



GOD'S VIEW OF HISTORY

Reading: Daniel 2

The Bible as God's history book

God does not see things in the same way as we do. He says in Isaiah 55:8,9:

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

God does not view history as we do. People may be impressed by powerful nations whereas God may consider them of little importance.

The Bible is God's history book and the Jews are His people. God's plan of salvation is centred on the Jews, although it extends to all nations. It is therefore not surprising that the Old Testament tells us about the history of the Jews. The New Testament tells us about the life of the Lord Jesus Christ and about the beginning of the Christian church.

People in the Old Testament

Here is a brief look at some of the people in the Old Testament.

ADAM was the first man. He was created by God. Adam disobeyed God and brought sin and death into the world (Genesis 3). Ever since, all people (except Jesus) have disobeyed God in one way or another, and all have died.

NOAH lived about 1,000 years after Adam was created. The people living at the time of Noah were so wicked that God sent a flood and destroyed them all – only righteous Noah and his family escaped, because they obeyed God (Genesis 6).

ABRAHAM was told by God to leave his home in Ur (in the south of modern Iraq) and move to a country that God would show him. God did not tell Abraham where he was eventually going to live, but he obeyed, knowing that God would guide him on his journey. God was pleased with Abraham's faith and obedience and made special promises to him (Genesis 12). The Bible describes Abraham as the friend of God.

ISAAC was the son of Abraham and Sarah. He was born by a miracle when Sarah was too old to have children (Genesis 21).

JACOB was Isaac's son. God changed his name to Israel, which means 'prince with God'. Jacob had twelve sons. They became the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel. Abraham's descendants through Isaac and Jacob are the people of Israel (also known as the Hebrews, or Israelites), later called the Jews.

JOSEPH was one of the twelve sons of Jacob. His brothers were jealous of him and sold him to traders, and he became a slave in Egypt. He faced many trials but God blessed him, and he eventually became head of the king of Egypt's government (Genesis 41:39,40). Later, all of Jacob's family joined Joseph in Egypt (Genesis 46). Many years after Joseph's death, because Jacob's descendants had become a huge number of people, the Egyptians began to see them as a threat and made them slaves.

MOSES was born in Egypt during this time of slavery. His parents were Jews but he was brought up by the daughter of the king of Egypt. God used Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt and through the wilderness (a barren and deserted land) to the land of Canaan, which He had promised them as a home. During the journey God formed the Israelites into a nation and gave them wise laws.

The people of Israel did not trust in God to help them conquer the promised land of Canaan. As a punishment God made them wander in the wilderness for 40 years, until all those who lacked faith had died.

