

'This Kingdom Is an Everlasting Kingdom

by T. Austin-Sparks

The Kingdom of God is an everlasting, spiritual kingdom of sons, where believers live under the open heaven and experience the power of His resurrection.

Scripture: Daniel 2:31, John 1:1, Romans 6:5

Topics: "Kingdom Of God", "Spiritual Israel"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks delves into the Book of Daniel, focusing on Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the great image and Daniel's interpretation, revealing the rise and fall of kingdoms and the establishment of the everlasting Kingdom of God. He emphasizes the transition from the old Israel to the new spiritual Israel, highlighting the importance of believers recognizing the greatness of the Lord Jesus, becoming sons of God through faith, and experiencing death and resurrection in their personal lives and in the history of the Church. Sparks connects the Old Testament figures like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to the spiritual principles embodied in the new Israel, culminating in the open heaven made accessible through Jesus Christ.

Transcript

As this is the last meeting of these series this week, it will be necessary for us to do a little reviewing of what has been said. Not very much, but just enough to be able to go on from where we left off last night. But before we come to that I want to take you back to the Old Testament. Those of you who are familiar with the Book of Daniel, will remember that in the second chapter of that book we have the account of the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar had a dream in which he saw a great image. The different parts of the body of that image from the head downward to the feet were made of different materials. The head was made of gold, and the other parts of the body were made of other materials, until the feet and the toes were made partly of iron and partly of clay.

When Nebuchadnezzar woke up from his dream, he wondered what it all meant, for people in that part of the world always believed that dreams meant something. Perhaps you do that. If you have an unusual dream, you wonder what it is all about. The next morning, you tell somebody about it, hoping that they will be able to explain your dream. Well, that is what Nebuchadnezzar did. He called all his wise men, but he did not tell them his dream. Now he said, 'You tell me what is the meaning of this dream.' But none of them could give the interpretation.

Then at last Daniel was brought in and Daniel prayed to the Lord, and the Lord explained the dream to Daniel, and Daniel said this: 'These four parts of the image represent four great kingdoms. The head of

gold is great Babylon, your kingdom, Nebuchadnezzar. After you will come another kingdom, and then that will pass away, and another will come; and then that one will pass away, and another one will come.' Daniel told him the names of most of these kingdoms, but the last one he did not name. Well, Daniel explained all that, and then he said this: 'In the days of those kingdoms, the God of Heaven shall set up a Kingdom. And that Kingdom, unlike all these others, will never pass away.' The Kingdom of the God of Heaven - what the New Testament calls the Kingdom of God, or the Kingdom of Heaven - and, beloved, we are living in the days of that Kingdom.

Now that is what we have been talking about this week. We are just going to leave that for the present and come back to where we were last night. It is rather impressive that in the days of Daniel, Daniel said that the God of Heaven would set up a Kingdom even while Israel still existed. The kingdom of Israel had not yet passed away at that time; although Israel was in captivity in Babylon, it was not finished with. A remnant did come back to Jerusalem, and rebuild the city and the temple, and for some four hundred years Israel went on. It was having a bad time with these other kingdoms. But what we have been seeing is that when the God of Heaven did begin to set up His Kingdom, the kingdom of Israel began to disappear. This great kingdom of Israel was also set aside by the God of Heaven. And what we have been seeing is that the God of Heaven brought in a new Israel, a heavenly and a spiritual Israel, to take the place of the older one. The God of Heaven, Who had dismissed the others, now brought in His new spiritual Israel. We, who are the Lord's true born-again people, are the new Israel. And this Kingdom is an everlasting Kingdom. It will never pass away. Everything is being done in the world to destroy it. The world powers are seeking to destroy this Kingdom. But as surely as those other four kingdoms had gone, and the Kingdom of the God of Heaven remains, so they are doomed to failure. THIS KINGDOM IS FOREVER.

