

From United Rome to Divided Rome

Daniel 2:41-43

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Skeptics have longed attacked the inspired Book of Daniel: particularly the prophetic accuracy revealed in it. Thus, they falsely claim it is not prophecy of future events at all, but history of past events. It was not Daniel that wrote this book (they claim), but someone much later (about 160 BC) that wrote about the empires of Babylon, Medo/Persia, and Greece. The most troubling part of the Book of Daniel for skeptics is the prophetic accuracy that is revealed in it. Their goal is to remove the prophetic portions of Daniel in which the all-knowing, sovereign God gives Daniel knowledge of what He has planned for the future.

But skeptics must also take into account that there are prophecies in the Book of Daniel that far exceed the time of the Maccabean war (160 BC) and prophecy about the great Roman Empire, the division of the Roman Empire into ten kingdoms, the rise of a “little horn” at the time of these ten kingdoms (papal antichrist), the advent and ministry of Jesus Christ (even to the exact year that He began His ministry), and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans (70 AD). Jesus even mentions that Daniel prophesied the desolation that would befall Jerusalem about 600 years before Jerusalem was destroyed (Matthew 24:15-16; Daniel 9:26-27).

Thus, the skeptics fail to remove the prophetic accuracy of the Book of Daniel, and God glorifies His omniscience and sovereignty over all history. The fulfillment of prophecy in history confirms our faith in all of Scripture. The main points for the sermon today are: (1) The Unity of the Roman Empire; (2) The Division of the Roman Empire; (3) The Application to Us.

I. The Unity of the Roman Empire (Daniel 2:33,40).

A. We have been considering King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and its interpretation that God miraculously gave to Daniel. The king dreamed of an enormous human image that was composed of different metals from the head to the feet of the image, which represented successive world kingdoms that would in significant ways have connections to God’s people: (1) the head of gold (the Babylonian kingdom); (2) arms and chest of silver (the Medo/Persian kingdom); (3) belly and thighs of brass (the Grecian kingdom); (4) legs of iron (the united Roman kingdom) to be followed by feet and toes of a mixture of iron and clay (the divided Roman kingdom—which is where we will spend our time today). The same four kingdoms are represented by four beasts in Daniel 7.

B. In the previous sermon on this portion of Daniel’s prophecy, we considered the fourth kingdom of Rome both as to its strength that crushed everything in its path and as to its unity and peace that could not be broken into pieces (*Pax Romana*).

1. The Roman Empire is likewise signified in the Book of Revelation by this terrible beast that arises from the sea, having seven heads and ten horns (Revelation 13:1). The seven heads represent seven successive forms of government that ruled over Rome: the first head of the Beast—the Kings of Rome; the second head of the Beast—the Consuls of Rome; the third head of the Beast—the Council of Ten of Rome; the fourth head of the Beast—the Military Tribunes of Rome; the fifth head of the Beast—the Dictators of Rome; the sixth head of the Beast—the Emperors of Rome; and the seventh head of the Beast—the Patricians of Rome.

2. One of the heads of the beast received a deadly wound (Revelation 13:3—this was the sixth head of the beast—which represented the emperors of Rome—which came to an end in 476 AD in the Western Roman Empire when Emperor Romulus Augustus was deposed by the barbarian king, Odoacer). For 277 years no emperors reigned over the Western Roman Empire. However, after the short rule of the

Patricians of Rome—the seventh head of the beast (753-800 AD), the deadly wound of the sixth head was healed when Charlemagne was crowned emperor of the revived Roman Empire by Pope Leo III.

3. There was an unsurpassed strength and unity in Rome until the collapse and deadly wound of the sixth head of emperors (476 AD), which is signified by the legs of iron in Nebuchadnezzar's image, but as Daniel moves to the bottom portion of the image, the feet and the toes are not iron, but a mixture of iron and clay.

II. The Division of the Roman Empire (Daniel 2:41-43).

A. There are two notable points about the feet and toes.

1. The first point is that the feet and the toes do not have either the unity or the strength that was represented in the legs of iron, but rather are a composite of both iron and clay (i.e. brittle clay that is hardened). Something in history has transpired to break down the unity and the strength of the mighty Roman Empire.

a. This stage of the Western Roman Empire is characterized by division, not unity (Daniel 2:41—"the kingdom shall be divided"; Daniel 2:43—"shall mingle themselves with the seed of men").

(1) This means that what had been the unified Western Roman Empire would become an intermingling and mixture of kingdoms of other languages, laws, constitutions, and customs that were not a part of the original iron. This would bring division in the once unified empire.

(2) In the three previous kingdoms (Babylon, Medo/Persia, and Greece) there was a unity—conquered nations were brought under the rule of these unified kingdoms—they did not divide these kingdoms. However, in Rome many kingdoms migrated or invaded the Western Roman Empire and brought independent governments to rule where there had been essentially one government.

b. The feet and the toes of iron and clay also speak of weakness—not the strength of the former Western Roman Empire (Daniel 2:41b-42).

