

Lesson 7

When we ended last week, we had identified the four kingdoms in King Nebuchadnezzar's dream: Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. And we were discussing both the inexplicable rise of Rome and the inexplicable fall of Rome, but, as we saw, neither was inexplicable.

Instead, the explanation for each is found in Daniel 2. Rome rose because God wanted Rome to rise, and Rome fell because God wanted Rome to fall. And both that rise and that fall had been prophesied centuries before the Roman empire ruled the world with iron.

But we remember from the vision that Rome was not entirely made of iron. The Roman empire may have started out that way, but eventually Rome was better represented as iron mixed with clay, and starting in verse 41 we will see the explanation for Rome's feet of clay.

Daniel 2:41-43

41 And whereas thou sawest the feet and toes, part of potters' clay, and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; but there shall be in it of the strength of the iron, forasmuch as thou sawest the iron mixed with miry clay. 42 And as the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken. 43 And whereas thou sawest iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men: but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay.

We learn some more about Rome in these verses that were written centuries before Rome became a world power.

What we learn here is that Rome would *become* in some sense a divided kingdom. Why do I say become? Because only the feet and toes are iron mixed with clay, and the flow of time is moving downward on this giant image from the head in Nebuchadnezzar's day to the legs and feet in the days of Rome. The iron lets us know that we are looking at the same kingdom, but the mixture with clay lets us know that that kingdom has somehow been divided and weakened.

Was that true of the mighty Roman empire? Did Rome have feet of clay? Yes! Rome began its history with great strength but that strength declined over time until Rome eventually fell.

But why did Rome fall? Historians have been debating that question for centuries. I have a book

entitled *The Fall of Rome: A Reference Guide* that lists 260 different theories about the fall of Rome including:

- the decline of agriculture (22)
- failed tax policies (25)
- soil exhaustion (48)
- a general decay in intelligence (76)
- lead in the diet of upper class women and long hot bathing by men (86)
- a large infusion of alien races (97)
- slavery (108)
- deforestation (112)
- climate change (114)
- malaria (121)
- rats and fleas (154)
- unions and legislation on prices and wages (179)
- crudity (230)

Gibbon's famous *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* gives four primary reasons why Rome fell: external invasion, inner decadence, inner strife, and the injury of time and nature. OF those four reasons, the inner strife sounds most like what we see in this prophecy about the feet of clay.

That inner strife was due in part to the client kingdoms that Rome set up to rule the borders of its empire. The Visigoths were the first such group to receive federate status, and they sacked the city of Rome in AD 410 marking the first time in 800 years that the city had been taken by a foreign invader.

So, one way we can view the fall of Rome is to look at it from a long perspective.

The imperial period of ancient Roman history began in 27 BC when Octavian, later called Augustus, became the first emperor of Rome and ended in AD 476 when the last Western Roman emperor, Romulus Augustulus, was overthrown. The Roman empire continued in the East for another 1000 years until the invasion by the Ottoman Turks in the 15th century. So Rome in the west fell in 476, and Rome in the east fell 1000 years after that.

But Rome also fell in another way. We can also view the fall of Rome from a shorter, more focused, perspective. And this perspective fits better with the timeframe we are given in this chapter.

Why do I say that? Because the stone we are about to look at hits the statue's feet of clay. So we need to align our explanation of the feet of the clay with our explanation of the stone.

So what do I mean when I say that the fall of Rome can be viewed with a shorter perspective? What I mean is that there is a sense in which Rome fell in the first century, not once but twice!

The key to this view is to recall something we have already seen in this vision. Sometimes Daniel uses the words "king" and "kingdom" interchangeably. We saw that with the head of gold, which denotes both Nebuchadnezzar and Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom.

The Julio-Claudian dynasty of Rome was the first dynasty, and it included the first five emperors of Rome (Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero). That dynasty fell when Nero died in AD 68. Nero was a terrible persecutor of God's people, and Nero's fall and the fall of his dynasty are described in Revelation *after* it happened.

