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The Kingdom Program & The Jews Under Babylon

Tonight we start a series on the Intertestamental Times (IT). Our purpose is to gain a general acquaintance with the kingdom of God and several new sects that developed during the IT that lead to the picture we see in the NT Gospels of an offer of the kingdom of God to Israel. The Gospels are surrounded with interpretive controversy, not only because of the unique claims of Jesus Christ but also because of a failure in large to understand the kingdom concept as taught in the OT. So a weak concept of the kingdom is going to lead to confusion in the gospels. For example, what is the nature of the kingdom being offered when John and Jesus say, “Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand?” Is this kingdom of a spiritual nature? If so, “Why do we need resurrection bodies?” Or is this kingdom of an earthly nature? If so, why? What is the purpose? Isn’t going to heaven the only issue? Then we ask, what are the requirements being set forth in the Gospels for entrance into the kingdom? Do I need to repent? Do I need to confess? Do I need to go sell all I have and give my possessions to the poor? You know, these things are not easy and certainly if you have read the Gospels and the Epistles you’ve wondered about some of these things. And who are all these groups like the Pharisees and Sadducees and Zealots and Samaritans? All these Jewish sects? What is their significance because Jesus’ confrontations with these sects is tailor-made for them, and so to decipher what He is teaching we have to know something about those sects. Needless to say there are profound interpretive difficulties when coming to the NT Gospels and I hope you bear with me for a while in trying to unravel some of the historical background in order to cast some light on the subject.

I had no idea what I was getting into in a study like this so before we plunge into this period it’s important to make some preliminary remarks and give historical background of God’s kingdom program. So today you’ll be familiar

with the bulk of the information but this is necessary to set the stage for the more unfamiliar information. First, much of the information presented here is not authoritative in the sense of Scripture because it is based on mere human records which are subject to fallibility. The reason we are reliant on human records is because God was silent during this period. Even the Jews during the IT admitted that they had no prophets which are God's instruments in the OT to speak into history. For example, in 164BC the Jews, having finally re-possessed the Temple after the desecrations by Antiochus Epiphanes IV, are said to have taken this action in 1 Maccabees 4:16, "So they tore down the altar, and stored the stones in a convenient place on the temple hill *until there should come a prophet to tell them what to do.*" Why didn't they know what to do? Because they had no living prophets. This meant God was not speaking and therefore they had no divine guidance on what procedures to follow in this situation. Dr Ironside said, "the canon of Scripture was closed very shortly after the days of Nehemiah. The voice of inspiration had ceased, nor was it again heard till the "dayspring from on high" had visited His people (Luke 1:78), and God then spake to us in His Son. All later books than that of Malachi, the last of the prophets, have therefore no place in the Old Testament" (p. 95). His point is that the OT canon closed with Malachi and then God went on silent mode for over 400 years.

If you find it strange that God went silent then consider that the recurring pattern we find is that God speaks for a while and then goes silent...then He speaks for a while more and then goes silent again. For example, God was speaking in Genesis up to the time of Joseph but then He went silent for 400 years before speaking to Moses in Exodus. Then again God was speaking in the NT up to the time of John when he wrote Revelation but then He went silent for 1900 years and He remains silent today. So it's not uncommon for God to go silent. This is a recurring pattern for God to speak for a while and then go silent. This is important to recognize because people are always saying God has to speak a fresh word to each generation and this in part is largely what the charismatic debate is all about. However, the record is that God does not speak a fresh word to each generation. Rather He speaks for a while and then He goes silent. That's what happens with Malachi. God has said all he wants to say for the time being and there's a lull in the conversation. What are people supposed to do during the lulls? Think. Think about what? Think about what God has said. He's giving the human race

