

THE “ROCK OF AGES”—AND THE “STONE THAT WAS CUT WITHOUT HANDS”

Presented by

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[**NOTE TO THE READER:** This sermon is roughly twice the length of the sermons that Blake and Tyler usually present, due to the fact that both boys spoke under the same title. Tyler presented the first half of the lesson, and Blake presented the second half. As you read through the manuscript, you will find a bracketed note on page 3 indicating where Tyler stopped speaking, and where Blake began his part of the presentation.]

In our Sunday-morning “Journey through the Old Testament” class, Blake and I have been exposed to events that can only be described by superlative adjectives such as “astonishing,” “captivating,” “amazing,” “mesmerizing,” and yes, even “miraculous.” In our studies we have seen God create the Universe, and we have seen Him destroy the Earth by a global Flood. We have seen God part the waters of the Red Sea so that the Israelites could walk across it on dry ground, and we have seen Him use the parted waters of that same sea to annihilate the army of the pharaoh of Egypt. We have seen a 90-year-old woman by the name of Sarah give birth to a son by the name of Isaac, and we have seen a 7-year-old king by the name of Joash rule righteously the Southern Kingdom of Judah. We have seen Gideon’s army, composed of a mere 300 men, use only pitchers, torches, and trumpets to totally decimate the army of the Midianites and Amalekites—which Judges 7:12 describes as being “as numerous as locusts.” We have seen an angel of the Lord slay 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in a single night in order to save the beloved “City of David.” And we even have seen God act on numerous occasions throughout human history in order to protect His eternal plan to send His Son to Earth, as God, through His providence, repeatedly rescued single individuals who were absolutely essential to the success of that divine plan—a plan that we came to call “saved by one!”

Then, just about the time in our studies when we honestly felt that we could not be surprised in any more ways (or any more often!) than we already had been, God reached out to act in a way that we had not expected in order to accomplish things that we never could have imagined. In fact, the topic of our sermon today centers on one such instance in which God did exactly that. Here is what happened.

Because of the sins that Solomon committed when he married 700 foreign wives and erected temples in Israel to their false gods, God told the king, “I will tear the kingdom away from you and give it to your servant” (1 Kings 11:11). Sure enough, upon Solomon’s death God gave Solomon’s servant Jeroboam the ten tribes that became known as the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and gave Solomon’s son Rehoboam the single tribe of Judah, which came to be known as the Southern Kingdom. Eventually, in 722 B.C., the sins of the people of the Northern Kingdom caused them to be carried away into captivity by the Assyrian king Sargon II—the result being that the people who once composed that kingdom were never heard from again. A little over one hundred years later, in 605 B.C., the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar began a

series of attacks on the Southern Kingdom of Judah that lasted until 586 B.C., at which time Jerusalem was razed, Solomon's temple was destroyed, and the people of Judah were carried away into a captivity that would last for seventy years because of their many sins against God.

Among the first group of captives that Nebuchadnezzar carried back to Babylon in 605 B.C. were those whom the Bible describes as "some of the nobles—young men in whom there was no blemish, but good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand, who had ability to serve in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the language and literature of the Chaldeans" (Daniel 1:3-4). One of those youngsters was a boy by the name of Daniel who fared well during his three-year-long training program, and who, because of a rather unusual event in King Nebuchadnezzar's life, was destined to unexpectedly come to the personal attention of the immensely powerful Babylonian ruler.

According to Daniel 2, King Nebuchadnezzar went to sleep one night as usual, but was awakened during the night because "his spirit was so troubled that his sleep left him." What "troubled" Nebuchadnezzar so intensely that it actually awoke him from his sleep was a dream—a dream, as it turns out, that he could not even remember the next morning. As a result, the king called for his magicians, astrologers, and sorcerers, and said to them, "I have had a dream, and my spirit is anxious to know the dream." The magicians, astrologers, and sorcerers said to the king, "O king, live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will give the interpretation."

