

## The Kingdom of Christ

I saw in the night visions and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven and came to the Ancient of days...and there was given Him dominion and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations and languages, should serve Him: His dominion is an everlasting dominion... and judgement was given to the saints of the most High...(Dan 7:13-14, 22).

The concept of the millennium refers to the reign of Christ, when and where Christ will reign. The three main views on the kingdom of Christ are:

*Post-millennialism:* The Second Coming of Jesus occurs *after* the millennium. The millennium is seen here as symbolic of a period before His Second Coming. It is not known how long this period is. In this period the church expands in glory and influence throughout the world, improving all things, including social conditions and justice.

There is strong support for this is scripture. For example, Paul said in 1 Cor 15:25 that Christ must reign until all enemies are subjected under His feet. We will discuss this passage below. Then there are the parables of the seed becoming a great tree and of the woman who added leaven to the dough (Matt 13:32-33).

The kingdom of Christ in the world will continue to expand in influence until all evil is put down. When that has happened, i.e. after this period of the victory of Christ's kingdom through the church, Jesus' Second Coming will occur, at which time we enter the New Heaven and New Earth.

This view has been held by many at various times throughout church history, including today. It was a fairly dominant view in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries.

*Pre-millennialism:* This view holds that the Second Coming of Christ occurs at the beginning of a literal millennium, i.e. a literal 1,000 year reign of Christ on earth. Jesus will reign in Jerusalem in the Middle East. Before this occurs evil will increase and dominate the earth. There will be a falling away of the church and antichrist will dominate. Christ comes to put down all evil and give us the victory.

There is a variety of views associated with pre-millennialism, regarding questions such as whether the temple will be rebuilt, or what the roles of Israel, the law and sacrifice will be. Most who hold to pre-millennialism believe that we enter eternity after the 1,000 year reign of Christ on earth. That is, after the millennium this planet and the heavens are destroyed and God makes a new universe with a New Heaven and a New Earth.

Pre-millennialism has been a major view within Christianity for about the last 100 years. It is depicted in popular novels about end-times.

*A-millennialism:* A is a Latin prefix meaning *no*, or *none*. So a-millennialism means *no* millennium. This means that there is no literal millennium on earth. The term *millennium* is a symbolic term representing Christ's rule from heaven. He reigns through the church, but He also exercises full sovereignty over all nations.

Evil still exists on the earth during the millennium, by God's permission and for God's purposes. But Christ reigns as He gathers in His elect and builds His Church. At the end of this age the Second Coming will occur along with the resurrection of the church and of the wicked for the last judgement and the New Heaven and New Earth.

A-millennialism has been held at various times throughout church history and overall has been one of the dominant views. It is still held by many Christians today.

Topics in this chapter include:

- Jewish thought.
- Early church history thought.
- Pre-tribulation rapture doctrine.
- The book of Revelation.
- The two resurrections.
- The reign of Christ.
- Fatalism.
- The rage of Satan.
- The book of Daniel.

We do not hold a distinction between the terms *kingdom of God*, *kingdom of heaven* and *kingdom of Christ*. The kingdom of God is sometimes said to be within us. It refers to the will of God being done in our lives. The rule or kingdom of God is also expressed through the kingdom of His Son.

There is a difference between the *kingdom of God* as it is taught in the Bible and ideas that were taught in paganism. Paganism had an influence on Jewish thought during the days of their captivity, first in Babylon and later under the Greeks and Romans. Some of these issues are discussed in the chapter on Spirit Baptism and the chapter on education, as these subjects interrelate.

### Apocrypha

In those days syncretism increased, i.e. the mixing of the Hebrew faith with pagan ideas. This is evident even in the days of Daniel, but more particularly during the Intertestamental period. The Intertestamental period is the period between the writing of the book of Malachi and the ministry of John the Baptist; about 400 years.

During the Intertestamental period many books were written by the Jews, called the Apocrypha. These are not biblical books. They are not inspired by God and were not written by prophets called by God. The books bear names, such as *Wisdom of Solomon*, but were not written by those they were named after. These books are useful for studying the history and thought of the period.

### Essenes

Jewish thought changed considerably during this Intertestamental period. They adopted first the spiritual warfare ideas of the pagans, i.e. that we influence our prosperity by manipulation of spiritual powers. Many of the Jews began to believe that they were in captivity to the Gentile powers because of the devil. However, God said that they went into captivity at His own hand, because they broke the covenant.

During this period the Jews adopted pagan ideas on asceticism, which they thought would purify them, giving them dominion over Satan and the return to Israel's of political power. Asceticism was a practice among some of the Greeks, following Plato's ideas, which meant to many that the human body was evil, preventing them from having spiritual power.

The Jewish Essene sect, influential in Israel during the days of Jesus, adopted these Platonist ideas. The Essenes conducted several ritual cleansings (daily baptisms) and fasts, hoping to bring the

Messiah who would return glory to Israel in Jerusalem. The main Jewish groups then were the Sadducees, Pharisees and the Essenes. It is important to understand these groups and the beliefs and practices of Judaism in that day, as a background to understanding the New Testament.

### Zionism

The Intertestamental period saw the rise of Zionism. When Jesus came the Jews were looking for their deliverer who would save all Israel and return the kingdom to Jerusalem. They did not care whether this was God's plan, they were going to force it by their own legalistic "purity". Even the disciples of Jesus seemed to think that Jesus would rule in Jerusalem (Luke 19:11). James and John wanted to sit with Jesus on the throne (Mark 10:37).

Some think that this is what Judas Iscariot was trying to achieve by betraying Jesus, i.e. trying to force His hand to overthrow Rome. However, Judas may have just been after the 30 pieces of silver. There were many bands of Jewish zealots in those days trying to establish a Zionist vision and many false messiahs stood up to lead them.

Barabbas was likely one of these. Theudas and Judas of Galilee were of this type (Acts 5:36-37). Even after Jesus rose from the dead the disciples still had no idea what His mission was. They asked Him, "Will you at this time return the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). Jesus answered with two points:

1. The seasons are not for them to know, but are in the Father's hands (vs. 7).
2. They shall receive power to be His witnesses in all the earth (vs. 8).

This power was Jesus' answer. Israel (the House of David) would be restored in the church, as James stated (Acts 15:13-18). After the Day of Pentecost the disciples understood this, but before then they did not know what the kingdom was, nor did they understand what Israel was. Christ reigns now in the church and He shall put down all corruption at the end, but that time is in the Father's hands.

### Platonism

Paul constantly battled against the encroachment of both pagan and Jewish ideas. After the first apostles passed on, pagan ideas in the church increased. Many of the converts to Christ in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century were Greek and were formerly Platonists. They believed that they would win more Greeks if they presented Christianity as a higher form of Platonism, i.e. a fulfilment of their own cultural values.

Thus they brought former Greek ideas into the church and mixed them with the gospel. These early fathers in the church taught that the flesh must be denied. They then led people away from truth with false revelations, including visions of Mary. This led people into asceticism and Mary and saint worship (idolatry). The early church was *Hellenized*, which means it became Greek in culture.

### Montanism

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century Montanism arose. This was a cultic Christian group with some false prophets. They followed several of the Jewish Apocryphal books, adopting from these ascetic and Zionist ideas. They were therefore a pagan/Christian mix. Some of their women would not marry, or would deny their husbands, a similar problem to that which Paul addressed in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 7.

