



## **AN UNSHAKABLE KINGDOM**

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As we watch news events unfold, it's easy to reach the conclusion that the world around us is increasingly unstable. Some are suggesting that we are seeing a shift in world affairs and superpowers such as the United States are losing that status and growing weaker. While we will leave that for the historians and the politicians to debate, what history tells us is that nations rise and fall. Kingdoms conquer and then they crumble. It is unsettling, if not frightful to witness the instability and upheaval that changing times bring. But this is the nature of the kingdoms of men. Even the greatest of powers will eventually diminish and perhaps even disappear.

The New Testament book of Hebrews was written, we believe, to Christians who were seeing the unfolding of events that presented challenges to their faith. They were struggling to leave the old life of Judaism and temple worship behind as they embraced Christ and were tempted to return to it as the threat of persecution loomed over them. Added to this, their beloved city of Jerusalem, and most importantly, the temple within it, was about to be destroyed. And so, the apostle wrote to these troubled Christians and exhorted them to be faithful and cling to Christ for He was better than all the sacrifices, ceremonies, and commandments of the old system. He was the fulfillment and fruition of all those things and what they had in Christ would never be surpassed or replaced by any other system of religion. In Hebrews 12:23-28, we read: *"To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel. See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven: Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we*

*receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear."*

The inspired writer of Hebrews pens this letter to a group of believers amid what seems to them a catastrophe. Their entire lives had been upended by the gospel of grace. All their lives were wrapped up in the law and covenant of Moses. In their eyes, it made them a superior race and gave them a perfect creed. They had tenaciously clung to the law and the temple and all that they represented. It WAS THEIR LIFE. It was their identity. And in following Christ, it was difficult to cross the bridge and leave their world behind. Jerusalem was a holy city and the temple on Mount Zion was an imposing symbol of the fact that God was the God of the Jews. Moses was the greatest of all prophets, the Jewish race was the supreme race, Jerusalem was the supreme city, and the temple was the supreme cathedral of the living God. These were the basic theological beliefs of the Hebrew. But now every one of these engrained dogmas was being shaken. The temple had already been shaken when Christ died on Mount Calvary just outside the city wall, for when He died, you'll recall an earthquake shook the land and the hand of God had ripped the veil of the temple from top to bottom – at last opening the way to God. A prophet greater than Moses had arisen. He had now offered His kingdom to all kindreds, tongues, and nations. He had made men and women of all colors, tongues, and tribes to be equal in Christ. He had replaced the old covenant they had lived under for so long with one that was new and better in every way. And now, the storm clouds were gathering over the long home of their faith, the city of Jerusalem for now, even the city would fall and the holy temple would be destroyed.

You must try to imagine how all of this must have felt to the Jews, even to those who had believed in Christ and followed Him. To the Jew, it must have seemed as though his world was crumbling around him. The ancient tree of his faith was being shaken and everything he had known all his life was falling on every side. The presented a challenge to the faith and courage of these unsteady Christians. It is always difficult to look beyond our immediate circumstances and see the larger picture. As the times change; as traditions are forgotten; as time-tested institutions are assailed; and as the world as we have known it slips away and we face an unknown future, it is easy to become dismayed and to lose heart. To these troubled brethren of the first century, the apostle's message was that when the shaking was over, when the things that could be shaken had fallen, there would remain some things that could NOT be shaken. And the same assurance is offered to Christians today. The nations, kingdoms, and empires of the world (no matter how mighty and great they may at one time, or another be) will all crumble. They will one day be a footnote in history. The things around us will be shaken. But there are things that will always remain and that is where our faith and allegiance belong.