Nebuchadnezzar, however, responded by telling the assembled group of alleged "wise men" that he wanted **them** to tell **him** both **the dream** and **its interpretation!** The wise men were so taken aback that they said, "There is not a man on earth who can tell the king's matter; therefore no king, lord, or ruler has ever asked such things of any magician, astrologer, or Chaldean. It is a difficult thing that the king requests, and there is no other who can tell it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh." As a result of their stalling tactics, the Bible tells us that "the king was angry and very furious, and gave a command to destroy all the wise men of Babylon."

Eventually word reached Daniel about the king's decree. As a result, Daniel 2:16 informs us that "Daniel went in and asked the king to give him time, that he might tell the king the interpretation." The king granted Daniel the time he requested. The next two verses explain what happened next when they state that "Daniel went to his house, and made the decision known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions, that they might seek mercies from the God of heaven concerning this secret so that Daniel and his companions might not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon." Because of the young men's prayer to God, verse 19 says simply, "Then the secret was revealed to Daniel in a night vision."

Daniel then returned to the king to tell him both the dream and its interpretation. First, we would like to share with you King Nebuchadnezzar's dream. Second, we would like to share Daniel's interpretation of that dream. Then, third, we would like to show you the astonishing manner in which Daniel's interpre-

tation came true—and what it means to those of us today who are Christians. Here is Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, as told to him by Daniel through the power of God.

“You, O king, were watching; and behold, a great image. This great image, whose splendor was excellent, stood before you; and its form was awesome. This image’s head was of fine 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 clay. You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth” Daniel 2:31-35).

[NOTE TO THE READER: As explained on page 1, Tyler presented the first half of this lesson (above), and Blake presented the last half (below). This marks the spot where Tyler stopped speaking, and where Blake began.]

Here is the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream.

“You, O king, are a king of kings, for the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory; and wherever the children of men dwell, or the beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven, He has given them into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all—you are this head of gold. But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours; then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others. Whereas you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter’s clay and partly of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; yet the strength of the iron shall be in it, just as you saw the iron mixed with ceramic clay. And as the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile. As you saw iron mixed with ceramic clay, they will mingle with the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay.

And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold—the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure” (vss. 37-45).

We know today, of course—because we can look backwards at the events of human history—what those four kingdoms were. The first kingdom, represented by the statue’s golden head, was the Babylonian Empire, of which Nebuchadnezzar was then the ruler. The second kingdom, represented by the statue’s silver chest and arms, was the Medo-Persian Empire, which would be ruled by such kings as Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes. The third kingdom, represented by the statue’s bronze belly and thighs, was the empire of the renowned Greek warrior Alexander the Great. The fourth kingdom, represented by the iron legs, as well as by the feet of iron and clay, was the Roman Empire, which at first was ruled by the Senate, but then later came to be ruled by emperors such as Julius Caesar, Marc Antony, Claudius, Nero, Vespasian, and others.

But the two questions we want to ask you today are as follows. First, what was “the stone that was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces”? Second, what was “the kingdom that shall never be destroyed,” “the kingdom that shall not be left to other people,” and the kingdom that “shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and that shall stand forever”?

Here are the answers to those two questions. The “little stone cut out of the mountain without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay and broke them in pieces,” represented the kingdom of God—**Christ’s church**—that ended up outlasting every single one of those great world empires. When Daniel told King Nebuchadnezzar that “in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed” (Daniel 2:44), he got it exactly right! Christ’s church was indeed established during the days of “those kings”—who happened to be the emperors of the Roman Empire. We see the beginning of that “little stone” in Luke 2:1, where we are told that “it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.” As a result of that Roman decree, a man and woman who both had come from the lineage of King David—Joseph and Mary—traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem where God’s Son, Jesus Christ, would be born into their family. Several years later during Christ’s earthly ministry He told His disciples, “I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). One verse later, in Matthew 16:19, Christ said to Peter, “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven,” clearly indicating that the “kingdom” and the “church” are one and the same. On the Day of Pentecost following Christ’s crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension into heaven, Peter used those “keys” (the Gospel message) to preach the first Gospel-based sermon to introduce to the Jews who were assembled in Jerusalem the kingdom of heaven—the church of Christ.

