The Undeniable Stone

**Daniel 2:44-49**

Dr. David G. Barker

 The theme of the kingdom of God is something that goes back quite far in Scripture, indicating to us that it is a central theme in the mind of God since before the foundation of the world. While the first mention of the kingdoms of man is found in Gen. 10:10 with the establishment of Nimrod’s kingdom of Babylon, the first description and promise of a kingdom given to the rule and authority of God is found in Exodus 19. Moses had led the Israelites out of Egypt and before the Lord God at Mt. Sinai and the Lord God declares to them:

*“if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples,*

*for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’” (Ex. 19:5-6, ESV)*

That first description, intention and design of the Lord God – that the people of God would be a holy kingdom of priests - gives us a very good idea of what the kingdom of God not only is to look like but what its purpose and mission was to be. Being a holy nation, Israel was meant to stand apart from the nations in the world and, at the same time, be ambassadors for the Lord God toward the nations of man in the world. The church of Christ today has inherited that mantle as Jesus states in the words of his great commission:

*“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,*

*baptizing them inthe name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.*

*(Mt. 28:19-20, ESV)*

Jesus, as King of kings and Lord of lords has received all authority and reigns in glory and his people – drawn from every nation, tribe and tongue are to be holy, distinct and separate from the world. And yet, considering their time on earth a mandate and mission to bring the gospel of King Jesus to the people in the world and gather more and more into Christ’s kingdom so that it grows larger and larger and larger. So how does that relate to the dream the Lord God gave to Nebuchadnezzar; and what are we to make of the stone which comes from the mountain, destroys all kingdoms, and grows, eventually, to become its own mountain? What event is that meant to depict?

**What is the stone?**

 When it comes to interpreting prophecy or parables there are two factors we have learned to consider: #1: neither of these are meant to be transparent and obvious. They are like Christ’s parables in the Gospels. Parables are sometimes thought to be just another form of illustration – “an earthly story with a heavenly meaning” - but it is just not that simple. As I said to you last time, the words of both the prophets and Jesus are given with the deliberate intention of both revealing and hiding the truth as opposed to only illustrating it. Jesus even celebrates that fact when he declares openly:

*“I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding*

*and revealed them to little children;*

*yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.*

*(Mt. 11:25-26, ESV)*

This reflects more than just a form of election on God’s part in which he chooses who it is that will understand; it is also an expression of God’s curse – he is deliberately hiding the truth from those outside of his favor so they cannot know his will. #2: the meaning of prophecy and parables will not be found in every single detail. Even when Jesus takes the time to explain his parables to his disciples – such as with the parable of the sower – not every single detail in the parable is matched with a specific and important referent to something in life. The structure of the prophecy or parable is first meant to carry the image and story but it is only the pertinent details that will line up with the purpose and message. Remembering these two points will help keep us from trying hard to link every detail in a prophecy and parable to some specific historic reference - even forcing the words to make them fit; and from being overly confident that the Lord has given to us, through our expert investigation, an answer that no one else has been able to ascertain.

 So, applying those things to this dream, we may first take note of the given detail that the stone is “cut from a mountain” and that is not “by human hand”. This would indicate a divine origin to the stone and that the stone is of the same substance as the mountain. From that we can conclude that the stone in the dream is of God, himself, and that God, in the form of the stone, will come into contact with the world. That contact will greatly exceed the more familiar ways that God’s people have already experienced – such as his speaking to Noah, to Abraham, others - or even by demonstrating his presence – such as in the burning bush or Mt. Sinai.

 This stone is destined to do much catastrophic damage. It is clearly describing an absolutely unique event – one that is singularly significant and world-changing. This stone strikes at the feet and toes of the statue. There is emphasis placed on the feet and the toes – they are said to be made of a mixture of iron and clay which prove to be their undoing when confronted and tested by the stone. This seems clearly to represent both the strength and the weakness of man which are illustrated in Daniel’s interpretation of the iron and clay in saying that the kingdom is filled with ”mixed marriages”. The toes, then, do not represent 10 kings - they just finish the illustration of the statue. The feet represent the foundation of character, dignity and stature which are there to support man in his dreams for glory – but which, in truth, are only weakened by his immorality and sin.

