**The Small Stone**

Daniel 2

When you think about Christmas time and nativity scenes, special stars and twinkle lights with wise men from the east, you probably don’t think about the book of Daniel. But I had a hunch that this fascinating Old Testament book would teach us a lot about the first coming of Jesus, and does it ever.

***Kingdoms rise and fall.*** Kings come and go. But God showed Daniel – 600 years before it took place – a kingdom that would appear and never fall, but that would fill the whole earth. Here is the key vision:

“As 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… But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.” Daniel 2:34-35

***Here is an enormous statue of gold***, silver, bronze, iron and clay representing all the kingdoms of man. That whole image goes up in a puff of smoke because it gets hit with a small stone. **A powerful and imposing figure that gets taken down by a small stone**. Does that remind you of anything?

David and Goliath!

The not yet revealed true King of Israel took ***a very unlikely instrument*** - a small stone - and used it to kill the fearsome enemy of the people of God: the great giant Goliath.

In the same way, **God introduced the ultimate King of Israel** to the world in a very unlikely and inconspicuous way – through a baby born in the insignificant town of Bethlehem. A small stone indeed.

But the key point is that it was not cut out by human hands. Here is the true and ultimate King of all Kings. What we will see in Daniel 2 is ***a contrast between the kingdoms of this world and the kingdom of God***; between the kings of this world and the King of all Kings. Let’s first look at the image in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and then we will turn our attention to the small stone that obliterated that statue.

**The kings of the world:**

1. False **Deity**

“You saw, O king, and behold, a great image. This image, mighty and of exceeding brightness stood before you.” Daniel 2:31

We pick up the story here as Daniel describes the king’s dream and then interprets it. But the 30 verses before this present the other wise men and astrologers around Nebuchadnezzar scrambling for their lives as the king refuses to tell them the dream. He says, “If you’re so wise and if you can really INTERPRET my dream, ***prove it by first telling me the dream I had***.”

Of course, the wise men try to explain to the king that no one can just KNOW the details of a dream someone had. There is a standard **protocol for dream interpretation**, understanding symbols and signs. But actually knowing what someone dreamed, that is beyond human capability.

King Neb won’t have it. He doubles down on the demand. Either tell me the dream, so I know you can interpret it, or you will all die. Of course, they couldn’t do it, so ***all the wise men were placed on death row***, executions the next day. Daniel was one of them! He asked for a little time extension to pray and get his friends praying. And that night God showed Daniel the king’s dream in a vision of his own. And by providing this interpretation, Daniel saved all the wise men of Babylon. And he helped the king rest easier at night.

What Daniel saw, which is what the king had seen, was **a huge statue**. An image. It’s a word used elsewhere in the Bible for an idol, a physical representation of a false god.

Notice how Daniel addresses Nebuchadnezzar, “O king.” This whole section, really the whole book of Daniel, is about ***who is the true king***, who is really in charge. In Daniel 4 Nebuchadnezzar will learn this lesson the hard way. Here God is trying to get “the king’s” attention. If Nebuchadnezzar was at all familiar with the Bible, the Hebrew Scriptures, he would have immediately had concerns about the “image” he saw. A huge statue of gold, silver, bronze, in the Jewish understanding, could only be a great idol, a false god.

**The kings of the world:**

1. False **Deity**
   * The **Appearance** of power without the reality

“This image, mighty and of exceeding brightness stood before you, and its appearance was frightening.” Daniel 2:31

What false gods always do is try to appear like the true God. Large, powerful, brilliant, glorious. ***This is what all kings try to do: appear divine.*** It’s what all people with power begin to feel like – to feel like God. It’s why pride always leads to a fall. This was the devil’s path – the most glorious of the angels who thought he could take the place of God. He became enamored with his own power and splendor and glory.

Now, I’m sure we are all thinking of Nebuchadnezzar and human kings and the rich and powerful – as NOT US. Yes, **THOSE PEOPLE are terrible**. They are proud, power hungry, self-aggrandizing and idolatrous. Putin. Khameini. Kim Jong Un. But not us. Not you. Not me. We are super humble. We are never proud, you and I. We know our place.

I never think of myself as the KING. You never imagine yourself as Queen. The sovereign ruler of your domain. You sit on your porch and survey the great Babylon that you have built.

Ok, I’ll leave you out of it. ***We all know pastors have issues.*** So I’ll just speak for myself. Often us pastors are quite content with the APPEARANCE of power because we know all too well that we don’t have actual power. What we want is control; appreciation; adulation; worship really.

It’s like that moment in the Avengers when **Tony Stark is talking about Loki** and what the narcissistic Norse deity wanted: “He’s a full tilt diva: he wants flowers, he wants parades, he wants monuments built to the skies with his name plastered…” And in that instant, articulating what he perceived in someone else, Tony realized his own ego. He wanted the same thing. In fact, he had built the very thing in Stark Tower. And that’s exactly where Loki went.

I’ll admit, I do the same thing. My selfish, proud, sinful heart wants recognition, applause – to appear winsome, successful, SHINY and golden.

Thankfully none of you struggle with these things so we can move on.

**The kings of the world:**

1. Financial **Idolatry**
   * The promise of **Security** without the provision

“The head of this image was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its middle and thighs of bronze…” Daniel 2:32

***What do kings pursue?*** First power. Then money. Or money first en route to power. That’s certainly American politics: money first. Money wins elections. The great statue was made of precious metals, the most valuable things in ancient times. Currency.

A King who could make a gold statue that large would truly be great because he didn’t need the gold to buy things, he could just use it for art. Come back next week for Nebuchadnezzar’s grand idea. ***“A big statue… of MYSELF!”*** Yes, let’s do that! Daniel 3. Once you have such a statue what good is it if people don’t bow down and worship it?

***Money and power are the idols of our day***, right alongside love and everything that goes with that. What does money promise? First security, then comfort, then happiness. Money promises everything. But it’s always a mirage in the desert. It’s always just over the next hill. You always need just a little bit more to *really* feel secure, to really get that thing that you want, to really be happy. Just a little bit MORE.

***Is money a good master?*** It demands everything of you. You must serve money and business with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength. And money promises happiness but ends up delivering a basketful of broken promises. So often the wealthiest people out there are the most unhappy. They end up losing their marriages, their children and their health all for the sake of making enough money to SERVE those very things. ***So money is the great deceiver.*** It promises everything and provides nothing. It advertises happiness but delivers suffering.

And again, THOSE PEOPLE out there, those blind and ***lost sinners like Ebenezer Scrooge***, they fall for the traps. But not us. We see those traps and avoid them every time. We never fall for the false promises of money and comfort and self-indulgence. Right? Not us. We are super beyond that nonsense.

You know **the test** of whether you are beyond the temptation of money? ***What you GIVE AWAY.*** If you can give away your house, your car, your savings account, your investments portfolio then those things have no control over you. But if you look around and say “mine. Mine. mine. Mine.” Then everything over which you claim ownership actually owns you. The more we hold onto things the more those things hold onto us.

Some of us need to do some **radical house-keeping**: some serious minimalizing, simplifying, to reduce the hold that STUFF has on us. But again, not us. That’s other people, who have issues. We are citizens of the kingdom of God who abound with generosity to all the priorities of the Lord! So we can move on.

**The kings of the world:**

1. **Fleeting** Reality
   * Conflict divides, everything **Decays**

“As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand and it struck the image on its feet and broke them in pieces.” Daniel 2:34

Suddenly a new thing appears, a small stone that struck the statue on its feet of iron mixed with clay. ***And the whole thing shattered.*** Look a few verses down at the explanation.

**The kings of the world:**

1. **Fleeting** Reality
   * Conflict divides, everything **Decays**

“As you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter’s clay and partly of iron, it shall be a divided kingdom.” Daniel 2:41

***The statue represents four kingdoms.*** Nebuchadnezzar is the head of gold, for Babylon. That was followed briefly by the Medes, who were quickly assimilated into the powerful kingdom of the Persians, which later gave way to Greece. Four kingdoms. Some scholars have combined the media-Persian empire and made the fourth kingdom Rome. But the definite focus of Daniel’s prophecy is Greece. Just read chapters 9-11 and you’ll see it walks through the conflicts in the Greek Empire 2 centuries before the time of Jesus.

### **<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/article/the-four-kingdoms-of-daniel-2-and-7/>**

And ***Greece was especially divided as a kingdom***. Alexander the Great led a unified Greek Empire for just over a decade. After him, the kingdom was divided four ways and it never regained the glory or unity it had under Alexander.

**The kings of the world:**

1. **Fleeting** Reality
   * Conflict divides, everything **Decays**

“As you saw the iron mixed with soft clay, so they will mix with one another in marriage, but they will not hold together.” Daniel 2:43

Marriage alliances are standard fare among kings, but often they just introduce more conflict as another powerful family joins the fray. This is the way of the world, the way of kings: to fight. Everyone wants his own glory, his own power, his own financial security and comfort and so conflict pervades the kingdoms of humankind. **This is the story of history**, not just of Babylon, the Medes, the Persians and the Greeks. It is all of history.

***U.S. history begins with a revolution***, breaking away from British control. And we had a huge Civil War that was about power and control on this matter called slavery. The Civil War fractured most of our Christian denominations across the middle, dividing north and south like the nation did.

Everything divides. Conflict pervades the kingdoms of man. It’s a fascinating detail of prophecy that shows the final downfall of evil in Revelation 17.

“The waters that you saw, where the prostitute is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages. And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the prostitute. They will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire, for God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by being of one mind and handing over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled. And the woman that you saw is the great city that has dominion over the kings of the earth.” Revelation 17:15-18

**The woman represents BABYLON**, the kingdoms of this world. The great beast represents kings. In the end what will consume the insatiable prostitute called Babylon? The beast itself. The kings of the earth will finally turn on the idol they served, for they will see that Babylon is a false deity, only offers false promises of financial security and happiness and, in the end, is a fleeting reality.

Everything decays. Everything falls apart. Look at what happens to the great golden image when the small stone hits it:

**The kings of the world:**

1. **Fleeting** Reality
   * Conflict divides, everything **Decays**

“Then 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…” Daniel 2:35

Poof. Like the end of Avengers Infinity War. Disappearing in a cloud of dust.

**The kings of the world:**

1. **Fleeting** Reality
   * Conflict divides, everything **Decays**

“And the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found…”

Daniel 2:35

From the death of Alexander the Great, ***Greece was divided among his four generals*** and various city-states within Greece rose and fell with power. When Rome began to rise in the second century BC, the fractured city-states of Greece could not resist its growing power. Finally, Corinth was conquered and destroyed in 146 BC, and after that Rome controlled Greece. But it wasn’t until 100 years after that that Egypt fell to Rome so most historians look to around 30 BC as the final end of the Greek Empire and the full ascendancy of Rome.

The identity of the different kingdoms is not the point. ***The point is that all kingdoms of man rise and fall.*** Conflict divides them all and ultimately every human kingdom will come to an end. Daniel expresses this in his prayer earlier in this chapter.

**The kings of the world:**

1. **Fleeting** Reality
   * Conflict divides, everything **Decays**

“Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might. He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings…” Daniel 2:20-21

***True power belongs only to God.*** Only His kingdom lasts forever. He raises up kings, giving them temporary authority over limited domains. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble, as Nebuchadnezzar - the greatest of them all - had to learn. The kings of this world represent false deity, financial idolatry and fleeting reality. Merry Christmas. Let’s sing deck the halls! Just kidding.

***Enter the small stone.*** This is what brings us to Christmas - the contrast to the kings of this world.

**The King of Kings:**

1. Full **Divinity**
   * Initially small and intentionally **Fragile**

“As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hands, and it struck the image…”

Daniel 2:34

Next to a great golden statue, who would think a small stone would have any relevance? Except that the stone was not cut out by human hands. **Here is a stone of DIVINE origin**. Cut out by the hands of God.

Now remember, **this was 600 years before Jesus was born**. So Daniel had no way of knowing HOW this prophecy would be fulfilled. He could not imagine a virgin named Mary being visited by an angel and told that she would become pregnant not by a man but by the Holy Spirit. Daniel could not have dreamt up this idea that the eternal Son of God would take up residence in Mary’s womb for 9 months and then be born in a stable as a fully human baby.

***What Daniel saw was a small stone.*** It later became a huge mountain but at first it was small. Again, reminding us of David and his sling. Daniel doesn’t get much more about the stone, just that it came from God, cut out by His own hands.

What we know about Christmas is that Jesus was born intentionally out of the spotlight and in the weakness and fragility of a fully human body. Why so weak? Why so fragile? Because his mission was to die. A problem with being **the eternal Son of God**, an infinite Spirit Being and the Creator of all things, is that you ***cannot die***. Death bounces off of you. The devil is like a buzzing mosquito. Fwip. You flick him away.

But, if you place that full divinity into a fragile human body, ***perfectly merging human DNA with divine essence***, you have the mystery of the incarnation. Christmas. Jesus was fully God and also fully human. Humble beginnings in that Bethlehem stable, noticed only by shepherds, honored only by foreign wise men. Then hunted by the Nebuchadnezzar of the Roman Empire, King Herod. So the small stone was whisked away to Egypt, King Herod died and the young Jewish couple brought Jesus back to a little town called Nazareth where he grew up in obscurity, until it was time for him to set out on his ultimate mission.

**The King of Kings:**

1. Total **Victory**
   * Internal **Transformation** and viral multiplication

“And it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces.”

Daniel 2:34

The stone hit the statue, and it broke into pieces. The prophecy about **hitting the feet** of the statue was mainly about ***the TIMING of the Messiah’s arrival***, not in the time of Babylon or Media or Persia, but in the time of Greece and Rome. And it was also about **VULNERABILITY**. The kingdoms of mankind were especially vulnerable when Jesus arrived, because of the division and conflict within them.

It has often been pointed out ***how ideally suited the Roman Empire was to the rapid spread of the gospel***. It was a time of relative peace, after the conflict of Greece. The roads were amazing and made travel much safer and easier. And the Greek language made communication possible throughout most of the known world. Which is why the NT is in Greek, it was the common language of the day.

Rome was, as it were, soft clay, to receive the small stone of Christianity.

But there’s a much more **personal symbolism here**. Think of that golden statue like Nebuchadnezzar did - it represents YOU. You in all of your greatness and splendor and wisdom and power and glory. Ah, glorious you! There was a time that you remember as your golden days. You were young, vibrant, beautiful, successful. Everyone loved you. Everyone cheered. Then there was a silver time. And a bronze time. And then some iron kind of mixed with clay. Not sure if that was your middle school or late middle age – probably both.

But at some point ***the small stone named Jesus flew into you***. You heard his name. You were confronted with your sin. You realized that in order to follow Jesus, part of you had to die. You had to let Jesus obliterate the old YOU. Then you let him remake you into something new. You were born again.

***You had to let Jesus have total victory over you.***

Some of you are here today and you haven’t yet done that. You are still the boss of your own life. You know about Jesus, but you haven’t let the small stone hit home yet. You are trying to block it with your shiny head of gold.

Let me give you some advice. ***Don’t fight against the small stone.*** Learn the lesson of Goliath. Jesus may seem small and insignificant, but He will have the victory. One day every knee will bow before Him and every tongue will confess that He IS the Lord.

***There can only be one king.*** Jesus does not share the throne. If you’re still in your golden era and you still want to be king, you can try for a while. But just know the day will come – probably soon – when that small stone will be zooming at you. And let me tell you, Jesus has really good aim.

But back in Jesus’ day his own followers were confused at the nature of Jesus’ victory. Even after the resurrection the disciples were wondering, “Hey, are you going to go conquer Rome now? Is it time to restore the kingdom to Israel?” Remember what Jesus said? “It’s not for you to know…” That wasn’t the mission.

Jesus didn’t come that time to defeat all the evil empires of the world. That’s what his second coming is for.