time to digest what He's said. It takes time to do that. You don't get your Bible out one weekend and master it. It takes years and years of thinking about what God has said to master it, even your whole lifetime and then you'll still have questions. Just before the Jews went into the IT period of silence God told them to do what? "Remember." Mal 4:4, "Remember the law of Moses..." So during this time of silence His people were to do what? Think about what He said in the Law of Moses? Do you think that might be important when you come into the pages of the NT and John comes with his message, "Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand?" You better believe it's important. Do you think all those sects had particular interpretations of the Law of Moses? Sure they did. This is a major issue in the Gospels and somehow its related to the kingdom of God coming. Then some strange things happen. The Jews reject Jesus, committing the ultimate boo-boo, they crucify Him but God raises Him and his disciples are still looking for the kingdom of God to come and He says "Bye," I'm leaving, and in my place I'm sending the Holy Spirit to do some work. Huh? What's all this about? And they go on preaching the kingdom message with the new information of the death and resurrection but God is founding this new thing they find out later called the Church. He speaks all this new truth, stuff never revealed before and then John writes the Revelation and boom, silence again, there's a lull in the conversation again, even down to our own day. What are we supposed to do now? Think. Think about what? Think about Christ's death by way of communion. Doesn't it say, "do this in remembrance of Me?" So always in the periods of silence we are to think about what He just said or did before. The troubling question is how well do we do that? Because we're fallen creatures we tend to be flighty. We've got our mind on everything else except what He told us to put our mind on. And the Jews during the IT to a large degree put their minds on everything but the Mosaic Law, they actually developed new laws and alternative interpretations of the law but all this did was nullify the law. So were they really thinking about it? No, they were thinking about their innovation.

So we will have to depend on human resources for much of the information about the IT because God was silent. What resources? Let's look at some of the source material. First, the Apocrypha. What's the Apocrypha? It's a set of books written during the IT by Jews. The word Apocrypha means "hidden" and that description has been interpreted a number of ways but the dominant way is that the Jews didn't consider them to be a divinely inspired

part of the canon of Scripture. These books are interesting not only because they contain history, tradition and lore but because they are written in Greek rather than Hebrew or Aramaic like the books they did accept as the canon of Scripture. There are fifteen books in this set; 1 Esdras, 2 Esdras, Tobit, Judith, the rest of the Chapters of the Book of Esther, The Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, A Letter of Jeremiah, The Song of the Three, Daniel and Susanna, Daniel, Bel, and the Snake, the Prayer of Manasseh, 1 Maccabees and 2 Maccabees. So while these books are not a divinely inspired part of Scripture they nevertheless provide information about the IT that is truth mixed with fiction. Second, the works of Josephus. Who was Josephus? Josephus was a Jew who lived just after the time of Christ. In the war of AD66-73 the Roman army captured him at Jotapata and used him as an aide and interpreter with the Jews. He was then taken to Rome and commissioned by Emperor Vespasian to write a history of the Jews. His two works that give a very comprehensive coverage of the IT are the *Wars of the Jews* written in AD81 and the *Antiquities of the Jews* written in AD94. Third, the works of secular historians. For example, the history of Persia is documented by the Greek historian Herodotus. The history of Rome is documented by Tacitus. Those are other sources for the IT.

Of course, we're not left without guidance from Scripture concerning these times because on one end of the IT we have the OT and it gives us an authoritative picture of God's kingdom program for the Jews and the surrounding Gentile nations and their role with respect to the Jews as they go into the IT and on the other end we have the NT that gives us an authoritative picture of God's kingdom program as it is offered to the Jews in the midst of Rome. Lets take up, for example, a few things on either end of this period. First, the final pictures of the OT gives prophetic insight into the history of the IT. For example, Dan 2 and 7 sketch the four successive Gentile kingdoms that would rule before the Jews kingdom of God would ultimately be restored. The first kingdom would be Babylon, the second Medo-Persia, the third Greece and the fourth Rome. These prophecies give a general picture of the kingdoms in power throughout the IT, Dan 2 from the human view point as remarkable achievements of the brilliance and ingenuity of man and Dan 7 from the divine view point as brutally oppressive regimes far below proper human standards of living. Daniel 8 portrays the defeat of the Persian kingdom by the Greek conqueror Alexander the Great, a defeat which occurred during the IT. Daniel 9 gives a calendar of 490 years for

