

THE COMING KINGDOM, PART XLI

by Andy Woods

In this series, the biblical teaching on the kingdom of God has been set forth. This series has also scrutinized the New Testament texts that "kingdom now" theologians rely upon in order to demonstrate the insufficiency of "kingdom now" theology. We then began noting why this trend of equating God's present work in the church with the Messianic kingdom is a matter that believers should be concerned about, since this theology radically alters God's design for the church and is the seedbed of many major false doctrines that have entered Christ's church.

ALLIANCES WITH NON-BIBLICAL GROUPS

In the last installment, we called attention to Clarence Larkin's warning concerning the impact of how "kingdom now" negatively impacts the church's calling, purpose, and mission. Larkin noted at least *five* consequences that "kingdom now" theology has upon Ecclesiology, or the doctrine of the church. Having already discussed the first *two* points, we had moved on to the *third* point. *Third*, because there are not presently and numerically enough Christians necessary to establish God's kingdom upon the earth, it becomes necessary for the church to find common ground with those who do not share its biblical convictions in order to build the political coalition needed to implement a "kingdom now" social agenda. Larkin well explains:

The great mistake the Church has made is in appropriating to herself in this Dispensation the promises of earthly conquest and glory which belong exclusively to Israel in the "Millennial Age." As soon as the Church enters into an "Alliance with the World," and seeks the help of Parliaments, Congresses, Legislatures, Federations and Reform Societies, largely made up of ungodly men and women, she loses her spiritual power and becomes helpless as a redeeming force.¹

In prior installments, we noted the "kingdom now" agenda behind popular pastor Rick Warren's "PEACE" plan. Consequently, it comes as no surprise that Warren has become one of the leading advocates of ecumenism in our day. Apparently not content to only build a bridge to Roman Catholicism only, Warren also seems to be building a similar bridge into Islam. Such advocacy of interfaith cooperation across vastly divergent belief systems is revealed through many of Warren's public statements.

Note, for example, the following prayer that Warren offered on January 21, 2009 at President elect Obama's inauguration: "I humbly ask this in the name of the one who changed my life, Yeshua, *Isa*, Jesus [Spanish pronunciation], Jesus, who taught us to pray..." (italics added).² While most would recognize in Warren's prayer the Hebrew rendering of Jesus (*Yeshua*) as well as the Spanish pronunciation of the name Jesus, who is "Isa"? World religions expert Eric Barger well explains Isa's true identity:

There I was, watching all of the regalia of the presidential inauguration...Of course, I was also waiting to see just what kind of prayer Rick Warren had co-opted to pray for the new incoming President and his administration...The inaugural prayer was proceeding along and Warren was rightly praying for God to lead and protect Obama...So, just when I thought I could say "amen," it happened. Warren said "I humbly ask this in the name of the one who changed my life, Yeshua, *Isa*, Jesus [Spanish pronunciation], Jesus, who taught us to pray, "Our father who art in Heaven..."...I have researched Islam for many years. Last year I ministered concerning the history, theology and intentions of Islam over 40 times in churches and conferences so naturally, Warren's use of the name of *Isa*, the false Jesus of Islam, was a glaring slap in the face to all that he had already prayed. "Isa" in no way represents the Jesus of the Bible but is instead the false Jesus of the Qur'an (Koran) and the Muslim Hadith. "Isa" (pronounced "eee-sa") is the Islamic Jesus who was but a prophet and who certainly did not experience a sacrificial death on a cross let alone resurrect from the dead. In fact, in Islam the prophet *Isa* is actually the destroyer of Christianity - not it's Savior. Obviously, this is simply NOT the same Jesus as is Yeshua.³

Thus, Warren in his inaugural prayer seems to equate the Muslim Jesus with the biblical Jesus. The bottom line is that if you are going to try to build the Kingdom of God on the earth, there are not enough Christians in the world to accomplish this goal. Thus, you have to start cooperating with people of different faiths, like Catholics and Muslims. Such spiritual ecumenism represents the natural outworking of the church viewing itself as the kingdom of God.

