

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this meditation and memorisation series you may learn how to build up the Christian Church.

In this ninth series, the Bible teaches five truths about the kingdom of God. The topic of today's meditation and memorisation is: THE TRIUMPH OF THE KINGDOM.

(S) **POINT 1. MEDITATION OF THE NEW BIBLE VERSE.**

The new Bible verse that we will meditate and memorise is Daniel 2:44. We will meditate the truths in the Bible together. King Nebuchadnezzar of the empire of Babylonia had a dream. He saw a large statue with awesome appearance. The head was made of pure gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron and its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay. While Nebuchadnezzar was watching, a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. The rock struck the statue on its weakest part, its feet, and smashed the statue! The clay, iron, bronze, silver and gold were broken to pieces at the same time and were blown away like chaff on a threshing floor without leaving a trace. But the rock that destroyed the statue became a huge mountain and it filled the whole earth.

Daniel interpreted the dream in Daniel 2:36-45. Please read Daniel 2:36-45 for yourself.

The memorisation verse is: The triumph of the kingdom. Daniel 2:44. "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. It will crush all those other kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever." Daniel 2:44.

(T) **First. The identity of the four regimes in the world.**

One. The materials of the statue.

Gold and silver are standard symbols for what is majestic and precious, in political and religious contexts, bronze and iron for what is strong and hard. There is no implication of deterioration as we move from head to trunk to hips to legs. The statue represents worldly power, splendour, strength, and impressiveness. However, the clay suggests weakness and transience and represents the opposite of the political power and strength implied by the four metals. The political and military power of the kings of the kingdom of the world is like an impressive high statue, but it always has a weak point - feet of clay, that threatens the stability of the otherwise uniformly overpowering edifice that towers above it. Just one rock hitting the statue at a weak point and it will collapse.

Two. The first regime.

The word 'kingdom' (A: malku) first denotes a regime or individual reign of a king (6:28), or his royal authority and sovereignty (5:18). Then it denotes a kingdom or realm of a king (4:18), or an empire with several dynasties of kings (7:23).

The four together have usually been interpreted as the Babylonian empire, the Medo-Persian empire, the Greek empire and the Roman empire. However, because Nebuchadnezzar is personally the head, the four rather refer to four regimes of kings within one empire! The statue represents a single empire, which was led by Nebuchadnezzar and passed on from one king to another. Nebuchadnezzar is 'the king of kings' (2:37), but Daniel emphasises that he rules only by the gift of God! His might, authority and glory do not come from himself, but from the God of heaven, who is the Lord of this king among kings (2:47)!

(S) **Three. The three other regimes.**

The regimes that follow Nebuchadnezzar are not identified and they must be allowed to remain allusive. Jeremiah 27:7 speaks of the rule of Nebuchadnezzar's son and grandson after him, until after 70 years "the time of his land" comes. Daniel adapts Jeremiah's words and his figure of speech to the figure of four kings or regimes. Just like the 4 quarters of the world, the number 'four' suggests completeness. The sequence manifests *no consistent pattern of degeneration*. Perhaps even the number 'four' cannot be pressed historically, but simply denotes completeness of earthly regimes of any empire in the history of this world. Daniel passes quickly over the second and third regimes, in order to focus on the fourth regime. The fourth regime has a crushing power (2:40) but an unexpected fragility (2:41-42). It seeks to repair this, probably by intermarriage with another regime, but cannot do so in a lasting way (2:43).

Daniel does not describe the arrival of Cyrus as the end of the Babylon's empire or as the end of Judah's exile. The arrival of Cyrus makes no difference to Babylon or to the exiles. But Daniel does refer to 4 regimes: the regime of Nebuchadnezzar over the whole earth (2:36-38; 5:18), the inferior regime of Belshazzar (2:39; 5:28), the regime of Darius the Mede over the whole earth (2:39; 5:31; 6:25-26), and the regime of Cyrus the Persian, well-known for his

irresistable might (6:28; Isa 41:2-3,25; 44:28; 45:1,13). The fourth regime would be a split regime: Cyrus was said to have been part-Median, part-Persian and to have married a Persian. Daniel 9:1 describes him (Darius = Cyrus) as ruling over the Babylonian kingdom. The implication is that the Medes and Persians bring a new dynasty but within the history of one kingdom or empire. The 4 regimes in Daniel 2 span a period from king Nebuchadnezzar to king Cyrus. The coming of the Persians did not bring the end of the dominion of the world over the people of God as Jeremiah and Isaiah 40-55 had implied. The implied readers of the book Daniel in the Persian period, perhaps disillusioned and depressed like those to whom the prophecies in Haggai, Zechariah and Isaiah 56-66 were addressed, are invited to *hold onto the conviction that the colossus consisting of the kingdom of the world will not stand for ever*. It has feet of clay. This is indeed the significance of the statue's message however the parts of the statue are identified.

(T) Second. The identity of the rock.