They had some false prophecies, believing that their tongues and interpretations were inspired on the level of scripture and a continuation of scriptural revelation. They believed that Jesus was going to return in their time and set up His kingdom in a city in Asia Minor. They adopted a form of Zionism

known as chiliasm, or more commonly known today as millennialism, i.e. that Jesus was returning to rule in an earthly kingdom.

### Early Church Fathers

We can see where the roots of millennialism came from, which began to affect Christians in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Centuries. Because early Greek Christians liked asceticism they were drawn to the Zionist ideas of the Essene and other Jewish sects. They developed teaching on “end-times” and millennialism that was not in accord with the mindset of the Hebrew prophets and early apostles.

The earliest church fathers were not millennial. The *Didache* of around 97AD did not teach a near Second Coming of Christ, but an age of gospel outreach to the end of the earth. The Epistle of Barnabas around 98AD declared an age of dominion for the church in all the world. Clemet of Rome about 99AD declared the same, as did the *Pastor of Hermas* in 100AD, Ignatius in 107AD and Papias in 145AD.

In 150AD we see millennialism in some of the writings of Justin Martyr, a converted Greek philosopher, where in other passages he spoke against it. In 165AD Tatian was strongly anti millennial, as was Athenagoras in 183AD. Irenaeus in 185AD was millennial in some parts of his writing, but not in other parts. Clement of Alexandria in 190AD and Caius of Rome in 210AD were strongly anti millennial.

We can go on with many cases. It is wrong to say that the early church fathers believed in a return of Christ to reign in Jerusalem. It is also wrong to say that they believed in a very soon return of Jesus. They believed in a period of time, the church age, in which Christ would reign over the nations from heaven and the gospel would go to the ends of the earth.

There is a claim that the church initially held to a pre-millennial view and changed to a-millennialism in 4<sup>th</sup> Century after Constantine gave the church political power. This theory does not account for the Jewish/pagan roots of pre-millennialism, or the church fathers well before Constantine who opposed it.

### Pre-Tribulation Rapture

The *pre-tribulation rapture* theory teaches two things: that there shall be a *Great Tribulation* just before the Second Coming of Jesus; and that the church shall be *raptured* (taken out of the world) just before that tribulation, or mid way through the tribulation. Some believe that the “overcoming saints” shall be raptured, but less victorious believers shall be purified in the tribulation.

This *pre-trib*’ theory also holds that there are two different resurrections of the body. The church shall be resurrected (raptured) first, before the return of Christ and the wicked dead shall be raised up second, after the millennial reign of Christ in Jerusalem. This means that there is a 1,000 year gap between the bodily resurrection of the church and the bodily resurrection of the wicked.

Here are two theories that the early church fathers did not believe. First, the early fathers did not believe in two separate bodily resurrections, one before and one after a 1,000 year reign of Jesus in Jerusalem. Second, the pre-tribulation rapture is not mentioned by any church father and is not mentioned anywhere in church history, until the year 1830.

The idea of two separate resurrections with a long gap of years between them appears in Babylonian teaching and then in Persian Zoroastrian chiliasm, but not in Christian teaching until Montanism and then inconsistently in Justin Martyr in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century.

This “pre-tribulation rapture” teaching did not occur in church history until 1830. Edward Irving translated a document into English, which was first written by a Franciscan Priest named Francisco Ribera (1537-1591). This document proclaimed the millennial theory, that Jesus was coming to reign for a 1,000 years in Jerusalem. Irving and John Darby then began to teach this in the UK.

Also, a young girl in Scotland associated with Irving’s ministry, named Margaret McDonald, gave a “tongues and interpretation” saying that the rapture of the church would occur before the Great Tribulation, after which Christ would come to reign in Jerusalem.

From 1830 John Darby began to popularize the teaching. Darby was Cessationist and claimed that he found this teaching in Bible study and did not get it from the Scotland manifestation. However, the *pre-tribulation rapture* doctrine is not mentioned in scripture once. There is not one scripture passage that we can turn to that directly teaches this.

### Revelation 20

The only reference to a millennium in the scripture is in Revelation 20. Before looking at this we need to see what the Revelation is about. It is about Jesus Christ, who is the spirit or theme of prophecy (Rev 19:10). Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of the millennium in Revelation 20. The first verse of the Revelation tells us how the book is to be interpreted:

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to Him, to show to His servants things which must shortly come to pass and He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John. (Rev 1:1).

“Signified” interpreted from the Greek means symbolize. Jesus said that God the Father gave Him the Revelation and that He then gave it to John by means of symbolism. Different books of the Bible are written in different forms, or *genre*. Genre refers to the *kind* of literature. Some scripture is narrative, other parts are poetic. Each genre has its own principles of interpretation.

### Scripture’s Genre

We know that poetry has distinct guidelines in interpretation. The Revelation is a particular kind of genre known as *apocalyptic*. This means it is symbolic prophetic scripture. Portions of Daniel are the same and portions of Ezekiel, for example, where wheels and other images are used to portray ideas.

Historical narratives are written in literal form. It would be wrong to interpret them symbolically. The miracles of Jesus in the Gospels are historical narrative. They actually happened in history. There are poetic devices used in the Psalms and the prophets. These are not literal. They use images such as fire, storms and the earth passing away, as images to portray judgement or destruction.

There are also idioms used in various places that are not literal. We use them in English today, such as, “He would have bent over backwards to help me.”. This means that he would do anything to help. It does not mean that he literally bent over backwards. This shows that we may read statements in the Bible without being aware of their idiomatic purpose in early Hebrew thought.

We are supposed to interpret scripture by its plain intention. If the intention of the genre is that we interpret it literally, then that is what we must do. If it is the intention of the genre that we interpret it symbolically, then it would be wrong to interpret it literally.

## Apocalyptic

Revelation is the apocalyptic genre. It uses images to relay meaning. Images of beasts portray meaning about the nature of fallen man. Numbers are used to portray meaning. The 12 elders signify completion. The 144,000 portrays the completion of the elect, the church of Jesus Christ. Every image in Revelation has theological significance in relation to Jesus Christ and His victory and kingdom.

When we come to the 1,000 year reign of Christ in Revelation 20 the principle is the same. We do not suddenly change the clear stated intention of the symbolism in Revelation when we get to chapter 20. The number 1,000 is a symbol that represents the totality of Christ's reign.

In the Old Testament the number 1,000 is employed the same way. "One shall put a thousand to flight." This is not a literal number. It simply means *many*. Literalism is a fault of Dispensationalism. Literalism means interpreting texts literally when that is not the plain intention of the passage. Literalism is also a Western thinking fault. It is not the intention of the Hebrew mindset.

The Old Testament says that, "God owns the cattle on a thousand hills." (Ps 50:10). This is not a literal number. The statement shows the Lord's ownership of all the earth. It is the same as saying, "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness (contents) thereof." When the Bible states how many died in a battle or how many were saved on the Day of Pentecost then those numbers are literal, because they are historical statements.

## Millennium is Now

The millennium in Revelation 20 signifies the reign of Christ. The 1,000 years is a symbol for the totality of His reign, power and sovereignty. The Revelation depicts a doctrine that had already been taught in the epistles. His reign is now, not when He returns at the end this world. Paul described the reign of Christ:

Then comes the end, when He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when He shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign, till He (Father) has put all enemies under His (Christ) feet. (1 Cor 15:24-25).

Dispensationalism says that the *rapture* is to occur *before* Christ comes to reign in Jerusalem. This means that the resurrection is before the reign of Jesus. But 1 Cor 15:24-25 shows the opposite. Paul said that Christ reigns *before the resurrection*. Jesus reigns *until* death is placed under His feet.

The resurrection occurs at the Second Coming of Jesus. Therefore, Paul said that Christ reigns in heaven *before* the Second Coming, not on earth after His Second Coming. The millennium is symbolic of Christ's current reign. It is not a literal number of years. We do not know when it will end. We do not know when Jesus will come. That is in the hands of the Father.

## The Resurrection

Here we discuss the doctrine of the resurrection. This is derived mainly from the book of Daniel, Jesus teaching in the Gospel of John and Paul's teaching. Revelation depicts this doctrine in symbolic form. What did Jesus and Paul teach concerning the two resurrections? How do these relate to the millennium?

Blessed and holy is he that has part in the first resurrection: on such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ and shall reign with Him a thousand years. (Rev 20:6).

Through the first resurrection saints reign with Christ. Through the first resurrection we enter into the kingdom of Christ. Both the believers on earth and those now in heaven are reigning with Christ through being partakers in the first resurrection. What is this first resurrection? Jesus spoke of two resurrections. The first resurrection Jesus spoke of was the new birth:

...He that hears My word and believes on Him that sent Me, has everlasting life and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death to life...The hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. For as the Father has life in Himself; so has He given to the Son to have life in Himself. (John 5:24-26).

In these verses Jesus spoke of the new birth, being raised from death in sin to life. He said, "The hour is coming and *now is...*" Jesus came to usher in His kingdom and the new birth. His kingdom was at hand, coming and was already here, about to be fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost. In this resurrection we have already passed from death to life. It is now, through the hearing of faith, not in the future (Rom 10:17). This is the first resurrection. Those who are born again reign with Christ:

...much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ. (Rom 5:17).

Paul also described the first resurrection in Ephesians:

And you has He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins...But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath made us alive together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved). (Eph 2:1-5).

### The Second Resurrection

Going back to John 5, Jesus goes on to describe the second resurrection:

(The Father) has given Him (Jesus Christ) authority to execute judgement also...for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth; they that have done good, to the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, to the resurrection of damnation. (John 5:27-29).

This speaks of the judgement at the end of the world. This hour is in the future. The dead bodies shall rise from the graves, both the just and the wicked in the same hour. There is no gap between the resurrection of the just and of the wicked. They are both in the same hour. The resurrection of the body at the *last day* is also spoken of by Jesus in another place:

Martha said to Him, I know that he (Lazarus) shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life: he that believes in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this? (John 11:24-26).

It is claimed that John 11 pre-figures the bodily resurrection at the end of the world. Martha said that she knew that Lazarus would rise on the *last day*. Jesus said that He is the resurrection, meaning

both that in Him is eternal life for those who believe and also that He is the one who will give life to our bodies on the *last day*.

The *last day* is distinguished from the term *last-days*, or *latter days*. The terms *last-days* and *latter days* were used by the prophets concerning the end of the Old Covenant era. Peter confirms this is Acts 2 where he refers to Joel's *last-days* being fulfilled at Pentecost. The *last day* is the bodily resurrection at the end of the world. We do not know when this will be and it has no direct relation to the term *last-days*.

In John 11 Jesus said two things about the second or the bodily resurrection. He said that the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then He said those who are alive and believe in Him will not die. This is exactly what Paul said.

For this we say to you *by the word of the Lord*, that we which are alive and remain to the coming of the Lord shall not go before them which are asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. (1 Thes 4:15-17).

Paul said he was passing onto the church of the Thessalonians what Jesus had given the apostles. This is what Paul means by the term *the word of the Lord*. He meant what Jesus had said in the flesh when on earth. Paul referred to the word of the Lord in his epistles, e.g. with regard to divorce in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 7 and the Lord's Supper in 1 Cor 11. 1 Cor 15:1-7 is another example of Paul referring to New Testament scripture already in existence.

In 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians Paul was referring to John 11. The dead in Christ rise first, then we which are alive in Christ are changed and join the others in the air, i.e. we do not die. Paul did not speculate when this would be. He did not even state the season. He did not say it was near at hand. In fact he said it was not at hand. We discuss this in another chapter.

In 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15 Paul spoke of this again and the context intimates that Paul saw it as far off:

Then comes the end, when He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father...the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. (1 Cor 15:24, 26).

Paul said that Christ would reign until the end, when the kingdom would be handed to the Father at the resurrection of the dead. He is speaking here of the resurrection of the body. Paul did not say when this would happen. He did not say he was expecting it soon. This passage speaks of the end of the world, as does Rom 8:19-25, Heb 2:8-10, as does also the last chapter of the book of Revelation.

Some might ask, "How do we know when Revelation is symbolic and when it is literal? How do we know that the first resurrection is about new birth and that the second is about the body?" We know by what the rest of scripture teaches. The epistles teach that the new birth is the first resurrection and the physical resurrection of the body occurs after the reign of Christ. The Revelation does not add any new doctrine to the epistles.

### Christ Reigns

We are now living in the age of the kingdom of Christ. Jesus spoke of His sufferings and the glories that would follow (Luke 24:26). Paul spoke in his day of the ages to come in which He would show us

the riches of His grace (Eph 2:7). Jesus spoke of the church which He would build (Matt 16:18). John the Baptist spoke of the kingdom which was at hand (Matt 3:2).

Daniel spoke of the rock cut out without hands that would then fill the earth (Dan 2:33-35). Isaiah spoke of the increase of His government, of which there would be no end (Is 9:7). Habakkuk spoke of the glory of the knowledge of the Lord covering the earth like the waters cover the sea (Hab 2:4). Revelation spoke of His rule amongst all nations. This is the time we are living in now, the kingdom of Christ.

### Negativity

Dispensationalism puts all this off until the Second Coming of Christ. It says that all these glorious scriptures are for the reign of Christ in Jerusalem when He returns. It says that now we are getting ready for the antichrist to rule. It sees things as getting progressively worse. We can do nothing but prepare for the end. "Store up food for the Great Tribulation", as *mid-trib'* or *post-tribulationists* put it.

The negativity of Dispensationalism makes it damaging. Dispensationalism became popular after the French Revolution, after modern industrialization resulted in poor urban social conditions and after the American Civil War. These events disturbed the earlier optimism of post-millennialism. The view changed to see mainly evil and that the world would only get worse.

If we look down through the ages since Paul we also see something different. Yes we see the evil, but we also see the gospel prevailing over the earth, just as Jesus said. We also know that the Father has not changed. The nations still belong to His Son and always will. God is not *going* to enthrone His Son on the throne of David when He returns. He *has* already enthroned His Son.

However, this negative view has caused the church to withdraw from society, instead of seeing the world as ruled by Christ. In the last 100 years many Christians have largely stayed out of government, out of universities and out of the media, or at least not tried in any significant way to change them. This negative behaviour is self-fulfilling. The next generation is almost bereft of godly society as a result. This is not fulfilling Christ's mission.

