

Focus on the Kingdom

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Doomed to Repeat It

by Kenneth LaPrade, Texas

The following quote is popularly attributed to Winston Churchill: “Those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it.” Evidently, his phrase is an adaptation of an older quote from George Santayana: “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it” (*The Life of Reason*, 1906). In pop culture we might allude to this concept when assessing how human overconfidence precedes disaster (like with the sinking of the Titanic). Or we might evaluate the latest political blunder leading to war in terms of how previous wars were foolishly started. Currently, I’m prayerfully concerned with how “Christian” misguided zeal plunges folks into hurtful errors and produces fruitless examples.

In recent years I’ve observed an increase in the following: (1) people zealously encouraging others to embrace false confidence in dispensational thinking and “salvation” by allegiance to a false theology; (2) “Christians” jumping on dubious political bandwagons; (3) persistent angry assertions by spiritual “leaders” (with boisterous ranting and raving) to defend the perverse doctrines of an old cult; (4) and people interpreting the Bible through their **experiences** (and thus placing an experiential base of feelings ahead of God’s Scriptural truth). The list of such detailed tendencies could be elaborated. In stating a few such observed trends, I have no axe to grind with folks who might be unaware or “in denial” of “the past.” I myself have been carefully emerging from many such painful errors (and others) by God’s grace and mercy.

1 John 5:19 indicates that the whole world lies under the sway of the evil one. I think many Christians think that they are an exception to this because of having certain beliefs about Jesus. Nevertheless, how many of us have been previously deceived by false, manmade religion? How many of us have inadvertently mixed Christian ideas with underlying cultural norms that are subtly opposite of Biblical realities?

I wonder if truth-seekers might benefit from some lessons of “history.” Even though much of traditional history is as highly biased as “revisionist history,” one can wade through certain helpful sources. As a general disclaimer, in recommending certain writings (or online sources), I do not endorse all views/attitudes held by certain authors. I’ll try not to list an overwhelming number of items here. I’ll preface my mention of sources by honing in on my priority: fruit discernment according

to Matthew 7:13-27. As I’m sure you are aware, discerning what real obedience to Jesus looks like might stand in stark contrast to what appears to be good, pious, and popularly “Christian!” By the way, I have no anti-American beef when I speak frankly now (observation # 2 in paragraph 3) about the miserable historical defects ignored by most all American Christians. I am prayerfully thankful for this country, but I’m more concerned with obeying Jesus. I shudder when I see “Christians” exalt an “American” idol!

To see a fair treatment of what has been good and bad among “Evangelicals” see *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America* by Frances Fitzgerald. A key historical point is this: people do not really “get” modern evangelical thinking without understanding “The Second Great Awakening” of the early 19th century. Personally, I slowly began to question “the Christian right” 30 years ago, when my “group” was seduced by the bluster of Jerry Falwell and others (who were mesmerized by a long time astrologer in the White House.) Very simply, there is a great difference in influencing America by “in your face” coercive bullying — and the gentle commitment to lovingly obey Jesus and be genuine examples, even if we suffer.

Christians cannot really “bring America **back** to God” if America’s roots are not really compatible with the God of the Bible! Please read *In God We Don’t Trust* by David Bercot for an eye-opening assessment of colonial America and the birth of the U.S.A. By the way, I was (like most Americans) previously indoctrinated into glorifying the founding fathers, praising the great godliness of the government documents, etc. But much of the whitewashed version is simply not true! How were Native Americans truly treated since the early days? Even the Pilgrims (praised for peace with the Wampanoag) became guilty of brutal murders of Indians based on rumors. William Bradford, when older, applauded the barbaric slaughter of a whole Native American village. The slave trade stemmed initially not from the south, but from Puritan New England’s prosperity in selling rum! The horrendous Middle Passage was instituted by greedy, so-called Christian business owners. “By their fruits [not by religious bluster] you shall know them!” There were some godly exceptions to the violent, greedy ways of the vast majority of European colonists, like William Penn and the Quakers in Pennsylvania.

