

CHAPTER TWO

The Image

In the second chapter of Daniel we read about the dream in which a great image represents four great kings or kingdoms. The dream is dreamed by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and the interpretation is given by Daniel.

This prophecy and the parallel one of the four beasts are recorded in the Aramaic language and not in Hebrew. In fact the whole section 2:4 to 7:28 is in Aramaic, an international Gentile tongue. This is appropriate, because both visions deal with the rising and falling of great Gentile nations and the ultimate triumph of God's people over them.

Nebuchadnezzar receives the revelation in the second year of his reign. Because he has forgotten the dream and is determined to learn the real truth, he calls upon his wise men to describe the dream itself as well as its interpretation. This they are unable to do. But Daniel and his companions pray to God and the secret is revealed to Daniel in a 'vision of the night'. This is how he describes it to the king:

'... there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. Your dream and the visions of your head as you lay in bed are these: To you, O king, as you lay in bed came thoughts of what would be hereafter, and he who reveals mysteries made known to you what is to be. But as for me, not because of any wisdom that I have more than all the living has this mystery been revealed to me, but in order that the interpretation may be made known to the king, and that you may know the thoughts of your mind.

'You saw, O king, and behold, a great image. This image, mighty and of exceeding brightness, stood before you, and its appearance was frightening. The head of this image was of fine gold, its breast and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay ...' (Daniel 2: 28-33)

The head of gold

The image has a head of gold, and Daniel interprets it as follows:

'You, O king, the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, and the might, and the glory, and into whose hand he has given, wherever they dwell, the sons of men, the beasts of the field, and the birds of the air, making you rule over them all — you are the head of gold.' (Daniel 2:37, 38)

Thus we are told that the head of gold represents *Nebuchadnezzar*, king of Babylon. Under Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon rose to a position of great power, wealth and magnificence.

The breast and arms of silver

The breast and arms of this image are of silver and Daniel interprets as follows:

'After you shall arise another kingdom inferior to you ...' (Daniel 2:39a)

In my opinion, Daniel is describing the Median empire here. This empire was contemporaneous with the Babylonian empire, but after the death of Nebuchadnezzar in 562 B.C. *it became the stronger of the two*, because the power and wealth of Babylon immediately declined. Babylon was still a power, but the scales had tipped in favour of the Medes. Remember that the head of gold symbolizes Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel says, 'After *you* (Nebuchadnezzar) shall arise another kingdom inferior to *you*'. Following the death of

Nebuchadnezzar, Media was the major power for at least twelve years until it was united with Persia in 550 B.C. under the rule of Cyrus. The Median empire did not, however, have the glory and magnificence of Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon — it was of *inferior* quality.

The usual objection to this is that the Median empire did not follow after the Babylonian empire — it was contemporaneous with it. It may be replied, however, that the order of Daniel's kingdoms is the order of their rise to the height of power and prominence. Daniel does not say that each kingdom exists only from the time of destruction of the preceding kingdom to the time of its own destruction. The order of the kingdoms is *not* merely the order of their existences — it is the order of their occupation of the seat of supreme power. In other words, the order in which they held the title of 'top nation'! This is confirmed in the vision of the four beasts, because we learn there that after the fourth kingdom has been destroyed, the first three kingdoms continue to exist for a while *together*, although their dominion is taken away from them. This clearly indicates that they are to some extent contemporaneous.

The assertion that there was no Median empire between the Babylonian and Persian empires seems to be based on a misconception. This misconception is the idea that Persia succeeded Babylon as dominant world power when it overthrew Babylon in 539 B.C. Persia became the dominant world power some years *before* Babylon fell. Cyrus built up a very large and powerful empire which outstripped the Babylonian empire several years before he got round to conquering the latter empire. If it be admitted, and so it must, that Persia became the dominant world power before the actual fall of Babylon, it can be admitted also that Media may have been the dominant world power before Persia.

