

17. The Coming Kingdom

As Nebuchadnezzar beheld the great image in his dream what mysterious new object appeared?

"Thou saw till that a stone was cut out without hands." Daniel 2: 34.

As the king continued to look the great image up and down, his gaze was distracted by a movement in the rock face behind. A stone became mysteriously detached from the cliff "without hands" and began to roll down the slope toward the image.

The expression "without hands," or something similar, occurs in several places in the Scriptures and invariably indicates the personal intervention of God. Thus in the Lamentations, it is said concerning the overthrow of Sodom by God that she "was overthrown as in a moment, and no hands were laid upon her." Lamentations 4:6. (R.V.)

All interpretations, therefore, which suggest that the stone is some earthly power such as the Jewish nation (as claimed by Augustine), or Britain (as claimed by British-Israelites), are inadmissible. The expression used by Daniel clearly indicates the supernatural and otherworldly, rather than earthly, origin of the stone.

Is this symbolic "stone" referred to elsewhere in Scripture? Whom does it represent?

"Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a Stone, a tried stone.... a sure foundation: he that believes shall not make haste." Isaiah 28:16. "The Stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner." Psalm 118:22. (See also Genesis 49:24; Zechariah 3:8,9)

Defending himself before the rulers of the Jews, Peter clearly identified this Stone with Christ. "Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel," he cried, "that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by Him does this man stand here before you whole. This is the Stone which was set at naught of you builders, which is become the head of the corner." Acts 4: 10-12. (See also 1 Peter 2: 6-8.)

Paul likewise confirms this identification: "Now therefore you are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone!" Ephesians 2:19,20. (See also Romans 9:33; 10:11.)

In consequence, every interpreter of prophecy who has kept close to the Scriptures has followed the inspired interpretation of the apostles. As Emanuel Lacunza asserts: "All interpreters of Scripture so far as I have had it in my power to examine, tell us that the Stone of which this prophecy speaks is evidently the Messiah, Jesus Christ Himself, the Son of God and the Son of the Virgin!"

What befell the great image when the Stone came into contact with it? How did Daniel interpret the falling of the Stone?

"Which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and break them in pieces!" Daniel 2:34. "The kingdom . . . shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms!" Verse 44.

When Jesus came the first time He was "set at naught" by the Jews (Acts 4: 11) and was "rejected" of men. (Isaiah 53: 3.) Far from overthrowing the kingdoms of this world, He refused to take sides with the fierce patriots who were burning for an opportunity to throw off the Roman yoke. Not only did He strike no blow against Rome, but He Himself was stricken by Rome. The Stone therefore did not fall at Christ's first advent.

Some have suggested that the work of the Stone began at Pentecost, but this interpretation is equally inadmissible. The propagation of the Gospel in the Christian era bears no more resemblance to the falling of the Stone than the ministry of Jesus on earth. The Gospel message is essentially redemptive. The work of the Stone is destructive Jesus compared the Gospel not to a falling stone but to leaven working gently, gradually, silently in the lump of dough. The expression "break in pieces," which literally means "utterly crush," suggests a sudden shattering blow which will instantly and completely disintegrate the kingdoms of men to make room for the kingdom of God. This, therefore, must be a still future event.

Did Jesus give the disciples any assurance at His ascension that He would return to consummate His work in the earth?

"This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as you have seen Him go into heaven." Acts 1:11.

The last question of the disciples to Jesus before His ascension was, "Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" Acts 1: 6. In reply Jesus told them that the time when God would complete His purposes for the earth was not to be made known to them then. However, immediately after Jesus had been taken up, they were assured by two angels who remained to comfort them that Jesus would certainly come again in person to dispose finally of sin and inaugurate His glorious and eternal kingdom.

This angelic assurance doubtless caused the disciples to remember earlier occasions when Jesus had associated the establishment of His kingdom with His Second Advent.

When telling His disciples of the signs which would give warning of His imminent return, Jesus had concluded by saying: "When you see these things come to pass [the signs of His coming], know you that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand." Luke 21:31.

Describing the separation of the righteous and the wicked at His coming He said: "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." Matthew 25:31.

The Second Advent thus became the "blessed hope" and the dominant note of their evangelism. So Paul exhorted the young man Timothy: "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.

How different will the Second Coming of Christ be from His first advent?

"Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before Him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about Him." Psalm 50: 3.

The Second Coming of Jesus will be no obscure event in history, as was His first coming to the manger of Bethlehem. Then He came in humility and weakness. When He returns He will come with the glory and majesty and power which befits the only-begotten Son of God, the Creator and King of the universe. The first time He came as a harmless Lamb. The second time He will appear as a destroying Lion. (See Isaiah 42: 13, 14; Joel 2: 2; Malachi 4: 1; 2 Thessalonians 1: 7, 8)

What will become of the kingdoms of men at the return of Christ?

"The Lord ... shall strike through kings in the day of His wrath." Psalm 110: 5: "I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms, and I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the heathen." Haggai 2:22. (See also Psalm 2: 8, 9) "There hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations." Joel 2:2.

Scarcely can the human mind form any conception of this stupendous event when it breaks in upon our world. The turmoil and commotion accompanying the overturning of previous empires are indicated in the image merely by the merging of one metal into another. But the last upheaval smashes the image to fragments. So is the future overthrow of earthly kingdoms contrasted with the greatest political upheavals of this world order.

Will any earthly kingdom survive the crash?

"The kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms." Daniel 2:44.

Not one of the existing kingdoms can have any part in the kingdom of Christ. All must go to make room for the world-embracing dominion of God. As Jesus said to Pilate when He stood before him in the judgment hall: "My kingdom is not of this world [literally, not out of this order] : . . . My kingdom is not from hence." John 18: 36.

To what are the disintegrated kingdoms of this world after the falling of the Stone compared? By what agency are they dispersed?

"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." Daniel 2:35.

In the eyes of men the kingdoms of this world are powerful and stable, but before the irresistible winds of divine judgment they will be as "chaff which the wind drives away." Psalm 1:4 (See also Isaiah 17:12,11) In that terrible day the earth will be swept clean by the winds of God.

The symbol of the wind would be perfectly understandable to Nebuchadnezzar for the name of Enlil, the chief god of the Babylonian pantheon, meant literally, "Lord of the wind . . . Lord of the storm," or "Storm of terrible strength." Merodach inherited these characteristics from Enlil and in his struggle

against Tiamet, the evil one, he made use of a "hurricane, an evil wind, a tempest, a four-fold wind, a sevenfold wind, a whirlwind." According to Esarhaddon, Merodach assisted him in the siege of the city of Ubbumi with the blast of "the north wind." He likewise helped Nebuchadnezzar with "four winds" to uncover the site of the temple of Shamash at Larsa so that he could rebuild it.

The king would, therefore, appreciate the power of the god whose "wind" would carry away all the kingdoms of men to make room for his own "great mountain" kingdom.

While the kingdoms of men will be scattered like chaff, whom will the angels gather?

"And He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." Matthew 24:31.

While the Stone brings destruction to the kingdoms of men, it will bring deliverance to "the elect," the "saints of the most High," living and dead. For the appearance of Christ in the clouds of heaven will be the signal for the resurrection of the righteous dead of all ages, and for their gathering together with the living remnant who have been preserved unscathed through the fearful destruction. (See also 1 Thessalonians 4: 16, 17)

Following the dissolution of the image, what transformation did Nebuchadnezzar observe in the Stone? How did Daniel interpret its growth?

"And the Stone that smote the image became a great mountain." Daniel 2:35. "In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom." Daniel 2:44.

The likening of the divine kingdom to a "great mountain" would have a special significance for Nebuchadnezzar. The city of Babylon was built upon the alluvial clay soil brought down by the great rivers of the plain, and was surrounded by vast stretches of swamp land and shifting sand dunes. By contrast, the mountains in the distant north were monuments of permanence and strength, and often Nebuchadnezzar wished they had been nearer that he might have used stone from them in the building of his capital. As they were not, he had to content himself with building the city "mountains high," and his palace "like a mountain" in the midst of it. For the great northern citadel, he did actually undertake the transport of massive stones, "the produce of the great mountains," and "like the mountains" he raised its "summit."

When therefore Nebuchadnezzar was told by the prophet that the Stone was to become a great mountain, he would immediately recognize that it was to be the mightiest and most enduring of kingdoms.

"The great mountain" would also have a religious implication, for Enlil, the chief of the gods in the old mythology of Assyria, and Babylonia, was referred to as "The Great Mountain, Enlil, the Lord of the lands, dwelling in the House of the Great Mountain of the Lands." And when Merodach superseded Enlil in the time of Khammurabi, he was given the same title. A Babylonian tablet dating from the seventeenth year of Nebuchadnezzar is signed by two priests of the "Great Mountain." Other priests are similarly described.

So not only would Nebuchadnezzar understand the "great mountain" to be the mightiest of kingdoms, but he would realize also that it would be, in very truth, the "kingdom of the great God!"

How extensive will the Stone kingdom be?

"And filled the whole earth." Daniel 2:35.

No competing dominion will be left upon the face of the earth. Christ's kingdom will, therefore, have no rival. It will be universal. "He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth." Psalm 72: 8. (See also Zechariah 14: 9)

Of what dominion will the kingdom of Christ be a continuation?

"Unto Thee shall it come, even the first dominion." Micah 4: 8.

It will connect with the kingdom of Israel where it was broken off in the days of Zedekiah. (Ezekiel 21: 27.) Christ, as the Seed of David (Matthew 1: 1), will take up the kingdom and crown laid down by Judah's last king, and in Him will thus be fulfilled all the promises of the perpetuity of the old kingdom and the seed of David.

Will the Stone kingdom be subject to overthrow like the kingdoms of the world?

"And the kingdom shall not be left to other people." Daniel 2:44.

Human monarchs have reigned for a longer or shorter period, and then have passed off the scene and their place has been taken by others. But Christ will never be superseded. He is the "King eternal."

How enduring will His kingdom be?

"The God of heaven shall set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed. . . . It shall stand for ever." Daniel 2: 44.

The kingdom will be as eternal as its King. It will continue without diminution of its power and glory for ever. "Thy kingdom," declares the psalmist, "is an everlasting kingdom, and Thy dominion endures throughout all generations!" Psalm 145:13. "Of His kingdom," was the promise of the angel to Mary at the incarnation, "there shall be no end." Luke 1: 33. (See also Isaiah 9: 7; Hebrews 1: 8)

Having completed the interpretation of the wonderful vision to King Nebuchadnezzar, how did Daniel stress its certainty?

"Forasmuch as thou saw that the Stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold. The great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure." Daniel 2:45.

The prophecies of the Word, like the promises of the Word, are "yea," and "amen," in Christ Jesus. (2 Corinthians 1:20) They "must needs come to pass," for "the Scripture cannot be broken." John 10: 35. In the previous pages we have shown how every detail of the image vision down to the feet and toes of iron and clay has been fulfilled with minute exactness. The remaining event, therefore, the coming of the divine kingdom, is equally certain and sure.

What effect had the dream and its interpretation upon King Nebuchadnezzar?

"Then the king Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face, and worshipped Daniel, and commanded that they should offer an oblation and sweet odors unto him." Daniel 2: 46.

Overcome by the marvelous revelation which he had received, Nebuchadnezzar prostrated himself at the feet of Daniel, the messenger of the great Revealer of secrets.

What confession did Nebuchadnezzar make?

"The king answered unto Daniel, and said, Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, seeing thou couldst reveal this secret." Daniel 2:47.

Nebuchadnezzar was prepared to give Jehovah a place among the gods he worshipped, to designate Him "God of gods" as he did Merodach, to acclaim His wisdom, and to bestow honors upon His servants. But unfortunately, he did not allow the revelations of Jehovah to influence his life. If he had done so, he would have saved himself the humiliating experience related in the third and fourth chapters of the book of Daniel.

Therein is a lesson for all. Prophecy is not unfolded merely to be informative. It is intended to lead to transformation of the life into harmony with the will of God. If it does not do this, then the knowledge it imparts is valueless.

What urgent decision, therefore, must all make in the light of the great image vision?

"Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder." Luke 20:18.

The vision of the great image leaves us with but two alternatives. We may choose to retain our "citizenship" (Phil. 3:20, R.V.) with the kingdoms of men and remain a part of the image, in which case we shall share its fate; or with broken and contrite hearts we may cast ourselves at the feet of the divine King, link up with Christ before the crash, and so participate in the kingdom into which it is to grow. How urgent then is the appeal of the apostle Peter: "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure."