A KINGDOM, NEVER TO BE DESTROYED

Daniel 2:31-49

Key Verse: 2:44

“In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever.”

In the last lesson, we thought of Daniel, a man for a time of crisis. There are mysteries in life which no man on earth can reveal. However, Daniel could approach the God of heaven, along with his friends, and plead for mercy. Then God revealed the mystery concerning the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar. At the time of crisis, we are to plead for mercy from the God of heaven in Jesus Christ, so that he can change our dark and hopeless time into a bright and hopeful one, revealing his purpose and glory. In today’s passage, the mystery revealed to Daniel would be shown to King Nebuchadnezzar. It is regarding the coming kingdoms of the world, that are to be crushed by the kingdom of Christ, that endures forever. In this one chapter, the whole history is covered from Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian captivity all the way to the time of Christ’s coming. The God of heaven is truly sovereign over the whole world, let alone over each one’s life. He brings the end of the world, accomplishing his purpose according to his blueprint. No man or human power or system can thwart it. May we have a biblical view of the coming world and live accordingly.

The dream of the king was not a long-complicated story but a very simple image of a large statue and its destruction by a rock, a statue and a rock; probably the duration of the dream itself was less than one minute. Further description of the dream includes an enormous and dazzling statue, awesome in appearance, frightening and terrifying. The head of the statue was made of pure gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay.

While the king was watching, a rock was cut out, not made by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were broken to pieces at the same time and became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without a trace. But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth.

It is really amazing that Daniel could recall the dream so vividly, as if he saw the dream, as if the king’s dream was recorded and played to him. Daniel was able to describe the exactly what Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream. Truly the king must have been awestruck. The dream was told, which itself is truly great. However, what message is contained in such a simple picture? What kind of interpretation can be drawn from such a simple dream? But the interpretation is truly, truly amazing, so profound. We can only say it is divine.

In the interpretation the word “kingdom” is written 6 times, and “kingdoms” 1 time. King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream was about the kingdoms of the world in the future. First of all, Daniel said, “You, O king, are the king of kings” (Ezekiel 26:7). What a great complement! Daniel continues, “The God of heaven has given you dominion and power and might and glory; in your hands he has placed mankind and the beasts of the field and the birds of the air. Wherever they live, he has made you ruler over them all.” Although Nebuchadnezzar is great as referred to the king of kings, Daniel stated very clearly that he did not become the king by himself, but the God of heaven has made him so, king of kings and ruler over all. And then Daniel said, “You are that head of gold.”

Daniel continues, “After you, another kingdom will rise, inferior to yours. Next, a third kingdom, one of bronze, will rule over the whole earth. It is interesting that Alexander the Great commanded people to call him by this title, Alexander King of all the Earth. Finally, there will be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron…” Now we know in history that the kingdoms after Babylon were Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. Interestingly, the kingdom of Babylon was not stated. Rather, King Nebuchadnezzar was cited, probably indicating that the kingdom was characterized by the king under his solid reign. Since then, no monarch is ever mentioned. It passes from a king to kingdoms. After him, the power rapidly diminishes. No king is firm and solid enough to represent each of the kingdoms. Nebuchadnezzar was a unique king. So he seems to be a representative of the whole kingdoms of the world, being referred to the king of kings.

It is known that the approximate specific gravity of gold is 19, silver 11, bronze 8.5, iron 7.8. In other words, gold at the top is more than twice as heavy as the bottom. The whole thing is top heavy. It is going to be a very precariously (unsteadily) balanced thing that will incessantly deteriorate until its final dissolution.

They say that Babylon was plentiful with gold. According to Isaiah 14:4, the city was called the golden city. In chapter 3 King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, 27 meters high and 2.7 meter wide. Babylon was preoccupied with gold. The characteristic of Medo-Persia would be money or silver; silver in Aramaic is the same as money. The Medo-Persia empire developed a vast system of taxation, demanding that their taxes be paid in silver. A Greek soldier had on his head a helmet of bronze, on his body a breastplate of bronze, and a shield and sword of bronze. Bronze became a sign and symbol of Greek conquests and the Greek empire. In Daniel’s day, iron was believed to be the strongest metal. And Rome, no question, was the strongest empire the world has ever known. What prophetic insight to see Babylon of gold, Medo-Persia of silver, Greece of bronze and Rome of iron!

Nebuchadnezzar reigned for 43 years, and the Babylonian kingdom of gold lasted only 70 years, the exact number of years that God wanted to chasten Israel in the Babylonian captivity. Nebuchadnezzar and his kingdom were just an instrument of God for His purpose. The end of the Babylonian kingdom is described in 5:30-31, “That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain, and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom, at the age of sixty-two.” So, in one night the kingdom was completely gone. Most probably Darius is not a name but a honoured title. He is Cyrus. In Isaiah, God uttered the name of Cyrus three times (44:28; 45:1, 13), who would come after the Babylon and liberate the Israelites from Babylonian captivity. The prophecy of Isaiah was around 100 years even before Babylon invading Judah. And in Daniel 7, in Daniel’s dream, these four kingdoms were depicted as four beasts – a lion, a bear, a leopard, and a fourth beast, terrifying and frightening. And in chapter 8 Greece defeating Medo-Persia is depicted as a goat that came crossing the whole earth without touching the ground, attacking and striking a ram, knocking him to the ground and trampling on him. 8:21 says, “The shaggy goat is the king of Greece” referring to Alexander the Great. It was definitely seven hundred years before his birth. It is difficult to say exactly when Rome started. Rome was never even heard of before rising to power. Rome emerged out of nowhere to rule the world. But it was predicted to come. Indeed, Bible prophecy is amazing and here in the book of Daniel, this prophecy concerning the coming kingdoms is described in two verses, 39 and 40 in this chapter.

And in verse 39, “inferior” does not mean in size and power, but just in quality. It is reasonable to understand that “inferior” refers to the lower-part of the statue. Babylon lasted 70 years, Medo-Persia lasted around 200, the Greek empire lasted around 200, and the Roman Empire lasted 500 years in the West, all the way to 1453 until Constantinople was knocked down in the East. The legs are the longest part of the image and the Roman Empire lasted the longest and was the most powerful.

The final kingdom was described in detail. Verse 40 says, “Finally, there will be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron—for iron breaks and smashes everything—and as iron breaks things to pieces, so it will crush and break all the others.” This kingdom is really strong, breaking and smashing, again breaking and crushing and breaking all the others, everything. All of those terms refer to a smashing, crushing, shattering power of Rome. There is a saying that the Roman legions were noted for their ability to crush all resistance with an iron heel.

In verses 41-43, there is further description of this final kingdom: “Just as you saw that the feet and toes were partly of baked clay and partly of iron, so this will be a divided kingdom; yet it will have some of the strength of iron in it, even as you saw iron mixed with clay. As the toes were partly iron and partly clay, so this kingdom will be partly strong and partly brittle. And just as you saw the iron mixed with baked clay, so the people will be a mixture and will not remain united, any more than iron mixes with clay.” We see in Europe that the Roman Empire as a unit does not exist, but its remains have been mixed into the nations as a confederacy, like the mixture of iron and clay.

And since the whole of the image is a political and historical picture, whatever the final kingdom is must also be actual, historical, political, and earthly. Now the key point of the interpretation is in verses 44: “In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever.” In light of the whole Bible, this is the kingdom of Christ. Born of a virgin Mary, raised from the dead, ascended to heaven, promised to return to the earth. At the time of Jesus’ conception the angel Gabriel said to Mary, “The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end” (Lk 1:32b-33). Here ten toes in the book of Daniel are ten kings, and they are matched with ten horns on a beast that came out of the sea (13:1), representing the final anti-Christ in Revelation 13. Revelation 17:12 says, “The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast.” In this chapter, there is no mention of the beast. But in the following chapters of 7, 8 and 11, it is described as a little horn (7:8), a stern-faced king, a master of intrigue (8:23), and one who does as he pleases, exalting himself above every god (11:36). And in Revelation 19, the beast and the kings were completely destroyed by Christ’s return depicted as a rider on a white horse (19:19-20). And Daniel 7:27 says, “The sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him.”

