

## Symbolism of God's Kingdom in Daniel 2:44-45: Why it Matters

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### Abstract

The symbolism for God's kingdom in Dan 2:44–45 is often linked to the stone (*'eben*) cut from the mountain (*tūr*). This interpretive trajectory may overlook the mountain's potential as the primary symbol of God's kingdom. Examining the linguistic and theological dimensions of the passage reveals that the definite article of the mountain, the analogical function of the particle preposition *kə* ("as")—framing the stone's breaking activity as illustrative of the kingdom's establishment, and the OT's frequent portrayal of God as *šūr* (Aramaic *tūr*) rather than *'eben*, collectively challenge conventional perspectives. This study proffers the mountain as a more fitting symbol for God's kingdom, inviting a deeper understanding of its theological implications.

Keywords: symbol(ism), stone, mountain, kingdom of God, vision

### Introduction

And in the days of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor the kingdom will be left to another people. It will break in pieces and put an end all these kingdoms and it will stand forever. Just as you saw that a stone was cut out from the mountain without hands, and it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold, the great God has made known to the king what will be

after this, and the dream is true, and its interpretation is trustworthy. (Dan 2:44–45, my translation)

Does identifying the symbolism of the kingdom of God in this passage matter?<sup>1</sup> This question drives the pursuit of the present study. In Dan 2, the prophet depicts a great image made of four metals, representing four different kingdoms, with the feet of iron and clay signifying a divided kingdom (2:36–43). Meanwhile, God’s kingdom is associated with a stone (*’eben*) cut out from the mountain (*ṭūr*) (vv. 44–45).<sup>2</sup> Identifying the symbolism for God’s kingdom is complex due to the presence of two potential symbols: *’eben* and *ṭūr*. Each carries distinct theological connotations,<sup>3</sup> needing a careful exploration to understand the significance of the symbol for the kingdom of God in Daniel’s vision.

Scholarly interpretations of the symbol for God’s kingdom in Dan 2:44–45 predominantly focus on the symbolism of the stone (*’eben*),<sup>4</sup> resulting in three major perspectives. The first interprets the stone as a cipher for God’s kingdom,<sup>5</sup> drawing

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<sup>1</sup> The kingdom of God is the central theme of the book. John E. Goldingay, *Daniel*, WBC 30 (Dallas, TX: Word, 1989), 330. Cf. Julius Boehmer, *Reich Gottes und Menschensohn im Buch Daniel* (Leipzig, SN: Hinrichs, 1899), 16–17.

<sup>2</sup> Chapter 2 is one of the great prophecies in the book of Daniel, serving as “the foundation of all the other visions which follow in this book.” Arno Gaebelin, *The Prophet Daniel: A Key to the Visions and Prophecies of the Book of Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1955), 17.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Isa 8:14, where Isaiah mentioned the terms *’eben* and *ṭūr*, describing the Lord as “a stone of offense and a rock stumbling to both houses of Israel.”

<sup>4</sup> Some recent scholarly studies link the stone that smites the great image in Dan 2:35 and 45 with the stone that sinks in Goliath’s forehead in 1 Sam 17:49. See Fernando Milán, “Stones That Strike Down Giants: Daniel and David in a New Light,” *Biblica* 103.2 (2022): 186–212; Naama Golan, “Metal and Stone: An Analogy between the Story of David and Goliath (1 Sam 17) and the Story of Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream (Dan 2),” *ZAW* 131.4 (2019): 631–35.

<sup>5</sup> The following are representatives of the above perspective: Goldingay, *Daniel*, 1989), 51–52; Zdravko Stefanovic, *Daniel: Wisdom to the Wise* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2007), 108–9; Christopher J. H. Wright,

from the OT portrayal of God as a rock (e.g., Deut 32:4; Ps 18:2). The second, though similar to the first, views the stone as a symbol of Christ or a messianic kingdom, interpreting “those kings” in Dan 2:44 as the toes of iron and clay in vv. 41–43, thereby situating the establishment of God’s kingdom at the Second Advent, which follows the reign of those kings.<sup>6</sup> The third associates the stone with the church, asserting that the church constitutes the kingdom of God, inaugurated at the First Advent of Jesus.<sup>7</sup>

Although these perspectives have their own merits. However, a closer examination of Dan 2 reveals interpretive shortcomings. Notably, the OT’s portrayal of God as a rock aligns more naturally with the mountain (*tūr*) in Daniel’s vision, which corresponds to the Hebrew term *šūr* (“boulder, large rock, rocky hill”),<sup>8</sup> rather than the stone, rendered as *’ēben* in both Aramaic and Hebrew.<sup>9</sup> While some scholars briefly comment on the mountain, often linking it to a kingdom based on Mount Zion,<sup>10</sup>

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*Hearing the Message of Daniel: Sustaining Faith in Today’s World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 19.

<sup>6</sup> Andrew E. Steinmann, *Daniel*, Concordia Commentary (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia, 2008), 138–42; Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel*, NAC 18 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 99–100; Mark Finley, *Understanding Daniel and Revelation* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2020), 38. However, others stress that while the stone has an eschatological overtone, it is not directly messianic. Louis Francis Hartman and Alexander A. DiLella, *The Book of Daniel*, 1st ed., AB 23 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1978), 149–50.

<sup>7</sup> Thus far, Augustine is the best representative of this camp. See Augustine, *The City of God* 20.9 (NPNF, 2:430, trans. Dods). Cf. Herbert C. Leupold, *Exposition of Daniel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1949), 121; Andrew Knowles, *The Bible Guide* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2001), 346.

<sup>8</sup> In the OT, there are several instances that when *šūr* is used to depict God, the LXX directly translates it as *theos*. See (e.g.) Deut 32:4; 1 Sam 2:2; 2 Sam 22:3; Ps 18:3; Isa 8:14; Hab 1:2. For definitions of *šūr*, see A *Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, s.v. “*šūr*.”

<sup>9</sup> Compare the Aramaic *’ēben* in Dan 2:44 and 5:4 with the Hebrew term in Gen 2:12 and Zech 3:9.

<sup>10</sup> Carl F. Keil, *The Book of Daniel*, Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 110; Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2002), 289; and Ronald S. Wallace, *The*

no significant scholarly treatment has posited the mountain as a potential symbol for God's kingdom.

This study contends, first, that the particle preposition *kə* ("as" or "like"), which introduces the phrase *kāl-qōbēl dī*<sup>11</sup> ("just as") in Daniel 2:45, positions the stone imagery breaking the statue as an analogy for the establishment of God's kingdom, rather than as the kingdom itself. Second, all metallic symbols, as well as the mountain in v. 45, are marked with the definite article (א transliterated with the silent characteristic '), distinguishing them as kingdoms, whereas the stone lacks this marker. Additionally, the OT frequently employs *šūr* as a metaphoric or poetic designation for God, reinforcing the mountain's potential symbolic association with God's kingdom. These considerations, among others, form the foundation of the argument presented in this article.<sup>12</sup> Yet, does it ultimately matter if the mountain symbolizes the kingdom of God?

## Analysis of the Text

The Masoretic Text (MT) of Daniel 2:44–45 contains no significant variant readings, except for the verb *hitgazeret* (from *gZR*, "cut out") found in a limited number of manuscripts,<sup>13</sup> differing from *'itgazeret* in the standard Hebrew text. While no explicit rationale for the reading *hitgazeret* in these manuscripts is provided, it may have been introduced for the sake of consistency, as *hitgazeret* appears earlier in v. 34. Regardless, this minor textual variation does not affect the theological intent of the passage. To establish the foundation for this study,

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*Lord Is King: The Message of Daniel*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979), 58.

