

The Roman Empire in Prophecy Daniel

From John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of the Prophet Daniel*, trans. Thomas Myers (Edinburgh, Scotland: Calvin Translation Society, 1843), Vol. II, 21-78, 347-357 emphasis added; English updated.

Daniel 7:7 “After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong. It had huge iron teeth; it was devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns.”

There is greater difficulty in this Fourth Monarchy. Those who are endued with moderate judgment, confess this vision to be fulfilled in the Roman Empire; but they afterwards disagree, since what is here said of the fourth beast many transfer to the Pope, when it is added a Little Horn sprang up; but others think the Turkish kingdom is comprehended under the Roman. . . . The Jews for the most part incline this way, and they are necessarily compelled to do so, since Daniel will afterwards add—I saw the throne of the Son of Man; since **it is clear, from this prediction, that Christ’s kingdom was erected by the overthrow of the Roman dominion**, the Jews turn round, and, as I have said, join the Turkish monarchy with the Roman, since they do not find their Christ according to their imagination.

And there are some of our writers who think this image ought not to be restricted to the Roman Empire, but ought to include the Turkish. In my view, there is nothing probable in that opinion; **I have no doubt that in this vision the Prophet was shown the figure of the Roman Empire**, and this will be more apparent as we go on.

The Roman Empire was “a beast.”

He says a *fourth beast appeared*. He gives it no fixed name, because nothing ever existed like it in the world. The Prophet, by adding no similitude, signifies how horrible the monster was, for he formerly compared the Chaldean Empire to a lion, the Persian to a bear, and the Macedonian to a leopard. In these comparisons there was something natural; but when he descends to the fourth beast, he says, it was *formidable in its aspect, and terrible, and very brave* or strong, and without any addition calls it “a beast.”

We see then his wish to express something prodigious by this fourth beast, as there is no animal so fierce or cruel in the world which can in any way represent with sufficient strength the nature of this beast. *Behold, therefore, the fourth beast which was formidable, and fearful, and very strong*. We know of no such Monarchy before this.

Although Alexander subdued the whole of the East, his victory, we are sure, was not stable. He was content with fame alone; he granted liberty to all people; and as long as they flattered him, he sought nothing else. But we know the Romans to have been masters even as far as Babylon; we know the following countries to have been subdued by them: Asia Minor, Syria, Cilicia, Greece, and Macedon, both the Spains, Gaul [France], Illyricum, and part of Germany. At length Britain was subjugated by **Julius Caesar**.

No wonder this beast is called formidable and very strong! For before Julius Caesar became master of the Empire, the whole Mediterranean Sea was in all its parts under

subjection to the Roman Empire. Its amazing extent is well known. Egypt had indeed its own kings, but they were tributary; whatever edicts the Romans decreed, they were executed immediately in Egypt. Minor sovereigns existed in Asia Minor as a kind of spies, but this state of things we shall treat presently. It is also well known that they possessed supreme power throughout the Mediterranean Sea, and that by the conquest of Mithridates. Pompey reduced Pontus under his dominion. In the East affairs were all at peace. The Medes and Persians gave them some trouble, but they never moved unless they were provoked. The Spains were not yet accustomed to the yoke, but we know that there were always two praetors there. Julius Caesar was the first who entered Britain after subduing Gaul [France]. Hence we see how far and wide the Romans extended their power, and with what immense cruelty. Hence Daniel calls this beast, *formidable and very strong*.

He afterwards adds, *It had large iron teeth*. This ought to be referred to its audacity and insatiable greediness. We see how completely free their nation was from the fear of death, for they were so hardened that if any one deserted his rank for the sake of avoiding danger, he was afterwards branded with such marks of infamy, that he was compelled either to strangle himself or to incur a voluntary death! There was, then, a certain brutal cruelty in that nation, and we also know how insatiable they were. For this reason Daniel says *they had large iron teeth*.

He adds, *it consumed, and broke to pieces, and trod the remnant under foot*. These things are spoken allegorically, not only because this vision was offered to the holy Prophet, but also because God wished to paint a kind of living image, in which He might show the peculiar characters of each government. For we know how many lands the Romans had consumed, and how they transferred to themselves the luxuries of the whole world, and whatever was valuable and precious in Asia Minor, and Greece, and Macedonia, as well as in all islands and in Asia Major — all was swept away — and even this was insufficient to satisfy them! This, then, is the ravenousness of which the Prophet now speaks, *since they consumed, says he, and rubbed to pieces with their teeth*.

He adds, *they trod the remnant under their feet* — a metaphor worthy of notice, as we know they were accustomed to distribute the prey which they could not carry with them. They devoured and tore with their teeth the treasures and costly furniture and everything else; for their supplies were provided by tributes which produced large sums of money. If there was any portion of the Mediterranean which they could not defend without keeping a permanent garrison there, we know how they engaged the services of tributary kings. Thus the kingdom of Eumenes increased to a great extent till the time of his grandson Attalus, but they bestowed it partly on the Rhodians, and partly on the Cyprians and others. They never remunerated those Allies who almost exhausted their own possessions in aiding them, out of their own resources, but enriched them with the spoils of others; and they not only seized upon the property of one city and bestowed it on another, but they set up their lands for sale. Thus, the liberty of the Lacedaemonians was betrayed to the tyrant Nabis. They also enriched Masinissa with so much wealth, that they acquired Africa for themselves by his means. In fine, they so sported with kingdoms in seizing and giving them away, that they rendered provinces tranquil by the wealth and at the expense of others.

This was remarkably conspicuous in the case of Judea, where they created out of nothing Ethnarchs and Tetrarchs and kings, who were nothing but their satellites — and that too but for a moment. For as soon as any change occurred, they retracted what they had given as easily as they bestowed it.

Hence, this their cunning liberality is called treading under foot; for that remnant which they could not devour and consume with their teeth *they trod under foot*, as they kept all those whom they had either enriched or increased subject to themselves. Thus we see with what servility they were flattered by those who had obtained anything through their generosity. And how degrading was the slavery of Greece from the time the Romans entered the country! for as each state acquired any new territory, it erected a temple to the Romans. They also sent their ambassadors there to act as spies, who, under the pretense of punishing the neighboring people for plotting against them, enriched themselves by plunder.

Thus the Romans held under their feet whatever they had given to others. We see then how suitably and properly the Prophet speaks, when he says, the Romans trod down the remnant; for whatever they could not consume, and what their voraciousness could not devour, *they trod under their feet*.

He adds afterwards, *And this beast was different from all the former ones, and it had ten horns*. When he says, *this beast was different from the rest*, he confirms what we formerly said, namely, this was a horrible prodigy, and nothing could be compared to it in the nature of things. And surely if any one attentively and prudently considers the origin of the Romans, he would be astonished at their remarkable progress to such great power; for it was an unusual monster, and nothing like it had ever appeared.

The ten horns

Interpreters treat in various ways what the Prophet subjoins respecting *the ten horns*. I follow simple and genuine opinion, namely, the Prophet means this Empire to belong to more persons than one. For the angel will afterwards assert the ten horns to be kings; not that so many kings ruled at Rome . . . ; but the Prophet here distinguishes the Fourth Monarchy from the rest, as if he had said it should be a popular government, not presided over by one king, but divided into many heads. For they even divided provinces among themselves, and made treaties with each other, so that one was governor of Macedonia, another of Cilicia, and another of Syria. Thus we see how numerous the kingdoms were.