That first time he came to die on the cross and rise again to provide ***an internal transformation of the heart*** that would change people from the inside and produce a viral infection that would spread all over the Roman Empire as His Spiritual Kingdom. His earthly kingdom will come in full when he comes back. For now, Jesus reigns through you and me.

**The King of Kings:**

1. Eternal **Supremacy**
   * Global **Saturation** and glorious exaltation

“But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.” Daniel 2:36

The kingdoms of man will all fall, but the kingdom of God, ***the reign of King Jesus, will last forever.*** For now it’s a spiritual kingdom that is spreading all over the planet as the Name of Jesus is shared, one person at a time, one conversation at a time.

And that gospel message will be proclaimed in all nations, to every people group before Jesus comes back. In that way, **Habakkuk 2:14** will be fulfilled that “the knowledge of the glory of the Lord will fill the earth as the waters cover the sea.” Matthew 24:14 confirms that promise in the New Testament.

This is our great commission: to make disciples of ALL NATIONS. **There are still 3 BILLION people** who have never heard the name of Jesus. We might think of missions to unreached peoples as a task from 100 or 200 years ago, but frontier missions are still out there. The populations that are least reached tend to have the most babies, so the task is immense.

But here is the meaning of the small stone that becomes a mountain:

**The King of Kings:**

1. Eternal **Supremacy**
   * Global **Saturation** and glorious exaltation

“And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed.” Daniel 2:44

This is what is happening every day right here in Tampa Bay and all over the world: the small stone keeps growing into a larger and larger mountain as proud kings of their own domains are confronted by the claims of Christ and bow to Jesus as the One True King.

**The King of Kings:**

1. Eternal **Supremacy**
   * Global **Saturation** and glorious exaltation

“Nor shall the kingdom be left to another. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever.” Daniel 2:44

After Jesus there will not be another King who will arise to take His place, as with all human kings. No. King Jesus reigns now and for all time. And His kingdom infiltrates and undermines all other kingdoms. The good news of Jesus Christ is the small stone – the simple message – that breaks into the heart of one person, who shares it with another, and the kingdom mountain grows and spreads a little further.

God revealed the mystery to Daniel.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **The kings of the world:** | **The King of Kings:** |
| 1. False **Deity**    * The **Appearance** of power without the reality 2. **Financial** idolatry    * The promise of **Security** without the provision 3. **Fleeting** Reality    * Conflict divides, everything **Decays** | 1. Full **Divinity**    * Initially small and intentionally **Fragile** 2. Total **Victory**    * Internal **Transformation** and viral multiplication 3. Eternal **Supremacy**    * Global **Saturation** and glorious exaltation |

He showed Daniel the contrast between **a great golden statue and a small stone**. The statue stands for the kings of this world, including you and me. The stone stands for Jesus, who came on Christmas night very small and fragile, but who conquered in total victory. Every king and every kingdom of this world will pass away, crumbling into dust. But King Jesus reigns forever.

***Where are you right now?***

* Are you like Nebuchadnezzar? The King of your own domain? Are you like that great golden image the king saw in his dream? If so, you are making yourself a false deity.
* Are you pursuing power in this world and the promises of wealth? Money is one of the most prominent idols of our day, and it is a very demanding master. Money always demands a little bit more and whatever you have it’s never enough.
* Are you living in the conflict and decay of this broken world? Life is fleeting. Everything breaks down. Every kingdom will fall, including yours and mine.

Have you been impacted by the small stone named Jesus?

* Have you experienced in that initially small and intentionally fragile baby born in Bethlehem the victorious king of Easter Sunday?
* Has the Lordship and glory of King Jesus exploded into your heart and life so that all other allegiances go up in a puff of smoke? Have you received that small stone as the seed of the kingdom?
* Have you acknowledged the total victory of Jesus, surrendering to Him as your King? Have you experienced the transforming power of the gospel of Jesus Christ to make you a new creation in Him?

The Kingdom of Jesus will never end. Those of us who belong to Him will love and serve Him forever. For now, ***our job is to share His love and victory with everyone we can!***

Who can you reach out to this Christmas season to help them get to know King Jesus?

Let’s pray.