

# A Stone in the Hand of God

## A look at Nebuchadnezzar's dream

*The image revealed to Nebuchadnezzar, while representing the deterioration of the kingdoms of the earth in power and glory, also fitly represents the deterioration of religion and morality among the people of these kingdoms. As nations forget God, in like proportion they become weak morally.*—The *SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, on Dan. 2:37-42, p. 1168. (Italics supplied.)

### A DUAL REPRESENTATION

The words "religion" and "morality" clearly point to the spiritual approach to this chapter rather than the literal and more common interpretation. In both cases the image is symbolic, but in one instance the symbols represent military prowess and political strength while in the other, devotion to the true God and loyalty to the principles of heaven are revealed. It is this second application of symbols that we wish to trace consistently through to the end.

### THE FOUR METALS

First, the head of gold represents not only Babylon but her knowledge and acquaintance with the true and living God—a knowledge of real worth, gold tried in the fire. But, "Babylon passed away because in her prosperity she forgot *God*."—*Ibid*.

This knowledge of God is clearly manifested in the experience of Nebuchadnezzar as he extols the King of heaven (Dan. 4:37). Her forgetfulness is demonstrated by Belshazzar, who humbled not his heart though he knew of his father's experiences. "And he [Nebuchadnezzar] was driven from the sons of men, . . . his body was wet with the dew of heaven; *till he knew* that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men.... And thou his son, O Belshazzar, *hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this*" (Dan. 5:21, 22). As a result the kingdom was finished and given to the Medes and Persians (verses 23-31).

Second, the Medo-Persian kingdom shows a marked change religiously, even as silver stands out against gold. "The Medo-Persian kingdom was visited by the wrath of heaven. . . The fear of the Lord found no place in the hearts of the people."—*Ibid*.

This attitude is clearly chronicled in the book of Esther and the nonchalant manner in which Xerxes would have exterminated the Jews.

Third and Fourth, were the kingdoms of Greece and Rome, and it is in their metallic representation that we see a still greater decline, even as brass and iron stand in sharp contrast to gold and silver. "The kingdoms that followed were even more base and corrupt. . . They sank lower and still lower in the scale of moral value." *Ibid*.

The epitome of this deteriorated relationship with the true God is reached when "with the arms of a flood shall they [God's people] be overthrown from before him, and shall be broken; yea, also the prince of the covenant" (Dan. 11:22)—the crucifixion of Christ under the iron monarchy of Rome.

## **RELIGIOUS CORRUPTION IN THE TOES**

Continuity and consistency of application dictate a further moral decline among the toes. We find, that—We have come to a time when God's sacred work is represented by the feet of the image in which the iron was mixed with the miry clay. . . . The mingling of churchcraft and statecraft is represented by the iron and the clay. . . . This investing the church with power of the state will bring evil results. Men have almost passed the point of God's forbearance.—/bid., on Dan. 2:43.

The fulfillment of this phase can be clearly seen even as the elements of pagan and, later, papal Rome have diffused themselves throughout the world. By their religious influence and iron determination they guide and control the weaker and more pliable segments of Christendom. Notice,

God's word has given warning of the impending danger; let this be unheeded, and the Protestant world will learn what the purposes of Rome really are, only when it is too late to escape the snare. She is silently growing into power. Her doctrines are exerting their influence in legislative halls, in the churches, and in the hearts of *men*.—*The Great Controversy*, p. 581.

True, nations before have stood against God—but in ignorance. The corruption among the toes and its eventual defiance of God is without excuse. "Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth" (John 9:41). The claim of papal Rome as the only depository of God's truth makes the sin exceedingly sinful.

The religious corruption and pagan elements begun in Babylon have dearly extended to our day even as the metallic substance of the image extends from the head down to the feet. This continuation of influence is also brought to view in Revelation 13:2, where the beast is composed of the body of a leopard, the feet of a bear, and the mouth of a lion. Truly this beast and these feet have picked up such elements from the foregoing nations as are needed for survival, prosperity, and religious influence in the world.

"Babylonia, . . . the kingdom preeminently which has moulded the *world*."—*Prophets and Kings*, p. 495.