It will probably be objected that the Jews had little or nothing to do with the Median empire. This is not only irrelevant; it is also largely incorrect. Both visions describing the four kingdoms are recorded in Aramaic, a Gentile tongue. This could suggest that these first two visions give a *world-view* of earth's kingdoms — not a narrow Jewish view. The later prophecies do tend to concentrate more on the Jewish view; but not so much these first two prophecies. In any case, the Jews *were* very conscious of the Median empire. That empire and the Babylonian one were the two great rivals for world power, and every educated Jew in the major centres of communication, like Babylon, would have been acutely conscious of the former's existence. This was the situation when Nebuchadnezzar saw his vision of the image. When Daniel saw the vision of the four beasts (after Nebuchadnezzar's death), Media loomed even larger. In fact those who knew the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah (see following chapter) had always expected Media to overthrow Babylon.

This was the state of affairs for a few uneasy years. But suddenly, events took an unexpected turn. Media's king was overthrown by one of his own vassals, the brilliant Persian king, Cyrus. This man, who was related to the royal house of Media either by descent or marriage, began his climb to the seat of supreme power from the throne of the small Persian kingdom of Anshan. He united the Medes and Persians as allies under his own rule; but from this time Persia was on the ascendant. For some years the two peoples held the reins of power together; but the Persians had the edge on the Medes and increased their power until they were completely dominant.

The belly and thighs of bronze

Daniel continues the interpretation as follows:

'... and yet a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth.' (Daniel 2:39b)

The third kingdom is symbolized by the image's belly and thighs of bronze and is to 'rule over all the earth'. The characteristic of this third kingdom is the immense area over which it rules. This is a perfect description of the Persian empire, because the most striking aspect of

that empire was the huge area it covered — it was by far the vastest empire the world had seen. The following Greek empire was in fact slightly smaller than the Persian empire. In all regions except Greece and across the Indus river, Alexander's Greek empire either fell short of or failed to extend beyond the limits of the Persian empire.

Cyrus himself created the largest empire the world had seen up to that time; but his successors continued to push the frontiers outwards until the Persian empire was truly breathtaking in size. In a series of brilliant campaigns Cyrus annexed the entire Median empire, the large and powerful kingdom of Lydia in Asia Minor, much territory in the East — and then the Babylonian empire. His successors added all Egypt, a chunk of Europe and more territory in the East.

Note that the references to Cyrus in Isaiah and elsewhere indicate that in the Biblical view, Cyrus the Persian was far from 'inferior'. Note also the way in which Daniel groups together the second and third kingdoms. The second kingdom is passed over quickly with a brief and belittling remark, possibly indicating that its term of supreme power is comparatively insignificant and short-lived, as well as being inferior in wealth and magnificence. It is grouped with, and closely followed and overshadowed by, the world-ruling third kingdom. The whole description is strongly suggestive of the Medo-Persian situation, because the comparatively insignificant Median empire was absorbed and eclipsed by the subsequently enormous Persian empire only a very short time after it (Media) had itself surpassed Babylon. The description of the second and third kingdoms fits the Median and Persian empires far better than it fits the huge, wealthy, long-lived Persian empire and the rather smaller Greek empire.

The legs of iron, and feet of iron and clay

The fourth empire is symbolized by the legs of iron and feet of iron and clay. Daniel explains,

'And there shall be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron, because iron breaks to pieces and shatters all things; and like iron which crushes, it shall break and crush all these. And as you saw the feet and toes partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, it shall be a divided kingdom; but some of the firmness of iron shall be in it, just as you saw iron mixed with the miry clay. And as the toes of the feet were partly iron and partly clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly brittle. As you saw the iron mixed with miry clay, so they will mix with one another in marriage, but they will not hold together, just as iron does not mix with clay.' (Daniel 2:40-43)

This is a perfect description of the Macedonian Greek empire. The legs of iron represent that empire in the time of Alexander the Great. Her power was irresistible and utterly phenomenal. She smashed the power of Persia rapidly and completely. The fall of Tyre with the savage treatment of its inhabitants struck terror into the heart of the East. Alexander is possibly the greatest military genius the world has ever known. He made war as no man in the world before. He was supreme in strategy, tactics and organization, swift and sure to strike. All resistance was swept away before him and he never knew defeat. Setting out from Greece in 334 B.C., his army stormed through the East like a whirlwind, his disciplined troops finding none to resist them effectively. Even today there are traces of the many legends that gathered around that terrible name.