Unfortunately, part of John Winthrop’s famous “city on a hill” speech proved prophetic: “If we shall deal

falsely with our God, we shall open the mouths of enemies to speak evil of the ways of God, and of all professors for God's sake. We shall shame the faces of many of God's worthy servants." These words became true for Winthrop himself, the crowds of Puritans, and the majority of colonists in America professing Christianity. Personally, I contend that coercive "Evangelical" posturing does not offer a viable alternative to the fallacies of liberal secularism. But lovingly obeying Jesus does! (Points 1, 3 & 4 of the 3rd paragraph will be addressed later.)

Perhaps most of us know what it is like to deal with extremely coercive environments, whether at home, school, work sites, churches, other social contacts, or all of the above! Likewise, most of us know what it feels like if harsh, slave-like subjection is imposed on us through mean-spirited ranting and raving — to make us cower in fear! "My way or the highway" threats, unfortunately, might seem "normal" to just about all of us! "Leaders," even Christian, religious leaders, **must** demand respect at all costs! Right? Perversely, some of us even develop weird addictions to such over-the-top treatment! Then we turn around and dish it out to others, assuming, in the name of "tough love," that we are doing them a favor!

Few people seem to realize that Jesus' manner of operation was the total opposite of coercion used by Gentiles and by dogmatic Jewish leaders. Jesus spoke often about how Gentile rulers "lord it over" or domineer (exercise authority over) people of this world, "but not so among you"! Mark 10:42-45 says it succinctly. Jesus himself served with a humble heart, and he prohibited his followers from adopting worldly methods of coercive leadership.

Jesus' genuine authority was extremely different from worldly authority. Jesus invited listeners to understand his reasonable message, respond from the heart with love-motivated obedience (if they wanted to), and thus be on track for the coming Kingdom of God! His apostles, though imperfect men, eventually matured to the degree that they, too, were lovingly persuasive, not coercive in dealing with listeners. So what happened to Christianity? When was it hijacked by Gentile-style bowing down to ecclesiastical authority as demanded by monarchical bishops? I highly recommend chapter one of *Possession and Persuasion: The Rhetoric of Christian Faith* by Robert Hach as an overview of early Christianity's severe deviation from Jesus' "persuasive" model. Most of the book addresses other related subjects, and I do recommend the whole book. (It is affordable in electronic and paperback form.)

Without belaboring the point excessively, I could write an encyclopedia about the bullying of "Christian" leaders in an absurdly cultic environment. The ways in which folks have been wildly manipulated by persistent

"ranting and raving" (coupled with seductive false promises) have been extremely shameful. Furthermore, I could even include myself in quite a few embarrassing episodes, being badly guilty of inflicting arrogant, boisterous damage! Without going into an analysis of how coercion is *brainwashing* (truly stunting and sabotaging critical thinking skills), from which one definitely needs God's help to recover, I'll simply recommend a few possible initial solutions.

Remember that the loving Father of Jesus understands what we've suffered in the context of previous delusions, when we were enticed (or coerced) into following dubious theological interpretations or false formulae for salvation, etc. Repentance and humility to receive corrective information is presently available, according to Jesus' call to have a real change of heart — in light of the approaching Kingdom of God! In repenting of past errors (whether they be individual sins or widespread "group-think" deceptions), we have access to God's gracious mercy in asking for His helpful intervention (Heb. 4:14-16).

For some people it might be helpful to become aware of just how poisonous the root background of their spiritual experiences was. In my case, it was tremendously helpful to read certain books about my old group, even though I do not endorse all the attitudes held by certain authors. For example: *Losing the Way: A Memoir of Spiritual Longing, Manipulation, Abuse and Escape* by Kristen Skedgell. A Kindle version of this book is available for an affordable price. A brief review of this book can be seen in the March, 2018 issue of Focus on the Kingdom at focusonthe kingdom.org

In the January, 2018 issue of *Focus on the Kingdom* (at the above site) one can also read a review of *The Cult That Snapped: A Journey into The Way International* by Karl Kahler (a somewhat expensive paperback, but worthwhile to me).