Israel, a calendar which began in Nehemiah's day and was counting down during the IT. Finally Daniel 11 gives a detailed history of the Ptolemaic and Seleucid branches of the Greek kingdom as they vied for dominance in the land of the Jews. In that prophecy particular attention is given to the rule of the Seleucid king Antiochus Epiphanes IV who would persecute the Jews heavily and thereby serve as a forerunner to the anti-Christ. All these prophecies and others relate to and spell out events that transpired during the IT. So we are not left without witness from the OT. Second, on the other end of the IT we have the NT as a bookend and this gives us an authoritative picture of the Jews and the surrounding Gentile world after the IT. For example, the NT tells us that the Sadducees were a group of Jews who did not believe in angels or the resurrection of the dead. On the origins of this group the OT are silent but their existence in the NT indicates they originated during the IT. The NT also tells us that the Pharisees were overly concerned with tithing and bodily purifications while disregarding the weightier things of the Law. This group is also not found in the OT but their existence in the NT is clear so they must have originated during the IT. The NT also quotes the OT but from a Greek translation. However, no such Greek translation existed during the OT times. Therefore a Greek translation must have been made during the IT and become popular by the NT times. The point is that while we have to rely a lot on the Apocrypha, Josephus and secular historians, God did not leave us without witness in that the OT predicts many things that took place in the IT and the NT gives us a picture of what had developed during the IT.

However, at the same time, some authors consider the IT critical to study in order to understand the NT. Hester, who authored *The Heart of Hebrew History*, is representative when he says, "...it is a very important period since such vast changes in social, economic, political and religious life took place during this time. It is impossible for the student to understand the life of Jesus and other New Testament events without some acquaintance with the happenings during these four hundred years." (p. 315). His statement may be an overstatement but he is certainly correct that it is more difficult for us to understand the life of Jesus and other NT events without some acquaintance of what happened during these four hundred years. The NT authors even recognize this to some degree when they give us parenthetical remarks to help fill in details about some of the groups or customs that originated in the IT.

We'll be getting into some of these groups in the weeks to come but tonight we want to lay the groundwork and this requires that we gain a general acquaintance with the historical outworking of God's kingdom program. This material will be familiar so our strategy will be to move from the familiar to the unfamiliar. I'd argue that God's kingdom program begins at Creation and that we ought to look at Adam and Eve as the first king and queen of creation, under lords so to speak of God's kingdom on earth, with responsibility to have dominion over the kingdom. At the Fall they failed to subdue properly and therefore the kingdom came into Satan's possession and he began his program of building a counter kingdom of man. By the time of the Flood his program had been so successful that the report is that the wickedness of man was great on the earth and that every intent of the thoughts of man's heart was only evil continually. The judgment/salvation at the Flood purified the kingdom leaving Noah and his family as kings and queens on the earth with the same responsibility given to Adam and Eve, that of having dominion over the face of the earthly kingdom. Each member of this family was a believer and from them descends the entire human race as we see it today. There were no nations at the time and everyone spoke the same language and used the same words. God commanded them to spread out over the face of the earth and repopulate the earth in order to bring it under the dominion principles of the kingdom of God. To do this God instituted civil government, giving the sword into the hands of men for the first time in history. However, in this post-Flood environment men did not trust God and obey Him by scattering out over the face of the earth and ruling justly but they rather rebelled by gathering together to build a city called Babel, which means "the gate of God." This term betrays the thoughts of men's heart, the concept that men could pass through a gate and become as God, the same lie Satan told Eve. Their program was to build a kingdom of man in opposition to the kingdom God wanted built. Their program involved a form of the belief in the continuous nature of being or existence; that God and man are on a scale and that men can move up the scale and become as God. This thought pattern is opposite to that at Creation of the Creator-creature distinction, that God does not differ from man by degree but by kind, that God is distinct from His creation and not subject to it. Man's failure to think God's thoughts after Him and trust him led to God disrupting the building project of the kingdom of man by changing the language so that the people were unable to communicate in this rebellious construction project.