But then in 323 B.C., at the age of 33, Alexander died a premature and tragic death — before he was able to organize his empire into as closely cohesive a system as that of the Persians. And so the empire was divided between his generals. Immediately it was weakened, divided and at strife within itself. The feet of iron and clay therefore represent the period following the death of Alexander. Now this extraordinary man had initiated a plan to fuse

East and West under one Hellenic culture by means of a policy of intermarriage and the planting of numerous Greek colonies all over his empire. These colonies were communities of Greek people carrying on the Greek way of life in the midst of an alien environment. 'They shall mingle themselves with the seed of men', as the R.V. translates it, is a very apt description of this deliberate policy of integration. The iron-like strength of Alexander's Greece was broken up and mingled with the claylike weakness of the conquered peoples; but the complete fusion that Alexander had visualized never came to fruition — 'they will not hold together, just as iron does not mix with clay'. In the Egyptian section of the divided empire particularly, there was a complete and utter failure of the Greeks to fuse with the native people, though there was some degree of fusion in the Syrian part of the empire.

The generals who succeeded Alexander founded separate Greek dynasties which continued to rule over the various fragments of the empire. These dynasties always remained essentially Greek and were not absorbed by the nations they ruled. They were constantly at strife with each other, first one side being the stronger and then the other. Much of Daniel 11 is taken up with an account of their struggles and unsuccessful attempts at reconciliation. The result of all this was a weak and divided empire which contained elements of the original Greek strength.

One of the most enthusiastic supporters of the policy of amalgamating Greek and barbarian was Antiochus Epiphanes, a descendant of one of Alexander's generals and king of the eastern part of the Greek empire. He sought to unite his empire of many different races by giving them one Hellenic culture and religion. His most notable failure was his effort to absorb the Jewish people. A considerable proportion of them stoutly refused to mingle with the Greek 'iron'. In order to make them conform, Antiochus had to resort to force, and the result was a savage persecution of those who remained faithful to Judaism. It is with this persecution that a large part of chapters 7, 8 and 11 is concerned.

It can be seen, therefore, that the post-Alexandrian Greek empire fulfils all the various similes of the iron and clay — the empire was divided, it contained some of the original strength, it was partly strong and partly broken and the Greeks 'mingled themselves with the seed of men' without cleaving to them. The Alexandrian Greek empire, on the other hand, by its irresistible strength completely fulfilled the prophecy of the legs of iron.

Rome was strong, but her strength was of a different nature. She was not irresistible — she lost battles. Her empire grew slowly and almost reluctantly. She did not by any means 'shatter all things'. Alexander defeated everyone he fought; but Rome was unable, for instance, to overcome the Parthians. At one stage, in fact, the Parthians drove the Romans right out of Palestine. The failure of Rome against Parthia is specifically mentioned later in the book of Daniel (11:44, 45).

In his book, *A History of Warfare*, Lord Montgomery says some very significant things about the Greek and Roman armies. Describing the army of Alexander, he says, 'The net result was the best balanced and most powerful army of ancient times — an army equipped to fight in any type of country and against any enemy. The essence of the Macedonian technique of warfare under Alexander was the combination of the rock-like phalanx with light and heavy cavalry'. About the Roman armies, he says, '... the great weakness of Roman armies was lack of cavalry. The legionary infantry was superior to any that the world had yet seen, but without a good cavalry arm Roman armies were gravely handicapped. For this reason the Romans could never have been a match for the Macedonian armies of the fourth century'.¹

It is apparent that Daniel's fourth empire is divided into two very distinct periods, one of strength and unity and one of weakness and division. The Greek empire was divided in exactly this way, whereas the Roman empire deteriorated very gradually and showed no such clear-cut division between strength and weakness, unity and division. The idea that the

Roman empire still exists through the various countries which were once part of it (so fulfilling the prophecy of the feet of iron and clay) seems distinctly forced. These countries may certainly owe a great deal to the Romans, but this is not the same thing as being part of an existing Roman empire. They are certainly also disunited and of unequal strength, but, unlike the Greek empire, they provide no satisfactory and clear-cut explanation of the words, 'As you saw the iron mixed with miry clay, so they will mix with one another in marriage, but they will not hold together, just as iron does not mix with clay'.

