

## The Stone Kingdom: *Jesus' Mission Rooted in History*

John Lennon's song *Imagine*, released in 1971, considers a world in which differences do not divide and in which people coexist in a state of mutual support and love for one another. The truth is God does more than imagine such a world. A world in which love reign's supreme is the goal of Jesus' mission.

Last week, we explored the mission and message of Jesus in the proclamation of the Kingdom of God. The gospel or "good news" of Jesus is actually more often than not referred to as the good news *of the Kingdom*. The world that Lennon could only imagine was the world that Jesus gave his life for.

The coming of God's Kingdom – a kingdom literally built by God was not really a new concept with Jesus. Jesus message of God's Kingdom was a very well-established hope embedded in the Old Testament prophets. This week, we are going to look at an ancient story from the Prophet Daniel that helps explain what Jesus meant when he announced the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth.

### Journey Together:

1. Describe your most memorable dream.

### Roadmap: Read Daniel 2

2. What impresses you most about this story?
3. Describe the details of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. What successive kingdoms are presented before the King and how are they differentiated? What do we know about these kingdoms?

**Note:** *The learning of the Chaldeans" (Dan. 1:4; 2:2; 4:7; 5:7,11) comprised the old languages of Babylonia, some knowledge of astronomy and astrology; mathematics, which their sexagesimal system of numeration seems to have facilitated; and a certain amount of natural history. To this must be added a store of mythological learning, including legends of the Creation, the Flood (closely resembling in all its main points the account in the Bible), and apparently also the Temptation and the Fall.*

4. What is so different about the fifth and final kingdom - the "Rock" kingdom?

**Note:** *Luke 20:17, 18 seems to identify this last kingdom as the kingdom that Jesus is inaugurating – a kingdom so different from all those represented in the king's dream that it smashes and crumbles all others that come before:*

*"Jesus looked directly at them and asked, "Then what is the meaning of that which is written: " 'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone? Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed."*

5. How does the message of the Kingdom of God introduced through Jesus help us understand Jesus' mission as something more than just salvation from sin? What are the implications of the "good news" or gospel of the Kingdom?

6. Ultimately, the reality of God's Kingdom on earth is in process. It is something God is accomplishing through Christ. It is also something Jesus encouraged us to pray for as we mentioned last week: *"Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,"* Jesus said. How is the Kingdom of Jesus a source of good news for you and what evidence do you see of the presence of Jesus' Kingdom already at work in your life and in the life of others?

7. How can this group pray for you this evening?

### My Journey: For further study John 3:22-36.

1. How has God used *Journey* in your life and witness this week?

**Note:** *In John 3:22-36, the disciples of John the Baptist are jealous of the new attention people were giving to Jesus, which was drawing them away from John. Notice how John handled the shift from himself to Jesus.*

2. In what areas of your life does Jesus need to become greater?
3. How can we best participate in God's Kingdom rule right now today?
4. How can this group pray for you right now?

**Backstory:** In this week's journey, we discover that Jesus' central message was not new to him. In fact, the coming of the Kingdom of God was a foundational promise buried in the Old Testament prophets. The Book of Daniel deals with the rise and fall of the great kingdoms of this world and especially their clash of God's eternal kingdom. The great Nebuchadnezzar, king of ancient Babylon, came into direct conflict with the supreme power of God and his eternal kingdom. It would become quite personal for him in Daniel chapter 4, where Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom would be taken away and he would learn who truly rules over the affairs of men.

Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like cattle. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird.

At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation.

All the peoples of the earth  
are regarded as nothing.  
He does as he pleases  
with the powers of heaven  
and the peoples of the earth.  
No one can hold back his hand  
or say to him: "What have you done?" (Dan. 4:33-35)

Because of the sequence of nations in Daniel 2 and the eventual rise of the Roman Empire, we are tempted to place the "Stone Kingdom" at the end of Earth's history. Though the event is accurate, the timing is off. It turns out that the Stone Kingdom is not so much about the end of time as it is about the end of the kingdom of man and the setting up of God's eternal kingdom. The stone Kingdom represents the kingdom that Jesus was inaugurating by his victory over sin and death. Daniel in fact reminds us, *"In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people"* (Dan. 2:44).

This new Stone Kingdom would come in the very midst of the rise and fall of these other nations. This was the good news that Jesus came to share and bring into reality. The days of oppression and injustice of these other kingdoms was over. God was establishing a new rule on earth under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

All these other kingdoms are mere idols in comparison with the government of God. This is why the apostles saw this world passing away in lieu of Christ and his mission.

Our task in this week's *Journey* is to realize that the coming of God's Kingdom was actually announced hundreds of years before it was to arrive. In fact, Jesus' favorite reference for himself was "Son of Man" a term straight from Daniel 7, where one like the "Son of Man" is ushered in to receive a kingdom from the Ancient of Days. (See Dan. 7:13 and 14)

This is the same authority that Jesus declared he had been given over heaven and earth in passages like Matthew 28:18. This is the authority he was extending through his disciples - a vital part of Jesus message and mission as the end of Satan's rule. The gospel also includes the wonderful truth that the power of Satan's rule in our own lives has come to an end in the victory of Christ.

John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus, was about the only one who recognized the greatness of Jesus and the full importance of his mission. In keeping with the words of the prophet Daniel, John virtually restates the grand purpose of God in the setting up of the Stone Kingdom – a kingdom made without human hands - and his rule that would never end by his pronouncement to his own questioning disciples: *"He must increase and I must decrease"* (John 3:30).