those days; they sealed their alliance by a marriage relationship. Nebuchadnezzar's Median princess came to live in Babylon. Naturally, she would miss the beautiful hills of Media in that dry thirsty land of Babylon. She was used to the high lands of Media. Nebuchadnezzar, being the ideal type of husband that he was, tried to make his wife very happy, he decided to build her an artificial mountain and beautiful hanging gardens. Now we don't know whether he succeeded in making her happy, but we do know that he succeeded in building one of the wonders of the ancient world, the hanging gardens. These have been excavated and the foundations of these gardens dug up. You can still see today the conduits which obviously carried the water to water the gardens.

Another interesting thing in Babylon today is the remains of the temple tower. This was practically demolished by Alexander the Great, but from the description that we have, it was a thing of extreme beauty. Professor Koldewey, the German archaeologist has helped to reconstruct by his description of what they dug up there in the early part of the century when they were excavating in Babylon. It rose in a series of seven stages and the top one contained a shrine, in which the Babylonians worshiped their gods. The side of this tower has been excavated; it measured 300 feet by 300 feet and towered up about 300 feet. Not quite as tall as the great pyramid at Egypt, nevertheless it was an imposing structure.

You can visit the Euphrates River today and see the new channel the River has cut. Originally the Euphrates River flowed right through the center of old Babylon; you can see the pools where the ancient river used to flow.

The prophet said in Jeremiah 51:37 "And Babylon shall become heaps, a dwelling place for dragons, (jackals) an astonishment, and a hissing. without an inhabitant." As you wander through the ruins of Babylon today, a more accurate description you couldn't find anywhere. Who would have imagined it, the golden city built by Nebuchadnezzar would become an uninhabited ruin?

A visit to the summer palace of Nebuchadnezzar is very convincing evidence of the fulfillment of this prophet's statement. You can stand there on the dry and the dusty ruins and see where the archaeologist has dug. A traveler states, "I was wandering around the great high mound, when all of a sudden staring me in the face was a jackal, like a wild dog. He turned on his heels and he ran off." It's interesting that Jeremiah said over two and a half thousand years ago that it would inhabited by jackals.

Herodotus, the Greek historian said that Babylon was a vast city. He said it measured 60 miles in circumference. We know today that he was incorrect, Babylon's circumference was ten and a half miles, making it the greatest city of antiquity.

Interesting that archaeologists today are showing that the pen of the historian is often wrong and they're correcting what the historians have been telling us regarding these ancient cities. But the wonderful thing is, that never one statement made by any prophet, or Bible writer has

ever had to be corrected, because what they said is being verified today by the spade of the archaeologist.

Around Babylon were huge walls; Herodotus said that the walls towered up to about 200 feet; we know today that was a slight exaggeration, they towered about 60 feet. They were not ordinary walls, but actually double walls and strong, certainly impregnable from without.

The Dream:

Way back in ancient Babylon, the great king Nebuchadnezzar had a dream. So significant was the dream that it was recorded in the Old Testament prophets by Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar had built Babylon to last forever; he hoped his dynasty would never die. As he pondered the future he wondered what lay in the future for his kingdom.

One night he fell into a troubled sleep and while he slept he dreamed. In the morning he woke up and he knew that he had dreamed but he couldn't remember what he dreamt. So he decided that the only thing to do was to call in his advisers, those trusted men of his kingdom who were around him continually to advise him in all matters of foreign affairs, internal matters, and things that would help the kingdom. So he called in the wise men, magicians, and the astrologers and he said. "I've dreamed a dream and I can't remember what it was."

Well the wise men and the educated men said. "Oh King Nebuchadnezzar; tell us the dream and we'll interpret it for you." You see those wise men could easily work out an interpretation to the dream, but of course the difficulty was that Nebuchadnezzar the king couldn't remember what the dream was. Now the king had a lot of confidence in these advisers that he had around him, they always claimed to be able to know and reveal all secrets, so he just thought that they were stalling for time. He offered them great gifts if they were able to make known to him this very troublesome dream. But they couldn't.

When he realized that they couldn't do what they had always claimed to be able to do, he became very furious, and ordered that all the wise men of Babylon be killed. Now this would include Daniel and his friends, even though the other wise men had conveniently arranged not to call them when the king ordered the wise men to appear before him.