In conclusion, therefore, the Greek empire perfectly fulfils every detail of the prophecy concerning the fourth kingdom, whereas the Roman empire falls short of the description in several respects.

Why separate Media and Persia?

It may have occurred to the reader to ask, 'Why does the book of Daniel complicate the issue by separating the Medes and Persians in chapters 2 and 7?' Why could there not have been three kingdoms (Babylon, Medo-Persia and Greece) instead of four? It was not because the author had a mistaken view of history. There must be some good reason why God chose the four-kingdom sequence — and the following extract from an article by J. E. Goldingay may well provide the answer we are looking for:²

'The four empire scheme resembles a pattern which appears in Greek, Latin and Persian writings, whereby four successive ages are symbolized by metals of diminishing strength or value, as in Daniel 2; the oldest certain occurrence of this symbolism comes in the eighth century Greek poet Hesiod (*Works and Days*, 106-201). These parallels suggest that Daniel's fourfold scheme pictures post-exilic history according to a common pattern. Probably it is more than merely a literary device; it makes a polemical point, like the use of near-Eastern mythological motifs elsewhere in the Old Testament. It expresses the conviction that Yahweh is the God who is really putting his will into effect in history. He is in control even of the degeneration which men can observe. Daniel applies the common image to the period of history with which he was concerned. This began with the Babylonians and ended with the Greeks, who thus have to be the first and last members of the scheme. What about the intervening material? Dr. Gurney suggests that this fits quite happily in between since a period of Median ascendancy occurred in between that of the Babylonians and of the Persians. But even if one has to grant that the material has to be squeezed (or rather stretched) to fit the scheme, this does not entail finding Daniel confused over post-exilic history. If he stretches a point over a period of history that is not in itself his main concern, this is because he is using an illustration which cannot be modified (otherwise, the point of using it disappears).'

I think there is truth in the point which Goldingay makes here; but I would word it a little differently. Goldingay believes that the book of Daniel is a pseudonymous work, written in the second century B.C. But I believe it was written by Daniel himself, and I believe that the vision of the image was given to Nebuchadnezzar *by God*. It was *God* who applied the pattern of four kingdoms — not some pseudonymous writer of the second century. The separation of Media and Persia in chapters 2 and 7 may appear to complicate things slightly; but it is done for a special purpose and involves no historical inaccuracies. I have shown that the descriptions of the four kingdoms correspond exactly to Babylon, Media, Persia and Greece. We shall see in the following chapter that the vision of the four beasts continues the idea of the 'four kingdoms'; and it confirms what we should have deduced already — namely, that the four kingdoms are Babylon, Media, Persia and Greece. This still leaves us with the question, 'Why did God choose Greece to be the fourth kingdom and not Rome?' But this will be dealt with in a later chapter.

The Stone

Daniel goes on to say,

'As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it smote the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces; then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.' (Daniel 2:34, 35)

The interpretation is as follows:

'And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed, nor shall its sovereignty be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand for ever; just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made it known to the king what shall be hereafter. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure.' (Daniel 2:44, 45)

A definite sequence of events is described here. A stone is miraculously, by no human agency, cut out of a mountain. First it smites the image upon its feet of iron and clay and breaks them. After this the whole image is broken up together. Finally, the stone becomes a great mountain filling the whole earth. It is possible that the stone began to grow into a mountain while it was still in the process of breaking up the image; but to me, the wording suggests rather that the image was completely broken up *before* the stone began to grow.

The radical critic, continuing to exclude all thought of the miraculous, assumes here that his second century author is predicting, hopefully but inaccurately, that God would destroy Antiochus Epiphanes and the Greek empire and then immediately afterwards establish a world-wide kingdom of Heaven. The possibility that this prophecy specifically predicts the coming of Jesus Christ is dismissed as being incompatible with rational thought. The prophecy is a noble idea, yes! A pious hope, yes! But a genuine prediction, directly inspired by God, which was actually fulfilled, no!

We shall see that this attitude is completely unjustified. We shall see that the prophecy *has* been fulfilled in a most wonderful way — just as we have seen that the description of the four kingdoms is an *accurate* description of Babylon, Media, Persia and Greece.

Let us leave aside, for a moment, the question of the stone's identity, and try to interpret the break-up of the image. The stone struck the image on its feet of iron and clay — the feet which represent the decadent Greek empire. How was the Greek empire actually destroyed? One very important thing to note is that it was a gradual process — it did not happen all at once. Macedon was defeated by Rome in 168 B.C. and Israel broke free of Syria soon afterwards (both events taking place during the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes). In 65 B.C. Rome annexed Syria and in 27 B.C. she completed the process by making Egypt a province of the Roman empire. (Macedon, Syria and Egypt were the three main kingdoms into which the Greek empire was divided.) The Parthians took over the eastern part of the Empire.

How, then, are we to interpret the break-up of the image? Note that in this vision (unlike that of chapter 7) the four kingdoms are combined together in *a single structure*. And this structure was probably the image of *a man*. The image seems to be a symbol of man's power. But it may be more than this. Illogical though it seems at first sight, it may also be a symbol of the Greek empire. In a sense *the Greek empire was a combination of all four kingdoms*, because it succeeded Babylon, Media and Persia and absorbed all three of them into its own

structure. The four metals *individually* symbolize Babylon, Media, Persia and Greece; but the image *as a whole* symbolizes both human political power and also the Greek empire. The Greek empire assumes tremendous importance in the book of Daniel, and is very much a symbol of man's power — man in opposition to God.

I suggest, therefore, that the breaking of the image's feet represents the beginning of the Greek empire's break-up (during the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes), and the destruction of the rest of the image represents the subsequent break-up of the whole Greek empire (ending in 27 B.C.).

This interpretation is supported very strongly by certain other parts of Daniel. In the vision of chapter 7 we are told that the fourth beast was killed, *and then its body was destroyed*. This corresponds to the breaking of the image's feet (the whole image must have crashed to the ground at this point), followed by the destruction of the rest of its body. In 8:25 we are specifically told that Antiochus was destroyed by God, *and the wording of that verse is very closely related to the wording of 2:34* (the verse which describes how the stone broke the image's feet). We shall see that the destruction of Antiochus is also very closely associated with the death of the fourth beast (7:11). And in 11:40-45 (a section which follows a description of Antiochus Epiphanes and precedes a description of the kingdom of Heaven), we are given a detailed description of the annexation of Syria and Egypt by Rome. This corresponds to the break-up of the image's body and the destruction of the body of the fourth beast. I shall deal with all these points in much greater detail when we come to the appropriate chapters; but I mention them here to give some indication of how everything fits together.

We come now to the interpretation of 'the stone'. Jesus Christ, who claimed to be the Messiah and the Son of God (and proved it by rising from the dead), was born in about 6 B.C., *almost immediately after the final destruction of the Greek empire*. From the very beginning of His public ministry He began to preach, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand' (Mark 1:14). Furthermore He almost certainly identified Himself as 'the stone' of Daniel 2.

'What then is this that is written: "The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner"? Every one who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; but when it falls on any one it will crush him.' (Luke 20: 17, 18)

In this saying Jesus brought together three Old Testament symbols. Namely, the stone which became the head of the corner (Psalm 118:22), the stone of stumbling (Isaiah 8:14, 15) and the stone of Daniel 2:34, 35. He had just related the parable of the vineyard, in which the tenants rejected and killed the owner's son; and it is clear that He was identifying the rejected 'stone' with the rejected 'son'.

But Daniel 2:44, 45 also identifies this stone with a kingdom set up by God. It seems, therefore, to symbolize both Christ Himself and also His kingdom, the Messianic kingdom of Heaven. Another way of putting it is to say that it symbolizes the rule and authority of Christ. As for the mountain out of which the stone was cut, this probably refers to God.

There can be no shadow of doubt that as far as the New Testament is concerned, God's kingdom was set up by Christ some two thousand years ago. He taught, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand' (Mark 1:15), 'The law and the prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached' (Luke 16:16), 'The kingdom of God has come upon you' (Matthew 12:28), 'The kingdom of God is in the midst of you' (Luke 17:21). Moreover He clearly taught, 'My kingship is not of this world' (John 18:36). Christ's parable of the kingdom resembling a mustard seed (Matthew 13:31, 32) is very similar to the picture of the stone growing into a mountain.