And with regard to the number ten, we know this to be a frequent and usual form of speech in Scripture, where ten signifies many. When plurality is denoted, the number ten is used. Thus when the Prophet states the fourth beast to have ten horns, he means, there were many provinces so divided, that each ruler, whether proconsul or praetor, was like a king.

For the supreme power was given to them, while the city and Italy were given up to the consuls. The consul could indeed write to the provinces and command whatever he pleased; then he could elevate to honor whom he pleased for the sake of favor and friendship; but **each of the praetors and proconsuls when he obtained a province, became a kind of king, since he exercised the supreme power of life and death over all his subjects.**

We need not be too anxious about the number, as we have already explained it. Those who reckon the Roman provinces make great mistakes; they omit the principal one; they make only one of Spain, and yet we know there were two. They do not divide Gaul, yet there were always two proconsuls there, except under Julius Caesar, who obtained the

control of both Gauls. So also they speak of Greece, and yet, neither a proconsul nor a praetor was ever sent into Greece.

Finally, the prophet simply means that the Roman Empire was complex, being divided into many provinces, and these provinces were governed by leaders of great weight at Rome, whose authority and rank were superior to others. Proconsuls and proctors obtained the provinces by lot, but favor frequently prevailed, as the histories of those times sufficiently assure us. Let us proceed—

Daniel 7:8 “I was considering the horns, and there was another horn, a little one, coming up among them, before whom three of the first horns were plucked out by the roots. And behold, in this horn, *were* eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking pompous words.”

Daniel proceeds with his description of the fourth beast. First, he says, *he was attentive*, with the intention of rousing us to serious meditation. For what is said of the fourth beast, was remarkably memorable and worthy of notice. This, then, is the reason why God struck the heart of his servant with wonder. For the Prophet would not have given his attention to the consideration of the fourth beast, unless he had been impelled to it by the secret instinct of God. The Prophet’s attention, then, sprang from a heavenly impulse. Therefore it is our duty not to read carelessly what is here written, but to weigh seriously and with the greatest diligence what the Spirit intends by this vision.

I was attentive, therefore, says he, *to the horns, and behold one small one arose among them*. Here interpreters begin to vary; some twist this to mean the Pope, and others the Turk; but neither opinion seems to me probable; they are both wrong, since they think the whole course of Christ’s kingdom is here described, while **God wished only to declare to His Prophet what should happen up to the first advent of Christ**. This, then, is the error of all those who wish to embrace under this vision the perpetual state of the Church up to the end of the world. But the Holy Spirit’s intention was completely different.

So Calvin argues that the little horn does not refer to the Pope or the Papacy or false religion but rather to the time of Christ’s first coming. Daniel is looking forward to the Roman Empire at the time of Christ, not the time of Christ’s second coming.

We explained at the beginning why this vision appeared to the Prophet — because the minds of the pious would constantly fail them in the dreadful convulsions which were at hand, when they saw the supreme dominion pass over to the Persians. And then the Macedonians broke in upon them, and acquired authority throughout; the whole of the East, and afterwards those robbers who made war under Alexander suddenly became kings, partly by cruelty and partly by fraud and perfidy, which created more strife than outward hostility.

And when the faithful saw all those monarchies perish, and the Roman Empire spring up like a new prodigy, they would lose their courage in such confused and turbulent changes. Thus this vision was presented to the Prophet, that all the children of God might understand what severe trials awaited them before the advent of Christ.

Daniel, then, does not proceed beyond the promised redemption, and does not embrace, as I have said, the whole kingdom, of Christ, but is content to bring the faithful

to that exhibition of grace which they hoped and longed for. It is sufficiently clear, therefore, that this exhibition ought to be referred to the first advent [coming] of Christ.

I have no doubt that *the little horn* relates to Julius Caesar and the other Caesars who succeeded him, namely, Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero, and others. Although, as we said before, the counsel of the Holy Spirit must be attended to, which leads the faithful forward to the beginning of the reign of Christ, that is, to the preaching of the Gospel, which was commenced under Claudius, Nero, and their successors.

He calls it a *little horn*, because Caesar did not assume the name of king; but when Pompey and the greater part of the senate were conquered, he could not enjoy his victory without assuming to himself supreme power. Hence he made himself tribune of the people and their dictator.

Meanwhile, there were always Consuls; there was always some shadow of a Republic, while they daily consulted the senate and sat in his seat while the consuls were at the tribunals. Octavius followed the same practice, and afterwards Tiberius also. For none of the Caesars, unless he was consul, dared to ascend the tribunal; each had his own seat, although from that place he commanded all others.

It is not surprising, then, if Daniel calls the monarchy of Julius and the other Caesars a *little horn*, its splendor and dignity were not great enough to eclipse the majesty of the senate; for while the senate retained the name and form of honor, it is sufficiently known that one man alone possessed the supreme power. He says, therefore, *this little horn was raised among the ten others*. I must defer the explanation of what follows, namely, *three of these ten were taken away*.

PRAYER

Grant, Almighty God, since You have formerly admonished Your servants, that your children, while they are pilgrims in this world, must be familiar with horrible and cruel beasts, if the same thing should happen to us, that we may be prepared for all contests. May we endure and overcome all temptations, and may we never doubt Your desire to defend us by Your protection and power, according to Your promise. May we proceed through the midst of numberless dangers, until after accomplishing the course of our warfare, we at length arrive at that happy rest which is laid up for us in heaven by Christ our Lord. — Amen.

LECTURE THIRTY-FOUR

Three things remain to be explained by us in expounding the Fourth Beast. First of all, *Three horns were taken away from its face*; Secondly, *The little horn*, which rose among the ten, *appeared with human eyes*; Thirdly, *It spoke magnificently*, or uttered swelling words.

With regard to the three horns, it is sufficiently evident from the testimony of the angel that they were three kings; not because this ought to be referred to persons, as I yesterday disproved, but because the Romans were accustomed to send to each province, rulers like kings who there exercised the supreme authority.

Those who extend this prophecy to the end of Christ's Kingdom, think that a dispersion which happened about three or five hundred years after the death of Christ is intended; but they are greatly mistaken. Clearly enough the whole strength of the Roman Empire

was exhausted and the provinces gradually cut off, till it became a kind of mutilated body; but **we yesterday showed the incorrectness of any explanation of this oracle, except concerning the state of the Church at the first Advent of Christ and the preaching of the Gospel.**

At that time, it is well known, nothing had been subtracted from the boundaries of the Empire. For Julius Caesar was formidable not only to the Gauls, but also to the Germans; and besides this, the affairs of the East were at peace. After his death, although Octavius or Augustus had suffered two very destructive slaughters, especially under Quintilius Varus, who had been sent into Germany with a powerful army, yet he also extended the boundaries of the Empire, especially in the East. He also subdued the whole of Spain, where no commotion afterwards took place.

As, therefore, at that period no province had been cut off from the Roman Empire, what is the meaning of the expression, *Three horns were cut off and removed from the face of the beast*? The solution is not difficult. Only let us observe how the little horn is compared with the first stature of the beast. It first appeared with ten horns; when the little horn arose its figure was changed.