DISPENSING WITH PROPHETIC TRUTH

Fourth, Larkin observed that the discarding of the study of Bible prophecy naturally takes place when "kingdom now" theology gains a foothold in the church. As noted earlier, Larkin observed, "The 'Kingdom Idea' has robbed the Church of her 'UPWARD LOOK,' and of the 'BLESSED HOPE.' There cannot be any 'Imminent Coming' to those who are seeking to 'Set up the Kingdom.'"⁴ After all, why be overly preoccupied with God's predicted prophetic plan involving the future overthrow of the Antichrist and His subsequent reign if the church is presently bringing in the kingdom? As already noted, popular pastor Rick Warren is heavily involved in a kingdom now agenda through his "PEACE" plan. Thus, it should also come as no surprise that Warren is a leading critic of those who invest time and energy into seeking to discover what the Bible reveals concerning the future. Interestingly, Warren appears to have a special animus for those who he deems are overly preoccupied with Eschatology, which is the study of God's plan for the future. He writes:

When the disciples wanted to talk about prophecy, Jesus quickly switched the conversation to evangelism. He wanted them to concentrate on their mission in the world. He said in essence, "The details of my return are none of your business. What is your business is the mission I have given you. Focus on that!" If you want Jesus to come back sooner, focus on fulfilling your mission, not figuring out prophecy. Speculating

on the exact timing of Christ's return is futile, because Jesus said, "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." Since Jesus said He didn't know the day or hour, why should you try to figure it out? What we do know for sure is this: Jesus will not return until everyone God wants to hear the Good News has heard it. Jesus said, "The Good News about God's kingdom will be preached in all the world, to every nation. Then the end will come." If you want Jesus to come back sooner, focus on fulfilling your mission, not figuring out prophecy. It is easy to get distracted and sidetracked from your mission because Satan would rather have you do anything besides sharing your faith. He will let you do all kinds of good things as long as you don't take anyone to heaven with you. But the moment you become serious about your mission, expect the Devil to throw all kinds of diversions at you. When that happens, remember the words of Jesus: "Anyone who lets himself be distracted from the work I plan for him is not fit for the Kingdom of God."⁵

According to Warren's line of thought, those that overly meditate upon the over a quarter of the Bible devoted to Eschatological truth are date setting, pursuing un-Christ-like priorities, unconcerned about evangelism, involved in a distraction, being influenced by Satan, and are unfit for the Kingdom of God! Yet the study of Bible prophecy should not be so quickly discredited and discarded since: "...we have the prophetic word *made* more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts (2 Pet. 1:19)."

Progressive Dispensationalists also emphasize "kingdom now" theology through their belief that Christ now orchestrates an "already" and spiritual phase of the Davidic Kingdom as He now reigns from David's Throne, allegedly in heaven. Thus, it again is not surprising to discover that Progressive Dispensationalists deemphasize Bible Prophecy in general. Key prophetic passages receive scant attention in their teachings and writings. Charles Ryrie observes how Progressive Dispensationalists are guilty of:

...ignoring the great prophecy of the seventy weeks in Daniel 9:24–27. Nowhere in the progressives' writings to date have I found any discussion of the passage, only very brief and occasional citations of the reference itself...While not denying the pre-tribulation Rapture or the literal tribulation period, revisionists do not give much attention to these aspects of eschatology. Blaising and Bock do not take obvious opportunities to mention the Rapture, and in one place (discussing 1 Thessalonians 5) they say only that the rapture "would appear to be pre-tribulational." They decry (as do many of us normative dispensationalists) the sensationalism of some interpreters of prophecy. But abuse of a doctrine is no reason for playing down the truth of that doctrine. Rather, it ought to make us more zealous to present it accurately and in a balanced fashion. Furthermore, there exists already in the writings of progressives a thrust towards positioning the Revelation as a book that is "difficult" to interpret. Playing up the imagery in the book, as some revisionists do, seems to play down a plain interpretation of it. The locusts in chapter 9 and Babylon in chapters 17 and 18 are examples of such "literal/symbolic difficulty" in interpreting the book.⁶

Again, the bottom line is that if the kingdom is now then the present should be our focus rather than some future event. Such a presupposition logically leads to a discarding of Bible prophecy.

(To Be Continued...)

¹ Clarence Larkin, *Rightly Dividing the Word* (Glenside, PA: Clarence Larkin Estate, 1920), 48.

² https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_detailpage&v=tJeNsPIC3vE

³ Eric Barger, "Rick Warren Invokes the Name of Islamic Jesus at Obama Inauguration," online: <http://lit4ever.org/revivalforum/index.php?topic=16453.0:wap2>, January 2009, accessed 4 January 2015.

⁴ Clarence Larkin, *The Second Coming of Christ* (Glenside, PA: Clarence Larkin Estate, 1918), 51.

⁵ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 285-86.

⁶ Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 176-77.