

THE COMING KINGDOM, PART XII

by Andy Woods

Because today's evangelical world believes that the church is experiencing the Messianic kingdom, we began a study chronicling what the Bible teaches about the kingdom. This earthly kingdom is anticipated in the office of Theocratic Administrator that was lost in Eden, in the biblical covenants, in the predictions of the Old Testament prophets, and in the earthly theocracy governing Israel from the time of Moses to Zedekiah. This theocratic arrangement terminated with the initiation of the "Times of the Gentiles" when the nation had no king reigning on David's Throne as Judah was trampled by various Gentile powers. Against that backdrop entered Jesus Christ, the rightful Heir to David's Throne. Had first-century Israel enthroned Christ, the earthly kingdom would have become a reality. Despite this unprecedented opportunity, Israel rejected the kingdom offer (Matt. 12) leading to the kingdom's postponement. Due to this postponement, Christ explained the spiritual conditions that would prevail during the kingdom's absence. This interim program includes His revelation of the kingdom mysteries (Matt. 13) and the church (Matt. 16:18). This interim program was explained in detail in prior installments. The important point to grasp is that neither the kingdom mysteries nor the church represent the fulfillment of God's Old Testament kingdom promises. Rather, they epitomize fresh works of God independent of the Old Testament kingdom expectation. Thus, the kingdom will remain in a state of abeyance as long as God's present work in the world continues through his interim program.

RE-OFFER OF THE KINGDOM TO FUTURE ISRAEL

However, one day the church's mission on the earth will be completed (Rom. 11:25b) resulting in the church's removal through the rapture. Then God, who is not forgetful of His prior

unconditional covenants with Israel (Exod. 2:24; Ezek. 36:22), will re-extend the offer of the kingdom to national Israel in the midst of the coming Great Tribulation. As noted in prior installments, when the Abrahamic Covenant is considered alongside of the Mosaic Covenant, Israel's covenantal structure can best be understood as an unconditional covenant with a conditional blessing. Once the nation fulfills the condition of enthroning Christ, she will then become the possessor or enjoyer of what she unconditionally owns. This coming time of unparalleled distress is the means by which God's covenanted nation will become not just the *owner* but also the *possessor* of the covenanted blessings. Just as God today oftentimes brings people to Himself through tribulation, God will use the events of the coming Great Tribulation period to make Israel aware of her need for her Messiah (*Yeshua* or Jesus). During this time, He will draw Israel to Himself. Thus, Jeremiah 30:7 predicts, "Alas! for that day is great, There is none like it; And it is the time of Jacob's distress, But he will be saved from it."

The Antichrist will desecrate the Jewish temple midway through the future Tribulation period (Dan. 9:27; Rev. 13:15). In so doing, he will replicate a well-remembered historical event indelibly etched on the minds of the Jews, when Antiochus Epiphanes did virtually the same thing in the days of the Maccabees during the intertestamental era (Dan. 11:31). Once history repeats itself in this manner, the Jews, who had been trusting the Antichrist as their Messiah up to this point in time, will come to their spiritual senses and recognize that it is not the Antichrist who is their long-awaited Messiah but rather it is Jesus Christ who came into the world some two thousand years ago. It will take a betrayal of this magnitude to bring the nation to saving faith in Christ.

Once Israel trusts in Christ as her Messiah, she will have fulfilled the long unfulfilled condition found in the Mosaic Covenant. Once this condition is satisfied, that future generation

of Jews will then enter into the unconditional covenantal promises thus ushering in the earthly kingdom not only for Israel but the whole world. This covenantal structure shows why Christ conditioned His Second Advent upon Israel properly responding to Him as her Messiah. Christ explained this condition to the Jewish people in Matthew 23:37-39. He said, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, 'BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!'" In other words, first-century Israel's failure to fulfill this condition resulted in the kingdom not being established as well as the imposition of covenantal discipline in A.D. 70 (Deut. 28:49-50). Conversely, future Israel's fulfillment of the condition will be evidenced by the nation's citation of the phrase "BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!" This phrase comes from Psalm 118:26, which is a Messianic psalm (Matt. 21:9). Once this condition is met, Christ will return to rescue Israel and establish His kingdom through her (Matt. 24:30-31; 25:31).