The Prophet then says — a part of the horns was cut off, as the senate then ceased to create proconsuls. For we know how Augustus assumed to himself certain provinces, and he did this for the purpose of creating presidents at his own will, and of constituting a strong force, ever at hand, should any one rebel against him. For he did not care so much about provinces as about an army, should any tumult arise. He was desirous, therefore, of throwing a bridle over them all, lest anyone should dare to attempt a revolution.

Whatever was thus added to *the little horn* was taken from the ten horns, that is, from the whole body, as the state of the monarchy was entirely changed. There is nothing forced in this exposition. We must also contend for a definite or fixed number being put for an uncertain one; as if the Prophet had said — a part of the power of the beast was abstracted after the rising of the little horn. Thus much for the first clause.

He now adds, *The eyes in this small horn were like those of men*; and then, *it spoke mighty things*. With respect to the eyes, this expression implies — the form of a human body was exhibited because, the Caesars did not abolish the senate nor change at once the whole form of the government; but, as we yesterday said, they were content with power; and as to splendor, titles, and pomp, they readily left these to the consuls and the senate.

If any one considers the manner in which those Caesars, who are doubtless intended by *the little horn*, conducted themselves, their conduct will appear like a human figure. For **Julius Caesar** pretended, although he was dictator, to obey the senate's authority, and the consuls asked the opinion of the senators, after the ancient manner. He sat in the midst, and permitted many things to be decreed without interposing his will. **Augustus** also abused the shadow of the tribunitial power only for the purpose of ruling the Empire. Thus he submitted to the consuls; and when he wished to be elected to that office, he became a candidate with the other competitors, and put on the white robe like a private citizen. **Tiberius** also was a great pretender, and while plotting schemes of tyranny, was neither open nor ingenuous in his plans.

So also *the eyes of a man appeared in the little horn*, that is, after this change took place and the senate and people were deprived of their liberty. He who held the government of the republic was not formidable, as an entire beast, but was like a private man as to outward form.

The Prophet adds, *The small horn had a loud sounding mouth*. For although, with the view of conciliating favor, the Caesars conducted themselves like men, we know how atrociously they threatened their enemies, and how imperiously they either hindered or committed whatever they lusted, as it seemed good to them. There was, then, a great difference between their mouth and their eyes. For, as we already said, the splendor and dignity of the empire was in the power of the consuls and senate at the beginning.

Meanwhile, by insidious arts, the Caesars drew towards themselves the whole power, till no one dared to do anything, except at their bidding. Many interpreters explain this as blasphemy against God, and impiety; and the angel will touch upon this point at the close of the chapter. But if we weigh the whole expression judiciously, what I say will appear correct, and the loud speaking here mentioned by the Prophet will signify that pride with which the Caesars were puffed up, imposing silence on all men and allowing no one to open their mouths contrary to their will.

The Prophet's words are very well explained by this fact; *for the three horns being removed from the ten*, means some part of the empire was separated from the main body; then, *the small horn being endued with human eyes*, implies a kind of modesty, as the Caesars acted like private persons, and left outward show with the senate and people; and thirdly, *when the mouth of the little horn spoke swellingly*, trepidation seized upon all the Romans, and especially whoever enjoyed any reputation, hung upon the nod of the Caesars, who imposed the vilest slavery, and received the foulest and most shameful flattery from the whole senate.

The Roman Empire's collapse and burning

Daniel 7:11 "I watched then because of the sound of the pompous words which the horn was speaking; I watched till the beast was slain, and its body destroyed and given to the burning flame."

Since the presumptuous speaking of the little horn terrified the Prophet, he now says he was *attentive in considering this portion*. He next says, *The beast was slain, and his body was consumed by the burning of fire*.

This ought clearly to be referred to the end of the Roman empire. For, from the time when foreigners obtained the mastery, the fourth beast ceased to flourish. The name was always retained, yet with great mockery of that ancient monarchy. I now omit all mention of **Caligula, Nero, Domitian**, and similar monsters.

But when Spaniards and Africans acquired the absolute sway, can we call Rome any longer the mistress of the world? Surely this would be foolish indeed! To this very day the Germans also say they possess the Roman empire [i.e., the Holy Roman Empire]; but while the title of empire has passed to the Germans, clearly enough Rome is at this very day in slavery. For as to the Pope having erected his own throne there, this empire is unworthy of the name of monarchy; but whatever be our view of this point, for about 1500 years the Romans have been in bondage as slaves to foreign princes. For, after the death of Nero, Trajan was his successor, and from that time scarcely a single Roman obtained the empire; and God branded it with the most disgraceful marks of

ignominy, when a swine-herd was created emperor, and that too by the lust of the soldiery! The senate retained its name till then; but if it pleased the soldiers to create any one a Caesar, the senate was immediately compelled to submit to their dictation.

Thus, the Prophet with great propriety says, *The beast was slain shortly after the promulgation of the gospel.* Then the presumptuous speaking of *the little horn* was at an end, and *the fourth beast* was extinct about the same time. For then no Roman became an Emperor who claimed for himself any share of power; but Rome itself fell into disgraceful slavery, and not only foreigners reigned there most shamefully, but even barbarians, swine-herds, and cow-herds! **All this occurred in fulfillment of what God had shown to his Prophet, namely, after the coming of Christ and the opening of the books, that is — after the knowledge which shone upon the world through the preaching of the gospel — the destruction of that fourth beast and of the Roman empire was close at hand.**

PRAYER

Grant, Almighty God, whatever revolutions happen daily in the world, that we may always be intent on the sight of Your glory, once manifested to us in Your Son. May the splendor of Your majesty illuminate our hearts, and may we pass beyond the visible heavens, the sun, the moon, and every shining thing; and may we behold the blessedness of Your kingdom, which You propose to us in the light of Your Gospel. May we walk through the midst of the darkness and afflictions of the world, content with that light by which You invite us to the hope of the eternal inheritance which You have promised us, and acquired for us by the blood of Your only begotten Son. — Amen.

Daniel 7:19-20 "Then I wished to know the truth about the fourth beast, which was different from all the others, exceedingly dreadful, *with* its teeth of iron and its nails of bronze, *which* devoured, broke in pieces, and trampled the residue with its feet; and the ten horns that *were* on its head, and the other *horn* which came up, before which three fell, namely, that horn which had eyes and a mouth which spoke pompous words, whose appearance was greater than his fellows."

Here the Prophet interrogates the angel concerning the Fourth Beast more attentively and carefully; as we formerly saw him touched with greater admiration on beholding the beast which was formidable beyond the other three, so that neither a name nor representation could be found for it. As, therefore, God displayed something great under the image of the fourth beast, he caused his Prophet to wake up to understand the mystery of it.

The origin of the Roman Empire

For this reason he now interrogates the angel; for he says *he wished for the truth* concerning the fourth beast, and he also repeats what we saw before, namely, *its being different from the others.* And surely the subjugation of so many kings by the Romans was a difference worthy of notice. Let us think upon the origin of that nation—a few robbers seizing upon a desert spot, growing great by brutal audacity and force, until they reduced all their neighbors under their power. Then they crossed the sea, and added first one province, and then another to their sway. And when the kingdom of Macedon came within their power, this was indeed portentous. At length they became masters throughout the whole circuit of the Mediterranean, and there was no corner which did not receive their yoke; and this could never have been imagined by human apprehension.

