

Focus on the Kingdom

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Change — but How?

By Pastor Chuck Jones

I believe that the only weapon we have is the Word of God. There is power there. The word *is* the Gospel. But it's not meant to beat people into submission. I advocate what Paul said in Romans 14:4-5: "Who are you who judge the servant of another? To his own lord he stands or falls. Yes, he will be made to stand, for God has power to make him stand. One man esteems one day above another. Another esteems every day alike. Let each man be fully assured in his own mind." We are all answerable in the end to Jesus as head of the Church. Yet unity is something to be sought and treasured.

So with that said, here's my point of view. Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world; if it were, my subjects would fight." Fighting as the world fights, boycotts, petitions, lobbying and so on, isn't in Jesus' arsenal of weapons. Nor Christians killing Christians in war. If we learn to fight with the world's tactics, then who are we learning from (or disciples of)? That's one of the dangers I see.

It's been said by some, "The early church, rather than being on the outside, did all they could to get into it, effect change and improve the system." This brings up some questions. One is this: when the Apostle James was killed by Herod, where do we read about "improving the system"? Were there protests or riots? *God's* justice was that "Herod was eaten by worms." Acts 12 gives a good example of prayer rather than protest. Protest would not have been tolerated at all, but prayer can't be stopped. Indeed the disciples were driven out of Jerusalem because of persecution. Peter wrote about how to handle this in his first epistle. He didn't talk about getting involved with the government. Can your child not pray silently in school?

I hold the view that the weapons we are to use are not according to the world's way. That is to say we don't need to pick up this world's weapons in order to bring about change. "For though we walk in the flesh, we don't wage war according to the flesh; for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but mighty before God to the throwing down of strongholds, throwing down imaginations and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:3-5). I don't think that political action is preaching the Gospel. Did Jesus overthrow Rome or try to?

I will admit that I could be wrong, but I'm convinced of this: This nation isn't the Kingdom of God. Preaching the Gospel is our only tool to make any change, and it is one person (of 6 billion) at a time. This is the only way people are brought to repentance and born again to a living hope (Mark 1:14-15).

I am gaining an aversion to "pressuring people" to do anything I think they should. Part of it is in the first paragraph; another point is in 1 Corinthians 6:10. I'll only highlight one group, the extortioners. These are those who use undue force or legal power or ingenuity to force people to do what they don't want to. Those who practice extortion will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

There was an incident in Grand Rapids, Michigan a couple of decades ago concerning an adult XXX theater. Some believers decided to picket the place with the desire to shut it down. I learned something from the owner. In an interview he said he was glad for the publicity. If he had no customers he couldn't stay open.

The lesson is: it's the individual heart that needs to be changed. That change turns this man's customers into non-customers, and he's out of business. This is what Paul the Apostle ran into in Acts 16. I do not read about protests, letters, lobbying or any pressure put on the government to "change." But I do read about deliverance through Yahweh's intervention. I would also assert that in Acts 17 Paul again ran into trouble because he was preaching the Gospel against *man's* idea of what is right. It is silly to conclude that the Gospel won't have any effect but man's methods will! ✧

Whatever Happened to Biblical Christianity?

Gentile Christianity does not deal fairly with the Jewishness of Jesus and the Apostles. The following observations from leading experts in the field of biblical studies and church history point to the fact that traditional Christianity departed, beginning in the second century, from the Apostolic faith. What we know as Christianity today is a mixture of Apostolic truth with a measure of paganism. This should prompt a widespread cry for reform and restoration of true Christian teaching. We find most instructive these words from seasoned experts in their subjects:

For most of Christian history Paul has been misunderstood:

"The first task of exegesis [explaining the Bible] is to penetrate as far as possible inside the historical

context(s) of the author and of those for whom he wrote. So much of this involves the taken-for-granted of both author and addressees. Where a modern reader is unaware of (or unsympathetic to) these shared assumptions and concerns it will be impossible to hear the text as the author intended it to be heard (and assumed it would be heard). In this case, a major part of that context is the self-understanding of Jews and Judaism in the first century and of Gentiles sympathetic to Judaism. **Since most of Christian history and scholarship, regrettably, has been unsympathetic to that self-understanding, if not downright hostile to it, a proper appreciation of Paul in his interaction with that self-understanding has been virtually impossible.**"¹

James Dunn is recognized as one of the outstanding biblical scholars of our time. Did you notice he said "for most of Christian history" we have misunderstood the Bible?! It is "impossible" to hear the text if we do not take the trouble to understand its background. But do churches teach us this?

In regard to scriptural teaching about the destiny of man, original Biblical concepts have been substituted with ideas from Hellenism and Gnosticism:

"The hope of the early church centered on the resurrection of the Last Day. It is this which first calls the dead into eternal life (1 Cor. 15; Phil. 3:21). This resurrection happens to the man and not only to the body. Paul speaks of the resurrection not 'of the body' but 'of the dead.' This understanding of the resurrection implicitly understands death as also affecting the whole man...**Thus [in traditional Christian teaching] the original Biblical concepts have been replaced by ideas from Hellenistic Gnostic dualism.** The New Testament idea of the resurrection which affects the whole man has had to give way to the immortality of the soul. The Last Day also loses its significance, for souls have received all that is decisively important long before this. Eschatological [forward-looking] tension is no longer strongly directed to the day of Jesus' coming. **The difference between this and the hope of the New Testament is very great.**"²

Paul Althaus is a famous name in scholarship. Notice that he admits that biblical teaching about what happens when we die has been replaced by pagan Greek thinking in churches. Does anyone care about this? Can we safely ignore the replacement of God's instructions through Jesus, and blithely call "Christian" what is a substitute from pagan philosophy?

¹James Dunn, *Commentary on Romans 1-8, Word Biblical Commentary*, Dallas: Word Books, 1988, pp. xiv, xv.

²Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966, pp. 413, 414.

Christian teaching was transformed; Messianic hopes were forgotten; the notion of the Kingdom of God on earth disappeared. Immortality at death took the place of the resurrection into the Kingdom on earth:

"Like all concepts the meaning of religious terms is changed with a changing experience and a changing world view. Transplanted into the Greek world view, inevitably **the Christian teaching was modified — indeed transformed.** Questions which had never been asked came into the foreground and the Jewish presuppositions tended to disappear. Especially were **the Messianic hopes forgotten or transferred to a transcendent sphere beyond death.** When the empire became Christian in the fourth century, **the notion of a Kingdom of Christ on earth** to be introduced by a great struggle all but **disappeared**, remaining only as the faith of obscure groups. Immortality — the philosophical conception — took the place of the resurrection of the body. Nevertheless, the latter continues because of its presence in the primary sources, but it is no longer a determining factor, since its presupposition — **the Messianic Kingdom on earth — has been obscured.** As thus the background is changed from Jewish to Greek, so are the fundamental religious conceptions...We have thus a peculiar combination — **the religious doctrines of the Bible run through the forms of an alien philosophy.**"³

Another celebrated expert (above) makes the same point. When Christians speak of "heaven" as their future hope, they give away the paganized roots of their belief system. Jesus does and did not sound like that! He taught us to expect our reward to be on a renewed future earth (Rev. 5:10). After all, he is coming back. And he will thus be on earth. So if we "go to heaven" we will not be with Jesus. But does anyone discuss these issues and then "blow the whistle" of warning, that we might be inventing our own version of "the faith"?!

Our creeds teach us to think in Gentile terms contrary to the New Testament:

"The primary kinship of the New Testament is not with the Gentile environment, but rather with the Jewish heritage and environment...**We are often led by our traditional creeds and theology to think in terms of Gentile and especially Greek concepts.** We know that **not later than the second century** there began the systematic effort of the Apologists to show that the Christian faith perfected the best in Greek philosophy...A careful study of the New Testament must block any trend to regard the New Testament as a group of documents expressive of the Gentile mind. This

³G.W. Knox, D.D., LL.D, Professor of Philosophy and the History of Religion, Union Theological Seminary, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed., Vol. 6, p. 284.

book's kinship is primarily and overwhelmingly with Judaism and the Old Testament...**The New Testament speaks always of disapproval and usually with blunt denunciation of Gentile cults and philosophies.** It agrees essentially with the Jewish indictment of the pagan world...The modern Church often misunderstands its relation to the Old Testament and Israel, and often inclines to prefer the Greek attitude to the New Testament view."⁴

"Our creeds," says this expert, teach us to confess belief in Greek philosophy and theology. Jesus was as far removed from Greek philosophy as possible. But his professed followers are not. This makes little sense. We are to love God with all our mind and thinking power.

Original Christianity was submerged under Graeco-Roman culture resulting in a perversion of the original faith:

"Although the acute form of the secularization of Christianity in Gnosticism was rejected, yet **the Church...continued to lose more and more its primitive character and to be conformed to its environment in the Graeco-Roman culture.** The process was advanced by the Apologists [spokesmen for the faith in the second century], seemed to suffer a check in the influence of Irenaeus, but was stimulated in the Alexandrian school of theology...This development brought about the definite transformation of the rule of faith into the compendium of a Greek philosophical system...**We cannot assume that the faith as delivered to the saints was adequately and finally expressed in these Greco-Roman intellectual forms...**That the faith was expressed in ecclesiastical dogma always without obscuration or distortion cannot be maintained...That the Christian organism could not escape being affected by, in adapting itself to, its Graeco-Roman environment must be conceded; that this action and reaction were not only necessary but a condition of progress may be conjectured...This does not however exclude the frank recognition of the fact that there were characteristics of the Greek speculative genius and the practical Roman ethos not altogether harmonious with the distinctive character of the Gospel, so that **there was perversion amidst the progress in the subsequent development.** The salt in seasoning did lose some of its savour. Greek metaphysics and law **misrepresented** as well as expressed the Gospel."⁵

"Misrepresentation" points to scam, fooling and deception. But is anyone alarmed, or is the status quo, because of its traditional antiquity ("what we have always believed"), just fine? Or ought the churches to be

on a continuous quest for bringing our language and thinking into line with Jesus, our Jewish rabbi and Savior?

Christians do not understand the meaning of "Messiah" nor the vision of his Kingdom:

"Christians have largely lost the sense of Jesus' Messiahship. **And they have largely lost the Messianic vision.** The Greek name 'Christos' means 'the anointed one' and is the literal translation of the Hebrew 'Mashiach' — Messiah...Christians who think or speak of Christ almost forget the Semitic word and the ideas which the name translates; in fact they forget that Jesus is primarily the Messiah. The very idea of Jesus' Messiahship has passed from their minds. Having lost the original sense of the word 'Christ,' many Christians have also lost the Messianic vision, i.e., the expectation of the divine future, the orientation towards **what is coming on earth** as the denouement of the present era of history."⁶

The Christian Gospel is all about the Messianic vision of Jesus for the Kingdom of God coming on earth. That is the Gospel of salvation as announced by Jesus (who is the model Gospel preacher, Heb. 2:3). If we have lost that vision, have we lost the Gospel while convincing ourselves that we have it?

"Heaven" is not what Jesus promised his followers, though Christians today constantly say it is:

William Strawson, a tutor in Systematic Theology and the Philosophy of Religion, made a detailed study of *Jesus and the Future Life* and dedicated 23 pages to an examination of the word "heaven" in Matthew, Mark and Luke. He concluded:

"In few, if any, instances of the use of the word 'heaven' is there any parallel with modern usage. The gospel records of our Lord's life and teaching **do not speak of going to heaven**, as a modern believer so naturally does. Rather the emphasis is on that which is 'heavenly' coming down to man...Our modern way of speaking of life with God as being life 'in heaven' is not the way the gospels speak of the matter. **Especially is there no suggestion that Jesus is offering to his disciples the certainty of 'heaven' after this life.**"⁷

What Jesus did offer his followers was the restored earth: "Blessed are the meek for they will have the land (earth) as their inheritance" (Matt. 5:5). If this scholar, who devoted much of his career to thinking about Jesus and the future, is right, Christians who speak of "heaven" as our goal are promoting something Jesus never approved or taught.

⁴ F.V. Filson, *The New Testament Against Its Environment*, SCM Press Ltd, 1956, pp. 26, 27, 43.

⁵ A.E. Garvie, "Christianity," *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, 1910, Vol. 3, p. 588.

⁶ Lev Gillet, in Schonfield, *The Politics of God*, pp. 50-51

⁷ *Jesus and the Future Life*, Epworth Press, 1959, p. 38.

A disaster occurred when, after the death of the Apostles, the Jewish element in original Christianity was ousted in favor of a new Gentile religion:

“The creation of the Christian religion necessarily involved a retreat from the teaching of Moses, the Prophets and Jesus, which more and more became a rout...As one Protestant Christian wrote: ‘The great people of God’s choice [the Jews] were soon the least adequately represented in the Catholic Church. That was a disaster to the Church itself. It meant that the Church as a whole failed to understand the Old Testament and that **the Greek mind and the Roman mind in turn, instead of the Hebrew mind, came to dominate its outlook: from that disaster the Church has never recovered either in doctrine or in practice...**If today another great age of evangelization is to dawn we need the Jews again...Christianity is a synthesis of Judaism and paganism. As such, it is a corruption of as much significance as the ancient Israelite deflection in blending their religion with the cults of the Canaanites. Therefore, it is not for the Jews to embrace orthodox Christianity, but for the Christians, if they are to be Israelites indeed as the people of God, to review and purify their beliefs, and to recapture what basically they have in common with the Jews, the Messianic vision.”⁸

A “disaster”? But one does not sense in church much awareness of what is suggested by this historian of religion. Could this be a “peace, peace,” when all is not well?

The entire Christian system, both Catholic and Protestant, is flawed by the mixing of the Bible with alien Greek ideas:

“Our position is that the re-interpretation of biblical theology in terms of the Greek philosophers has been both widespread throughout the centuries and everywhere destructive to the essence of the Christian faith...There have always been Jews who sought to make terms with the Gentile world, and it has in time meant the death of Judaism for all such. There have been Christians from the beginning who have sought to do this...**Neither Catholic nor Protestant theology is based on Biblical theology. In each case we have a domination of Christian theology by Greek thought.**”⁹

Dr. Snaith was distinguished enough to be head of the Methodist Church of his time. He was learned and bold enough to warn that what we learn in church, either as Roman Catholics or Protestants, is not the theology and teaching of the Bible, but a system with a different,

⁸ H.J. Schonfield, *The Politics of God*, Hutchinson, 1970, pp. 98, 99, citing Canon Goudge, *Essays on Judaism and Christianity*.

⁹ N.H. Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament*, London: Epworth Press, 1955, pp. 187, 188.

non-biblical origin. Was he misled, or a prophet needing to be heeded? (Most prophets were ignored!)

The Church as it developed after Bible times was poisoned by elements of Gnosticism:

“Who can maintain that the Church ever overcame the Gnostic doctrine of the two natures or the Valentinian Docetism? Even the later councils of the Church which discussed the Christological problems in complicated, nowadays hardly intelligible definitions, did not manage to do this; **the unity of the Church foundered precisely on this.**”¹⁰

30,000 differing denominations hardly sound like the one Church Jesus founded. Is disunity not the result of a corroding and corrupting process which has affected the churches?

While Protestants claim that the Bible is their authority, they have in fact accepted a Greek-influenced version of Christianity which abandons the Bible:

“The difference is obvious between the mental patterns of the New Testament and most of our accustomed Christian thinking...The explanation of this contrast lies in the fact that **historic Christian thought in this regard, as in others, has been Greek rather than Hebrew.** Claiming to be founded on the Scripture, it has, as a matter of fact, **completely surrendered many scriptural frameworks of thinking** and has accepted the Greek counterparts instead.”¹¹

“Surrendered the scriptural frameworks of thinking”? How much of that can one safely do without undoing the whole fabric of original Christianity as Jesus taught it?

The Church says one thing and does another:

“The Church has not usually in practice (whatever it may have claimed to be doing in theory) based its Christology [understanding of who Jesus is] exclusively on the witness of the New Testament.”¹²

Is not claiming one thing and doing something else the essence of self-deception? While claiming the Bible as the Christian handbook, our understanding of Jesus and God are not based on Scripture’s witness. And this from a master Cambridge historian of Christianity.

From the second century a new form of Christianity was beginning to replace the faith of the Bible: “Developed Gentile Christianity of the sort which was beginning to take shape towards the end of the first century has very little to do with Jesus or the faith of the

¹⁰ Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, Harper and Row, 1983, p. 372.

¹¹ H.E. Fosdick, *A Guide to Understanding the Bible*, Harper Bros., 1938, p. 93.

¹² Maurice Wiles, *The Remaking of Christian Doctrine*, SCM Press, 1974, pp. 54, 55.

first generation. **It is a new religion developed to replace the original faith.**¹³

“A new religion replaced the original.” Is there smoke without a fire? Do not these brilliant commentators warn us to investigate personally, for our own integrity and the interests of the critical thinking so valued (or so it is claimed) in education?✧

The Parousia (Second Coming)

The reason I think that the second coming of Jesus has not happened is that he is *not here!* You can go to Jerusalem and look for him and you will not find him there, nor the throne of David on which he has never sat. The 12 Apostles are not there either, and yet Jesus promised them royal office when he returned (Matt. 19:28).

The internet is full of what is called “preterism.” This word means “past-ism” and it assures Christians that the second coming of Jesus *happened in AD 70* within 40 years of Jesus’ time on earth. Preterism informs its adherents that the Messiah came back at the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70.

Here is my reason for thinking that this is an enormous falsehood: I understand the Kingdom of God, which Jesus made the center of the saving Gospel, to include the reestablishment of David’s throne in Jerusalem. If that view of the Kingdom of God is wrong, vast amounts of Scripture would have to be dumped. Jesus promised his close followers that their reward for being Christians would be to sit on 12 thrones administering the twelve tribes of Israel (Luke 22:28-30). Later, based on this information, the Apostles very reasonably inquired just before Jesus left them: “Has the time now come for you to restore the Kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). This would of course be *the* question. The arrival of Jesus would put an end to the trials, troubles and tragedies of our present experience. It would mean sound government on earth and the end of international strife.

Jesus had told them that “when the Son of Man comes in his glory...**then** he will sit on the throne of his glory” (Matt. 25:31). His coming will mean the restoration of the presently non-existent throne of David. The Apostles will bless the world on a grand scale as they assist Jesus in the huge task of reorganizing society under a sound government. If Jesus is to sit on his throne when he comes in glory, he is not now sitting on that throne.¹⁴ Moreover since the Apostles are to rule in a

¹³ Dr. Don Cupitt, *The Debate About Christ*, SCM Press, 1979, p. 69.

¹⁴Note the deceptive mistranslation of Matt. 25:31 in the NIV which speaks of “heavenly” glory, trying to divert us from Jesus’ presence *on earth* when he comes back. Note also the mischievous mis-rendering of Jesus’ words in John 13:3, 16:28 and 20:17 which makes Jesus say what he did not say!

restored Israel “when the Son of Man comes,” that is, “in the regeneration, when the world is reborn,” it follows that this event has not happened. Jesus cannot have come back. If he had, then the Apostles would be here on 12 thrones ruling and administering with Jesus.

If you believe that this is the state of affairs in our world today, you must not be watching the news! Where is the good evidence that Jesus is now on the throne of David in Jerusalem (where it has to be located as much as the throne of the queen of England is in London) and that the Apostles are ruling with him?

Traditional Christianity has not only abandoned Jesus’ very Jewish view of God as a single Person, it has abandoned his Gospel of the Kingdom, which promises that he and all the saints of all the ages will rule together on a renewed earth. Preterism tries to tell you that next week is really this week. It teaches that the coming of Jesus and thus his co-administrative activity with the saints began in AD 70. On this view, the visible second coming is a thing of the past. There never will be a restored Davidic throne.

John Calvin, one of history’s most brutal exponents of Christianity as he misunderstood it, was naturally unhappy with the disciples’ perceptive question about the Kingdom of God in Acts 1:6: “Is this the time when you are going to restore the Kingdom to Israel?” With characteristic and inflexible dogmatism, he declared, “There are more errors in that question than words.”

Calvin, who was personally responsible for the judicial murder of fellow theologian Michael Servetus (because the latter supported Jesus’ view of God in Mark 12:28-34), did not like the idea of a restored Kingdom involving Israel and the Apostles. He ruled it out by accusing the Apostles of blindness. But Jesus did not correct his own students as Calvin would have liked. Jesus had taught them about that restored Kingdom and their place in it. He merely informed his followers that the *time-frame* of the coming of the Kingdom was not to be known. The Father kept that fact within His own authority. The Son, being a human being, did not know, despite his unique authority under God.

In Acts 1:5-7 the coming of the spirit in power to mark the Apostles as Jesus’ accredited agents on earth, when he had ascended to heaven, was to be *within a few days*. But the coming of the Kingdom was to be at a time totally unknown. This simple fact needs to be emphasized: The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is not the coming of the Kingdom of God. The coming of the Kingdom of God is to be expected at the future second coming of Jesus: “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, **then** he will sit on his throne of glory” (Matt. 25:31). The timing is quite clear as it is in masses of other passages of both Testaments, especially Daniel

7:14, 18, 22, 27. Jesus in Luke 19 gave the memorable parable of the departing and returning nobleman, to instruct us that the Kingdom of God will arrive only after the return of Jesus in glory to defeat his enemies: “Bring them before me and slay them” (Luke 19:27).

The public in Jesus’ day knew that the Kingdom of God was destined to arrive in Jerusalem. They needed further light on the stages of God’s plan and Jesus opened their minds to know that the Kingdom had to await his future return as the “nobleman,” the Messiah.

The prophets of Israel announced the future day of the Lord in a way which attracted maximum attention. They said that the day of God’s intervention was “near” and “coming very quickly.” This is important background to the study of the New Testament view of the future. I want to quote some translations of Zephaniah 1:14 to make the point clear. I start with the LXX, the translation of the Old Testament into Greek, often used by the New Testament writers:

Zeph. 1:14: “Near is the great day of the LORD, near and very swiftly coming. Hark, the day of the LORD! Bitter, then, the warrior’s cry.”

“Near is the great day of the LORD, near and coming very quickly. Listen, the day of the LORD! In it the warrior cries out bitterly.”

The reader is invited to ponder this prophecy with care and examine its context. What event does the prophet have in mind? Here are the obvious clues to the prophet’s meaning: “Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to deliver them on the day of the LORD’S wrath; and all the earth will be devoured in the fire of His jealousy, for He will make a complete end, indeed a terrifying one, of all the inhabitants of the earth” (Zeph. 1:18).

“Therefore wait for Me,” declares the LORD, “for the day when I rise up as a witness. Indeed, My decision is to gather nations, to assemble kingdoms, to pour out on them My indignation, all My burning anger; for all the earth will be devoured by the fire of My zeal. For then I will give to the peoples purified lips, that all of them may call on the name of the LORD, to serve Him shoulder to shoulder. From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia My worshipers, My dispersed ones, will bring My offerings” (Zeph. 3:8-10).

The event in question affects the earth and it will result in a purifying of languages. There is no historical fulfillment of this prophecy. Yet the event is predicted as near and coming quickly. Zephaniah penned his words in the seventh century BC.

John, to whom the book of Revelation was given, announced the coming of Jesus with these urgent words: No less than four times in Revelation Jesus says “I am coming *quickly*.” John announced the events of his prophecy as “coming shortly and quickly” (1:1) “for the time is near” (1:3). The prophecies of John as we all

know include the day of the Lord and the establishment of the Kingdom and the thousand-year reign initiated by the resurrection of dead saints. They include the binding of Satan, who is currently “deceiving the whole world” (12:9). Starting with the prophesied millennium, introduced by the resurrection of the faithful dead, Satan will be bound so that he can no longer deceive the nations” (Rev. 20:2-3)

All this Jesus and John wrote is “near and coming quickly.” That is exactly what Zephaniah had said about the Day of the Lord 650 years earlier and over 2500 years ago! He said that the Day of the Lord was near and coming quickly. And the Day of the Lord has not yet happened.

The data provided by the prophets and by Jesus and John have given the skeptics, as they think, an easy attack on the genuineness of the whole Christian faith. How could these so-called spokesmen for God, Jesus and the prophets, have been so wrong? How could they have spoken of the ultimate intervention of God as “near and coming quickly”?

From this so-called problem Christians have not been in general (there are notable exceptions) persuaded to give up belief in Christ and the Bible. They have pointed out that if “coming quickly” always means that God must intervene within a chosen (by our reckoning) short span of time, then clearly the prophets were wrong. But Peter tackled the issue when he pointed out that God is able to *reckon a thousand years as a day*. In this way the urgency of our response to the Day of God’s intervention is maintained. Any of us can die at any time, and the next second of our consciousness we face the Lord at his future coming. The Day of the Lord has never been more than about 90 years ahead of any of us living now. Yet thousands of years of world history have elapsed since the prophets of Israel and finally Jesus spoke of the Day of the Lord as coming quickly.

