

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

MOTIVATIONAL LESSONS “The Eternal Kingdom”

Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, James Gravelle.

“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear” (Heb. 12:28). Welcome to *THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST*. There are some who teach that Jesus came to this world two thousand years ago to set up an earthly kingdom, but failed to do so—a failure that occurred when the Jews rejected Him, rose up against Him, and caused Him to be crucified. Such people suggest that because of the Jews’ rejection of Jesus, God was forced to “scramble” to put together some type of intermediate plan to fill the gap until such a time until He could again send His Son into the world to establish this earthly kingdom. Those who hold to this view look to a future literal kingdom that God will establish here on Earth. But those who look for such a kingdom look in vain. I invite you to take Bible in hand and study with me “the everlasting kingdom.”

We read a moment ago, in Hebrews 12:28, that the writer of Hebrews said that the people at that time were “receiving a kingdom,” and how he described that kingdom as one that could not be shaken. The phrase, “could not be shaken,” is rendered in the King James Version as “could not be moved.” Listen to the words of the angel Gabriel as he discussed this very thing with Mary, the mother of Christ. In Luke 1:31-33 the text records,

“And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.”

It is this kingdom that we will be discussing today. This is not the first time that this kingdom is mentioned in the Bible. The Old Testament points to, and describes, this kingdom in minute detail. Six hundred years before the birth of Christ, a man by the name of Nebuchadnezzar was king of Babylon. He was a powerful king who ruled a world empire. He had made himself busy expanding the borders of his empire by conquering other nations. In 606 B.C., during the reign of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, the forces of Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem and overthrew the city. He gave orders to Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, to bring certain of the princes of Israel back to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar did not hate the Jews. It just so happened that he had conquered them. They were merely one of the nations that he had conquered. Nebuchadnezzar had a recurring dream that he believed contained some type of message (which it did). But there was a problem. He could not remember his dream. So, he called his soothsayers, wise men, and magicians. Today when people are bothered by recurring dreams, they sometimes go to a psychologist, who says to them, “Tell me your dream and we will work through it to see if we can come up with some kind of meaning.” That is similar to what was happening to Nebuchadnezzar. The king’s “therapists” told him the same thing. But Nebuchadnezzar could not remember his dream. Follow Nebuchadnezzar’s logic. In his mind, it took miraculous ability to interpret dreams. So, if his soothsayers, wise men, and magicians had the ability to do **one**

thing miraculously, then he felt that they should have the ability to tell him what his dream was. Nebuchadnezzar thus said to them, "Tell me the dream **and** its interpretation." Obviously, they could not do that. The conclusion that Nebuchadnezzar reached (and rightly so!) was that these people were not what they claimed to be. The king asked, in essence, "You are not a bunch of frauds, **are you?**" "Oh no, king," they said. "You need to understand that there is no king anywhere else in the world who would make such a request. It is unheard of. This is not the way this is supposed to work." Notice in Daniel 2:10 that the text says, "The Chaldeans answered the king, and said, "There is not a man on earth who can tell the king's matter; therefore no king, lord, or ruler has ever asked such things of any magician, astrologer, or Chaldean." Nebuchadnezzar had a solution, however. He said basically, "Let **me** tell **you** how this is going to work. I am going to give you a little time, and you will tell me the dream, and you will give me the interpretation of it, or I will kill you and turn your houses into dung hills." This was truly a life-changing event for these soothsayers, wise men, and magicians. They put their heads together and wondered, "What shall we do?" They knew that they were frauds, and they knew that there was no way out of this.

It just so happened, though, that included in this group of men were Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. The blanket execution order covered them as well. News of this event reached Daniel, so he sent word to Nebuchadnezzar saying, "Don't do anything yet, king. Give us some time and allow us to inquire of our God. Let us go to Him to learn what your dream is all about." That information was given by God to Daniel in a vision at night. Word was sent to the king that Daniel could provide the answer, so the king ordered Daniel to be brought to Him. Daniel then found himself standing before Nebuchadnezzar, and was able to tell him the content of his dream. In Daniel 2:28,31-33 we read,

"But there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. Your dream, and the visions of your head upon your bed, were these: you, O king, were watching; and behold, a great image! This great image, whose splendor was excellent, stood before you; and its form was awesome. This image's head was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay."