A third book which reveals quite a bit about the shady dishonesty of "Biblical research" claims is *Undertow: My Escape from the Fundamentalism and Cult Control of the Way International* by Charlene L. Edge. This book is affordable electronically and in paperback.

All three of these books reveal very disturbing details that were initially painful for me to grasp. Nevertheless, by slow, contemplative reading coupled with prayer, I was able to **stop being in denial** about certain things that had affected me subtly for decades.

I know for sure that there are some from my background who would "rant and rave" now — to **ensor** even considering such books (or even reading the two brief book reviews), but I would presently recommend that people **not** cower in fear before coercive, manmade authority. Such books themselves are not for everyone, but they might help a few,

especially those who've been oblivious and happy-go-lucky, and truly in denial about the roots of our old "cult."

I used to roll my eyes at the mention of the word "cult" in connection with my old group, assuming that it was just a frivolous putdown by Trinitarians toward any non-Trinitarians like me. (I know the term is often misused in this way.) Nevertheless, I'm no longer in denial about multiple devastating aspects of what was truly cultic in my background. I'm highly motivated now, more than ever, to urgently pray for powerful deliverance in the lives of all the wonderful, but misguided folks who were part of my old background ministry, or of several more current spin-offs. ♡ *To be continued...*

Prophecy, Future or Past? All Over or Yet to Come?

A leading observer of the Protestant church scene laments what he calls the "hopeless confusion of evangelicals on the issue of eschatology."¹ That daunting word "eschatology" means simply "the study and teaching about things of the future," especially relating to the hope of the coming Kingdom of God on the earth when the Messiah comes to take up his rightful position as heir to the throne of David restored in Jerusalem. (This is the heart of the Christian Gospel as Jesus and the Apostles and Evangelists always preached it: Mark 1:14-15; Acts 8:12; 19:8; 20:24-25; 28:23, 30-31).

Not to see that the Kingdom of David has yet to be reinstated, under Jesus' leadership, is to miss a large amount of Gospel information. Diminishing the Gospel is strongly condemned by our Bible. Bible teachers hoping to find favor with God must be prepared to teach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27).

The central point of Scripture is that the lord Messiah (Luke 2:11), the promised "lord, son of David" (Matt. 15:22; 20:31) has been divinely appointed by the One God, his Father, to rule the world. This, in due time, he will do, visibly at his one future Parousia (second coming).

We offer the following as a contribution to sorting out the muddle over the events of the future. This subject touches on the issue of hope. Hope is the second great virtue bestowed on the believer by the spirit. So important is it to grasp the meaning of hope that Paul taught that faith and love *depend on* a right understanding of hope. Faith and love are built on and caused by hope (Col. 1:4-5).

For Jesus the future was the subject of a long lecture in Matthew 24 (Mark 13, Luke 21), but more than this,

Jesus spoke almost constantly of the future of the world and its government. Jesus came announcing the most stupendous political event of all time — the future arrival of a brand new world government and order, the Kingdom of God (or Kingdom of Heaven; the two terms are exactly synonymous).

First a word about who Jesus is. The whole point of the Messiah is that he is the Lord's *anointed King*. Jesus is presented in the New Testament, from cover to cover, as the promised King of Israel, God's chosen agent and royal ruler. Luke introduces the leading character of his narrative as "the Lord's Anointed" or "the Lord's Christ/Messiah" (Luke 2:26). This phrase is found 12 times in the Bible, eleven of them in the Old Testament. People who knew their Bibles had little difficulty understanding who Jesus claimed to be. He was the ultimate model King, the final and definitive "Lord's Messiah." His "birth certificate" reads "Messiah lord" (Luke 2:11).

On the understanding that Jesus was the Messiah, no more and no less, Jesus promised to found his whole church (Matt. 16:16-19). Any loss of information about the identity of Jesus as Messiah — for example the amazing notion that he *is in fact God at the same time as being the Messiah* — undercuts the message of the New Testament at its base. You cannot be God and the Messiah at the same time. No Jew could have believed it and Jesus himself never imagined such a bizarre concept.

Churchgoers have lost touch with the Bible in this important matter of recognizing who Jesus is. Jesus Christ is of course not a first and last name. Jesus is not, as one Sunday School student imagined, the child of his parents Joseph and Mary Christ. Christ is not the family name of Jesus. Christ is his royal title. Jesus was itself not an uncommon name, but Jesus Christ is unique. He is the one and only designated ruler of Israel and the whole world and at the same time the Savior of all who believe and **obey him** and his Gospel: "me and my word," "me and the Gospel" (Mark 8:35, 38; cp. 1:14-15).

Jesus came as a bearer of the warning announcement that the Kingdom is going to come. Yes, Jesus is coming back (unless he and the whole NT is a pious fraud!), and he is going to come and save the world from its mad rush to self-destruction. For God, one adultery per year in the world or one murder is too much. God is troubled deeply by the broken marriages and by the damaged children. He is outraged by abortion. He is agonized by the pathetic state of the world, drowned as it is in every imaginable form of evil — from the crippling, destructive cancer of pornography (an addiction to fornication) to the futile pursuit of amusement, the love of pleasure over the love of God.

¹ Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, p. 244.

Jesus was deeply concerned *to instruct* his followers, commissioning them to pass on their understanding to posterity (Matt. 28:19-20). Jesus gave a detailed account of what is coming in the future just before the arrival of the Kingdom of God. Each generation is to relay that information accurately.

Jesus, of course, did not invent the idea of his own future coming. **The Day of the Lord**, the day when God, using His royal agent, intervenes to sort out our human chaos, is a major feature of the Hebrew prophets' vision. **The Day of the Lord** is the day when God takes matters into His own hands. He calls a halt to the world's giddy descent into oblivion. He sends the Messiah, the Lord's anointed King, the Christ, descendant of David, to punish and restore; to tear down and reconstruct; to reeducate and rebuild; to arbitrate permanent peace and to put an end to the present insanity of human killing human (see Jer. 1:10). "They will indeed beat their swords into useful farm tools. Never, ever again will nations train armies or think of building a weapon!" (see Isa. 2:1-4).

According to the witness of the prophets that day is coming. The issue for us as individuals is this: Are we prepared by repentance, obedient belief in the Gospel of the Kingdom (Mark 1:14-15; 4:11-12; Matt. 13:19) to take part in that glorious new political order and society of the Messianic future? Are we fit to "manage the affairs of the world and have the world under our jurisdiction"? (see Moffat translation of 1 Cor. 6:2). Are we en route to the fulfillment of the destiny given originally to Adam and now to Christ: the charge to represent the Deity on earth and to organize the affairs of mankind in the way God intended?

Do Not Be Deceived

In Matthew 24 Jesus gave a rather straightforward account of what to expect. He spoke first of massive deception and warned against it (v. 4). He then promised, as he often had elsewhere, that his followers would be a rejected minority, subject to harassment and persecution (v. 9). Not for a moment did Jesus think of massive, national structures as his Church. Not once did Jesus envisage a fully Christian nation. It is the wildest delusion to claim that any nation-state in the present evil age is equivalent to the body of Christ. If so, then Revelation 11:15-18 would present a falsehood. That text says that at the coming of the Christ — and only then — all the present nations will become the Kingdom of God. They are not so now.

In Jesus' discourse on the Mount of Olives (Matt. 24) he warned believers that things would become so difficult that the time would arrive when (as he said elsewhere) "those who kill you Christians will think they are doing so in the service of God" (see John 16:2). Such a situation can only point to a pernicious

deception, so effective that the professed (false) believers would actually destroy the true believers! Surely that saying of Jesus calls us to the closest, most intensive self-examination and investigation of the Bible. Could we be deceived? Could we have been tricked into disobedience? Could we be practicing a partial discipleship, stopping short of the "hard teachings" of Jesus? The murderers of Jesus were convinced that they represented the true religion. But a careless, mindless acceptance of tradition contrary to Scripture had undermined their judgment. They had killed their own promised Messiah!