The result was that it forced people to spread out into tribal groups that shared the same language. It was at this time that God established the first nations as described in the Table of Nations and the result of this is that while they were forced to scatter everyone continued to do what was right in his own eyes. It was in this context of human depravity and apostasy that God decided to call out one man and make a nation from him through which He would build the kingdom of God. This man was Abram, a pagan who worshipped the moon God. He spoke to him and made a covenant with him and his descendants after him promising a kingdom including all the necessary aspects of a kingdom such as a land and a king. This kingdom was to be the greatest kingdom on earth, ruled by a great servant king who would spread His dominion over all the nations of the earth in order to supply blessing for all. This kingdom was certain to come since God based His covenant on His own nature. Then Abraham had a son named Isaac and the covenant was reiterated to him. Isaac had a son named Jacob and the covenant was repeated to him. Jacob was renamed Israel and he had twelve sons and the covenant was confirmed to the twelve tribes. These twelve tribes went down to Egypt, the purest form of the kingdom of man at the time, and they remained there for 400 years building this kingdom while they grew numerically into a nation. When the oppression of God's covenanted people by the kingdom of man reached a breaking point the people cried out and God judged Egypt and saved His people. At this time the kingdom of God was once again born into history in a visible form. The people of the great King marched to Mt Sinai where He gave them the law of His kingdom. In giving the Ten Commandments He stated that He had first done for them by redeeming them from Egypt so they should obey Him and thereby establish the kingdom on earth. He promised that if they lived in obedience to His law then they would be blessed in the kingdom and would live long in the land but if they lived in disobedience to His law they would be cursed in the kingdom and ultimately be exiled from the land. While that generation agreed to obey all the King's law they rebelled and consequently wandered in the wilderness for forty years. When they had all died except Joshua, Caleb and all those under 20 years of age, they entered the land at the Conquest and Settlement. In these great battles the nation under Joshua learned how the Lord would bless them if they obeyed their King's laws. Meditating on them day and night led to victory while disobeying them led to defeat. While the Conquest was largely successful the nation had only partial obedience and therefore the conquest was incomplete and God pronounced doom at

Bochim. That generation would not possess all the kingdom real estate at that time, but it would remain for another generation to conquer. At that time the nation divided mainly along tribal lines. They lived independently from one another and when problems would arise and the people cried out their King would raise up tribal judges to solve their problems. For 400 years the tribes swung from legalistic tendencies to gain control of the social situation to licentious tendencies when the pressures of legalism became too great. Never able to find the perfect balance the people eventually became tired of swinging back and forth between these two extremes and found a solution already at hand among all the other nations. They therefore wanted a king like all the other nations. A king would solve all their problems. He could go out and fight all their battles and he could fund programs that would solve their social problems. Of course, they had forgotten that they already had a King. God was their King and so requesting a human king was not a true solution since God would solve all their problems if they would be obedient to Him. The problem was not their king, the problem was them. Nevertheless, when it was explained to them the procedures of the human king and how he would oppress them and tax them heavily the people still wanted a king like all the other nations. Reluctantly God granted them Saul. With Saul a mediatorial form of the kingdom of God began. What we mean by mediatorial is that God is reigning over His kingdom through a human mediator. Before Saul they enjoyed a theocratic form of the kingdom where God ruled as King directly independent of any human mediator. So when the nation rejected God as their theocratic king and said, "we want a king like all the other nations," God reluctantly gave them Saul to serve His mediator of the kingdom of God. So we have with Saul the beginning of the mediatorial form of the kingdom of God. Now Saul was a head taller than anyone else in the nation and appeared to be a great and mighty king. However, Saul consistently failed to trust the Lord and so eventually God rejected him and chose David, a man after His own heart. David had to rise through the ranks to the throne but when he did he was the first king to join all twelve tribes together and reign as a monarch. David was a loyal believer and God promised him an eternal dynasty. This meant that the kingdom of God would ultimately come to be ruled by an eternal King from David's lineage who would rule over the whole earth. David also conquered Jerusalem and this would be the city from which this eternal King would rule. Because of King David's loyal leadership the kingdom expanded and enjoyed great prosperity, though they never conquered the entire kingdom real estate. Nevertheless