We need to be very clear here that one cannot escape any perceived problem by saying that the Second Coming of Jesus is all over — past, fulfilled in AD 70. This would just cancel the Kingdom of God and the resurrection. Nor can *any* theory of cancellation be proposed, since there is no evidence for this in the prophets who prophesied the Day of the Lord. If God has changed His mind about the Second Coming or perhaps cancelled it altogether, He has certainly not told us this in the Bible. Jesus echoes the prophecies of Daniel specifically and adding further detail to them expounds them as certain to be fulfilled.

What then did Jesus announce? The answer is simple. He was asked about his “coming [Parousia] and the end of the age” (Matt 24:3). The end of the age he had already defined in Matthew 13:43 as the time of the harvest and the resurrection when the saints will “shine like the sun its strength in the Kingdom of their Father.”

Jesus was quoting Daniel 12:3. Daniel's prophecies spoke also of the "time of the end" and the end in question was marked by the resurrection of the dead (Dan. 12:2). By speaking of the glory of the saints in their Father's Kingdom in connection with the harvest, Jesus obviously took Daniel as accurate and inspired. There will be a resurrection of the dead and there will be glorified saints in the Kingdom which begins at the resurrection.

Back to Jesus' account of the future. "The end is not yet," he replies to the question about his "coming and the end of the age" (Matt. 24:3). And only a few verses later, "then the end will come." The end will come, Jesus said, when the Christian Gospel of the Kingdom will have been preached worldwide as a fair warning to the inhabitants of the earth, all nations (24:14). Following his statement about the end, he immediately gives more detail. With this end of the age in mind, he warns of the Abomination of Desolation standing where **he**¹⁵ ought not to (Mark 13:14). It is at this point that some unfortunately indulge in a grasshopper method of reading simple words. They say that Jesus is no longer speaking of the end of the age, the only end available so far in the discourse, but that Jesus must have introduced without warning a *completely different* "end" in AD 70!

Language and communication fail when words are so treated. We are able to follow each other (most of the time!) when the ordinary rules of sense prevail. Jesus is answering a question about the *end of the age* and the Parousia, which he describes as a visible event "like lightning flashing from east to west." This did not happen in AD 70. There was no "harvest" resurrection of the dead then, and Jesus did not come back. He did not sit on his throne in Jerusalem, and he is now not there. This means that he did not come back! He is still in heaven.

The Christian Gospel itself is destroyed if it is maintained that the coming and Kingdom of God happened in AD 70. The Gospel would be falsified, since no Kingdom came then and no Jesus returned. And no dead were raised. Since the inheritance of the Kingdom is the Christian hope, the Christian hope is reduced to nothing on the premise that Jesus has already come back!

The Olivet Discourse is based on the outline provided by Daniel. Scholars have shown how hugely indebted Jesus was to the book of Daniel. He saw there a prophecy of himself as Son of Man, destined to rule with the saints in the Kingdom to be established "under

the whole heaven" (Dan. 7:27) and destined to crush with a single shattering blow all other nation-states.

Jesus took the prophecy of the resurrection of the dead as literal prophecy. Daniel spoke of the Great Tribulation as an event associated with the death of the final King of the North. The Great Tribulation (of which there can only be one, since it has no equal) is to occur, says Daniel, in close connection with the King of the North who is to come to his end in Israel. "At that time" the dead will be raised. Jesus said exactly the same thing. He quotes the very words of Daniel about the righteous shining in the Kingdom at the time of the harvest (Matt. 13:41-43; Dan. 12:2-3). Jesus reads Daniel in the only way it can be read as prediction of the great events in God's plan.

Jesus' view of the future is not hard. The end will come when the Kingdom of God Gospel has been preached internationally. The end of the age will come when we see the Abomination of Desolation standing where he ought not to. The chronological sequence is precise: "When you see...then there will be a great tribulation such as has never happened and never will happen...Those days will be days of distress for pregnant women...Unless those days were shortened no flesh would remain alive...**Immediately after** the tribulation of those days, the sun will be darkened...and they will see the Son of Man coming in power and glory, and he will gather his elect from the four corners of the world" (Matt. 24:15-30).

This account matches Daniel's exactly. The final events are closely linked and connected by precise and unambiguous time markers: "and then...immediately after..." Jesus will return immediately after the end of the Great Tribulation — a post-tribulational coming! ✧

To be continued next month...

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¹⁵ See some translations and good modern commentary for the masculine participle in the Greek here, *estekota*, indicating in this case a person, not a thing.