

The Dawn of World Redemption

by
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Chapter XI "The Times of the Nations (The Four World Empires of Daniel)"

The peoples are as the roaring sea, as breaking billows,
which rage tumultuously.
(Comp. Isa. 17:13)

With Nebuchadnezzar (586 B.C.) began the "times of the nations" (Luke 21:24), that is, the times during which Israel is given into the hands of the world powers. They will end only with the setting up of the visible kingdom of God.

Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel were privileged to view the entire unfolding of world powers in a prophecy which covers world history in general, but each from a different standpoint, corresponding to his place in the plan of salvation.

Nebuchadnezzar, the heathen ruler, saw the *outer* side of world history, its *human* countenance, its "humanity," its organic connexion (*one* figure), the sublime, heroic, imposing in it; the colossal human statue "of extraordinary brightness" (Dan. 2:31); *to him* the kingdom of God appeared to be only a "stone" from the mountain (Dan. 2:34, 44, 45).

Daniel, the Minister of State, but at the same time a holy seer, saw the *inner* side of history, its *sub-human*, its wild beast nature (Dan. 7:4-7), its "brutality," its discordant, dismembered state in the conflict of the peoples with one another (Dan. 8:4, 6, 7; 11:2, 4, 11), the crushing (Dan. 7:7, 19), "the blaspheming" (Dan. 7:8, 25) elements in it; and *to him* the kingdom of God is the kingdom of the "Son of man" (Dan. 7:13, 14, 27), that is, a kingdom in which, for the first time, there will be set up on earth a rule of true humanity in the sense of the Holy Scriptures.

The first kingdom was a *unit* (Babylonia, *one* head), the second a *duality* (Medo-Persia, breast and two arms), the third *fourfold* (the four Grecian States that succeeded Alexander, the leopard with four horns), the fourth will be a *tenfold* unity (the fourth world kingdom of the End time; ten toes, ten horns, but which through Antichrist will be bound together in a single unit). But finally, when Christ appears, this will all become a *multiplicity* of ruins (Dan. 2:35; Rev. 16:19; 19:11-18; Matt. 21:44), and then the Lord, as the proper Monarch of men, will bring all peoples and races into a true unity, under one head, Himself (Eph. 1:10; Zech. 14:9).

Going from east to west the development and direction of history may be compared to the course of the sun--closing with night. Downwards, away from God, move sin and the world. From gold it passes to silver (Dan. 2:39), from silver to copper, copper to iron (compare Ovid's four ages of the world), and on feet of clay stands Nebuchadnezzar's colossus (Dan. 2:33). The parts of the body also descend in rank:

first the head, the seat of the intellect;

then the breast, the seat of the vital organs;
then the belly, the seat of the digestion;
finally the feet, which walk in the dust.

Therefore the end is a "breaking to pieces." The giant statue is "crushed" (Dan. 2:35, 45) and the sovereignty of the beasts is taken away (Dan. 7:12). Then, suddenly, in the midst of the deepest night, the sun arises. The Son of man, coming from heaven (Dan. 7:13; Matt. 26:64), establishes the true kingdom of humanity. The "stone" increases to a "mountain" and "fills the whole earth" (Dan. 2:35), and "the kingdom and the sovereignty and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Most High" (Dan. 7:27).

From the eighth to the sixth century before Christ it was "spring-time" with the peoples of the world. No other epoch in the history of the pre-Christian world was of such basic significance in the formation of the intellectual life of mankind. A wave of inspiration passed right over the whole civilized world. In Eastern Asia lived Confucius and Lao-tse, the greatest of Chinamen; in Southern Asia Buddha, the most influential Indian; in Persia Zoroaster, the prophet of the religion of Cyrus. In Western Asia was the full flower of Israel's prophecy under Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel; and in Greece the first germinating of philosophy (Tales, Heraclitus, Pythagoras, and Socrates) and the flowering of classical poetry (Sophocles, Euripides and Aeschylus).

