

# A Kingdom Made Without Hands (Daniel 2:31–44)

*"In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever" (Daniel 2:44).*

As God's prophet, Daniel told King Nebuchadnezzar about a gigantic "statue" which the king had seen in a dream. Its "brilliance" was "extraordinary," and its "appearance was frightening" (Daniel 2:31; NRSV). The head of the statue was of "fine gold," representing Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom (Daniel 2:32, 38; NRSV). The "chest and arms" were "of silver," pointing to "another kingdom" arising after Nebuchadnezzar's (Daniel 2:32, 39; NRSV). The "middle and thighs" of the statue were "of bronze," pointing to a third kingdom ruling "over the whole earth" (Daniel 2:32, 39; NRSV). The legs were "of iron mixed with clay," pointing to a "fourth kingdom, strong as iron" (Daniel 2:33, 40, 43; NRSV).

Then "a stone was cut from the mountain not by hands," and this stone "struck" and "crushed" the statue (Daniel 2:34, 45; NRSV). "But the stone that struck the statue became a great mountain and filled the whole earth" (Daniel 2:35; NRSV). As the stone crushed the statue, so a fifth kingdom—set up by "the God of heaven"—would crush the four kingdoms and would itself "stand forever" (Daniel 2:44; NRSV).

Daniel was revealing a word-picture of unfolding history. Isaiah had already called Babylon "the golden city" (Isaiah 14:4; KJV). Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar, "You are the head of gold" (Daniel 2:32, 38). Historians date his empire as lasting from 606 B.C. to 539 B.C.

The statue's "chest and arms of silver" (Daniel

2:32; NRSV) pointed to the silver ornaments that would be worn by the soldiers of the Medo-Persian Empire (539–333 B.C.).

The bronze "middle and thighs" (Daniel 2:32; NRSV) pointed to Alexander's Greek Empire (333–63 B.C.), with soldiers having armor of bronze.

The legs were of iron, and the feet were of iron "mixed with clay" (Daniel 2:43; NRSV), pointing to the Roman Empire (63 B.C.–A.D. 475). The Roman emperors wore crowns made of iron.

Unfortunately, *The New Interpreter's Bible*<sup>1</sup> tries to eliminate Rome as being Daniel's fourth kingdom. If the Medo-Persian Empire points both to the silver and the bronze kingdoms, then God's promise to set up an indestructible kingdom during the days of the iron empire (Daniel 2:44) did not come to pass.

The error of this interpretation can be seen in three truths: (1) It is clear that the Medes and Persians are counted as one kingdom. "The ram which you saw with the two horns represents the kings of Media and Persia" (Daniel 8:20). (2) The fourth kingdom is stronger than any of the three preceding kingdoms. It has the strength of iron, as opposed to gold, silver, or bronze. This was not true of Alexander's kingdom, but it was true of the Roman Empire. (3) The consum-

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<sup>1</sup>Leander E. Keck, et. al, *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 7, *Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 55, 105.

mation of these things was to take place in the latter days (Daniel 2:28; 10:14). New Testament writers identified the “latter” or “last” days with the Christian Age, which includes the time of the Roman kings (Acts 2:16, 17; Hebrews 1:1).<sup>2</sup>

After Daniel had described four kingdoms made with hands—that is, with physical military might—he then described a fifth kingdom made “without hands” (Daniel 2:44, 45; ASV). It would become a reality in the “latter” or “last” days (Daniel 2:28). While Rome, the iron kingdom, was very much in control, Jesus built on Daniel’s teaching, announcing, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand” (Mark 1:15a).

The establishment of the kingdom about which Daniel had prophesied was, in fact, so close “at hand” that Jesus said some bystanders would live to see the kingdom of God “come with power” (Mark 9:1). That power came on the Day of Pentecost, Sunday, May 28, A.D. 30 in the city of Jerusalem (Acts 1:8; 2:1–4).

On that day, for the first time, came the announcement that Jesus had gone to heaven to be seated on David’s throne (Acts 2:30). David’s throne had become spiritual, a kingdom made “without hands,” without military might. Unlike the Roman Empire, Jesus’ kingdom “is not of this world” (John 18:36).

Distinct even from David’s kingdom, Jesus’ kingdom is invisible, “inside” (*entos*, Luke 17:21; FHV<sup>3</sup>) its citizens. Essentially, it is in no way external, but wholly inward, a kingdom of “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:17).

At the very moment penitent believers in Jesus are “buried with Him in baptism,” they are “transferred” into “the kingdom of [God’s] beloved Son” (Colossians 2:12; 1:13; NRSV). Their “citizenship is in heaven” (Philippians 3:20), but they are recognized in this world as “God’s family” (1 Timothy 3:15; FHV), called “the church of the living God” (1 Timothy 3:15; NRSV).

The church is the fruition of “the eternal purpose” of “the only wise God,” the realization

of “things into which angels long to look” (Romans 16:27; Ephesians 3:10, 11; 1 Peter 1:12; NRSV). It is glory to Him and joy to the angels when they look down from heaven and see lost sinners born again and saved, being added to the Lord’s called-out people, the church (Luke 15:10; Ephesians 3:21; Acts 2:47).

A learned British historian understood Daniel’s iron age to refer to Rome:

The arms of the republic, sometimes vanquished in battle, always victorious in war, advanced with rapid steps to the Euphrates, the Danube, the Rhine, and the ocean; and the images of gold, or silver, or brass, that might serve to represent the nations and their kings, were successively broken by the iron monarchy of Rome.<sup>4</sup>

The effect of Daniel’s stone cut out of the mountain is vividly seen in Edward Gibbon’s summary of Christianity. His account is especially objective, since he personally was a skeptic:

While that great body [the Roman Empire] was invaded by open violence, and undermined by slow decay, a pure and humble religion gently insinuated itself into the minds of men, grew up in silence and obscurity, derived new vigour from opposition, and finally erected the triumphal banner of the Cross on the ruins of the Capitol.

Nor was the influence of Christianity confined to the period or to the limits of the Roman Empire. After a revolution of thirteen or fourteen centuries, that religion is still professed by the nations of Europe, the most distinguished portion of human kind in arts and learning as well as in arms. By the industry and zeal of the Europeans it has been widely diffused to the most distant shores of Asia and Africa; and by means of their colonies has been firmly established from Canada to [Chile], in a world unknown to the ancients. . . .

Our curiosity is naturally prompted to inquire by what means the Christian faith obtained so remarkable a victory over the established religions of the earth.<sup>5</sup>

Gibbon listed five reasons for the triumph of Christianity: (1) zeal, (2) the doctrine of immortality, (3) alleged miracles, (4) pure and austere morals, and (5) church organization.

<sup>2</sup>Glen Mayfield, “Daniel’s Prophecy of the Kingdom,” *Gospel Advocate* (24 November 1977): 739.

<sup>3</sup>The FHV, sometimes called the Freed-Hardeman Version, is *McCord’s New Testament Translation of the Everlasting Gospel* (Henderson, Tenn.: Freed-Hardeman College, 1988).

<sup>4</sup>Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, IV, 104; quoted in H. N. Sargent, *The Marvels of Bible Prophecy* (London: Covenant Publishing Co., 1938), 123.

<sup>5</sup>Edward Gibbon, *The Triumph of Christendom in the Roman Empire*, ed. J. B. Bury (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), 1–2.

Flavius Josephus (A.D. 37–95), the famous Jewish historian, was also a reader of the Book of Daniel:

Daniel did also declare the meaning of the stone to the king; but I do not think proper to relate it, since I have only undertaken to describe things past or things present, but not things that are future; yet if any one be so very desirous of knowing truth, as not to waive such points of curiosity, and cannot curb his inclination for understanding the uncertainties of futurity, and whether they will happen or not, let him be diligent in reading the book of Daniel, which he will find among the sacred writings.<sup>6</sup>

Isaiah (2:2) and Micah (4:1) had preceded Daniel in writing that “the mountain of the house of the Lord” would become a reality in the “last days.” Their prediction coincided with Daniel’s announcement that a stone “cut out of the mountain without hands” would itself become “a great mountain” and would fill “the whole earth,” and that this would occur in the “latter days” (Daniel 2:28, 35, 45; ASV).

The phrase “latter” or “last” days has become a description of the time span of Christianity. Peter quoted Joel as saying that what happened on the Day of Pentecost (when the kingdom, the church, was established) was in “the last days” (Acts 2:17). Later, Peter wrote that what Jesus did on this earth was “in these last times” (1 Peter 1:20).

Also, the inspired author of the Book of Hebrews wrote that “in these last days” God speaks to us by His “Son” (1:2). If he meant the last days of Judaism, up to 70 A.D., then one must wonder how 1,900-plus years can come *after* the “last days.”

Furthermore, the phrase “consummation of the ages” (“the end of the world”; KJV) in Hebrews 9:26 cannot mean anything but that Christianity is the last religion. Similarly, the phrase “the end of the world” (KJV) or “the completion of the ages” (FHV) in 1 Corinthians 10:11 refers to a time that had already arrived in Corinth in A.D. 57. Such phrases, then, point to the entire time span of Christianity.

The fact that Jesus will be with His apostles “unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:20; KJV) tells us that the phrase “the last days” describes all the time from “the beginning” of

Christianity until the world is “burned” (Acts 11:15; 2 Peter 3:10, 11).

The fifth kingdom spoken of by Daniel is unique. (1) It was made without hands; (2) it was established and is maintained without military force; and (3) it is invisible. Further, (4) it is indestructible. Even “the gates of Hades” cannot prevail against it (Matthew 16:18). Indeed, Christians have received a kingdom that “cannot be shaken” (Hebrews 12:28). It is established “with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore” (Isaiah 9:7). God has determined that “it will itself endure forever” (Daniel 2:44).

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### “What Must I Do To Be Saved?”

The question “What must I do to be saved?” was asked, in effect, by the Jews on the Day of Pentecost. Peter’s sermon had pricked their hearts and prompted them to ask the question. Peter answered, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins . . .” (Acts 2:38). According to the answer, baptism is essential as well as repentance.

Saul, later called Paul, asked, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” (Acts 9:6a; KJV). Ananias answered the question in Acts 22:16: “. . . Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.” Thus we see that baptism stands between a penitent believer and the washing away of his sins.

The question was next asked by a Philippian jailer: “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30). The answer given to this unbeliever by Paul and Silas was “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household”; but the story does not end there. They preached to him so that he might believe (see Romans 10:17). The jailer then “washed their wounds [repented], and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household” (Acts 16:33).

These men were given different answers to the same question because they were at different places on the road to salvation. Nevertheless, all did the same things. Where are you on that road? Can you see what you need to do? Will you do it?

Adapted From *The Greatest Questions Of the Ages*

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<sup>6</sup>Josephus *Antiquities* 10.10.4.