<sup>11</sup> Both the BibleWorks 10 and Accordance 13 detail *kāl* in the phrase *kāl-qōbēl dī* from prepositions *kə* ("as" or "like") and *lə* ("to" or "for").

<sup>12</sup> This study does not deal with the issues of dating related to God's kingdom.

<sup>13</sup> Pauci manuscript (3-10 [1/2 S: 3-6] codices manuscripti).

a comparative table presenting the Hebrew text alongside its literal translation is provided.<sup>14</sup>

*Table: Daniel 2:44–45 in Aramaic and Its Translation*

Literal Translation	Aramaic Text
And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will not be destroyed and the kingdom will not be left to another people it will break in pieces and put an end all these kingdoms and it will stand forever. Just as you saw	<i>Ūḥayōwmēhōwn dī malkayyā 'innūn yəqīm 'ēlāh šamayyā malkū  dī b'ālāmīn lā tīḥabbal ūmalkūtāh b'am 'āhorān lā tištəḥiq taddiq wəṭāsēp kāl-'illēn malkəwātā wəhī təqūm b'ālmayyā. Kāl-qəḥēl dī-ḥəzaytā</i>
that a stone was cut out from the mountain without hands, and it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold, the great God has made known to the king what will be after this, and the dream is true, and its interpretation trustworthy.	<i>dī miṭṭūrā 'itgazeret 'eḥen dī-lā ḥīdayin wəhaddeqet parzēlā nəḥāšā ḥaspā kaspā wəḏahāḥā  'ēlāh raḥ hōwḏa' ləmallā  māh dī lehēwē aḥārē ḏanāh wəyaṣṣiḥ ḥelmā ūməhēman pišrēh.</i>

As observed in the table, the literal translation of Dan 2:44–45 aligns closely with English versions that follow a literal approach to the MT (e.g., ASV, ESV, JPS, KJV, NAB, RSV).<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1967–77).

<sup>15</sup> For the categories of the Bible versions, see Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2014).

However, variations emerge, particularly regarding the definiteness and indefiniteness of the symbols in the passage.<sup>16</sup>

For instance, the ASV and JPS render the stone as indefinite, while treating the mountain and the metallic elements as definite. In contrast, the KJV and NAB present the stone, the mountain, and the metallic elements all as definite. The ESV and RSV adopt yet another approach, rendering both the stone and the mountain indefinite while maintaining the definiteness of the metallic elements.

Among these translations, the ASV and JPS most faithfully preserve the MT's treatment of definiteness and indefiniteness. These versions correctly render the stone as indefinite and the mountain and metallic elements as definite, consistent with the Aramaic text. Conversely, the KJV and NAB deviate from the MT by rendering the stone as definite, contrary to the original text. Similarly, while the ESV and RSV appropriately render the stone as indefinite, they diverge from the MT by treating the mountain as indefinite, despite its definiteness in the MT. This deviation in the ESV and RSV may reflect influence from the Septuagint (LXX),<sup>17</sup> which renders both the stone and the mountain in indefinite forms. Such alignment suggests a potential interpretive preference for the LXX reading over the MT in these translations.

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<sup>16</sup> In the Aramaic grammar, the definite is called determined and the indefinite is called undetermined. See Frederick E. Greenspahn, *An Introduction to Aramaic*, 2nd ed. (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 25–27.

<sup>17</sup> See the LXX of Dan 2:44–45 and how it renders the symbols stone and mountain in indefinite form (note the underline words).

καὶ ἐν τοῖς χρόνοις τῶν βασιλείων τούτων στήσῃ ὁ θεὸς τοῦ οὐρανοῦ βασιλείαν ἄλλην ἣτις ἔσται εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας καὶ οὐ φθαρήσεται καὶ αὕτη ἡ βασιλεία ἄλλο ἔθνος οὐ μὴ ἑάσῃ πατάξῃ δὲ καὶ ἀφανίσῃ τὰς βασιλείας ταύτας καὶ αὐτὴ στήσεται εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα καθάπερ ἑώρακας ἐξ ὅρουσ τμηθῆναι λίθον ἄνευ χειρῶν καὶ συνελόησε τὸ ὄστρακον τὸν σίδηρον καὶ τὸν χαλκὸν καὶ τὸν ἄργυρον καὶ τὸν χρυσόν ὁ θεὸς ὁ μέγας ἐσήμανε τῷ βασιλεῖ τὰ ἐσόμενα ἐπ' ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν καὶ ἀκριβὲς τὸ ὄραμα καὶ πιστὴ ἡ τοῦτου κρίσις.

## The Setting of the Dream

Daniel 2 recounts the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar, which he received during the second year of his reign (v. 1). This chronological detail has posed a significant challenge for interpreters, as it appears to conflict with the timeline provided in Dan 1:5 and 1:18.<sup>18</sup> If the events in Dan 2:1 follow sequentially after those in the previous chapter, how could Daniel and his friends have completed their three-year training before the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign? Various interpretations<sup>19</sup> have been proposed to address this issue, but this study approaches the dating through the regnal system of Babylonian kings.<sup>20</sup>

Victor H. Matthews notes that Nebuchadnezzar ascended to the throne on September 6, 605 BCE,<sup>21</sup> with his first regnal year

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<sup>18</sup> Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, *The Book of Daniel: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections*, The New Interpreter's Bible (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 7:496.

<sup>19</sup> For example, Judah Slotki suggests that the "second year" of Nebuchadnezzar's reign occurred two years after the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 587 BC. Judah Slotki, *Daniel-Ezra-Nehemiah: Hebrew Text and English Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (London: Sonino, 1999), 7. However, this idea is uncertain. Some prefer the translation "twelfth year" for the Aramaic *šānat šatayim*, as the second year conflicts with Dan 1:5, 18. See Karl Marti, *Das Buch Daniel* (Tübingen: JCB Mohr, 1901), 7; Edward Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 55. This proposal is difficult to accept since no manuscript supports it. John Calvin attempted to resolve the conflict by suggesting that during Daniel's exile, Nebuchadnezzar was merely a vice-regent of his father Nabopolassar. John Calvin, *Commentary on the Prophet Daniel*, trans. by Thomas Myer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 5:357. John J. Collins sees no issue with the Babylonian capture of Jerusalem before Nebuchadnezzar's accession. John J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, Hermenia, trans. O. C. Dean, ed. Frank Moore Cross (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 154.

<sup>20</sup> See Mervin Maxwell, *God Cares: The Message of Daniel for You and Your Family* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1981), 1:46, 47.

<sup>21</sup> Victor H. Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), Dan 2:1. On Babylon's victory over Egypt, Jerusalem's fall, and the deportations of the people of Judah, see

officially beginning in the spring of 604 BCE and ending in the spring of 603 BCE. Consequently, his second regnal year spanned from the spring of 603 BCE to the spring of 602 BCE.<sup>22</sup> It is plausible that the king's dream occurred during this period,<sup>23</sup> likely before Daniel and his friends completed their training.<sup>24</sup> By that time, the Babylonian Empire had achieved notable military victories, solidifying its dominance in the region.

