

His Kingdom Lasts Forever

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Date: 24 January 2021

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[0 : 0 0] Okay, well, what does the future hold? After a difficult 2020, what can we expect in 2021? At the end of last year, The Economist published The World in 2021, and it's their annual forecast for the year ahead, with the experts predicting the trends, the technology, the leaders, the nations that are most likely to influence the world in the coming year. And on the front cover, they had a big picture of a slot machine, and the lever on the slot machine had a tiny world at the end. And the images on the slot machine essentially summed up the influences of 2020.

So there's the coronavirus, there's a needle for the vaccine, there's an emoji with a face mask, there's a Zoom logo, there's the China flag, there's the US flag ripped in half, there's a cartoon face of Joe Biden, there's a dollar sign, there's a bomb, there's the TikTok logo, and there's a couple of question marks. Now, of course, you should never judge a book by its cover. But you don't need to read The Economist, The World in 2021, to know that they expect the future to be a bit of a gamble.

Where 2021 is going to be, they suspect, highly unpredictable, due to the ongoing pandemic, struggling economies, divisive politics, and controlling technologies. And so, along with the unpredictability comes insecurity, and along with insecurity comes fear. And so the future does rightly concern us, whether globally, or nationally, or personally. And we might find ourselves asking, well, who is really in control? Where does the power actually lie? And how will this power be used to shape our world? And what impact will all of this have on my life? And so we may think that power comes from a number of places in the world, like the Houses of Parliament in Westminster, or the Scottish Parliament in Holyrood, or the European Parliament in Brussels, or the Great Hall of the People in

Beijing, or the Capitol Building in Washington. But as we've seen recently, the places that presume to have power can be shown up to be very weak and fragile indeed, because there's a limit to what human power can do. And we're given this much-needed reminder from our Bible reading this morning in Daniel chapter 2, because we're told that powerful leaders and nations aren't in control, no matter how much they like to think they are. And we are certainly not in control, no matter how much we like to think that we are. Because the message of Daniel, you see, is God rules. God rules over this world, and God rules over our lives. And that's really the significance of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, where this giant statue is smashed by a rock. And Daniel's interpretation tells us that the worldly kings and kingdoms will rise and they will fall, whereas God is establishing a kingdom that will last forever and will never fall. And so the message of Daniel wasn't just a comfort for the people in exile, that's the context of the book, but it was also a challenge to all people to know and to understand that God rules. And that's probably why Daniel chapters 2 to 7 were written in Aramaic, because

Aramaic at the time was the international language that everybody spoke, which meant that the message is a message of universal significance. It's for those who believe in God, but it's also for those who don't believe in God. And so whatever you stand in relation to God today, Daniel's message that God rules is one that you need to know. And so we'll look at Daniel 2, and we'll see two things this morning. We'll see how God shakes our foundation and how God rocks our world, because the message applies to our individual lives and it also applies to our world. So our first point is God shakes our foundation, verse 1 to verse 30. And our second point is God rocks our world, verse 31 to 49. So first of all, let's look at God shaking our foundation. How does he do it? Well, we see this in how he deals with Nebuchadnezzar by giving him this dream. And that's the focus of chapter 2. What we see is that

[4 : 49] Nebuchadnezzar was shaken, but Daniel was not stirred. So it wasn't James Bond who came up with shaken, not stirred. It's here in Daniel chapter 2. Nebuchadnezzar was shaken. You see, he was a mighty king, and his Babylonian empire was the great superpower of the ancient world. He was the ultimate big man who ruled. And so there was no opposition party. And so you would like to think or imagine that he would sleep like a baby. And his lovely big soft bed and his nice secure palace. But, verse 1 says, in the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams. His mind was troubled and he could not sleep.

And so we're introduced to him and he's in his pajamas, probably cold sweat, walking around in his massive palace because he is unable to sleep. So despite having the head that wears the crown, he is deeply disturbed by his dreams. God shook the very foundation of his life.

And so he said to his dream team, verse 3, I have had a dream that troubles me and I want to know what it means. But his plan wasn't to tell them the dream so they could then interpret it. No, he wanted them to tell him the dream first and then interpret. And so can you see, despite the king's great power, he is in a realm that he can't control. And despite the dream team's wisdom, they are in a realm that they can't control. And they knew it. Verse 10 tells us, the astrologers answered the king, there is no one on earth who can do what the king asks. No one, no king, however great and mighty, has ever asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or astrologer. What the king asks is too difficult. No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among humans. And so for all their pagan religion, for all their worldly wisdom, they knew that this was way beyond them. The dream from God was a shock to the system for Nebuchadnezzar.

