

# The Rise and Fall of Rome

by John F. Walvoord

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*John F. Walvoord explores the rise, dominance, and eventual fall of the Roman Empire in light of biblical prophecy.*

**Topics:** "Biblical Prophecy", "End Times"

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## Description

John F. Walvoord delves into the fulfillment of biblical prophecies in history, particularly focusing on the rise and fall of the Roman Empire as foretold in the book of Daniel. He highlights how Rome's expansion and dominance aligned with the prophetic descriptions of a powerful kingdom with iron teeth that subdues all. While the fall of the Western Roman Empire was gradual due to barbarian invasions, the final stage of Rome's destruction as prophesied in the Bible is yet to be fulfilled, pointing towards a future event at the second coming of Christ.

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## Transcript

Long before Antiochus Epiphanes had fulfilled the prophecies of Daniel 8:23-25 and 11:21-35, the fourth empire of Daniel's prophecy was already in the making in the rising power of Rome. Roman power was manifested first in the conquering of Italy except for the far north. Rome then proceeded to challenge Carthage which at that time was the absolute master of all Northern Africa. Carthage had been founded by Phoenicians from Tyre and Sidon centuries before, but in the divided power of the Macedonian Empire it was possible for Carthage not only to conquer Northern Africa, but many islands in the Mediterranean including Sicily.

The expanding power of Rome was first manifested in conquering Sicily in 242 b.c., and Carthage had to recognize this conquest in the following year. Although Carthage continued to meet success in conquering Spain and under Hannibal made remarkable progress in extending its power into Gaul, these victories were short lived. It was not long until Rome attacked Spain, and in 202 b.c. at the battle of Zama in North Africa Carthage came under Roman control as a tributary and was eventually destroyed completely in 146 b.c.

### The Rise Of Roman Power

With the beginning of the second century b.c., the western Mediterranean became a Roman lake. The Roman Empire also extended in the north to the Alps, but the next major move was to the east. One by one the nations fell, first Macedonia, then Greece, then Asia Minor. Countries conquered were often

allowed to have local government for a time which later would be replaced by Roman rulers. The prophetic description of Rome as a monster with great iron teeth which trod underfoot its opponents (Daniel 7:7) was fulfilled again and again. People seized in conquered countries were sold by the hundreds and thousands, and all menial tasks were performed by these slaves. Such was the power of Rome that Antiochus Epiphanes who had previously been compelled to surrender Egypt to Rome barely survived the threat of Roman domination until his death in 164 b.c., but thereafter Syria also became Roman. Roman conquest continued with the conquering of Palestine under the Roman general Pompeius who subdued Jerusalem in 63 b.c. Thus it was that our Lord was born in Bethlehem where Joseph had gone in obedience to a Roman order for registration.

Meanwhile Roman power was being extended throughout middle Europe including what is today Great Britain, Switzerland, France, and Belgium, with all the territory south of the Rhine and the Danube in Roman hands as well as some territory to the north. The march of Rome continued until by the end of the second century a.d. most of Mesopotamia and the area up to the Euphrates River was under Roman control. Everywhere as country after country fell under the heel of Rome, thousands were carried off into slavery and extreme brutality became the order of the day.

The glory of Rome was built on the misery of its conquered peoples. Thus were the prophecies of the fourth kingdom accurately fulfilled as in Daniel 2:40, "And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron: forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things: and as iron that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise." Daniel's prophecies thus far have been graphically fulfilled in history.

#### Propheesied End Of Rome Not Fulfilled

It is essential to the understanding of prophecy relating to the fourth empire to discern, however, that the final state of this empire described in Daniel 2:42-45 has never been fulfilled. In like manner, the description of the beast as having ten horns and the further development of the emergence of a little horn by which three of the first horns were uprooted (Daniel 7:7, 8) has never been fulfilled. It is also evident that there has been no literal fulfillment of the fifth kingdom which was to succeed the fourth, namely, the kingdom described as that of the Son of Man which is everlasting in its character and which can only come when the fourth kingdom is destroyed.

In contrast to the first three beasts who according to Daniel 7:12 "had their dominion taken away: yet their lives were prolonged for a season and time," the fourth beast according to Daniel 7:11 "was slain, and his body destroyed, and given to the burning flame." The fourth beast according to these prophecies was violently and dramatically to be broken at the time of the institution of the kingdom given to the Son of Man.