F. W. Newman, a colleague of Darby, described the negativity of Darby's Dispensationalism, "The importance of this doctrine is that it totally forbids all working for earthly objects distant in time." (Cited in *Christian Zionism*, Stephen Sizer.)

When one young man sought Darby's advice on whether he should do further studies in mathematics, Darby answered, "Such a purpose was very proper, if entertained by a worldly man. Let the dead bury their dead; and let the world study the things of the world...such attitudes cannot be eagerly followed by the Christian, except when he yields to unbelief." (Cited in Sizer.)

### Fatalism

As new Christians we were taught that Henry Kissinger was the antichrist. He would take over either the United Nations or the European Union and enter a peace treaty with Israel before the Great Tribulation would start. We were told that the Second Coming of Christ would occur in a few years time. Friends we know left university, messing up their lives. In Thessalonica they left their jobs for the same reason and Paul wrote to correct them.

Dispensationalism produces a crippling fatalism. We think that there is no point to striving, that prophecy must be fulfilled and we do not stand against the *falling away* of the "last-days". We think there is nothing that we can do: "These are called *the signs of the times*". It is claimed that Israel

becoming a nation is a sign of the end. Our attitudes and actions have been predetermined by a false view of scripture.

This is harmful to Christian influence in the world. Christians who should be active are not. Earthquakes, famines and evil in the world are not a sign that Jesus is coming in our generation. These things have been going on for 2,000 years and morality has been much worse in earlier generations. Besides, this view of *signs* is taken from an incorrect understanding of Matthew 24, which we speak on later.

### Evangelism

We have spoken to church leaders who said they know that what is taught on *last-days* is probably not true, but that it is good for making converts. They said it excites people. But when the people realize that what they were told is wrong they “backslide”. Our Christian life must be built on genuine repentance that comes from God. Whether Jesus is coming tomorrow or in 1,500 years should not make any difference to the way we live. Why would anyone fear the last-days, if they had a relationship with God?

It is thought by some that today the antichrist may be the leader of Iran. It is reckless to make speculative interpretations of scripture. In every generation there are figures who oppose the gospel, but the Bible gives no basis to speculate about the end. Every generation that has done this has been wrong.

Some have said that the Second Coming will not take us unaware, meaning we will know when the event is about to occur by that which precedes it (1 Thes 5:1-8). Firstly, Paul was not referring to the Second Coming in that text. Secondly, when we are living for Christ we are always ready. That does not mean that we know the season that it will occur. The Bible says that that season is in the Father’s hands and is not for us to know (Acts 1:6-8).

Jesus said “occupy till I come.” (Luke 19:13). Jesus said His kingdom is like leaven that fills the whole lump of dough (Luke 13:20-22). This means we are supposed to have influence in the world.

It was claimed that Jesus will come by the year 2,000, since it would then be 6,000 years after Adam was made, when we would enter the last 1,000 years, the *Sabbath millennium*. The Bible does not say this. This is an allegory from Genesis 1, not intended by scripture. God said that His promises to Abraham and His seed would last for 1,000 generations (1 Chron 16:15). If literal, that is 40,000 years. If symbolic, it is also a long time.

We must recover the view of former generations of Spirit filled believers who laboured in faith, martyrdom, theology, evangelism, mission, government, education and science, etc, to hand down to the generations that followed a blessing that we still enjoy. We are living on the fruit of earlier generations. It is time to change our outlook, so we can be a blessing to those who follow, if the Lord tarries.

We are not permitted to speculate on His coming. We are instructed to occupy. Let us be obedient servants.

### Christ’s Coronation

Concerning when the kingdom of Christ shall be and when His coronation in that kingdom was, we now look at Psalm 2. Remember that the kingdom of Christ is the millennium. Psalm 2 describes this

millennium and Christ's coronation after His resurrection. We will quote the whole Psalm, as it so well depicts the age in which we now live:

Why do the heathen rage and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder and cast away their cords from us. He that sits in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall He speak to them in His wrath and vex them in His sore displeasure.

Yet have I set My King upon My holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the Lord has said to Me, You are My Son; this day have I begotten You. Ask of Me and I shall give You the heathen for Your inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.

Be wise now therefore, O you kings: be instructed, you judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry and you perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him. (Psalm 2).

This Psalm is not about David's coronation. It is about the reign of Christ. David never expected to reign over the uttermost parts of the earth or receive the nations of the heathen for his inheritance. This Psalm is about the reign of Christ from sea to sea.

He shall have dominion also from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth. (Ps 72:8).

The scripture is full of passages like this. They are not describing the world to come, but the world which is now, when people will still oppose the rule of Christ. Texts in the prophets such as "the lamb shall lie down with the lion" and "they shall beat their swords in ploughs" relate to our current gospel age.

### His Redemption

Before we look at Isaiah 2 (and chapter 65 further below) we need to realise that Isaiah uses parables. These are parables of Christ's kingdom, just as the parables that Jesus used. They use terms familiar to human existence, to help us to understand His redemption plan. They are not meant to be literal.

The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall come to pass in the last-days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.

And many people shall go and say, Come and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways and we will walk in His paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

And He shall judge among the nations and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into ploughs and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. (Is 2:1-4).

This is speaking of the kingdom of Christ set up in the *last-days* of the Old Covenant age. When Isaiah wrote this, it was still about 600 years away. The passage speaks of the Gentile nations coming to the Lord and of His gospel going out from Zion and Jerusalem, which means from Christ's kingdom.

It also says that Christ will reign among the nations. He brings down one nation and lifts up another as He establishes the gospel message throughout the earth. As nations come against the Lord and His gospel, He rebukes them in His time and brings peace and periods of establishment for the church. Just as in Psalm 2, we see Christ ruling not in the next world, but in the presence of His enemies.

This is redemption peace. It is more than physical peace. It is peace that passes all understanding, which Jesus gives and is greater than worldly peace (Phil 4:7). It is resurrection peace, given at Pentecost, with the Spirit within us. It is a fruit of the Spirit. Those who walk in this peace are children of God (Matt 5:9). "The fruit of righteousness is peace." (Is 32:17). Whenever a nation serves the Lord this is what we have.

This peace in Isaiah 2 was fulfilled in the birth of Christ:

Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying, blessed be the Lord God of Israel. For He has visited and redeemed His people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David. As He spake by the mouth of His holy prophets, which have been since the world began.

That we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all that hate us, to perform the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to our father Abraham. That He would grant to us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him, all the days of our life. (Luke 1:67-75).

As Isaiah also said of Christ's reign:

And all Your seed shall be taught of the Lord and great shall be the peace of Your seed. In righteousness shall You be established. You shall be far from oppression; for You shall not fear: and from terror; for it shall not come near You. Behold, they shall surely gather together, but not by Me: whosoever shall gather together against You shall fall for Your sake. (Is 54:13-15).

Speaking of the church, Haggai said:

The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, says the Lord of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, says the Lord of hosts. (Hag 2:9).

Regarding the gospel, Zechariah says:

And He shall speak peace to the heathen: and His dominion shall be from sea even to sea and from the river even to the ends of the earth. (Zech 7:10).

His peace conquers the world:

These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you might have peace. In the world you shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world. (John 16:33).

Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world gives, give I to you. (John 14:27).

This peace is spoken of throughout God's word as a New Covenant blessing (John 20:19, 21, 26, Acts 10:36, Rom 5:1, 10:15, 14:17, 15:3, 16:20, Gal 5:22, 6:16). Brothers in Christ from different tribes and nations are one nation in Christ and fight each other no more:

But now in Christ Jesus, you who sometimes were far off are made near by the blood of Christ. For He is our peace (between Jew and Gentile), who has made both one and has broken down the middle wall of partition between us, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in Himself of two one new man, so making peace. (Eph 2:13-15).

These New Covenant blessings go on into eternity. The peace that Isaiah speaks of in Is 2:4 climaxes as Christ hands His kingdom to the Father at the end of this church age. However, there is no mention in any of the prophets of a 1,000 year reign of Christ on earth. In prophetic language *Jerusalem* and *Zion* speak of Christ's rule, not of an earthly Jewish kingdom. (See our chapter on Israel where this is shown in detail.)

The rest of Isaiah 2 depicts the judgment upon Israel, including its destruction in 70AD, after the New Covenant has been established in Christ. Compare Is 2:19-21 with Luke 21:20-26, 23:30 and Rev 6:16, 9:6.

### Covenant in Christ

We will now look at Isaiah 65. Just as with the parables that Jesus used, this parable also has a main point to which all the particulars relate. The subject of Isaiah 65 is that the sinners of Israel (not all of Israel) will be destroyed, while God brings in the elect of the Gentiles.

Paul went through this in detail in Romans 9 to 11, taking his sources from Isaiah 65 and other Old Testament passages. Paul spoke of God judging some of Israel, while calling the remnant and of joining to them the Gentiles. He quoted directly from Isaiah 65 and said that this is fulfilled in the gospel age.

Isaiah 65 starts with:

I am sought of them that asked me not: I said, 'Behold Me. Behold Me', to a nation that was not called by My name. (Is 65:1).

We cannot read this without being moved by the heart of God's kindness that is shown here. Imagine the creator and ruler of the universe calling to us like this! Paul quotes this verse directly in Rom 10:20 and refers to the same concept as he discusses Israel and the Gentiles in Rom 9:24-26, 30.

Isaiah 65 shows that while the Jews who reject Him would be starved of spiritual nourishment, the Gentiles whom He calls would be given it. Jesus used this language in John 6 to describe eternal life. Amos also speaks of this famine for the word of God (Amos 8:11).

Behold My servants shall eat and drink, but you shall be hungry and thirsty. (Is 65:13).

The theme of Isaiah 65 is stated again in vs. 15, "For the Lord God shall slay you and call His servants by another name.". In Romans 11 Paul addressed this theme of the reprobate Jews stumbling and the elect Gentiles being grafted in.

Isaiah 65 shows that we Gentiles and the elect Jews are saved because of Christ, "As the new vine is found in the cluster and one says, 'Destroy it not, for a blessing is in it', so will I do for My Servant's sake, that I may not destroy them all." (Is 65:8). This is the vine that we are grafted into (Rom 11:24).

Then Isaiah depicts our redemption in Christ:

And I will rejoice in Jerusalem and joy in My people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying. There shall not be there an infant of days, nor an old man that has not filled his days: for the child shall die a hundred years old; but the sinner being a hundred years old shall be accursed.

And they shall build houses and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of My people and My elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

...And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, says the Lord. (Is 65:19-25).

All these blessings begin in Christ. He has wiped away every tear. We have been to Christian funerals which are a genuine celebration, not in hype, but a genuine work of the Holy Spirit. We do not sorrow as the world does (1 Thes 4:13). "Oh death where is your sting, O grave where is your victory?" (1 Cor 15:55). Christ's redemption brings us real joy now, or we do not have it. We are not saying that we do not sorrow, but somehow God works in our hearts through His Son to take it away.

Isaiah then pictures the redeemed living a long time. He says that we shall build houses and enjoy them and that our days shall be as *the days of a tree*, meaning we will long enjoy God's blessing (Is 65:21-22). Sinners are accursed. They are outside, as Revelation 21 depicts. This is not just when the kingdom is handed to the Father in eternity, but it is a reality of the church now. No person can pass into the church of Jesus Christ (into His body) without been cleansed in His blood by the Holy Spirit.

The *long age*, *houses* and *trees* all depict in human terms peace with God and the blessings of the New Covenant that will *endure*, in this age and in eternity with the Father. They are not like Old Covenant blessings, which require constant sacrifice. This is an eternal covenant in one sacrifice. These terms mean that sin has been *forever* put away in Christ. This is the difference between the covenants that the prophets pointed to and the way that the book of Hebrews interpreted these passages (Heb 10:4-9).

The wolf and lamb speak of former enemies, Jew and Gentile, united in Christ. Instead of food laws to separate Jew and Gentile, we eat together at one table of the Lord (Eph 2:15). Satan eats dust, as the New Testament epistles depict. We look at this in detail in the chapter on spiritual warfare. Satan is bound for the redeemed in Christ, until the end of this church age when he shall be cast into the lake of fire.

God says it in these pictorial terms to make it simple to understand. *It is a parable*, just like Jesus used. Isaiah concluded with the summary of his theme; "My elect shall *long* enjoy the work of their hands. (Is 65:22) We cover Is 65:17 further below and in the next chapter.

John Calvin said in a nut shell what we are saying here. He was speaking about *the world to come*. To Calvin this is our redemption in Christ, which began at Pentecost but has its final expression at the end of the church age at the resurrection of the body.

Here the *world to come* is not that which we hope for after the resurrection, but that which began at the beginning of Christ's kingdom; but it will no doubt have its full accomplishment in our final redemption (resurrection). (Calvin, *Commentary on Hebrews 2:5*).

Isaiah 65 depicts the gospel age we are now in, which has its final expression in the resurrection of the body at the Second Coming of Christ. Jesus referred to Isaiah 65 in His parable of the vineyard; the vineyard would be taken from the Jews and given to another nation. Isaiah 65 is about the New Covenant. Jeremiah and all the prophets stated how these passages are to be interpreted: "Behold the days come when I make a New Covenant...not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers." (Jer 31:31-32).

### His Government

Isaiah depicts the Son born, to bring a great light to the Jews. His redemption again is depicted in terms of the joy of a great harvest, or spoil of war. The oppressor and yoke of enemy nations poetically depict the curse of the law, which Jesus breaks by setting us free from sin. The Son also receives a kingdom upon the throne of David that is everlasting.

The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them has the light shined...according to the joy in harvest and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil. For You have broken the yoke of his burden and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor...

For to us a child is born, to us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David and upon his kingdom, to order it and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this. (Is 9:2-7).

There is no mention that the kingdom of Christ should be delayed until some future period of earth. He comes, He is born, He sets us free, He receives His kingdom, He orders the world upon the throne of David and His government continues to increase throughout the world, through the gospel.

Passages like this lend themselves to a post-millennial view: a growth of gospel influence around the world until Christ returns. They also lend themselves to an a-millennial view: Christ reigning from heaven as He rules the nations and sends forth His word of salvation and peace. But there is no mention of Jesus ruling on earth for 1,000 years.

