

24. THE KINGDOM OF THE STONE

LONG AGO, in the early days of the settlement of the western part of the United States, a traveler came to the edge of the mighty Mississippi River in the depth of winter. Never before had he seen the Father of Waters, either in winter or in summer. He was alone in a lonely land. Night was coming on, and wild animals, and wilder men made it dangerous for him to stay where he was. He must cross the river to safety on the other side, where there was a settlement.

He looked out across the surface of the great river, sheeted with ice. Being unaccustomed to the wilderness, he had no idea of its thickness. He hesitated a long time, then cautiously and with infinite care, crept out on his hands and knees, spreading his weight as much as possible. Every little while he heard a crackling sound in the ice, and sometimes a roar, as if it were ripping from shore to shore. The poor man trembled with every sound, expecting the ice to break through at any moment and plunge him into the icy waters below.

After he had crawled slowly almost halfway over the broad river, he was surprised to hear singing somewhere behind him. He could not believe his ears. Then he heard the hoof beats of horses trotting across the ice. He looked up and saw a man singing as he drove a team of four horses with their load of logs across upon the ice. The ice, which this poor traveler feared would not hold his weight, was holding this great load of logs as well as the horses pulling it.

With great relief and somewhat ashamed of himself, he got up and ran the rest of the way across the river.

So it is with many of us who step out tremblingly on the promises of God. Others stronger in faith go singing through life with the joy of the Lord in their hearts, fearing nothing, because they implicitly, fully, and completely believe the Word of God. As the Scripture says, "Who so puts his trust in the Lord shall be safe." Proverbs 29:25.

Jesus continually appealed to the promises of God in His Holy Word. He said, "The scripture cannot be broken." John 10:35. He also said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." Matthew 4:4. He spoke of those who build upon His own promises as building upon the solid rock. The winds might blow and the floods descend, but that house would not be moved, for, said He, it was founded upon a rock. (Matthew 7:24-27.) Jesus said that He built His church upon a rock, and He Himself, the living Word, is that Rock. (Matthew 16:18.)

Now let us consider God's preview of nations and the stone (or rock) kingdom in the second chapter of Daniel. This prophecy was written over five centuries before Christ was born, at a time when Jerusalem was overthrown by the Babylonians and many of the leading men were carried into captivity, among them Daniel.

This young man was a true servant of God and gifted with the Spirit of prophecy. Through him God revealed the future to the reigning monarch of the day, Nebuchadnezzar, ruler over most of the then-known world. To him, appropriately, the King of heaven revealed the secrets of the future in a vision.

Nebuchadnezzar was greatly disturbed by this dream, although he could neither remember nor understand it. All his officials were helpless in this matter. No one could bring the vision back to the king's mind or interpret it for him. This opened the way, by Divine interposition, for Daniel, one of God's captive children from Jerusalem, to come into the scene in the affairs of men. In answer to prayer God's vision was interpreted by God's man, Daniel. Read the whole story in the second chapter of Daniel.

We shall begin now with verse twenty-eight. After the complete failure of the wise men and philosophers of Babylon to bring back the dream to the king's memory and to interpret it, the captive Daniel, still in training for official work in the court, was brought in before the king. His direct declaration was, "There is a God in heaven that reveals secrets, and makes known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days." Daniel 2:28. God's prophet could boldly say this because, in answer to earnest prayer by himself and others, the vision and its meaning had been revealed to him. Daniel, a captive in the courts of royalty, had been faithful to God in the midst of corruption and idolatry; and now he was called before the world's greatest monarch to explain a vision depicting four great world powers, beginning with Babylon itself.

The vision which had been given to the king was simple. It portrayed a great metal man with head of gold, breast and arms of silver, sides of brass, legs of iron, and feet a mixture of iron and clay. Last of all, the king saw a stone, cut out of the mountain without any human effort, smite the image on its feet and grind it to powder. Then the stone became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. (Daniel 2:35.) This

last part of the vision was really a prophecy of the coming worldwide kingdom of Christ, the kingdom of the Stone.

Let us go back again now to the preview of history. "Thou, O king, saw, and behold a great image. This great image, whose brightness was excellent, stood before thee; and the form thereof was terrible." Verse 31. This dream was immediately brought back to the king's mind by divine power, and he recognized it as the one that had disturbed him so greatly. The king had been thinking about the future, planning for his kingdom. He was a mighty ruler, and his nation was the greatest on earth. Babylon, its capital, was practically his own creation, since he had renewed and rebuilt it. While he was considering the future of his kingdom-as all good rulers should do--God gave him this dream, which greatly disturbed his spirit until its meaning was explained.

