

“The Statue and the Stone”

Daniel 2:24-49

Most of you will be familiar with the name Paul Harvey, a man who was legendary in the world of radio broadcasting. From 1951 to 2008, his radio broadcasts were heard by 24 million listeners each week on more than 1,200 stations. It was printed in more than 300 newspapers. He had one of those deep voices which are perfect for radio. Up until his death in 2009, Paul Harvey hosted a series in which he told stories with plot twists and turns unknown to the public at large. And no one could tell a surprise ending better than him. Listeners waited for the last sentence, followed by a pause, then his famous phrase as he ended his broadcast that has become iconic—“And now you know...the rest of the story.”

If you and I are not careful, we can find ourselves getting sucked into the drama of our time so that we become way out of balance. Fear and anxiety wraps its icy grip around our minds as we find ourselves frustrated by the spiritual decline of our generation. We may even begin responding to the world around us as if it were our enemy rather than our mission field. That’s why as Christians you and I must live with ‘the rest of the story’ in mind. It provides answers to our questions, releases tension, and builds confidence in our hearts as we work our way through various chapters. It is important for seeing the big picture. God’s Word tells us the story of redemption. We know the beginning chapters of the story, we’re living somewhere in the middle of it all in the present. But what about the end of the story? Where is it all headed? Secularism says that the world does not have a coherent story line. It is man merely reacting to his world with himself being the main actor. And as far as the future is concerned, secularists can only speculate, throw their hands up and say, “Who knows?” However, those of us

who view history as God's story, with His purposes and plans playing out, we see the world differently. For not only do we see God's hand at work in the past and present, but as Paul Harvey said, we also know the rest of the story!

Turn with me in your Bible to the second chapter of Daniel, a chapter that is one of the most remarkable chapters in all of Scripture. Within this passage we are told about a king who has a dream. It is a significant dream, a dream that he knows has an element of mystery to it, but it is one that he doesn't understand. So he turns to the smartest and most respected men of his empire to provide him with some explanation. None of his advisers and wise men can offer him any answers. However, there is a young man in his kingdom among the captives from Judah, and Daniel is his name. This book of the Old Testament that bears his name tells us the story of his life in Babylon that spans more than seven decades.

As we pick up the story in verse 24, Daniel has been given a vision from the Lord about the nature of the king's dream and its interpretation. He sends word to the king's captain who had been ordered to kill all the wise men of Babylon. (Read)

At least four times in this chapter does it say that God is the 'revealer' of mysteries. Because of that, Daniel has a wisdom that surpasses anything that Babylon can produce. What cannot be known by Babylon's magicians is revealed to Daniel. God allows him to see the rest of the story as it relates to the rise and fall of man's empires and the coming kingdom of Christ. Here in the text, we see him seizing the moment of divine opportunity, explaining the meaning of the king's dream, and declaring the message of a coming kingdom.

1—The MOMENT of divine opportunity (2:24-30)

“Therefore Daniel went in to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to destroy the wise men of Babylon. He went and said thus to him: ‘Do not destroy the wise men of Babylon; bring me in before the king, and I will show the king the interpretation.’”

It is important that we keep in mind what was said of Daniel in the first chapter:

1:17—“Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.

Though it wasn’t his choice, it wasn’t an accident that he found himself in Babylon. In His providence, God had so arranged the circumstances of Daniel’s life for such a time as this. He was in Babylon for this moment, a moment that he recognizes is one of divine opportunity.

His attitude before the Lord

The Bible says that he “went to his house and made the matter known to his companions, and told them to seek mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery.” In other words, he got together with his friends and sought the face of God through prayer and worship. He isn’t so much concerned about knowing what was going on in his world as much as he was concerned about knowing God. That’s a good reminder for us as believers. Can we say that we more concerned about knowing God than we are about the latest news coming out of Washington? Do we spend our time obsessing over the affairs of this life, or are we filling our minds and hearts with God’s truth? Your prayer life is a reflection of what you’re the most passionate about.