The rock was cut out from a mountain not by human hands (2:45), destroyed the regimes of the kingdom of the world and grew into a mountain itself, which filled the whole earth (2:35). This rock symbolises *God's own sovereignty and power that establishes a lasting kingdom* just like the mountain in Isaiah 2:2-3 (Ezek 17:23; Ps 2:6; 48:1-2). The interpretation clearly says that the new regime has a divine origin (2:44). Isaiah 8:11-15 has a related message: the God of the Bible, who was meant to be the source of strength and protection for all people, becomes a mortal danger to those kings, governments and empires that build their own edifices and refuges!

(S) Third. The four regimes scheme.

The four regimes represent the governments of the kingdom of the world in any period of human history. The four regimes of the colossus is a model for what happens with the governments or kingdoms in the history of this world. The readers of the book Daniel live in the second century B.C. under the oppressive regime of another king, king Antiochus IV. The book of Daniel is a message for the readers during the crisis, in which king Antiochus forbade the worship of the God of the Bible and defiled the temple at Jerusalem in 167 B.C. Thus the book of Daniel draws an arc from the kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar in the 6th century B.C. to the kingdom of Antiochus IV in the 2nd century B.C. Under Nebuchadnezzar the manifestation of the direct hegemony of the kingdom of the world over God's people, Israel, begins. And under Antiochus IV this oppressive hegemony of the kingdom of the world over God's people, Israel, continues. In the beginning, the kingdom of the world is characterised in positive terms. It is impressive and the power that God gave it deserves admiration. But in its final manifestation, the power of the regimes or governments of the kingdom of the world become crushing like iron, and yet strangely vulnerable like baked clay. The governments of the kingdom of the world always have a weak point, which they try to buttress by desperate but doomed means.

While Jeremiah's prophecy did not look beyond the destruction of the Babylonian kingdom, Daniel's message pictures the establishment of a quite different sovereignty. The rock that destroys the governments of the kingdom of the world and grows into a mountain that fills the world represents God's own sovereignty and power that establishes a lasting kingdom, namely, *the kingdom of God!*

People miss the point when they spend time arguing over the identity of the 4 regimes. What mattered for the recipients of the book of Daniel was that they lived during the fourth regime of the kingdom of the world and that it would be followed by the kingdom of God! When later generations of God's people have reapplied the scheme of the four regimes to the history of their own day, they have responded to the vision of Daniel in the way it sought to be understood and applied!

(T) Fourth. Daniel presents a theology of secular history.

One. The history of Israel becomes the history of the nations.

The vision does not focus on *Israel's history*, like the other Old Testament prophets do, but on *world history*. It is not confined to *salvation history*, but offers a theology of *secular history*.

The history of the nations in Genesis chapters 1-11 had narrowed to become *the history of Israel* from Abraham to the exile.

Nebuchadnezzar brought the Davidic kings in Jerusalem to an end and ruled the first Gentile empire that directly controlled the destiny of Israel. From that time, Israel and the Jews were a part of *secular history*. From that time the history of the world broadens again to become *the history of the nations*. The history of the nations is now on its way to become the history of God's rule or *the history of God's kingdom*, which is fully unfolded in the New Testament period.

The book of Daniel does not say that the secular history of the world is working against God or against his purpose for his people. But it does say that the governments of the kingdom of the world, under who the Jews will henceforth live, are under God's sovereignty in the same real, though indirect, way as the kings of Judah had been before the exile. God sets the history of the governments or kings of the kingdom of the world in motion and he also terminates it.

Two. The history of the world is not explicitly condemned as evil.

The vision does not suggest a cosmic dualism of four evil kingdoms versus a good kingdom. The vision does not explicitly condemn the fourth regime any more than the other three regimes. The readers know that they live under a power that is capable of awesome violence and destructiveness. However, the capacity to crush and shatter is not wicked in itself, because God's rule in Daniel 2:44 has the same capacity. The fourth regime falls because of its inherent fragility.

Three. The history of the world is not pre-determined, but God is sovereign in the history of the world.

The revelation of Daniel implies that the history of this world can be divinely foreknown, but not that it is divinely pre-determined or foreordained. Daniel chapter 2 does not speak of final events fixed since time's beginning. It does not speak of a dualism, of the whole world under the power of evil waiting for the righteous world to come. It does not speak of a division of world history into periods determined by God. The revelation of Daniel assumes that human beings make real decisions that do shape history, yet human decision-making does not necessarily have the last word. Daniel chapter 2 affirms the sovereignty of God in history, working sometimes via the process of human decision-making and sometimes despite of it.

Four. The history of this world does not come to an end.

The vision does not suggest the imminent end of the world. There is no reference that the history of the world has reached such a low point that divine intervention is inevitable or imminent. The book of Daniel hints that the history of the world is proceeding according to laws of its own, neither progressing nor degenerating, but simply taking its changing course by God's permissive will.

Five. When God acts within the history of this world, the kingdom of God comes with catastrophe.

But then God acts at a time known only to him. It is not possible to work out when this time must come, because human history always stands before the possibility of God's acting. God's acts emerge from his own free will and for reasons known only to him and not revealed to us! When God's time comes to act, the kingdom of God requires the destruction of the human kings or governments of the kingdom of the world rather than his working through them. The human kingdoms or governments are God's will for the time being, but not for ever. When God's moment arrives to act, God's kingdom comes with catastrophe and not by development!