The vision which the king had, and which was revealed and interpreted by the prophet Daniel, referred to the future. In it God declared to "king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days." (Daniel 2:2S.) So we may expect, in the interpretation of this vision to the king, a message from God that reaches down to our own time. Indeed the history of the entire world from that time to the setting up of God's eternal kingdom is represented by the various parts of this strange image of prophecy.

After speaking respectfully to the king of his great work as ruler of Babylon, the prophet says plainly, "Thou, O king, art this head of gold." Daniel 2:37. That is, as the king representing the kingdom of Babylon, you are the head of gold. Or, in other words, Babylon is the head of gold. The king of metals represents the first world empire of the prophecy. No other metal could be more appropriate, for Babylon was literally a golden city in a golden age. In fact it was known all over the world of that time as the Golden City, "the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency." (Isaiah 13:19.) Nebuchadnezzar must have felt gratified that his kingdom was represented by gold.

But the prophet continued speaking, "And after thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee, and another third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth." Verse 39. Nebuchadnezzar's dream of having an endless kingdom was shattered. It was not in God's plan.

Did the golden kingdom go down? Does history tell us that God spoke the truth? Yes. Babylon went down, and another kingdom arose-Medo-Persia, represented by the breast and arms of silver of the great metal man of the vision. Babylon fell in 539 BC., and Medo-Persia ruled over Babylon's former territory and greatly increased the area by world conquests.

Not long ago I visited the ruins of ancient Babylon. Bouncing in and out of deep ruts and raising tremendous clouds of dust, our motorcar had forced its way about fifty miles southwest of Baghdad. Suddenly ahead of us, across the road at right angles, loomed what looked like a precipitous hill. As we drew nearer, it seemed to stretch away in a straight line to the east and west. The road passed through a notch cut in this great embankment. What was it? You can imagine my astonishment and delight when the driver assured me that I was looking at the wall of ancient Babylon. Since childhood I had longed to see the ruins of old Babylon, mentioned again and again in the Holy Scriptures, especially in this second chapter of Daniel. In fact we might almost call the Holy Bible The Tale of Two Cities, the story of Babylon and Jerusalem in their literal and spiritual conflicts down through the ages.

Soon our car pulled to a stop, and with our Arab guide and a well-known archaeologist, I spent several wonderful hours walking over the ruins of this mighty city. Here was the great hall built by Nebuchadnezzar. Here were the gates leading down to the Euphrates. Here was the ancient river bed, clearly visible. We could walk where ships once floated. The river itself has moved a number of miles west. One can now walk in the dry bed of what was once the great river that flowed through the heart of the city.

The archaeologist in our company with his maps, explanations, and diagrams-made everything most interesting and convincing. He made it clear that the Scripture prophecy had been fulfilled, for this ancient city of Babylon, mentioned by Isaiah in the thirteenth chapter of his prophecy, is not inhabited. It is just as Isaiah said it would be: "Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall the shepherds make their fold there. But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures; and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there. And the wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces: and her time is near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged." Isaiah 13:19-22.

This prophecy indicates that the beautiful city would never again be inhabited, but would lie waste. The wild beasts of the desert would dwell there. This has all come true. We could see it with our own eyes. How wonderfully has the Word of God been fulfilled! Babylon, the mightiest city of the world at

that time, the capital of the nation that persecuted God's people Israel and took them captive, has gone down in oblivion. If we were offered a reward of a million dollars, we could not find one Babylonian today. The world's first great empire mentioned in Bible prophecy is remembered only by historians and archaeologists.

God's prophetic word through Daniel has been fulfilled. People do not live inside the area which was the city in Isaiah's time. The Arabian does not pitch his tent there; the ruins lie in solitude except for the presence of jackals, owls, and other creatures of the wilderness. Babylon has become like Sodom and Gomorrah, desolate and uninhabited, a wilderness of brick and stone—mostly brick, since all stone had to be brought many hundreds of miles down the river. Here are thou sands of bricks, each stamped with the name and titles of Nebuchadnezzar, the great builder.