But politically there raged the spring *storms*. In 650 B.C. Nineveh was still standing, and the great king of Assyria was the lord of the Middle East. Yet in 612 Nineveh fell, and thenceforward events followed one another like waves in a fast flowing stream. After a few decades Nebuchadnezzar's empire was overthrown by Cyrus (538). The empire of Cyrus was overthrown by Alexander the Great (333). After Alexander's death his kingdom fell into four States (301), and then Rome took over the whole inheritance. Only with the Roman empire came for some centuries quietness from storms.

I. THE NEW BABYLONIAN WORLD EMPIRE - 612-538 B.C.

"Thou art the head of gold:" thus did Daniel explain the statue to Nebuchadnezzar.¹ The first of the four beasts which Daniel himself saw corresponded to this kingdom. The new Babylonian empire was the *lion with eagle's wings* (Dan. 7:4), for what gold is among metals and the head among members, so the lion is among the beasts of the earth and the eagle among the creatures of the air, and the new Babylonian empire combined a lion-like royal might with eagle-like swiftness and rapacity.

It was founded by Nabopolassar (625 B.C.), consolidated by Nebuchadnezzar (604-562), and destroyed by Cyrus the Persian (538). It lasted almost exactly seventy years and the period of its existence was almost the same period as the Babylonian captivity of the Jews (606-536). With its destruction was fulfilled the prophecy of Jeremiah: "The Lord has stirred up the fury of the kings of the Medes; because his device is against Babylon to destroy it; for it is the vengeance of the Lord, the vengeance for his temple" (Jer. 51:11, 24; Isa. 13:17). But at the same time with the fall of Babylon the whole world-rule of the Semitic race collapsed permanently (538 B.C.).

II. THE MEDO-PERSIAN WORLD EMPIRE - 538-332 B.C.

¹ Even before this, the old Babylon of the time of Hammurabi (1900 B.C.) had been the "brains" of the Middle East and the intellectual "head" of civilization.

Cyrus is uniquely saluted in the Old Testament. In the history of the nations he is the only warrior who a century or more before his birth is mentioned by name in Israelitish prophecy, that is, by Isaiah (44:28; 45:1) about 200 years before Cyrus himself. The Lord, for the sake of His servant Israel, had taken him by the right hand to subdue peoples before him (45:1, 4). He calls him His "shepherd" (44:28), His "anointed," who will carry out all His will (45:1), and He says to him: "I will go before thee and make the impassable places level; I will break the brazen gates and break to pieces the iron bars. I will give over to thee the treasure hidden in darkness, and the well-concealed precious things, so that thou shalt know that I, Jehovah, it is, the God of Israel, Who has called thee by thy name" (Isa. 45:3, 4). Thus did the Old Testament salute the founder of Aryan (Japhetic) world-rule.

The Medo-Persian empire was the *silver breast*, with the two arms (Dan. 2:32), the *bear* which raised itself up on one side (Dan. 7:5), the *ram* with the two unequal horns, of which the higher grew up last (Dan. 8:3, 20).

The Medes and Persians were brother peoples, yet at first the Persians were under the overlordship of the Medes. But in 559 B.C. the Persian prince Kurush (Kuras, Cyrus, Kores) of Ansan completely overthrew the Median king Astyages, and thenceforth the Median kingdom became Persian. The bear had, as it were, "raised itself up" on the one side, i.e., the Persian side, while the other, the Median, lay beneath; of the two horns of the ram the one that had grown later had surpassed the other.