"The earliest religious . . . traditions of our present civilization were cradled in Babylonia."—Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia, Art. "Babylonia," quoted in *Prophets and Kings*, p. 496.

No wonder in the book of Revelation, chapter 18:2, we read, "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird." One of the most prominent religious traditions that have molded the world is the custom of worshiping on the day of the sun. This custom existed in Babylon, continued in Persia, extended to Greece, advanced to Rome, from whence it spread to all the world, perverting the law of God. This line is clearly traced, just as the metallic substance can be traced, through all the kingdoms represented. (For this see R. L. Odom's book, *Sunday in Roman Paganism*. Compare page 151 for Babylon; page 43 for Persia; page 42 for Greece; pages 52, 153 for Rome; and for the feet, pages 53, 187.) So sun worship, the forerunner of Sunday worship, is still present with us today, not that Christians worship the sun, but rather that in either case the law of God is set at naught. It is this breaking of God's law that is soon to be enforced. We see the mingling of churchcraft and statecraft, the controlling of the consciences of men.

## **THE STONE**

In Daniel 2:34, 35 we find a stone bearing down upon the image, smiting it upon its feet and then growing into a mountain. In all three areas of action the stone is the focal point.

1. The *stone* is "cut out without hands."
2. The *stone* smites the image on its feet.
3. The *stone* becomes a mountain.

Now we cannot stop short and shift positions in the middle of the interpretation. The most important part is yet to come, namely the setting up of God's kingdom. If the interpretation is to be consistent and sure, the symbolic representation must also be applied to the stone as was applied to the previous sections of the dream. That is, the religious and moral relationship to God's truth must be met also in the symbolism of the stone.

First, let us consider the stone itself. "Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become *the* head of the corner?" (Matt. 21:42). "Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed" (Rom. 9:33). The Rock whereof it speaks is Christ (1 Cor. 10:4). Christ is the Rock upon which the church is built and "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). Nevertheless, Christ said, "It is expedient for you that I go away" (John 16:7). Therefore in a more practical sense it is the confession in Jesus Christ as the Son of the living God that constitutes the Rock (Matt. 16:15). It is the relationship of God to His people and they to Him that binds the church to the Arm of strength and the power of Omnipotence.

In another scripture we find that the stone again is Christ, but this time it is Christ working through His word. In 1 Peter 2:7, 8 we read: "The stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which *stumble at the word, being disobedient.*" Here the rock is not only Christ but obedience to that which is of Christ. The same thought is brought out in the parable of Matthew 7:21-27. Christ is saying that mere profession is not enough to enter heaven but obedience to the will of God is also very much an essential. "Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock." *Therefore* means, "in conclusion." In conclusion of what? Concluding the fact that obedience is a necessary prerequisite. "Therefore . . . , I will liken him unto a wise man [a man that was wise to obey], which built his house upon a rock: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock"—founded upon the rock of obedience, obedience to the Rock of Ages.

Further amplification of this practical point is seen in Revelation 14:6-12. It is not the three angels that are spreading the gospel, the judgment hour message, et cetera. It is God working through His people. Therefore the stone represents Christ, yes, but Christ working through His word, which means working through His people. For "how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Rom. 10:14). It is men who carry the gospel and confront their fellow mortals *with the necessity of obedience to God's Word*. It is at the words of the living preacher that men stumble and fall. Christ first, then Christ through His Word, afterward Christ through His people, requiring obedience. This is the foundation stone of the church, the cornerstone which cannot be set aside. Now the question is, Can this practical aspect of this symbolic stone fulfill the necessary three points the stone must fulfill?

## **THE STONE CUT WITHOUT HANDS**

"Without hands" means of divine origin (Heb. 9:24). Since the stone represents God's message of salvation and obedience to it, we must look for a special awakening of God's message in the latter days—the time of the feet of the image. In 1844 a movement began that was of divine origin. It was not a movement of man's devising but was the doing of the Lord God of heaven. It came at a time in earth's history when churchcraft and statecraft would once again come into focus and finally bloom in its fullness—a time of religious awakening and reinstating of great truths once delivered to the saints. The stone cut out without hands represents the three angels' messages—the work of Christ in the earth, culminating in the establishment of His everlasting kingdom.

