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The Return of Christ - Pre-millennial

by Rev Ivan Foster

(This message was given at the first meeting of 2000 of the Sovereign Grace Advent Testimony in London.)

"And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever" (Daniel 2:44).

When it comes to the study of prophecy, this subject is a very elementary one, yet it is a subject to which many give little thought. Many Christians have a general view of the return of Christ, that it is going to happen, but they are not well versed on what the Bible has to say about that glorious event. That ought not to be. It is a subject with which God's people should be well acquainted.

It is clear from the Word of God that the Christians in the days of the apostles were very well taught about the return of Christ. Indeed, when Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, he said he needed hardly to write on this subject as they knew about it perfectly (1 Thessalonians 5:2). It could be thought that those early believers would have had to learn so many subjects; that they were to be taught in doctrine of which they never had the slightest knowledge before the gospel came to them. Paul would have had to deal with the doctrine of God, His Person, His power, the mystery of the Trinity, and the inspiration of God's Word. Although there was so much to teach, the apostle found time to tell those early believers about the second coming of the Lord and of the end times. Many ministers today would speak as if Paul had so much else to proclaim, that teaching about the return of Christ and the doctrine of eschatology could be left to a later generation.

If Paul felt it necessary to explain prophetic facts 2000 years ago, it seems logical that there is an even greater necessity upon God's servants at the present time to deal with this important subject. There never has been a generation nearer to the Lord's return than the present one. We are closer to the end times than anyone has been, and you do not have to be a genius to work out that if there is one generation that has ever walked the face of this earth that ought to know about the return of Christ, what it means, and what circumstances will be prevailing when He comes, it is this generation. But I would venture to suggest that there might never have been a generation of God's people so ignorant of these matters as the present one. Satan is the author of ignorance. He hath blinded minds, and the ignorance that prevails so widely today is of the devil.

God's people should know that if the devil does not want them to see a thing, it certainly is something they should understand. And if the devil would seek to keep us from giving thought to what the Bible says about the return of Christ, you can be sure that it is an important subject to study.

It indicates how perverse the natural mind of man is that such a blessed subject as the hope of Christ's glorious return, linked with the resurrection and glorifying of the saints, can become a matter of such contention that it is virtually robbed of its sweetness for so many believers.

It seems that more time and study have been devoted by Christian men to rebut what God's Word teaches on the second advent of Christ. And more effort, and time, and labour have been put into the propagating of false views, those the Bible does not teach, than to the expounding of the simple truth of God on the subject.

The Sovereign Grace Advent Testimony holds to the position that Christ's return will be post-tribulation and pre-millennial. 'Post-tribulation' means that the return of the Lord Jesus will take place after that period noted in prophecy as the great tribulation which will be mounted here on earth against those who love the Saviour by the agents of the devil under the rulership of the Antichrist. 'Pre-millennial' means Christ's return will be before the millennial reign of Christ. In our present study, we are considering primarily this topic, the fact that Christ's return will be BEFORE the millennial reign.



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Our text (Daniel 2:44) gives clear evidence of that position. 'In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom.'

1. God is Going to Establish a Kingdom on This Earth.

The verse firmly confirms this first point that God is going to establish a kingdom on this earth.

1. To this, the prophets all agree. It is not practical to try to turn to every prophecy now, but for anyone desiring to investigate the prophets' references to this subject, the Sovereign Grace Advent Testimony has a quantity of literature available. From the Book of Genesis onward, there are numerous references to the kingdom which God will set up on the earth at the close of this age.

Isaiah 52 is a prophecy that deals with the period of time to which we are referring, the end of this age. There will come an establishing of a kingdom on this earth. Verses 7-10 have these words, 'How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth! Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the LORD shall bring again Zion. Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem: for the LORD hath comforted His people, He hath redeemed Jerusalem. The LORD hath made bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.'

Here is an event which will centre upon Jerusalem, an event that will entail the comforting of Jerusalem, an event which will be particularly for the ears of Jerusalem when it is announced, 'Thy God reigneth.' Such is this reign that we are told it is a demonstration of the power of God and it is done in the eyes of all the nations. 'And all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God' means that here is an event that all the world will see.

Jeremiah 23:5-6 says, 'Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In His days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is His Name whereby He shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.' Every Christian should know that this title is a reference to our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the King Who shall reign and prosper and execute judgment and justice in the earth. When? In that day when God raises up this kingdom.

Zechariah says, 'And the LORD shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one LORD, and His Name one' (14:9). We are not left in any doubt when that will be for we read in verse 4, 'And His feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south.' That is the day of Christ's return. And that is the day that the Lord shall establish His kingdom over all the earth (verse 9).

In Acts 1, the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ is recorded. The Lord sent two angels to ask the disciples who witnessed the ascension why they continued gazing up into heaven. This surely indicates how attached those disciples were to that last sight of the Lord Jesus and how their hearts had gone up with Him. But the Lord, knowing how His disciples would have felt, gave them a glorious promise. We read that the angels said, 'This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven' (verse 11). And He will come back to the very place He left - the mount of Olives. We are told in verse 9, 'a cloud received Him out of their sight.' And that is how He will come back - in clouds of glory. That is what the Bible says - in like fashion. It seems to me that there was nothing that would have persuaded those disciples to have left that spot other than the fact that the Lord is coming back again. They had not lost Him for ever. He will return to this very place.

That is what Zechariah had said many years before when speaking of the second coming of Christ and of God's setting up of the kingdom. This chapter in Zechariah clearly refers to the return of Christ and the events that will happen after His return.



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In the Book of the Revelation there is a record given of seven angels each sounding a trumpet; and the events taking place following the sounding of the trumpets are also recorded. We are clearly told that following the last trump, 'There were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever' (11:15). So when the sound of the last trump is heard and Christ returns, there is a setting up of a kingdom. He will take over the governorship of the kingdoms of the world. That is what the prophets had been saying from the beginning of time. That is it for which the believers in Israel had been looking. This will happen at the last trump.

2. It was for the manifesting of this kingdom that Israel looked. Herein is explained something of the confusion that existed amongst the Jews concerning the Lord Jesus. When they heard Him say that He was the Messiah, they thought that could not be as He had no earthly kingdom. The Jews had missed in the preaching of the prophets the message of the Messiah's first coming, and their minds had fastened upon those prophecies that dealt with His second coming, in power and great glory, that coming that would see Him establish a kingdom over all the world with Jerusalem and Israel placed at the heart of its affairs. Consequently, when they saw the lowly Nazarene, they could not understand. And even the disciples, when taught by the Lord to distinguish between His first and His second coming, still hankered after the glorious kingdom. 'When they therefore were come together, they asked of Him, saying, Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?' (Acts 1:6). They still had thoughts of that great kingdom that the prophets had so frequently mentioned. Now, if there was to be no kingdom, what would the answer of the Lord have been to such a question? Surely it would have been, 'Do not be so foolish; there is no such plan in God's eternal purpose. There will never be a restoring of the the kingdom to Israel or any earthly kingdom.' But the Saviour did not say that. Instead, His answer was, 'It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His Own power.' Please note what the Saviour did not say! He did not dismiss the idea of a re-establishing of the kingdom of Israel. Such a hope was widespread and if it was in error, then that was the time to confront this error and refute it. The Saviour's reply clearly suggests that there would be such a restoration but it was not for them to know when that would take place. His words are an echo of a former statement. 'But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but My Father only' (Matthew 24:36). Both statements refer to the same event, the coming of the Son of God and the establishing of His kingdom.

3. God's kingdom will be established subsequent to that of Antichrist's kingdom. It is important to note this simple fact. In our text, we are told exactly when it is that God is going to set up His kingdom. The verse begins, 'In the days of these kings.'

There are those who hold to the idea that the world is gradually going to get better until the world is subdued and becomes a glorious place, and then Christ will take over and rule. That cannot be supported by our verse nor by any other Scripture that deals with this matter. There are those that believe that the gospel is going to be preached with increasing success and effect until the world is brought under the rule of the gospel, and then Christ will assume the kingdom. But Christ's return will not take place after the earth has been subdued by the preaching of the gospel and the nations of men have been brought under the rule of grace. Rather, the Kingdom of God is set up subsequent to the destruction of that system of rule in the prophetic earth which Daniel shows was to extend from the time of Nebuchadnezzar and which was to culminate in the kingdom of the Antichrist.

The image seen by Nebuchadnezzar in his dream had four basic elements, the head of gold, then the breast and arms of silver, then the belly and thighs of brass, and then the legs of iron. This great image of a man symbolised the four kingdoms, or systems of government that would occupy the Gentile world from the days of Nebuchadnezzar right to the days when God will set up His kingdom. Every day that you hear the Euro mentioned; every day that you hear of a superstate in Europe, you are but seeing a drawing nearer to a manifestation of that system of government that has been beneath the surface for a long time in Europe, but which is now surfacing in bringing the nations together. There will be a superstate in Europe, and out of that superstate will come a superman called the Antichrist. And it is subsequent to his brief reign, in the days of these kings, that God will set up His kingdom. The kingdom of God is symbolised in the dream that



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Nebuchadnezzar had, as a stone, cut out without hands, smiting the feet of this great statue, and then filling the whole earth. It did not fall on the head of the statue because that symbolised Nebuchadnezzar, and the event was not to occur in the time of his kingdom. It did not fall on the breast and arms of the statue because that symbolised the kingdom of the Medes and the Persians. It did not fall on the loins of the statue because that symbolised the kingdom of Greece. And it did not fall on the knees of the statue because that symbolised an aspect of the fourth kingdom, which was the Roman Empire. Rather the stone fell on the feet which is the final manifestation of that spirit of iniquity, of rebellion, of anti-God government that was first seen on a national scale in Nebuchadnezzar, and which continued in successive empires and will be manifested in the last days.

The stone was cut out without hands. It was not a man-made stone, for God's kingdom is not a man-made kingdom. It will smite and crush that statue and bring to an end the man-made system of government, and God will fill the earth with His rule, His glory, and His power. So God will establish His kingdom on the earth. The prophets spoke of it frequently. It was the expectation of Israel that one day that would come to pass and we are told in our text that that kingdom will be established subsequent to the manifesting of the kingdom of the Antichrist (Daniel 2:34-35).

2. God's Kingdom Will Crush and Replace the Government of Man

There will be a bringing to an end of the man-made government of this world, when God sets up His kingdom. This is very important for it clearly shows that:-

1. The kingdom to which our text refers is not the spiritual kingdom of Christ. We who are believers, are citizens of the United Kingdom, but we are also citizens of God's kingdom here on earth. There is a spiritual kingdom of Christ over which He rules. I would seek to contend strongly for the Kingship of the Lord Jesus. He is the Sole Head and King of the Church. But this verse is not speaking of that spiritual kingdom. Christ does not exercise spiritual rule over all the people of the earth. That is all too evident. Is it not our desire that the Lord Jesus might exercise spiritual rule over far more people? Would we not like to see the largest building in London filled with people listening to the Word of God? But there is a vast multitude out there who have no regard for Christ, nor for His Word, other than to live in complete defiance of it. Christ does exercise spiritual rule over His people in this world. 'Behold, the kingdom of God is within you' (Luke 17:21). The spiritual kingdom of Christ is proclaimed and advanced by the preaching of the gospel.

Jesus said, 'And into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you: and heal the sick that are therein, and say unto them, The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you' (Luke 10:9). I remember with joy the day that I was translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son. I, who had been a rebel against God, a child of the devil, became an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven. When God says, 'In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom,' that is not the same as that which was set up in my heart and of which I became part when I was converted.

The spiritual kingdom of Christ does not destroy the institutions and structures of man's government. God does not set us against the government of this land. We are required to speak out upon ungodly aspects, but we are not against man governing. Rather we are taught by the Lord Jesus that we should render 'unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's, and unto God the things which be God's' (Luke 20:25). In Romans 13 we are called upon to be in subjection to the kingdoms of men, and Peter tells us that we are to submit ourselves to the ordinances of man for the Lord's sake (1 Peter 2:13). There are many like portions. Daniel was a positive benefit to the kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar and that kingdom which followed, the Medo-Persian Empire. He was not a destroyer of them. We are told to pray for the princes of this world. Now that is the very opposite of setting Christians against the kingdoms of the world. Christians are not rebels. The only time that we have an obligation not to do what governments tell us, is when their orders are contrary to the revealed will of God, as did the apostles when they said, 'We ought to obey God rather than men' (Acts 5:29). But when the government tells us to do something and it is not in contradiction to God's law, we are



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to do it, and submit ourselves to it. That is the teaching of the Bible.

But we read in our text, 'In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms.' When, in history, did the spiritual kingdom of Christ ever set itself against the kingdom of men? None of the Reformers set out to destroy a kingdom even when they were ruled over by the most wicked princes. They endeavoured to influence and to change by the preaching of the gospel, but they certainly did not destroy as a stone, falling upon pottery, fragments it in an instant.

