

The Age of Messiah

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Much of modern evangelicalism is plagued by several exegetical¹ diseases. The primary cause of these maladies is a failure to read and understand the Bible in the way it is presented to us, the failure to read and understand the Bible *as it was written to those who first read it*. Most Christians fail to understand that the Bible was not written *to us*; it was written *for us*.²

Because of this failure to read Scripture rightly, all sorts of erroneous notions have proliferated and become dogma to most evangelicals. One example of this is eschatology or the word concerning the last times. Ask any Christian if they are living in the “last days” and ninety-nine out of one hundred will say, “Why, certainly. Why would you ask such a question? Everyone knows that we are living in the last days.”³ Next, try to convince most modern Christians that this “last days mania” fails to do justice to Scripture and they will look at you thinking that you are from another planet or they will call for the men in white jackets to come take you away!

This issue of understanding what the Bible teaches about the “end times” is crucial, not just for settling disputes about the Antichrist, the great tribulation, the rapture, or the millennium. It is essential that our testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ to a watching world be true. If our understanding of His person and work is incorrect, then our witness to the world is false. Since the Church is the pillar and the ground of the truth (I Timothy 3:15), it is important that she know and understand truth rightly.

The First-Century Church

The New Testament gives us an accurate picture of the church in the first century. Because of compelling internal evidence, many Bible scholars believe that every book of the New Testament was written between the resurrection of Christ (around 40 AD⁴) and the destruction of Jerusalem (70).⁵ The early church lived during momentous and exciting times. Imagine living during the history portrayed by Dr. Luke in the book of Acts (written in 63). Imagine experiencing the Pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit and being a part of the explosive growth of the Church. Imagine, too, the persecutions, trials, and tribulations that the early Christians encountered.

The Apostle Paul spoke (ca. 55) of these years as the “present distress” (I Corinthians 7:25) and instructed the Church at Corinth accordingly. Paul, in the same book, used Israel’s history to admonish first-century believers telling them that “the end of the ages”⁶ had come upon *them* (I Corinthians 10:11). Earlier, Paul spoke of the victory of the crucified Christ and how that, through

¹ *Exegesis* is Greek for interpretation.

² Scripture was written to its original audience; i.e., when we read it, we are reading someone else’s mail. Even if Scripture is not addressed directly to us, it is for us. We can only understand how it is for us if we listen to the text as if we were the first hearers of the text.

³ By “last days,” most Christians believe that they are living in the last generation of mankind, the time in which most of the Book of Revelation will be fulfilled before our very eyes.

⁴ AD is the abbreviation of the Latin *anno Domini*, in the year of our Lord. All stated dates hereafter in this essay are in AD.

⁵ The date of the book of Revelation may have been written later, i.e., ca. 90. Some of its internal evidence points to the temple in Jerusalem already standing so it may have been written before 70.

⁶ αἰών (aeon) means age. The word is referent to an age or time, a duration. Combined with τέλος (telos: end, consummation, completion), the phrase τέλος τῶν αἰώνων literally means “the goal of the ages” or, as Paul states in Romans 13:11, “our salvation is near.” The goal of history had come in Christ, whom to know is life eternal (John 17:3), since He is the “Father of eternity” (Isaiah 9:6).

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the Cross, “the rulers of this age (αἰών: aeon) were *coming to nothing*” (I Corinthians 2:6-8; cf. Colossians 2:15). In Romans (written in 57), Paul commanded first-century believers to “put on the armor of light” because “our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. *The night is far spent; the day is at hand*” (Romans 13:11-14). Paul also warned young Timothy, in 62, about many “falling away from the faith” in the *latter times* (I Timothy 4:1). He also identified the *last days* as being “perilous times” and told Timothy (in 67 or 68) what he was supposed to do about it (II Timothy 3).

In the late 60s, the writer of Hebrews, referring to Christ’s suffering and shed blood, said that “once at the *end of the ages* (συντελεία τῶν αἰώνων: completion of the ages) He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” (Hebrews 9:26). The same writer earlier said that God had “in these *last days* spoke to by His Son” (Hebrews 1:2). Is there any doubt that the “last days” and the “end of the ages” refers to the time of Jesus and the generation living at that time? Speaking of the Old Covenant, he said that it is “becoming obsolete and growing old and ready to *vanish away*” (Hebrews 8:13). After speaking about the glorious company of the redeemed, he warned of a *shaking* that would occur that would remove everything that could be shaken. In contrast, the Hebrew believers “are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken” (Hebrews 12:18-28).