 And it is against this immorality that the stone strikes. We remember John the Baptist, being the forerunner of Jesus Christ who had the courage and boldness to confront Herod the Tetrarch about his immoral relationship with Herodias. Everyone else was of the mind to think: “He is a powerful king – he can do as he likes.” Today, it does not take power to sin boldly: everyone thinks the same way: “It’s my life. Let me live as I choose.” It is only the Moral Law of God and gospel of Christ that comes into the world to call everyone – high or low – to repent and to acknowledge in their own individual lives that Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords.

 It would stand to reason that the stone in the dream represents Jesus Christ – the promised Messiah of the Jews and the one who is identified as a rock or stone many times throughout the Old Testament Scriptures. But what are we to make of the impact and ensuing destruction? It is the impact and destruction revealed by the dream that convinced Clarence Larkin and other Dispensationalists that this could only refer to Christ’s second coming and the ensuing kingdom of God which he thought would follow. But to consider this to be a depiction of the second coming essentially declares that nothing in between amounts to anything – that all the providence of God and the movements of nations from then on are to be regarded as insignificant. To understand it this way would be to assume that the Lord is overlooking completely the entire era of the Christian church as an act of God on earth and deny the influence of the gospel on mankind – thousands of years during which the Lord Christ is building his church. It is much more sensible in many ways to see the stone coming from the mountain which confronts the kingdoms of man as being the first coming of Christ. But if we do that, what does the dream mean by the impact that the stone has upon the kingdoms of man? What has been the effect of the gospel on the world?

**What is the effect of the stone?**

 First, it is described as becoming a kingdom never to be destroyed.

*in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed (Dan. 2:44, ESV)*

Even though the dream seems to depict an impact that immediately destroys the kingdoms of man and replaces them with the kingdom created by the stone, it is the interpretation of Daniel that tells us clearly there will be an overlap – the kingdom of God will be set up “in the days of those kings”. That includes the days of Nebuchadnezzar himself for the gospel has already come and crashed into his kingdom in the form of Daniel and his three friends bringing the truth of the living God. This is how Jesus, himself, describes the kingdom of God. He begins his gospel proclamation by declaring to all men everywhere that the kingdom of God is near. He illustrates the kingdom of God as seed – seed sowed, for instance, in parables like the one of the Sower and of the one of the wheat and the tares - as a kingdom that grows among unbelievers; and as seed that grows over time such as in the parable of the mustard seed. That is precisely how we understand the influence and growth of the Christian church as it first grew undeniably through the persecutions of the Jews and then of Rome until, finally, the gospel was not only accepted but embraced by the empire of Rome as being the king’s own faith. Very soon after that, Christianity became the official religion of the whole Roman empire. Jesus also gave his promise that his church - which represents the kingdom of God on earth - would not be overcome, even by the gates of hell itself.

 Second, it is described as a kingdom that shall not “be left to another people”. This speaks of the weakness of man-made institutions and their susceptibility to corruption and attack from within over political and financial affairs. I am sure that Nebuchadnezzar was relieved to hear from Daniel that his own kingdom would not collapse around him; but once he passes from the scene, Daniel says, it will not take long at all for the kingdom of Babylon to rot from the inside making it vulnerable for take-over all too soon. The promise of the dream, however, is that the kingdom that Christ sets up on earth will not fail due to internal weakness and corruption. There are many times down thru history that it would appear to be just the opposite. The medieval Catholic church became very corrupt at almost every level but the Reformation brought great change which saw that, while the church lost its visible unity, the purity and integrity of the gospel was restored. Even in our own generation there are reports of scandal by individual pastors or congregations, but the corrective power of the gospel has kept the church moving forward. Even through the shifts of generations this is so. Whereas some countries were once strong for the gospel in the past – such as Europe in the 16-17th centuries and the United States in the 18th-20th centuries – these have seen that testimony and witness wane. Other countries today see growth for the gospel – such as the witness of the church in China and Russia and Africa – as well as conversions that occur even in the heart of Muslim countries.