It is said that a fatal objection to the Babylon-Media-Persia-Greece interpretation is the

statement that the heavenly kingdom will be set up ‘*in the days of those kings*’ (Daniel 2:44), whereas Christ established His kingdom *after* the destruction of Greece. Note, however, that *the stone* (symbolizing Christ) first destroys the fourth kingdom and *after* that it grows into a mountain. The vision of Daniel 7 also clearly indicates that Christ and the saints receive the Messianic kingdom *after* the destruction of the fourth kingdom. There is no problem here if we realize that *the fourth kingdom was destroyed by the pre-incarnate Christ*. Christ can be said to have set up His kingdom in the days of the Greek kings, in that the process of setting up the kingdom included the destruction of the Greek empire. This is consistent with the vision of Daniel 7, where the destruction of Antiochus and the Greek empire is depicted as being the first step in the process of setting up the kingdom of Heaven. Christ therefore started the process of setting up His kingdom in the days of the Greek empire, but He continued the process after the empire had been destroyed.

When I suggested that the fourth kingdom was destroyed by the pre-incarnate Christ, some readers probably raised their eyebrows (metaphorically, if not literally!); so let me add a word of clarification before continuing. We shall see in the next chapter that the fourth beast of Daniel 7 symbolizes the empire of Alexander and, after his death, the *Syrian* part of the Greek empire. We shall see that the beast’s ‘little horn’ symbolizes Antiochus Epiphanes, king of Syria. We shall also see that 8:25 clearly indicates that Antiochus was destroyed *by God*, and we shall see that the wording of that verse links it with 2:34 (which describes how the stone struck the image on its feet of iron and clay). These considerations make it likely that the feet of the image primarily, but not exclusively, symbolize the *Syrian* part of the Greek empire. As we shall see, there is no difficulty in understanding how God was responsible for the destruction of that empire. In one sense, of course, God is responsible for the destruction of all world powers; but we shall see that the Syrian Greek empire comes into a special category of its own. That empire deliberately tried to stamp out Judaism and it was the faithful worshippers of the one true God, motivated by religious zeal, who rose up against their Greek masters and defeated them again and again. In any case, as I have said, the book of Daniel itself clearly indicates in 8:25 that Antiochus, who was at the head of the Syrian Greek empire, was struck down by God Himself. Furthermore, the language employed links that verse with 2:34. We shall see later that it is possible to go even further and to deduce from 8:25 that it was Christ who destroyed Antiochus and the Greek empire.

I was saying that Christ began the process of setting up the kingdom of Heaven by destroying Antiochus and the Greek empire. Now some interpreters say that the process of setting up the kingdom did not *begin* with the destruction of the fourth kingdom. They say that the kingdom was first set up by Christ in the days of the Roman empire, but at the end of this age He will destroy the Roman empire (weakened and divided since the 5th century A.D.) and it is then, at the time of the second advent, that the stone will become a mountain. Obviously it would be fatal to this interpretation if it could be shown that the stone has *already* become (or is becoming) a mountain — and has been one since the time of the first advent. It would be fatal because the stone only begins to grow *after the destruction of the divided and weakened fourth empire*. The Roman empire simply *cannot* fit this picture of the fourth empire if the stone began to grow at the time of the first advent. The Roman empire was still expanding in the time of Christ, and it reached its greatest extent more than a century after His birth (during the reign of Trajan, 98-117 A.D.). When the western part of the empire eventually collapsed, over four centuries had passed since His birth. At this time the church had already grown into a large and powerful organization. Moreover, these interpreters tell us that the Roman empire has not even been destroyed yet — they say it has been in its ‘divided and weakened’ state since the 5th century A.D.