After Nero, Rome had three civil war emperors that all reigned within a single year, the so-called year of four emperors. The fourth of those four emperors was Vespasian, who returned to Rome leaving his son Titus behind to destroy Jerusalem.

Vespasian's dynasty was called the Flavian Dynasty, and it included three emperors (Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian). Domitian was another terrible persecutor of God's people, and Domitian's fall and the fall of his dynasty are described in Revelation *before* it happened.

Those two falls are linked together in the Bible, and they are linked together by history. In fact, Domitian was commonly called Nero Redivivus (Nero Reborn).

Both of those persecuting dynasties fell in the first century, and both of them fell because of inner weakness and division.

In what sense was Rome divided at this time? The most immediate answer is to recall those three kings who reigned between the Julio-Claudian and Flavian dynasties. They are called the **civil war** kings! You can't get much more divided than that!

Another way Rome was divided can be seen by how the Roman Senate reacted immediately after they heard that Domitian had been assassinated. Here is how Suetonius describes their reaction.

The Senators however were filled with joy and rushed to the House to denounce the dead Emperor, shouting out bitter insults, and calling for ladders so that his votive shields could be torn down and his statues toppled to the ground before their eyes. Then they decreed that all inscriptions mentioning him should be effaced, and all record of him obliterated.

Again, that sounds to me like there was some serious internal strife and division during the reign of Domitian.

We will look at these various falls of Rome in more detail as we work through the book, but I favor the shorter, more focused, view of Rome's fall for two reasons: First, it fits the time frame of the stone perfectly. And second, these Roman dynasties are described with great detail in the book of Revelation, which we will also see as we study the book of Daniel (especially Chapter 7) and compare it with the book of Revelation.

So why did Rome fall? Daniel tells us. Rome fell because God wanted Rome to fall. Whatever the reason or reasons, God was the cause. The fall of the Roman empire had been prophesied long before the rise of the Roman empire.

So what then are the four kingdoms represented by this statue? They are Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome.

And is that it? Is that the end of the story? Just those four kingdoms? No! There is a fifth kingdom! Let's keep reading.

Daniel 2:44-45

44 And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. 45 Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure.

Verse 44 is one of the most important verses in the Bible, and certainly one of the most important linking passages between the Old and the New Testaments.

In many ways the Old Testament slowly pulled back the curtain on the mystery of the gospel that was fully revealed in the New Testament. We see glimpses of the gospel and of the eternal kingdom all throughout the Old Testament - and perhaps nowhere in the Old Testament do we learn more about the church than we do here in verse 44 (although some of the verses we studied in Zechariah are very close!).

Verses 44-45 explain the part of the image that must have been the most interesting part to Nebuchadnezzar - the stone. What was this stone that would cause his great golden head to collapse to the ground and be blown away as dust? And when would that happen? Daniel answers both of those questions.

Let's first remember what we learned about the stone back in verses 34-35.

We learned that the stone smashes into the feet of the statue and breaks them into pieces, causing the entire statue to collapse into pieces and be carried away like dust by the wind. We learned that the stone then becomes a great mountain and fills the whole earth. And we learned that the stone was cut out without hands.

What more do we learn about the stone here in verses 44-45?

Verse 44 tells us that the stone is yet another kingdom, but it is nothing like the other four kingdoms. Why? Because it will be set up by God, because it will never be destroyed, because it will not be left to other people, and because it will stand forever. In fact, not only would this kingdom never be destroyed, but it would "break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms." And verse 45 repeats a very important feature of this stone that we saw earlier: it was "cut out of the mountain without hands."

Do we learn anything more about this stone? Yes. Daniel gives us the all-important time frame of the prophecy. Daniel tells us **when** the kingdom represented by this stone would be set up. "And **in the days of these kings** shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed."

Which kings? Either "these kings" are all of the kings of the vision including Nebuchadnezzar (meaning that this kingdom would be set up before all of those other kings and kingdoms passed away) or, more likely (in my view) based on the immediate context of verses 41-43, "these kings" are the kings of the fourth empire. They are the kings of Rome.

So whatever this eternal kingdom is, Daniel is telling us that it would be set up by God during the days of the Roman kings.

So what is this great kingdom set up by God? We know that answer to that question. This great kingdom is the church. But how do we know that for sure?

First, we can look at other Old Testament prophecies about the church.

Here in Daniel 2 we see that the stone becomes a great mountain that fills the whole earth. Have we seen anything like that elsewhere in the Bible? Yes, we see it in the great prophecy about the church in Isaiah 2.

Isaiah 2:2-3 - And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

When was that prophecy from Isaiah 2 fulfilled. Luke answers that question.

Luke 24:46-49 - And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, **beginning at Jerusalem**. And ye are witnesses of these things. And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: **but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high**.

When did they received that power in Jerusalem? When did the word of the Lord first go out from

Jerusalem? That all happened in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost when Peter preached the first gospel sermon. That day was when this great kingdom was established.

But if that's true, then shouldn't we see the disciples talking somewhere about being in a great kingdom? Yes, and we do.

Colossians 1:13-14 - Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into **the kingdom of his dear Son**: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins

Hebrews 12:28-29 - Wherefore **we receiving a kingdom** which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire.

Revelation 1:9 - I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and **in the kingdom** and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.

So Daniel told us about a kingdom, and Paul and John told us about a kingdom. Maybe we have two kingdoms? Does that make sense? I like how Foy Wallace answered that question:

Daniel's kingdom is indestructible. Paul's kingdom is immovable. If they are not one and the same thing, how can Paul's kingdom be moved to let Daniel's kingdom begin?

The answer is that they are one and the same thing. The eternal indestructible kingdom of Daniel 2 is the immovable kingdom of Hebrews 12. It is the kingdom of God's dear son from Colossians 1. It is the church. The kingdom of God's dear son into which we have been translated by God is the church of Christ into which we have been added by God.

And just as Daniel prophesied centuries earlier, the church was established during the days of the Romans kings. We see that great event in Acts 2 as it occurred during the reign of Tiberius, the second emperor of Rome.

And what can we learn from the fact that this kingdom started out as a stone and then later became a mountain that filled the earth?

First, the stone was no less powerful when it was just a stone - that stone destroyed Babylon, Persia,

Greece, and Rome!

Second, we can learn the same thing Jesus told us about the kingdom in Matthew 13.

Matthew 13:31-32 - The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.

Third, we see in that description of the stone another indication of the timing of these events - they occurred when the church was still in its infancy. They occurred before the stone became a giant mountain. And any premillennialist who tries to tell us that the feet of the statute represent a yet future kingdom should pay very close attention to the timing here - those feet were destroyed before the stone became a giant mountain that filled the earth. Those feet were destroyed while the church was still in its infancy.

And that was precisely when Rome tried to destroy the church, just after the church was established. But things didn't turn out the way Rome thought they would! The Roman empire is long gone, but the church is still here.

Let's ask another question: Is the stone Christ or is the stone Christ's kingdom? Many commentators say that the stone is Christ, and there is a sense in which that is true. It is the same sense in which the head of gold can represent both Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon. Christ the king and the kingdom of Christ cannot be separated.

And we see Jesus as a stone in Psalm 118.

Psalm 118:22 - The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner.

That verse is quoted in Matthew 21:42, Mark 12:10-11, Luke 20:17, and 1 Peter 2:7. We also see Jesus as a stone in Isaiah.

Isaiah 8:14 - And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel.

Isaiah 28:16 - Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.

Those verses are quoted in Romans 9:33 and 1 Peter 2:6, 8. We may even see a reference back to Daniel 2 in the description from Luke 20.

