

## CHRIST ARISEN: ROME'S DEATH SENTENCE

April 2, 2017

Daniel 2:1-49; Matthew 28:1-20

“And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.” Matthew 28:4

Nebuchadnezzar's dream of an image destroyed by a mountain stone was a God-given prophecy. It prefigured Christ destroying man's kingdoms and establishing His own. Christ, the stone, would inaugurate a kingdom that would expand to fill the whole earth.

The king's image represented four successive empires: Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome, all of which entered then exited human history, as foretold. Rome, the last, was smitten by the stone: Christ. The psalmist foretold Christ's rejection by men and His exaltation when he wrote, “the stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner” (118:22). Both Christ and Peter cited this text as a reference to Jesus (Matthew 21:42, Acts 4:11, I Peter 2:7).

Christ was born into the Roman Empire, His own nation being forced into submission. A Roman emperor's decree resulted in His birth at Bethlehem, fulfilling Old Testament prophecy (Luke 2:1, Micah 5:2). Jesus taught that taxes were to be paid to Rome (Matthew 5:21). He was taken by Roman soldiers to be judged. A Roman governor sentenced Him to death (Matthew 27:26). The soldiers mocked, beat, crowned with thorns and crucified Him, gambling for His garments, and were assigned to guard His tomb, which was sealed by a Roman seal.

To man's view, Christ was no stone destroying Nebuchadnezzar's image. But the spiritual, mystical and supernatural nature of Christ's kingdom is not observable to human senses. It is known only by divine revelation. This revelation is made in the Gospels.

As noted in earlier messages, Christ was in control of everything cited above. His Spirit gave the Old Testament prophecies which Rome unwittingly fulfilled (I Peter 1:10, 11). Roman soldiers were driven backward to the ground by His words, “I am” (John 18:6); they could not arrest Him. Pilate had no authority over Christ except that given to him from heaven (John 19:11).

On the cross Christ showed His dominion over Rome in three events. First, He changed a thief's thoughts, forgave his offences and gave him eternal life (Luke 23:40-43). Rome could neither reform nor forgive him, but only condemn him and take his life. Second, by the words “I thirst” Jesus prompted a Roman soldier to offer Him vinegar, making him the instrument to fulfill Scripture (Psalm 69:21, John 19:28, 29). Third, by selecting the precise moment of His death, Jesus governed the soldiers' actions who left His legs unbroken, fulfilling the prophecy, “He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken (Psalm 34:20, John 19:31-33).

These provide glimpses of Christ's governance of Roman power. But His resurrection was that stone uncut with hands, destroying the Roman Empire. When any government passes the sentence of death, executes the one sentenced, buries him and seals his tomb, assigning a guard to secure it, but is unable to keep him dead, that government is doomed. It may linger in progressive decline, perhaps for centuries. But its doom is sealed.

When Christ arose, the soldiers who had arrested Him and been driven to the ground by His word, experienced His power over them once again. They became as dead men, for Christ arose, triumphant over the empire that crucified Him, and in fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy.