

Daniel 2:31

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

Daniel's description of the statue begins: 'Thou, O king, sawest, and behold a great image.' The Aramaic *tselem* (image/statue) suggests an idol, ironically appropriate for representing earthly kingdoms in their pride. The image's 'brightness was excellent' and 'form thereof was terrible' combines awesome splendor with frightening power—human kingdoms appear glorious yet threaten destruction. The statue's composite materials (gold, silver, bronze, iron, clay) represent successive kingdoms, each inferior to its predecessor, showing the deterioration of human governmental authority over time. This vision reveals God's perspective on human empire-building—impressive but ultimately fragile and doomed.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern art commonly depicted deities and kings as colossal statues symbolizing power and permanence. Nebuchadnezzar himself erected an enormous golden image (Daniel 3:1), possibly inspired by this dream. The descending value of metals (gold to clay) reverses typical ancient thinking that valued earlier 'golden ages.' Daniel's interpretation subverts imperial propaganda: empires grow militarily stronger (iron) but politically weaker (mixed clay), culminating in fragility rather than permanence.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does the image's outward splendor contrasted with internal deterioration reflect human kingdoms' pride versus their actual fragility?
2. What does the progressive deterioration from gold to clay teach about the trajectory of human government apart from God's kingdom?

Interlinear Text

שָׁגַ יֵאָדָּם עֲלֵמָה וְאֵל הִנֵּה יֵרָא הַמֶּלֶךְ אֵל נִתְּהָ
Thou **O king** H2370 **sawest** **and behold** **image** **a great** H7690
H607 H4430 H1934 H431 H6755 H2298

לְקַבֵּל קָאָם יֵתִיר וְזִיוָהּ כִּבְרִי דִּבְרֵי עֲלֵמָה אֵל
image **This** **great** **whose brightness** **was excellent** **stood** **before**
H6755 H1797 H7229 H2122 H3493 H6966 H6903

וְרֵי דְקִילָהּ
thee and the form **thereof was terrible**
H7299 H1763

Additional Cross-References

Habakkuk 1:7 (Parallel theme): They are terrible and dreadful: their judgment and their dignity shall proceed of themselves.

Isaiah 13:11 (Parallel theme): And I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible.

Ezekiel 28:7 (Parallel theme): Behold, therefore I will bring strangers upon thee, the terrible of the nations: and they shall draw their swords against the beauty of thy wisdom, and they shall defile thy brightness.

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