Peter said that the prophet Joel spoke of the pouring out of the Spirit in the *last days*. According to Peter, what happened on the day of Pentecost fulfilled Joel’s prophecy – “This is that,” he confidently asserted (Acts 2:15-21).⁷ In fact, later in the book of Acts, Peter pronounced that *all* the prophets of the Old Testament had foretold *these days* of the Holy Spirit (Acts 3:24; see also I Peter 1:10-12). He also said that Christ had been manifested in the “last of the times”⁸ for *you* (in 63), his readers (I Peter 1:20). Also, Peter commanded the pilgrims of the dispersion to be grave and watchful in their prayers for “the end of all things is at hand” (I Peter 4:7; cf. Romans 13:12).⁹ He also warned, in 66 or 67, of scoffers coming “in the last days” (II Peter 3:3).

The Apostle James, in the late 40s or early 50s, spoke of the corrupted rich heaping up treasure “in the last days” (James 5:3). Because of this injustice, James comforted the believers to be patience for “the coming of the Lord is at hand ... The Judge is standing at the door” (James 5:7-9).

In the late 60s, the Apostle John spoke of the “*darkness passing away*, and the true light already shining” (I John 2:8). He said that the “world (cosmos) is passing away” (I John 2:17). He told the little children that this is “the last hour.” How did he know this? By the fact that many antichrists have come (I John 2:18-19). In the book of Revelation (ca. 60s or 90s), the beloved apostle spoke of the *immediate* (not imminent) return of Jesus Christ (Revelation 1:1, 3; 22:7, 12, 20), a return that would occur in the first century for the seven churches of Asia, the original readers of John’s letter.

What Does This Mean?

How did the first century Church understand these passages? Did they think that the end of the world was “at hand?” Did they think that, in their lifetime, they would see the termination of all

⁷ Both Isaiah and Micah also spoke of the last days (Isaiah 2:1-4; Micah 4:1-5).

⁸ The phrase “last of the times,” in the Greek is ἐσχάτου τῶν χρόνων (eschatou ton chronon), where chronon means “the passing of moments.” Our English word chronology means the arrangement of events or dates in the order of their occurrence.

⁹ The force of the Greek ἐγγίζω (eggizo) translated “at hand” means “impending” or “near.” It is like the crest of a wave ready to crash on a beach. Grammatically, ἐγγίζω is in the perfect active indicative. Indicative means it is a declaration of truth. Perfect active refers to an action completed in the past, but also has continuing results in the present; i.e., something has been completed in the past that endures in the present. What has been completed is the finished work of Christ, the τέλος (telos: the end, completion with respect to time). (Note: In Galatians 4:4, Paul states that Christ came in the fullness of time.) Christ’s completed work carried its impact, like a crashing wave, to the readers of Peter’s first epistle in 63 and, by consequence, to all readers thereafter. For an explanation of “all things,” see footnote 29.

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things and the close of history as we know it? These are crucial questions, and it is at this point that modern evangelicalism goes astray. They cannot get around the force of these passages, and they assume that these texts are referring to the end of time *near to them* (the “last days” two thousand years later), not to believers of the first century. By convoluted reasoning, they separate these texts from their first-century context and leap them into modern times. By this sleight of the hand, the “rabbit comes out of the hat” and, behold, modern evangelicals witness to themselves and the watching world, “The end is near.”¹⁰

Are we, who live in the 21st century, living in the last days as most evangelicals define it? In II Timothy 3:1-7, Paul was writing a letter of instruction to Timothy. Paul said, “But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come. For men shall be lovers of themselves ... *from such people turn away.*” How could Timothy turn away from such men if these verses referred to the 21st century or later? The context here clearly shows that “last days” had reference to a time more than two thousand years ago.

