

THE QUEST TO IDENTIFY THE EMPIRE OF THE ANTICHRIST

I have a friend who is now with the Lord. He was, from my perspective, a very good friend, and I think my friendship was reciprocated.

“Rich” is not an adequate word to express my friend’s wealth; I am not sure what word to use. But allow me to illustrate his wealth by this true account. I told my friend I noticed a prestigious financial magazine listed him high up among the 500 richest men in America. In a touch of humor, but spoken in truth, he said, “The magazine underestimated my wealth. If they were more accurate in their estimation, I would have been higher on the list.”

My friend did not inherit his wealth; he amassed it through his brilliance, business acumen, decisiveness, and courage to take carefully thought-out business risks. In a short time – because of a sudden change in the federal tax laws – he lost most of his wealth. Almost overnight he went from being a multi-billionaire to close to bankruptcy.

He called his creditors. He was an honorable man. He wanted to pay his

debts. My friend reasoned, “If you force me into bankruptcy, you will only get pennies on the dollar. If you will give me a little time, I will pay you every penny I owe.” They agreed, and amazingly in a very short period of time every obligation was paid in full. I can still remember a phone call from my friend as if it happened yesterday. It began with two words. He said, “I’m back.” He did not have to elaborate for me. I understood what he meant.

However, infinitely more important than my friend’s wealth was his love for His Savior and passion for His Word. He would be at the front of a line that proclaims, “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mark 8:36). He had a lot of money, but he built his house upon the Rock.

He generously funded the construction of churches, orphanages, and schools in third-world countries where he recognized the need and saw strong leadership and sound doc-





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trine. Domestically, he significantly (and I am speaking of large sums of money) helped Bible colleges, seminaries, Christian liberal arts colleges, mission organizations, Bible conferences, radio ministries, dozens of missionaries, and other, what he believed to be, worthy conservative, Bible-believing Christian causes. The ministry through which I served the Lord at that time was privileged to be among them. He did so without sounding a trumpet or calling attention to himself.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF SECOND DECISIONS

On one occasion, which stands out vividly in my mind, I asked my friend what qualities he looked for in the executives he chose to direct his many business ventures. Now, this was a man who was invited to address the boards of some of America's largest corporations. He was the kind of man you want to listen to, especially if you are looking for business wisdom. He said to me, "Marv, I look for men who can make the second decision." He must have noticed the perplexed look on my face as I inquired, "What do you mean, 'make the second decision'?"

He said, "Good executives will make many good decisions. But occasionally time and evidence will reveal that a bad decision had been made. Instead of nursing the bad decision along, trying to cover it up, and in the doing increase the mistake, he must have the courage to admit the mistake, accept the consequences, and make the decision to correct it." He then added, "That's the second decision."

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My friend was referring to the business world, but how does this affect the Christian world? Most pastors, evangelists, college and seminary professors, missionaries, and Christian leaders

spend years in the study of the Bible, theology, church history, Bible languages, Christian education, and other important subjects. Many of the instructors are godly, brilliant communicators, and these teachers have great influence over their students.

By the time the students graduate from school their major doctrinal positions are usually largely formed. These students, in turn, pick up the baton and through their ministries teach what they were taught. Few stray far from the doctrinal positions held by their teachers and the institutions that trained them. Their foundational doctrinal positions are by then locked in concrete. If they attended good schools, they will, among other things, believe:

- the triune nature of God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There are not three Gods in one Person, there is one God in three Persons.