The Hebrew writer here speaks of the great transitions of time as 'shakings.' And he speaks of two great shakings that have taken place that each marks the beginning of a new era of time and a new administration of things. He first refers to the Law being given to Moses on Mount Sinai. This caused a literal shaking of the ground. In verse 26, he reminds them that when God gave the old law to Moses on the mountaintop, that *"His voice then shook the earth."* This initiated a new dispensation which was marked by a literal earthquake when God spoke to Moses. But then he says, *"...but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven."* This is a quotation from the prophet Haggai during the building of the second temple. The prophet's sermon to ancient Israel reads like this in Haggai 2:6-9. *"For thus saith the LORD of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, And I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: And I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the LORD of hosts. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts: And in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts."* This is a

magnificent prophecy concerning the temple and its ultimate Messianic fulfillment. Haggai is encouraging the rebuilding of the destroyed temple but in so doing, he is pointing with a prophetic figure to its anti-type to come one day – the spiritual temple that Christ would build, which is His church. He says that there would be one last shaking. That is, there would be one last transition in the plan of God for His people on earth.

You see, the temple that they were building was a replacement to Solomon’s temple which had been destroyed when Israel was taken into captivity by the Babylonians. This second temple would not equal the beauty or grandeur of the first temple even with the costly and ornate renovations of Herod years later. It would still pale in comparison to what Solomon built. It would, for one thing, lack the Shekinah glory. But Haggai says that is alright because this temple would not be permanent. It too would be shaken, and it would one day fall. In its place there would stand the permanent temple of God: not a temple made with stone and precious metal and jewels but a spiritual and everlasting temple that the Messiah would build on Mount Zion. This would not be literal building but would be a spiritual house where God would dwell with His people. It would be the Lord’s kingdom, the church of Christ. All the nations of the earth would come into this temple and worship and God’s glory would forever fill it. This is what the Hebrew writer speaks of in our text. He speaks of this ‘one last shaking’ when the Mosaic covenant; its law; its priesthood; its animal sacrifices; its tabernacle and temple; its yearly atonement; would all be taken away. They were temporary.

The Christians to whom the Hebrew letter was addressed were to mature in their faith to the point that the shaking of those things that had been so important to them would not shake their faith in Christ. He says in verses 27-28: *“And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.”* Today, our faith is not being challenged by the removing of the Old Covenant or Herod’s Temple, but we today look about us and see the temporary things of earth being violently shaken and we wonder what this means for us. We wring our hands over the future of America or political unrest around the globe. We see the looming threat of terrorism or communism or other ism’s that we view as a threat to our peace, our safety, and our welfare. The message to Christians today is the same as it was to Christians living in the first century: *“Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.”* Stop fearing what will happen in the world and rather fear the One who holds the world in His hand.

The writer says the things that when time has toppled all the things we think of as so important – the things that remain are unshakable. And that which still stands and will forevermore stand is THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST. It is an unshakable kingdom. And we are not waiting for it to appear. That kingdom exists in the world right now. It’s a spiritual kingdom that began when Christ ascended to the Father and took His seat at the right hand of God and was given all power and authority. And the bible says that kingdom will never be destroyed.

The book of Daniel records an incredible prophecy of that kingdom in Daniel 2. While the Israelites were in captivity in Babylon, King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that the prophet Daniel was called to interpret. He dreamed of a great and formidable image with a head of fine gold, its chest and arms made of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, and its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. He then saw a stone cut out without hands which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay and broke them in pieces. Then the rest of the image crumbled and was crushed and blown away by the wind until

not a trace was left. When Daniel interpreted the king's dream. He began by saying in verses 37-38: *"Thou, O king, art a king of kings: for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory. And wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the heaven hath he given into thine hand, and hath made thee ruler over them all. Thou art this head of gold."* He then goes on to describe the succession of mighty empires that would arise and rule down through the next several hundred years culminating in the rise of the Roman empire. These empires were rich; they were powerful; they were influential; they seemed unstoppable. But those empires were all destroyed thousands of years ago. And there is not a kingdom on the face of this earth that will not wax and then wane and that will not at some point lie in the dust heap of history. Daniel says they would all come to naught. But notice in verse 44, when he comes to the last of these great world powers (the Roman empire) he says: "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 forever." No other kingdom would be compared to it and no other power would conquer it: no earthly power nor even the power of Satan and His kingdom could or will ever destroy it. We have received a kingdom which CANNOT be moved. Its capitol is not in Washington, DC; it is not in London, England; or Beijing China. It is not in Kabul, Afghanistan or even in Jerusalem. It is in heaven above. And for 2,000 years, Satan has hurled his fiery darts at her, and world powers have sought to crush her yet the kingdom of our Lord, the church of His Christ, still stands and ever will.