It is said then, *this beast was different from the others, and very terrible*. In the same sense *its teeth* are called *iron*, and *its claws brazen*. No mention had until now been made of his claw; the Prophet had spoken only of iron teeth, but he now adds *brazen claws*, as if he had said, This beast shall be endued with such savage madness, as not only to attack all things by its unusual violence, but to tear, lacerate, and devour all things; as he repeats again what he had said, *eating and destroying and treading under foot the remainder*. As I have already explained all these points, I am unwilling to consume your time in vain and to confuse you with useless repetitions.

I asked also, said he, *concerning the ten horns, which, were upon its head*. And this is the reason why I must cut the subject off shortly here, as the angel's reply will follow directly. The Prophet, therefore, is now, without doubt, placed under a celestial impulse, because God was unwilling to teach him only as a private person; he was to be a witness and herald of so great a mystery; and we may at this day learn from his writings, which are of the utmost use to us when we become fully acquainted with them. He says, therefore, *He also inquired about the ten horns which were on the head of the beast, and of the other horn which had arisen*, meaning the small one, *and concerning the three horns falling from the face of the beast*.

We have shown how provinces were denoted by the ten horns, and how the difference between the Roman Empire and other monarchies was pointed out, because there never was one supreme ruler at Rome, except when Sylla and Marius exercised their usurped authority — but each for only a short time. Here then the continual state of the Roman Empire is under review, for it was not simply a single animal, as it had ten horns. A finite number is put for an indefinite one.

With regard to the little horn, I said it referred to the Caesars, who attracted the whole government of the state to themselves, after depriving the people of their liberty and the senate of their power, while even under their sway some dignity was continued to the senate and some majesty retained by the people.

We have explained also how the three horns were broken; that is, how craftily the Caesars infringed upon and diminished the strength of both people and senate. Lastly, we have accounted for this little horn being displayed with human eyes, since the Caesars exercised their dominion with cunning, when they pretended to be only tribunes of the people, and allowed the ensigns of empire to remain in the hands of the consuls; for when they came into the senate, they sat in a lowly situation in curule seats prepared for the tribunes. As, therefore, they tyrannized with such cleverness and cunning, instead of by open violence, they are said to be endowed with the eyes of a man. Then as to the tongue, the sense is the same; for although they always professed the consular power to be supreme in the state, yet they could not restrain themselves, but vomited forth many reproachful speeches. On the one side, we see them remarkable for eyes, and on the other, for the tongue.

And its aspect was terrible beyond its companions. This seems not to belong peculiarly to the little horn which had arisen among the ten, but rather to the fourth beast. But if any one wishes to understand it of the little horn, I will not contest the point, as it will thus make tolerable sense. But I rather embrace my former opinion, for it is not surprising to find the Prophet after his discourse on the little horn, returning to the beast himself.

Daniel 7:21-22 "I beheld, and the same horn was making war against the saints, and prevailing against them, until the Ancient of Days came, and a judgment was made *in*

favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom.”

The Prophet now adds what he had omitted. The angel does not yet answer him, but as he had not sufficiently expressed how the little horn waged war with the sons of God, he now supplies the omission. He says, therefore, *he saw* — this ought to be received by way of correction; *I saw*, says he, meaning it was shown me in a vision, how the little horn *made war with the saints so as to prevail against them*. Clearly enough other tyrants assailed the elect people of God with far greater injury. Hence many refer this to Antiochus Epiphanes, who was hostile to the Jews beyond all others, and was utterly determined to blot out the name of the God of Israel. And we know how often he raised powerful armaments to extinguish both the people and the worship of God. As, therefore, the cruelty of Antiochus was so severe against the Israelites, many think his image to have been exhibited to the Prophet as the little horn, and what we shall afterwards see about “the time,” and “times” and “half-a-time,” they explain of the three years and a half during which the Temple was in ruins, and the people thereby prevented from offering sacrifices. As, therefore, their religion was then interrupted, they think that tyranny was denoted, by which the people were prohibited from testifying their piety.

But although this opinion is plausible, and at first sight bears upon the face of it the appearance of truth, yet if we weigh all things in order, we may easily judge how unsuitable it is to Antiochus. Why, therefore, does the Prophet say — *the little horn waged war with the saints*? Antiochus certainly made war against the Church, and so did many others; the Egyptians, we know, often broke in and spoiled the Temple and the Romans too, before the monarchy of the Caesars. I reply, this is spoken comparatively, because **no war was ever carried on so continuously and professedly against the Church, as those which occurred after the Caesars arose, and after Christ was made manifest to the world; for the devil was then more enraged, and God also relaxed the reins to prove the patience of His people.** Lastly, it was natural for the bitterest conflicts to occur when the redemption of the world was carried out; and the event clearly showed this.

We know first of all, by horrid examples, how Judea was laid waste, for never was such cruelty practiced against any other people. Nor was the calamity of short duration; we are well acquainted with their extreme obstinacy, which compelled their enemies to forget clemency altogether. For the Romans desired to spare them as far as possible, but so great was their obstinacy and the madness of their rage, that they provoked their enemies as if devoting themselves to destruction, until that dreadful slaughter happened, of which history has sufficiently informed us. **When Titus, under the auspices of his father Vespasian, took and destroyed the city, the Jews were stabbed and slaughtered like cattle throughout the whole extent of Asia.** Thus far, then, it concerns the Jews.

When God had inserted the body of the Gentiles into His Church, the cruelty of the Caesars embraced all Christians; thus the little horn waged war with the saints in a manner different from that of the former beasts, because the occasion was different, and the wrath of Satan was excited against all God’s children on account of the manifestation of Christ. This, then, is the best explanation of *the little horn, waging war against the saints*.

Thus he says, *It must prevail.* For **the Caesars and all who governed the provinces of the empire raged with such extreme violence against the Church, that it almost**

disappeared from the face of the earth. And thus it happened, that the little horn prevailed in appearance and in general opinion, as, for a short time, the safety of the Church was almost despaired of.

It now follows, *Until the Ancient of days came, judgment was given to the saints of the lofty ones.* No doubt the Prophet says God came in the same sense as before; namely, when He erected His tribunal and openly appeared as the judge of the world in the person of Christ. He does not here set before us the Son of Man, as he did before, but yet a fuller explanation of this passage is to be sought in the former one. *God* then is said *to have come*, when He put forth His power in supplying the needs of the Church, as by common figure He is said to be at a distance from us, and to sleep or to be reposing, when he does not show himself openly as our deliverer. So, on the other hand, He is said to come to us, when he openly proves His constant care of us. Under this figure Daniel now says he beheld the appearance of God Himself.

The Ancient of Days then *came*. If we ask when, we have the reply at hand; it was immediately after the promulgation of the gospel. Then God stretched forth his hand for His Church, and lifted it out of the abyss. For since the Jewish name had been for a long time hated, and all people desired to exterminate the Jews from the world, Christ's advent increased this hatred and cruelty; and the license to injure them was added, as they thought Christ's disciples were plotting a change of government, and wished to overthrow the existing state of things; as in these days all the pious suffer grievously under this false imputation. God, therefore, is said to have come, where the doctrine of the gospel was more and more promulgated, and some rest granted to the Church. Thus, by this repose, *the saints received the kingdom* which had been taken from them; that is, the kingdom of God and of the saints obtained some fame and celebrity in the world, through the general diffusion of the doctrine of piety, in every direction. Now, therefore, we understand what Daniel wished to convey by the phrase, *The Ancient of Days came, and judgment was given to the saints of the lofty ones.*

Daniel 7:23-24

“Thus he said: 'The fourth beast shall be the fourth kingdom on earth, which shall be different from all *other* kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, trample it and break it in pieces. And the ten horns out of this kingdom are ten kings who shall arise. And another shall rise after them; He shall be different from the first *ones*, and shall subdue three kings.'”