Donald J. Wiseman highlights the far-reaching effects of Babylon's victories,<sup>25</sup> noting that Nebuchadnezzar's conquests extended beyond Egypt, including his decisive battle at Carchemish in 605 BCE, to encompass the entire region of Hatti, where "Hatti" at that time was a term broadly referring to Syria and Palestine.<sup>26</sup> These military successes contributed to the establishment and consolidation of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, with some scholars suggesting that the second year of his rule marked the zenith of his triumphs.<sup>27</sup>

Amid this period of unparalleled victories, Nebuchadnezzar appears to have turned his thoughts toward the future of his empire. The prophet Daniel underscores this in his account: "To you, O king, as you lay in bed came thoughts of what would be after this" (v. 29a).<sup>28</sup> Nebuchadnezzar's reflections on the fate of his kingdom created an opportune moment for divine revelation

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Donald J. Wiseman, *Chronicles of the Chaldean Kings* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1974), 25–27.

<sup>22</sup> See Samuel R. Driver, *The Book of Daniel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1900), 17; Ellen G. White, *The Story of Prophet and Kings* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1943), 491.

<sup>23</sup> Maxwell, *God Cares*, 46–47.

<sup>24</sup> Z. Stefanovic, *Daniel*, 82.

<sup>25</sup> Wiseman, *Chronicles of the Chaldeans Kings*, 25.

<sup>26</sup> Wiseman, *Chronicles of the Chaldeans Kings*, 25.

<sup>27</sup> For a good overview of Nebuchadnezzar's victories during the second year of his reign, see Raymond Hammer, *The Book of Daniel*, The Cambridge Bible Commentary 26 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 26.

<sup>28</sup> All scriptural references are from ESV, otherwise stated.



through a dream.<sup>29</sup> This dream conveyed a clear and sobering message: his kingdom, despite its grandeur, would eventually come to an end. Other kingdoms would rise and fall in succession, yet only the kingdom of God would endure eternally. The dream not only revealed the transient nature of earthly powers but also affirmed the ultimate sovereignty of God's eternal kingdom.

## Literary Analysis

The text of Dan 2 is often regarded by John J. Collins as highly complex in its literary features,<sup>30</sup> with its eschatology considered anomalous.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, the presence of repetition, reduplication, and possible insertions has been viewed as challenging the structure and unity of the text.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, a literary analysis of Dan 2 offers valuable insights into these perceived complexities and incongruities.

### Structure of Daniel 2

The narrative of Dan 2 is highly crafted, featuring a logical structure divided into seven sections. The literary arrangement

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<sup>29</sup> Dreams are one of the mediums through which God communicates with people (e.g., Gen 28:10–22; Dan 4:4–18; Matt 1:20; 27:19). See Peter M. van Bemmelen, "Revelation and Inspiration," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2000). In the Ancient Near East (ANE), kings commonly received dreams believed to come from the gods. Ernest Lucas, *Daniel*, *Apollos Old Testament Commentary* 20 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 69. Adolf Leo Oppenheim pens various dream accounts from different ANE cultures: the dream of Gudea (Sumerian), the dream of Gyges (Akkadian), the dream of Nabonidus (Babylonian), the dream of Thutmose IV (Egyptian), and the dream of Hattushili (Hittite). Adolf Leo Oppenheim, "The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 46.3 (1956): 245–55.

<sup>30</sup> Collins, *Daniel*, 153.

<sup>31</sup> Collins, *Daniel*, 153.

<sup>32</sup> T. J. Meadowcroft states that there are portions in Dan 2 which are inserted during the final redaction. T. J. Meadowcroft, *Aramaic Daniel and Greek Daniel: A Literary Comparison*, JSOT 198 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1995), 162–86. CF. Hartman and DiLella, *The Book of Daniel*, 39.

is evident in how each section either parallels or complements the others through contrast, except for the central section, which serves as the apex of the structure. This artistic sequence, forming a chiasm, suggests coherence and unity in the text that critics have questioned:

A Introduction: Nebuchadnezzar was disturbed by his dream (v. 1)

B Magicians: they failed to recount and explain

C Nebuchadnezzar's dream (vv. 2–11)

D Daniel and Arioch: death decree, Daniel went to the king with a proposal (vv. 12–16)

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C<sup>1</sup> Core: God revealed the dream to Daniel (vv. 17–23)

B<sup>1</sup> Daniel and Arioch: death decree is averted, Daniel went to the king with an answer (vv. 24–25)

A<sup>1</sup> Daniel: he recounted and explained Nebuchadnezzar's dream (vv. 26–45)

Conclusion: Nebuchadnezzar was enlightened, acknowledged God, and promoted Daniel and his friends (vv. 46–49)<sup>33</sup>

The chiastic structure of Dan 2 underscores the centrality of section D (vv. 17–23), emphasizing the portrayal of God as the revealer of mysteries and the possessor of wisdom to unlock dreams. A closer examination of this structure reveals that the central section (vv. 17–23) functions as a thematic bridge, linking and transforming the parallel sections of Dan 2. Specifically, it reverses the negative situations outlined in the ABC sections into the positive outcomes presented in the A<sup>1</sup>B<sup>1</sup>C<sup>1</sup> sections. The pivotal placement of vv. 17–23 and its integration into the parallel structure of the chapter challenges the claims of some scholars who argue that vv. 17–23 (together

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<sup>33</sup> This is a modified structure of David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis-Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1999), 261.

with vv. 13–16) represent later insertions during the final redaction of the book.<sup>34</sup> On the contrary, the central positioning of vv. 17–23 and its interplay with the chapter’s broader structure highlight deliberate theological intentions that resonate throughout Dan 2.

The concept of God as the revealer of mysteries is essential for understanding the future in Dan 2. Nebuchadnezzar, contemplating the future of his kingdom, receives divine revelation through a cryptic dream (vv. 1, 29). Given the difficulty of the dream (v. 11), God reveals both its content and interpretation to Daniel (vv. 17–23), enabling the king to comprehend the future of his kingdom (vv. 29–30). Intriguingly, the focus of this revealed future is not merely on Nebuchadnezzar or the successive kingdoms but on God and His kingdom of God (vv. 44–45). Notably, the dream and its interpretation contain at least three linguistic elements that underscore the centrality of the kingdom of God.

### *Ḥāzāh* in Daniel 2:31–35

In the narrative of the dream (Dan 2:31–35), the verb *ḥāzāh*<sup>35</sup> (“see” or “look”) appears twice, serving as a linguistic marker to divide the section into two parts: vv. 31–33 and vv. 34–35. Jacques Doukhan notes that the first instance of *ḥāzāh* in v. 31 introduces the great image composed of metallic elements.<sup>36</sup> He further observes that the second instance, in v. 34, marks the

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<sup>34</sup> The following are examples of some scholars who suppose that Dan 2:13–23 is an insertion of the chapter: Collins, *Daniel*, 153; and Meadowcroft, *Aramaic Daniel and Greek Daniel*, 162–67.

<sup>35</sup> The root *hzh* is a technical term to designate the prophetic vision (e.g., Isa 1:1; Ezek 13:6; Dan 8:13; Amos 1:1; Mic 1:1; Hab 1:1).

<sup>36</sup> Jacques B. Doukhan, *Secrets of Daniel: Wisdom and Dreams of a Jew Prince in Exile* (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2000), 28. The metals depreciate in value, decreasing from gold to silver, then to bronze, and finally to iron. From another perspective, however, the metals increase in strength, escalating from gold to silver, then to bronze, and ultimately to iron. See Frederick J. Murphy, *Introduction to Apocalyptic Literature*, ed. Leander E. Keck, *The New Interpreter’s Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 7:54; and Lucas, *Daniel*, 74.

destruction of the image by a stone cut out from a mountain, which subsequently becomes a great mountain (v. 35).<sup>37</sup> This dual usage of *ḥāzāh* delineates a clear distinction between the metallic elements and the cut stone. The former are transient and destructible, while the latter is enduring and permanent (vv. 34–35).

Within the framework of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, the stone cut out from the mountain appears last in the sequence of metallic elements, yet it shatters the entire image into pieces. This demonstrates the superior strength of the stone over the metallic elements. In the OT, the stone frequently symbolizes strength and resilience (Job 6:12; 41:24; Ezek 11:19). Additionally, the detail that the stone is “cut out from the mountain” (Dan 2:45) further emphasizes its durability, as the mountain itself signifies immense permanence and stability.<sup>38</sup>

#### *’Ēlāh Šamayyā’* in Daniel 2:36–45

Similar to the recounting of the dream (Dan 2:31–35), the interpretation of the dream (vv. 36–45) follows a two-part structure. The phrase *’ēlāh šamayyā’* (“God of heavens”) appears twice and serves as a linguistic marker dividing the section into vv. 36–43 and vv. 44–45.<sup>39</sup> When Daniel interpreted the dream, he identified the metallic elements as representations of world kingdoms. In v. 37, he emphasized that it was *’ēlāh šamayyā’* who had granted Nebuchadnezzar his kingdom. However, in vv. 44–45, *’ēlāh šamayyā’* no longer bestows dominion upon a human ruler but establishes his own eternal kingdom.

As with the use of *ḥāzāh* (“to see”) in the earlier section, the repetition of *’ēlāh šamayyā’* here underscores the contrast between the transitory nature of worldly kingdoms and the

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<sup>37</sup> Doukhan, *Secrets of Daniel*, 28.

<sup>38</sup> See *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, s. v. “Mountain.”

<sup>39</sup> Doukhan, *Secrets of Daniel*, 37.

permanence of God's kingdom. Notably, the kingdom of God surpasses earthly kingdoms on every level,<sup>40</sup> as it will ultimately destroy and replace them all (vv. 44–45).

### Verbal Stems in Daniel 2:36–45

The significance of God's kingdom is further underscored through the use of verbal stems, as illustrated in the accompanying footnote.<sup>41</sup> When Daniel presents the interpretation of the dream, he appears to employ a deliberate verbal stem pattern. The prophet predominantly utilizes the *Pe'al* and *Pa'el* stems in his explanation of the metallic symbols (vv. 36–43). However, he shifts to the *Hap'el* or *'Ap'el* stem when introducing the kingdom of God (vv. 44–45). Although the reason for the dominance of the *Hap'el*/*'Ap'el* stem in these verses is not explicitly stated, it is plausible that this shift draws attention to and emphasizes the establishment of God's kingdom.

### Structure of Daniel 2:44–45

Daniel 2:44–45 is treated as a single unit.<sup>42</sup> In the structural analysis below, these verses are divided into five segments based on recurring linguistic elements, forming an ABCB<sup>1</sup>A<sup>1</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Doukhan, *Secrets of Daniel*, 37. For the superiority of God's kingdom, see Arthur G. Keough, *Let Daniel Speak* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1986), 35–43; Roy Allan Anderson, *Unfolding Daniel's Prophecies* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1975), 45–46; and Philip R. Davies, *Daniel*, Old Testament Guides 45 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 45–46.

<sup>41</sup> Below is the list of verbs in Dan 2:36–45 with different stems. In each unit, *Peal*/*Pael* dominates in vv. 36–43, but in vv. 44–45, the *Hap'el* or *'Ap'el* eclipses with *Peal*/*Pael*.

Passage	Total Occurrences	Stems and Specific Occurrences
vv. 36–38	five times	<i>Peal</i> (4x), <i>Hap'el</i> (1x)
v. 39	two times	<i>Peal</i> (2x)
v. 40	six times	<i>Peal</i> / <i>Pael</i> (4x), <i>Hap'el</i> or <i>'Ap'el</i> (2x)
vv. 41–43	fifteen times	<i>Peal</i> / <i>Pael</i> (13x), <i>Hitpaal</i> (2x)
vv. 44–45	eleven times	<i>Peal</i> / <i>Pael</i> (3x), <i>Hap'el</i> or <i>'Ap'el</i> (5x), <i>Hithpaal</i> / <i>Hithpaal</i> (3x)

<sup>42</sup> The section of Dan 2:36–45 is divided into five units: vv. 36–38, 39, 40, 41–43, and 44–45.

chiastic pattern. The first segment introduces the titles *’ēlāh* (“God of heavens”) and *malkayyā’* (plural of *malkā’*), associated with the phrase “in the days of those kings” (v. 44a). These titles reappear in the fifth segment, where *’ēlāh* is described as “a great God,”<sup>43</sup> and *malkā’* refers specifically to Nebuchadnezzar (v. 45c; cf. vv. 1, 36).

The second segment highlights the verbal root *deqaq* (“to break”), illustrating the activity of God’s kingdom in breaking the earthly kingdoms into pieces (v. 44b).<sup>44</sup> This verb resurfaces in the fourth segment, where *deqaq* describes the breaking action of the smiting stone, which shatters the metallic elements (v. 45b). Between these segments lies the central, third segment, which focuses on the symbolic imagery of the stone cut out from the mountain (v. 45a). Notably, this segment stands without a linguistic parallel, further emphasizing its pivotal role within the structure.

A God (*’ēlāh*) sets up a kingdom in the days of those kings (*malkayyā’*) (v. 44a)

B it breaks in pieces (*deqaq*) all the world kingdoms (v. 44b).

Ca stone was cut from the mountain without hands (v. 45a).

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B<sup>1</sup> it breaks in pieces (*deqaq*) the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold (v. 45b).

A<sup>1</sup> God (*’ēlāh*) has made known to the king (*malkā’*) what shall be after this (v. 45c)

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<sup>43</sup> Keil remarks that *’ēlāh rab*, meaning “great God,” in Dan 2:44 is not an undefined great God because it lacks a definite article; rather, it refers to the great God in heaven, whom Daniel had already announced to the king as the revealer of mysteries. Keil, *The Book of Daniel*, 561.

<sup>44</sup> The verb *deqaq* (“break in pieces”) emphasizes total destruction. René Péter-Contesse and John Ellington, *A Handbook on the Book of Daniel*, UBS (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 65.

The chiastic structure of Dan 2:44–45 places the C segment—the stone cut from the mountain without hands—at its center, underscoring the centrality of this symbol. This arrangement highlights that the primary focus of Nebuchadnezzar’s symbolic dream is not the great image but the stone, closely connected to God’s kingdom and divine activity. Framing the C segment is the verb *deqaq*, meaning “to break,” which appears in both B and B<sup>1</sup> segments. In the first instance (B), the verb describes the breaking activity of God’s kingdom upon the earthly kingdoms. In the second instance (B<sup>1</sup>), *deqaq* depicts the stone shattering the great image, with gold, silver, bronze, iron, and iron-clay components.<sup>45</sup> The repetition of *deqaq* creates a thematic parallel between the breaking activity of God’s kingdom and the destructive power of the stone.<sup>46</sup>

This chiastic structure establishes a strong connection between the stone and the kingdom of God, emphasizing divine authority and eschatological intervention. The language and time frame associated with the establishment of God’s kingdom are distinctly eschatological.<sup>47</sup> However, grammatical and syntactical elements within the text suggest a balance to this

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<sup>45</sup> In the Aramaic portion of the OT, the term *deqaq* (“break in pieces” or “shatter”) appears ten times, exclusively in the book of Daniel. In Dan 2, *deqaq* implies that the breaking activity of God’s kingdom upon the world empires mirrors that of the stone striking the metallic statue in pieces (vv. 34, 35, 40, 44, 45). In chapter 6, it is used to depict the lions’ action of crushing the bones of Daniel’s accusers and their families (v. 25). Meanwhile, in chapter 7, *deqaq* describes the terrifying activity of the fourth beast as it devours its prey in pieces (vv. 7, 19, 23). This data suggests that what God’s kingdom will do to the kingdom represented by the legs of iron in Dan 2 (cf. the fourth beast in Daniel 7) appears to be a retributive judgment for the actions this kingdom has taken against its subjects. For more information of the verb *deqaq*, see its Hebrew equivalent *daqaq*. Cornelis van Dam, “*daqaq*,” *NIDOTTE* 1:982–83; Herbert Wolf, “*daqaq*,” *TWOT* 1:194–95.

<sup>46</sup> Goldingay mentions that the crag (mountain, *tūr*) where the stone (*‘ēben*) was cut out symbolizes “strength and reliability” as evident in Deut 32:18; Ps 18:3 (2); 31:3–4 (2–3). Goldingay, *Daniela* 52.

<sup>47</sup> Miller agrees with Young (*Prophecy of Daniel*, 148–51) that Dan 2 is, in many ways, thematically the same as chap. 7, where the kingdom of God will be established in the final phase of the fourth kingdom. Miller, *Daniel*, 97.

eschatological focus. These nuances imply that while the ultimate fulfillment of God's kingdom lies in the future, its influence begins to manifest within the present historical framework.

## Grammar and Syntax

When exploring the symbolism of God's kingdom, it is essential to consider the specific aspects of the stone imagery that Daniel employed. Moreover, one must reflect on why the prophet emphasized that the stone was cut from the mountain.

### The Use of Preposition *Kə*

As noted earlier, the world kingdoms are represented by metallic symbolism, while the kingdom of God is symbolized by the stone cut out from the mountain. Analyzing the interpretation section (Dan 2:36–45) reveals that Daniel, in his explanation of the dream, first mentions the kingdom (*malkū*) before addressing its symbolism.<sup>48</sup> This sequencing suggests that the kingdom is analogous to its corresponding symbol, as indicated by the preposition *kə* ("like," "as," or "according to"). However, the analogy between the symbol and the kingdom it represents is limited to specific characteristics. This is evident in that only certain attributes of the kingdom are highlighted and compared to the symbolism through the use of *kə*, which is prefixed to a noun, relative pronoun, or preposition.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> The pattern of mentioning the term "kingdom" (*malkū*) before the symbolism is particularly evident in Daniel's interpretation of the great image, where he details the meanings of gold, silver, bronze, iron, and stone cut out from the mountain. This pattern is especially notable in his interpretations of the first to fourth kingdoms and the heavenly in Daniel 2:36–40 and 2:44–45. In all instances, *malkū* is mentioned first, except in the interpretation of the feet made of iron and clay, where the symbol is mentioned before referring to the divided kingdom (vv. 41–43).

<sup>49</sup> The terms within the interpretation section that include *kə* and carry analogical overtones are as follows: *kəpārzēlā'*, *kāl-qābēl dī*, *kādī*, and *kāl-qābēl dī* (Dan 2:40–45). Notably, all these terms apply specifically to



For instance, in v. 40, the fourth kingdom is likened to iron (*kəp̄arzelā*) based on its strength, as conveyed in the phrase: “There shall be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron.” The iron’s strength is emphasized by the statement, “because iron breaks in pieces and shatters all things.” Similarly, “like iron (*p̄arzelā*) that crushes, it [the fourth kingdom] shall break and crush all these.” Another example appears in vv. 41–43, where the feet and toes, partly made of clay and iron, represent a divided kingdom. The analogy between the symbol and its interpretation is established on the premise that the divided kingdom retains the toughness of iron, “just as (*kol-qāḇēl dī*)<sup>50</sup> ... the iron is mixed with common clay.” However, the iron and clay fail to adhere to one another, “even as (*kədī*) iron does not mix with clay.”

Finally, in vv. 44–45, the kingdom of God is compared to the stone cut out from the mountain without hands. Yet, this analogy appears to be limited to the breaking activity of the stone. The structure of v. 44, which describes the kingdom of God and its characteristics, provides valuable insights into this idea.

<i>Ūḥayōwmēhōwn dī malkayyā</i>	In the days of those kings
<i>’innūn</i>	
<i>yəqīm ’ēlāh šamayyā malkū</i>	God will set up a kingdom
<i>dī</i>	that
A <i>lə’ālāmīn lā tīḥabbal</i>	it will not be destroyed
B <i>ūmalkūtāh lə’am ’āhorān lā</i>	the kingdom will not be left to
<i>tīštəḇiq</i>	another

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the iron or the fourth kingdom (including the feet of iron and clay) and the kingdom of God, paralleling the contextual use of *deqaq*.

<sup>50</sup> The phrase *kol-qāḇēl dī* appears fifteen times in Biblical Aramaic. The term *qāḇēl*, meaning “in front of,” “because of,” or “because that” (when followed by *dī*), is often preceded by *kāl*, a combination of prepositions *kə* (“as” or “like”) and *lə* (“to” or “for”), as indicated by BibleWorks 10 and Accordance (Bible software). In the book of Daniel, this preposition is frequently rendered in English as “inasmuch as” (NASB) or “just as” (ESV and NRSV).

B<sup>1</sup> *taddiq wəṭāsēp̄ kāl-’illēn* it will break and put an end  
*maḵəwātā* all these kingdoms  
A<sup>1</sup> *wəhī təqūm b̄’ālbmayyā.* it will stand forever.

One notable observation from the structure involves the pattern of definiteness and indefiniteness in the linguistic elements. In the A and B segments, the linguistic elements (*b̄’ālbmîn* and *ūmaḵūtāh* from *maḵūtāh*) appear first in the word order of their respective clauses and lack a definite article. In contrast, the linguistic elements in the A<sup>1</sup> and B<sup>1</sup> segments (*b̄’ālbmayyā* and *maḵūtā*) occur last in the word order of the clauses and include the definite article (’ or ʕ in Aramaic).<sup>51</sup> This pattern of linguistic elements forms the basis for arranging the descriptions of God’s kingdom into an ABB<sup>1</sup>A<sup>1</sup> structure.

Among the four descriptions of God’s kingdom in Dan 2:44 it is noteworthy that the stone cut out from the mountain and its activity of breaking the image in pieces (v. 45) corresponds specifically to the third description of God’s kingdom.<sup>52</sup> In this sense, the analogy between God’s kingdom and its symbolism focuses solely on the breaking activity. This connection is evident in the linguistic parallels between the activity of God’s kingdom described in v. 44 and the activity of the stone in v. 45. For instance, the clause “it will break in pieces (*deqaq*) and put an end to all these kingdoms” (v. 44) corresponds to the clause “it breaks in pieces (*deqaq*) the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold” (v. 45). These parallels indicate that the preposition *kə* (“as” or “like”) is contextually tied to the third description of God’s kingdom.

<sup>51</sup> For comparison between the Hebrew and Aramaic article, see Gary D. Pratico and Miles V. Van Pelt, *Basics of Biblical Hebrew Grammar*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019); Miles V. Van Pelt, *Basics of Biblical Aramaic: Complete Grammar, Lexicon, and Annotated Text*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2023).

<sup>52</sup> In Dan 2:44, I call the above four statements as descriptions of the kingdom of God because they assert about the indestructible and eternal nature of God’s kingdom in contrast to the four kingdoms, which are earthly and physical in nature. Cf. Miller, *Daniel*, 100–101.

If so, the juxtaposition of linguistic elements in vv. 44–45 highlights that the stone breaking the metallic image symbolizes God’s kingdom acting upon earthly kingdoms, not the stone itself as God’s kingdom. Rather, the stone’s symbolism emphasizes the kingdom’s establishment through decisive action, aligning with the context that God’s kingdom ultimately aims to establish eternal rule, depicted as the stone becoming a mountain filling the whole earth (v. 45; cf. v. 35).<sup>53</sup>

### The Aramaic Article in the Symbols

The initial appearance of the symbols in Dan 2:32–34 is marked by the absence of the Aramaic definite article ܐ ('). These include the great image (*ṣelēm*), the head of gold (*dēhab*), the breast and arms of silver (*kesep*), the belly and thighs of bronze (*nēhāš*), the legs of iron (*pērazel*), the feet partly of iron (*pērazel*) and partly of clay (*ḥāsāp*), and the stone (*ʿeben*) cut out without hands. In v. 35, these symbols reappear, this time with the definite article: *ṣelmāʿ*, *pērazelāʿ*, *ḥāsāpāʿ*, *nēhāšāʿ*, *kesepāʿ*, *dēhabāʿ*, and *ʿebenāʿ*. Additionally, the mountain (*ṭūr*) is introduced in v. 35 in an anarthrous form. The absence of the article for the mountain is consistent with Daniel’s pattern of presenting symbols in chapter 2, where the initial references to symbols are anarthrous, and subsequent mentions are articular<sup>54</sup>—except for the stone and the feet of mixed of iron

<sup>53</sup> The filling of the mountain on the whole earth recalls Isa 2:2–4, where nations come to the mountain of the Lord. David S. Russell, *Daniel*, The Daily Study Bible Series (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 53. One may object to this connection, as the mountain here is *har* instead of *šūr*.

<sup>54</sup> The term used for “image” (*ṣelem*) appears five times in Dan 2. Its first occurrence is anarthrous, while the remaining instances are articular (vv. 31 [2x], 32, 34, 35). The term for “gold” (*dēhāb*) occurs four times: the first instance is anarthrous, and the subsequent occurrences are articular (vv. 32, 35, 38, 45). The term for “silver” (*kesep*) is used three times, following a similar pattern: the first is anarthrous, and the rest are articular (vv. 32, 35, 45). The term for “bronze” (*nēhāš*) appears four times: the initial occurrence is anarthrous, while the rest are articular (vv. 32, 35, 39, 45). The term for “iron” (*pārazel*) is found fourteen times. Its first use is anarthrous (v. 33), with subsequent instances predominantly articular (vv. 34, 35, 40 [3x], 45). However, its usage to

and clay, which remains partly articular and partly anarthrous, reflecting their composite nature.

In the interpretation section (Dan 2:36–45), Daniel identifies the articular metallic symbols as world kingdoms (vv. 36–43), while the stone cut out from the mountain is linked to the kingdom of God (vv. 44–45). Daniel’s interpretive approach appears to follow a consistent pattern: symbols rendered in definite forms are interpreted as kingdoms. However, the symbols of the partly iron and partly clay feet are presented in both articular and anarthrous forms. This observation does not undermine the broader pattern, as the symbols reappear in summary form in v. 45, where all are rendered as definite: *pěrazelā*’, *něḥāšā*’, *ḥāsāpā*’, *kesepā*’, *děhabā*’, and *tūrā*’, with the exception of the stone (*’eben*), which remains anarthrous.

The consistent use of the definite article for the metallic elements and the mountain in the summary (Dan 2:45) suggests that the kingdom of God is more appropriately associated with the mountain, which is rendered with the definite article, rather than the stone, which remains markedly indefinite. This suggestion aligns with Daniel’s consistent interpretation of articular symbols as kingdoms in vv. 36–43. If so, the mountain (*tūrā*’), with its definite article in v. 45,

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describe “partly of iron” in vv. 41–42 is a mixture of articular (v. 41 [2x], 43 [2x]) and anarthrous (vv. 41, 42), likely reflecting the composite nature of the material, which is not fully iron as in the fourth kingdom (v. 40). The term for “clay” (*ḥāsēp*) is used nine times, with a pattern similar to “iron.” Its first occurrence is anarthrous (v. 33), followed by articular instances (vv. 34, 35, 45). Similar with the previous, references to “partly of clay” are a blend of anarthrous (vv. 41 [2x], 42, 43) and articular (v. 43), again likely due to the mixed composition of iron and clay. The term for “stone” (*’eben*) is used three times: the first is anarthrous (v. 34), the second is articular (v. 35), and the third reverts to anarthrous (v. 45). Lastly, the term for “mountain” (*tūr*) appears only twice: the first instance is anarthrous (v. 35), and the second is articular (v. 45).

emerges as a more fitting symbol for God's kingdom than the anarthrous stone (*'eben*).<sup>55</sup>

## Word Study

The terms *'eben* ("stone") and *ṭūr* ("mountain") are relatively scarce in the Aramaic sections of Daniel. However, their Hebrew counterparts, *'eben* and *šur*, occur frequently in biblical Hebrew. An overview of these terms within the OT and the broader ANE context provides valuable insight into the divine significance underlying these symbols.

### *'Eben* in ANE, Aramaic, and Hebrew

Lexicons reveal no consensus on whether *'eben* ("stone") is a loanword from the ANE, but Semitic dictionaries identify its literal usage across related languages such as Akkadian (*abnu*), Ugaritic (*'bn*), Syriac (*abna*), and North-West Semitic inscriptions (*abn*).<sup>56</sup> Of particular significance in the ANE religious context is the use of stone, where sacrifices to the gods are offered.<sup>57</sup>

The usage of *'eben* in biblical Aramaic and Hebrew, however, diverges in key ways. In biblical Aramaic, the term is predominantly used literally, referring to materials for idols (Dan 5:4, 23) and construction (Ezra 5:8; 6:4). Nonetheless, a few occurrences are figurative, as seen in Dan 2:34, 35, and 45. Similarly, in biblical Hebrew, *'eben* appears primarily in a literal sense, with 272 occurrences largely referring to tangible objects (e.g., Exod 20:25; Deut 27:5; Ps 62:3; Neh 4:3).<sup>58</sup> However, a

<sup>55</sup> Outside Dan 2, the Aramaic term *'eben* appears five times. It is articular in Dan 5:4, where the rest of the elements are also articular (cf. v. 23), but the rest are in anarthrous form (Ezra 5:8; 6:4; Dan 6:18).

<sup>56</sup> See (e.g.) *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, s.v. "*abnu*"; *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian*, s.v. "*abnu*"; *Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions*, s.v. "*abnu*."

<sup>57</sup> *Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions*, s.v. "*abnu*."

<sup>58</sup> For examples, stone as material for architectures (Exod 20:25; Deut 27:5; 1 Kgs 5:17–18; Ps 62:3; Neh 4:3), as vessels (Exod 7:19), as weapons (Judg 20:16), as material for idols (Deut 4:28), as pad for inscriptions

small subset of uses is figurative, revealing two distinct theological emphases.

First, *'eben* symbolizes judgment (Isa 30:30; Ezek 38:22) and divine restoration (Zech 3:9).<sup>59</sup> Second, it serves as a reference to the divine, as in Gen 49:24, Ps 118:22, Isa 8:14, and 28:6. Douglas Bennett posits that the stone in Ps 118:22, Isa 8:14, and 28:6 bears a messianic connotation (Mark 12:10–11; Rom 9:33; 1 Pet 2:6–7).<sup>60</sup> However, in their OT contexts, these references to *'eben* primarily evoke Yahweh rather than a messianic figure.<sup>61</sup>

*Ṭūr* (*Ṣūr*) in ANE, Aramaic, and Hebrew

The term *ḡr* corresponds to the Aramaic *ṭūr*, the Hebrew *ṣūr*, and *har*.<sup>62</sup> Various ancient texts illustrate the connection between mountains and divine activity. For example, mountains in Syria-Palestine, including Mount Zaphon, were not only worshipped but also served as place of worship.<sup>63</sup> Baal was believed to dwell on Mount Zaphon, while El resided on the

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(Deut 27:2, 8), as pad for the Ten Commandments (Exod 24:12; 31:18; Deut 4:13), and as an instrument for judgment by stoning (Lev 20:2; Num 15:35; Deut 13:10).

<sup>59</sup> See the figurative use of *'eben* in Andrew E. Hill, “*'eben*,” *NIDOTTE* 1:248–50.

<sup>60</sup> Douglas Bennett, “The Stone Kingdom of Daniel 2,” in *Symposium on Daniel Book 2*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series; Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, 1986), 361–67.

<sup>61</sup> This is particularly evident in Isa 8:14, which addresses judgment against Judah. Fearing the alliance between Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah, king of Israel, Ahaz, king of Judah, sought assistance from Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria (2 Kgs 16:5–9). However, Isaiah warned Ahaz that the Assyrians would overrun Judah and devastate the entire region. Amid this crisis, the Lord alone would remain as a sanctuary. Those who trust in Him will find refuge, while those who do not will encounter Him as “a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling” (Isa 8:5–14).

<sup>62</sup> Mitchell Dahood, *Ras Shamra Parallels: The Texts from Ugarit on the Hebrew*, *Analecta Orientalia* 50 (Rome, Italy: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1972).

<sup>63</sup> Louvin Lipinski, “*ṣāfōn*,” *TDOT* 12:438–40.

“Mount of El.”<sup>64</sup> Other examples include Mount Kankaniya, an underworld mountain Baal must have to seek after his death,<sup>65</sup> and Kammer Duku, the “bright mountain of the east,” where gods fixed destinies on New Year’s Day.<sup>66</sup> Similarly, Mashu, a western mountain, marked the entrance to the realm of the dead,<sup>67</sup> while Mount Targhuzizza and Mount Tharumegi served as boundary mountains between the inhabited world and the realm of Mot.<sup>68</sup> These examples underscore that mountains were perceived as divine dwelling places and centers of worship where humans sought to invoke divine blessings.<sup>69</sup>

In Aramaic, the term for mountain is *tūr*, but since it appears only in Dan 2:35 and 2:45, it is helpful to consider its Hebrew counterpart, *šūr*, instead of *har*. The term *šūr* is translated “rock,” “boulder,” “large rock,” or “rocky hill.”<sup>70</sup> It occurs seventy-three times in the OT, with approximately half of the occurrences are used in a literal sense (e.g., 1 Sam 21:10; 24:3; Ps 78:20). The remaining instances are figurative, with *šūr* frequently serving as an epithet for God—at least thirty-two times.<sup>71</sup> Notably, in many of these cases, *šūr* is translated directly as θεός (“God”) in the LXX.<sup>72</sup> Examples include: θεός ἀληθινὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ (“the rock, his work is perfect,” Deut 32:4), θεοῦ σωτηριος αὐτοῦ (“rock of his salvation,” Deut 32:15),

<sup>64</sup> See James B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 130.

<sup>65</sup> Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 130.

<sup>66</sup> See Werner Foerster, “óros,” *TDNT* 1:475.

<sup>67</sup> Foerster, “óros,” 475.

<sup>68</sup> Foerster, “óros,” 475.

<sup>69</sup> Gary A. Lee, “Hill,” *ISBE* 2:715.

<sup>70</sup> *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, s.v. “šūr”; *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic*, s.v. “šūr.”

<sup>71</sup> Deut 32:4, 15, 18, 30, 31; 1 Sam 2:2; 2 Sam 22:3, 32, 47 (2x); 23:3; Pss 18:3, 32, 47; 19:15; 28:1; 31:3; 61:3; 62:3, 7, 8; 71:3; 78:35; 89:7; 92:15; 94:22; 95:1; 144:1; Isa 8:14; 17:10; 26:4; 30:29; 44:8; 51:1; Hab 1:12.

<sup>72</sup> See Deut 32:4, 15, 18, 30, 31; 1 Sam 2:2; Pss 18:31 (32), 46 (47); 28:1; 31:2 (3); 62:2 (3), 6 (7), 7 (80); 71:3; 78:35; 91:15 (16); 95:1; 144:1; Isa 26:4; 44:8.

εὐλογητὸς ὁ θεός μου (“blessed be my rock,” Ps 17:47), and γενοῦ μοι εἰς θεὸν ὑπερασπιστὴν (“be to me my rock,” Ps 70:3). These translations demonstrate that the Hebrew scribes who rendered *šūr* into Greek recognized its divine significance, equating it with θεός.

From a brief overview of stone and mountain symbolism in the ANE, Aramaic, and Hebrew contexts, mountains are consistently associated with divinity—either God in Jewish thought or gods in pagan perspectives. In Dan 2:44–45, the contrast between stone and mountain symbolism is significant. King Nebuchadnezzar, familiar with ANE traditions, would likely have understood the mountain as a symbol of divine presence and power,<sup>73</sup> while the stone, lacking inherent divine significance in ANE thought, was often associated with materials for carved idols (Dan 5:4, 23). Werner Foerster observes that Babylonian literature frequently portrays mountains as the abodes of gods.<sup>74</sup> Thus, the reference to the mountain from which the stone was cut in Dan 2 adds profound meaning. It emphasizes that the destruction wrought by the stone upon the great image originates directly from the divine—either from the gods in Nebuchadnezzar’s view or from God in Daniel’s interpretation.

### **Final Symbol in the Dream**

In the recounting of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (Dan 2:31–35), the *’eben* (“stone”) that struck and shattered the image is not the final symbol. Rather, the focus shifts to the *tūr* (“mountain”) that fills the entire earth (v. 35). Although the mountain is explicitly mentioned for the first time in verse 35, it is implicitly

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<sup>73</sup> In ANE, there is no clear separation between the “mountain and the world of the divine.” See Martin Selman, “*har*,” *NIDOTTE* 1:1052. Cf. Goldingay, *Daniel*, 52.

<sup>74</sup> Foerster, “*óros*,” 475.



present in the phrase, “a stone was cut out without hands” (v. 34).<sup>75</sup> Two observations can be drawn from this phrase.

First, the expression “a stone was cut out without hands” implies that the stone was hewn from a larger source. The interpretation section (vv. 36–45) clarifies that the stone was cut out from the mountain (v. 45). Since the mountain where the stone was cut out is depicted as part of the overall scene in Daniel’s vision, it is not an overstatement to infer that the mountain—symbolizing, as I propose, the kingdom of God—exists concurrently with the earthly kingdoms represented by the metals of the great statue. This concurrent presence of the mountain alongside the statue suggests that God’s kingdom possesses a historical dimension, co-existing with earthly kingdoms, rather than being purely eschatological in nature. Consequently, this interpretation challenges the view that God’s kingdom is exclusively an eschatological reality.<sup>76</sup>

Second, the Aramaic verb *gezar* (“cut” or “divide”), as used in the phrase “a stone was cut out from the mountain,” conveys the idea of severing or separating something from the same substance. This meaning is supported by various OT passages. For example, Solomon commanded that the child be divided (*gezar*) into two (1 Kgs 3:25–26), the people cut down (*gezar*) trees near the Jordan (2 Kgs 6:4), and God divided (*gezar*) the Red Sea (Ps 136:13).<sup>77</sup> With this framework, the cutting out

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<sup>75</sup> Cf. James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, ICC (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1927), 169.