Daniel had been taken captive when Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem in 586 BC. He had been educated in Babylon and was included as one of the wise men. When Arioch the king's captain went about to carry out the king's decree. Daniel wanted to know what all this was about. So the king's captain Arioch explained to him. Then Daniel told Arioch to take him to the king and if the king would grant time for him to seek his God, then he would make known to the king what he wanted to know.

The king really wanted the answer more than he wanted to kill off all his wise men, so he granted the delay and Daniel and his 3 friends prayed and during the night God gave the dream and interpretation to Daniel. Then the next day Daniel stood before the king.

"Daniel answered in the presence of the king and said, The secret which the king has demanded cannot be shown unto the king by the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, the soothsayers, show unto the king: "But there is a God in heaven that reveals secrets and makes known to the king Nebuchadnezzar

what shall be in the latter days. Thy dream and the visions of thy head upon thy bed are these." Daniel 2:27-28.

Daniel said "The dream that you've dreamed Nebuchadnezzar, actually has to do with the latter days. It's really the whole history of mankind."

Verse 29. "As for thee, O king, thy thoughts come into thy mind upon thy bed what should come to pass hereafter; (in the future) and He that reveals secrets makes known to thee what shall come to pass."

Imagine the king sitting there breathless, listening to the wise man Daniel, waiting for him to relate the dream. And Daniel begins.

"Thou, O king, sawest, and behold a great image. This great image, whose brightness was excellent, stood before thee; and the form thereof was terrible. This image's head was of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, His legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay. Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth." Daniel 2:31-35.

"Now that's what you saw king, a great image. Don't you remember the head was of gold, the breast and arms of silver, the thighs of brass, the legs of iron and the feet part of iron and part of clay?" As Nebuchadnezzar, that mighty king of Babylon, listened, the whole dream came back to him and he remembered it. Daniel began to interpret it.

"This is the dream; and we will tell the interpretation thereof before the king. Thou, O king, art a king of kings: for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory. And wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the heaven hath he given into thine hand, and hath made thee ruler over them all. Thou art this head of gold." Daniel 2:36-38

That must have been very pleasing to Nebuchadnezzar; what a beautiful symbol that the kingdom of ancient Babylon is represented by this golden head, the golden city of Babylon; but then came some very bad news.

Verse 39. "And after thee (that in, after the Babylonian empire) shall arise another kingdom interior to thee...."

Just as the prophet predicted before Nebuchadnezzar over 600 years BC, Babylon fell in the year 538 BC. As every student of history knows, when Babylon fell the next great power that took over world control was the kingdom of the Medes and the Persians.

It's rather interesting that in that great image that Nebuchadnezzar dreamed that the golden head represented Babylon, then the breast and arms of silver. In history you find that when the Medes and Persians went into war they wore silver corsets as a protection.

So if Babylon was built to last forever, if their walls were impregnable, however did the Medes and the Persians conquer ancient Babylon? Well it's a very interesting story; way back the prophet Isaiah predicted that Cyrus, the Persian was going to conquer Babylon. Over 150 years before Cyrus was born, the prophet Isaiah even named him. Cyrus came down with the Medes and Persian army and when he came against the walls of Babylon they were absolutely impregnable.

There was enough food stored in that city so that if they needed to close the gates, no one needed to go in and out for 15 years. In fact, so unconcerned were they about the Medes and Persians, even though the Babylonians knew that they were outside the city, they were having a drunken party. They knew that their city was impregnable from without.

But what Cyrus did was this.

Remember that the Euphrates River flowed right through the center of ancient Babylon, so what he was to divert the water and the level of the Euphrates River dropped. He had one third of his soldiers go up against the walls, as if trying to lay siege to them. In the meanwhile, the water level in the Euphrates dropped, because he had diverted it into an artificial lake.

Then his soldiers marched underneath the walls; but even then they would have been caught like rats in a trap had it not been for that night the gates inside the city were left open. Isaiah had predicted that also:

"Thus saith the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut;" Isaiah 45:1.

Not only were walls on the outside of the city but there were gates on the inside leading to the riverbed. If these had been shut the army could have marched in and through Babylon and out the other side and never entered the city. But as the prophecy said, those gates were left open because that night they were having a drunken feast to their idols. Daniel 5 tells all about it; we know it as Belshazzar's feast. So the Medes and Persians conquered Babylon.

The power that overthrew Babylon was a dual power, called the kingdom of the Medes and Persians. Eventually the Persian Empire became much stronger and generally speaking, when we talk about Medes and Persians we refer to the Persians, but initially it was a dual kingdom.