they enjoyed the blessing that God promised would result when they obeyed His laws. The kingdom under David's mediatorial rule enjoyed a high biblical culture and a complex national worship centered on the tabernacle. He desired to build a beautiful Temple for this worship but because he was a bloody warrior God denied David the rights to build His house but extended those rights to his son. When David died the kingdom was passed to his son Solomon. Solomon was initially a very godly ruler and God granted to him more wisdom than any other person until even the time of Christ such that people from all over the earth came to Jerusalem to hear the wisdom of Solomon. He had understanding in every branch of human thought and due to the nation's loyalty to God the kingdom expanded, enjoyed unparalleled prosperity in the history of the human race and drew the nations from round about. However, Solomon later rebelled against God's laws by marrying foreign women which introduced idolatry, and multiplying for himself human armies and war machines which evidenced his failure to trust God to fight his battles. Consequently the kingdom began to deteriorate as God cursed them. When Solomon died the kingdom passed to his son Rehoboam who continued to rebel against God and oppress the people in order to gain control and order of the kingdom. In exercising oppressive rule he almost caused a civil war and the kingdom was torn from him and broken into two kingdoms. The kingdom of God was now divided into two parts. The northern kingdom, composed of ten tribes was known as Israel, and was ruled initially by Jeroboam who was not of David's house. The southern kingdom composed of two tribes was known as Judea and continued to be ruled by Rehoboam who was of David's house. Both kingdoms went into spiritual decline. However, Israel in the north declined more rapidly than Judea in the south because they did not have the stability given by a Davidic covenant which promised an eternal King ruling over the kingdom real estate for all eternity. During much kingdom intrigue and dynastic changes Israel was warned by prophet after prophet to return to the King's law but ultimately they rebelled and consequently were totally defeated by Sennacherib of Assyria in 721BC and sent into Exile. The Assyrians were the rod of God, implements of God's own discipline on His people. The Assyrians employed their policy of deporting captives of war to other parts of their expanding empire. Their purpose was to encourage foreign captives to intermarry with one another so as to break down national identity, curb national fervor and eliminate revolutionary tendencies in their kingdom. Thus, when they defeated Israel, whose capital was Samaria, they deported the ten tribes to various places in their empire

and imported foreigners into their land. In the meantime the southern kingdom remained intact, but they were in a difficult situation geographically. Situated directly between the powerful Assyrian kingdom in the north and the rising Egyptian kingdom in the south they were constantly under pressure as both kingdoms vied for control of Judea. Initially the Assyrians gained the upper hand but gradually their power waned. Judea continued to decline spiritually in the reign of evil Manasseh and while God sent them prophets to warn them of further cursings they continued to rebel. They were coming dangerously close to facing Exile like the northern kingdom. About 650BC the prophet Nahum predicted in a highly vivid account the sudden and total destruction of the great Assyrian capital of Ninevah. A new power was rising and about 615BC Habakkuk predicted the sudden, meteoric rise of the Babylonian kingdom that would overrun Judea and send them into Exile. In 612BC the prophecies of Nahum and Habakkuk began to coalesce when the Assyrians were decisively defeated by the Babylonians at Ninevah and routed again in a follow up battle at Haran in 610BC. The Egyptians tried to stave off the forces of Babylon in the battle of Carchemish in 605BC but were defeated thoroughly by a man named Nebuchadnezzar who was operating in his father, King Nabopolassar's, stead in his military campaigns. He forced the Egyptian to flee back to the borders of Egypt with their tail between their legs. But as he pursued them south along the plains of Israel alongside the Mediterranean Sea he received a report of his father's death and upon turning back decided to take some time to stop at the splendid city of Jerusalem before returning to be crowned king of the world. The southern kingdom of Judea was now facing its gravest fear; Exile and domination by a Gentile kingdom. Their fears were realized in a series of three deportations. The first deportation occurred in 606/5BC when Daniel, his three friends, other royals and nobles, along with some of the temple vessels were taken to Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar immediately changed their godly names to pagan names and enrolled them in the local university to be trained in all the learning of the Babylonians. The best students after three years were to serve in his kingdom as administrators in order to manage the various nations within his kingdom. This policy was a kingdom-wide policy so it applied to every nation that he conquered. The royalty and nobles of all nations he conquered underwent the same training as Daniel and his friends. It was at this time that he began to have his recurring dream of the metal statue with a head of gold, arms and chest of silver, waist and thighs of bronze and legs and feet of iron and iron mixed

with clay. Then a stone cut out without hands would appear and strike the statue at the base smashing it entirely and then growing to fill the whole earth. The dream disturbed him and he wanted to know the dream and its interpretation from those wise men in his kingdom who professed to know such mysteries. When they could not reveal the dream he issued the death penalty for all of them. Daniel however, prayed to God and the dream was revealed to him. He subsequently went into the king and explained its meaning. Nebuchadnezzar was the head of gold, the first and greatest king of the Gentile kingdoms. He had been given his kingship and kingdom by Daniel's God. However, following his kingdom would come a second Gentile kingdom, then a third and finally a fourth in two phases. It was during the final phase of the fourth Gentile kingdom that the kingdom of God would be restored and ruled by the eternal king from David's line. Until then the Jews would remain in exile, subservient to Gentile kingdoms. The second deportation occurred in 597BC when the puppet king Jehoaichin rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. In this deportation Ezekiel and 10,000 captives were taken into exile. Finally the third deportation occurred from 588-586BC when the next puppet king Zedekiah rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. By this time King Nebuchadnezzar had had it and so he captured and deported the remaining remnant, deposed King Zedekiah and destroyed Jerusalem, the Temple and many cities throughout the land. The Shekinah Glory that manifested in visible form the presence of God also departed from the Temple. This meant that the Jewish kingdom of God officially was no longer on earth and the Davidic throne would lay vacant until David's eternal seed would come to reign. But the dream of Nebuchadnezzar had shown that this would not occur until the four Gentile kingdoms revealed in that dream had run their course. So at this time the Jews had officially entered the period Jesus referred to in Luke 21:24 as "the times of the Gentiles."

Within the land we have a situation we have not spoken of much in our Bible classes. The land was now a province of Babylon and only the poorest and eldest people remained as stragglers in the land. King Nebuchadnezzar appointed a man named Gedaliah to be the first governor of his new province and he gave him Babylonian servants to ensure his rule. Because Jerusalem lay in ruins Gedaliah established Mizpah as the new capital city. He instructed the people to live in the land and serve the king of Babylon. However, after seven months a plot led by a man named Ishmael, in an alliance with the king of Ammon, assassinated Gedaliah and the Babylonian

servants. In fear that Nebuchadnezzar might send armed forces to retaliate against this rebellion many Jews wanted to flee to Egypt. Before departing they asked Jeremiah to intercede on their behalf and bring them God's decision, promising to follow it no matter what He said. Jeremiah revealed that they should remain in the land and not be afraid of the king of Babylon. The reason was, because, God, if you recall, had already raised up one of their countrymen, Daniel, to one of the highest posts in the Babylonian kingdom. His three friends were also in high administrative positions. So Daniel and his three friends were well-respected by King Nebuchadnezzar and could work on behalf of the Jews. Therefore there was no need to leave.

Nevertheless, after several of Jeremiah's warnings the people said, no, but we will go to the land of Egypt. Jeremiah reluctantly went with them to minister to them there and he settled in Tahpanhes in the Nile Delta. Other Jews settled in Migdol, Memphis and the land of Pathros. Rather than returning to the Lord their God, in Egypt they began to worship other gods, thus continuing to do what their fathers had done, the very things that resulted in their Exile to begin with. It was revealed through Jeremiah that they would consequently suffer in Egypt and that all of Egypt would come under the power of the king of Babylon rather than escape. Because of their idolatry Jeremiah warned them to stop offering sacrifices to the queen of heaven which they had brought in alongside God as the king of heaven but they would not and so God determined to destroy all of them such that only a few refugees in Egypt would ever return to the land. And so the whole of Egypt came under Babylonian rule, they did not escape.

About the same time King Nebuchadnezzar had thought about the dream of the statue that Daniel had interpreted as four Gentile kingdoms starting with Nebuchadnezzar. He himself had been the head of gold but why could he not be the entire statue? Why could his kingdom not last forever? So in his arrogance he re-interpreted the statue and had a large gold statue erected in the plain of Dura of himself. To consolidate the loyalty of his administration he brought all his officials to the plain to bow down and worship him. Daniel's three friends were present and because they were ultimately loyal to God their King, they would not worship. Consequently they were given another opportunity but rejected and cast into a burning furnace. Yet they were not burned up, and there was even a fourth man seen in the furnace walking around with them. So when they were brought out not even the smell of smoke was found on their clothing and King Nebuchadnezzar was

amazed and he gave honor to the God of the Jews along with all the other gods in his kingdom.

After this King Nebuchadnezzar saw another dream. In this dream he saw a great tree grow up and it reached to the heavens and shaded the whole earth and provided food for all the beasts of the field and every bird of the sky dwelt in its branches. And then suddenly the tree was cut down and all its branches so that all that was left was a stump and the beasts and the birds fled away and a band of iron was put around the stump and there was a man who began to act like a beast and go around on all fours and eat grass from the ground and this man acted this way for a set period of time. When Daniel interrupted this dream he explained that it referred to king Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom growing great and providing support for all its conquered nations but at some time the king himself would lose touch with reality and start acting like an animal and eat grass from the field like a beast and during that time the conquered nations would rebel in revolutions until the king admitted that God was the one who gave him his kingdom. And so it was that in due time Nebuchadnezzar was walking around his palace and he began to exalt and praise himself in his mind for his mighty power in establishing his kingdom and so because of this arrogance God struck him and he lost his mind and acted like a beast going about on all fours and the nations in his kingdom went into revolution until the king at last raised his eyes toward heaven and gave credit where credit was due. I take it that when he raised his eyes to heaven he was believing that God was sovereign and that He is the one who gives kingdoms and takes kingdoms away. And I take it that he became a genuine believer at that time. And so the first Gentile king was a genuine believer and he was served by Daniel and his three friends and he was a friend to the Jews. Other kings like Nebuchadnezzar's son Evil Merodach also exercised kindness to the Jews, probably because of Daniel's influence. So even though they were in exile to Babylon they enjoyed much freedom and prosperity.

As for life in Babylon Leon Wood says that while Daniel held these high positions it is likely that he was "able to play a significant role in securing pleasant conditions for his captive countrymen." For example, the elevation of Jehoiachin by Evil-Merodach (2 Kgs 25:27-30) is an act toward a captive king that "suggests the interests of a special friend working in his behalf." "Evidence exists that life for the Judean captives was comparatively

pleasant; much different, surely, than the condition of bondage experienced by their ancestors in Egypt.” Five evidences reveal a relatively tranquil life for Jews in Babylon. First, “some of Judah’s own institutions were maintained. For instance, elders, long employed in the local government of Judah, were still active.” “Also, the institutions of the prophets and priests (in their respective teaching ministries) were retained; for when Jeremiah addressed a letter to the captives, he mentioned first the elders, then both prophets and priests, and finally the people generally (Jer. 29:1). Second, the “captives enjoyed freedom of movement in the land. Ezekiel...even having his own house (Ezek 8:1). Also, the elders were at liberty to visit him there. The freedom accorded Jehoiachin, after liberation from prison by Amel-marduk [aka Evil Merodach], testifies similarly. He was given food and other provisions at the court for the remainder of his life and may even have been granted some authority to rule, for it is stated that he was given a “seat” (throne?) above that of other kings with him in Babylon (II Kings 25:28).” Third, the Judeans retained “correspondence privileges...Jeremiah speaks of such letters (29:25) and also wrote to the captives in Babylon himself (29:1). That communication of this kind must have been carried on is evidenced also by people in Judah knowing of Jehoiachin’s status, so that they were able to hope for his return as king (Jer. 28:3-4).” Fourth, a most significant evidences is the Judeans “favorable employment opportunities...One is found in the type of person Nebuchadnezzar chose to deport. He took craftsmen and artisans, particularly in the captivity of 597 B. C. (II Kings 24:14-16). Apparently Nebuchadnezzar planned to put them to work in skilled trades. The other is found in the many business tablets, discovered at Nippur on the canal Kabari, which contain Jewish names in a context showing that they were active in business: renting, buying, and selling.” Fifth, the Judeans were “permitted to live on fine, fertile land. Many resided along or near the river Chebar (Ezek. 1:1, 3; 3:15, 23; etc.), which...likely...flowed out of the Euphrates...The canal supplied irrigation for a rich farming area, which means that Jews were favored by an advantageous land for farming, whether for themselves or in working for others.” In conclusion to life in Babylon, the picture emerges that it was a relatively pleasant one given the circumstances. Yet this picture does not mitigate the circumstances entirely. Wood says, “the experience did serve as a punishment, if only because the people had been uprooted from their homes and were forced to endure the kind of humiliation that comes with captivity under the best of conditions. This sense of humiliation would have been felt most keenly at the beginning