There is an important difference;

- the Bible is inspired of God and is authoritative, infallible, living, and powerful. If a person says he doesn't believe the Bible, keep sharing it with them, precisely because it is living and powerful. Like a sword, it can pierce into the deepest recesses of the heart whether they say they believe it or not;

- all men possess a sin nature, commit sins, are separated from God, and are in need of a Savior. In the first instance, men are not sinners because they sin, they sin because they are born with a sin nature, which is inherited as a result of the fall of Adam who was the federal head of the human race. We all sinned in Adam because we were all in his loins;

- Jesus, the Son of God, is undiminished deity, and because of His virgin birth He is perfect humanity. He is the God-Man – 100 percent God; 100 percent man. Don't ask me to explain it. Just believe it by faith because it is a clear, biblical, and fundamental doctrine;

- at Calvary, the Son of God paid a debt He did not owe because we owe a debt we cannot pay. Men are responsible for what they had done to God's Son. But Jesus, as our great High Priest, offered Himself to His Father for us as the only possible holy, infinite sacrifice for sin. He offered the sacrifice and then turned around and was the sacrifice that was offered. Jesus was not running from the cross, He came to climb onto the cross. For that purpose He came into the world;

■ death could not hold Jesus captive. On the third day he arose bodily from the grave. He had power to lay His life down and to take it up again, exactly as He said He would;

■ after 40 days Jesus ascended into heaven and is enthroned at the right hand of His Father. Based on His shed blood, He is now functioning as our great High Priest. It is not only what Jesus did for us at Calvary and will do for us when He comes again, it is important to understand what He is doing for us at the present. When Satan accuses the believer of some sin before the throne of God, Jesus turns to His Father and says, "Father, I shed My blood for that sin." Therefore, the sinner can with confidence sing, "More secure is no one ever than the loved ones of the Savior." My security is not dependent upon what I can do for myself but on what Jesus did and continues to do for me;

■ salvation was planned by God the Father, purchased by God the Son, and processed by God the Holy Spirit – the ultimate illustration of "team" work. We pray to the Father, through the Son, and by the help of the Holy Spirit. In the Scriptures, prayer is always directed to the Father;

■ salvation is not obtained by works of righteousness which we have done, but by grace through faith, and the faith that leads to salvation itself is a gift of God. It is not simply a Calvinistic doctrine, it is biblical truth (Ephesians 2:8-9);

■ Jesus is coming again at the end of the age, not as a lamb to be slain, but as the Lion of Judah to reign. At His coming, He will resurrect the dead in Christ, rapture living believers, defeat all evil in the physical and spirit realms, and establish a literal and physical millennial (1,000-year) Kingdom upon the new heaven and earth. If that does not bless you, your "blesser" button is in need of urgent repair.

Those who are called into the ministry and to be teachers of God's Word are to be "set for the defence of the gospel" (Philippians 1:17). With all of their might they must defend foundational, doctrinal truth against false teachers. No second decisions will ever be needed, and I recognize that the identification of foundational truth is debated.

For instance, I teach the deity of Christ, but I will never debate His deity. His deity is not on the table for consideration. It is for me locked

in the vault of God's Word. Salvation itself rests upon the deity of Christ. It was a holy, eternal, and infinite Savior, without beginning or ending, who died on the cross for my sin. Jesus is God's Son in the flesh.

However, there are other doctrines whose importance cannot be minimized, but are not foundational; therefore, they should not be shielded by a concrete wall and a sign that says, "No Trespassing."

To illustrate, the second coming of Christ is a foundational doctrine (it is essential to the consummation of Christ's redemption of the earth) and I will defend it with my life. But the chronology of events that leads to the Lord's second coming is debated, particularly as it relates to the timing of the rapture ("snatching up") of the Church at His coming. Some teach a pretribulation rapture, some a midtribulation rapture, a few a partial rapture, and some a posttribulation rapture. The view one holds is very important.

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The schools I attended and the professors who trained me championed a "Pretribulation Rapture" of the Church. As a pastor, then as a mission director, publisher of a magazine, and preacher of God's Word, I heralded the "Pretribulation Rapture" across America for 25 years. I did so loudly, sincerely, and, to my shame, dogmatically.

