



God's Kingdom: Present, Future, or Both?

And in the days of these kings 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. Forasmuch as thou sawest 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 hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure. (Daniel 2:44-45)

When did (or shall) God set up this everlasting kingdom? Is it yet-future? Or has it already been set up? The dominant contemporary interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream and Daniel's interpretation is that the prophecy refers to the toes of the image, supposedly a still-future European world power that will in some inexplicable way be an extension of the ancient Roman Empire, the legs and feet of the image. However, it should be observed that Daniel does not interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream to include five world empires, but four, and they are sequential, not separated by centuries. From Babylon to Medo-Persia to Greece to Rome, one kingdom overran and replaced the former with no time delay whatever. What about this vision indicates that there is to be an extended and indefinite delay between the image's feet and toes? Does the vision indicate that the toes are amputated from the feet, or does it reveal that they are connected?

A more specific point on which to reject this spurious interpretation appears in the answer to one simple question. Daniel states, "In the days of these kings...." In the days of which kings shall this glorious kingdom be set up? The answer to this question will eliminate any obscurity and erase the view that imposes an indefinite time gap onto the dream's fulfillment. Notice Daniel's punctuating, final thought.

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Notice also that Daniel assures the king that the dream is certain, as well as his interpretation of that dream. When Daniel observes that God shall set up this everlasting kingdom, he clearly intends

to include the scope of all four kingdoms, not a theoretical extension of the fourth kingdom millennia later. God's kingdom shall be set up during the time span covered by the four kingdoms mentioned, interpreted throughout Daniel as referring to the four empires mentioned above.

Biblical prophecy is always specific and precise. We could describe every such prophecy with the same terms that Daniel uses to the king of his own interpretation, "...the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure." Consider the specific accuracy of just a few other Biblical prophecies.

1. The Messiah, God Incarnate, shall be born of a virgin. (Isaiah 7:14)
2. He will be born in Bethlehem, and not just any little village named Bethlehem, but that particular Bethlehem located in Ephratah. (Micah 5:2)
3. A yet future pagan king would initiate steps to free God's chosen people from an extended period of exile, and he would initiate a decree to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. Although this event, including the future king's birth, was over a hundred years in the future, God named the king, Cyrus. (Isaiah 44:28; 45:1)

If we were to read that Jesus was born in Nazareth, though Joseph's ancestors lived in Bethlehem, would we dismiss the deficiency and claim precise fulfillment anyway? No. If the future king who issued the order to end Babylonian exile and to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem was named Nebuchadnezzar and not Cyrus, would we claim precise fulfillment, despite the error in his name? No. Biblical interpreters who attempt to apply this flawed logic to Daniel's writings claim that God merely inserted a prophetic time parenthesis into the prophecy so that the time that unfolds during this parenthetical time lapse should

merely be ignored. They impose a major factual flaw in the prophecy, but they attempt to claim accurate prophetic fulfillment, despite that flaw. Consider a far more personal flaw that will illustrate the depth of their logical problem. Jesus repeatedly predicted His death, as well as His resurrection three days later. (Matthew 12:40; 27:63, acknowledged even by His enemies; Mark 8:31) How would we react if someone began to teach that Jesus died and was buried in the borrowed tomb exactly as Scripture affirms, but that He did not rise from the dead on the third day, their claim being that God inserted a parenthetical time gap into the resurrection prophecy, so that He shall eventually arise, fulfilling His prophecy accurately because God doesn't count time inside the parenthesis? Would you accept this bizarre claim? Why then should we accept the equally bizarre claim of a non-counted time parenthesis regarding prophecies in Daniel, particularly when a clear fulfillment in fact occurred that requires no time parenthesis? One more example; I live in southern California. According to the normal route, the distance between my home and San Francisco is approximately 437 miles. Let's say that I do not have access to maps, so I ask you to give me directions to San Francisco, knowing that you've been there many times. During our conversation and my review of your driving directions, I notice that you have not mentioned the distance, and I do not know how far San Francisco is from Riverside, so I ask you to tell me the distance. You tell me that the distance between Riverside and San Francisco is about a hundred thirty seven miles. You gave me a precise number, so I will accept your information and prepare for a trip of a hundred thirty seven miles. I begin my journey. As my vehicle's odometer nears the 137 mark, I begin to look for signs of San Francisco, but find none. Then I notice a mileage marker listing San Francisco, but it tells me that I have an additional three hundred miles to drive. What is my first thought regarding your testimony that the distance is a hundred thirty seven miles? When I finally arrive in San Francisco and meet up with you, will I congratulate you on the accuracy of your directions, or will I remind you of the bogus distance you gave me? And how might I react if you explained your answer by telling me that there was a three hundred mile distance "parenthesis" in the trip that you didn't count? All of these examples clearly reveal the flaw, the essential and factual flaw, on which Bible interpreters dismiss the facts of Daniel's prophecies and reinvent them according to their own wishes, or forced and unhistorical, unbiblical beliefs, rather than Biblical facts revealed in the text and precisely confirmed in secular history.

If we accept the literal information presented in the text and begin to study Daniel's prophecy, we will expect to see the prophecy's fulfillment sometime during the era of the four empires that Daniel identifies in the prophecy, not at some indefinite and extended date after those empires have long since ceased to exist. And if we encounter a difficulty in explaining what this kingdom is, should we make overt attempts to reinvent the prophecy in our own theological image, or should we seek Biblical answers that might accurately explain the prophecy according to God's design? ***In simple terms, do we lead the text where we want it to go, or do we follow it where God wants us to go?***

Perhaps the major single factor that most interpreters of this flawed interpretation offer is their claim that God has not yet set up His kingdom. If God has not yet set up that kingdom, they reason, its fulfillment must be delayed. What if they are wrong? What if God set up the kingdom, but it is different from the kingdom these people expected? I believe this is in fact the case. It is significantly noted that the Jews, religious scholars of the first century, read their own holy writings, our Old Testament, and constructed their own ideas regarding the nature of Messiah's coming and the kingdom that would attend His appearance. Their construct of God's Messianic kingdom was so different from the reality that the New Testament presents to us that they boldly rejected Jesus as their Messiah and plotted His death. Were they right, or is the New Testament correct regarding Jesus being the Messiah? Was their image of the Messianic kingdom accurate, or is the New Testament correct? How do we reconcile their errant ideas with the New Testament? Who says we should try to reconcile errant ideas with truth? That is why they are errant; they deviate from the true New Testament message; they contradict the New Testament message, so we inform our faith and grow by identifying those contradictions and rejecting them. Bible believing Christians of our own era would serve their faith similarly by understanding the errors in modern interpretation of precise and accurate Bible prophecies through their frivolous injection of "parenthetical" and non-descript time gaps and by rejecting any interpretation of Biblical prophecy that requires such a flawed explanation. Would they accept that Jesus didn't really rise on the third day, though through a flawed idea of a parenthetical time gap He shall eventually arise? Of course not; all Bible Christians would shout their rejection of such a blasphemous idea. And well they should. We should do no less with the present idea of randomly inserted time gaps that destroy the precision and accuracy of Biblical prophecy.

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Worship service each Sunday 10:30 A. M.
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