Now there is, in fact, every reason to believe that the stone *has* already begun to grow into a mountain. Christ’s parable of the mustard seed has been mentioned already. An even closer

parallel is that of the stone which became the head of the corner. This stone was made the foundation stone of a great building which is even now in the process of being built up (Luke 20:17, 18; Acts 4:10, 11; Ephesians 2:19, 20; I Peter 2:3-5). This would indicate that the mountain is at least already growing. But in addition to this there are many passages which indicate that Christ's kingdom is, in fact, already filling the whole earth and has been doing so since the time of the first advent, long before even the division of the Roman empire. See, for example, Matthew 28:18; Ephesians 1:20-22; I Corinthians 15:24-28. These and other examples will be quoted in full in the following chapter.

In a certain restricted sense, the kingdom consists only of the true church of Christ (John 3:3; Matthew 18:3). In this sense the kingdom is still growing. But there seems to be another, wider sense in which the kingdom consists of Christ's universal rule in heaven and on earth. In this sense, the kingdom has filled the whole earth since the time of the first advent.

If, then, we take it that the stone has already at least begun to grow into the mountain, Rome is ruled out as the fourth empire. The vision represents the kingdom of Heaven as beginning to grow only *after Christ has destroyed the divided and weakened fourth empire*. The Greek empire fits this picture perfectly — shortly after the pre-incarnate Christ had finally destroyed it, He entered this world to complete the process of setting up His kingdom and it has been growing ever since. More than this, He has possessed all authority in heaven and on earth *since the time of the first advent*.

The image was a top-heavy structure with a weak and unstable foundation. The kingdom founded by Christ was a massive, immovable mountain. What a contrast! Such is the contrast between the best and most powerful of man's kingdoms and the kingdom of Christ.

It should be clear by now that the vision of Daniel 2 has been perfectly fulfilled in every detail. The negative attitude taken by critical scholars is completely unjustified. God *did* destroy the image and He *has* set up His kingdom, precisely as predicted.

The question of which advent

Now many conservative interpreters assume that Christ's reference to the stone (Luke 20:18) shows that in His day this part of Nebuchadnezzar's dream had yet to be fulfilled. But this is not necessarily so at all. Christ was obviously *identifying* Himself as the stone, but He was employing a past event as an illustration or 'type' of a future event. Christ was not speaking of the event in Daniel (except in a secondary sense), because there the stone destroys only the four kingdoms, whereas Christ gives a much wider application, saying, 'when it falls on any one'. Christ was speaking of the judgment which is eventually to fall upon *all* His enemies (and particularly the judgment which was then shortly to fall upon the Jews). The destruction of the image *typifies* his future destruction of all world powers.

A few paragraphs back we noted that some conservative interpreters maintain that the heavenly kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar's vision did not *begin* with the destruction of the fourth empire. It can hardly be denied, however, that we do get the distinct impression that the heavenly kingdom began by destroying the fourth empire. Perhaps it is no more than an impression in this vision; but in the next vision it is stated quite clearly. The latter vision indicates plainly that the fourth empire was utterly destroyed before the saints possessed the kingdom.

At this point these interpreters will hasten to tell us that the kingdom of chapter 7 is not quite the same thing as the kingdom of chapter 2. The latter kingdom was established by Christ at the time of the first advent, whereas chapter 7 only describes a kingdom which will be established after the second advent. The stone, they will tell us, represents the kingdom Christ established some two thousand years ago. At the time of the second advent it will

destroy the fourth empire and become a world-dominating power, as represented by its growth into the mountain — and it is *this* stage of the kingdom which is pictured in chapter 7.

According to this theory, the description of the kingdom in chapter 2 is largely a description of Christ's kingdom during and after the second advent. Little is said about the kingdom *already* established by Christ apart from the statement that it was founded in the days of the four empires (2:44). All the 'action' is reserved for the time of the second advent. Even more drastically, chapter 7 has *nothing whatever* to say about the present kingdom — it passes over it in complete silence and concentrates entirely on a kingdom to be founded after the second advent.