All the while, privately in my heart and mind, I had a problem that would not go away. Major second-coming texts such as the Lord's Olivet Discourse, which focused on the *sign* of His coming (Matthew 24), the apostle Paul's *comfort* to those who were grieving over loved ones who had died and thought they had missed out on the blessing associated with Christ's coming (1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11), and Paul's *warning* to the Thessalonian believers concerning false teaching associated with the Lord's coming (2 Thessalonians 2) never seemed to me to harmonize with a pretribulation rapture of the Church. But I dismissed my doubts because, I

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thought, *Who was I to disagree with my teachers whom I held in such esteem, some of whom I almost believed could “walk on water?”*

But then one day I could no longer duck the issue when the Spirit of God presented me with a challenge as I was studying the sixth chapter of the Book of Revelation. The challenge resulted in more than ten months of agonizing objective study. The evidence produced by my study was for me so clear, so compelling, and so important that I will give my life in its defense. Only, this time, I do not treat brethren who disagree with me as lepers.

MY “SECOND DECISION”

It was time for me to make a second decision. That decision resulted in the writing of the book,

It was time for me to make a second decision.

The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church. It is now approaching its 25th year in print. It has gone through many printings and has made a dramatic change in how a great host of believers from all stations of life now view the timing of the Rapture. As a result, in my view, they are far better prepared to live victoriously in the midst of what may soon be occurring upon the earth. I am referring to the final seven years of history spoken of by the prophet Daniel (Daniel 9:24-27).

A presentation or defense of the Prewrath Rapture is beyond the scope of this article. I only referenced it because it was an important issue, which led me to make a “second decision.”

However, with the above in mind, I must now speak to you concerning a *second* “second decision” I believe God’s Spirit has led me to make – a decision I believe is biblical, important, and has strong contemporary implications for every believer.

The second chapter of the Book of Daniel has sometimes been described as the backbone of prophecy. The brilliant and wicked king of Babylon had a dream. He didn’t remember the dream or know what it meant, but instinctively he knew it was important. Only Daniel, among all of the king’s counselors, who was gifted by his God in the interpretation of dreams and visions, was able to tell the king his dream and its interpretation (Daniel 1:17; 2:19).

The dream centered around an image (statue,

or colossus). The image was composed of five clearly distinguishable parts representing five powerful empires. These five empires are found in the pages of God’s Word for one, and only one, reason. Not because they were powerful empires, but because four of the kingdoms have already ruled over the nation of Israel and her capital Jerusalem, and the fifth kingdom will, at the end of time (shortly), seek to rule Jerusalem.

The first four kingdoms in the image begin with Babylon, the world’s oldest city from which all idolatry had its origin (Genesis 10:10; Revelation 17:5), and is the head of gold. The second kingdom is the chest and arms of silver and represents the Medo-Persian kingdom. The third kingdom is the belly and thighs of bronze and represents Greece. The fourth kingdom is the legs of iron and represents Rome.

Nebuchadnezzar, the head of gold, launched attacks against Jerusalem on three occasions: 606 B.C., 598 B.C., and 586 B.C. On the last occasion the king, wearied of the rebellious captive people, ordered his generals to lay siege to the city and kill all who resisted. On this final attack, the walls of the city were torn down, and the Temple was set on fire. But before the end came, King Zedekiah, who was an evil king but a descendant of King David, sought to escape with his family through a secret passageway in the wall that surrounded the city (2 Kings 25:4-7). He was caught by Nebuchadnezzar’s soldiers near Jericho and forced to watch the murder of his sons. Then his eyes were plucked out, and he was taken as a prisoner to Babylon (2 Kings 25:7). Astounding but true, King Zedekiah was the last Davidic king to rule Israel in the past 2,600 years.

With the capture, blinding, and imprisonment of King Zedekiah, Israel – which had become a great and powerful nation during the reigns of King David and King Solomon centuries earlier – was now reduced to a weak, humiliated, and beggarly nation.

God had promised King David by covenant that “thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever” (2 Samuel 7:16). But God also told King David that if his descendants (the royal lineage) sin, He would punish them, but God would never put an end to the Davidic lineage (2 Samuel 7:12-16). That is absolutely critical for when Jesus returns, He does not return as a usurper. He will return as a legitimate heir to a

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legitimate throne over a legitimate nation. Simply read the first verse of the first book of the New Testament.

