

Daniel 2:42

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And as the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay,
so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken.

Analysis

And as the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken. This verse reinforces and elaborates the instability described in verse 41. The toes—ten in number, corresponding to the ten horns of Daniel 7's fourth beast—represent specific divisions or rulers within the final phase of Gentile dominion. The parallelism "partly strong, and partly broken" (Aramaic: מִנְהָ תָּקִיפָּה וּמִנְהָ תְּבִירָה/minnah taqqipha u-minnah tebirah) emphasizes the simultaneous presence of contradictory qualities.

"Partly strong" indicates that this kingdom possesses real power—military might, economic dominance, technological sophistication, administrative efficiency. The iron element ensures formidable coercive capacity. Yet "partly broken" reveals inherent fragility—internal divisions, ideological conflicts, moral decay, or spiritual emptiness that undermine structural integrity. The Aramaic root (tebir, broken/fragile) suggests brittleness, easily shattered despite surface strength.

From a Reformed theological perspective, this describes all human kingdoms operating under the curse of sin. Even the most powerful empires contain the seeds of their own destruction. Human pride, injustice, idolatry, and rebellion against God create fault lines that eventually produce collapse. No political arrangement, however sophisticated, can achieve lasting stability apart from submission to God's reign.

The ten toes have fueled extensive prophetic speculation. Some interpreters see them as ten specific rulers or kingdoms in the end times (correlating with Revelation 17:12's ten kings). Others view them as representing the complete number of divisions in the final world system. The Reformed tradition typically emphasizes the theological principle over precise historical identification: human governments remain divided and unstable until Christ's return.

This verse warns against placing ultimate trust in political power, military strength, or governmental systems. Even the mightiest empires are 'partly broken'—unstable foundations ensure eventual collapse. Only God's kingdom, established by the 'stone cut without hands,' provides unshakeable security.

Historical Context

The imagery of mixed iron and clay would have resonated powerfully with Daniel's ancient audience. In Mesopotamian metallurgy, iron represented the strongest known material—used for weapons, tools, and symbols of power. Clay, conversely, represented the commonest, weakest substance—easily molded but easily broken. The incompatibility of these materials was obvious: they couldn't be fused or alloyed.

Nebuchadnezzar himself exemplified 'partly strong, partly broken.' His empire was militarily dominant—he conquered Egypt, Judah, and surrounding nations. Yet his personal instability (chapter 4's madness) and Babylon's rapid collapse after his death revealed fundamental weakness. Human glory, however magnificent, proves transient.

The historical progression from Daniel's time through the church age has repeatedly demonstrated this principle. Rome appeared invincible yet fragmented into warring kingdoms. Medieval Christendom claimed universal authority yet splintered into competing states. Modern nation-states wield unprecedented technological power yet face internal divisions, ideological conflicts, and moral decay.

The ten toes have been variously identified throughout history: the ten provinces

of the Roman Empire, the ten barbarian tribes that overran Rome, ten European kingdoms, or the United Nations Security Council. While specifics remain debated, the pattern is consistent: human attempts at unified global governance repeatedly fail. The final attempt will likewise prove 'partly strong, partly broken.'

For persecuted Christians throughout history, this verse provided hope: oppressive regimes, however powerful, contain inherent instability. Rome's emperors seemed omnipotent, yet Christianity outlasted the empire. Medieval monarchs claimed divine right, yet their kingdoms crumbled. Modern totalitarian states appeared unbreakable, yet collapsed within decades. God's purposes prevail despite human pretensions.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. What are examples of contemporary institutions or nations that are 'partly strong, partly broken,' and what are their iron vs. clay elements?
2. How does recognizing the inherent instability of all human governments affect our political expectations and engagement?
3. Why do you think human attempts at unified global governance repeatedly fail to achieve lasting stability?
4. What is the difference between healthy patriotism and placing ultimate trust in governmental systems?
5. How should the certainty of earthly kingdoms' instability shape Christian priorities and investments?

Interlinear Text

וּמִנְּהָהּ הַסְּרִירָה And as the toes	אַתְּ אֶת of the feet	כְּגָלִים אַתְּ אֶת and part	וּמִנְּהָהּ אַתְּ אֶת of iron	לְפָרָז לְפָרָז H4480	וּמִנְּהָהּ אַתְּ אֶת of clay	וּמִנְּהָהּ אַתְּ אֶת and part
H677	H7271	H4481	H6523		H2635	H4481
לֹא תְּשִׁיבֵנִי אֶת־מַלְכוֹתָא so the kingdom	אַתְּ אֶת־מַלְכוֹתָא shall be	תִּקְרִיב הַתְּבִיבָה strong	תִּקְרִיב הַתְּבִיבָה and part	וּמִנְּהָהּ אַתְּ אֶת shall be	תִּקְרִיב הַתְּבִיבָה broken	תִּקְרִיב הַתְּבִיבָה broken
H7118	H4437	H1934	H8624	H4481	H1934	H8406

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