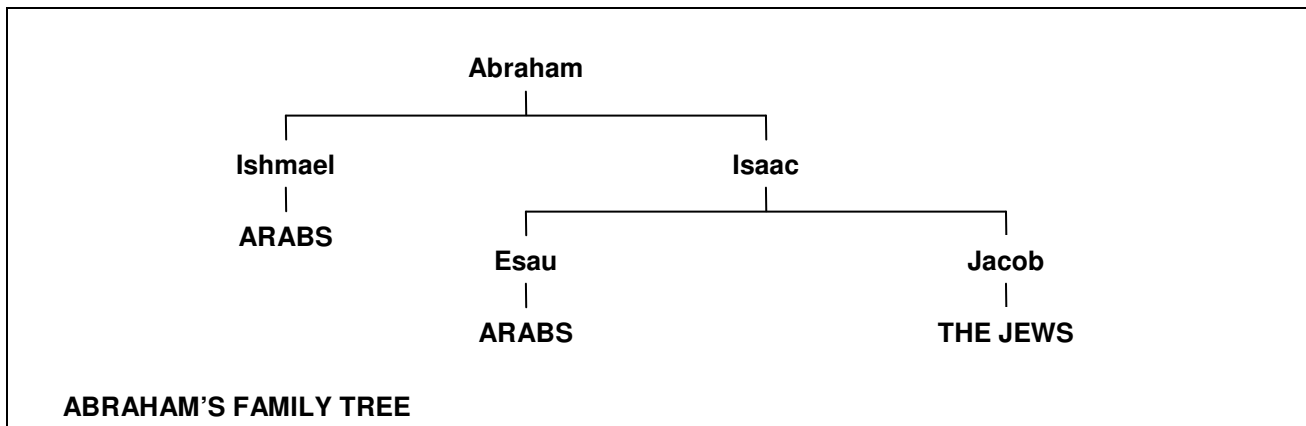




JOSHUA led the new generation of Israelites into Canaan, the land that God had promised them as a home. Canaan is now known as Israel.

Judges rule the people

At last the people of Israel were living in the land of Canaan. God was their King and He provided judges to rule over them for Him. The nation often disobeyed God’s laws and He punished them by sending other nations to fight them. When they were in trouble, the people returned to God, and He saved them through one of the judges. Many times the nation turned away from God, and many times He showed His love by rescuing them. Nehemiah 9:28 says, “*many times you (God) delivered them according to your mercies*”.



The people want a king

After about 400 years in the land, the people of Israel asked for a human king. They did not want God – they wanted a king they could see, like the other nations.

SAUL was the first human king. He did not please God.

DAVID, the second king, was from the tribe of Judah and reigned from Jerusalem. He wrote many of the Psalms. Acts 13:22 describes him as a man after God’s heart because he tried to do God’s will in his life. Because David pleased God, he was given special promises, to be fulfilled by the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Samuel 7).

SOLOMON was the next king to reign for God. He wrote many of the wise sayings found in the book of Proverbs, and built the great temple in Jerusalem.

A divided kingdom

After Solomon, the Kingdom of Israel was divided into two parts. The ten tribes in the north became the northern kingdom, and kept the name Israel. The two other tribes formed the southern kingdom. It became known as Judah, because all of its kings came from the tribe of Judah – they were descendants of David and Solomon.

The people of Israel (the northern kingdom) grew so wicked that God brought the Assyrian army against them. They were taken into captivity and then scattered. They never returned to their own land as a nation.



Later, the people of Judah (the southern kingdom) were taken captive to Babylon, because they too had turned away from God. From that time, even to the present day, there has been no king in Jerusalem. After 70 years of captivity in Babylon, the people of the southern kingdom were allowed to return to their own land. However, other nations ruled over them, including the Romans, who were in control in the time of Jesus.



The New Testament

About 400 years after the close of the Old Testament, God provided His own Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus was rejected by many of his own people, the Jews. Before he was led away to be crucified they cried, “*His blood be on us and on our children!*” (Matthew 27:25). The Jews could not have committed a worse crime. God later used the Romans to punish them. This resulted in the Jewish people being taken from their land and scattered among the nations of the world. They remained scattered until about 150 years ago, when they started to return to their land.

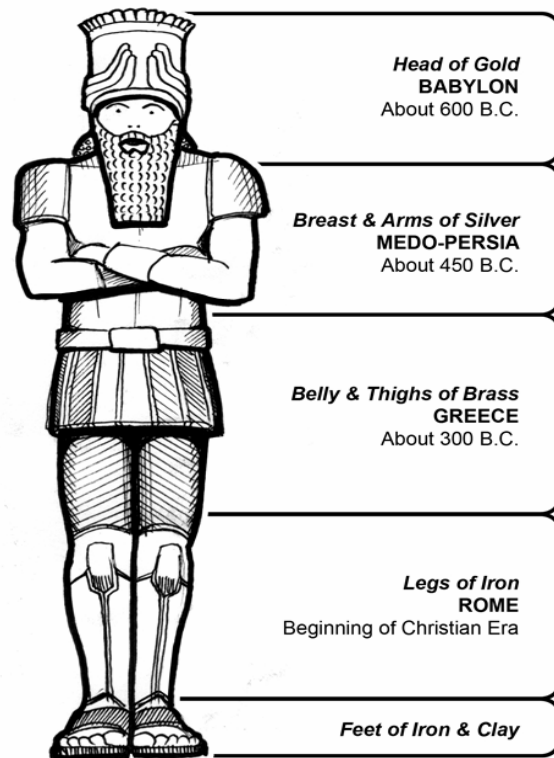
Nebuchadnezzar’s dream – a vision of the future (Daniel 2)