This reply of the angel is subject to the same obscurity as the vision itself, but it ought to be sufficient to calm the minds of the faithful to know that various changes should arise and shake the whole earth; for as many troubles were prepared for the saints, so also they were braced up to fortitude and endurance. For God was not willing fully to explain what He had shown to His Prophet; He only wished to set before him this conclusion — a kingdom shall arise completely different from all others. Thus the angel says, *The Fourth Beast signifies a fourth kingdom, which shall differ from all the kingdoms.*

Previously to that period, no state was so extensive in its sway. For although the Spartans and Athenians performed illustrious and memorable exploits, yet we know them to have been included within narrow boundaries; and the ambition and wordy vanity of the Greeks caused them to celebrate those wars which were scarcely of any consequence, as we learn even from their own histories. Whichever way we take this, Sparta obtained with difficulty the second rank in Greece, as Athens did the first.

As far as concerns the Roman Empire, we know it to have been more extensive and powerful than the other monarchies. When all Italy came under their sway, this was sufficient for any noble monarchy; but Spain, Sicily, part, of Greece, and Illyricum were added, and afterwards all Greece and Macedon, Asia Minor, Africa, and all the islands; for by one word they expelled the king of Cyprus, and sold his goods by public auction. When the dregs of the people were collected, Claudius made a law for the banishment of the king of Cyprus, and this he accomplished by his single voice, without the use of force at all.

No wonder then that God foretold *how different this kingdom, should be from all the others; it had no single head; the senate had the chief authority, though all power was centered in the people.* There was therefore a kind of mingled confusion, since the government of Rome was never settled. And if we weigh all things prudently, it was neither a republic nor a kingdom, but a confused compound, in which the people exercised great power in a tumultuous way, and the senate oppressed the people as much as it could. There were three ranks — the senatorian, the equestrian, and the plebeian, and that mixture made the kingdom like a monster. The angel, therefore, announces *the fourth kingdom as different from the others.*

He afterwards confirms what we said before; *it will fall, says he, and break to pieces, and tread down the whole earth.* This was fulfilled after Gaul [France, Belgium, and northern Italy] and Britain were subdued, Germany partially subjugated, and Illyricum, Greece, and Macedon, reduced to submission. At length they penetrated to Asia, and Antiochus was banished beyond the Taurus; his kingdom afterwards became their prey, then they obtained possession of Syria. The kings of Egypt were their allies, and yet became dependent upon their nod; the sovereign dared not appoint an heir, without consulting their pleasure.

As, therefore, they ruled supremely so long and so widely, they fulfilled this prophecy by *devouring the whole earth. For such lust for dominion never existed before; wars were heaped upon wars, they were alike greedy of the blood of others, and by no means sparing of their own.* The whirlpool was insatiable, while it absorbed the whole world, and their pride crushed it and trampled it under foot. **Cruelty was added to pride,** for all looked up to the Romans, and conciliated the favor of Rome by flattery, for the purpose of raging savagely against their own people. By these arts almost the whole of Greece perished. For they knew how many innocent persons everywhere perished in every city, a kind of diversion which delighted them; they were fully aware how easy it was to attract all the power of the whole world to themselves, when it was able to put forth neither strength, nor skill, nor power against them. For their nobles were constantly at variance; sometimes one faction and sometimes another was supreme, and thus the splendor of every city easily and gradually diminished. Thus all Greece was spoiled, and the Romans exercised their dominion there without difficulty, as over brute beasts. We may say the same of Asia also. We are not surprised then at the angel saying, *the earth would be trodden down and trampled on by this fourth beast.*

The ten horns are the ten kings which should arise.

He afterwards adds, *The ten horns are the ten kings which should arise.* These Ten Kings are clearly comprehended under one empire, and there is no question here of separate persons. In the Persian kingdom, we observed many kings, and yet the image of the second beast was single, while it embraced all those kings until the change occurred. So also now, when treating of the Romans, the Prophet does not assert that

ten kings should succeed each other in regular order, but rather **the multiform nature of the kingdom, under more heads than one. For the royal office belonged to the senators or leading citizens, whose authority prevailed very extensively both with the senate and the people.** And with reference to the number, we said the plural number only was denoted, without any limitation to the number ten.

The conclusion is as follows—this kingdom should be like a single terrible animal bearing many horns, since no single king held the chief sway there, as was customary by constant usage in other lands, but there should be a mixture, like many kings in place of one holding the preeminence.

The fulfillment of this is sufficiently known from the history of Rome; as if it had been said, there should not be any single kingdom, as of Persia and other nations, but many kings at the same time, alluding to the mixture and confusion in which the supreme authority was involved.

The little horn explained

The Little Horn follows: *A king shall arise, says he, different from those former ones, and shall afflict three kings.* We showed how unintelligible this becomes, unless **we refer it to the Caesars to whom the monarchy passed;** for after long and continued and intensive strife, the whole power passed over to the Triumvirate.

The Triumvirate

A conspiracy was entered into by **Lepidus, Mark Antony, and Octavius.** Octavius was then all but a boy, having scarcely arrived at manhood, but all the veteran soldiers were in his favor, in consequence of the name of Julius Caesar and his adoption by him. Hence he was received by the other two into that alliance, of which Lepidus was the first, and Antony the second. At length discords arose among them, and Lepidus was deprived of his place in the triumvirate, and lived, as if half-dead, while his life was only spared to him because he was raised to the office of chief priest.

Reverence for the priesthood restrained Antony from putting him to death, so long as he was content to live in privacy and retirement. Octavius at length became supreme, but by what artifice? We said **Julius Caesar took no more upon himself than the office of dictator,** while consuls were annually elected as usual. He did not strain the power of the dictatorship beyond moderation, but he so restrained himself, that some popular rights might seem still to flourish. **Octavius also followed the cunning of his uncle and adopted father.** The same conduct will be found in the other Caesars, though there were many differences between them.

As the shadow of a republic yet remained, while the senate was held in some degree of reverence, it is not surprising, if the angel predicts that the beast should survive, *when another small horn should arise different from the others.* He adds, *And shall afflict the three kings.* I have explained this point by the slight change which the Caesars effected in the provinces, for if any of the provinces were warlike, strong armies and veteran soldiers were usually sent there. The Caesars took these to themselves, while some executive management was left to the senate with regard to the other provinces.

Lastly, by this form of speech, the angel portrays the coming dominion of the little horn, and its diminishing the strength of the former ones. And yet the beast should remain apparently entire; thus, the effigy of the republic was preserved, as the people were

always designated — in the forum, by the high-sounding name, Romans, and in battle, as fellow-soldiers.

Meanwhile, although the name of the Roman empire was so celebrated, and its majesty was in every one's mouth, the supreme authority was in the possession of one little horn which lay concealed, and dared not openly raise its head. This, then, is the pith of the interpretation of what the angel here sets before us. It follows —

Daniel 7:25

“And he shall speak *pompous* words against the Most High, shall persecute the saints of the Most High, and shall intend to change times and laws. Then *the saints* shall be given into his hand for a time and times and half a time.”