The Abomination of Desolation

Jesus reaches the climax of his account of what is coming (eschatology) at Matthew 24:14. Defining the Gospel as **the Gospel about the Kingdom**, he stated that this saving message must have worldwide coverage before the closing events of the present evil age (Gal. 1:4; cp. 2 Cor. 4:4) could occur. Jesus went on: "...and then the end will come. When you therefore see the Abomination of Desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place [Mark says 'standing where *he* ought not to'² (Gk. *esteekota*, a masculine participle), showing the Abomination to be a single person], then flee to the hills" (Matt. 24:14-16).

The first important point to be noted here is that Jesus knew nothing about a so-called prior-to-the-tribulation rapture/resurrection or pre-tribulation rapture! A gullible and uninstructed churchgoing public has been feeding in recent times on a pleasant illusion: that being a Christian means that during the coming Great Tribulation we will be supernaturally airlifted from the earth. But if Jesus believed that, why, oh why, did he instruct his followers to "escape to the mountains" at the onset of the time of trouble (Matt. 24:16)? There would be no need for flight to the hills if the resurrection/rapture (1 Thess. 4:13-18) was going to occur *before* the tribulation.

It is of course a drastic evasion to suggest that Jesus was not talking to Christians in this discourse! Let us assure our readers that Jesus addressed his teachings to us and our children, via the Apostles, whose students we are to be. To say that Jesus was not talking to Christians would establish a principle by which anything in the teaching of Jesus could be discarded.

The sign for flight to the hills was meant for "those who are living in Judea" (v. 16). What if you live elsewhere? Then other directions or guidance will be forthcoming when the time is ripe. The critical sign, however, is to be the appearance of the **Abomination of Desolation**, the Desecrating Abomination, or Idol, appearing in the holy place (v. 15).

² See for example Weymouth or NEB, RNEB.

Jesus did not leave us in the dark about the specifics of this terrible event. He directed us to the same expression “Abomination of Desolation” found in the extraordinary prophecies of Daniel. Jesus of course did not believe, with some liberal scholars, that Daniel was a pious forgery. That is the view of many who write on the Bible today. Thus the authority of Daniel has been disparaged. Jesus, on the other hand, believed that the essential prophetic warning had been detailed “through the prophet Daniel” (Matt. 24:15). By this he did *not* intend us to understand “through a pseudo-Daniel, or 2nd-century BC Daniel claiming to be the 6th-century BC prophet”!

What Daniel had seen would surely come to pass. Jesus instructs us to take careful note of Daniel’s teaching on the Abomination. When would it appear in relation to other prophetic end-time events? We are urged by the Master Rabbi to read with understanding (v. 15). What then is the scoop on the Abomination of Desolation? We must not construct our own interpretation but rely on the data given by Daniel and confirmed by the Messiah. A despicable, desecrating Abomination, a human individual (as Mark reports Jesus saying, Mark 13:14), either in person or represented by his statue, will take up a position in the holy place.

The connections to Daniel are expressly said to be the key to understanding. The Abomination is found in four passages in Daniel: 9:27; 11:31; 12:11 and 8:13. Three of these reflect the precise language of Jesus in Matthew 24:15. The fourth expression in Daniel 8:13 is very similar: “the rebellion causing desolation.”

The Great Tribulation

The crucial question is where in the sequence of events *Jesus* places the Abomination event. Let us follow his narrative: “When you see the Abomination of Desolation usurping a place which is **not his** (let the reader understand) then those who are in Judea must take to the hills” (Matt. 24:15-16, NEB). This dramatic development will trigger the worst time of trouble and chaos in the whole of human history: “For those days will bring distress such as never has been until now, since the beginning of the world which God created, and never will be again” (Matt. 24:21, NEB). *The connecting time indicators must be noted with care.* “**Then** [at the appearance of the Abomination in the holy place] there will be great tribulation” (Matt. 24:21). “Alas for women with child in those days” (v. 19). “It will be a time of great distress. There has never been such a time from the beginning of the world until now and never will be again. If that time of trouble were not cut short, no living thing could survive, but for the sake of God’s chosen it will be cut short” (v. 21-22).

