

A Look at Some Important Problems

1. The Interpretation of Symbols

A special problem in the interpretation of Daniel's predictions is the matter of symbolism, such as is found in chapters 2, 4, 7 and 8. The problem appears in the first long prophecy in the book (ch. 2), where Daniel describes and interprets Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

This dream involved a great image, evidently the statue of a man. Its head was made of gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, and its feet partly of iron and partly of clay (v. 32-33). A stone from the mountain fell on the feet of the image and destroyed it. Then the stone grew until it became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth.

Without the subsequent interpretation (vv. 37-45) there would be no solid basis for understanding the image. It could be interpreted in many ways. If Daniel had not said that it represented a historical progression going downward from the head to the feet (vv. 38-41), it could just as well be suggested that the progression would go upward from the feet to the head, or that the dream pictured conditions that would exist simultaneously in various areas.

Without the interpretation there would also be no way to know which features of the vision were significant.

Daniel said to Nebuchadnezzar, "You are that head of gold" (v. 38). Nothing was said about any specific meaning for the mouth, the nose, or the eyes. There is no reason to