As I stood looking over this prophetic desolation, all predicted in the Word of God, I seemed suddenly transported back, back through the centuries, to that day so long ago when God's prophet Daniel—a representative of defeated, captive Israel—stood before the mighty Nebuchadnezzar. Even at that time, when they hung their harps upon the willows along the waterways of Babylon and tried through tears to sing the songs of Zion (Psalm 137:2), their land lay in desolation far to the west. But through the strange dream and vision sent to him from God, Nebuchadnezzar had his attention drawn to the Creator; and, through his influence and decrees, a knowledge of the true God was spread over the world. What the wisdom and chicanery of the so called wise men of that age could not do, God's prophet did by divine inspiration. Through God's prophet the future was revealed.

The great yellow walls of Babylon, miles in circumference; the beautiful temples; the great tower, or ziggurat; the glorious gates covered with beautiful blue-colored tiles; the white temples; the famous hanging gardens, of which Herodotus speaks—all have sunk into the desert sands. Remember the words of the prophet, "And after thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee." Daniel 2:39. Nebuchadnezzar's empire was not to last forever, not even for a thousand years. Less than a century later Babylon went down in a night of blood, of which we read in the fifth chapter of Daniel.

That night, Belshazzar, who was king of Babylon at the time, was holding a drunken carousal with a thousand guests. Although the city was surrounded by enemies, he felt secure behind his mighty walls and defenses. Suddenly a bloodless hand from a sleeve of darkness wrote his fate upon the palace wall: "MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.... Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians." Daniel 5:25-28. Thus the second world empire arose, represented by the silver breast and arms of the image.

But this was not the end of the story. Medo-Persia, the tyrannical power that ruled over 127 provinces from India to Ethiopia in the days of the lovely Queen Esther, was not to last forever. This nation—mentioned in the Bible in connection with the story of the rebuilding of the temple and the return of the Jewish exiles to the Holy Land, as recorded in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah—was to finish its course and be overthrown by a third nation. After Medo-Persia, the third kingdom of brass was to rise and "bear rule over all the earth." (Daniel 2:39.) This refers to the rule of Grecia under Alexander the Great and his successors. Just as silver was used for personal adornment by the Persian warriors, so brass was characteristic of the Greek soldiers. They used it not only for their body armor but also for shields, swords, battle-axes, and tips for their spears. Homer speaks of the brass-clad Greeks. This, of course, was not brass as we know it, but rather bronze, which is called by this name in the Bible.

Alexander, with his trained Greek phalanxes, overthrew the Medo-Persian army at the Battle of Arbela in 331 BC. By his rapid campaigns, his military victories, and civilizing influence, Alexander shot like a meteor over the earth. He went on conquering, pushing into India even to the Khyber Pass, where he won a great battle on the Indus River. But his men would go no farther. Having been away from home for years, they refused to penetrate the unknown lands to the Pacific Ocean and forced the great conqueror to turn back toward the west. Reaching the ruins of Babylon, he stopped and tried to rebuild it. His men did a great deal of work clearing out the debris in preparation for new buildings. There Alexander the Great, who seven years before, at twenty-five years of age had conquered the known world, died in a drunken debauch aggravated by a fever. Soon afterward his mighty empire dissolved into fragments and was destroyed by the Roman legions in the Battle of Pydna in 168 BC.

Then the iron monarchy of Rome ruled the world and continued her power for nearly six hundred years. In passing, we must not forget to note the preparation for the birth of Christ and for the spread of Christianity brought about by Alexander's invasions. The Greek language and the influence of Hellenic civilization and culture were spread over the earth by the conquerors, lasting long after Alexander and his

successors were gone. This did more, perhaps, to prepare the world for the coming of Christ and His gospel than any other single event except the rise of Rome itself, the fourth world empire.

Roman roads, postal system, government by law, and world peace also prepared the way for the ministers of Christ to go forth in the early days of the Christian faith. Not only was Jesus, the Prince of peace, born in this time of world peace under Roman rule but He was also crucified by Roman authority, as we read in Luke 2: 1: "And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed." We know what happened then. Down from Nazareth came Mary with Joseph; and there, in the humble place where animals of the stall were kept, was brought forth the Babe who is someday to rule all nations "with a rod of iron." (Revelation 2:27.) Despite His holy life, His miracles, His teaching, He was seized by the Jewish authorities and turned over to Pilate, the Roman governor, who authorized His crucifixion as a criminal-although he acknowledged His innocence.

The empire of the Caesars reached from the Rhine and the Danube on the north to the burning sands of the Sahara on the south. It was the world's greatest empire, bound together by its excellent system of roads and famous for its laws and justice. It was over these roads that the first apostles traveled, carrying the gospel of God's eternal kingdom to earth's remotest bounds. But Rome was not to last forever.

The prophet Daniel continued his interpretation of the king's dream, speaking of days far in the future. The mighty empire of the iron legs was itself to be divided. "And whereas thou saw the feet and toes [of the metal image], part of potters' clay, and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided." Daniel 2:41. And so it was divided. The Roman Empire was broken into fragments by the barbarian invasions of the fourth and fifth centuries. These barbarians were the well-known Alamanni, Ostrogoths, Visigoths, Franks, Anglo-Saxons, etc.-ten of them-the progenitors of the nations of modern Europe. So today we find France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Belgium, England-nations which at one time were parts of the Roman Empire-some of them strong, some of them weak.

Thus the prophecy was fulfilled in history. "And as the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken." Verse 42. The prophecy made it clear that in spite of efforts to unite the nations, union would not be accomplished. In verse forty-three we read the words of the prophet: "They shall mingle themselves with the seed of men: but they shall not cleave one to another." And history says, "How true, how true!"

Charlemagne, emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, tried to restore the original, to weld its fragments together. His empire was an effort in that direction, an empire which Voltaire, the witty infidel, said was neither holy nor Roman nor an empire.

Charles V tried it, without success, and wound up his life in a monastery trying to make a number of clocks run together.

Louis XIV of France tried it and deluged Europe in blood.

Napoleon the Great tried it, but his glory vanished at Waterloo. When someone protested to Napoleon that Providence would not permit him to rule the world, he is reported to have said, "Providence is on the side with the heaviest artillery." He had the heaviest artillery, but God's warm June rains came, and the heaviest artillery could not move. His fine cavalry fell in a sunken road. Blucher came to help Wellington-we all know the story of Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo. As Victor Hugo said, "God was bored with him." The real trouble was that the Little Corporal was smashing his fists against God's prophecy-"They shall not cleave one to another, ... the kingdom shall be divided." Verses 43, 41.

Then Kaiser Wilhelm II is said to have had a vision of a restored empire over all western Europe. Hitler followed, his new Reich to last for "a thousand years."

By marriage and intermarriage efforts have been made to strengthen and cement together the shattered empire of Rome. These attempts have always failed. At one time, in an effort to bring world peace, there was so much of this intermarriage among the ruling families of Europe that Queen Victoria was called the "Grandmother of Europe." Before World War I practically all the kings and rulers of Europe were related, yet family ties failed to prevent the outbreak of that terrible conflict.

Since that time, statesmen have endeavored to curb the menace of aggressive nationalism by international leagues, alliances, and treaties. The League of Nations was an attempt in this direction. Now the United Nations is a more ambitious scheme to keep the world together. Will it succeed? Time will tell. But we know that the prophecy of God's Word will be fulfilled.

We must remember that this remarkable prophetic dream of Daniel 2 is part of the Holy Scriptures. In briefest form, but with great clearness, it outlines the successive world empires from the time of Nebuchadnezzar, down to the setting up of Christ's everlasting kingdom. You ask, Are you sure of that last statement? Yes, because of verse forty-four, the words of the prophet as he continued speaking to the

king: "And in the days of these kings [or kingdoms; that is, the broken fragments of mighty Rome, now called the nations of western Europe) shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: . . . but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever."

This is the kingdom of the stone. In the vision this stone was cut out of a mountain without hands—that is, without human intervention. It was of divine origin. The stone smote the mighty metal image of prophecy on the feet. Then were the gold, the silver, the brass, the iron, and the clay ground to powder; and the wind carried them away as chaff from the threshing floor. "And the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth." Verse 35. The coming kingdom will be established by divine intervention.

We read in Lamentations 4:6 that when Sodom, the wicked city of the past, went down before the onslaught of heaven, "no hands stayed on her." And in 2 Corinthians 5: 1 we read the words of the apostle: "If our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." The inference is clear: "without hands" means "by divine intervention."