#### The Fall Of Rome In History

Nothing should be clearer from the subsequent history of the Roman Empire than that there has been no fulfillment of this last stage of the Roman Empire. The growth of the Roman Empire took almost four centuries, in contrast to the rapid rise of the three preceding empires. It was also slow to disintegrate.

As the history of the Roman Empire makes clear, the western half from which its power originated was the first to go down. The details of this need only be mentioned in a general way. It began with the division of the empire into the eastern and western parts in a.d. 364 by the Emperor Valentinian I. In the fifth century, barbarians from the north such as the Goths, originating in northeastern Germany, conquered most of

southwestern Europe and a large part of Spain. Much of France was also occupied and Roman troops had to leave Great Britain as early as a.d. 409.

Eventually the barbarians invaded Italy itself and, under Attila, the Huns not only conquered much of Europe, setting up a rival kingdom to the eastern half of the Roman Empire, but invaded Italy in a.d. 451. Italy was also attacked by the Vandals and Moors in a.d. 455 who invaded Italy by sea from North Africa, taking off many of the objects of wealth to Carthage, including the vessels from the temple at Jerusalem captured by Titus in a.d. 70. All of these tremendously significant movements in Europe and in North Africa tended to wrest power from the western half of the Roman Empire.

It is most important, however, to note that none of these movements correspond in the slightest to what the Scriptures anticipate as the last stage of the Roman Empire, namely, the ten nations anticipated in the ten horns of Daniel 7:7 or in the toes of the image in Daniel 2:42. Even if they had, it would not have provided any explanation of the continuance of the eastern half of the Roman Empire, which from a Biblical standpoint was probably more important, inasmuch as it related to the Holy Land.

The destruction of the Roman Empire in its eastern division was accomplished only after the western Roman Empire had been practically destroyed. This was effected largely by the rising tide of the followers of Mohammed (a.d. 570-632) who had as their goal the conquering of the eastern aspect of the empire. After the death of Mohammed, his successor conquered Persia. Later leaders gained control over Syria, Palestine, and Egypt, extending their power over all of North Africa and into Spain. The rapid rise of the empire of the followers of Mohammed, however, lacked a cohesive force and soon various portions of it declared their independence.

The political weakness of Mohammedanism paved the way for the conquest of the Turks who had originally come from Central Asia. The Turks rapidly conquered Persia, Armenia, and Asia Minor. Although opposed by the Crusaders who attempted to conquer Palestine and free it from the Turks as well as the Saracens (followers of Mohammed), the Turks, nevertheless, although opposed by the Mongols in the thirteenth century, consolidated their power in Asia Minor. Under the Ottomans, they succeeded in conquering all the area around the Black Sea including Constantinople and Greece, as well as Northern Africa and Egypt, also extending their power into the Mesopotamia valley.

In a.d. 1453 Mohammed II conquered Constantinople, installing Moslem worship. In the process, the Roman Empire, for all practical purposes, ceased to exist with the death of the last of the Roman emperors who was killed in the battle. The decline of the Turkish Empire began shortly before the seventeenth century, but in the twentieth century they still controlled Asia Minor, the Holy Land, and the Mesopotamian valley. One of the important results of World War I was the freeing of the Holy Land from Turkish domination.

#### The Future Destruction Of Rome

It should be evident from this brief historical survey that nothing corresponding to the complete destruction of the image of Daniel 2 or the beast of Daniel 7 occurred in the gradual deterioration of the Roman Empire. More than 1,500 years elapsed from the beginning of the Roman Empire to its final complete destruction, a.d. 1453. A more gradual process could hardly be imagined, nor is it true that the empire was destroyed by Christians or by the power of the Gospel as some postmillenarians teach. Rather, the normal courses of war and superior military might took its toll. With its decline the Roman Empire left unfulfilled that of which prophecy had spoken, namely, the sudden destruction of the feet stage of the image of

Daniel 2 and the ten-horn stage of the beast of Daniel 7:7.

Inasmuch as the first portion of the prophecy concerning the Roman Empire was so graphically fulfilled in history just as other prophecies relating to the preceding empires of Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece, it is most reasonable to conclude that the final stage of the Roman Empire will also have its precise fulfillment. At that future time the stage will be set for its complete destruction and the bringing in of the fifth kingdom, by the Son of Man, which will occur at the second coming of Christ.

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