

Partly Iron, but Partly Clay

You may recognize the title as being taken from Daniel's inspired interpretation of King Nebuchadnezzar's vision in Daniel 2. Particularly, it comes from a description of the Roman Empire that would eventually succeed those of the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, and Grecian. Though this "*fourth kingdom*" would be "*as strong as iron*," it would also be "*divided*" and "*mixed*"- possessing both "*the toughness of iron*" as well as being "*brittle*" like "*clay*" since it is pictured as containing a combination of both, cf. Dan.2:39-43. *Iron* is both tough and strong. *Clay* can become hard when dried or fired, but remains brittle. *Mixing* these two compounds together improves neither of them, and in fact, as the text states, "*they will not adhere to one another, even as iron does not mix with pottery*," v.43.

Despite all of the above, this article is not about past World Empires or metallurgy, but the imagery and information can lead us to some important spiritual considerations...

At least one of the definitions of "*holy*" is that of being "pure" or "unmixed." Metaphorically, it means that "*holiness*" is pure and unmixed with spiritual contaminants like sin and the evil thoughts, emotions, and desires that produce it. Let's think about these things in a couple of ways.

- 1) Obviously, *God* is *holy/pure/unmixed*, 1Pet.1:16, "*You shall be holy, for I am holy.*" Such should be our objective, or that for which we strive, "*but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves in all your behavior*," 1Pet.1:15. To be "with" God eternally in heaven, we must first learn to be "like" Him here and now.
- 2) Producing *love* that is divine in origin and nature from a *pure/unmixed "heart"* is the goal of inspired revelation and instruction in it, 1Tim.1:5, "*But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.*" The Word of God is given and taught in order that we may learn to *love* and *live* like God, in *unmixed purity/holiness*). Absenting or isolating ourselves from the Word and those who practice and teach it never helps the attainment of this objective.
- 3) To get there, we must rid ourselves of *impurities* that *contaminate* and *weaken* us, 2Tim.2:22, "*Now flee from youthful lusts, and pursue after righteousness, faith, love, and peace with those who call on the Lord with a pure heart.*" Simply put, these *impurities* will not and cannot "mix" with the "*purity of devotion to Christ*" (cf. 2Cor.11:3), and only serve to *weaken* and *destroy* it (cf. 1Cor.6:12-20), as further evidenced by the example of the Roman Empire provided by God through Dan.2:40-43.

God has indeed *built* and *provided* a "*kingdom which cannot be shaken*" (Heb.12:28), but we are all too often *citizens* weakly comprised of *partly iron* and *partly clay*. Let us strive for *purity*. Let us strive for *holiness* that we may share God's *holiness* both now and forever. (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at southportcofc.org)