Other Old Testament prophets use this term, "the stone," to refer to the coming Messiah. In Genesis 49:24 He is called "the stone of Israel." In Isaiah 28:16 He is called the foundation stone; in Isaiah 8:14 He is called "a stone of stumbling." In fact when here on earth, Jesus, in referring to Himself, said, "The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner." Luke 20:17. The disciples were assured that the stone represented Christ, for we read in Acts 4,~ I 1, 12, "This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

Jesus was rejected by His own people. He who was the foundation stone of God's kingdom was unrecognized. This stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner, and there is salvation in none other.

In Nebuchadnezzar's dream the falling of this stone upon the feet of the image shows that it is identical with the second advent of the Messiah in power and glory, in other words, the second coming of Christ. This fits in exactly with the words of Jesus and of the apostles. We read first Matthew 25:31: "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory." The Apostle Paul, speaking of this same great event, says: "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; preach the word." 2 Timothy 4:1, 2.

At the time of Christ's second coming the present kingdoms of this world will indeed become His. As the revelator puts it, "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever." Revelation 11: 15. The broken fragments of the Roman Empire will not then be welded together into a modern caricature of ancient Rome, but will become a part of the glorious, eternal kingdom of Christ, to which there will be no frontiers the kingdom of the Stone. Gold, silver, bronze, iron, clay—then the stone, the stone that grinds all. I like to call it the "Diamond Kingdom" because none of the other kingdoms can stand before it. "Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth." Daniel 2:35.

Not only does the stone fill the whole earth but, as we read in verse forty-four, this kingdom "shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever." This means that the people of the coming kingdom of Christ will be immortal. One generation will not go down before another. There will be no change of kings and dynasties; it will be the kingdom of eternity, the kingdom of Christ, the kingdom of the Stone which the builders rejected, and which has become the head.

We might ask the question, What will be the extent of this kingdom of Christ? The answer is in Daniel 2:35: "The stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth." Notice, it fills the whole earth. Someone asks, Is this really likely to happen? Let us read verse forty-five, in which the prophet continues: "The dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure."

What a mighty confirmation of the Holy Scriptures is this simple but wonderful prophecy previewing the nations, of modern Europe! Babylon appears and goes down. Medo-Persia appears and fades into the mists of the past, leaving only records in its ruins and on the Behistun Rock, where her great kings recorded their names and deeds. The glory that was Greece comes upon the world's stage, then passes, leaving the marbled ruins of the Parthenon and the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle. Then Rome seizes the scepter of world power and tramples over the prostrate nations. She builds the great city of

Rome, sometimes called the Eternal City, only to prove that she is not eternal. The mighty fabric breaks up into various fragments of varying sizes, the nations of modern Europe. These nations, through their leaders, attempt to get together, to live in peace. They fail in both, thus fulfilling the prophecy to the letter.

Then just around the corner of tomorrow the King comes, the One who in divine prophecy is called "The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." (Isaiah 9:6.) And of His kingdom there shall be no end, no frontiers. It will be worldwide, glorious, eternal.

The real subject of this prophetic preview of nations is Jesus Christ Himself, "the stone which the builders rejected." History is His story. I believe it was George Bernard Shaw who, at the close of World War I, wrote: "The only man who came out of the war with an enhanced reputation for common sense was Jesus Christ." Frank Crane said that "Jesus was the only teacher tall enough to see over the fences that divide the human race into compartments." Why was this? Because He was the Son of God, the fulfiller of prophecy. Not only so, but He is the Redeemer of mankind.

Our attitude toward Him means everything. As we read this great prophecy made five hundred years before Jesus was born, we come face to face with the heart searching question, "What think you of Christ?" Matthew 22:42. Here is what Jesus Himself said, as we find it recorded in Luke 20:18: "Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall he broken; but on whom so ever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder." Are you willing to fall upon that stone, the foundation of the church of the living God? Are you willing to be broken upon Jesus Christ? His kingdom at last will rule all and rule forever. We must know Him now in order to meet Him in peace then. Remember, He, the King of the ages, wants to be the King of your heart.

As a small boy was viewing Holman Hunt's famous painting "The Light of the World," he asked his father, "Daddy, why don't they let Jesus in?"

The father answered, "I don't know."

A moment later the little fellow said, "I know why they don't let Him in. They live in the basement and can't hear Him knock."

Friends, if we are living in the basement of life, let us move up. Let us open the door of our heart to Jesus Christ. It is He of whom all the prophets speak. "For there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." Acts 4:12. Make Him your Savior today-yes, make Him your Savior now! Then you can pray: "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." Matthew 6:10.