(S) Fifth. The expected kingdom of God.

One. The expected kingdom of God is a kingdom on earth.

Daniel 2:41-43 does not specifically say that the fourth regime constituted a dynasty of kings rather than just the reign of one king. Therefore the kings "in that time" (2:44) more naturally denote Nebuchadnezzar's three successors, mentioned in the book of Daniel.

Daniel does not say that the four regimes are succeeded by a fifth regime. The four regimes are rather succeeded by something wholly other. Daniel does not promise a new extension of the present, but a new future. His understanding of *the kingdom of God* is more like the prophetic idea of the Day of the Lord than that of the other apocalypses. The kingdom of God is of supernatural origin, but nevertheless located on earth, not in heaven. He does not envisage a dissolution of the cosmos or the creation of a different world.

The problems of politics and history can only be resolved by a supernatural intervention that inaugurates a new kingdom, the kingdom of God! And this involves, *not the abandonment of this world, but a changing of the lordship of this world!* The new kingdom fills *the earth!* History is not destroyed, but the other sovereignties or political and military kingdoms on earth are destroyed!

Two. The expected kingdom of God is not an Israelite kingdom.

Daniel does not see the "rock" as representing an Israelite kingdom. His emphasis is that power and wisdom belong to God. Daniel chapter 2 has no reference to Israel as the people of God, or to the land of Israel, or to the city of Jerusalem, the temple, the remnant, the Messiah, or even to the eternal destiny of humanity. The sole focus of Daniel is on God's kingship or rule within the history of this world!

Three. The expected kingdom of God is not turned into another kind of kingdom.

Isaiah 40-55 seems to some people to promise the final realisation of the kingdom of God after the return from exile. But at the end of the exile this final and ultimate realisation of God's kingship did not take place. The history of the world is continued.

Daniel's response was not to turn God's kingship into something nationalistic: the Lord is to be Israel's king. He does not turn it into something individualistic: the Lord's kingship is to be realised in the individual believer's life. He does not turn it into something otherworldly: the Lord's kingship is to be realised in heaven. Daniel reaffirms and continues

to proclaim that God's kingship is in this world and in our history and concerned with us people here and now, just as the prophecies in Isaiah 40-55 does.

Daniel is talking about a reign of God on earth that continues to be more an object of hope than of sight. And that is why Christians still pray, "Your kingdom come" (Lk 11:2).

Four. The expected kingdom of God is a kingdom for ever.

The qualities of the new kingdom or rule are not described except by saying that it is God's rule and that it will last forever! The qualities are contrasted with those of its predecessors. The kingdom, power and glory was a gift *for a while* to Nebuchadnezzar. But now they are manifested elsewhere *for ever and ever*. The motif of time recurs once more: Nebuchadnezzar's kingship cannot last for ever (2:39), but God's regime will last for ever (2:44)(cf. 2:20-21).

Five. The expected kingdom of God was not fulfilled in Daniel's time.

Daniel's vision was not fulfilled in the historical periods to which the book refers. It has its parallels in the many prophecies that give the impression that the Day of the Lord is about to dawn, but after which things continue as they have done before and people ask, "When is Jesus Christ coming as he promised (2 Pet 3:4)?" This is also true of Daniel's vision: The empires that Daniel and his readers during the 2nd century B.C. knew, namely, the Babylonian empire, the Medo-Persian empire and the Greek empire, did disappear. The rule of the God of heaven was re-established in Jerusalem, partly after the return from exile when the temple and Jerusalem were rebuilt, and partly after the defilement of the temple by Antiochus IV when the temple was again cleansed and rededicated. Thus, the readers of the book of Daniel were aware that they had seen some measure of fulfilment of the prophets' words. And they were convinced that that the words of the prophets would find their complete fulfilment in time.

Six. The expected kingdom of God begins to be fulfilled at the first coming of Jesus Christ.

By the New Testament times, "the rock" in Daniel 2 had become associated with other "rock" passages in Scripture. Jesus Christ would be a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation (Isa 28:16) and the rejected stone that becomes the capstone (Ps 118:22). In Lk 20:17-18 (cf. Isa 8:14) Jesus Christ sees himself as the stone that crushes, the very embodiment of the kingship or rule of God!

However, there is no indication that Daniel understood the rock to denote a personal Messiah. According to Christian conviction it turns out that the One who initiated the ultimate downfall of the governments of the kingdom of the world and the establishment of God's kingdom was the man Jesus Christ (Mk 1:15; Rev 17:14).

(T) POINT 2. MEMORISATION OF THE NEW BIBLE VERSE.

Memorise the Bible verse. The triumph of the kingdom. Daniel 2:44. "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. It will crush all those other kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever." Daniel 2:44.

(S) POINT 3. ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK.

First. Daily review the last five memorised Bible verses once every day for 5 weeks.

Second. See the workbooks "Go and build Christ's Church" and Internet on www.dota.net.

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".