Now we are coming over again to where we left off last night. We come into the Gospel by John. I think you know that John wrote this gospel toward the end of the first century of this dispensation. All the other apostles had gone to be with the Lord. John had had a long life, and through long years, he had meditated much upon the relation between Jesus and the Old Testament. John knew the Old Testament very well, and through all those years of his life, he thought about it. More and more clearly, by the light of the Holy Spirit, he saw the connection between Jesus and the Old Testament. John knew that the old Israel of the Old Testament had been rejected by God, and he knew that Jesus had come to form a new Israel.

This new Israel was not something of this world. It was a heavenly Israel, a spiritual Israel. Everybody knows that the Gospel by John is the most spiritual of all the Gospels. John had come to see that the new Israel embodied all the spiritual principles of the old Israel - although the Old Testament Israel had been put away. God's thoughts in Israel were eternal thoughts and John saw that all those thoughts of God, which were represented by the old Israel, were now taken up by Jesus in a spiritual way in a new Israel. John saw that when God began with the old Israel, He appeared as the God of glory unto Abraham. "The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham," and that was the beginning, the first step of God toward the old Israel. Then John took that over into the new Israel, so that when he began to write his Gospel, he spoke about this coming of the God of glory. "And the Word was God... and we beheld His glory" (John 1:1,14).

So John began the new Israel where God began the old. And then he knew that God promised Abraham a son, and through that son He would make a great nation, and through that son all nations of the earth would be blessed. He introduced a new idea. This was not creation. He was not creating a new man; He was bringing one to birth. There is a difference between being created and being born. The new idea was

sonship. Isaac was to be Abraham's son.

Now John begins in his first chapter all about the Son, God's Son. And then God was going to have a new Israel of sons in His Son. So John says, in His birth. Isaac was on supernatural ground, he was "Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." And then John knew another thing about the beginning in the Old Testament. He knew that the God of glory had appeared to Abraham, he knew that He had spoken about the son, and then he knew that that son was quite impossible along natural life. Isaac could not be born in the natural way. Probably you know all about that. We simply make the statement. Isaac was a natural impossibility. Nevertheless, Isaac was born.

Now John takes that over, and he knew quite well that Jesus was not born in a natural way. JESUS WAS THE RESULT OF A DIRECT INTERVENTION OF GOD. Isaac was a miracle. Jesus was a miracle not on natural ground. Jesus was on supernatural ground from His birth. But then we saw that even Isaac had to go into death and resurrection. You know the story quite well. I am having to take it for granted that you know your Bible. If you do not know what I am talking about, go back and read your Bible (Genesis 22). You will find it all there. Isaac had to be offered as a sacrifice, and then as in a figure raised from the dead.

Now here is a rather impressive thing! You are not far into the Gospel by John in the first chapter before this Son of God comes to the river Jordan. He comes to be baptized by John the Baptist. You know the meaning of baptism; it is a figure of death and burial and resurrection. But the impressive thing is this: John has been talking about the eternal Son of God, through Whom all things were created. And now, before he had got much further, he calls Him "The Lamb of God." There you have it repeated, "Behold the Lamb of God, Which taketh away the sin of the world" (verse 29). The Lamb has to be slain. When you come to the Book of the Revelation, the Lamb is in the midst of the throne, and all are worshipping the Lamb (Rev. 5). This great Isaac has gone into death and into resurrection.

Now we must just stop in this course for a moment to make the application. You see, we have said that believers in this dispensation are God's new heavenly Israel. What is it that makes us members of this heavenly Israel? In the first place, it is that we have seen the greatness of the Lord Jesus. We are able to say in a measure, "We have beheld His glory." Every true believer ought to be able to say that I have seen at least something of the greatness of the Lord Jesus. You may not put it in these words, but this is what it means, "that the God of glory has appeared to me." "I have seen the Lord of glory." We may put it in different ways, but that is what it amounts to. Something of the greatness of the Lord Jesus as God's Son has been revealed in our hearts, that is the first step toward the new Israel. I wonder how many of you in this hall tonight can say, I am a member of that Israel; I have seen the Lord! The Lord of glory has appeared in my heart. If not in the same words as Paul, you could say the same thing. "For God, Who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (II Cor. 4:6). That is the beginning of the new Israel.

