

power, which came to an end when the Persian king, Cyrus, conquered Babylon, about 22 years after Nebuchadnezzar's death.

In the preliminary discussion of symbolism (pp. 41ff) we saw that the detailed features of the statue do not yield additional information, beyond the fact that there would be a succession of four great empires. We did not at that point give particular attention to the various metals of which the image was composed. The interpretation includes statements about the meaning of the iron and of the mixture of iron and clay, but says nothing about any specific meaning for the gold, the silver, or the bronze. Attempts have been made to relate these three metals specifically to the history of the three empires that they represent but such attempts are purely fanciful. There is no reason why silver should be considered more characteristic of the Persian kingdom than of that of Nebuchadnezzar or of Greece, and gold or bronze could properly characterize any one of the three. The use of three different metals to represent the first three kingdoms showed that there would be great differences between them, but the particular metals did not indicate distinguishing characteristics of these kingdoms.

Some interpreters say that the decreasing value of the metals indicates that each of the last three kingdoms would be in some way inferior to those that preceded it. Such an interpretation is quite natural, in view of the usual rendering of a statement in verse 39: "After you, another kingdom will rise, inferior to yours." However, there is no solid basis for rendering this word as "inferior," since it is simply the Aramaic word for earth, with an ending to indicate direction. Literally the word means "toward the earth," or "lower down." There is no known instance where this word is used in Aramaic literature or inscriptions to mean "less valuable," but there are a number of occurrences where it clearly means "lower down". Thus it is used in the ancient Aramaic translation ("targum") of Genesis 6:16 to indicate the lower decks of the ark.

When Nebuchadnezzar heard that he was represented by the head of gold and that there was to be another kingdom,