Because the church was planned and instituted by the God of heaven “before the foundation of the world” (1 Peter 1:19-20; Acts 2:23-24), and because, as Jesus Himself explained, His Kingdom is “not of this world” (John 18:36), it often is referred to in the New Testament as “the kingdom **of heaven.**” Jesus Christ, as the church’s singular Head (Ephesians 5:23), is its sole reigning Monarch, and rules it by His sovereign Word because He has been given “all authority in heaven and on earth” to do so (Matthew 28:18). All humans—both those in the church and those outside of the church—will one day stand before God to be judged by, as Jesus put it “the word that I have spoken” (John 12:48). On that fateful day, according to Matthew 16:27, “the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his deeds.”

In Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, the kingdom of God was symbolized by “the little stone cut out of the mountain without hands, and that smote the great image upon the feet, broke it all into pieces, scattered all of the world empires as dust, and increased until it filled the whole earth.” Has Daniel’s interpretation

of the king's dream come true? Indeed it has. As the apostle Paul noted in Colossians 1:23, even as he penned his epistle to the Colossians in A.D. 63, the Gospel was in the process of being preached "to every creature under heaven."

And was Christianity "scattering all of the world empires as dust"? Yes, it was. The renowned historian Will Durant once wrote on this very subject,

"There is no greater drama in human record than the sight of a few Christians, scorned or oppressed by a succession of emperors, beating all trials with fierce tenacity, multiplying quietly, building order while their enemies generated chaos, fighting the sword with the word, brutality with hope, and at last defeating the strongest state that history has known. Caesar and Christ had met in the arena, **and Christ had won.**"

In A.D. 389, the Roman emperor Theodosius closed down all pagan temples, outlawed the pagan priesthood, and initiated numerous other changes that emphasized the totality of the Christian victory. As Daniel 2:35 predicted, "The stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth."

Daniel also predicted that "the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed" (Daniel 2:44). Indeed, Christ's church is a kingdom that knows no decay, can never fall prey to any form of human revolution, and is in no danger of any type of destruction that can possibly be imagined or brought about by either physical or spiritual beings. As Jesus Himself said, even "the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). Regardless of what humans or devils may think or do, Christ's church remains forever the same and forever safe—because it was created on the rock of Peter's confession that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16).

At the end of time, when this Earth is "burned up with a fervent heat" (2 Peter 3:10), Christ then will "deliver the kingdom to God the Father, and will put an end to all rule and all authority and power" (1 Corinthians 15:24). The kingdom of Christ will outlive all other kingdoms, and will continue to flourish long after those kingdoms have dissolved into the dusty pages of history and been long since forgotten—because Christ's church is the everlasting kingdom about which the prophet Isaiah wrote, "Of the increase of His government and peace **there will be no end**" (Isaiah 9:7).

As Tyler said earlier, just about the time in our studies when he and I felt that we could not be surprised in any more ways, or any more often, than we already had been surprised, we saw God reach out to act again in a way that we had not expected in order to accomplish things that we never could have imagined. What possibly could provide better proof of the truthfulness of that statement than the forgotten dream of an ancient Babylonian king—as interpreted by a captive Jewish boy—about how the God of heaven would "set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed" based upon "the Rock of Ages" who is "King of kings and Lord of lords" (Revelation 19:16)?

It goes without saying that if the things we have seen thus far in our studies are any indication, God undoubtedly will continue to amaze and astonish us—not just because of **what He does**, but also because

of **Who He is**. Just between you and me—we hardly can wait to see what other remarkable revelations God has in store for us in the days, weeks, and months that lie ahead as we make our way toward the end of our “Journey through the Old Testament.” And in case you’re wondering...yes, we will be happy to let you know what those revelations are—in our future sermons!