Jesus was positively not speaking of the distress of AD 70! There have been worse times of agony than the

period of Roman invasion of Jerusalem in AD 70. But even if that were not so, the words of Jesus absolutely forbid us to restrict the “great tribulation” to the events of AD 70. He goes on to connect the time of unparalleled distress with the appearance of cosmic signs introducing the stupendous event of his Second Coming in glory. Note the all-important connection: “**immediately after** the tribulation of those days,” “**in those days**, after **that** tribulation, the sun will be darkened” (Matt. 24:29; Mark 13:24).

It is a measure of the unwillingness of readers to believe the words of Jesus that various devices have been proposed to avoid the obvious. Some have argued that the Great Tribulation began in AD 70 and *has been continuing and is continuing uninterrupted until our day*. This cannot be true. It is false to extend this “great tribulation” over millennia. It is impossible to posit a “great tribulation” at least twice as long as the future millennium! Jesus has expressly directed us to the words of Daniel, and Daniel had already fixed the limits of the Great Tribulation in Daniel 12:1: “**At that time** [he is referring to the final days of the ultimate antichristian tyrant, 11:31-45] Michael will appear...and there will be a time of distress such as has never been since there was a nation until that time. But **at that time** your people will be delivered, everyone who is written in the book, and many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to everlasting life...” (Dan. 12:1-2).

The Great Tribulation is not a concept to be devised and elaborated according to our choice. It is a well-defined period of final agony, defined by Daniel, in connection with a brutal despot, and just preceding the resurrection of the dead. These facts of course exclude AD 70 as the time of the Great Tribulation. They tell us that the Great Tribulation lies in the future, “**immediately after**” which (Matt. 24:29) cosmic disturbances will herald the visible³ arrival of Jesus to inaugurate his Kingdom in Jerusalem.

Daniel’s Vision

This is exactly the picture drawn by Daniel. Jesus is merely developing that preexisting prophecy. Daniel’s vision had revealed the rise of a final, antichristian, dictator figure, **the King of the North** (Dan. 11:21ff) who will act like a “beast”: “He will turn and vent his fury against the holy covenant; on his way back he will take due note of those who have forsaken it. Armed forces dispatched by him will desecrate the sanctuary and the citadel and do away with the regular offering. And there they will set up the abominable thing which causes desolation” (Dan. 11:30-31, NEB). This same king “will do what he chooses. He will exalt and

³ Systems of theology which have proposed an *invisible* second coming represent an amazing assault on Scripture!

magnify himself above every god, and against the God of gods he will utter monstrous blasphemies” (Dan. 11:36). “At the time of the end” (v. 40) he and the King of the South will collide in battle. But the evil aggressor will “come to his end with no one to help him” (11:45). The resurrection follows in Daniel 12:2.

Further reference to the Abomination of Desolation is found in the “debriefing” conversation between Daniel and the interpreting angels. Daniel had chronological questions about the vision he had just seen. The interpreting angel provided answers: “From the time when the continual burnt offering will be taken away, and the detestable thing which causes desolation set up [11:31], there will be 1290 days” (12:11). The time when the Abomination of Desolation appeared was described as the activity of the final King of the North (11:31). From that moment on a brief period of time — 1290 days — will see the completion “of all these events” (12:8) ending with the resurrection (12:2).

The third reference to the Abomination appears in Daniel 9:24-27. Daniel 9:26b-27 reads: “the city and the sanctuary will be destroyed by the people of the prince who is to come, but **his** end [*kitzo*, cp. 11:45] will come like a flood [of judgment]. To the end of the war desolations are determined. And **he** will make a firm covenant with the many for one ‘seven’ [of years], and for half of the ‘seven’ **he** will cause the sacrifice and offering to cease; and upon the wing of Abominations **he will cause Desolation**, until what is determined is poured out [as a flood of judgment] upon the Desolator.”