The next thing is, we have become sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ. We are amongst those of whom it can be said, our real spiritual life is not by the will of man, it is not by natural blood. We have not inherited it from anybody. We have not got it because some people persuaded us into it. Not by the will of man, not by natural blood, but we have been born of the Spirit of God. We are children of God by the will of God. Now all that is very simple and very elementary, I know, but we have not finished yet.

The next thing in this new Israel is this: You and I have got to come through death unto the ground of resurrection. We have got to know something of the power of His resurrection in our life. What Paul calls,

"being in the likeness of His resurrection" (Rom. 6:5). This is a very important thing, not only at the beginning of the Christian life, but this is something that has got to characterize the new Israel all through history. Just look at the history of the people of God during these two thousand years. Before God finally destroyed that great Roman Empire, that Roman Empire massacred ten million Christians. How many Christians there must have been? That mighty iron empire determined to destroy this new Israel, that was the first great historic baptism into the death of Christ. You wonder that anybody remained. But it was the Roman Empire that was destroyed. The only thing you know about that Empire today is to go to the city of Rome and see a few ruins.

But where is the heavenly Israel? It is everywhere in the world. You see, this Israel is indestructible. But since that first baptism into death, it has had many others, right up to our own day. The heavenly Israel has been baptized into death in China, has been baptized into death in Russia, and it is the same in other parts of the world.

Well, what is going to be the end of this? It is a great pity that those people who do this do not read history; if only they would read history, this is what they would see. The Jewish nation tried to kill Christianity and the Jewish nation has been set aside. The far greater Roman Empire determined to kill the heavenly Israel, but it is the great Roman Empire that has been killed. The heavenly Israel just goes on and many other great powers have tried to do that. But where is the heavenly Jerusalem? This spiritual Israel just goes on. **THE GOD OF HEAVEN HAS SET UP A KINGDOM WHICH SHALL NEVER BE DESTROYED.**

Now this baptism into Christ's death and resurrection is not only a historic thing, it is not only a thing in history, it is a thing in personal experience. The Lord, again and again, takes us into an experience of death - an experience when we feel that the end of everything has come, and it looks as though we are never going to get through. It may be for one reason or another, but there it is. It looks as though we are at the end. And that has happened to us many times. But we are still alive. We are still going on.

The Apostle Paul spoke of his own experience of this when he said, "I would not have you ignorant, brethren, of what befell us in Asia. We were pressed beyond our measure. We had the sentence that it was death. We despaired of life, that we might not trust in ourselves, but in God Who raiseth the dead" (II Cor. 1). When the apostle wrote that, that was an experience in the past, and he was now writing in resurrection. Sometimes, it is like that in the work of the Lord. Things seemed to go right into death. We feel that the end has come - there is no more. We go through deep experiences like that. Why does the Lord allow this? Why has He allowed it in the history of the Church? Why does He allow it in His own work? And why does He allow it in our own personal experience?

Well, why did He allow it in the case of Isaac? You remember where we finished last night, we said that it was in order that everything should be kept on supernatural ground, This new Israel is a supernatural thing, and it has got to be kept on that ground. Because resurrection is something which belongs to God alone, and it has got to be said about everything that is God's. "This is of God, and not of man." Our lives have got to bear the mark of God in them. While we have strength, we feel we can go on. But sometimes the Lord takes away our strength, and we feel that we can go on no more, and then His strength comes in. His strength is made perfect in weakness. Resurrection of the Lord Jesus is not only something which happened 2000 years ago. It is something that has got to be continually happening in all of us. The Apostle Paul had lived a long life. He had lived a very full life. I doubt whether there was anyone else who had a fuller knowledge of the Lord than he did. But right at the end of that life, he was saying, "That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection" (Phil. 3:10). Right to the end, there is still more in the power

of His resurrection for us to know. That is the nature of the new Israel. You see how John is following the course of the old Israel in a spiritual way?

