

# Discover Bible Studies

## #7: About Your Future

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Doctors Patricia and David Mrazek saw a great deal of heartbreak in their work. As paediatric specialists they dealt with many suffering children. But they were struck by the fact that some kids bounced back from disaster while others were crushed by it. Why? Why, for example, does one child go to drugs, while another goes to college? Why do some abused children grow up to become abusers themselves, while others become good parents?

The Mrazeks conducted an extensive survey to find answers to these questions. In their study, one overriding trait kept popping up among those kids who survived trauma and went on to build healthy lives. The secret? "A basic life view of optimism and hope."

Hope made the difference. Hope, more than anything else, helps us beat the odds when they're stacked against us.

Human beings desperately need hope. But how do we get it? Hope is hard to find in our world- UNTIL we look at it from the perspective of Bible prophecy. This DISCOVER guide examines a remarkable prophecy that has inspired countless individuals with a vibrant hope.

### 1. AN AMAZING BIBLE PROPHECY

About five hundred years before the birth of Christ, God gave the world a startling glimpse into the future through the prophet Daniel. God presented an outline of world history in advance for 2,500 years, from Daniel's time to our own day.

This prophecy originated in a dream God gave Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, some 2,500 years ago. The dream deeply troubled this monarch-but he couldn't remember the dream when he woke up! After all of Babylon's wise men failed to help the king recall his dream or interpret it, a young Hebrew exile named Daniel arrived on the scene, claiming that the God of Heaven could reveal all mysteries.

Standing before the king, Daniel boldly declared:

*"You looked, O king, and there before you stood A LARGE STATUE-an enormous, dazzling statue, awesome in appearance.*

*"The head of the statue 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.*

*"While you were watching, a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them.*

*"Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were broken to pieces at the same time and became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. But THE ROCK THAT STRUCK THE STATUE became a huge mountain and FILLED THE WHOLE EARTH." -Daniel 2:31-35. (Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural texts in the DISCOVER guides are from the New International Version of the Bible [NIV].)*

This statue, at first glance, may seem to have little to do with finding hope in contemporary times, but hold on.

## 2. THE PROPHECY INTERPRETED

After telling a very impressed Nebuchadnezzar exactly what he'd seen in his vision, the prophet Daniel explained:

*"This was the dream, and now we will interpret it to the king." -Daniel 2:36.*

THE HEAD OF GOLD: What world power did Daniel tell the king the head of gold symbolized?

*"You, O king, are the king of kings. The God of heaven has given you dominion and power and might and glory. . . . YOU ARE THAT HEAD OF GOLD." -Verses 37, 38.*

Daniel was saying to the ruler of that world's greatest empire: "Nebuchadnezzar, God is telling you that your empire, Babylon, is represented by the statue's golden head."

THE CHEST AND ARMS OF SILVER: From a human perspective Babylon looked like an empire that would last forever. But what does the prophecy say would happen next?

*"After you, another kingdom will rise, inferior to yours." -Verse 39.*

In fulfilment of God's prediction, Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom crumbled into ruins when Cyrus, the Persian general, overthrew the Babylonian empire in 539 B.C. So the chest and arms of silver represent Medo-Persia, another mighty empire.

THE BELLY AND THIGHS OF BRONZE: What does this part of the great metal image represent?

*"Next, a third kingdom, one of bronze, will rule over the whole earth." -Verse 39.*

The belly and thighs of bronze of the image symbolize the kingdom of Greece. Alexander the Great conquered the Medes and the Persians, turning Greece into the world's third great empire. She ruled from 331 to 168 B.C.

## THE LEGS OF IRON:

*"Finally, there will be a fourth kingdom [said the prophet], strong as iron-for iron breaks and smashes everything-and as iron breaks things to pieces, so it will crush and break all the others." Verse 40.*

After the death of Alexander, his empire weakened and split into rival factions until finally in 168 B.C., at the battle of Pydna, the "Iron Empire" of Rome crushed Greece.

Caesar Augustus ruled the Roman Empire when Jesus was born about two thousand years ago (Luke 2:1). Christ and His apostles lived during the period represented by the legs of iron. Gibbon, the eighteenth-century historian, no doubt had Daniel's prophecy in mind when he wrote: "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, The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire (John D. Morris and Company), vol. 4, p. 89.

Think for a moment about this prediction from a human point of view. How could Daniel, living in the time of Babylon, have any idea of how many empires would succeed each other hundreds of years in the future? We have a hard time figuring out what the stock market is going to do next week! And yet Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome followed each other exactly as predicted-like obedient schoolboys in a line.

Is God in control of the future? Can we have hope on the basis of His grand plan? The answer is a resounding, Yes!

THE FEET AND TOES OF IRON MIXED WITH CLAY: Would a fifth world power follow Rome?

