

partly clay, so this kingdom will be partly strong and partly brittle. (43) And just as you saw the iron mixed with baked clay, so the people will be a mixture and will not remain united, any more than iron mixes with clay.

Those who hold the Maccabean view claim that these verses describe the Greek kingdom after the death of Alexander the Great, when it was broken up among his various generals. From this viewpoint the first phase of the fourth kingdom would be hardly more than twenty years in length, with the second phase more than eight times as long. It seems more realistic to consider the fourth kingdom as representing the Roman empire, which exerted great strength for several centuries before entering a period of very severe decline.

Although the passage includes a number of statements about this second phase of the fourth empire, much is left unexplained. Various attempts have been made to determine what is meant by the mixture of iron and clay. Some of the suggested meanings could apply just as well (or even better) to the period of decline of the first kingdom or of the third. Some could apply almost as well to the early history of the Roman empire as to its latter days.

The most obvious suggestion is that the mixture of iron and clay represents an intermixture of various peoples or nations. While this is probably part of the meaning, it can hardly be all that is involved. Such intermixture was already a characteristic of the Babylonian empire, for it was then a regular practice to compel the people of ability in a conquered nation to migrate to a distant region. At the same time the people of ability and leadership in that second area might be forced to migrate to a third region. This procedure was begun by the Assyrians and continued by the Babylonians. The resulting type of mixture is described in some detail in 2 Kings 17:24ff.

Although Cyrus gave the various peoples permission to return to their homelands, many had become established in the regions to which they had been carried and chose to