Here in chapter 2 verse 25 it says, “This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands—a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces.” It is very interesting that in the Bible God is portrayed as rock and also Christ. Genesis 49:24 says, “…because of the hand of the Mighty One of Jacob, because of the Shepherd, Rock of Israel.” It is Moses’ blessing upon Joseph concerning what will happen to him in days to come. Moses said in the song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32:15, “…He…rejected the Rock his Saviour.” It was written in a negative way. David sang to the LORD in 2 Samuel 22:2-3, “The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock…” Isaiah prophesied in Isaiah 28:16, “So this is what the Sovereign LORD says: ‘See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious corner stone for a sure foundation; the one who trusts will never be dismayed.” When Jesus came, he said of himself, “The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes” (Mt 21:42; Mk 12:10, 11; Lk 20:17), quoting Psalm 118:22, 23. Then Peter said in 1 Peter 2:4-8, “As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him” and quoted the words of Isaiah, “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never put to shame.” He is the living Stone, the precious saving stone, to be trusted. And it is “a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.” And it is written clearly in Luke 20:18, “Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but on whom it falls will be crushed.” Not only an individual but the whole nation and kings will be crushed by this rock of Christ’s kingdom, which will endure forever.

We thank and praise God for Christ’s kingdom that endures forever. What a blessing it is to be members of this kingdom of Christ! Those who accept Christ Jesus as our Saviour and King can belong to this kingdom. It will be truly wonderful to live under his kingship and serve his kingdom work. As we have Christ as our King, we are not to live according to our desire and own wisdom and schedule, but entrust all things to him and obey him and follow his leading at each step of life. This kingdom of Christ is in the hearts of his people as invisible, but will be visible to the whole world.

The interpretation was truly amazing. But we also need to pay attention to the terms used in the dream and interpretation, “cut out”, “mountain” “wind.” They say that Nebuchadnezzar was one of the greatest builders in ancient history. He had worked with stone. He would have understood what it was to be a rock cut out without human hands because he would have known the incredible effort necessary to cut out stones by hand. And here was one that just happened. It is said that Nebuchadnezzar’s chief god was a god that he called Bel-Merodach. Now Bel-Merodach had a very special name. His name was Shadu Rabu, meaning the great mountain. Nebuchadnezzar thought Shadu Rabu, Bel-Merodach was the great mountain. But Daniel said to him, “The rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain filling the whole earth.” Not Shadu Rabu, but the God of Daniel is the great mountain, meaning the omnipotent God. There was a story that Bel-Merodach battled with Tiamat, the dragon of chaos. Bel-Merodach defeated Tiamat by sending a hurricane, a wind, and then a fourfold wind, and then a sevenfold wind, that blew the dragon away. In his bountiful grace, God used the terms Nebuchadnezzar would understand, although Daniel’s telling him the exact dream he had and its interpretation themselves were overwhelming to him. Daniel finally said in verse 45, “The great God has shown the king what will take place in the future. The dream is true and the interpretation is trustworthy.” The LORD God is great, holding to the future of the world in his hand and he is also a personal God, being so mindful of one pitiful soul king Nebuchadnezzar.

Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and paid him honour and ordered that an offering and incense be presented to him. The king said to Daniel, “Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery.” What a confession! Babylonian gods were nothing, for the God of Daniel is the God of gods. In the dream and its interpretation, Nebuchadnezzar was referred to the king of kings. At this point he realized that he is nothing before the Lord of kings, as Isaiah said in Isaiah 40:23, “He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.” This term “the Lord of kings” is written here uniquely in the Bible. This was his own understanding after hearing this marvelous revelation. No one but this God is a revealer of mysteries.

Then the king placed Daniel in a high position and lavished many gifts on him. He made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men. Moreover, at Daniel’s request the king appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego administrators over the province of Babylon, while Daniel himself remained at the royal court.”

Truly God is the sovereign Ruler of history over all nations. Praise God for Christ’s kingdom coming on earth. May we truly put our faith and full trust in him and serve his kingdom work, striving to save one soul after another into this lasting kingdom of Christ.