Once again the Abominating event is placed *immediately* before the end, immediately prior to the death of the Desolator. Jesus places the Abomination of Desolation in a period of brief, unique, terrible tribulation just before his coming. On what basis did Jesus know of this end-time Abomination? He read about it in Daniel 11:31, 8:13, 12:11 and 9:27. He recognized that it must occur within a period of 1290 days from the end (11:31; 12:11). Jesus thus also recognized the futurity of the 70th “week” of years given to Daniel in Daniel 9:24-27. He speaks of the Abomination in connection with the *final* events of the present era. This proves that Jesus read the seventieth “week” of Daniel as future.

Some have objected to a disconnection of the final seven years from the other 483. The objection, however, risks challenging the Master Rabbi. It is Jesus who is our model for a “futurist” understanding of the final seven years:

“Jesus puts the Abominable Horror in our future yet, In Daniel’s 70th ‘week’ the abomination will be set. That the 70th ‘week’ is future, therefore, let us not forget.”

The final reference to the Abomination is found in Daniel 8:13. The eighth chapter of Daniel provides important information about the final events of the present age. Following the political rise and fall of Medo-Persia and Greece, represented by Alexander the Great as a principal “horn,” i.e., ruler, there will arise a future wicked “horn” who will interfere with the sacrifices for a period of 2300 days. There can be little disagreement that the vision of Daniel 8 foretold the rise and fall of Alexander the Great and the subsequent division of his Greek kingdom into **four geographical regions**. This happened in history. But the main point of the vision, to which by far the most attention is given, is the rise of a further wicked “horn from small beginnings” (8:9):

“Out of one [of the four divisions of the Greek empire, i.e., ‘out of one of the four horns’] there issued one small horn, which made a prodigious show of strength south and east and towards the fairest of all lands [Israel]. It aspired to be as great as the host of heaven, and it cast down to the earth some of the host and some of the stars and trod them underfoot. It aspired to be as great as the Prince of the host, suppressed his regular offering and even threw down his sanctuary. The heavenly host were delivered up, and it raised itself impiously against the regular offering and threw true religion to the ground. In all that it did it succeeded. I heard a holy one speaking and another holy one answering him. The one said: ‘For how long will the period of this vision last? How long will impiety cause desolation, and both the Holy Place and the fairest of all lands be given over to be trodden down?’ The answer came: ‘For 2300 evenings and mornings. Then the Holy Place will emerge victorious’” (8:9-14).

Much prophecy study of Daniel’s vision of this wicked ruler has relegated it to past history only — to the desecration perpetrated by Antiochus Epiphanes of Syria in 167 BC. Daniel’s visions, however, stretch forward to the time of the coming Kingdom (2:44; 7:18, 22, 27; 11:45-12:3, 7, 11). The eighth chapter is hardly an exception. The angel could not have made himself much clearer: “Understand, O man, that the vision points to **the time of the end**...When he spoke to me, I fell to the ground in a trance, but he grasped me and made me stand up where I was. And he said, ‘I shall make known to you what is to happen **at the end of the wrath**; for it belongs to **the appointed time of the end**’” (8:17-19). Daniel 8 presents the final enemy of God as emerging from one of the divisions of the Greek Kingdom, in its last phase (8:23).

All this fits admirably both with the King of the North of chapter 11 and with the Desolator of 9:27. The future seventieth “week” of years will apparently see the creation of a covenant between Israel and a political leader. The spirit of antichrist has of course been active

since the times of the Apostles, but it will culminate in a final wicked figure: “you have heard that Antichrist is coming” (1 John 2:18). A false view of who Jesus is will foster the antichristian spirit (1 John 4:1-4; 2 John 7).

The Church Fathers

The interesting fact is that this view of the future was known not only in New Testament times but by the earliest and finest Christian experts in the field of eschatology. Two early, major contributors to our explanation of Bible prophecy were Irenaeus and Hippolytus. These men were classic believers in the future millennial Kingdom, knew nothing of a “pre-tribulation rapture,” and strongly opposed the notion that the soul goes consciously to heaven or hell at death.