And it shook him because the realization was dawning on him that he, though powerful, didn't really have control. So verse 12 says, this made the king so angry and furious that he ordered the execution of all the wise men in Babylon. Now, Nebuchadnezzar here exemplifies humanity his insecurity. His dream is a startling wake-up call for him because it's devastating to discover that despite the power and control that you have, that you're not actually in control. And the wisdom of this world is powerless to help us because Nebuchadnezzar didn't just have dreams. He had everything that anybody could dream of. Power, riches, success, influence. Actually, his hanging gardens in Babylon became one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. And so he may have thought that he was the grand old Duke of York controlling all his men, but in reality, he was more like Humpty Dumpty.

And no matter how much he ranted and raved, all the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put King Nebuchadnezzar together again. And so despite being one of the most powerful men on earth, he realized he was still only a man. We might sum up his words with the German philosopher's words, Friedrich Nietzsche, who said, if there is a God, how can I bear not to be that God?

[8 : 39] So Nebuchadnezzar was so shaken by his dream that he couldn't cope. Because anything that shakes the foundations of our lives and reveals our weakness will disturb us. It reminds us that we can't fully control our lives because in reality, we are weak and fragile human beings. And whatever we've been trusting in to give us power or control will ultimately fail us. And so the foundations of your life might be a mixture of power, success, wealth, relationships, looks. But then what happens when those foundations are shaken, when they're knocked and you're troubled and you realize that you aren't in control? One example that's obvious is the fact that COVID-19 has shaken our lives. We thought we were in control of our lives, in control of our health, in control of our jobs, in control of our families, in control of our plans for the future. But how wrong we were. A virus comes along and it reminds us that we can't say, along with Henley's *Invictus*, that I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul. And so whatever makes up the foundation of your life, if it isn't God, it will be like the feet of clay in the dream. It's weak, it's fragile, and it will crumble away unless God smashes it to teach us that he rules and we don't. Because if we don't know with certainty that God rules, then we will continue to be haunted by fear and anxiety. So that's Nebuchadnezzar, clearly shaken. But Daniel, well Daniel was not stirred. Daniel knew that God rules, and it's clear from how he handled himself in the situation. And so before we get to the dream and its interpretation, it's worth pausing to see how God's people should live in the world, knowing that God rules. Because basically the prospects were not good for Daniel. Verse 13 says, so the decree was issued to put the wise men to death, and men were sent to look for Daniel and his friends to put them to death. So despite the threat, despite the danger, see how Daniel responds. He responds by doing five things. First of all, he speaks wisely. Verse 14 to 15, we read that Daniel spoke with wisdom and tact. So Daniel didn't give in, waiting to be executed, but nor did he panic. He knew he had something to say, and he knew the best way to say it. So he speaks wisely. Secondly, he thinks strategically. Verse 16, Daniel made a bold request of the king. He asked for more time so that he might interpret the dream for him. So he sticks his neck on the line, quite literally, and yet he could do that because he had confidence in God. Look back to chapter 1 in verse 17, where we read that God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning, and Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds. So he's thinking about using the abilities that God has given to him. So he speaks wisely. He thinks strategically. Thirdly, he prays specifically. Verse 17 and 18. The first thing Daniel does is arrange a prayer meeting with his mates.

Verse 18 says, he urged them to plead for mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that he and his friends might not be executed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. Praying to God, whether for Daniel or for us, praying to the God of heaven is an acknowledgement that God rules, no matter what situation that we find ourselves in. So he speaks wisely. He thinks strategically. He prays specifically.

And fourthly, he worships instinctively. Verse 20 to 23. When God revealed the dream in a vision, Daniel's automatic response wasn't to run to the king so that he might save his skin. First of all, he gave praise and thanks to God. Verse 20. Praise be to the name of God forever and ever. Wisdom and power are his. Daniel knew wisdom and power belong to God, not to this world. And so that's why building our lives on anything other than God is to build on a very shaky foundation. And then fifthly, Daniel doesn't just speak wisely, think strategically, pray specifically, worship instinctively. Fifthly, he acts decisively. Verse 24 to 30. Daniel said to Ariok, he was the man who was tasked with executing the wise men of Babylon. He said, take me to the king and I will interpret his dream for him. And so when Daniel goes to the king, the king asks him, are you able to tell me what I saw in my dream and interpret it? And then verse 27, Daniel replied, no wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about. But there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come. Your dream and the visions that pass through your mind as you were lying in bed are these. So Daniel acts decisively because he testifies about God to this pagan king. He seizes the opportunity to show how weak human wisdom is and how weak human power is.