David Jeremiah—*“Daniel needed time, not to look up answers in a dream manual, consult the stars or the nearest psychoanalyst, but to do what all of us should do in tense situations, and that is to pray.”*

God had given Daniel the gift of understanding dreams and visions, but his confidence is not in his gifts; his confidence is in his God! His confidence is seen through his actions of committing the matter to God in faith. He takes the matter to God in prayer, and the Lord supplies him with spiritual insight into his situation. Verse 19 says, “Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night.” The word ‘mystery’ is used eight times in chapter 2. It translates a word that refers to hidden truth that is revealed. God had hidden prophetic truth in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and He enabled only Daniel to both know the dream as well as its interpretation. As we will see, it had to do with God’s future plans concerning the nations. By means of prophetic revelation, the Spirit of God shows Daniel what the king had dreamed and what it all meant. Upon receiving such insight, Daniel blessed the God of heaven. He worships God for His sovereign rule over the universe, and declares that God is the One who gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding. With calm, confident faith, Daniel goes to the king’s captain who then brings him before the king. His confidence led to action.

His answer to the king

Nebuchadnezzar asks Daniel a question in verse 26: “Are you able to make known to me the dream that I have seen and its interpretation?” This is the very thing that Babylon’s wise men could not do, despite all of their credentials and countless hours of studying the stars. Daniel responds:

“No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked...”

In other words, the answer cannot be found with human wisdom. All the world’s philosophers and political pundits combined cannot come up with one single

answer to the mysteries of life. With all of their supposed wisdom and knowledge of the universe, they will never stumble upon the truth of the Creator even though the evidence for His existence stares them in the face. The reason is that God has made foolish the wisdom of the world. Scripture says:

1 Corinthians 1:21 — “For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.”

Hebrews 11:3 — “By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.”

Faith in Christ is the secret to unlocking the mysteries of life. All things exist by Him, for Him, and through Him. The answer to the king’s problem doesn’t lie with the wise men of the world. Daniel presses further in verse 28 and says:

“...but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days.”

He says that the king’s dream and the visions of his head as he lay in bed involved thoughts of what would be after this. Nebuchadnezzar had risen to power like a meteor flashing across the sky. He had established himself as the ruler of world. He had arrived at the pinnacle of power, and so it was only natural that he should wonder what all would come ‘after this.’ Alexander would do the same thing after he conquered the world. It is said that when he learned that there were no more peoples to subjugate, he sat down and cried like a baby.

Daniel is telling the king his thoughts, and says in verse 29 that ‘He who reveals mysteries’ has made known to the king what is to be. It had nothing to do with

Daniel's ability. It wasn't because Daniel had more wisdom than any of the others. Instead, God had set him apart for the specific task of interpreting the king's dream. Daniel glorifies God in the matter and points the king to Him.

2—The MEANING of the king's dream (2:31-43)

"You saw, O king, and behold, a great image. This image, mighty and of exceeding brightness, stood before you, and its appearance was frightening."

In verse 31, Daniel begins to explain and then interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

The image

"You saw, O king, and behold, a great image. This image, mighty and of exceeding brightness, stood before you, and its appearance was frightening."

King Nebuchadnezzar had dreamed about a fearsome image or statue of what looked to be a man made up of various elements. It was 'great' in the sense that it had a very imposing presence and was immense in size. The appearance of it struck terror into the king's heart. Daniel then proceeds to tell Nebuchadnezzar of how the image had a metallic character—the head was made of gold, the arms and chest was made of silver, the mid-section was bronze, the legs were made of iron, and the feet were comprised of an iron clay mixture. Now, just a quick survey of the image itself will call to mind some things that are observable.

John Walvoord points out:

- the preciousness of the metals deteriorates from top to bottom; a depreciation of value from gold to clay

- the gold is much heavier than the silver, the silver than the bronze, and the bronze than the iron
- while they decrease in mass, they increase in hardness

I'll come back to this in a minute, but I want you to notice what Daniel says next. After he explains how the image is described made up of its various parts, he then says that it is destroyed. In the dream, the king saw a stone was cut out but not by human hands. This stone struck the image on its feet of iron and clay and broke them to smithereens. Notice verse 35 says:

“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; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.”

Now, that is the dream. If Daniel stopped here, we'd say that Nebuchadnezzar had been eating pizza with an extra helping of mushrooms the night before which contributed to his overactive brain. However, the text informs us that the dream was from God.

The interpretation

Daniel tells King Nebuchadnezzar that the statue points to a reality greater than itself. The image of the man made up of the different metals was symbolic of man's kingdoms. It was a vision of world empires, both present and future.

First, there is the head of gold. In verse 37, Daniel says, “You, O king, the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, and the might, and the glory, and into whose hand He has given, wherever they dwell, the children of man, the beasts of the field, and the birds of the heavens, making you

rule over them all—you are the kingdom of gold.” Such a thought no doubt would have given Nebuchadnezzar the big head. As the king of Babylon, he was the leader of the most powerful nation on earth for 43 years. He was also a very proud man. The head of gold is Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar, which is appropriate since it was literally filled with wealth. When the Greek historian Herodotus described it, he mentioned the extravagant amount of gold that was kept in its temple. It was known as ‘the golden city.’ But he failed to realize what so many politicians in our own time fail to realize—it wasn’t Nebuchadnezzar’s doing—it was the God of heaven who had given him the kingdom! It is God’s way of pointing out the king’s accountability.

Romans 13:1 —“For there is no authority except from God and those that exist have been instituted by God.”

There is no government except that which God allows into power. It may be hard for us to understand, but even the most wicked regimes of man serve the purposes of God if not but to be an example of His just and holy wrath against them. Paul makes this same point in:

Romans 9:17 —“For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, ‘For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed in all the earth.’”

As Daniel continues, notice how he says that the kingdom that would follow Babylon would be inferior it, as illustrated in the decreasing value from gold to silver. The chest and arms of the image are made of silver, and this represented the kingdom of the Medes and Persians, an empire which spanned some two hundred years.

A third kingdom would follow the gold and silver and be a kingdom of bronze. In history, this is the empire of Greece under Alexander the Great. Though young, Alexander was a military genius. After the death of his father in 336 BC, he crossed into what is now part of Turkey that, at the time, belonged to the Persian Empire. Within three years, he would overwhelm the armies of Persia. He would spread Greek culture throughout the known world. An interesting fact from history is that Alexander's armies were equipped with helmets and shields of bronze.

The image of the man went from a head of gold, to arms and a chest made of silver, a torso of bronze, to legs made of iron. It was the Roman Empire that conquered the world after the Greeks. Rome and its 'iron legions' was noted for its ability to subjugate and crush all who stood its way. The strength of Rome led to 'Pax Romana' throughout the world which was peace through strength. No one dared to stand against Rome, because to do so was futile. The Jews of the first century learned this the hard way when Titus and his armies marched against Jerusalem and burned it to the ground in 70 AD.

Many students of Bible prophecy see the two iron legs of the image as representing the division of the Roman Empire into east and west in 395 AD. The eastern part because known as the Byzantine Empire with its capital in Constantinople. The iron/clay feet of the image represent yet another division of the empire as symbolized by its ten toes. Daniel tells of a time when ten nations come together and consolidate their power in a final world empire ruled by the future antichrist (see Dan. 7). When it comes to all of the particulars, it isn't our purpose to speculate and neither is it beneficial, but to be encouraged by the truth that all of the kingdoms of men will crumble and Christ will establish His kingdom without end. That's the ultimate meaning of the vision anyway.

