

“IN THE DAYS OF THOSE KINGS”: DANIEL 2:44

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In Daniel 2:44 *those kings* [הָלָן] seems to refer to the preceding four kingdoms [מָلָכוֹת] of 2:38-43. Daniel uses *kingdom* and *king* somewhat interchangeably in that *king* can by metonymy stand for the realm he rules, even though over a period of time there may be several kings in one kingdom. In 2:39 the writer says, “*And after you, Nebuchadnezzar, will arise another kingdom inferior to you.*” A similar shift of terms comes in 2:44, “*In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom . . . it will break all these kingdoms in pieces and consume (them).*” Later in 7:17 the four beasts from the sea (7:3; earth, 7:17) are said to represent four kings, whereas 7:23 says that “*the fourth beast will be a fourth kingdom that will be different from all the kingdoms.*”

As a result, we need not suppose that those kings of 2:44 means the toes of the image described in 2:40-43. Some commentators have identified these toes as kings answering to the ten horns of the non-descript beast in chapter 7, but the context of 2:44 does not so identify them. We would expect the references of 2:44 to be used by the writer in terms of the passage he is now writing. We must not allegorize a symbol beyond its intended representation, especially when an interpretation is given, as in this case.

We may ask how it can be that the fifth kingdom in 2:44 can be set up at a particular time in the days of four successive kingdoms. The answer is that, in the historical development referred to, a continuity of territory existed. Each succeeding kingdom includes the preceding one (cf. 7:12): Rome, Greece, Medo-Persia, Babylon. Furthermore, as will be shown later, all these kingdoms have the common characteristic of being a replacement for divine rule.

If this identification of the four kingdoms is correct, then the fifth kingdom was to be set up “in the days of” the Roman Empire, the fourth kingdom, which included territorially (at least in part) the kingdoms that preceded it and with which it was historically continuous. The text says “in the days of” (בַּיּוֹם הָזֶה), not “after” (בַּתְּהָר, cp. 2:39), which does not allow for an indefinite lapse of time to intervene. Not only is the establishment of this kingdom “in the days of” the Roman Empire, but it is “in the days of those kingdoms” (= “kings”; see ¶1) considered as a unit. The idea that the kingdom will yet be established in a revived Roman Empire does not seem to fit the historical continuity that was to exist between those kingdoms that preceded it and in the days of which the fifth kingdom would be established. If the kingdoms possess a historical and geographical unity, the text does not accommodate easily the discontinuity introduced by the

concept of revival. In the case of a Roman Empire, revival would have to mean bringing back what has historically passed from the scene, because there is today no Roman Empire.

The basically spiritual character of the fifth kingdom is implicit in the fact that the God of heaven will set it up (2:44), that it is a stone cut out without hands (2:34), that it will be given to the saints of the Most High (2:27), and even in the fact that it is eternal (2:44²; 7:27). While the other kingdoms arise from the sea, or the earth (7:3, 17), that is, from among men (sea = people; cp. Revelation 17:15), the fifth kingdom breaks into human history from the outside. Since it is divine, it is basically spiritual.

Although the text says the kingdom will be set up in the days of these kings (2:44a), it does not say that kingdom will complete its breaking in pieces and consuming in the days of these kings (2:44b). A rough parallel may be found in the constitution of Israel as a nation and in its conquest of Canaan. Israel was formally identified as a nation at the crossing of the Red Sea (1 Corinthians 10:2) and formally constituted as a nation at Sinai, but it did not even begin to conquer its land for another generation and did not fully do so for nearly five hundred years. Likewise, the fifth kingdom may be viewed as constituted in the days of the Roman Empire without necessarily saying that its conquests are completed then.

The fifth kingdom is basically spiritual, but it does not simply pervade or fill previously existing entities with new dynamic. It replaces them. They are to be broken and carried away as by a wind like the chaff of the summer threshing floor, so no place was found for them (2:35) forever (2:44; 7:14). It is therefore the functional equivalent of them, wholly diverse from them, and fully in place of them.

As a result of the fact that the fifth kingdom is basically a spiritual entity as well as a replacement for its predecessors, there may be at least two stages to the progressive completion of the conquest it carries out: (1) the stage in which it was against the ideology common to the other kingdoms, and (2) the time when these kingdoms are replaced by what is antithetical to them.

In light of this two-stage aspect of the fifth kingdom's full establishment, we should note that it is constituted "in the days of" the Roman Empire, but its full conquest is not said to be completed then; it only destroys them without mentioning the mode or the time. We conclude that it was constituted in the days of Rome and began its spiritual conquests at that time. Full conquest by this spiritual kingdom, however, will not occur until the Son of David fully reveals himself at his second advent. The pattern is similar to physical Israel, which did not complete its conquests until several hundred years after its constitution. The first David finally conquered the Canaanites whose land had already been given in promise.

It may be added parenthetically that in the days of the millennial kingdom there may be those who are conquered but not completely converted by the spiritual reign of David's Son,

even as there remained Canaanites who were reduced to tribute but not eradicated, even at the time of David. These people who only give a “tribute” of lip service during the millennium, while they are without a leader (Revelation 20:3), will rise up at the loosing of Satan to commit insurrection against the kingdom and will be summarily destroyed (Revelation 20:7-10) in much the same way as Sennacherib’s army was wiped out in the days of Isaiah.

The fifth kingdom may therefore be viewed as the reign of God initially constituted in the first-century establishment of the church. Since the kingdom of God is basically spiritual, its warfare is spiritual, not military. But this spiritual warfare will not fully conquer until the Lord reveals himself at his second coming, at which time he will fully establish a spiritual kingdom. It will be a spiritual, not a political, kingdom, because what he establishes is not only antithetical to the ideology of previous kingdoms, but completely replaces their kind.

The fifth kingdom was constituted in the days of the fourth kingdom and began its conquest then (A.D. 30). It will yet eventually conquer the Roman Empire of the first century in the sense that it will finish later what it began then. It did not begin a political conquest, but a conquest of an ideology—the system of human jurisprudence—that was inherited from the head of gold, the heart of silver, and the trunk of brass, and was bequeathed to those kingdoms that succeeded it. The stone of Daniel 2:34-35, 44-45 does not break in pieces the Roman Empire as such, because it does not break in pieces the iron-clay legs-feet alone. It breaks the whole image in pieces: gold, silver, brass, iron and clay (2:35, 45). When the stone strikes the image, it strikes at the feet indeed (2:34), but the whole image falls—the whole with which the Roman Empire is considered a part: (1) “*in the days of those kings*.” (2) “*it will break all these kingdoms in pieces and consume (them)*” (2:44). Historically speaking, the first three kings-kingdoms had passed from the scene, but they all are said to be conquered (rather begun to be conquered) at the same time in history.

The image therefore represents two things: (1) the historical succession of four empires, but more importantly (2) a unitary substitute for divine rule. It is a single image “embodying” four members. In short, this golden-headed image in chapter 2 represents the same sort of thing as the golden image of chapter 3.

“In the days of these kingdoms” typical of all human kingdoms, God initiated a new kind of rule that he will cause eventually to replace them. No longer will the misused iron rule God gave man (cp. Romans 13:1ff.) be mingled with the voice of popular opinion (Daniel 2:43). God will fully establish a just rule in which he alone will direct the affairs of his eternal kingdom.