Only God in heaven, Daniel says, only the God who rules could reveal the mystery of this dream to the king. And so we've got two men, Nebuchadnezzar, shaken, Daniel, not stirred. Who are we more like?

We're shaken if we look to the wisdom and power of this world to help us because it will fail. It won't manage. And yet Daniel tells us that we should really look to the God who rules and have confidence in him because to him belongs all wisdom and all power.

[15 : 13] So see the contrast. God shakes our foundation. That's our first point. He certainly shook Nebuchadnezzar's foundation, but Daniel remained firm. So let's look then at our second point and get into the dream and its meaning.

Our second point is God rocks our world. Verse 31 to 49. Literally, God rocks our world. And it's clear in the dream because the dream here reveals the future.

So first of all, the dream. Verse 31. The king saw an enormous, dazzling statue, awesome in appearance. And then a rock struck the statue. It was broken into pieces and then swept away by the wind.

So we read, but the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth. So that's basically the king's dream. But what did it mean?

Well, God revealed the interpretation to Daniel, who then told the king. Because the body parts of the statue are different kingdoms. So when we read from verse 36 to 38, this becomes clear.

[16 : 22] This was the dream, and now we will interpret it to the king. Your majesty, you are the king of kings. The God of heaven has given you dominion and power and might and glory. And in your hands he has placed all mankind and the beasts of the field and the birds in the sky.

Wherever they live, he has made you ruler over them all. You are that head of gold. So the head of gold is Nebuchadnezzar and probably his Babylonian empire.

And Daniel makes it clear that his power was given to him by God. And then the rest of the statue represents the successive kingdoms which stretch into the future.

And so while Daniel doesn't mention the other kingdoms by name, the dream refers to the kingdoms which followed Babylon and the Babylonian empire in world history.

So in all, four kingdoms are mentioned. So we've said the head of gold is the Babylonian empire. And then it was followed by the Medo-Persian empire, the Medes and the Persians.

[17 : 28] That's the chest and arms of silver. And then that empire was followed by the Greek empire. That's the belly and the thighs of bronze. And then it was followed by the Roman empire.

And that's represented by the legs of iron. And then there's the feet of iron and clay because the Roman empire, we're told, would be a divided kingdom, a strong one, but one that would be easily broken.

And so from the top of the statue right down to the bottom, we're being told the statue represents human kingdoms. From strength, great strength, right down to great instability.

And then that's where the rock comes in. Verse 34 says, While you were watching, a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them.

And then we read later, verse 35, But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth. So how are we to understand the rock and the mountain?

[18 : 37] Well, the rock represents Jesus Christ and the mountain is the kingdom of God. The kingdom that God is establishing through Jesus Christ.

How do we know? Well, because notice that the rock is not of human origin. Twice we're told a rock was cut out, but not by human hands, indicating Jesus' divine origin.

And that's why the kingdom that Jesus brought is indestructible. Verse 44, The God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed. And it's also unconquerable, because it will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end.

And again in verse 44, It's eternal. It will itself endure forever. So while every human kingdom rises and falls, God's kingdom lasts forever.

And so the dream is saying that the kingdom of God would arrive with Jesus during the time of the Roman Empire. And when did Jesus come? During the time of the Roman rule.

[19 : 42] But this kingdom would continue to grow. And it would take over everything. And so when Jesus came, he said, The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near.

Repent and believe the good news. And so as God's king, Jesus came to establish the kingdom on earth. It came through his life, through his ministry, and through his death and resurrection.

So that now, Jesus Christ reigns as king. And one day, Jesus will return. And so the kingdom of God arrived in Jesus' first coming.

But it will come in its fullness when Jesus comes again. And that's why the kingdom of God is already, but not yet.

Already, but not yet. And so for Nebuchadnezzar, the dream was about the future. But for us, part of the dream has been fulfilled. Jesus, the rock, has already come.

[20 : 42] And yet the mountain is still growing. And it will fill the whole earth when Jesus returns. So I guess you could say that we're living the dream right now.

Because we are between the already and the not yet of the kingdom of God. How does the kingdom grow? Well, the kingdom grows as people submit to Jesus as God's king.

And then follow him. And it will continue to advance every single day until the day that Jesus returns. And it will be fully and finally complete.

God literally rocks our world. Because Daniel chapter 2 isn't irrelevant ancient history. The dream doesn't just give a timetable for history.

But it interprets history for us. History according to God's rule. It's revealing to us God's plan and God's timetable for the world.

[21 : 41] But also for your life and mine and our part in it. And so it assures us that God rules right now in this present time.

Because he has got the future taken care of. So the dream and its interpretation reveal the ultimate triumph of the kingdom of God. And this must have been such a boost for God's people in exile.