The Bible contains a prophecy which spans history from the time of the Babylonian Empire (BC 600), through to our own day and beyond to the time when God’s kingdom is restored on earth. The prophecy shows that God controls world events and the time will come when the “*kingdom of men*” (Daniel 4:17) will give place to the Kingdom of God.

A young Jewish prince called **DANIEL** was taken captive to Babylon when the southern kingdom of Judah was coming to an end. One night Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, had a very strange dream. This dream was a prophecy given by God, who showed Daniel its meaning.

In his dream the king saw a great image, perhaps like the one shown here. The image gives a picture of five periods of history, which would follow one after the other. Daniel explained to the king of Babylon that the head of gold represented his Babylonian empire (Daniel 2:37,38).

Nebuchadnezzar was told that after his empire would come a less powerful empire, represented by the silver breast and arms of the image in the dream. We know that this was the empire of the Medes and Persians. A third great empire would follow, represented by the brass stomach and thighs. This refers to the Greek Empire. The legs of iron refer to the Roman Empire which came to dominate the world. The Roman Empire spread further than any of the others. It was during the Roman Empire that Jesus was born, and Roman soldiers were involved in his crucifixion. A few hundred years later the Roman Empire broke up and there has never since been an empire to dominate this area of the world and rule over the Jewish nation.



History books confirm that four great empires followed each other just as described in Daniel 2. This remarkable prophecy shows that we can trust the Bible.

The time from the end of the Roman Empire until our time, a period of nearly 2,000 years, is represented in the dream by the feet of the image – a mixture of iron and clay, strong nations and weak nations. They are divided and separate, just as bits of iron will not mix with clay. We are living in this time – a time of divisions – nations can agree on very little.

In the dream Nebuchadnezzar saw a small stone hitting the feet and smashing the image to powder. The powder was blown away in the wind, leaving only the stone. The stone then became a great mountain that filled the whole earth. Daniel 2:44,45 explains what is to happen in the time of the feet (our times!):



“And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever, just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold.”

The image represents the kingdom of men. The stone “cut from a mountain by no human hand” represents the Lord Jesus Christ, who had no human father. When he returns to the earth, he will end the rule of all the kingdoms of the world and restore God's kingdom, which will fill the whole earth.

Much of Nebuchadnezzar's dream has come to pass – and we can be quite sure that the last part will also be fulfilled. Notice that the future kingdom will be here on this earth.

Summary

1. The Old Testament tells us about the history of God's people, the Jews.
2. The New Testament tells us about Jesus and the beginning of the Christian church.
3. The prophecy of Daniel 2 describes four great empires that followed one after the other, followed by a time of strong and weak nations. We live in the time represented by the feet of the image, and are waiting for the Lord Jesus Christ (represented by the stone) to return.
4. Christ will bring to an end the kingdom of men and restore God's kingdom, which will fill the whole earth.

A verse to learn: Daniel 2:44

And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand for ever ...

Verses to read:

Deuteronomy 7:6-8 – The people of Israel are God's chosen nation.

For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Acts 13:17-23 – The apostle Paul gave this history lesson.

The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with uplifted arm he led them out of it. And for about forty years he put up with them in the wilderness. And after destroying seven nations in the land of Canaan, he gave them their land as an inheritance. All this took about 450 years. And after that he gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. And when he had removed him, he raised up David to be their king, of whom he testified and said, 'I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will.' Of this man's offspring God has brought to Israel a Saviour, Jesus, as he promised.

Also read Nehemiah 9:7-31, Acts 7.