With powerful thrusts the Persian kingdom stormed forward, especially after the fall of Babylon (538 B.C.). "I saw how the ram pushed westward, northward, and southward" (Dan. 8:4). It is significant that the east is not mentioned; for as a matter of fact the Persian kings undertook no conquests towards India. But in the other directions this insatiable empire "devoured" land after land in succession: "Stand up; devour much flesh" (Dan. 7:5). In the "mouth" of the bear there were three particular "ribs," the Lydian (from 546 B.C.), the Babylonian (from 538), and the Egyptian kingdom (from 525), and with its 127 provinces it embraced almost the whole of the then civilized world (Esther 1:1). Only against Greece were its attempts futile, and it was there that the germ of its later fall reposed (Dan. 11:2).

III. THE GRECO-MACEDONIAN WORLD EMPIRE - 333 B.C. and subsequently.

The collapse of the Persian empire, after a duration of 206 years (538-332), was effected by Alexander of Macedonia, the son of king Philip. His empire is *the copper belly and the loins* of Nebuchadnezzar's statue, the *panther* with the four wings and four heads of Daniel's dream-vision (Dan. 7:6), and he himself is the "great horn" of the "goat" which, coming "from the west" in "furious" assault, brought about the overthrow of the Persian "ram" (Dan. 8:5-7, 21).

"Ram" and "horn" were in themselves obvious pictures for a military leader and royal power (Jer. 50:8; Zech. 10:3). They were particularly suitable for Persia, especially in distinction from Alexander's empire, the goat. For as the ram is more peaceable than the goat, which is agile and able to defend itself, and more tractable than the latter in its wildness and waywardness; and as in its thick woolly coat it can present a fitting picture of comfort and prosperity--so it was with the Persian empire at the time of Alexander. Moreover the Persian kings, when they appeared at the head of their army, did literally often wear a ram's head instead of the diadem, and likewise there

were ram's heads on the pillars of their chief city, Persepolis.

On the "goat" as the symbol of Alexander the Great, Hävernicks remarks:

The city of Edessa in Macedonia received from king Cranus the name of Aega (comp. Gr. *aix*, *aigos*, the goat), and from this the Macedonians themselves had the name Aegeades, which according to the classical writers was given them expressly because of the goats which enabled the king to capture that city (Justin). That city, under that name, long remained the residence of the early Macedonian rulers (Diod. Sic.). The son of Alexander the Great by Roxane was called Alexander Aegus. One finds several of the Macedonian kings portrayed on their coins with the horns of a he-goat, and goats served as a device on the banners and standards of the Macedonian army (Justin).

The victorious march of Alexander is the mightiest spectacle of antiquity. With furious speed, as if the swift-footed goat, flying, did not touch the ground (Dan. 8:5), like a four-winged leopard (Dan. 7:6), Alexander rushed impetuously against the less active ram, the plump, massive Persian bear. In incomparable victories at the Granicus in western Asia Minor (334 B.C.), at Issus in Cilicia, not far from Tarsus (333), and at Gaugamela, near Nineveh (331), the youthful warrior destroyed the gigantic hosts of the weak Darius Codomannus. At Gaugamela Alexander's army was twenty times weaker in number than the Persian army. "In the ram there was no strength to stand before him, and he threw him to the ground and trampled upon him, and no one saved the ram out of his hand" (Dan. 8:7). After scarcely *three* years of war the young man of five and twenty years was lord of the *two thousand* years old Orient. To the leopard "lordship was given" (Dan. 7:6); the goat "became great above measure" (Dan. 8:8).

But then tragedy entered the mighty spectacle. At the height of his power, in the flower of his age, in the world centre of Babylon, Alexander died after a carousal, of a high fever. It was June 13th, 323 B.C., in his thirty-second year. It was a sudden death, and he left no heir to his throne. The "horn" was "broken" (Dan. 8:8, 22). "A hero king will arise and rule over a great kingdom, and will carry out all that he wishes. Yet scarcely will he have arisen when his kingdom will collapse and will be divided to the four quarters of the heaven, but will neither be handed on to his descendants, nor will the power remain with which he has ruled" (Dan. 11:3, 4).