The first century Christians knew that something dramatic was going to happen in their lifetime. They knew this on the guarantee of the apostles, the prophets, and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Referring to the temple then standing in Jerusalem, He told His disciples that “not one stone will be left upon another” (Matthew 24:2). After discussing the near end of the temple, He assured His followers that “all these things will come upon this generation” (Matthew 24:36). Many modern exegetes have performed all sorts of explanatory gymnastics to get around the plain import of these statements of Jesus, the Prophet (Acts 3:22-23). Modern interpreters of Scripture read in Matthew 24 of the gospel being preached in all the world, of the great tribulation, of a collapsing universe, and of the coming of the Lord concluding that indeed, these things did *not* happen in the first century. But, contrary to their assertions, Jesus said that *all these things would come upon the generation He addressed*. Who are we to believe? Are we to believe the perceptions of modern commentators or Jesus, the Prophet? Whose word can we trust? Whose word is sure and true? Here is where “boys must become men” and face the words of Jesus squarely. What Jesus said is true. The problem does not lie with Him, but with us and our hearts. We have erred by mishandling Matthew 24, along with many other passages in the New Testament. We need to heed what Prophet Jesus says, and we need to repent of our misreading of this text and learn how to understand it and the New Testament texts already mentioned as they are presented to us.

This Age and the Age to Come

The Apostle Paul speaks of the enthronement of Christ “far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, *not only in this age* (αἰών: aeon) *but also in that which is to come*” (Ephesians 1:20-21). A few verses later he speaks of those dead in trespasses and sin who “walked according to the age (αἰών: aeon) of this world (cosmos), according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience” (Ephesians 2:1-2). As already mentioned, Paul proclaimed that the “rulers of this age (αἰών: aeon)” were “coming to nothing” in the first century (I Corinthians 2:6-8). He spoke of the foolish “wisdom” of this age/world (aeon/cosmos¹¹) (I Corinthians 1:20; 2:6; 3:18). He said that “the god of this age (αἰών: aeon) blinds the minds of those perishing” (II Corinthians 4:4). He warned first-century believers not to fashion themselves after this age (αἰών: aeon) (Romans 12:2). In 62, he commanded Titus to

¹⁰ For a disheartening analysis of this phenomenon and its effect on 20th century evangelicalism, see Dwight Wilson, *Armageddon Now! A Premillenarian Response to Russia and Israel since 1917* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991). The author has heard the “end is near” refrain as a recurring theme since the 1960s.

¹¹ For an explanation of the Greek word cosmos, see footnote 13.

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tell the churches in Crete to live godly in this present age (αἰών: aeon) (Titus 2:12) because the character of this age (αἰών: aeon) is evil and God has delivered first century Christians from it (Galatians 1:4 – written in 49).¹²

Jesus said that this age (αἰών: aeon) has its cares (Matthew 13:22). In Luke 16:8, Christ compares the sons of this age (αἰών: aeon) with the sons of light. Paul calls believers “light in the Lord” (Ephesians 5:8). In Luke 20:34-38, Jesus speaks of the sons of this age (αἰών: aeon) who marry and are given in marriage and compares them with those that are worthy to attain that age and the resurrection of the dead calling them sons of the resurrection. Paul, in Romans 8:23, speaks of believers in Rome as the first fruits of the Spirit eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of the body.

The apostle John said that the whole world (cosmos) of the first century “lies in the evil one” (I John 5:19).¹³ He also said that the god of this world (cosmos) was a god of was passing away (I John 2:17) echoing Paul’s sentiment that the rulers of that age (αἰών: aeon) were “coming to nothing” (I Corinthians 2:6).¹⁴

When we read Hebrews 9:26 and I Corinthians 10:11, we see that the first century Christians saw themselves as living at the end of the ages. In fact, in the Gospel, the “powers of the age (αἰών: aeon) to come” could be tasted (Hebrews 6:5). They understood “the end of the ages” not as the end of history but the terminal point of one age and the starting point of another – identified as the “age to come” which had arrived in the death of Christ and is arriving in the power of the Holy Spirit.¹⁵

30-70: Period of Transition

To read the Bible rightly, we must understand the forty years from 30-70 as a time of transition. It was a period of overlap in which the old age (or the Old Covenant or old order of government) was passing away, and the new age (or New Covenant or new order of government) was coming. The death-resurrection-ascension of Christ marked the beginning of this transitional period (Acts 2:29-36), and the destruction of Jerusalem marked its end (Matthew 24:30).