*"Just as you saw that the feet and toes were partly of baked clay and partly of iron, so THIS WILL BE A DIVIDED KINGDOM; yet it will have some of the strength of iron in it, even as you saw iron mixed with clay. As the toes were partly iron and partly clay, so this kingdom will be partly strong and partly brittle." -Daniel 2:41, 42.*

The prophet predicted, not a fifth world empire, but a division of the iron monarchy of Rome. Rome would fracture into ten kingdoms, as symbolized by the feet and toes of the image.

Did this actually happen? It certainly did. During the fourth and fifth centuries of the Christian Era barbaric invaders from the north poured down on the decaying Roman Empire, delivering blow after blow. Finally ten of the tribes gained most of the territory of Western Rome, and ten distinct, independent nations established themselves within the boundaries of Europe. Thus the toes symbolize the modern nations of Europe today.

### **3. OUR DAY IN BIBLE PROPHECY**

Does Daniel's prophecy predict that efforts would be made to unite these nations of Europe under one ruler?

*"And just as you saw the iron mixed with baked clay, so THE PEOPLE will be a mixture and WILL NOT REMAIN UNITED, any more than iron mixes with clay." -Daniel 2:43.*

Over and over powerful men have tried to unite Europe, but they fall short of the goal every time. Napoleon came nearer than any other man to uniting a divided Europe, but probably thinking of this prophecy, as he fled defeated from the battlefield of Waterloo, he cried, "God Almighty is too much for me!"

Kaiser Wilhelm II and Adolf Hitler created the most powerful armed forces of their day. But each failed to unite Europe under their rule. Why? Because God's Word was at stake: "The people will be a mixture and will not remain united." The outcome of two world wars confirm that God holds the future in His hands; He is ultimately in control. That's certainly enough to give us hope, peace of mind, and confidence in His plan for our lives.

### **4. A LOOK INTO THE FUTURE**

Only one part of Daniel's prophecy remains unfulfilled. What is the meaning of the stone that strikes the statue on the feet, grinds it to powder, and becomes a great mountain which fills the whole earth?

*"IN THE TIME OF THOSE KINGS [the modern nations of Europe], THE GOD OF HEAVEN WILL SET UP A KINGDOM that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but IT WILL ITSELF ENDURE FOREVER." -Daniel 2:44.*

*"Those kings" could refer only to the kings symbolized by the feet and toes of the statue-the rulers of modern Europe, pointing to our day. The stone that is cut out without human hands is to strike the statue and break it into pieces, and will then fill the whole earth (verses 34, 35, 45). Soon Jesus will descend from heaven to "set up a kingdom," His kingdom of happiness and peace. Then Christ, the Rock of Ages and the King of Kings, will rule the world forever!*

Everything in the prediction of Daniel 2 has come to pass except the final act-the striking of the statue by the stone. According to God's timetable, we are now approaching the grand climax, Christ's return to our world. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is about to end the long, bloody struggle of human history and establish His eternal kingdom of love and grace.

## 5. THE KING'S DREAM AND YOU

This prophecy reveals the guiding hand of God in the rise and fall of nations. God knows the past, and this Bible prophecy clearly shows that He knows the future as well. If God directs the movements of nations with such precision, surely He can guide each individual's life. Jesus assured us: "Even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid" (Matthew 10:30-31). God's gift of faith can become the antidote to all our worries and fears. The hope He inspires can serve as an anchor for our souls (Hebrews 6:19).

The sixteenth-century scholar Erasmus related an incident during a sea voyage that stayed with him the rest of his life. His sailing vessel ran aground in a storm. As violent waves smashed against the ship and it began to break up, even the sailors panicked. The passengers were near hysteria. Most shouted for help to their patron saint, sang hymns, or pleaded loudly in prayer.

Erasmus noted one passenger, however, who acted very differently. "Of all of us," Erasmus wrote, "the one who remained most composed was a young woman who was holding a baby whom she was nursing. She was the only one who did not shout, weep, or bargain with Heaven. She did nothing but pray quietly to herself while clasping the baby tightly on her lap."

This prayer, Erasmus realized, was just a continuation of her regular prayer life. She seemed to entrust herself to God.

As the ship began to sink, this young mother was placed on a plank, given a spar to use as an oar, and sent out into the waves. She had to hold her baby with one hand and attempt to row with the other. Few thought she would survive the pounding surf.

But her faith and composure stood her in good stead. The woman and her child were the first to reach shore.

Hope in a trustworthy God can make all the difference—even when our world seems to be breaking up around us. We're not out there paddling on our own. A greater hand is guiding us and holding us up.

If you will come to Christ in full surrender, He will give you a faith that will see you through every storm. Discover the supernatural peace that Jesus promises:

*"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. . . . Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." -John 14:27.*

Do you have that peace? If you do, thank Jesus, your Saviour. If you don't, why not invite Him into your life today?

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