After twenty years of conflict by his generals over the inheritance of Alexander there emerged substantially four chief kingdoms:

1. The Syro-Babylonian kingdom of Seleucus (the "king of the north:" Dan. 11:6, 7, 11);
2. The Egyptian kingdom of Ptolemy Lagos: (the "king of the south:" Dan. 11:5, 9, 11);
3. The Macedonian-Greek kingdom of Cassander; and
4. The Thracian-Bithynian kingdom of Lysimachus.

Thus, through the battle of Ipsus (Phrygia) in the year 301 B.C. there was a literal fulfilment of the prophecy by Daniel in the sixth century B.C. (Dan. 7:1, 6; 8:1): "The he-goat waxed exceedingly great; but when it was at its strongest, the great horn broke off and four other notable horns grew up in its place toward the four quarters of the heavens" (Dan. 8:8). Therefore also the panther had not only four wings but also four heads (Dan. 7:6).

Out of these four successor States, those of chief account for the history of salvation are the two greatest, the Egyptian "king of the south" and the Syrian "king of the north," and of these again principally the latter. And so to them a specially detailed prophecy is devoted (Dan. 11). From 301 to 198 B.C. Israel was under the rule of Egypt, then, after the battle of Panea, it belonged to Syria.

Here, after only a few decades, there came that mighty conflict between world civilization and revelation embodied in the names of Antiochus Epiphanes and Judas Maccabeus.

Out of one of the four horns of the he-goat, which grew up in the place of the broken off Alexander-horn, there emerged a particular "little horn which became exceedingly great toward the south and east and toward (Palestine) the glorious land of the earth. And it waxed great even to the host of heaven, and cast down some of the host and of the stars of heaven to the earth and trampled upon them" (Dan. 8:9, 10). "A king will appear insolent of face and a master of intrigues. His power will be notable, and he shall cause extraordinary misery. He will be mighty, and also will ruin the people of the saints" (Dan. 8:24).

Antiochus IV, Epiphanes, is meant, the eighth king of the north (175-164 B.C.). Because of his many follies his contemporaries called him "Epimanes," the mad, instead of "Epiphanes," the brilliant. Nevertheless, in spite of his crazy ideas and ferocity, we may not depict him as only a raw barbarian, but as an enthusiastic partisan of Greek culture. After the conquest of his father Antiochus III by the Romans (190 B.C.) he dwelt for thirteen years at Rome as a hostage, and was so saturated with Roman-Greek ideas that the German historian Mommsen calls him "the Roman ape by profession." Especially after 168 B.C., when the Romans forbade him to conquer Egypt (Dan. 11:30), he purposed the inner strengthening of his power by means of a religious-political amalgamation of all parts of his kingdom. In this he encountered opposition only in Palestine. Solely to break this down and to carry through the slogan, *one king, one state, one civilization*, he persecuted those Jews who worshipped Jehovah. His real object in this was the introduction of Greek civilization into Jewry, united with the worship of the Olympian Zeus, Jupiter.

He therefore prohibited circumcision and the temple services (Dan. 8:11; 11:31-36), forbade the observance of the sabbaths and feasts, caused the sacred writings to be seized, torn up, and burned, and killed those with whom such were found (Dan. 11:33). Therefore he robbed the temple of the gold-plated altar of incense, the golden lampstand and table of shewbread, and the veil between the Holy place and the All-holiest (169 B.C.). Therefore also he compelled the people to eat the flesh of swine, and, indeed, on the 25th Kislev (about December) 168, on the annual festival of the Olympian Zeus, he caused a small altar consecrated to that god, to be placed on the altar of burnt offering at Jerusalem (1 Macc. 1:20-24, 41-64)--the "abomination of desolation" in the Holy Place to which the Lord Jesus, in His discourse on Olivet referred as a typical prophecy of the future (Matt. 24:15; comp. Dan. 11:31; 9:27; 12:11). By all this he became a type of him whom the apostle John terms the "Antichrist." Therefore he also was represented in the prophecy as the "little horn" of the *third* world empire (Dan. 8:9, 23), even as the Antichrist is the "little horn" of the *fourth* world empire (Dan. 7:8, 20, 24, 25).