I wonder if I have time just to take you one step further. Do you notice the next thing that comes in John's Gospel? You will find it at the forty-third verse of the first chapter. Now note how true to principle John is keeping. At that point Jesus is calling His twelve apostles. He is saying to this one and to that one, "follow Me." He is selecting twelve. That is the number of the tribes of Israel. So, He is constituting the new Israel on the principle of twelve. But as He is doing this, He calls one man, and that man's name is Nathaniel. One of the others brings Nathaniel, and as Nathaniel is coming and Jesus sees him, Jesus says, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile! Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no Jacob!" Nathaniel said, "Master, how do You know me?" Jesus said, "Before your friend called you to come, I saw you under the fig tree." Why had Nathaniel gone under the thick fig tree? He wanted to pray, and he did not want anybody to see him. He wanted to be alone, quiet, where no one would see him and disturb him, and so he went under the fig tree. Jesus said, "I saw you when you were under the fig tree." It must have been a very thick fig tree, because Nathaniel was so surprised, so surprised that anybody could have seen him that he said, "Master, Thou art the Son of God; Thou art the King of Israel." Now listen to what Jesus said to him. "Because I said, I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You shall see greater things than that. Afterward thou shalt see the heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

Starting with Abraham, we went to Isaac, now we come to Jacob. Everybody knows the story of Jacob's dream - how he journeyed and when the sun went down, he lighted upon a certain place, and he went to sleep, and he had a dream. He saw a ladder set up on the earth. The top of it reached into heaven. And he saw the angels of God ascending and descending upon the ladder. And the Lord was above the ladder. And the Lord spoke to Jacob. Now John has taken that over also. Perhaps we would be better to say the Holy Spirit is taking it all over. So we come to Jacob. Where did everything of God begin with Jacob? What is the great thing about Jacob? There are many things about him that we can forget for the moment. And we just remain with this dream because Jesus put His finger upon that. He said to Nathaniel, "an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" And then to him He said afterwards, "Thou shalt see the heavens open, the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

Of course, that was all type and figure. We will see in a minute what it meant. We have got to go back to the Old Testament again. You know right from the day when Adam sinned in the garden, the presence of God was shut and closed to him. All through the Old Testament, God is so separate from man that man cannot come near God. Everything in the Old Testament says to man, "Keep out! Come not near, this is holy ground." That court around the tabernacle said to man, "Keep out. You cannot come in here, only the priests can come in here, you keep out." You see, man was excluded from the Presence of God. It was a terrible thing to come into the Presence of God. If ever anybody felt that God had come near, they would have been afraid for their life. Heaven was closed. The old Israel had a closed heaven. "Thou shalt see the heaven open." A WONDERFUL FEATURE ABOUT THIS NEW ISRAEL IS THAT IT HAS AN OPEN HEAVEN IN JESUS CHRIST.

When did Nathaniel come to experience what Jesus said he would? You open your New Testament at the beginning of the Acts of the apostles. You will read the names of the people who were gathered together after the resurrection of Jesus. It says now there were so-and-so, so-and-so, so-and-so, and Nathaniel. Oh, Nathaniel is there! And they were all gathered together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven the sound as of a mighty rushing wind. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2). The

heaven is open. Why? Because Jesus has gone through and opened it. And on that day, and from that day, they lived under the open heaven. That is, they had a freeway through to God. No longer were they kept outside. The Holy Spirit says now you can come with boldness to the Throne of Grace. It is no longer a closed door to God. The heavens are open. That is the inheritance of the new Israel.

I think we are having a little bit of the experience of that today. We have an open heaven here tonight. We know something about the Lord speaking to us from heaven in the Lord Jesus. God's messages are coming to us from heaven. I trust that is true. That is our great privilege as the new Israel. Now I have got to stop. And I only got to the first chapter of John, and that goes right through the whole Gospel of John to the end. All that which is in that wonderful gospel has to do with this new spiritual Israel. We are brought into a wonderful thing through the Lord Jesus, to the God of glory, to the wonderful miracle of spiritual sonship. We are learning to know the power of His resurrection and we are coming to experience more and more of the meaning of the open heaven. This is not just Bible teaching. This is wonderful spiritual experience. **IT IS ALL THE INHERITANCE OF THE CHILDREN OF THIS NEW ISRAEL!**

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