Imagine the difficulty that a pre-millennial pastor has in his Sunday service: "Good morning church. Jesus has saved us but the antichrist rules until His Second Coming. Until then all we can do is hide out and await a better day." A better gospel is, "Good morning church. Jesus died for our sins and reigns in heaven. The world will come against us, but God's will prevails. He will give us the victory through Jesus Christ."

## The Glory to Follow

Psalm 22 describes His kingdom. It begins after His sufferings and extends throughout all the earth through the gospel. There is no gap before His kingdom begins. The writer of the book of Hebrews explained that this is fulfilled by Christ in the church age, when Christ declares praise amongst His brethren from *the heathen* nations (Heb 2:12):

They part My garments among them and cast lots upon My vesture...I will declare Your name to My brethren...praise Him; all you the seed of Jacob...For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither has He hid His face from Him...All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord: and all the kindred of the nations shall worship before You.

For the kingdom is the Lord's: and He is the governor among the nations...They shall come and shall declare His righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that He has done this. (Ps 22:17-31).

God has not despised the afflictions of Christ, but He heard His prayer on the cross. Hebrews 1 and 2 go through this in detail. Christ receives a kingdom after His cross and He brings salvation to the ends of the earth, by virtue of His sufferings, His gospel and through the Spirit of God. This is the message of all the prophets. They speak of the Gentiles flowing into Christ's kingdom during this current age.

Lift up Your eyes round about and see...Your sons shall come from far and Your daughters shall be nursed at Your side...the abundance of the sea shall be converted to You, the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto You...

For in My wrath I smote You, but in My favour have I had mercy on You. Therefore Your gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; that men may bring to You the forces of the Gentiles and that their kings may be brought. For the nation and kingdom that will not serve You shall perish; yes, those nations shall be utterly wasted. (Is 60:4-12).

This is the Spirit of God speaking to Christ through Isaiah. God smote Him for our sin, as Isaiah 53 describes. In this passage in chapter 60 the Spirit speaks of the Gentiles coming to Jerusalem, but this Jerusalem is Jesus Christ and His church. This is the New Jerusalem, having been renewed in the blood of Christ.

## Coronation Psalm

When God extends the influence of His Son and grace in the earth He makes His people willing in the day of His power. The times of refreshing and revival are in His hands. Psalm 110 is another coronation psalm. According to Hebrews 1 this coronation took place at Christ's ascension when He sat down on the Father's right hand. Christ sits on the throne of David today, not when He returns.

The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I make Your enemies Your footstool. The Lord shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion: Rule in the midst of Your enemies. Your people shall be willing in the day of Your power...

The Lord has sworn and will not repent; You art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek. The Lord at Your right hand shall strike through kings in the day of His wrath. He shall judge among the heathen, He shall fill the places with the dead

bodies; He shall wound the heads over many countries. He shall drink of the brook in the way: therefore shall He lift up the head. (Psalm 110).

Here is Christ's reign, again in the midst of His enemies. His reign through the nations is for the purpose of the gospel, to save, to build His church. Therefore, His priesthood and his throne go together, throughout the earth.

### The Son of Man

Dan 2:34-35 portrays the throne of Christ beginning after His resurrection in the days of the fourth beast, the Roman Empire. The coronation occurred when Jesus ascended on a cloud to the Father in heaven. It is at this point that Daniel said that the saints reigned with Christ, as depicted in Revelation 20.

I saw in the night visions and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven and came to the Ancient of days...and there was given Him dominion and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations and languages, should serve Him: His dominion is an everlasting dominion... and judgement was given to the saints of the most High...(Dan 7:13-14, 22).

When Jesus said to the High Priest that he would see the Son of man come in His glory, He was referring to this passage in Daniel (Matt 26:64). The cloud depicts His ascension to rule. Both the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost and the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple would be visible signs of that rule, that the Stone that the builders rejected had become the head of the corner.

Jesus' coronation is recorded in Heb 1:8-12. It is said there that His rule would be over heaven and earth and that He will roll kingdoms up as a blanket during this age (vs. 12). These verses depict His rule over kingdoms during our time. Kingdoms are represented in scripture by terms such as *heaven* and *earth*, *stars* and *moon* (Is 13:10, 13, 24:23, 51:6, 60:19). Christ reigns over kingdoms, shaking the nations as He gathers out His elect in this church age.

### Daniel 2

Daniel 2 records Nebuchadnezzar's vision of a beast, representing world empires in the days of Israel. In the vision the gold head was Babylon, the silver arms and chest was Persia, the bronze thighs Greece and the iron legs Rome. The beast had feet of iron mixed with clay.

The clay (from which Adam was made) represents man. It meant that the beast stood on feet of clay and would be brought down. It also referred to the lack of unity in the Roman Empire. The vision shows a rock cut out without hands that smites the image on the feet and then fills the earth.

"Upon this rock I will build My church." (Matt 16:18). This is the rock: Jesus and His kingdom and authority. Jesus was likely referring to this passage in Daniel when He spoke to Peter about this, as Jesus' kingdom was often spoken of in terms of Daniel's vision.

You saw 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...and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. (Dan 2:34-35).

Daniel said that the stone was the kingdom of God. A straight forward reading of Daniel shows that Christ came in the days of Rome and by His blood obtained our eternal life. He ascended and from

heaven His gospel rule goes to all nations, from sea to sea. This occurred after Christ's first coming, as He said, "I will build My church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it."

### Gap Theology

Dispensationalists agree that there is a chronological fulfilment of the parts of this vision, from Babylon to Persia, then to Greece and Rome. However, they then put a gap (which is now almost 2,000 years) until the last part of the vision is fulfilled, i.e. the feet of iron and clay and the stone cut out without hands that smites the image on the feet.

Dispensationalism teaches that the stone smiting the image is Christ's second coming, at which time His kingdom shall come and then fill the earth. To achieve this view of the text, Dispensationalism must have this gap between the legs and the feet and look for a fulfilment of the feet in the days that they believe Jesus will return.

Thus in the 1980's the feet were said to be the European Union, which had ten member states (ten toes). It was claimed that the Union was the resurrected Roman Empire, the beats of the Revelation whose fatal wound was healed. But Europe now has many more than 10 member states, so new speculations have arisen in more recent years.

The question is does Daniel 2 say directly or indirectly that there should be a gap or thousands of years between the legs and the feet? The answer is no. There is not even a hint in Daniel 2 that this gap exists. The clear intention of the whole book of Daniel is to show that Christ shall come with God's kingdom, His salvation, just as John the Baptist also said, "The kingdom of God is at hand."

### Daniel 9

Daniel 9 is written about the return of the Jews from their captivity in Babylon and from the surrounding nations, to Jerusalem. Daniel received a message from Gabriel that explained that this return was to prepare the Jews for the coming of Christ and the salvation of the elect of Jacob in the ongoing New Covenant.

Daniel was shown that this New Covenant would be fulfilled within 490 years. He was given the time period of 70 weeks. There is broad agreement that each day of these 70 weeks represents one year. See Ezek 4:5-6, where Ezekiel lay on his side one day for each year of the sins of Jerusalem and Israel. God said, "I give you a day for a year." So 70 weeks is 490 years.

This time period fits in with the Intertestamental period after Daniel and before Christ came. The 490 years began when King Cyrus of Persia gave the command for Jerusalem to be rebuilt for the Jews to return and was completed when Jesus came to put away sin, fulfil prophecy, receive His coronation and give the Holy Spirit.