Against this violating by civilization of the revealed faith the heroes of freedom, the Maccabees, raised their revolt (168-141 B.C.). "The people that know their God will show themselves strong and will act accordingly" (Dan. 11:32). After heroic conflict they won back freedom of religion (165 B.C.), and finally even political independence (141). Yet at that very time the history of their opponent showed that, in the interval, a new era for the peoples of the world had dawned. For in

the background in the life of Antiochus, limiting and restricting him (Dan. 11:30), there stood a new power, hitherto unknown to the Orient--Rome.

IV. THE ROMAN WORLD EMPIRE - 201 (133) B.C. and subsequently.

The rise of a western world power, and the collapse of the Semitic-Assyrian Orient, had long since been foretold by Balaam, the contemporary of Moses in the middle of the second millennium before the birth of Christ. "Woe! Who will remain alive when God allows this to take place? For ships come from the Kittim (that is, Cyprus; see Gen. 10:4; Isa. 23:1, 12; Ezek. 27:6; Dan. 11:30), they humble Asshur and humble Eber (Gen. 10:21); but he also will go to ruin" (Num. 24:23, 24). After 1,200 years this was fulfilled in the Roman empire.

In its beginning small as a corn of wheat--in full flower the mistress of the peoples from the rising of the sun to its setting: this is the development of Rome. At the time of the foundation of the Persian empire but a tiny town in mid-Italy, which the Greek historian Herodotus does not even mention, in the days of the Lord Jesus Rome was "the common centre," "the meeting place of the world."

The impulse to its development Rome derived from Greece. The Romans themselves would probably never have been in a position to call into existence a civilization of their own, lofty, artistic, and philosophical. Their strength lay principally in militarism, government, and law. In discipline and devotion to the State they were incomparable; but even in the periods of their highest power they remained inwardly half barbarian. This is shown by the rough amphitheatre, that horrible place of amusement of Roman brutality. The Roman empire was indeed iron (Dan. 2:40). It corresponded to the legs in the royal statue of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 2:33), and was the first stage and phase in the development of the fourth empire, the fourth "beast" in the night vision of Daniel, "terrible and fearful and extraordinarily strong; it had great iron teeth, it devoured and crushed, and what was left it trod down with its feet" (Dan. 7:7).

The interpretation of the royal image of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 2:31-43) and of the four corresponding beast figures of the night vision of Daniel (ch. 7) as the Babylonian, Persian, Grecian, and Roman world empires is found as early as Irenaeus (died A.D. 202) and in Josephus and the Jewish Rabbis. Luther says: "Upon this interpretation and meaning all the world is harmonious, and fact and history strongly prove it." And all difficulties vanish when one reflects that the all-knowing God can as easily make known to His servants the most distant future as the nearest. Comp. Isa. 42:9; 44:7.

Originally (1) a small State of *husbandmen*, land-hunger, caused by a growing population, drove Rome almost of necessity to conquest. After victorious wars against similar neighbours (especially the Samnites 343-290), by 300 B.C. Rome was (2) *the great power of Italy*. Entrance into world politics was the unavoidable consequence, and it followed of itself that there came at the same time rivalry with Carthage, the neighbour opposite to Italy in the Mediterranean. By the overthrow of this most dangerous opponent (201 B.C., especially in the victory of Publius Cornelius Scipio over Hannibal at Zama, 202), Rome became (3) *the undisputed leading power of the western Mediterranean*, and equally compulsorily--even without direct intention to become a world power--an intervention of Rome in the Orient became unavoidable.