Luke 20:18 - Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.

But verse 44 is very clear on this point - the focus of the stone is on the kingdom. Verse 44 says that God shall set up a kingdom. The reason why many commentators say that the stone is Christ is because they don't want to admit that God established an eternal kingdom in the first century. (But how could we have a king without a kingdom?) Verse 44 leaves no doubt - this stone is a kingdom. It is the kingdom of Christ.

Finally, at the end of verse 45, Daniel reminds Nebuchadnezzar who it was who had revealed his dream to him - it was not Daniel but rather it was "the great God" who had made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter. And, of course, that meant the dream was certain, and the interpretation was sure.

So what do we learn about the church from this vision? Many things.

We learn that the church is not a mistake or a fallback plan. The church was a part of God's plan right from the start.

Premillennialists teach that Christ came to earth the first time to set up an earthly kingdom but was unable to do so because the Jews rejected him. As a "Plan B" God decided instead to set up the church until Jesus could return a second time to set up an earthly kingdom. Thus, they teach that the church is the result of a failed plan. JESUS CHRIST DID NOT FAIL IN ANYTHING HE DID. EVERYTHING WENT EXACTLY ACCORDING TO GOD'S PLAN.

Is the church a mistake? Listen to Paul:

Ephesians 5:25-27 - Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

Acts 20:28 - Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you

overseers, to care for the church of God which he obtained with the blood of his own Son.

Does that sound like a Plan B to anyone?

This eternal kingdom is the church of Jesus Christ, and it will demolish and outlast any human organization just as Daniel says it will. That includes every man-made organization that calls itself a church. And that brings us to another important point that we learn from Daniel about the church.

The church is not a divided kingdom. There is one and only one stone in this image. The kingdoms shatter into pieces, but the stone does not. There is one church and only one church. This is not a popular theme these days, but it is the truth. This message may not make us very popular, but we must continue to proclaim it. The church is unique and distinctive.

Ephesians 4:4-5 - There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism.

1 Corinthians 10:17 - Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

Colossians 3:15 - And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful.

John 10:16 - And I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd.

If God had wanted two churches, he would have made one for the Jews and one for the Gentiles. Listen to how Ezekiel describes the eternal kingdom:

Ezekiel 37:22 - And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all.

The church cannot be split! God has set up an eternal kingdom that cannot be divided. We are not made of clay!

Another thing we learn is that the church is not of human origin. In verse 34, we see that this stone was cut out by no human hand. This stone is not from man. The church is not a denomination. The

church was not built by man or established by man. The church is the church of Christ. That is, the church was built by Christ, was bought by Christ, and belongs to Christ.

Matthew 16:18 - And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock **I will build my church**; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

John 18:36 - Jesus answered, **My kingdom** is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is **my kingdom** not from hence.

Acts 20:28 - Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which **he hath purchased** with his own blood.

I think a lot of the problems and division in the religious world can be traced to the false idea that the church is ours and we can do with it what we please. It is similar to what we hear in the abortion debate today - my body is mine, and I can do with it what I please. The Bible teaches me that neither my own body nor the body of Christ belongs to me, and I am not free to do with either as I please. The phrase "my church" appears once in the Bible, and that is when Jesus said, "I will build my church."

We also learn from Daniel 2 that the church is powerful and eternal. It completely demolishes and replaces and outlasts its opposition.

So here is how God sees the church:

- It is eternal.
- It is powerful.
- It is beautiful.
- It is not man-made.
- It is more important than any earthly kingdom.
- It is the focus of all human history.

- It is not changed by history; it changes history.

But is that how we see the church?

Or do we see ourselves as just a footnote? As powerless to affect the world as it rushes by? As just another man-made religious group? As something that is swept away by the kingdoms of this world rather than the reverse?

If we want to be the people God wants us to be, our first step must be to see ourselves as God sees us. How can we be powerful if we see ourselves as powerless? How can we be the beautiful city of God if we have an inferiority complex?

Yes, it may sometimes look as if human institutions and man-made kingdoms are in control - but they are not. God is in control, and God's kingdom will outlast and destroy every man-made organization that has ever been or ever will be - be it a man-made government or a man-made church.

Daniel 2:44 - And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.

THAT'S US! DO WE BELIEVE IT?

Daniel 2:46-49

46 Then the king Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face, and worshipped Daniel, and commanded that they should offer an oblation and sweet odours unto him. 47 The king answered unto Daniel, and said, Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, seeing thou couldest reveal this secret. 48 Then the king made Daniel a great man, and gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon. 49 Then Daniel requested of the king, and he set Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, over the affairs of the province of Babylon: but Daniel sat in the gate of the king.

The end of Chapter 2 is a truly remarkable scene! Of all the scenes in the Bible that I would like to travel back and see in a time machine, this event would be near the top of my list. One commentator has written:

The despot who but an hour before had ordered the execution of all his wise men was prostrating himself before this foreign captive from a third-rate subject nation! Even though he opposed the wisdom of the Chaldeans, this absurd monotheist had somehow found the right answer.

Nebuchadnezzar is likely very relieved. He is the head of gold, and although trouble is coming from this stone and from the second kingdom, it is apparently a long way off. Perhaps he is having the same reaction we saw earlier from Hezekiah after he was told by Isaiah that maybe he shouldn't have shown the Babylonians all of his royal treasures. Yes, trouble is coming, but not in my lifetime!

Did Daniel approve of the king's worship of himself in verse 46? No. How do I know? The Bible doesn't say one way or the other, but I know Daniel. After all Daniel has said and done, do we really think that he could have approved of someone falling down to worship him? Daniel had already said that God had interpreted the dream and not himself.

We must understand verse 46 in the light of verse 47, where Nebuchadnezzar praises the power behind Daniel. God is "God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of secrets." Daniel is honored because of what his God has done, not because of what he has done - and I think that must be how Daniel saw it. Otherwise Daniel would have reacted as Paul did at Lystra.

Was the king "converted" in verse 47. No, and we will soon see evidence of that. All verse 47 shows us is that Nebuchadnezzar was not a fool. Nebuchadnezzar was saying the right things, but only because he had just seen a clear and undeniable demonstration of God's power. True worship is in spirit and in truth. The king spoke the truth, but the spirit was not there as we will soon see.

Did the king make Daniel great? That is what verse 48 says: "the king made Daniel a great man, and gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon." But we have already been told where Nebuchadnezzar got his power and his rule - from God. And we have seen the hand of God throughout all the events leading up to this one. So even though Nebuchadnezzar is portrayed as the giver in verse 48, we know that God is behind that gift. Daniel has these honors because God wanted him to have them. God made Daniel great. Nebuchadnezzar just noticed it.

The king fulfills the promise he made in 2:6 and loads Daniel down with gifts and royal honors. The king also makes Daniel governor of the capital city, and ruler over the wise men. (Don't you imagine the wise men loved that!)

Did Daniel forget his friends? Not at all. How easy it would have been to forget about his prayer partners, but Daniel did not, as we see in verse 49. Their new positions will lead to the jealousy of native officials, which results in the conflicts in Chapter 3.

The final phrase in Chapter 2 ("Daniel sat in the gate of the king") means that Daniel was an advisor to the king and remained in the court of the king. As we said in the introduction, this explains in part why Daniel was not considered an official prophet by the Jews. Ezekiel and Jeremiah worked among the people (Ezekiel among the exiles and Jeremiah among those still in Jerusalem). But Daniel worked in a pagan court away from the people. And the lesson for us? We can do the work of God wherever and whenever we find ourselves. God gives us open doors of opportunity, but often we each get different open doors. We just need to look for them and take advantage of them while they remain open.

#daniel