Dr. David Jeremiah has pointed out some characteristics of the image as it relates to human government throughout history. It speaks of:

- the decreasing stability of man's government

What begins with gold ends with clay. The whole thing is top heavy and destined to crumble. It all stands on a weak foundation. It is nothing but clay. The Lord told Adam:

Genesis 3:19—“...till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

That is an important thing to remember about any human government, whether it be a democracy or a dictatorship. Flawed kings build flawed kingdoms. Man's best systems of government are all inherently flawed because man himself is deeply flawed, and the very notion that humanity longs for righteous government is yet one more piece of evidence that points us to the hope of our Savior.

- the deteriorating morality of man's government

Something else to ponder as it relates to nations is how they tend to spiral into immorality and chaos. What begins with gold ends with a mixture that won't hold together. This totally contradicts everything that secularism has told us, doesn't it? Evolution's false ideas tell us that humanity is gradually becoming better. The image here tells us that the opposite is true. Each kingdom is built on the ruins of the one that came before it. So on one level there is progress, but on another level there is decline. Although the value of the metals decreases from the top to the bottom of the statue, their strength increases (from gold to iron). In other words, as the kingdoms degenerate in morality, they increase in force. The result

is a devastating combination of continually stronger power yoked with continually weaker character.

It is a sobering thought that as we're spiraling downward in morality we're also increasing in force. America has never been in a position of greater military strength than we are currently. And yet at the same time, we have never been weaker morally and spiritually. With lawlessness on the increase, we're actually hearing politicians supporting the defunding of police departments. These are interesting and confusing times. It is all impermanent and won't last.

Alexander Tytler — *“A democracy cannot exist as a permanent form of government. It can only exist until the voters discover that they can vote themselves money from the public treasure. From that moment on the majority always votes for the candidate promising the most money from the public treasury, with the result that a democracy always collapses over loose fiscal policy followed by a dictatorship. The average age of the world's great civilizations has been two hundred years. These nations have progressed through the following sequence: from bondage to spiritual faith, from spiritual faith to great courage, from courage to liberty, from liberty to abundance, from abundance to selfishness, from selfishness to complacency, from complacency to apathy, from apathy to dependency, from dependency back to bondage.”*

- the disintegrating unity of man's government

In verse 43, it says, “As you saw the iron mixed with soft clay, so they will mix with one another in marriage, but they will not hold together, just as iron does not mix with clay.” The final kingdom of man will be brittle. As we get closer and closer to the end of the age, tension will only increase and nations will be torn apart by strife and division, both internally and externally. No matter how hard

humanity tries to build a kingdom that lasts, it will all crumble into dust in the end. The great empires of the past are but relics, their greatness is now reduced to the ash heap of history. But there is a King who is coming to reign, One whose kingdom will never end.

3—The MESSAGE of a coming kingdom (2:44-49)

“And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever...”

In the vision, a Stone that was cut out, but not by human hands, struck the statue at its most brittle point, thereby causing the whole thing to come crashing down. Without the interpretation of the dream, we'd be pretty miserable at this point. History would seem pointless, and life would be hopeless. Man can't get it right no matter how hard he tries. The 'perfect kingdom' is something that has been sought after throughout man's history, but it has proven to be illusive to him. No matter how hard he tries to build the ideal society, he is doomed to fail. The very best of man's empires are but dust and ashes. Humanity's kingdoms are destined to crumble, smashed to pieces by a mysterious Stone.

However, it is in the Stone that we find all of our hope! For it is Jesus Christ coming in all of His glory to obliterate all of Satan's attempts to rule the world. As the Stone became a mountain that filled the earth, so also will the kingdom that Christ has established. He rules now in the hearts of His people where He is enthroned, though physically in another dimension. The time is soon coming when He will descend from heaven, smash into pieces all that opposes Him, and He will reign on the earth. We will rule and reign with Him! Let me tell you, this

truth ought to fundamentally alter the way we look at life. It should impact the way we invest our time and resources. Are we pouring our lives into earthly kingdoms that are doomed to fail, or are we investing in the only kingdom that will stand forever? Am I building my life on the world's sand, or the Solid Rock?