Seventy weeks are determined upon your people and upon the holy city, to finish the transgression and to make an end of sins and to make reconciliation for iniquity and to bring in everlasting righteousness and to seal up the vision and prophecy and to anoint the most Holy. (Dan 9:24).

Dan 9:27 mentions the last week (7 years), in which the covenant was confirmed and sacrifice ended. There are three main views on this verse:

1. Some say that this 7 year period was prophetic of the Roman General Titus who destroyed the temple in 70AD, ending temple sacrifice.

2. Dispensationalists say that this is a period of 7 years that today is still future, in which the antichrist will reign before the Second Coming of Christ. This means that almost 2,000 years are inserted between the 69<sup>th</sup> week and the 70<sup>th</sup> week.
3. The 7 year period was the time in which Christ ministered and when He made an end of sin on the cross He put away sacrifice. That is, there is no gap between the 69<sup>th</sup> and the 70<sup>th</sup> weeks.

It is clear that Daniel is referring to the coming of the New Covenant and the destruction of Jerusalem soon after the 70 weeks had finished. We speak of this later. Daniel continued in chapter 9 by saying that the people of the prince who is to come (Rome) shall destroy the city and the sanctuary (temple).

To agree with the Dispensationalist view that the 70<sup>th</sup> week is still in the future and will be fulfilled by an antichrist figure just before Christ's Second Coming, there has to be a gap (of almost 2,000 years so far, maybe more if it continues to delay) between the 69<sup>th</sup> week and the 70<sup>th</sup> week.

Daniel does not say anything about this gap. It is not hinted at anywhere in the book of Daniel. This is the point. The whole system of Dispensationalism depends on this gap. Without this gap in Daniel 9 Dispensationalism cannot stand. Therefore, Dispensationalism depends on what the scripture does not say. This is not a good basis for end-times speculations.

This whole hermeneutical framework is built on one supposition. Because Darby and others in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century began to take a negative view of history, they decided that Jesus could not be reigning now, but must reign when He returns. They then went about to redefine all the traditional views on the texts that we have looked at, to fit this new supposition.

Writing in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, when this shift in view began to take shape, Charles Spurgeon said:

It would be easy to show that at our present rate of progress the kingdoms of this world never could become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ. Indeed, many in the Church are giving up the idea of it except on the occasion of the advent of Christ, which, as it chimes in with our own idleness, is likely to be a popular doctrine.

I myself believe that King Jesus will reign and the idols be utterly abolished; but I expect the same power which turned the world upside down once will still continue to do it. The Holy Ghost would never suffer the imputation to rest upon His holy name that He was not able to convert the world. (From the jacket of *Paradise Restored*, by David Chilton.).

### Nations Brought Down

Therefore Your gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; that men may bring to You the forces of the Gentiles and that their kings may be brought. For the nation and kingdom that will not serve You shall perish; yes, those nations shall be utterly wasted. (Is 60:11-12).

Remember that these Servant songs are not addressed to the city of Jerusalem under the Old Covenant, but are addressed to Jesus who rules over New Jerusalem. He is the Servant of the Lord whom the Spirit is addressing through Isaiah. Down through the centuries this text has been fulfilled over and over again and will be until the Lord returns and hands this kingdom to the Father.

“For the nation and kingdom that will not serve You shall perish...” The Roman Empire, the Holy Roman Empire, the Mongols, Hitler and Communism all perished as world rulers. Every nation or ideology that rises up against the King of kings will in God's time be put down and wasted. The gates of hell shall not prevail against the church.

Today one third of the world's population claims to be Christian, twice as many as any other religion. Kings and millions in many nations have turned to Christ in different epochs through the ages. We do not see a negative future. We see China, the Middle East, Europe and India opening wide to the gospel. We see renewal in America. We see Africa and South America influencing the world with the gospel. No nation can close itself to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

### We do Not Rule

We are not saying that church leaders rule. Jesus rules. He rules through the church, but according to His will and plan, not according to our ambitions or wisdom. We are not speaking of a theocracy, where a Christian nation rules. God does not make covenants with nations today. The days of theocracy finished with Israel. We are now in the New Covenant. There is one king: Jesus Christ.

The church is not God's government on earth. A nation whose leaders turn to Christ is not the government of God. No Christian nation runs God's plan, or has any monopoly over God. Christ is the governor and no one else. He reigns in the hearts of His people, the church and He reigns over all flesh and over all powers.

### Not Glory Theology

We are not teaching *triumphalism*. There will always be evil on the earth during the reign of Christ. As Psalm 2 states, *the heathen will rage*. The book of Revelation describes those inspired by Satan who will come against the Lord's purposes, such as "Gog and Magog" (Rev 20:8).

This has nothing to do with the attack of Gog and Magog against Israel fulfilled in the Intertestamental period (Ezek 38:2). See historical commentaries for details. Josephus claimed this was the attack of the *Scythians*, meaning northern tribes. Meshech and Tubal lay between the Euxine and Caspian Seas (*Barnes Commentary*). They were known as savage people.

In Revelation *Gog and Magog* are symbolic of God's enemies. They come against *the Lord and His anointed* throughout the generations. In all this Christ reigns. "He shall laugh them to scorn and have them in derision." (Psalm 2). The Father could put all down any time it pleased Him. But He will not do this until the end. The Father has not called the church to put Satan down. He has already done this in Christ.

Why does God allow evil to continue? Evil is the result of man's sin. He allows it to continue for several reasons. First, the Bible says He is long suffering. He does not bring judgement quickly. He is not willing that any should perish (2 Pet 3:9). This does not mean that He will save everyone. It means that He is patient and kind and He waits for His elect.

### Satan Loosed

The long suffering of God means that He waits and deals with man in the right season as He works out His salvation. In Revelation 20 Satan is depicted as let loose for a season. He gathers the people against Christ but then fire comes down from heaven and destroys them. Revelation 20 is not a chronological series of events. It depicts themes, one after the other in picture form.

The loosing of Satan shows how God allows him to perform certain functions in the nations. At various times in history Satan is allowed to gather *the goats* (the unclean, unbelievers) together against the gospel and God finally judges in favour of His church. It is the Psalm 2 scenario. Satan *puts out the garbage*, as it were. God organises all that Satan does. There is coming a time when Satan will be cast into *the lake of fire* at the end of the world.

### Subject to Vanity

Why has God not yet put all enemies under the feet of Christ, since Christ rules over all already? It is timing. God has chosen to save His elect out of the world while the curse remains. He has “hidden His pearl (church) in the field (world)” (Matt 13:34), so He gets the glory and not us.

He has chosen to allow the curse to be a catalyst in showing us the vanity (meaninglessness) of life without Him, as His Spirit draws us and the rest of His people to eternal life:

For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of Him who has subjected the same in hope, Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. (Rom 8:20-21).

His voice shakes the nations, meaning He brings down the pride of men and reveals the meaninglessness of our ways. All that we trust in and give our souls to collapses. This is a kindness from God, so that we may look beyond this life to Him. This is an ongoing work of Christ throughout our ages as Christ reigns. He brings down kingdoms and establishes His gospel in our hearts.