It is AN UNSHAKABLE KINGDOM because it has an UNSHAKABLE KING. When He came to earth, Christ could not be overcome by any power, not the least of which is death. And if He could conquer death, the greatest and most tenacious enemy to all of mankind, then He holds power over all other forces. Make no mistake, despite the seeming chaos and upheaval we see in the world today because of sin, Christ is sitting firmly on His throne. The governments of men are fragile and are constantly being shaken. Even our own government is being shaken. But Christ and His kingdom cannot be shaken. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:20-28 that King Jesus is putting all enemies under His feet. He broke the penalty of sin at Calvary. He broke the power of sin in His resurrection. He is breaking the hold of sin as souls find freedom from their sin in the gospel. And with every soul that submits to Him and obeys Him, His kingdom continues to expand into every nation and into the furthest reaches of earth. Until when He at last comes again and the dead are raised, the last and great enemy of all mankind, death will be finally destroyed. And having put down all other rule and power, Paul said He will then deliver that kingdom up to God, that God may be all in all. Friend, I have much more faith in that king than I do any president, prime minister, or monarch. I have more confidence in that kingdom than I do the United States, the United Kingdom, The United Nations, or whatever other powers unite upon whatever premise or for whatever objective. Kings come and go and kingdoms rise and fall but King Jesus reigns evermore and of His kingdom there will be no end. (Isaiah 9:7)

And lastly, that the Kingdom of Christ not only is an UNSHAKABLE KINGDOM because it has an UNSHAKABLE KING, but it also has an UNSHAKABLE CONSTITUTION. If the constitution which upholds and guides a nation fails, the nation will fail. But the constitution of Christ's everlasting kingdom is the New Covenant which the Hebrew writer shows is a permanent and a lasting covenant. Its premises and its promises better than the covenant of old made with Moses. The things of Moses were shaken and were removed but the new covenant which came by Christ Jesus stands. Jesus said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away but my words shall not pass away." (Matthew 24:35). If you go to Washington DC, you'll find the constitution of the United States signed by the founders encased in glass and protected. The government is to operate by it. Its citizens are protected by it. But one day, that piece of paper will turn to ash. The constitution of Christ's kingdom, the New Testament scriptures, will stand forever. Not one

word of it has passed away or become irrelevant, outdated, or lost its significance. And if it stands forever, so will the kingdom it upholds and the King who rules it in righteousness. We had better be more concerned with what IT says than any earthly document. The kingdoms of men are passing away, but the kingdom of Christ will withstand the fires of earth and the fires of God's eternal judgment.

Are you a citizen of that kingdom? When every nation of men has crumbled... and when the earth itself is dissolved... the kingdom of Christ will stand. Nothing can destroy it! Persecution only fans the flames of its zeal. It cannot be done away with. Jesus and His everlasting kingdom is the only unchanging and indestructible force there is. How foolish to place your hopes and confidences in the kingdoms of this earth. Become part of Christ's kingdom today. How? Submit to Him as King. Paul says in Colossians 1:13-14 that when we, by obedience to the gospel, are delivered from the dark kingdom of sin, we are then translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son. Thus, Luke tells us that when sinners on the Day of Pentecost heard the word of the gospel first preached, they were moved to faith and obedience and were baptized for the forgiveness of their sins and Acts 2:47 says the Lord added to the church daily such as were being saved. Make that same decision today and "build your hopes on things eternal. Hold to God's unchanging hand."

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