In one sense, we can understand this transition as instantaneous (in the death and resurrection of Christ the old age was done away with and the new age came), but in another sense, it was gradual.

¹² God delivered them by bringing the principalities and powers of the old age to naught replacing them with the power of the Holy Spirit of God grounded in the power of the Cross, the superior power of the new age, the new creation. Refer to Colossians 2:14-15, I Corinthians 1:18f, and footnote 26.

¹³ The Greek indicates that the world (κόσμος: cosmos) lies in the lap of πονηρός (poneros), i.e., evil. In his first epistle, he defines world as a system of thought and living. “Do not love the world (cosmos) nor the things in the world (cosmos). If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world (cosmos), the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world (cosmos). The world (cosmos) is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever” (I John 2:15-17). The cosmos, as John used the word in his first epistle, means the ordered structure of humanity, its governing economy, that is opposed to the being, ways, and works of the Triune God. The cosmos can also be understood as including all that exists, animate and inanimate, organic and inorganic, people and space. In the New Testament, cosmos, then, can be understood in many ways; the context governs how we are to interpret each passage that contains this rich word. As we have noted, αἰών (aeon) is referent to an age or time, a duration, in contrast to cosmos, a referent to space and the people who inhabit a portion of that space.

¹⁴ Again, note what the Cross of Christ *has done* to Satan and the principalities and powers (Hebrews 2:14; Colossians 2:14-15; I John 3:8).

¹⁵ The new age that has come to birth and the powers of the old age have been abolished in the one defining moment of the death of Christ on the Cross. See N. T. Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began: Reconsidering the Meaning of Jesus’s Crucifixion* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2016), pp. 235-236.

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For the sake of early believers in Christ, this transition lasted forty years, perhaps, to soften the concentrated shock of the revolutionary character of Messiah's kingdom.¹⁶

From the perspective of the book of Hebrews, the first-century transitional believers were living in the wilderness preparing to enter the Promised Land, the inheritance. In the mind of the author of the book, the land promised to Abraham was a foreshadowing of a greater land, a heavenly land, a phrase equivalent to the kingdom of heaven (Hebrews 11:8-16; 12:22-24).¹⁷ Paul saw the land of Promise, the land of Canaan, as a sign post point to something bigger, the inheritance of the world (cosmos) governed by the Gospel of the Kingdom, the righteousness of faith (Romans 4:13). Note the emphasis of 40 years in Hebrews 3-4 (cf. Psalm 95:10). In one sense, Hebrews is the New Testament Deuteronomy. Hebrews 13:5 states, "I will never leave you nor forsake you," a quote from Deuteronomy 31:6-8 and a promise of God's presence for His people as they conquered the Promised Land. Note the same promise of Christ's abiding presence is given to the Church as she goes forth to conquer the Promised Land of the whole earth by discipling all nations (Matthew 28:18-20).

We understand this period as an extension of mercy and grace to national Israel before its predicted dissolution. Those Jews who rejected the sacrifice of Christ kept on acknowledging the validity of temple sacrifices, persecuted Christ's Church, and thereby filled up their measure of sins becoming abominable in the sight of God (I Thessalonians 2:14-16; Matthew 23:31-38; 24:15).

For those who lived through it, this period of the shaking of the old so that the new might come forth was indeed both a season of peril and a season of great opportunity.

Behold, I Make All Things New

The New Testament employs many phrases, not only for this transition period but also for the consequent "Age of Messiah." These words exemplify the transformation that will take place in the earth through the proclamation and application of the Gospel of the kingdom. In this transformation, all nations shall serve Him, and His dominion will be "from the river to the ends of the earth" (Psalm 72:8-11). His kingdom will increase with no end (Isaiah 9:6-7). These phrases speak of this present Age of Messiah – its beginning, goal, progress, and place in history and time.