Wherein you greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, you are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith...might be found to praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: Whom having not seen, you love...with joy unspeakable and full of glory. (1 Pet 1:6-8).

### Yet Once More

Whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, Once more I shake not the earth only but also the heaven. And this word, *Yet once more*, signifies 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 fear. (Heb 12:26-28).

This is referring to the time that God shook Mount Sinai when the first covenant was made:

And mount Sinai was altogether on smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire. And the smoke ascended as the smoke of a furnace. And the whole mountain quaked (shook) greatly. (Ex 19:18).

God came down on Sinai and shook the mountain. When Hebrews 12 says, “*Once more* I shake not only earth, but also heaven.” it is speaking about the institution of a *second* Covenant. The first shaking is the first covenant. The second shaking is the second covenant. This second shaking is a removal of an Old system and an installation of the New. It refers to the putting away of sin in Christ and the bringing in of unconditional faith, righteousness and eternal life.

Heb 12:26-28 quoted Hag 2:5-7. Haggai was speaking about the New Covenant and the Gentile church that would come to Christ. He said that God established the *first* at Sinai, but will shake the earth *once more*. Haggai was referring to the New Covenant being established by Christ. This shaking has nothing to do with the Second Coming of Christ. It is referring to the time of “reformation” from the Old system to the New Covenant (Heb 9:10).

The book of Hebrews is about the removal of the Old Covenant and the establishment of the New. The rituals, types, shadows, the temporary, the unsatisfactory, the things that have no life, no substance, are shaken and removed, that that which is solid (Christ and His substance and fulfilment) may remain in the New Covenant. This is the intended meaning of Heb 12:26-28. It refers to the atonement of Christ, His ascension and the sending of the Spirit at Pentecost.

### God Has Chosen

God has chosen to glorify Himself through the circumstances of this life so that in the midst of this world, we can come to see His immeasurable love towards His people and the multitude of His kindnesses and deliverances through Christ.

God has chosen that in weakness His strength is made perfect (2 Cor 12:9-10). The thorn in Paul's flesh was the Jews who buffeted him wherever he went, as they rose up persecution against him. The reign of Christ did not mean that Paul would not suffer, but it did mean that Christ would never fail Paul.

Paul said it is given to us not only to believe on Christ, but also to suffer with Him (Phil 1:29). This suffering is persecution for the gospel. Those who come against Christ come against His people. God did not say that He would prevent this, but He did promise that it would turn to glory for those who are His people. If we say that this suffering shows the devil is not bound, we not understand God's ways.

God gave Pharaoh a kingdom to bring Him glory by the deliverance of a slave nation. God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and Shechem and allowed Abimelech to prosper until Shechem was judged. When Abimelech's work was done, a woman dropped a millstone on his head (Judges 9:53). God uses all manner of people and prospers them until His work is done. "In a great house there are vessels of honour and vessels of dishonour." (2 Tim 2:20).

God is over all. Everybody, including Judas Iscariot, serves His glory. Isaiah said, "I bring forth evil and good, light and darkness", but He tempts no man (Is 45:6-7, James 1:13). He brings down one kingdom and sets up another, but He is never the author of sin. Satan is bound, but God employs Him at His will until He has finished gathering in His elect.

### Prophecies

So what do these Old Testament prophecies about the glory of the New Age mean? Most people see one of three options:

1. They are either about the gospel age we are now in.
2. Or about a future 1,000 year reign of Christ after a resurrection of the church.
3. Or about a coming New Earth and New Heaven in eternity.

The prophecies refer to the gospel age which started when the kingdom of Christ began 2,000 years ago, the age of the gift of the Spirit and continue in eternity when Jesus hands over the kingdom to the Father at the end of this world.

Behold, I will do a *new thing*; now it shall spring forth; shall you not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. (Is 43:19).

There is no prophecy in the Old Testament about Jesus returning to reign in a physical Jerusalem at the end of this age. Neither is there in the New Testament. The Jews expected it at His first coming, based on a syncretised understanding of scripture. Jesus made it clear that their expectations were entirely wrong because they failed to understand the scriptures.

### New Creation

The new age began with the coming of Christ 2,000 years ago. The old order of the Old Covenant was taken away and God made all things new in Christ. This is what He meant when He said that He makes a *New Heaven* and a *New Earth*. The New Covenant is so distinct from the Old that it is a complete renovation of all things in Christ.

If any man be in Christ he is a *New Creation*, old things have passed away, behold all things are become new and all things are of God...(2 Cor 5:17-18).

We can miss this because even though we are born again, we are still trained to think in Old Covenant terms. The book of Hebrews shows the perfection, completeness and *rest* that are already in Christ. In Him we have already entered the Promised Land. Blindness to this fits in well with a wrong view of sin and spiritual warfare. If we think that we have not yet overcome sin then we still await the *rest*. If Christ has not yet conquered all powers, then we view *rest* as future.

### The World to Come

The book of Revelation speaks of the *New Heaven* and *New Earth* to come, the *eschaton*, the future that the prophets spoke of and that Israel was expecting. Christ is the *eschaton* and in Him we have already entered the future state with *Israel*. His kingdom, Christ in us and in the church, is the *first fruits* (Rom 8:23). We will discuss this in the next chapter.

We wish to quote this statement from John Calvin again, because it sums up what we are saying:

Here the *world to come* is not that which we hope for after the resurrection, but that which began at the beginning of Christ's kingdom; but it will no doubt have its full accomplishment in our final redemption (resurrection). (Calvin, *Commentary on Hebrews 2:5*).

When we know that we are in His kingdom now, we partake of it now and we expect to see the Lord reign now and we do not just wait until His Second Coming.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> Century John Owen spoke to the British parliament about the *New Heaven and New Earth*. The sermon was called, *The Advantage of the Kingdom of Christ in the Shaking of the Kingdoms of the World*. You can read it on [www.ccel.org/ccel/owen](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/owen). Owen is often considered to be the best English speaking theologian in history. In this sermon he taught what we are teaching in this chapter.

Owen gave an a-millennial scenario of the kingdom of Christ and said that in the centuries to follow He will bring in a very large harvest of souls in world missions. Owen challenged the British parliament to get out of their selfishness and become interested in the things of Christ, or be set aside by Christ.

Owen's work had a very significant influence on the years that followed, as Christians laboured in missions, politics and education to impact the world. Owen's views became the bedrock of Christian and political development in early America, making it a nation with the purpose of reaching the world with the gospel. Owen's vision of the future was fulfilled exactly as he set it out 400 years ago.

## Summary

In this chapter we have seen the *Idealist* interpretation of the book of Revelation. As a school of thought, idealism claims the Revelation has no exact historical application, but covers themes that relate to Christian life. The book depicts the reign of Christ over the nations. This reign is also depicted in Psalms 2, 22 and 110, as well as in Isaiah, Daniel and all of the prophets.

During this reign Satan is bound, meaning that he is under the complete dominion of Christ, but is released seasonally to gather Christ's enemies against Him. This results in their destruction and the continued victory of Christ and His church in history, as God gathers in His elect from the four winds. At the end of the current church age the devil shall be cast into the lake of fire.

Eschatology is simple. It is one thing: Jesus came to establish the New Covenant that has its climax in His Second Coming and the resurrection of our body. This is all that there is to eschatology. There is no Jewish state.