

Modern Israelite Government Institutions Not From Greece and Rome

Ralph Linton has written a book entitled The Tree of Culture which was published some fifteen years ago. It was in his work that I first read the idea expressed by any modern writer that, in reality, the character of all institutions of Northwestern Europe is not to be traced to the Greek and Roman World but is to be traced to the peoples of northern and central Europe from the Middle East.

He said that the actual channel of movement of ideas that we now recognize as traditionally British, American, Scandinavian, even German (as distinct from other ideas that maybe the Germans have and acquired from the Roman world)—in other words, that aspect of civilization which we call democracy, the republican form of government with the concepts that go with it in this part of the Western world, all came from the non-classical world.

And he said that what has tragically happened is that everybody assumes that, since Rome was first a republic and since we now are, all our concepts of thinking are therefore Roman. This is not the case! Just because Greek city-states had democracies and we call ourselves a democracy, this doesn't mean all democratic thought came from Greece. In fact, the Greek democracies were blessed with tyrants! The Roman Republic was blessed with dictators! Now these officials were public benefactors—supposedly! That's why (1) Greece went under and why (2) Rome became an Empire! There was no other solution to the problem.

It is interesting to note that just as Greece broke down and never became a significant empire—I mean, after Alexander was dead it was all gone, and he was a Macedonian anyway from north of Greece—that just as the Greek world shattered, so has the orthodox world of the Greek churches and all the other people shattered. But just as the Romans were able to pick up the pieces of the Republic and build an Empire, so the wretched Samaritan refuse that was spread in the Roman world and took root at Rome was able to create that imperial church that we call the Roman Catholic Church. You will see to what extent Roman and Italian thinking now apparently is applicable only in the religious area but was, in times past, applicable also in the military area.

But a people in northwestern Europe that had these forms of government nevertheless think so differently. The Romans would not recognize our republican institutions as typically Roman. The external form may be somewhat the same, but by no means is the way in which we carry it out. Thus we never think of the Roman Republic or the Greek democracies as responsible government. If you read Roman historians you will see it characterized as generally irresponsible! (Note Matt. 20:25.)

But there is such a thing as responsible government. That is the very thing that, for instance, is lacking (by common consent) over long periods of time in Germany and why the Germans go from the responsible government of the Adenauer era to something that will resemble the Hitler period again.

Roman Conquest of Greece

You should carefully read the story of the Roman Conquest of Greece on page 92 in Langer. Here is a very significant account that relates to a key quote given on page 46 of volume one of the Compendium from the Roman historian Velleius Paterculus. The quote is: "Between this time (when Rome conquered Philip, king of Macedonia, in 197 B.C.) and the beginning of the reign of Nimus (Nimrod) king of the Assyrians, who was the first to hold world power, lies an interval of 1995 years." This period of time brings us back to 2192 which marks the beginning of Nimrod's sole reign in Egypt. The basis of this quote was the time that the Romans conquered Philip—not Philip the father of Alexander the Great but a later Philip here in the Second Macedonian War (bottom of column one on page 92) in the battle of 197 B.C.

The Greeks declared war on Rome. There were many struggles with the Romans for about a period of a century. Ultimately Rome conquered the Greek realm in 146 B.C. (note the bottom of the second column on page 92 in Langer). So 146 B.C. marks the close of the independence of Greece—and, in a way, you could say that Greece has never again been independent hereafter. Not until 1826 or so did the nation of Greece begin to gain their independence from the Turks; so Greece did not gain independence until comparatively recent modern times.

SELEUCIDS VERSUS PTOLEMIES

Now you should notice pages 93-95 on the Seleucids and 96-97 on the Ptolemies which provide the background for Daniel 11. Now most of us who have read the story of Daniel 11 have not known to what extent these two Empires that we think of as Syria and Egypt were, in fact, struggling for world control! And to what extent the Seleucid area went all the way to Bactria, Afghanistan, and the borders of India! To what extent the Ptolemies wanted to control Asia Minor and the Mediterranean!

This was a struggle between these two powers for the ultimate control of the eastern world, the old Persian realm! If they had ever united, I don't think Rome could have conquered them!

But Rome's rule was, "Divide and conquer!" And, as it was, the world she faced was already divided! So Rome confronted a divided world which she could conquer.

And as the Italians said, you know (we were reading Tacitus), "All we can hope is that as Rome is hustled along by the hands of fate, that at least the Germans will still be warring with themselves lest we have to face a united front up there!" And I feel that the Romans who were really thinking even in that day realized that the only reason Rome survived is that all her enemies were divided—and finally she became bigger than any group of enemies that could be assembled at any point!