The early Persians were Zoroastrians; they didn't worship Idols, they worshiped fire and water and air. There is a fire altar and those Zoroastrian priests would stand at the altar and the people would come into that area, which was their temple.

But the king's dream showed that even the kingdom of Medo-Persia wasn't going to last forever!

Verse 39. ". . . And another third kingdom of brass which shall bear rule over all the earth."

In the year 331 BC Medo-Persia was followed by the great Grecian empire of Alexander the Great.

The early Greeks were the foremost artists of the day; Greek architecture has set a pattern for nearly every capital building in the United States and around the world.

In the center of Athens is found the steep hill called the Acropolis, which rises about 230 feet high. The Acropolis is dominated by the most perfect and magnificent ruin in the world, the Parthenon. It is built of marble and no mortar was used in its construction. There's not a straight line or an absolutely perpendicular line in the entire building. The Greek architects used curved lines to counteract optical illusions. The eye, when you look at a horizontal line in the distance, will tend to dip in the center. In order to overcome that perspective fault, the Greeks made the floor line of the Parthenon follow a curve of a circle otherwise it would seem to sag. The beams on the top of the Doric columns all follow the same principle, the columns all tilt inwards. If you projected the lines right up they would meet one and a half miles above the Parthenon.

Then there's Mars Hill, where the Apostle Paul stood over 2,000 years ago looking down over the Agora or marketplace. The Agora is world-famous because men like Pericles, Euripides, Sophocles, Plato, and Aristotle walked these streets, and here Paul himself argued with the Athenian philosophers.

The Stoa of Atlas has been reconstructed as a museum, completed in 1956 by the American Archaeological Association. At the other end of the Agora is the most magnificently preserved temple in Greece, the temple of Hystaspes.

But even the brilliance of Greece wasn't going to last forever because the prophet went on to state:

Verse 40, "And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron: forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things: and as iron that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise."

Babylon had gone; Medo-Persia had gone; Greece fell in the year 168 BC. Taking over from Greece was the iron monarchy of Rome. History simply records that after Greece, Rome would rule the world.

About the middle of the first century BC two prominent statesmen appeared on the Roman scene. One was by the name of Pompeii who conducted some very successful campaigns down in the Middle East. The other, by the name of Julius Caesar, was very successful in Gaul and in conquering England. These two men together with Crassus formed the first trio government.

They would have been able to rule co-jointly had it not been for a political intrigue that developed. Julius Caesar felt very insecure, so he moved against Pompeii. Pompeii withdrew and fled down into Egypt and Julius Caesar pursued him. While in Egypt, Caesar installed Cleopatra as ruler of Egypt and the success of the Ptolemaic Empire.

Then Caesar went back and campaigned in Turkey. It is here that he said those famous words "I came. I saw. I conquered." Then he returned to Rome but wasn't destined to rule Rome for very long, as finally a revolt broke out and Caesar was assassinated in the year 44 BC by the instigation of Brutus.

It was Julius Caesar that brought in the new calendar called the Julian calendar. One of our months, July, is named after Julius Caesar.

After Caesar fell there were two main contenders for the rulership in Rome. One was Octavian and the other was Anthony. Now Anthony entered into an affair with Cleopatra down in Egypt

and finally Octavian and Anthony met in a naval battle of Actium in 31 BC and Anthony and Cleopatra committed suicide.

Octavian became head of the Roman Empire, called himself emperor, and accepted the title of Augustus and was known in history as Augustus Caesar.

It was during the reign of Augustus Caesar that Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem as recorded in Luke 2:1, "And it come to pass in those days that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed," That's the decree that brought Mary and Joseph, who were living up in Nazareth down to Bethlehem.

Following Augustus Caesar was Tiberius Caesar. As time went on Rome's glory began to fade under the attacks of Barbarians coming down from the north to attack the borders of Rome. History records that there had been four world empires; Babylon, followed by Medo-Persia, followed by Greece, and then Rome.

In the ancient dream, these were symbolized by the head of gold representing Babylon; the breast and arms of silver representing Medo-Persia; the belly and thighs of brass representing Greece; and the legs of iron representing Rome.

Listen to a statement by Edward Gibbon, about the rise and the decline of the Roman Empire. No one would ever suggest that Edward Gibbon was a believer in the Bible or the Old Testament prophets, not at all. In fact he was sarcastic as far as Christianity was concerned. But notice the phraseology that Edward Gibbon uses in his book *The Rise and the Decline of the Roman Empire*.