Daniel demonstrates three characteristics every believer needs in times such as these: obedience to God's truth, perspective to see the big picture, and courage to stand for what is right. Those three characteristics ought to set you and me apart and inform our political engagement. That's why we need to know where candidates stand on issues and then vote from a position that is most in line with our Christian worldview. Some of the most important issues at stake in the election are:

- Judicial appointments

Isaiah 1:26—“I will restore your judges as at the first, and your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city.”

A nation's judges are reflective of the morality which is true of the nation. Good judges will bring righteousness to the land by virtue of their decisions. Bad judges abandon the rule of law. Which candidate will appoint the best judges and justices?

- Border security

God's Word has a lot to say about a nation's borders.

Acts 17:26—“And God has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings.”

Zechariah 7:10—“Do no oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. Let none of you plan evil in his heart against his brother.”

Which candidate will best support our national security and uphold the law when it comes to legal/illegal immigration? And how can this best be done in a humane way?

- Israel

Genesis 12:3—“I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families shall be blessed.”

I’m shocked at the open animosity toward Israel which is becoming increasingly seen in our nation. The nation of Israel is not perfect. Support of Israel does not equal blind agreement with all Israel does, but the Bible is clear that God has given the land to Israel. He will bless those who bless Israel. So we should ask which candidate will best support Israel as our nation’s closest ally?

- Religious liberty

Exodus 20:3—“You shall have no other gods before Me.”

As a believer, there is nothing which is come between you and the exclusive worship and obedience rendered to God. When a government mandate interferes it is a violation of your conscience and is therefore an infringement on your religious liberty and is why we have the first amendment:

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

Examples of those who exercise this right include doctors who decline to perform abortions, bakers who decline to participate in same-sex weddings, employers

who decline to provide abortifacient drugs, employees who decline to take a vaccine, and so forth. Before we vote we should research which candidate will best understand and support our religious liberty?

- Biological sex

Genesis 1:27—“So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”

Contrary to what those on the far left would say, it is God who assigns a person's gender in the womb. To support, to legitimize, to celebrate the so-called changing of one's gender is to celebrate spiritual and mental illness. Instead, we should seek to help that person understand and rest in the way that God designed him or her. And along with this is the importance of the role of parents in the life of a child. In the state of Minnesota, under legislation signed by Gov. Tim Walz, if a minor has been unable to obtain “gender-affirming care” because one or both parents object, then the courts are allowed temporary emergency jurisdiction over the child.

Booker T. Washington — *“A lie doesn't become truth, wrong doesn't become right, and evil doesn't become good, just because it's accepted by a majority.”*

And before we step into the voting booth on Tuesday to cast our ballot, we ought to ask ourselves the question, “Which candidate will best stand for and support God's design of biological sex and parental rights to make the decisions that their children are in no place to make?”

- The sanctity of human life

Psalm 139:13-14—“For You formed my inward parts; You knitted me together in my mother’s womb. I praise You for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are Your works; my soul knows it very well.”

Life is precious because God is the Author of life. Human beings are made in the image of God, and therefore life is to be valued and protected from the womb.

The simple fact of the matter is that those who celebrate the murder of the unborn cannot be trusted to govern the born. You and I ought to consider which candidate’s policies more closely align with a pro-life position.

You will often hear critics of Christianity accuse us of trying to impose our morality through law. The old adage is, “You cannot legislate morality.” To which I say, “Name one law that doesn’t impose someone’s morality.” The fact of the matter is that everyone who argues for policy one way or another begins with a sense of morality. The reality is that it is impossible to not legislate morality. And so the critical issue then becomes whose definition of morality influences our legislation?

In his farewell address, George Washington said that “true religion and good morals are the only solid foundations of public liberty and happiness.” John Adams observed, “Our constitution was made for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.” The founders of our nation left us a vehicle for self-government. The issue isn’t the vehicle, but the responsibility of the one behind the wheel.