The image of Daniel 2 depicted the times of the Gentiles (nations). The times of the nations is a description of a period of time when no descendant from the royal lineage of King David was ruling over Israel. Instead, the special nation that God had chosen to bear His name and through whom the King of kings and Lord of lords would come into the world would be ruled over by four idolatrous, pagan nations. As certain as morning follows night, the times of the Gentiles were the Satanic plan to defeat God's plan to redeem the world through His son.

Babylon began to rule Jerusalem in 606 B.C.
Medo-Persia began to rule Jerusalem
in 536 B.C.

Greece began to rule Jerusalem in 322 B.C.

Rome began to rule Jerusalem in 63 B.C.

Then something of stellar divine significance occurred. Six hundred years after Zedekiah, the last Davidic king to sit on the throne of Israel, Caesar Augustus passed a decree that all Jews return to the town of their ancestry. Mary, the mother of our Lord – who should be highly esteemed by believers – nearing the time for giving birth, with Joseph her husband had to make the more-than-seventy-mile journey over mountainous terrain from Nazareth to Bethlehem. They were both Judeans, in the genealogy of King David, whose hometown was Bethlehem. Mary (her real name was Miriam, anglicized to Mary, and I suggest she would prefer her real Hebrew name) gave birth to Jesus.

Shepherds, notified of the birth by angelic messengers, rushed to locate the child and worship. Wise men from the East took the long journey to find and worship the king of the Jews. (I insert here for your edification that I believe these wise men [we don't know how many, only that they had three gifts] came a long distance to worship the king of the lowly Jews for only one towering reason: They knew the king of the Jews they came to worship would one day be the king of the universe.)

Jesus grew to manhood, and for about three years He ministered to His nation while it was still under Roman domination. His credentials were impeccable. The lineage from which He sprang, the place of His birth, the method of His birth, the things He taught, the life He lived, and

the miracles He performed all testified that He was the "Seed" of the woman (Genesis 3:15), (in every other instance in the Bible, *seed* is modified by the masculine pronoun; in attributing the seed to the woman, the virgin birth is substantiated) and the Son of David, the promised King, and long-awaited Messiah. But the nation from which He sprang, through their corrupt religious leaders, rejected Him. "He came unto his own [creation], and his own [nation] received him not" (John 1:11).

As a consequence, Jesus, with great sorrow, foretold of the coming destruction of Jerusalem.

Jesus foretold of the coming destruction ...

He said, "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled" (Luke 21:24). The times of the Gentiles' rule over Jerusalem would have ended had the Jewish people accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as their Messiah and King. Instead they chose to reject Him and, amazingly as the Lord foretold, they have continued under the influence of the nations of the world to this very hour.

Israel became a nation in May of 1948. However, Jerusalem, her capital city, remains a divided city because the United Nations decreed it so. Israel has fought five wars to survive, as well as enduring countless terror attacks since her nationhood. The Temple Mount, the very soul of Jerusalem, remains in Gentile hands. And demands by the nations that Israel retreat behind the impossible-to-survive borders of 1967 grow louder and louder with every passing day. But the end is not yet.

The prophet Daniel, in interpreting Nebuchadnezzar's dream, spoke of a fifth part of the image: first, the head of gold; second, the chest and arms of silver; third, the belly and thighs of bronze; fourth, the legs of iron; and, lastly, the feet and toes of iron and clay.

The mixture of iron and clay indicates the feet and toes would be partly strong and partly weak (fragile). Many Bible teachers identify the two feet as representing a revived Roman Empire which will appear at the end of the age. Then, in this view, the image only represents four empires, all of which ruled over Israel from the time of Nebuchadnezzar to the death of Christ. In the centuries that have followed, a host of nations,

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one after another, ruled over the beleaguered nation exactly as Christ had foretold. And at the end of the age, these teachers suggest, a revived Roman Empire will emerge over which the Antichrist will rule to become the supreme persecutor of Israel during the Great Tribulation. This is what I was taught, and for years I taught to others.