"The arms of the republic sometimes vanquished in battle, always victorious in war advance with rapid steps to the Euphrates, the Danube, the Rhine and the Ocean. And the images of gold or silver or brass that might serve to represent the nations and their kings were successively broken by the iron monarchy of Rome." Edward Gibbon in the last century uses the very same phraseology the prophet wrote 2,500 years earlier.

If you had four empires, Babylon followed by Medo-Persia followed by Greece, followed by Rome what would you naturally think?" Well, that Rome would be followed by another world dominating power. But the prophet says, "No", History will not repeat itself; when Rome went down, prophecy said that never again would a single power dominate the world.

Verse 41. "And whereas thou saw the feet and toes part of potters' clay and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; but there shall be in it of the strength of the iron, forasmuch as thou saw the iron mixed with miry clay."

It's going to be a divided kingdom.

Verse 42. "And an the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken." (brittle.)

After Rome fell there wouldn't be another world dominating power. Rather, Rome was going to be divided up into some strong kingdoms and some weak ones; some would be strong and some would be brittle or weak.

In 410 AD the Goths succeeded in attacking Rome under Alaric. Then they were followed by the Huns under Attila who invaded the Roman borders. In 456 AD the Vandals came from the north of Africa, sailed across the Mediterranean up the coast of Italy and Genseric attacked Rome. The other Barbarian kingdoms came until finally in the year 476 AD the old Roman Empire collapsed and was divided, into exactly ten divisions. There were the Franks, the Huns, the Burgundians, the Suevi, the Vandals, the Visigoths, the Anglo-Saxons, the Ostrogoths, the Lombards, and the Herull. That's where we get our Europe from today, the breakup of the old Roman Empire.

Over 2,500 years before the prophet had predicted that there would be four universal world empires, but there wouldn't be a fifth. After the fourth, it would be divided into ten divisions. Some would be strong out of those ten divisions and some would be weak and all the European powers that we have today have come from the breakup of those ten divisions of Rome.

Verse 43. "And whereas thou saw iron mixed with miry clay they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men; but they shall not cleave one to another, even an iron is not mixed with clay."

Now it says that these divided nations, these ten divisions of the old Roman Empire, would try intermarriage. They would try to mingle themselves with the seed of men in order to bring about unity to weld their empire together, but even that would fail. Europe would always remain separate powers. They'll never weld themselves into one great unified kingdom as in the past.

The First World War was really a family squabble, because all of the rulers of Europe were related. The kings of England, Russia, Greece, Norway, Germany, and Denmark were all either first cousins or brothers. So the war of 1914 was really nothing more than a family squabble of Queen Victoria's grandchildren.

Men down through the ages have tried to weld Europe together; Charlemagne right back in the 8th century; Charles V in the 16th century; Louis XIV in the 18th century; and Napoleon Bonaparte in the 19th century.

Napoleon Bonaparte was determined to make Europe one, he was meeting with success after success. Someone finally said to him that maybe the gods were against him. Napoleon said that the gods are on the side of the kingdom with the heaviest artillery; "I will be master of the world." He had a little statue made "Napoleon Bonaparte, master of the world," But Napoleon Bonaparte went into Russia with 500,000 men and crawled out with less than 13,000. Then he went to Waterloo and that was his end, for prophecy said. "They will not cleave one to another."

Then in the 20th century we have Kaiser William. He was going to build the great German empire and unite the iron and the clay, but he ended up as history records, sawing wood in Holland. More recently came Adolf Hitler; he boasted he was going to change the history of the world for the next thousand years to come. He would build the great race that would unite and dominate the globe, but Hitler made the very same mistake as Napoleon made a hundred years before, of attacking Russia. Today Hitler is dead and gone for the prophet said, "They will not cleave," they will not join one to another.

In the conclusion of the dream, a great stone is cut out without hands and comes and hits the image on its feet and the whole image breaks up and blows away. Then, this stone becomes a great mountain and fills the whole earth.

Verses 44, 45. "And in the days of these kings (that is in the days when Europe is divided) shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms and it shall stand for ever. For as much as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver and the gold; the great God has made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter and the dream is certain and the interpretation thereof sure,"

We can rest in that; just as there has been four universal empires; Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome, followed by the division of Europe into ten divisions, we can be certain of the next great coming event which is the kingdom of Christ and it's going to rule for ever. We must be citizens of that Kingdom! He's coming soon! Get ready! Be Ready! Stay Ready!