The angel now explains a little more clearly what the Prophet had formerly touched upon but briefly, namely, **this last king should be a manifest and professed enemy to the Church**. We yesterday showed how miserably and cruelly the Church had been harassed by many tyrants. And if we, compare these tyrants with each other, **we shall find the Church to have been much more heavily afflicted after Christ's advent, and to have been opposed by the Caesars in open warfare**.

The occasion arose in this way. The doctrine of the Gospel had been dispersed through almost all the provinces of the empire. The Jewish name was hated; and the novelty of the teaching added greatly to that unpopularity. Men thought the Jews had invented a new deity for themselves — even Christ, as their language seemed to imply the worship of a new divinity. As, therefore, some material for rage against the pure worship of God was afforded them, the Caesars became more and more stirred up to carry on war against the elect, and to oppress the Church. It was not their fault if they did not extinguish the whole light of the celestial doctrine, abolish true religion, and banish the knowledge of God from the world.

This agrees very well with what Daniel relates of this king becoming so headstrong, as to *utter words against the most High God*. . . . The equivalent phrase is this: so great should be the pride of this new king, who did not exercise his power openly but by hidden deceit, that he should sit as it were on the side of God and in opposition to Him. This means he should be manifestly God's enemy.

Does this speak of Antichrist or the Caesars of the Roman Empire?

Those who understand this of Antichrist, think their opinion confirmed by the conduct of other tyrants who carried on their warfare against God with arms and violence, but not by words. But the Prophet does not speak so subtlety here. For by *words* he does not here mean doctrine, but that verbal boasting by which the Caesars dared to promulgate their edicts throughout the whole world, urging all the proconsuls to punish the Christians, and not to permit that impious and cursed sect to flourish; and thus terrors flew about throughout the whole world.

What Daniel now relates was then fulfilled, namely, *the utterance of words of defiance against God*; for those tyrants thought their own edicts, without the armament of soldiers, would be sufficient to extinguish the memory of Christ. Thus, also, true piety was disgracefully traduced [maligned], and the very name of Christ lacerated by horrible reproaches, as historians have amply informed us.

This explanation, therefore, is most suitable *to the little horn speaking or uttering words against the most High. He shall afflict, says he, the saints of the lofty ones.* . . . By saints he doubtless means sons of God, or His elect people, or the Church. He calls these “saints of lofty ones,” because as elect they depend upon heaven; and although they are pilgrims in the world, yet their life is in heaven, where the eternal inheritance remains for them which was obtained by Christ. As, therefore, their treasure is now heaven, they deservedly boast of being citizens of heaven, and allies and brethren of angels. Thus they are properly called “saints of lofty ones”; they are separated from the world, and know themselves to live here day by day until they arrive at firm and enduring repose.

We know this to have been fulfilled, because overwhelming terror fell upon all the pious, and the Church almost perished, while multitudes who were suspected of being Christians were subjected to cruel tortures. **The prevalence of this universal license for persecuting all the pious explains how the saints were then afflicted by the small horn.**

The Prophet or rather the angel next says, *He will think, or meditate, to change time and law, and they shall be delivered into his hand.*

As to the time here spoken of, many refer it to holy days. But we may understand it generally of the small horn overthrowing whatever was formerly customary in the world; and thus also I interpret the word . . . not [as] the Law of God or the Gospel, but any rites, customs, and institutions. While interpreters are contending about this word, some referring it to the Decalogue, and others to the preaching of the Gospel, I think the simple sense of the Prophet to be this: **the Caesars perverted all laws, both human and divine.** We have seen how they attempted this, and how far they accomplished it.

It is not surprising then if the Prophet assigns this unbridled audacity to this last king, *who thought to change whatever had been formerly ordained in the world.* And for this reason it had been formerly said this horn should be furnished with human eyes; and next, should speak mightily, thundering horribly, and inspiring all men with fear through its voice alone.

We know this to have been represented as in a glass, if we consider how far the Caesars proceeded in their arrogance.

First, as to **Octavius**, while he restrained himself within due bounds politically, he suffered himself to be adored as a god, and altars to be erected to him; he wished the public to be persuaded of his deity, and celebrated a banquet in which he sat among the superior deities.

Tiberius neglected religious ceremonies entirely, and yet we see how he despised all men. Although he was of an obtuse [stupid, lacking quickness of perception or intellect] disposition, in his daring he was extreme, and was all the while craftily deceiving the senate.

Next, as to **Caligula**, he threatened Jupiter in this way —“What! You are an exile here and I a native. I will banish you into Greece your native place.” He often inflicted blows upon the statue of Jupiter, and not content with the name of a god, he ordered the chief sacrifices to be offered to himself.

This diabolic fury increased in **Domitian**.

And considering the Caesars as men, what was their character? One of them said, "I wish the Roman people had but one neck." He enjoyed the slaughter of the senate as a sport, and wished to make his horse a consul. How disgraceful was such conduct!

We see, then, how this prediction was not uttered without a cause; namely, so great should be the arrogance of the small horn that it would dare to change and turn into a new chaos all "law," meaning all order of every kind, and "times," meaning the very series and nature of all things.

The Prophet then says *he thought*. He does not express the result, but simply signifies the arrival of the small horn at such a degree of madness as to suppose it could draw down the sun from heaven, turn light into darkness, and leave nothing entire, nothing in order, throughout the world. Those occurrences really happened in accordance with this prophecy. I cannot enter into details here. I should have to detain you many days or even months while citing history; I can only touch shortly upon what is necessary for explaining the Prophet's words and the meaning of his prediction.

God's sovereign rule

They shall be delivered into his hands means — however the small horn should leap forward in desperate fury, yet God should always rule over him, and nothing should happen without His permission. It was God then who delivered into the hands of that king the saints, the political government, and the institutions of piety, allowing him to pour out promiscuously human blood, to violate every national right, and to ruin as far as possible all religion.

It brings us then no little comfort to know when God's permission is given to tyrants to harass the Church and interfere with His lawful worship; for if we were left to the mercy of their lusts, how distressing would be the universal confusion! But He succors us, as the angel says, when tyrants assail us and disturb all order by their horrible licentiousness and cruel rage against the miserable and the innocent: He succors us, I say, so that they are unable to move a finger against us without God's permission.

We are not permitted to know why God relaxes the rein in favor of the enemies of His Church; perhaps it is to prove and try the patience of His people. It is sufficient for us, if, when tyrants scheme and plot in every way, they are unable to do anything without the divine permission.

But a greater consolation is added in the last clause, *even for a time and times, and the division of a time*, or half, as some translate it; it is properly a division. Interpreters differ widely about these words, and I will not bring forward all their opinions, otherwise it would be necessary to refute them. I should have no little trouble in refuting all their views, but I will follow my own custom of shortly expressing the genuine sense of the Prophet, and thus all difficulty will be removed.

Those who consider a "time" to mean a "year," are in my opinion wrong. They cite the forty-two months of the Apocalypse (Revelation 13:5), which make three years and a half; but that argument is not conclusive, since in that case a year will not consist of 365 days, but the year itself must be taken figuratively for any indeterminate time. It is better then to keep close to the Prophet's words.