MY SECOND SECOND DECISION

And then comes the next portion of Scripture, and it is this text which, in part, has led me to make a second decision. When all looks grim, dark, helpless, and hopeless – in the nick of time – help will arrive in a way the greatest of playwrights had never envisioned. A Stone – cut out of a mountain without hands – appears on the scene (Daniel 2:34, 45). The Stone is Christ. Christ is the smitten Stone (Isaiah 53:4); Christ is the stumbling Stone (1 Peter 2:8); Christ is the chief corner stone (Psalm 118:22); and, in Daniel's text before us, Christ is the smiting Stone. He will smite the counterfeit world kingdom of Antichrist and Satan. The fact that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands means there was absolutely no human involvement. The Stone (the Lord Jesus Christ) alone smashes the image on the feet and the entire image comes crashing to the ground at once. Allow me to quote this important text directly from God's Word.

Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together [at the same time], and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain [literally "kingdom"], and filled the whole earth (Daniel 2:35).

That means the four nations represented in the image were all present at the end of time, not simply the final empire, the Roman Empire, revived.

The Medes and Persians defeated the Babylonians but that was not the end of Babylon. The Greeks defeated the Medo-Persians, but that was not the end of the Medo-Persians. Following the death of Alexander the Great, the Greek Empire divided into four parts and weakened as a world power, but that was not the end of Greece.

In the century before Christ, Rome ascended to become the superpower of the world, but by the fourth century A.D. it diminished in strength and influence, but that was not the end of Rome.

At the end of time (and I believe that I am justified in saying the end times are getting close), all four kingdoms re-emerge for the final attempt to destroy Israel and keep Christ from returning as the Lion of the tribe of Judah. *That means the feet do not simply represent a revived Roman Empire. That means there will be a fifth and final kingdom composed of all four former kingdoms. The popular view that often identifies the two feet and ten toes with Rome, Italy, Western Europe, and the papacy, I believe, is without biblical evidence.*

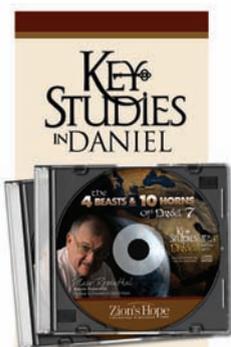
The prophecy of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem is often cited as evidence that the Roman Empire is the kingdom of the Antichrist at the end of days. They appeal to Daniel's statement that "the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary" (Daniel 9:26). "The prince that shall come" is widely understood to be the Antichrist, who "shall destroy the city" is referring to Jerusalem, "and the sanctuary" is the Temple located on hallowed Mount Moriah. Ancient and modern historians both provide us with a number of important facts concerning the assault on Jerusalem and the Temple.

First, General Titus, son of Vespasian, emperor of Rome, led the attack.

Second, the invading force was made up of six Roman legions. The fifth, tenth, and fifteenth legions were the "tip of the spear" that broke through the walls of the city and destroyed the Temple. There was also a significant number of auxiliary forces. It is estimated the total invading force numbered between 50,000 and 55,000 men.

Third, it was the "people" (not the nation) of the prince (Antichrist) that will come who will destroy the city and sanctuary.

Fourth, the people (soldiers) that made up the invading force were overwhelmingly recruits from the regions of Syria, Asia Minor, Egypt, and Arabia. Only a small number of Europeans were among them. Therefore, and this is at the heart of this article, it is historically accurate to say that "the people of the prince that shall come" are the Asia Minor ancestors of the Muslim peoples who dominate the Middle East *today*. Identifying the iron and clay feet and toes of the image as



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solely Roman has led many to look in the wrong place for the Antichrist and the peoples who will attack Jerusalem in the last days. In other words – and don't miss this – in my view, the Antichrist will not emerge from Europe or a revived Roman Empire, as it is commonly defined today.