<sup>76</sup> Many scholars assign the establishment of God’s kingdom in the final phase of the fourth kingdom, Rome. Keil, *Daniel*, 109–10; Leupold, *Daniel*, 123; Miller, *Daniel*, 100; Wood, *A Commentary on Daniel*, 72; Walvoord, *Daniel*, 75–76. Johannes Weiss and Albert Schweitzer see the proclamation of God’s kingdom as proclamation of what was going happen towards the close of earth’s history. Johannes Weiss, *Jesus’ Proclamation of the Kingdom of God*, Lives of Jesus Series (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971); Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 330–31.

<sup>77</sup> Michael A. Grisanti notes that the meaning of *gezar* ranges from cutting/dividing and exclusion from a place or thing to establishing a decree. Daniel 2:45 corresponds to the sense of cutting/dividing from

(*gezar*) of the stone from the mountain in Dan 2 likely implies that the stone shares the same essential qualities as the mountain, particularly its hardness, strength, and durability. As John Goldingay explains, “The crag from which the rock came might be a symbol for God himself in his strength and reliability.”<sup>78</sup> Therefore, the stone and the mountain are characterized by a shared nature.

Daniel underscores this relationship further. The stone, which was cut out from the mountain (v. 34; cf. v. 45) and subsequently shattered the great image, transforms into a great mountain, filling the whole earth.<sup>79</sup> The culmination of the dream, then, points to the establishment of God’s kingdom on earth.<sup>80</sup> This is where the eschatological aspect of the kingdom emerges.

## Conclusion and Implications

The two symbols, *’eben* (“stone”) and *ṭūr* (“mountain”), in Dan 2:44–45 are not intended to be understood literally; rather, they serve as figurative representations of the kingdom of God. Of

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the same substance. See Michael A. Grisanti, “*gezar*,” *NIDOTTE* 1:850; James E. Smith, “*gezar*,” *TWOT* 1:58.

<sup>78</sup> Goldingay, *Daniel*, 52.

<sup>79</sup> The ANE narrative that parallels the description of the stone that strikes and breaks the image into pieces is found in Gilgamesh Epic, where a dream is recounted in which Enkidu is symbolized as a meteor that falls at Gilgamesh’s feet. However, the narrative does not depict any destruction caused by the rock. Matthews, Chavalas, Walton, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, Dan 2:35–40.

<sup>80</sup> In King Nebuchadnezzar’s mind, the stone that became a mountain and filled the whole earth is a rival kingdom that destroys his. Joyce G. Baldwin, *Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC 23 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 103. Montgomery (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, 178) stresses the spiritual nature of the kingdom of God, However, failing to see the physical dimension of God’s kingdom would render this view imbalanced. For more information, see Martin Selman, “The Kingdom of God in the Old Testament.” *TynBul* 40.2 (1989): 161–83. Cf. John Bright, *The Kingdom of God* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1980); Nicholas Perrin, *The Kingdom of God: A Biblical Theology*, Biblical Theology for Life (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019).

the two, the mountain symbolism more convincingly represents God's kingdom than the stone, as supported by the syntactic and semantic evidence presented earlier.

Both the stone and mountain serve distinct purposes within the vision of Dan 2:44–45. While the mountain symbolizes the kingdom of God in the enduring and universal nature of its reign, the smiting stone illustrates how God's kingdom will overthrow the earthly kingdoms. However, it is essential to recognize that the ultimate destruction of these kingdoms will be accomplished by Christ at His Second Advent in the eschaton.<sup>81</sup> Consequently, the stone symbolism carries possible divine connotations.<sup>82</sup>

The identification of the symbolism of God's kingdom in Dan 2 must be approached not only through the textual witness but also with consideration of the theological implications. In this regard, the mountain appears to be a more robust symbol for God's kingdom than the stone. In Daniel's vision, the mountain underscores not only the eschatological reality of the kingdom but also its historical nature (concurrent with earthly kingdoms), thereby affirming its enduring and eternal character (cf. Dan 4:3 [3:33], 34 [31]; 6:26 [27]). God's kingdom transcends temporal limitations and geographical boundaries (4:25 [22]).

In contrast, the stone symbolism emphasizes the eschatological aspect of God's kingdom, focusing on its establishment on earth as a final act of divine intervention. The establishment of God's kingdom on earth, marked by the destruction of worldly kingdoms, does not imply that its power is confined solely to

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<sup>81</sup> Collins comments that NT writers appropriate the image of the stone to Christ (e.g., The NT writers apply the image of a stone to Christ: Mark 12:10–11; Matt 21:42; Luke 20:17; 1 Pet 2:7). Although I agree that there appear to have linguistic parallels between Dan 2 and the foregoing, it is not precisely clear whether NT writers really allude to them in Dan 2 or Isaiah's passage (8:14).

<sup>82</sup> Cf. John 14:2–3; Acts 1:10–11; 1 Thess 4:16–17; cf. 2 Thess 1:7–10 (a portrayal of the justice and glory at Jesus's return); Rev 1:7; 22:12.

the eschatological period. Historically, God's sovereignty has been evident through His interventions in human affairs (Dan 2:22). His reign is described as enduring from generation to generation (4:3 [3:33]; 4:37 [34]), and His kingdom is characterized as everlasting and unshakable (2:44; 4:33 [3:33]; 7:27). The enduring nature of God's kingdom is intrinsically linked to His being as the living God and the source of all life (5:23; 6:26 [25]). In Him, there is no death; rather, His presence is the source of life (3:24–26; 6:22 [21], 27 [26]).

Recognizing these theological implications is essential for understanding the symbolism of God's kingdom, and thus, it matters. This study, therefore, identifies the mountain as the primary symbol of God's kingdom while acknowledging the significance of the stone as an integral element within the vision, pointing to the kingdom's eschatological consummation. When fully realized, God's kingdom will bring an end to evil and oppression. The saints of the Most High will inherit the kingdom, experiencing security and freedom from the intrusion of enemies. This hope for God's kingdom is important expectation in the OT and finds its continuation in the theology of the NT (e.g., Matt 3:2; Mark 1:2–3; Luke 3:4; John 1:23; cf. Isa 40:1–3).<sup>83</sup> Indeed, history moves inexorably toward the establishment of God's kingdom as its ultimate consummation.

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<sup>83</sup> David Wenham, in his article "The Kingdom of God and Daniel" (*ExpTim* 98 [1987]: 132–34), compellingly contends that Dan 2 and 7 serve as "the primary background for the New Testament concept of the Kingdom of God." While I acknowledge the contribution of the kingdom of God in Daniel's book to the NT theology of the kingdom, its direct influence is more on descriptions of Jesus's coming in the clouds (Matt 24:30; Mark 13:26; Luke 21:27; Acts 1:9–11; Rev 1:7; cf. Dan 7:13). Against this idea, I argue that instead of Dan 2 and 7, Isa 40:1–11 is the most prominent background, as the gospel about the kingdom in the NT gospels is framed on the promise of God's return to Zion to rule over His people (Isa 40:1–11). For more information, see Perrin, *The Kingdom of God*, especially the first two chapters; Joel B. Green, "The Kingdom of God/Heaven," *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* 2nd ed., eds. Joel B. Green, Jeannine K. Brown, and Nicholas Perrin (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 468–81.

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