

Let Your Kingdom Come

Daniel: When Kingdoms Collide

Daniel 2:31-49

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This summer, my son Abe and his friend Isaiah started skateboarding. Since I skated as a kid, I've been helping them learn the ropes. But the more I help them, the more I want to skate. I'm frankly becoming addicted. I've bought a board. I'm going to the skate park on my day off. On my lunch break. And on the weekends. I've learned how to ride the ramps and a picked up a few tricks. But the main thing I've learned is a great illustration for my sermon. Daniel is about kingdoms colliding.

There are collisions in skateboarding. Mainly collisions between my body and the concrete. And what I've learned is the concrete is a lot harder than my body. It always wins. It's bruised my hands and cut my wrists. It's tweaked my hip. It's strained my hamstring. It's banged up my knees. And left goose eggs on my shins. It's really no contest. My body is no match for the hard rock concrete. But I keep at it anyway.

In our passage this morning, we see again the collision of kingdoms. And the kingdoms of this world, represented by the statue of a human body, are no match for the kingdom of God, represented by a rock.

Last week, we were introduced to Nebuchadnezzar's dream. We were given the setting of the dream, but never actually heard the dream or its interpretation. This week we will hear the dream and its interpretation. I want to begin by simply reading the passage, starting with the last few verses of what we covered last week.

Daniel 2:26-49¹

²⁶The king declared to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, "Are you able to make known to me the dream that I have seen and its interpretation?" ²⁷Daniel answered the king and said, "No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked, ²⁸but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. You dream and the visions of your head as you lay in bed are these: ²⁹To you, O king, as you lay in bed came thoughts of what would be after this, and he who reveals mysteries made know to you what is to be. ³⁰But as for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because of any wisdom that I have more than all the living, but in order that the interpretation may be made know to the king, and that you may know the thoughts of your mind. ³¹"You saw, O king, and behold, a great image. This image, mighty and of exceeding brightness, stood before you, and its appearance was frightening. ³²The head of this image was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its middle and thighs of bronze, ³³its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. ³⁴As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. ³⁵Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

³⁶"This was the dream. Now we will tell the king its interpretation. ³⁷You, O king, the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, and the might, and the glory, ³⁸and into whose hand he has given, wherever they dwell, the children of man, the beasts of the field, and the birds of the heavens, making you rule over

¹ Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® unless otherwise noted.

them all—you are the head of gold. 39Another kingdom inferior to you shall arise after you, and yet a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. 40And there shall be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron, because iron breaks to pieces and shatters all things. And like iron that crushes, it shall break and crush all these. 41And as you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, it shall be a divided kingdom, but some of the firmness of iron shall be in it, just as you saw iron mixed with the soft clay. 42And as the toes of the feet were partly iron and partly clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly brittle. 43As you saw the iron mixed with soft clay, so they will mix with one another in marriage, but they will not hold together, just as iron does not mix with clay. 44And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever, 45just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure."

46Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face and paid homage to Daniel, and commanded that an offering and incense be offered up to him. 47The king answered and said to Daniel, "Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery." 48Then the king gave Daniel high honors and many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon. 49Daniel made a request of the king, and he appointed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego over the affairs of the province of Babylon. But Daniel remained at the king's court.

This is the Word of the Lord.

In this passage, God is addressed as the God of heaven, three times. In verse 28, we read, "there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries." In verse 37, Daniel says to Nebuchadnezzar, "the God of heaven has given [you] the kingdom." And in verse 44, "the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed."

Calling God the God of heaven reminds us that he rules in heaven; he's sovereign. And there are three things we learn about his rule in our passage. We'll look at these three truths. Then we'll spend some time thinking about how we should respond.

GOD REVEALS MYSTERIES (VV. 27-35)

What we learn in verse 28 is review from last week. God reveals mysteries. At the beginning of our passage, Nebuchadnezzar wants to know if Daniel can tell him his dream and the interpretation. And Daniel says he can't. "But there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries."

This is repeated at the end of the passage too. In verse 45, Daniel says, "A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure." And Nebuchadnezzar also acknowledges this truth in verse 47: "Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery."

Remember what we learned last week? A mystery in the Bible is God's plan for the world—a plan that was hidden, but is eventually revealed. Part of God's plan is revealed through Nebuchadnezzar's dream. More of God's plan will come out later in the book through Daniel's apocalyptic visions.