 Third, it is described as a kingdom that “shall stand forever”. This speaks of the gospel’s ability to so strengthen and inspire God’s people so that they continue to stand and bear testimony to the truth in the face of incessant and continued historical persecution. The history of this is also well documented - the first attacks upon the church were from the Jews as the story of Saul of Tarsus illustrates. That was followed by the brutality of Rome which slaughtered Christians for sport and suppression; then the rise of Islam brought aggression from the east that focused on the taking over of Christian territory and beheading Christians for not converting. (We have seen that same aggressive rise and spread of Islam in our own day as well.) During the time of the Reformation, Foxes’ Book of Martyrs was published in several editions and enlarged to several volumes all depicting the brutality levied on Protestants in their efforts to stand for the gospel. The Armenian genocide took place during World War One and took the lives of one and half million Christians and was not only the inspiration for Hitler for his racial genocide of World War Two, but, as he perceived, it was also the permission to do so because other nations did not rise up to defend the Armenians. To go along that, throughout history, the intellectual attack on the gospel - whether it be theological, scientific, or philosophical – has always been one to destroy the Christian message and do away with the growing kingdom of Christ.

**What happened as a result of Daniel’s words?**

 In essence, the stone of the mountain in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream has already struck the statue. Not only was Daniel’s life spared by the hand of God but also those of his friends; and, as we read in vs. 49: Daniel was made the chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon which means that their lives were also spared. Nebuchadnezzar was so pleased with Daniel’s service that he rewarded Daniel and gave him honor in a way that intentionally reminds us of the experience of Joseph in the book of Genesis. The hope of God’s will has not been snuffed out. It is alive and growing already in Babylon.

 But, as we will find out next, that similarity in Daniel with the story of Joseph continues. Even as the book of Genesis ends with Joseph and his family comfortably and safely dwelling in the best of the land of Egypt by the Pharaoh’s favor, we also remember that the book of Exodus begins with those very familiar words:

*Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. (Ex. 1:8, ESV)*

In spite of the service rendered them in this episode, new trials will await Daniel and his friends. That goes to remind us that while we are on the way in this life, we are never to think we have arrived or that we have paid our dues or that the spread of the gospel will mean peace and victory for us from this time forth. Daniel will spend a lifetime in Babylon just as you and I will need to be in this world all of our lives. And all the while, we, too, must continue to be deliberately Christian and devoted to God and not allow ourselves to become of the world.

**Studies in the Book of Daniel**

Two Worldviews in the Age of the Fourth Rome

**The Undeniable Stone**

*Daniel 2:44-49*

(see also: Gen. 10:10; Ex. 19:5-6; Mt. 11:25-26; 28:19-20)

The Kingdom of God is:

a) just “pie in the sky by and by”.

b) the United States.

c) a holy nation of priestly representatives.

**The Stone that strikes the statue.**

**I. What is it?**

 Prophecy & parables are

 a)

 b)

 The stone must represent:

 The stone strikes against:

 Which appearance of Christ is this?

**II. What is the effect of the stone?**

 “In the days of those kings” tells us:

 The kingdom of God

 “shall never be destroyed”

 It is as a seed it must \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

 & it cannot be \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

 “shall not be left to another people”

 “shall stand forever”.

**III. What is the result of Daniel’s words?**

 Is he rewarded?

 Is his work over?

 How should I consider my life’s work?

New Covenant Presbyterian Church, PCA, Abingdon, MD (410) 569-0289

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