Superficially, all this may look quite reasonable. But in fact the perspective is all wrong. One of the gravest weaknesses of the orthodox and dispensationalist theories is the lack of attention paid to the kingdom which Christ established at the time of His first advent. They give it a little attention in the first vision, but completely ignore it in the second. We have to bear in mind that these visions were seen at a time when the arrival of the Messiah and His kingdom was the great event to come. The New Testament repeatedly declares that Christ's *first advent* was what all the prophets had been talking about. In our own times the second advent is the great event to come; but in Old Testament times it was the first advent that filled the prophetic horizon. We can expect to find a good deal about the second advent in the book of Revelation; but on the authority of the New Testament itself, we should expect to find far more about the first advent in the book of Daniel:

'And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came afterwards, also proclaimed *these days*.' (Acts 3:24)

'Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written of the Son of man by the prophets will be accomplished

'For these men are not drunk, as you suppose

'In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in *these last days* he has spoken to us by a Son.'

'..... since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at *the end of the age* to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.'

'He was destined before the foundation of the world but was made manifest at *the end of the times* for your sake.'

Despite this, Daniel's prophecies undoubtedly do contain much that is relevant to the second advent. The way in which certain past events can typify things yet to come has already been mentioned. In addition, we are told that the heavenly kingdom will fill the whole earth and have absolute dominion (chapter 7). Clearly this prophecy will find its most complete fulfilment some time in the future — and yet it is all part of the kingdom which Christ established some two thousand years ago.

Nebuchadnezzar saw a stone which destroyed an image and became a great mountain filling the whole earth. These few words describe the history of Christ's kingdom — a history which is unfolding over a period of many centuries. When we look at a range of mountains from a distance, the individual mountains appear very close together. It is only when we come close that we see the great distances between them. The kingdom which Daniel saw from a distance was foreshortened (as described in our introduction) in the same way. He saw *when* the kingdom was to be established and that it was to fill the whole earth; but there is much that he was not told. He was not told that many centuries were to elapse between the founding of the

kingdom and the time when it would, in every sense of the phrase, 'fill the whole earth'. This was something which became apparent only after the time of Christ — although Christ Himself predicted it clearly enough.

A similar technique is used in Zechariah 9:9, 10. These verses clearly refer to Christ's triumphant entry into Jerusalem at the time of His first advent (Matthew 21:1-11), and yet at the same time they speak of His universal dominion. *In the same way* Daniel speaks of Christ's first advent and universal dominion, but gives no indication of the long period of time involved.

Now I realise that my reasoning so far will not convince every reader. For example, there are some who reject the idea of a revived or continuing Roman empire and accept that the stone began to grow at the time of the first advent, but they still manage to believe that Rome was the fourth kingdom. They do this by maintaining that verses 34, 35, 44 and 45 could describe a gradual break-up of the image as the stone grows into a mountain. In other words, the fourth kingdom gradually disintegrated at the same time that the kingdom of Heaven was growing. I agree that it is possible to maintain that the stone began to grow into a mountain immediately after striking the fourth kingdom, while it was still in the process of breaking up the image; but it is difficult to maintain that the stone began to grow *before* it struck the fourth kingdom. Yet this is exactly what we have to believe if we regard Rome as the fourth kingdom and the stone as beginning to grow at the time of the first advent.

Let the reader consider, for a moment, the fact that the Roman empire reached its greatest extent during the reign of Trajan in the second century A.D., many years after the time of Christ. Trajan was the second of the 'five good emperors', whose era can be regarded as the 'golden age' of the Roman empire. At this time Rome was at the zenith of its power. It was powerful, secure, prosperous and at peace within its own borders — more so than at any other time in its history. By this time Christianity had spread to most if not all parts of the Roman empire and far beyond. When the western empire eventually broke up, some four hundred years had passed since the time of Christ. *Let it be clearly understood that the Roman empire did not begin to break up until long after the kingdom of Heaven began to grow.*

I repeat that if the growth of the stone into a mountain represents the spread of Christianity and the growth of the church (not to mention Christ's universal rule in heaven and on earth), it cannot be said that Rome fulfils the picture of the fourth kingdom.

We shall go on now to consider the vision of chapter 7. We shall see that it provides very strong support for our interpretation, because it indicates clearly that the fourth empire was utterly destroyed before Christ and the saints received the kingdom at the time of the first advent.

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1. B. L. Montgomery, *A History of Warfare*, (Collins, 1968).
 2. John E. Goldingay, 'The book of Daniel: three issues', *Themelios*, January 1977, p. 46.
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http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/book_god-in-control_gurney.html