THEN DANIEL HAD HIS OWN DREAM

Daniel, Chapter 2, records a wicked pagan king's dream of an idol that was dazzling, terrifying, and fear-inspiring in appearance. Daniel, the prophet of God, in interpreting the dream for the king, evidenced no concern or distress over the meaning of the dream – because it posed no imminent danger to his people Israel – and he was promoted to a high position in the government of Babylon and given many gifts by Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 2:48).

Then, about 553 B.C., fifty years after Nebuchadnezzar's dream, Daniel had a dream. Both dreams, with a broad brush, painted a picture of human history during the times of the Gentiles (nations) beginning in 606 B.C. until the return of the Jewish King, the Son of David, who will judge the world for its iniquity and at last bring in a golden age upon the earth. In Daniel 2, Nebuchadnezzar's dream, it is Christ the Stone (Daniel 2:45) who will achieve the victory. In Daniel 7, Daniel's dream, it is Christ the Son of Man (Daniel 7:13-14) who will achieve the victory. Nebuchadnezzar's dream tells the story through an awesome impressive image. Daniel's dream tells the story through four beast empires, and to Daniel's mind, was a significant and frightening "upgrade" from Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Chapter 2. Whereas Nebuchadnezzar's dream reflected a sweeping and general scope of world history, Daniel's dream in Chapter 7 was more focused – in a negative way – on Israel, hence we read, "I Daniel was grieved in my spirit in the midst of my body, and the visions of my head troubled me" (Daniel 7:15).

The four beasts are traced through history. The first, like a lion with eagle's wings, indicating power and royalty, is **Babylon**. The second beast, like a bear, raised up on one side and devouring much flesh, indicated the **Medo-Persian Empire** where the Persians, at first the weaker, became the more dominant of the two and like a lumbering powerful bear expanded its empire through conquest. The third beast, like a leopard, had four wings like a bird and four heads to indicate

the **Grecian Empire** of Alexander the Great, who conquered much of the Eastern world through rapid and brilliant tactics but, upon his death, his kingdom was divided by four of his generals. In time, these nations lost their superpower status but ethnically and culturally continued on through the centuries. They often became so frail they were almost unnoticed among the nations, until at the right hour of history they will arise once again to become the enemy of the Jews. Even in this hour of the Jews' unbelief, they are, without knowing it, intimately tied to Jesus their Messiah, whom they will soon come to trust.

Ancient Babylon is modern-day Iraq. Simply look at a map. Ancient Persia is modern-day Iran. Get out your encyclopedia. Persia changed its name from Persia to Iran in 1935. Ancient Greece is modern-day Syria. Just check your history. Don't for an instant think this is a leap in the dark or some kind of stretch. Mentioned above, after the death of Alexander, the Grecian Empire was divided into four parts. One of the dominant parts of the Grecian Empire is modern-day Syria, and under Antiochus Epiphanes Syria became a great persecutor of Israel.

These ancient persecutors of Israel have re-emerged in preparation to unite with the fourth beast empire. This empire, which can be specifically identified, will be under the control of the Antichrist, the progeny of Satan. Current events are fulfilling prophecy before our very eyes and are clearly indicating the lateness of the hour.

You may have heard this empire referred to as the "Revived Roman Empire." It is true this final empire will entail some form of "rebirth" or "revival" of the original Roman Empire, but, I believe, its final form will be different than what you may have been taught.

In my opinion, it is time for us to take a second look at the "Revived Roman Empire" and view it from a fresh, biblical perspective.

I am running out of allocated space for this article and getting ready to leave for ministry in Israel where much of what I am writing about is coming to pass. The Lord willing, I will continue this article in the next issue of *Zion's Fire* and write about the fourth beast, the ten horns, and the Antichrist. The subject is complex, but exceedingly important, particularly at this hour of history. Please pray the Lord helps me to help you.

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