(1) Because what had been the mighty Western Roman Empire was divided among many different kingdoms it did not have the strength that it once had—how could it if it was mixed with hardened, brittle clay? It would be "partly strong" at times like iron, but also "partly broken" like brittle clay.

(2) Apparently this means that some of these kingdoms in the once mighty Western Roman Empire will at times show great strength like iron and at other times be weakened like brittle clay. There would not be an ongoing strength of iron like Rome of old, but due to war and conquests some of these kingdoms would increase in strength like iron while others would decrease in strength and be broken like clay.

2. The second notable point about the feet and toes of the image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream is that we learn have a hint as to the number of foreign kingdoms that divided and weakened the Western Roman Empire—for it is implied there are ten toes (ten horns in Daniel 7:7; Revelation 13:1; Revelation 17:12). Carefully note that the Apostle John states that at the time that he was writing the Book of Revelation, these ten kings (or kingdoms) had not yet received power to rule. Thus, we should not be searching for these ten kingdoms at the time of John but subsequently to his time. So who are these ten toes or these ten horns and where do they appear in history in fulfillment of this prophecy?

a. We know they come into the Western Roman Empire (the leg of iron). We know they divide the unified Western Roman Empire (iron and clay). We know they weaken the once great strength of the Western Roman Empire (as a mixture of iron and clay is easily broken). We know they had not come to power as kingdoms until after the time of the Apostle John. Finally, we know there were ten kingdoms (ten toes).

b. Who fits historically these prophetic facts? The barbarian kingdoms that

infiltrated the Western Roman Empire primarily in 5th and 6th centuries AD fulfil this prophecy. I submit the implied ten toes (Daniel 2) and the explicit ten horns (Daniel 7; Revelation 13,17) are the ten barbarian kingdoms that brought disunity and weakness to the once unified and powerful Western Roman Empire: the Heruli, Ostrogoths, and Lombards occupied various parts of present Italy; the Visigoths occupied what is presently parts of Hungary, Austria, Croatia, and Serbia; the Suevi occupied what is presently Spain and Portugal; the Franks occupied what is presently France, the Burgundians occupied various parts of Europe at different times, including Scandinavia, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and northern France; the Anglo-Saxons occupied what is presently Britain; the Vandals occupied what is presently part of Italy, and the Alemanni occupied what is presently Germany. These were the ten main barbarian kingdoms that infiltrated the Western Roman Empire, divided it, weakened it, and did not receive a kingdom until after John had penned by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Book of Revelation. We will have more to say about the ten horns when we come to Daniel 7. But for now, we have identified in history the feet and toes of the great human image that God gave to Nebuchadnezzar in a dream and which Daniel interpreted by the supernatural knowledge granted to him by the Lord.

c. The prophetic revelation of the ten toes/horns does not end in the 5th and 6th centuries in their infiltration and invasions into the Western Roman Empire. There is much more to say about them in Daniel 7, but we will end here for now.

III. The Application to Us.

A. In Revelation 8-9, the Lord Jesus pours out His trumpet judgments upon the Christianized Roman Empire.

1. Trumpet judgments 1-4 (Revelation 8:6-13) are poured out upon the Christian Western Roman Empire by means of the barbarian invasions in bringing to an end its unity and strength due to the Church of Rome's perversion of the true religion, doctrine, worship, and government of Christ taught in Scripture.

2. Trumpet judgments 5-6 (Revelation 9) are poured out upon the Eastern Roman Empire by means of the Muslim invasions in bringing to an end its unity and strength due to the Eastern Orthodox Church's perversion of the true religion, doctrine, worship, and government of Christ taught in Scripture.

3. These were mighty kingdoms and churches that God judged in history for their corruption and backsliding. Let us not think that Jesus will not likewise judge and purify nations and churches today. Let us be humbled and repent (whereas those kingdoms and churches in the West and in the East did not). If mixture of different laws and constitutions brought disunity and weakness and destruction of the Roman Empire, do we think it will not do the same to Christ's Church?

B. That which seems confusing becomes clear in the light of God's Word and by the illumination of God's Holy Spirit.

1. Case in point: The ten toes composed of iron and clay may after a first read seem so mysterious that we may be tempted to discontinue reading the prophecies in the Book of Daniel (or be tempted to quickly pass over such symbols in these prophecies) simply because it is like trying to read a foreign language that we have not learned.

2. However, my earnest prayer is that this series of sermons might make clear the biblical interpretive keys to unlocking these prophecies and might give to you a hungering and thirsting for Christ's truth and righteousness found in His Word (Psalm 36:9).

3. We must not desire to know God's truth simply to gain knowledge and to satisfy our curiosity. We desire knowledge that we might know our Savior and Lord—His greatness, His power, His mercy, His justice, His love (Jeremiah 9:23-24). That was true of Daniel.

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