Reminding them that God rules. And so they must keep living for him. But it was also a challenge for all nations. Reminding them that because God rules, they must submit to him.

And Nebuchadnezzar began to recognize this. So verse 47. 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. And so whether we would call ourselves a Christian or not, we must recognize that God rules. And so when the superpowers of this world show off their strength, or when thrones topple, or when regimes are overthrown, or when administrations change, or when political parties become government, we need to know that behind all of the rising and falling of human kingdoms, God is building his everlasting kingdom.

[23 : 06] And it will be a perfect kingdom of peace and justice ruled by a loving king in Jesus. And so we just need to look back to history, or even to the world around, to see the outworking of this dream.

For example, all that's left of Nebuchadnezzar's powerful Babylon are just a few exhibits in various museums around the world. And so you can visit them in the British Museum in London.

Or you can go to the Berlin Museum and see the beautiful Ishtar Gate that was once part of Babylon. And then there's the Roman Empire. What's happened to it?

Well, there isn't a Roman Empire anymore. There's loads of roads. And if you visit Rome, you can go and see loads of nice buildings. But they are all crumbling. And it used to be rule Britannia.

Britannia rules the waves. But no longer. Last century, we had Nazi Germany and the Third Reich. So powerful, and yet soon defeated.

[24 : 10] And then there's the communism in Europe, collapsing along with the Berlin Wall. But what about the mighty empires of our own day? Well, there's the United States of America.

But it's a very divided nation, looking very fragile. So one president rules for four years. Then on the day of the new president's inauguration, he starts to dismantle the previous president's legacy.

With his own administrations to overturn the last administration's policy. And so whether you think it's good or bad for a nation, it doesn't exactly exude of great power or control.

But what about China? It is undoubtedly becoming more and more powerful. And North Korea. North Korea loves to display its military strength.

And then there's the Islamic State, working away in the news that we never see. And don't forget the big tech, flexing their muscles in Silicon Valley to show their power.

[25 : 18] It can be frightening to think about, can't it? And yet the dream in Daniel chapter 2 reminds us that these powers are simply feet of clay.

They may exercise some power for a while, but they will go. And one day all human power will ultimately be crushed. And so the reality is that God rules.

And it's his kingdom that is the only true superpower. And so while it's impossible to know in exact detail what the future holds, we can know who holds the future.

Because he has already revealed the big picture of what that future is. God is building a kingdom that lasts forever. And so we can be confident that history is not dictated by kings, presidents, prime ministers, dictators, empires, governments, tyrannies, or terrorists.

And nor is it determined by the environment, nor economics, or even pandemics. And nor is this world a victim of random and chance. Nebuchadnezzar's dream reveals that history is his story.

[26 : 33] With Jesus Christ as the very centerpiece of that history. And so God has rocked our world by sending Jesus to establish his everlasting kingdom.

He rules over our world. And so that should tell us that he rules over your life and mine. And so don't let the mysteries of Daniel chapter 2 confuse you.

Because the message is clear, isn't it? God rules and his kingdom will continue to march on until the day that it comes in all its fullness. With nothing and no one able to stand in its way.

Jesus himself made this clear when he spoke about himself in Luke chapter 20. So in the parable of the tenants, Jesus alluded to the rock that's in the dream in Daniel chapter 2.

Jesus tells of a vineyard owner's son who is rejected and killed by the tenants. And it's indicating his own rejection and death.

[27 : 38] And so Jesus quoted one of the Psalms to say, The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. And then he added, Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces.

Anyone on whom it falls will be crushed. So Jesus is using the language that comes straight out of Daniel chapter 2. Jesus is saying that God's kingdom will be established through his own rejection and death.

And so the kingdoms of this world, all powerful as they may look, are actually very weak. And yet Jesus Christ and his kingdom, seeming so weak and insignificant, will actually take over the world.

And so Jesus is saying here that whilst his kingdom is established, he's also the stone who will crush anyone who stands in opposition to him.

And so there is salvation on offer right now before that judgment comes. And so the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection means that when we repent of our sin and believe in Jesus now, then we are welcomed into God's everlasting kingdom.

[28 : 54] But if we continue to reject Jesus in this life, then he will reject us when he returns as judge.

And so please don't miss this, because this is what the history of this world is all about. And so there's an urgency to respond to God's rule now and to receive Jesus as king while there's still time.

So have you done that? Because the time is coming when the kingdom of the world will become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever.

That's what we're told at the end of the Bible, and that will be the end of history as we know it. So are you prepared? You can be by going to Jesus and becoming part of a kingdom that lasts forever.

Amen.