A "time," then, is not put for a certain number of months or days, nor yet for a single year, but for any period whose termination is in the secret counsel of God.

They shall be given, then, for a time, says he, and afterwards adds times; that is, for a continuance of times; and again, even to a section or division of a time; meaning, these calamities should come to an end whenever God, in mercy to His Church, should restrain those tyrants by His wrath against them. As long, therefore, as the cruelty of the Caesars oppressed God's Church, it was committed into their hands.

We have already seen how many Caesars were enemies of the true Church.

First, of all, **Nero raged most cruelly, for he burnt some thousands of Christians at Rome, to extinguish the infamy which raged against himself.** The people could not endure his barbarity; for, while the fourth part of the city was destroyed by Nero, he was enjoying his pleasure and rejoicing so mournful a spectacle! As he feared the popular tumult against himself, he laid hold of many Christians, and offered them to the people as a kind of expiation.

Those who followed him, did not cease to pour forth innocent blood, and those who seemed to be endued with some degree of clemency and humanity were all at length seized with a diabolic fury. **Trajan** was esteemed a very excellent prince, and yet we know how he commanded the Christians everywhere to be slain, since he thought them obstinate in their error.

And others were more savage still. No wonder, therefore, the angel predicts, even for a time, and times, and the division of a time, that license would be given to the tyrants and enemies of the Church to pervert all things, to despise God, and set aside all justice, and to execute a cruel and barbarous slaughter.

Over a hundred years of the persecution, often fierce persecution, of Christians

This ought to be predicted for two reasons: first, lest through length of time the faithful should fall away, because when "the time" — a space of about ten years — had passed, they would come to *the times*, consisting of about fifty or a hundred years.

This, then, was one reason why God admonished the faithful *concerning the time and times*. But He wished also to mitigate their sorrow by **adding half a time, thus promising some moderation and ending to such great calamities.**

The Olivet Discourse of Christ

The language of our Lord to His Apostles concerning the various commotions of the earth, corresponds very well with this view. "There shall arise wars and rumors of wars, and no end as yet," says He. He announces them as the preludes to greater evils, when the whole of Judea should be devastated with wars and other slaughters. He afterwards adds, "Unless those days had been shortened" (Matthew 24:6; Mark 13:7; Luke 21:9). This shortening of the days is here noticed as if the Lord cut short a continued succession of them. **For when the possession of the tyranny appeared fierce, then suddenly and beyond the expectation of all, God at length snatched away His Church, and then the evangelical doctrine emerged, and was celebrated everywhere. God, therefore, then shortened the days on account of His own elect,** and this is understood by the last clause, a division of a time. . . .

PRAYER.

Grant, Almighty God, since we must be daily exercised by various contests, that we may never yield to the infirmities of the flesh, and never forget Your holy calling. Animate us,

we pray, for all hostile engagements; may we stand unbroken against all the assaults of Satan and the wicked; and thus give ourselves up and devote ourselves to You. May we never hesitate to suffer death itself, if necessary, and even to offer ourselves daily to various kinds of death, until we shall have discharged our warfare, and enjoy that happy and eternal rest which You have prepared for us in Your only-begotten Son. — Amen.

The fall of the Roman Empire foretold

Daniel 7:26

“But the judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and destroy it unto the end.”

The, angel now answers Daniel concerning the death of the fourth beast. For we said when **the Caesars had transferred the empire to themselves**, the strength of the senate and of the people was enervated [weakened or destroyed]; but because the name still remained, **the fourth beast is not said to have been slain until foreigners disgracefully became masters of Rome.**

For if the Romans had been conquered a hundred times over by professed enemies, they would not have suffered such disgrace as when obscure and low-born men exercise a cruel and barbarous tyranny; for then neither the senate nor the people enjoy any authority. The angel thus marks the time correctly at which the fourth beast was to fall, when **the Spaniards, the Africans, and other barbarians, who were even always unknown in their own country, were raised to the highest honors beyond the expectation of mankind.** For their lust oppressed the whole state; they beheaded the most noble senators, and appointed in their place the meanest [lowliest] of men, in token of their spirit of ignominy [shameful or disgraceful conduct]. *Then the fourth beast, was slain;* and this is the explanation of this portion of the angel's reply.

He says also, *Judgment shall then sit;* that is, God shall again restore to order all this confusion, and the world shall feel His Providence ruling over the earth and the human race. For when all things are allowed to proceed without punishment, and neither justice nor honesty are held in any account, God is then supposed to be enjoying His ease in heaven, and to be forgetful of the human race. Hence, in opposition to this, He is said to ascend a tribunal as often as we really and experimentally feel His care over us.

Thus the restoration is here called a sitting in judgment, **when the Roman empire was blotted out, and God executed the penalty of such great and such unbridled ferocity as that already recorded.** As this phrase is very common and of frequent use in Scripture, I will not continue the explanation.

After darkness, light.

The judgment, then, shall be set; that is, after all things have been long involved in darkness, new light shall burst forth, and men shall readily acknowledge the sway of the Almighty.

And power, says he, shall they take away from the beast for dissipating and destroying even to the end. Here the angel announces the final overthrow of the fourth beast. Respecting the plural number of the verb, we have already mentioned the opinion of some who refer it to more angels than one, but it is better to understand it more simply, as an absolute and indefinite form of expression. And yet I do not object, as I before stated, to the view of those who take it of angels, yet I fear this is too refined; I prefer the

simpler view as being free from all controversy.

The sense, then, is this: When the beast; shall have raged cruelly for a length of time, and especially the little horn, God shall discharge the duty of a judge, and the beast, with this small horn, shall be removed out of the way. The angel adds next, There shall be no hope of any new life similar to that of many kingdoms which often fall at one period and rise again at another; but he here announces the final slaughter, as if he had said, the wound is incurable and deadly. It now follows:

Daniel 7:27

“Then the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High. His kingdom *is* an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him.”

Nothing happens by chance. God had the Church’s safety in view, as He ordained the fall of Rome.

This verse assures us how these predictions concerning the destruction of the beast regard the Church’s safety. Thus the faithful might know themselves noticed by God, and how the changes which successively happened tended to the same end, the acknowledgment on the part of the pious of their continuance under the care and guardianship of God. For any discussion of the four monarchies would have been cold and useless, unless there had been added God’s peculiar care of His own Church, and His conducting the affairs of the world for the safety of His people.

As we have said in other places, God’s elect people are of more consequence than all the kingdoms which are conspicuous in the world (Isaiah 43:3). This, then, is the sense of the words. . . . [The] chief intention of this prediction is, as I have said, to show the relation of all events to the safety of the pious. When, therefore, all things seem carried away by the blind impulse of chance, we ought always to contemplate God as watching for His Church, and tempering all storms and all commotion to the service and safety of the pious, who rest upon His Providence.

Most refer this prophecy to Christ’s Second Coming. Calvin explains that this actually refers to the giving of Christ’s kingdom to Christians at the time of the fall of the Roman Empire.

These two things, then, are mutually in accordance, namely, *the slaying of the fourth beast, and the giving of the kingdom and authority to the people of the saints*. This does not seem to have been accomplished yet; and hence many, no, almost all, except the Jews, have treated this prophecy as relating to the final day of Christ’s advent. All Christian interpreters agree in this; but, as I have shown before, they pervert the Prophet’s intention. . . .