Therefore, the fact that the Davidic Covenant is not being fulfilled in the present day in no wise negates its future fulfillment. When the disciples inquired as to when the kingdom would be restored to Israel, Christ never challenged the idea of an eventual fulfillment. Rather, He simply challenged the disciples' presupposition of its immediate fulfillment (Acts 1:6-7). In the future Tribulation period, the offer of the kingdom will once again be extended to Israel (Matt. 24:14). Unlike at the First Advent (Matt. 23:37-38), this time the offer will be accepted leading to Christ's return (Matt. 24:30-31) and subsequent earthly kingdom (Matt. 25:34; Rev. 20:1-10).

THE TRANSFER OF EARTHLY AUTHORITY

Thus, one of the dominant themes of the Book of Revelation is how this world is transferred from the grasp of Satan to the earthly Messianic kingdom predicted in the pages of the Old Testament. In other words, Revelation explains how the world will eventually transition from the rule that Satan has had on the world ever since the Fall in Eden (Luke 4:5-8; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2; 1 John 5:19) to the future time in history when God and His people "will reign upon the earth" (Rev. 5:10b). Revelation 11:15 captures this theme when it says, "The kingdom of the world has become *the kingdom* of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever."

The mechanism for this transition of authority is the seven-sealed scroll in Revelation, which represents the title deed of the earth.¹ As each of the seals is broken, another divine judgment comes upon the world thereby progressively loosening the grip that Satan has had on the planet ever since the Fall of Man. This reality explains why so many of Revelation's judgments bear a striking resemblance to the ten plagues of the Exodus. For example, the sores of the sixth plague (Exod. 9:8-12) resemble the first bowl judgment (Rev. 16:1-2). The rivers to blood of the first plague (Exod. 7:19-21) resemble the third bowl judgment (Rev. 16:4-7). The darkness of the ninth plague (Exod. 10:21-23) resembles the fifth bowl judgment (Rev. 16:10-11). The hail of the seventh plague (Exod. 9:22-26) resembles the seventh bowl judgment (Rev. 16:17-21).

What is the point of these similarities? God took His people out of four hundred years of Egyptian bondage (Gen. 15:13) in the Exodus. In Revelation, God will perform the ultimate Exodus by taking the entire world out of the Satanic bondage it has been under since the Fall. Each Exodus plague progressively weakened Pharaoh's resolve to hold Israel in captivity. Pharaoh's will was ultimately broken through the death of his first born as expressed in the tenth

¹ Renald Showers, *Maranatha Our Lord, Come!* (Bellmawr: FOI, 1995), 88.

plague. In the same way, each divine judgment in Revelation will progressively weaken Satan's grip on the planet until finally the entire world will be transferred into the glorious Messianic Kingdom. The death of God the Father's "first born" son laid the groundwork for Satan's ultimate defeat (Rev. 5:9). Satan's sentence will finally be imposed as the scroll is progressively opened by God the Son.

Given the significance that the scroll of Revelation 5 plays in releasing the world from Satanic bondage, it is easy to see why John weeps when he first learns that none is worthy to open the scroll (Rev. 5:2-4). John weeps because he sees the world continuing indefinitely under Satanic bondage. Yet, the apostle John stops weeping (Rev. 5:5) when he learns that Christ is worthy to open the scroll because of His role in redemption (Rev. 5:9) and creation (Rev. 4:11). John stops weeping because the scroll can now be opened and thus the liberation of planet earth from Satan's ruthless rule can now begin.

Satan certainly does not want this transfer of authority to take place. He has enjoyed ruling the world for all of these centuries since Eden. He knows that once the kingdom comes he will be bound (Rev. 20:1-3) and eventually thrown into the lake of fire at the conclusion of the thousand years of Christ's earthly rule (Rev. 20:10). Thus, he has always worked in history to prevent the establishment of this coming Messianic kingdom (Rev. 12:9-10). Just as he sought to prevent Christ's First Advent (Rev. 12:1-5; Ps. 2:9), he will again try to prevent the coming kingdom by eradicating all the Jews (Rev. 12:1; Gen. 37:9-10) during the Tribulation period (Rev. 12:5-17). The logic of this preemptive attack is that if there are no Jews left to accept the re-offer of the kingdom and call Christ back to the earth (Matt. 23:37-39), then the kingdom will never come thereby allowing Satan to continue indefinitely as the world's unchallenged ruler. Yet, just as God worked to prevent Satan from thwarting the birth of Christ (Rev. 12:4-5), He

will work once again in the future Tribulation period to protect Israel from Satanically inspired annihilation (Rev. 12:6, 13-16; Zech. 13:8-9). God will do this so that He can ultimately fulfill Israel's unconditional covenants thereby resulting in the manifestation of the earthly Messianic kingdom.

(To Be Continued...)