Rather, the advancing of the spiritual kingdom of God has been here a little, there a little. It has been in circumstances when a handful of people have met and prayed that God would have mercy upon the souls of their fellow citizens. That is how the spiritual kingdom of God has advanced. It influences for good, but it can never be said of it what is said of God's kingdom in Daniel 2:34-35,44. These verses describe God setting up a kingdom which in an instant destroys all the world's kingdoms. And what a destruction it is! It is a complete destruction.

2. The overthrow of man's rule is complete. Nebuchadnezzar was reminded by Daniel of that which he saw in his dream. 'Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors: and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them.' There was not even the semblance of what they looked like remaining.

There may not be too many who have seen chaff being driven away by the wind, but I recall it. It was so dispersed that it could not be found. There was not the slightest evidence of it. It was gone. That is how God, when He comes to set up His kingdom, will remove from the face of the earth every semblance of the rule of man. Did you notice what it said? When the stone fell on the feet of the image, the gold, the silver, and the brass were destroyed as well as the iron and clay. That great image symbolised man's government of this world which will all be destroyed.

Man's government is made up of failure and destruction. The earth and its resources have been polluted and destroyed by man, but the Lord will come one day and set up a kingdom when there will be nothing left of man's destructive imprint upon the face of the earth. Earth will be restored under the glorious power of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The day spoken of by the prophets will have dawned. 'Ask of Me, and I shall give thee the heathen for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; Thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel' (Psalm 2:8-9). 'They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea' (Isaiah 11:9).

3. How vain it is to hope for progress toward a better society under man's government. This is the hope of the modernist, the ecumenist, the humanist, the Romanist. It cannot be the hope of the Bible believer. It is a Christian's duty to ever speak out against that which is wrong, but it is foolish for the Christian to anticipate a system of government devised by man ever really benefiting society, and bringing about a betterment in this world. It will not happen. An obvious example of this is what has happened in Northern Ireland. We have what is termed 'a peace agreement.' Peace has been announced and during that time many people have been murdered, maimed, and driven out of their homes. God's intervention and establishing of order and righteousness comes about through the destruction of the institutions of man's government. This world is not to get better but to wax worse and worse (2 Timothy 3:1-13).

My hope is in the truth stated in this verse. When God sets up His kingdom, there will be peace. Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3 tell of real disarmament, when swords shall be turned into ploughshares and spears into pruninghooks. There will be no arguments then. The I.R.A. will not be saying that they do not think it is



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time to disarm. God has said to His Son, 'Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron: Thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.' What a change this world will see in the day that God sets up His kingdom!

3. The Kingdom God Shall Establish Shall Never End

1. It shall never be destroyed. At Christ's second coming a kingdom will be established for a millennium (one thousand years). But it will be a rule which shall never end. Certain events will take place at the end of the millennial reign and the old earth will pass away, but that rule of God which begins at the return of Christ will continue and never change, alter, or end. It shall not suffer the set-backs and damage that the mightiest of men's kingdoms have suffered. There will never be any disappointments. There will never be an administrator who will have to confess that objectives have not been kept to timetable. The greatest of kingdoms have suffered set-backs, humiliation, and hurt by their enemies, but that will not be so with God's kingdom. The word translated 'destroyed' is the same as that in Daniel 6:22, where we have the word 'hurt.' There, Daniel said that God had shut the lion's mouths that they had not hurt him.

2. It will never come under the control of others. It 'will not be left to other people.' We think of Oliver Cromwell, but his reign came to an end when he died. His son was a good man but nothing like his father. He could not control the kingdom that his father left him, and when the kingdom, or commonwealth, of Cromwell passed to his son, it fell apart. But God's kingdom will never be handed over to anyone because He will always be there to rule, to reign, to administer, to maintain, and it will therefore stand for ever.

3. It will stand for ever. It will stand perpetually. God repeats that at the beginning and end of our text. The one attempt to attack it that will be permitted, will be swiftly and utterly destroyed (Revelation 20:7-10).

This is the blessed hope of the people of God that is set before us in His Word. We hear of lawlessness and blasphemy, and read with despair what is taking place in our parliament, where men are systematically dismantling the legislation that godly generations in the past have placed upon the statute book. We see politicians dismantling laws that safeguarded the sanctity of the Lord's Day, the sanctity of human life, etc. As it was in the days of Noah so today we witness the final stages of man's disastrous experiments in government, bringing misery and shame. But we bless God that there is a day coming when He will establish a kingdom. That is our hope. For that we look forward. For that the Lord Jesus taught us to pray, 'Our Father Which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy kingdom come ... on earth'. That should be our constant, earnest desire - the manifesting of the kingdom of God.