Allow your imagination to ponder this scene. Imagine Nebuchadnezzar's face as Daniel says these words to him, and he sees the image that is made of these different types of materials. Nebuchadnezzar says in essence, "Yes! **That** is my dream!" Nebuchadnezzar remembers the details of the image. So, Nebuchadnezzar says, "Tell me more." Daniel then continues: "A stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces." Nebuchadnezzar says again, "Yes! That is my dream! But please, Daniel, tell me what this dream means." Daniel then explained that Nebuchadnezzar was the head of gold—the Babylonian Empire, which was so powerful. But there were second, third, and fourth kingdoms that Daniel explained as well. Then we see from Daniel 2:44 that "in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever."

History begins to unfold here. As it does, time moves slowly forward. Nebuchadnezzar dies, and his son Belshazzar comes upon the scene as king of Babylon. He is much more wicked than his father. He has allowed the power of his office to corrupt him, and he has sought out the pleasures of the flesh. One night the king threw a huge party to which thousands of people had been invited. The king had invited all of his wives and the lords of his various provinces. There was a lot of drinking going on, and immorality was rampant. Belshazzar remembered his father having conquered the Jews and bringing back to Babylon the vessels of gold from the temple in Jerusalem. He was thinking about those golden ves-

sels while the people at his party were drinking and offering praises to their gods. It occurred to him that they could do much better if they were to use the vessels of gold that the Jews had made. So, he commands his servants to go get the vessels so that the people at the party could drink from them and do obeisance to their gods.

Then, suddenly, the fingers of a hand appeared, writing on the wall. In Daniel 5:25 we see the words of the inscription that was written: “MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.” Belshazzar was scared to death. In fact, the Bible tells us that he was **so** scared that his knees knocked together. He was wondering what in the world he was going to do. He wanted to know what the words meant and what they were saying to him. He recognized the words as some kind of miraculous sign. His queen remembered that Daniel, in a similar instance, had interpreted a dream for Nebuchadnezzar. Belshazzar summoned Daniel, who then stood before the king. In Daniel 5:26-28 we read,

“This is the interpretation of each word. MENE: God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it; TEKEL: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting; PERES: Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.”

As this was occurring, a man by the name of Darius, the leader of the Medes, was about to attack the city. Nebuchadnezzar, in the building of Babylon, had used his own engineering skills, as well as the skills of others, to design a city that was spectacular. Babylon did not have a water supply within the city. Thus, Nebuchadnezzar had his engineers design a way of moving water from the river to the city—which took place by means of a canal. The river occasionally flooded, however. So, in order to prevent the city from being flooded, gates were erected in the canal that could stop the water from entering the city. Darius was a pretty smart fellow, too. He had his soldiers capture the gates and close them, which stopped the water from flowing into the city. Babylon would not have been able to be conquered from the outside if an opposing army tried to go through or over its walls. Darius, however, had another plan. The Medes entered the city by walking in the canal where the water otherwise have been. History tells us that the slaughter was great. The streets ran red with blood, and the Medo-Persian Empire continued from that point.

History continued, and time marched on. In 332 B.C., a certain man wanted to conquer the world. This man was Alexander the Great. He went so far to the east that it is said that he sat down and wept because there was nothing left to conquer. There, he died. Of course, his empire was the Greek Empire, which was the third empire mentioned in Daniel’s vision. His kingdom was divided among four generals, and then was split again with two generals on each side. Eventually, the empire came to nought and fell.

Then, in 63 B.C., another kingdom—known as the kingdom of iron—came to dominate the world. Like the three kingdoms that preceded it, the Roman Empire would fall as well. However, it would fall, not from outward attacks, but from within. Just sixty-three years in the future, someone was coming. Jesus Christ was born of a virgin. He was laid in a manger. He grew to be a man, and preached that “the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Look at Mark 9:1—“Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power.” Jesus—the Son of God—would go to the cross, die for all mankind, and utter these words: “It is finished.” The kingdom that He came into this world to establish **was** established. The Jews who had crucified and killed Him could not stop this kingdom from being established. In fact, it is not that mankind somehow kept God from doing what He had promised to do. It was exactly the opposite. Mankind **assisted** God in doing what He had said that He was going to do in setting up His kingdom. Death could not hold Jesus, for by the power of God He was raised from the tomb. There was power promised—and we see this power coming in Acts 2 when Peter and the other apostles preached to the Jews who had slain Christ. Those Jews knew that Jesus was the

Son of God. Notice in Acts 2:36 what Peter said: “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” Notice the wording—that they could “know assuredly” that Jesus was the Christ. In verse 37 we read, “Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’” Why did they ask such a question? They knew that what Peter had said was true. They had killed Jesus, the Son of God! After Peter had explained to them what they needed to do, those who received his word were baptized, and that day about 3,000 souls were added to them. Notice Acts 2:47—“And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” What does the Lord do with someone who sins, but whom He forgives? We find the answer in Colossians 1:13—“He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.” Notice that we—as we are being saved—are conveyed, carried, or delivered into the kingdom of Christ. Put that together with Acts 2 where it tells us that when people were told what to do, they were baptized—and the Lord added them to the church. The church and the kingdom are the same thing. Thus, those people became members of the kingdom of Christ at that time.

That is what Nebuchadnezzar’s dream was all about. Daniel said that in the time of the fourth kingdom (the Roman Empire) another kingdom would be established that it would never fail. That is not said of any other kingdom or organization. Notice in Matthew 16:18, where Christ said, “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” Jesus promised to build His church. In verse 19, He said, “And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” Notice that in these two passages Jesus uses the terms “church” and “kingdom” to describe the same organization. Here is an important question: How can the church (which Jesus promised to build 2,000 years ago) still be in existence in its original form today?

Here is another question that perhaps will help us answer the first question. What do you know about seeds (garden-variety seeds)? If you take a seed, plant it, water it, and allow sunlight to beat down upon it, the seed gives rise to a plant that bears fruit. Here is another question: What does it bear? Of course, what the seed bears depends on the type of seed that was planted. That is the nature of the seed. It produces only “after its kind.” If you plant black-diamond watermelon seed, you get black-diamond watermelons. If you plant beefsteak tomato seed, you get beefsteak tomatoes. The point is: the seed bears **only** after its kind. This is a law of God that goes back to Genesis and the account of Creation. What happens if you wait a year to plant this seed? A year after harvest, if you plant a black-diamond watermelon seed, you still will get black-diamond watermelons. What happens if you wait ten years to plant that seed? That same black-diamond watermelon seed is going to give you, not corn or beans, but black-diamond watermelons.

Here is another question: What if you waited 2,000 years to plant that seed? The illustration may break down at this point since most seeds do not normally last 2,000 years due to decay and the fact that the seed is corruptible. In Luke 8 there is a parable about a sower, which gives much detail about soils and seeds. It talks about Jesus as the Sower. The heart is the soil; the seed is the Word of God. When the seed is planted in people’s hearts, there is a one-in-four chance that it will produce what it should—not because of the seed, but because of the quality of the heart. Some hearts are hard; some hearts are thorny; some hearts are rocky; and some hearts are good. In Luke 8:11, Jesus explained, “Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God.” The text of 1 Peter 1:23 tells us, “having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God

which lives and abides forever.” Notice that the Word of God is incorruptible. It does not decay. How can this seed still work 2,000 years later? It is because of the seed principle. Also, as Jesus tells us in Matthew 24:35, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.” The Gospel seed was planted into the hearts of those people who were present on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. When it took root and grow, what did it yield? If you ask the people who came up out of the baptismal pools, “To what church has the Lord added you,” they probably would give you some funny looks because all that was planted in their hearts was the seed. And all that is in the seed is pure, true Christianity.

So, what if you took that same seed 2,000 years later and planted it? Remember that it is an incorruptible seed that will never decay. If you plant it in a good heart, what will it bring forth today? It will produce just one thing—whatever is in the seed. That is the nature of the seed principle. It will bring forth only “after its kind.” It will produce only Christians—and that is **all!** As God Himself added the people to the church (kingdom) 2,000 years ago, so He adds people today, too. The church is the only kingdom that God said would never be shaken. The church is the only kingdom that God said would never be moved. The church is the kingdom that will stand forever. Some say, “You folks in the church of Christ are strange.” That’s true in many ways. They say, “You folks in the church of Christ do not use a piano.” That’s right—we do not. Why is that? It is because it is not in the seed. Some people say, “You folks in the church of Christ do not recite the sinner’s prayer.” That’s right—we do not. Why is that? It is because it is not in the seed. Some people say, “You folks in the church of Christ do not allow women preachers, elders, or deacons.” That is correct—because it is not in the seed. But what **is** in the seed gives us the ability—2,000 years later—to be “just Christians.” If you could still be a member of the New Testament church that Jesus promised to build, wouldn’t you want to do that? Consider the person of reasonable intelligence—one who says, “I really **want** to be saved,” and who therefore asks, “Can you tell me **how** to be saved?” Suppose you hand him only a Bible, and he knows nothing about any type of organized religion whatsoever. You give him a copy of the Bible, and you send him into a room by himself. Whatever time he needs, he uses to study the Bible. When he comes out, all he knows is what he read in the Bible. He will not come out of the room and say, “I want to go to Heaven, so I want to be a Catholic.” He does not know enough to be a Catholic. He is not going to come out of the room and say, “I want to go to Heaven, so I want to be an Episcopalian, Lutheran, Methodist, Baptist, or Pentecostal—because he does not know enough to be one of those. Someone else may come along and teach him how to be one of those, but all he knows is how to be a member of the church—the kingdom that Daniel saw through the telescope of prophecy. All he knows is how to be a member of the kingdom that the angel Gabriel discussed with Mary. All he knows is how to be...**a Christian!** I want to ask you a question. What’s wrong with that? I want to go to Heaven. Do you? Are you a Christian? Are you a member of this precious kingdom that will last forever? If not, why not? We invite you to join us again as we continue to preach the Gospel of Christ.

Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

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STUDY QUESTIONS FOR “THE ETERNAL KINGDOM”

1. According to Hebrews 12:28, what type of kingdom did God establish?
2. According to Hebrews 12:28, how are citizens of that kingdom commanded to worship God?
3. According to the angel Gabriel’s words in Luke 1:31-33, how long would the kingdom last?
4. Daniel 2 tells us that something unusual happened to the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar. What was it?
5. In Daniel 2:9, what strange command did King Nebuchadnezzar issue to his wise men and magicians?
6. According to Daniel 2:19, what happened to Daniel in regard to King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream?
7. In Daniel 2:28,31-33, how did Daniel explain King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream?
8. Who took King Nebuchadnezzar’s place as king of Babylon upon his death?
9. According to Daniel 2:44, what type of kingdom did God say He would establish “in the days of those kings”?
10. What unusual event occurred when King Nebuchadnezzar’s successor was throwing a banquet one evening?
11. According to Daniel 5:26-28, what was the meaning of this unusual event?
12. What empire replaced the Babylonian Empire?
13. What empire replaced the empire that took the place of the Babylonian Empire?
14. What empire was ushered into power as the result of Alexander the Great?
15. What empire replaced the empire of Alexander the Great?
16. According to Mark 9:1, what empire (or kingdom) was ushered in during the time of the Roman Empire?
17. According to Acts 2, on what Jewish holy day did that kingdom begin?
18. According to Acts 2:47, what was that kingdom called?
19. Paul wrote in Colossians 1:13 that God “**has delivered** us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.” What does that statement tell us about whether or not the kingdom was already in existence?