But now it became "as smashing iron" (Dan. 2:40), blow upon blow. After four years *Macedonia*

was broken (197 B.C., by the victory at Magnesia, north-east of Smyrna). In 168 B.C. Macedonia was *destroyed*, consequent upon the victory at Pydna in that land. In 146 *North Africa* became a "province," by the destruction of Carthage, and *Greece* also, in the same year, when Corinth was conquered. In 133 *Spain* was subdued, by the conquest of Numantia, and by inheriting the kingdom of Pergamum (133), *Asia Minor* was incorporated in 129.

Thus, chiefly in the second century B.C., the prophecy of Daniel was fulfilled: "It will devour and tread down and crush the whole world" (Dan. 7:23), as "iron crushes and breaks to pieces" (Dan. 2:40). Zama, Kynoskephala, Magnesia, Pydna, Numantia--these are the five chief steps by which Rome rose to world power. To speak broadly, Rome had taken over the inheritance of Alexander the Great, and since 146 B.C. (or 133), she was generally acknowledged to have become (4) *the dominant military republic of the eastern and western Mediterranean* areas. "It was as if the god of war with iron feet had stalked over the earth and caused streams of blood to flow at every step."

But now came the time of fermentation. The ascent had been too violent. A period of (5) *revolution* had to follow (133-31). "May it please heaven that I am a liar; but I see Rome, proud Rome, falling as a sacrifice to its prosperity" (Propertius, first century B.C.).

With the expansion of Roman rule Rome had become the centre of the world. All the treasures of the nations flowed together to the ruling classes. The result was senseless luxury, most riotous prodigality, debauchery, and corruption. As early as 190 B.C., while the young Antiochus Epiphanes sojourned in Rome, a prosecution was going on of not less than ten thousand persons, the majority of whom were condemned to the death penalty. With the conquest of the world republican Rome dug its own grave. Originally Rome had been a peasant State, but, especially from the second century B.C. and onwards, after it had become the world power of the entire Mediterranean, everything changed. In order to hold the giant empire together they were compelled to maintain a large standing army of citizens. But because in the long period of military service the house and homestead of the small farmer decayed, he sold them to the richer land-owners. Thus there arose the great landlord with his vast estate, which he cultivated through slaves. The middle class was ruined. The peasant population was driven from the countryside to the great cities. The "flight from the land" set in. The great antithesis between capitalism and the proletariat arose. Then, because of the emptying of the country districts, the former military levy system was no longer possible, and the mercenary system was adopted.

The mercenaries were blindly devoted to the general who enlisted them. The decisive factor with them was who would lead them to most robbery and booty and would promise them the highest pay. The personality of the individual *demagogue* would turn the scale. The appearance of various ambitious leaders, especially Marius and Sulla, Caesar and Pompey, Antony and Octavius (Augustus), was followed by *civil wars* which agitated the Roman State for over a century (133-31 B.C.); and out of the civil wars there came finally the sole sovereignty of the Caesars of the time of Christ. Thus Rome had entered upon its sixth stage; it had become (6) *a world military monarchy* (from 31 B.C. and onward). The seventh and last stage is the collapse already foretold by Balaam (Num. 24:24), and particularly the fall of the western Roman empire in A.D. 476, and the eastern in 1453.

This development is unique and without any parallel in world history. The fourth beast "was different from all other beasts" (Dan. 7:7, 19). With it one thing followed out of the other by strict

compulsion. The will of the Divine World Ruler governed Rome's history with, as it were, the power of fate. *On Account of Christ* Rome *had to* become that which it became. It is true that the Romans were "the robbers of the world," but without their knowledge their robberies played a part in the annals of salvation. Rome had to create a reservoir for human civilization in preparation for the spread of the gospel of mankind. Thus it was her task "to gather, or shall we say quite plainly, to gather for Christ."

Chapter XI, "The Times of the Nations," in Erich Sauer, *The Dawn of World Redemption: A Survey of Historical Revelation in the Old Testament*, trans. G. H. Lang (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1955).