The Age of Messiah is also called:

- The restoration of all things (Matthew 17:11; Malachi 4:6; Luke 1:16)
- The regeneration (Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:28-30)
- The age (αἰών: aeon) to come (Mark 10:29-30; Luke 18:28-30)
- The redemption of Israel (Luke 24:21; cf. Luke 1:68)¹⁸
- Times of refreshing (Acts 3:19)
- The times of the restitution of all things (Acts 3:21)

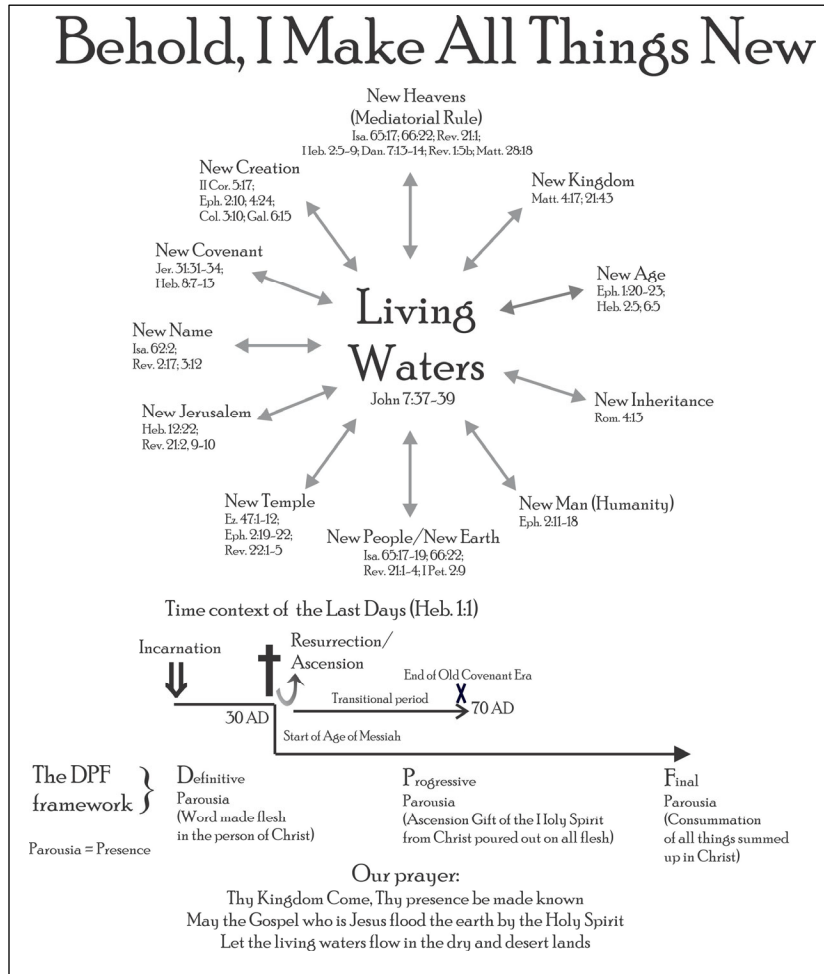
¹⁶ The first believers in Christ were Jews (Acts 2). The book of Acts shows us how difficult it was for some of them to accept the notion of Gentiles coming into the kingdom – one of the implications of the end of the old Jewish economy. It also reveals the Jewish opposition to the preaching of the Gospel of the kingdom (see Acts 5:29-42; 6:10-14; 7:54-60; 9:22-23, 29; 11:2; 13:45, 50; 14:2, 19; 17:5; 18:12-13; 21:27-31; 28:20). The unbelieving Jews knew the implications of this Gospel and they tried to stamp it out. Saul was one of them until Christ arrested him on the road to Damascus and appointed him, as the apostle Paul, to minister the Gospel to the Gentiles.

¹⁷ The phrase "kingdom of God" and "kingdom of heaven" are synonymous.

¹⁸ The Greek word for redemption is ἀπολύτρωσις (apolutrosis: Romans 3:24) meaning to "let go from captivity" or to "let go for a ransom." Every Jew living in the first-century would connect this word to the Exodus, the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage in the time of Moses. In Luke 9:31, on the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus, Moses, and Elijah were speaking of Jesus's soon departure (ἐξόδος: exodos) which He was about to accomplish in Jerusalem.

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- The reign of grace (Romans 5:17)
- The time of reformation (Hebrews 9:10)
- The new heavens and new earth (Revelation 21:1; II Peter 3:10-13)¹⁹
- The new creation (Galatians 6:15; II Corinthians 5:17)
- The Trinity making “all things new” (Revelation 21:1-5).
- The Christian import on dating generated the Latin phrase *anno Domini* (in the year of the Lord). This expression was taken from Isaiah 61:1-2 and Luke 4:16-19 as a way of recognizing the Age of Messiah.²⁰



As mentioned earlier, the Apostle Peter spoke of the “end of all things is at hand” (I Peter 4:7) and the apostle John spoke of the “first heaven and first earth passing away” and “all things being made new.” How can we reconcile these texts? Applying “a thousand years are with the Lord as one day” to the Petrine text would render it unintelligible. What Peter meant by “the end of all things is at hand” is that the finished work of Christ, the end, a completed work in the past, has redemptive implications for the day of his readers. What John meant by “first heaven and first earth passing away” is not the passing away of the physical heavens and earth, but a passing away of the old economy of redemption – the elementary principles of the old age (Galatians 4:1-8; Colossians 2:8-10). These elementary

principles include the elaborate system of rites and ceremonies that was part of the Old Covenant and the adjournment of this Jewish economy came to pass in the destruction of Jerusalem by Romans armies in 70. (Note: John heard Jesus’ very words on this matter in Matthew 24:3, 6, 14, 34.) The passing away of the Jewish economy was what the writer of Hebrews meant using the phrase “ready to vanish away” (Hebrews 8:13). What John meant by “all things being made new” is the renewal of all things by the preaching and application of the Gospel of the Kingdom or, in

¹⁹ cf. Isaiah 65:17-19 and Isaiah 66:22 where the new heavens, the new earth, and the new Jerusalem, the people of God, are interrelated.

²⁰ Late 20th historians replaced *anno Domini* with CE, meaning Common Era, certainly a secularizing of a long-standing view of Christian history.

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Paul's words, the reconciliation and redemption of the world (Romans 5:6-11; Colossians 1:15-20; II Corinthians 5:17-21²¹).

God the Father is making all things new in Christ through the Holy Spirit. He made all things new in the Incarnation when, as the Son of the Father, he took the flesh of humanity as a babe born in Bethlehem through the power of the Spirit (Matthew 1; Luke 2; John 1:14). He made all things new through His life, death, resurrection, and ascension through the power of the Spirit. He makes all things new through the healing power of His Spirit as the Gospel floods the earth (Isaiah 11:9; Habakkuk 2:14; II Corinthians 5:17; Ezekiel 47:1-12; John 7:37-39). He will make all things new when all His enemies are under His feet (I Corinthians 15:24-26) when, at His final coming,²² He will personally destroy death, the last enemy, through the physical resurrection of all humanity (John 5:19-29). At the Cross, Christ completed the redemption of the cosmos. The making new through the Spirit is the fruit of His redemptive activity in flow of history. The parables of the kingdom (Matthew 13) speak of Messiah's kingdom as seed planted in human history, the slow but inevitable growth of that seed, the admixture of tares in the field, and the harvest of the seed at the end of the Messianic age.²³

The Church as a Royal Ambassador

We must learn to read and understand Scripture as God's word for us, not to us. As Christians living today, we live in the "age to come," the Age of Messiah. Because of the transitional character of the times of the first century Church, we must realize the "wilderness" context of the New Testament. The Church of the Lord Jesus Christ lives now in the Promised Land, the heavenly country, the kingdom of God, the New Creation. In union with her Savior and Lord, when God's people preach and apply of the Gospel of the kingdom the gates of hell, the dark powers, shall not prevail against her (Matthew 16:18; John 1:5). We obey the commands of Christ given to us in the New Testament, not from first-century wilderness perspective, but from the conquering, cruciform perspective of the Age of Messiah.²⁴ It is only as the Church gives witness to Christ – the Son of God crucified, risen, ascended and reigning that she conquers in Him – will the nations of the world stand up and take notice.²⁵

Another malady of modern evangelicalism is its radical pietism. To many, if Jesus is Lord then He is Lord *only* behind the eyes and between the ears. To this, unbelievers say, "That's fine. Keep your Jesus there. We do not want him to be Lord over anything else." Jesus is Lord over heaven *and*

²¹ In II Corinthians 5:19, Paul proclaims that "God was in Christ, reconciling the cosmos to Himself."