These men “were undoubtedly the forerunners of the modern ‘dispensationalist’ interpreters of the Seventy Weeks.⁴ We may say that Irenaeus presented the seed of an idea that found its full growth in the writings of Hippolytus. In the works of these fathers, we can find most of the basic concepts of the modern **futuristic view** of the seventieth ‘week’ of Daniel 9. That they were dependent to some extent on earlier material is no doubt true. Certainly we can see the influence of the pre-Christian Jewish exegesis at times, but by and large we must regard them as founders of a school of interpretation, and in this lies their significance for exegesis [explaining the Bible].”⁵

Hippolytus believed there would be a gap between the 69th and 70th “week.” “For when the sixty two weeks are fulfilled, and Christ has come, and the Gospel is preached in every place, the times being then accomplished, there will remain only one week, the last, in which Elijah will appear, and Enoch, and in the midst of it the Abomination of Desolation will be manifested, that is to say, Antichrist, announcing desolation to the world” (*Fragments from Commentaries, Daniel*, para. 22).

This view of the future close-to-the-second coming Abomination of Desolation was exactly that of the New Testament itself. As the celebrated *International Critical Commentary* on Daniel tells us, “The apocalyptic view of the seventieth ‘week’ is found in the Gospels and in Paul” (p. 394). “Irenaeus (*Against Heresies*, 5, 24, 4) inherits the apocalyptic interpretation of the NT; Dan. 9:27, with its 3 ½ years, is a prophecy of the Antichrist. He relates with it Paul’s prospect of the Antichrist in 2 Thess. 2:3ff” (p. 398). The final 3 ½ years “is understood as of the era of Antichrist” (p. 399).

⁴ This by no means implies that Irenaeus or any early writer shared other teachings of modern “dispensationalists.”

⁵ Knowles, “The Interpretation of the Seventy Weeks of Daniel in the Early Fathers,” *Westminster Theological Journal*, Vol. 7, pp. 136-60.

George Ladd was undoubtedly right when he stated that the modern view of the seventieth “week” as still future is very ancient in the church: “The [modern] futuristic interpretation was essentially a return to the method of prophetic truth found in the early fathers, essential to which is the teaching that the antichrist will be a satanically-inspired world ruler at the end of the age who would inflict severe persecution upon the church during the Great Tribulation.”⁶ It would therefore be most misleading to suggest that futurism arose first in Roman Catholic circles, as some have alleged.

The Bible’s extensive discussion of the future points to trouble for Israel from a neighboring Middle Eastern country, designated Assyria (Mic. 5:6, etc.), the King(dom) of the North (Dan. 11) and the Land of Nimrod or Shinar (Zech. 5:11; Mic. 5:6; see “The Assyrian in Messianic Prophecy” at our site). The Messiah will deliver his exiled and oppressed people at his return. The believers will be immortalized and become the royal family with Jesus in the Messianic rule over a renewed earth and society. The “word of the Kingdom” (Matt. 13:19, Dan. 7:27) — the Gospel of salvation — imparts the life-giving message. It creates the members of the royal family, the “sons of the Kingdom” who will one day help to “fix” the world with Messiah. For that glorious day of peace and justice on earth Jesus urged us to pray. Meanwhile the Messianic community must be busy spreading the saving word of the Kingdom, the seed of immortality (2 Tim. 1:10). This is indeed a continuation of the ministry of Jesus, superintended by the now risen Messiah, whose Gospel has not changed. To understand what Jesus promises to his true followers, please read Revelation 2:26-27. A simple summary is Daniel 12:1-3: A Bible Master Key!✧

Comments

- “I just finished reading sister Buzzard’s article, ‘Abba Father’ in the March *Focus*. I got caught up in the ‘Sacred Names Movement.’ Thank God our Father that He helped me to escape that trap of Satan. Not to quote the whole paragraph, but sister Buzzard wrote, ‘Not to be irreverent, but as His children we have something going with God, and it is not a matter of the pronunciation of His name. It is a matter of how He relates to us. It is that all-important matter of Identity. We must know at all times Whose we are.’ Thank you sister Buzzard for these wonderful, powerful, words of life. At least they are to me.” — *Maine*

- “I found your website and read your beliefs in Russian, and found what I have been looking for. I have been studying the Bible alone for 20 years.” — *England*

⁶ *Blessed Hope*, p. 37.