of the period, probably the time when Psalm 137 was written, speaking as it does of weeping by the rivers of Babylon.”

The last king of Babylon was Nabonidus who reigned from 555-539BC and his son Belshazzar was his co-ruler from 553-539BC. It was during the reign of these two co-kings that Daniel saw his vision of the four beasts that depicted the same four successive Gentile kingdoms as depicted by the four metal statue seen by Nebuchadnezzar. The first beast was like a lion with wings of an eagle who then lost his wings and stood up on two feet like a man and then was given a human mind. The second beast was like a bear raised up on one side with three ribs in its mouth. The third beast was like a leopard with four wings on its back and it had four heads. The fourth beast was like a dreadful and terrifying beast with large iron teeth and brass claws and it had ten horns and then a small little horn grew up and pulled up three of the others, and the little horn had eyes and a mouth and uttered great boasts. Fifth, one like a Son of Man came up to the Ancient of Days and received a global kingdom over all the peoples of the earth. Daniel was awestruck and he approached an angel to understand the interpretation. The angel explained that the four beasts are four successive Gentile kingdoms who would rule and then a fifth Kingdom, the kingdom ruled by the Son of Man would come and the Jewish believers would receive this kingdom and possess it forevermore. It was a picture of the course history must take which results in the restoration of the kingdom of God on earth. Whether Daniel shared this vision with Nabonidus and Belshazzar is not known but we do know that Nebuchadnezzar did pass the events of his temporary insanity on to his grandson Belshazzar. On the final night of the Babylonian kingdom Belshazzar was holding a great feast for a thousand of his nobles and drinking wine. When he tasted the wine he requested that the gold and silver vessels that had been taken by Nebuchadnezzar out of the temple in Jerusalem be brought so they could drink from them. When they drank from them they worshipped the gods of gold and silver and bronze and iron and wood and stone. This act of idolatry resulted in the mysterious hand writing a cryptic message on the wall. Belshazzar feared greatly, understanding that he had done something that warranted this ominous declaration, particularly when none of his wise men could interpret it. The queen suggested Daniel be brought in since he had formerly deciphered difficult dreams and visions for his grandfather. When Daniel arrived and understood the message he rebuked Belshazzar for not humbling his heart when he learned about his

grandfather's period of temporary insanity. The message was short and decisive, Belshazzar had been weighed and found wanting, the days of his kingdom had come to an end, it was being divided and given to the Medes and the Persians. Even at that moment the Medo-Persian army had already diverted the channels of the Euphrates River that ran under the city wall and within moments they had entered the banquet hall. On that night they took Babylon without a fight. The first of the four Gentile kingdoms had come to an end. For seventy years they had remained in Babylon just as Jeremiah predicted (Jer 25:11).

Nevertheless, their time in Babylon was quite peaceful given the fact of an Exile. But now a second Gentile kingdom had come to power, the Persians, and life in Persia would not be quite as tranquil. Thus the story is that the kingdom of God had begun with Adam but been lost to Satan who constantly is trying to counterfeit God's kingdom with his own. God frustrates his attempts and in the meantime established a kingdom of God through Israel that He reigned theocratically but when the people asked for a king He gave them one and ruled mediatorially. With Solomon the kingdom began to decline and it divided and eventually both kingdoms went into Exile such that the kingdom of God gave way to four successive Gentile kingdoms. God reigns supreme over these kingdoms but they must run their course before the eternal King of David's line comes and is established in the earth.

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