This stone has its origin from the mountain, and Ezekiel 28:14-16 applies this figure to the throne and dwelling place of God, the heavenly sanctuary: "Thou [Lucifer] wast upon the holy mountain of God." Again, "I will cast thee as profane out of the mountain of God." Where else, I pray thee, did this message arise except from the great truth of the sanctuary of God. "Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed" (Dan. 8:14). Then shall the truth of the sanctuary be revealed again, the truth about the true sanctuary which the Lord pitched and not man (Heb. 8:2). Notice,

I was shown three steps—the first, second, and third angels' messages. Said my accompanying angel, "Woe to him who shall move a block or stir a pin of these messages. The true understanding of these messages is of vital importance. The destiny of souls hangs upon the manner in which they are received." I was again brought down through these messages, and saw how dearly the people of God had purchased their experience. It had been obtained through much suffering and severe conflict. *God had led them along step by step, until He had placed them upon a solid, immovable platform.—Early Writings*, pp. 258, 259. (Italics supplied.)

## **THE STONE SMITES AND BREAKS**

"And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder" (Matt. 21:44). The grinding of the stone represents the separation of the chaff from the wheat. So also the three angels' messages—God's final appeal to men—will sift from the world those who love God and those who love Him not. "Sanctify the Lord of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. And he shall be for a sanctuary; . . . a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel. . . . And many among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken. Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples" (Isa. 8:13-16). It is only in the three angels' messages that we see this text fulfilled. Here only it is that we see the sanctuary, the law, and the sealing emphasized. Through these mediums God will be a stumbling block to many. The hour of God's judgment, the fall of Babylon, the corruption of the beast—these are the stumbling stones of God. It is the law that is the great taskmaster to bring us to God.

The three angels' messages will also expose the sins of Babylon by striking at the footing of all religious intolerance--churchcraft and statecraft.

Thus the message of the third angel will be proclaimed. . . . The sins of Babylon will be laid open. The fearful results of enforcing the observances of the church by civil authority, the inroads of Spiritualism, the stealthy but rapid progress of the papal power,—all will be unmasked. By these solemn warnings the people will be stirred. Thousands upon

thousands will listen who have never heard words like these.—The *Great Controversy*, p. 606.

This does not mean that the message will succeed in ushering in a theocracy. On the contrary, Sunday laws will be enforced. But God's people will succeed in smashing the plans of Satan and prevent a complete triumph of spiritual enslavement of the world by the evil one.

### **THE STONE BECOMES A MOUNTAIN**

"Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth: but when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it" (Mark 4:30-32). Truly this fits the movement of the third angel. The time will come, yes, is come, when we no more will be considered an insignificant people. Here we have a picture of growth. The swelling of the third angel's message into the loud cry of Revelation 18 and the finishing of the work of God in the earth.

The prophecies in the eighteenth of Revelation will soon be fulfilled. During the proclamation of the third angel's message, "another angel" is to "come down from heaven, having great power," and the earth is to be "lightened with his glory." The Spirit of the Lord will so graciously bless consecrated human instrumentalities that *men, women, and children will open their lips in praise and thanksgiving, filling the earth with the knowledge of God, and with His unsurpassed glory, as the waters cover the sea.*—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, on Rev. 18:1, p. 984. (Italics supplied.)

"After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. . . . And he said to me, *These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple*" (Rev. 7:9-15). (Italics supplied.)

This preaching of the third angel's message is the mountain that fills the whole earth as the waters cover the sea. This is climaxed only by the appearance of God Himself. In fact, Daniel sees these glories as one—the glories of the closing message blending with the glories of the new heaven and the new earth. As earth and sky seem to meet on the horizon, so to the prophet's vision the twain are as one. Quickly the man of God spans the millennium and sees the church as the mountain and the mountain as the earth made new.

God refers to His church as "my mountain in the field" (Jer. 17:3). "In the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills" (Micah 4:1). (Compare *Counsels to Teachers*, pp. 454, 455.) "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Isa. 11:9).