Someone may say, “Wait a minute pastor. What about the separation of church and state?” Most people are clueless about what that even means. In 1802, Thomas Jefferson, in a letter to the Danbury Baptists, prescribed “a wall of separation between church and state.” The key question is what the wall was

meant to keep out. Many assume that he wanted to keep religion out of politics, but the letter's context shows the opposite. Feeling pressure from the state of Connecticut's established Congregationalist church the Danbury Baptists (and Jefferson) wanted to keep the government out of religion. Though he was not a Christian in any orthodox sense, Jefferson and the nation's founders did not want religion abolished from public life. A mere two days after writing the Danbury letter, for example, Jefferson attended church services in the House of Representatives. It was a deliberate way of supporting religion as an aspect of the government of a constitutional republic. It gives the transcendent basis for morality which otherwise would not exist. Without God, there is no moral basis.

Those who now openly advocate for the separation of God from government ignore the fact that there is no basis for a moral law apart from a divine Lawgiver. To fill the void that has been left by the rejection of God, we turn to ourselves and to our idols. When a person worships idols, it impacts their view on the issues:

The issue of abortion? The underlying idol behind an open support of the slaughter of the unborn is unrestrained and unrestricted personal autonomy.

The issue of transgenderism? The underlying idol is the belief that oneself gets to determine truth and reality. The rest of society is then expected to bow down and affirm me in my false reality.

The issue of illegal immigration? The underlying idol is the notion that a world without borders will lead to the ideal of a unified global government.

On and on I could go and could continue to make the case that a person's 'god' serves as the underlying basis for their politics. The issue is not whether or not a person worships. The issue is who or what they worship, who determines the morality, who it is that shapes their worldview. Beloved, the upcoming election

will not solve those issues. The heart is not changed by the law, but by the grace of God. What our nation needs most is the gospel of Jesus Christ, and it is something that only we can share with the world. Before we see a great nation, we need to be about the Great Commission, for it begins with disciples making disciples. That's Christian moms and dads leading their children to follow Christ, seeing to it that their minds and hearts are shaped by the truth of Scripture. That's Christian employees doing the very best they can in their work, for their witness to others is at stake. It means that we leverage our relationships with people for the sake of the gospel, looking for ways and opportunities to share Jesus with our neighbors and the people that He brings to us. Our mission statement is right there above the doors—Leading People to Follow Christ. Which means we must be more concerned about proclaiming the message of the Stone than we are polishing the metals of the statue.

Beloved, we need to bring the wisdom of God with us into the voting booth when we are voting on leaders whose decisions will impact our lives, our children's lives, and our grandchildren's lives. That's why you need to know where each candidate stands on the issues. But all the while, let us never forget that man's kingdom is destined to crumble. So don't become too preoccupied with polishing the statue. Rather, let's proclaim the Stone. For the Stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

Let me tell you, Daniel was able to live confidently because he personally knew the Lord. This is the great hope of the church—our King and His kingdom are coming! He came the first time unnoticed by the world. Caesar Augustus was ruling the world through the iron will of Rome, all while our Savior from heaven quietly made His entrance into our world in an obscure place like Bethlehem. And when He began His ministry, the first words out of His mouth were these:

Mark 1:15—“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the gospel.”

What started small during the days of Roman emperors has been growing ever since. Spiritually, the kingdom is established in believing hearts. The rule of Christ in the hearts of those who believe. But the time is coming in the future when that kingdom will fill the whole earth as Jesus sits upon the throne of David and reigns as King.

Zechariah 14:4—“On that day His feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west. Then the Lord my God will come, and all the holy ones with him...The Lord will be King over all the earth.”

In order to have a perfect kingdom, you’ve got to have a perfect King. There is only One who qualifies—the Lord Jesus Christ. Of His kingdom there will be no end. Those who bow to Him, who know Him and love Him and serve Him, we will rule and reign with Him forever.