This prophecy does not seem to be accomplished at the destruction of the beast; but this is easily explained. We know how magnificently the prophets speak of Christ’s kingdom, and adore His dignity and glory with splendid eulogies; and although these are not exaggerated, yet if judged of by human perceptions, you would surely think them exceedingly extravagant, and find neither solidity nor firmness in their words. And no wonder: for **Christ’s kingdom and His dignity cannot be perceived by carnal eyes, nor even comprehended by the human intellect**. Let those who appear the most sagacious of men combine together all their clear-sightedness, yet they can never ascend to the height of Christ’s kingdom, which surpasses the very heavens. Nothing is

more contrary to our natural judgment than to seek life in death, riches in poverty and want, glory in shame and disgrace — to be wanderers in this world, and at the same time its heirs! Our minds cannot naturally comprehend these things. No wonder, then, if mortals judge erroneously of Christ's kingdom, and are blind in the midst of light.

Still there is no defect in **the Prophet's expressions, for they depict for us the visible image of Christ's kingdom**, and accommodate themselves to our dullness. They enable us to perceive the analogy between things earthly and visible, and **that spiritual blessedness which Christ has afforded to us, and which we now possess through hope in Him**. For while we only hope, our happiness is concealed from us; it is not perceptible by our eyes or by any of our senses.

Constantine's Christian empire—The fierce persecution of Christians ceased, and the kingdom of God was able to prosper. Daniel's prophecies have been partially fulfilled. The kingdom of God is already upon us and yet not completely as it shall be at the last day.

Let us now return to the passage. Daniel first of all says, *A kingdom, and power, and extensive dominion, shall be given to the people of the holy ones*. **This was partially fulfilled when the Gospel emerged from persecution**: then the name of Christ was everywhere celebrated and held in honor and esteem, while previously it had been the subject of the greatest envy and hatred. For nothing had been more hated and detested for many years than the name of Christ. **God, therefore, then gave the kingdom to His people, when He was acknowledged as the Redeemer of the world throughout its many changes, after having been formerly despised and utterly rejected.**

I may here remark again, and impress upon the memory what I have frequently touched upon, namely, the custom of the Prophets, in treating of Christ's kingdom, to extend their meaning further than its first beginnings; and they do this while they dwell upon its commencement. **Thus Daniel or the angel does not predict here occurrences connected with the advent of Christ as Judge of the world, but with the first preaching and promulgation of the Gospel, and the celebration of the name of Christ.** But this does not prevent him from drawing a magnificent picture of Christ's reign, and embracing its final completion.

It is sufficient for us to perceive **how God begins to give the kingdom to His elect people, when, by the power of His Spirit, the doctrine of the holy Gospel was everywhere received in the world**. The sudden change which it occasioned was incredible, but this is a customary result; for, when anything is predicted, we think it a fable and a dream, and when God performs what we never would have thought of, the event appears to us trifling, and we treat it as of no significance. For example, when the preaching of the Gospel commenced, no one would have thought its success could have been so great and so prosperous; no, two hundred years before Christ was manifest, when religion was almost blotted out, and the Jews were execrated by the whole world, who would have thought the Law would spring from Zion? Yet God erected His scepter there. The dignity of the kingdom had vanished, the offspring of David was extinct. For the family of Jesse was but a trunk, after the simile used by the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 11:1). If anyone had asked all the Jews one after another, no one would have believed the possibility of those events which accompanied the preaching of the Gospel; but at length the dignity and virtue of the kingdom of David shone forth in Christ. Yet it vanishes before our eyes, and we seek new miracles (e.g., a *future* millennial kingdom), as if God had not sufficiently proved Himself to have spoken by His prophets! Thus we

observe how the Prophet keeps within bounds when he says, *A kingdom, and a power, and a magnitude of empire was given to the people of the saints.*

The nature of the kingdom of God—Christians are in but not of the world. Christ is King of a kingdom, but it is not of the nature of this world's kingdoms. Jesus taught, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here" (John 18:36).

He adds, *one empire under the whole heavens. . . . We know the reign of God and of Christ, although existing in the world, not to be of it (John 18:36); the meaning of the two expressions is exactly the opposite. God, therefore, still exercises His heavenly reign in the world, because He dwells in the hearts of His people by His Spirit. While God held His seat at Jerusalem, was His kingdom merely an earthly and corruptible one? By no means, for by the possession of an earthly habitation He did not cease to be in heaven also. Thus the angel instructed the Prophet concerning the saints who are pilgrims in the world, and yet shall enjoy the kingdom and possess the greatest power under heaven.*

Daniel prophesies regarding the Church between Christ's first and second coming. Thus, Daniel's prophecy is already fulfilled. At Christ's ascension, He was seated as King over His kingdom.

Hence also we correctly conclude, that this vision ought not to be explained of the final advent of Christ, but of the intermediate state of the Church. **The saints began to reign under heaven, when Christ ushered in His kingdom by the promulgation of His Gospel.**

Another point must be noticed, what belongs to the head is transferred to the body. There is nothing new in this, as the supreme power is constantly promised by the Prophets to the Church, especially by Isaiah, who often predicts its complete supremacy.

The Papists seize upon such testimonies to clothe themselves in the spoils of God, as if God had resigned His right to them! But they are immersed in the same error with the Jews, who swell with pride whenever such dignity is promised to the elect people, as if they could remain separate from God and yet obtain the right of treading the whole world under foot. The Papists also do exactly the same.

We, however, must be guided by a very different rule, namely, in consequence of the intimate union between Christ and His Church, the peculiar attribute of Christ Himself is often transferred to His body. Not that the Church reigns by itself; but Christ, as its only supreme head, obtains dominion in it, and not for His own private advantage — for what need has He of this dominion? but for the common safety of all its members.

Christ is our King! And He has "made us kings and priests to His God and Father" (Revelation 1:6).

Wherefore Christ is our King, and He designs to erect His throne in the midst of us; He uses nothing for His own advantage, but communicates all things to us, and renders them useful to us; hence, we are deservedly called kings, because He reigns, and as I have already said, language which is exclusively appropriate to Him, is transferred to us in consequence of the intimate communion existing between the head and the members.

This is also the sense of the phrase here added by the Prophet, *All powers shall serve and obey it*. I have no doubt the angel here confirmed Isaiah's prophecy, as the Holy Spirit, the better to confirm and strengthen the faith of the pious, often reconciles one Prophet with another, and thus their mutual agreement becomes the seal of their truth. It is said in Isaiah, The kingdom and the land which will not serve you shall be destroyed. Kings shall come and adore you, the people shall offer you gifts (Isaiah 60:12). In the Psalms it is said, "Kings shall assemble together, to serve God" (Psalm 102:22). And Isaiah treats very fully on the empire of the Church. The angel now repeats the same thing, to add, as I have said, greater confidence and authority to the prophecy of Isaiah.

The prophets all testify of the rise of Christ's kingdom at the time of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire.

Meanwhile, we observe how completely all the Prophets agree, and at the same time **we interpret these words of the kingdom of Christ, from the period at which the teaching of the gospel was rendered remarkably conspicuous**; for then God's royal scepter went forth from Jerusalem, and shone far and wide, while the Lord was extending His hand and His authority over all the regions of the world. As all these important events tended to the common salvation of the Church, it is said, *The kingdom shall belong to the holy people*.