But this dream is our first taste of what scholars call apocalyptic literature. Apocalyptic literature is a genre of literature where God's purposes for the future are made known. The curtains of history are

pulled back. Apocalyptic is highly symbolic literature, and usually very detailed.² And it's generally meant to encourage God's people who are struggling under an oppressive kingdom, so they can know that God's kingdom will eventually prevail. We'll learn more about apocalyptic literature in the weeks ahead.

But for now, I'm pointing this out because that's exactly what we find in Nebuchadnezzar's dream. Highly symbolic language meant to encourage the people of God. There's a four-part statue with a head of gold, a chest and arms of silver, a midsection and thighs of bronze, and legs and feet of iron mixed with clay. This statue is eventually struck by a stone that becomes a mountain and fills the whole earth.

So, what does the symbolism in the dream of the statue and stone teach us? Well there's one thing we learn from the statue and another from the stone. This comes out in Daniel's interpretation of the dream.

GOD REMOVES AND SETS UP KINGDOMS (VV. 36-43)

The statue teaches us that God removes and sets up kings. We heard this truth last week in verse 21. But it's reiterated here. Daniel starts his interpretation by making it clear that the God of heaven has given Nebuchadnezzar the kingdom of Babylon. As verse 37 says, "You, O king, the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, and the might, and the glory."

This is a critical point. God *gave* Nebuchadnezzar his kingdom. In the same way that God *gave* the king of Judah into his hands and *gave* the vessels from the temple (1:2), God is sovereign; he rules over all kings and kingdoms. And all kingdoms are established by his sovereign will. He sets up kings. And he also removes them. In verse 38, we read that Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon are the head of gold. But in verse 39 we read, "Another kingdom inferior to you shall arise after you, and yet a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth." And in verse 40, "And there shall be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron, because iron breaks to pieces and shatters all things."

We know from other parts of Daniel that the second kingdom, the kingdom of silver, is the Medo-Persian Empire. And the bronze kingdom is Greece, under the leadership of Alexander the Great. So, most likely, the kingdom of iron is Rome. But the point here isn't simply to predict the future. The point is to make it clear that God is the one who's setting up kings and removing them. And all the kingdoms of this earth are passing away. This is highlighted in the fourth kingdom. Even though the kingdom of iron is strong and shatters other kingdoms, it has a fatal flaw. Its feet, and therefore its foundation, are a mixture of iron and clay. And so, they won't hold together.

One of the hazards of interpreting apocalyptic literature is to take the imagery too far. For example, we don't need to speculate on the identity of the toes.

The point is simply to say that although the fourth kingdom is as strong as iron, there is still a weakness. So, whether it's the rich kingdoms of gold and silver or the strong kingdoms of bronze and iron, they will all come to an end. They're passing away.

² James M. Hamilton, Jr., *With the Clouds of Heaven: The Book of Daniel in Biblical Theology*, New Studies in Biblical Theology

GOD IS ESTABLISHING AN EVERLASTING KINGDOM (VV. 44-45)

That's what the imagery of the statue is teaching us. But what about the imagery of the stone? It teaches us that God is establishing an everlasting kingdom. Our final use of "the God of heaven" is seen in verse 44: "And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever."

If the kingdoms of this earth are passing away, the kingdom of God is permanent.³ And the way the statue of kingdoms comes down is through the stone. The stone strikes the statue. And eventually the stone becomes a mountain that fills the whole earth. So, it not only destroys all other kingdoms; it also becomes so large that there's no room for any other kingdoms.

What is the stone spoken of here? It's a stone cut from a mountain by no human hand (v. 45). Most commentators think this means that the stone is not of human origin; the stone is divine. And as we learn from other parts of Scripture, the stone spoken of here is Jesus—the Son of God and Israel's promised Messiah.

In Genesis 49, early on in the Bible, we read that God's people will be bitterly attacked, but they will remain unmoved because the Mighty One of Jacob will save them. This Mighty One is referred to as the Stone of Israel (v. 24).

In Psalm 118, Israel is likened to a stone that the builders have rejected (v. 22). The nations reject Israel. But the Lord will save his people (v. 25). The rejected stone will become the cornerstone.

In Luke 20, Jesus picks up this imagery and applies it to himself. Jesus told a parable that made it clear that he was God's Son. And he would be rejected and put to death. He was the stone that the builders rejected. Then he goes on to refer to Daniel 2. He says that anyone who rejects him will be broken to pieces and crushed.

We see this destruction described in Revelation 19. At Jesus' second coming he will come to wage war on all who oppose him. His eyes will be like a flame of fire. And on his head, he'll have many crowns. He will be seen as the King of kings and Lord of lords. He will strike down the nations and rule them with a rod of iron. And he will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty.

So, Jesus is the stone that smashes the kingdoms of this world and those who reject him. But he's also the cornerstone on which God's everlasting kingdom is being built.

In Luke 1, Gabriel told Mary that Jesus "will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end" (vv. 32-33).

All the kingdoms of this earth will come to an end. But God's kingdom will expand and endure. That's good news for people who are living in exile. That's good news for people being opposed by the kingdoms of this world.

³ Mike Bullmore, "[A King's Dream, A Fragile Statue and A Kingdom that Endures Forever](#)"

RESPONSE

How should we respond to these truths? The first thing we have to do is respond to Jesus. This passage not only applies to kings and nations. It also applies to every human being. Jesus made that clear in Luke 20. Anyone who opposes God's kingdom will be crushed by the stone. And the fact is that in our sin, all of us rebel against God and his kingdom. So, where's the good news in this passage for us?

The good news of the gospel is that at Jesus' first coming, he didn't come to smash; he came to save. At his first coming, he came as a humble servant. Instead of breaking people and nations to pieces, he broke down the wall that separates us from God.⁴ He died on the cross for our sins. And through his death, he makes it possible for rebels to become citizens of his kingdom. And until he returns, his kingdom is being built—it's growing into a mountain that will eventually fill the whole world, through the preaching of the gospel.

So, the most important thing is what you do with Jesus now. He's the king! He's the stone. If you reject him, you'll be crushed. But if you receive him, you'll stand on a firm foundation. How will you respond to Jesus? Will you receive him or reject him? That's the foundational response to this passage.

But what about those of you who have already received him as Savior and Lord? How should you respond?

Maybe an illustration will help. What would you do if you knew exactly what stocks would pay out in the future and which ones would plummet? What would you invest in? You certainly wouldn't invest in the ones that would fall. You'd invest in the ones that will grow.

As Christians, we know how things are going play out. That should affect what we invest in. We know the kingdom of God is everlasting. And we know the kingdoms of this world are passing. So, we should be people who say, "I'm not counting on things working out in the world."⁵ Your health isn't going to hold. You'll eventually be out of money. And I hate to break it to you, but the election isn't going to "work out" either.

In this election season, there are some who are excited about the possibilities for the future. Others are anxious. Some want to see our country restored to some version of the way it was. Others want to see progress toward new heights.

But Daniel 2 gives us a proper perspective on this upcoming election. It may not tell us how to vote in November, but it does lift our eyes above the noise. In God's grand scheme, this election is not going to work out! But God's building an everlasting kingdom that will work out. Don't confuse what's passing with what's permanent. As believers, we should seek first the kingdom of God.

And yet, with that in mind I want to say, that doesn't mean we should completely withdraw from the world. Notice what happens at the end of the passage.

⁴ Bullmore

⁵ Bullmore

When Nebuchadnezzar heard the dream, he acknowledged the God of heaven was the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries (v. 47). We'll talk more about the significance of his response next week.

But for now, notice what he does after this. He honors Daniel and places him in the highest position in the kingdom. He's the ruler of the whole province of Babylon (v. 48). And what does Daniel do with this honor and position? He asks that his friends—the other three faithful believers—be placed over the affairs of Babylon. Then at the very end we're told "Daniel remained at the king's court" (v. 49).

This is an important point. Even though Daniel knows Babylon is passing away and God's kingdom is permanent, he still serves the earthly kingdom. In the words of Jeremiah 29, he still sought the welfare of the city.⁶

So, we can still live in and serve the society we're in, and should. We need to seek the good of this world and seek to bear witness in this world.

But at the same time, we don't put our confidence in this world. We don't get overly discouraged when things *aren't* going well. And we don't get overly excited when things *are* going well in the world. Because God is doing something bigger.

Some of you have a favorite sports team.⁷ You cheer when they do well and you sulk when they do poorly. The same is true with politicians and political parties. This passage isn't teaching us to not care about sports or politics. But there's a team that's not of this world. There's a king who's not on the ballot. His name is Jesus.

And I'm here to tell you today that he wins! He is victorious.

And his victory should throw light on all other wins and losses. It should give us joy. And it should inform what we prioritize in this life.

Let his kingdom come! Let his will be done.

⁶ Iain M. Duguid, *Daniel*, Reformed Expository Commentary

⁷ Illustration adapted from Duguid.