²² In his letter to the Ephesians (written in 60), Paul identified the ultimate goal of salvation in Christ as "an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth" (Ephesians 1:10). The phrase *πληρώματος τῶν καιρῶν* (*pleromatos ton kairon*) means the "filling up of the seasons, the opportune times." He told the believers at Ephesus to "redeem the time (*καιρὸν*: *kairon*) for the days are evil" (Ephesians 5:16). To redeem the season means to "buy up the opportunities of the season in which you live."

²³ The seed planted is the seed of the new heavens and new earth, as a holy city coming down from heaven, the new Jerusalem, as John describes it (Revelation 21:1-2). When the seed, planted to die (John 12:24), develops into a mature tree, the new heavens and new earth are in their fullness. What is in the fullness of maturity was in the seed at the beginning.

²⁴ This conquering, this victory, is through the means of the Cross, though means of suffering as we proclaim the message of light in a world held captive by dark powers who do not want to lose their ground, even if they have no ground upon which to stand (Colossians 1:24; Romans 8:17-18, Philippians 2:17; II Corinthians 1:5; 12:15). See footnote 26.

²⁵ From the ancient martyr's hymn of triumph, in Latin, *Christus Vincit, Christus Regnat, Christus Imperat* (Christ is conquering, Christ is reigning, Christ rules over all).

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earth (Matthew 28:18). He is Lord over principalities and powers²⁶, thrones and dominions (Ephesians 1:20-21). He is Lord over the devil (I John 3:8). He is Lord of history (Revelation 19:11-16). He is Lord of all the kings of the earth (Revelation 1:4-6). He is Lord of the nations (Revelation 15:3-4). Since His Lordship is comprehensive, then our understanding of the faith must be comprehensive. The narrow, impotent “get me to heaven when I die” faith of the modern churchman is pseudo-Christianity because modern evangelicalism’s concept of heaven is a far cry from the New Testament hope, the hope of the glory of the resurrected body in the consummated new heavens and new earth. Our present hope is the glorious hope of Christ in us (Colossians 1:27). In union with our Lord, we are His royal priesthood, His royal ambassadors in this world (I Peter 2:9; Ephesians 6:20).

It is no surprise then, given the exegetical flaws of many modern evangelicals, that its witness before the nations is in shambles. When the Church repents of her impotent “the end is near” diatribe and embraces and proclaims the truth that is in Jesus, the mouth of the kings will be shut and listen (Isaiah 52:15). When we return to the confession of the comprehensive Lordship of the Triune God in Jesus Christ, then, and only then, will our witness to the nations be a witness that will be heeded.

The Savior of the World

The age of Messiah is where He rules in glory over all (Matthew 28:18-20; I Peter 3:22). He came to save the world, the cosmos (John 3:16-17; I John 4:14). Do the phrases “reconciling all things to Himself” (Colossians 1:19-20), “reconciling the world (cosmos) to Himself” (II Corinthians 5:19), and “saving the cosmos” necessarily imply a form of universalism that believes that everyone will eventually be saved? No, the evidence of the New Testament states that not all shall reciprocate the love of God shed upon all in Christ.²⁷ Tares exist until the consummation of the age of Messiah (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43). In Romans 2, Paul speaks of people who remain unrepentant, who store up wrath for themselves in a future day of judgment (Romans 2:4-11).

In Revelation 7:9, though, we read that the number of the redeemed will be uncountable, people from every tribe, tongue, and nation.²⁸ On the Cross, Christ has saved the whole world, the cosmos; He saved space (the universe) and humanity (personal, interpersonal, and the fabric of the social order). *He came to save the cosmos, and He did save the cosmos.* As Lord of history, He will so transform all

²⁶ Principalities (ἀρχαί: heads or beginnings) and powers (ἐξουσίαι: authorities) is a New Testament phrase that stands for angelic beings, good (light) and evil (dark). The dark powers have a grip on humanity, and therefore, the cosmos. The strength of this grip is the idolatry of humanity that is the ground of our attitude and acts of sin. Sin is missing the mark (ἁμαρτία: hamartia), aiming one’s worship toward the creation rather than to its Triune Creator (Romans 1:18-32). By our sin, we have handed to the dark powers authority that is properly ours. Christ’s death on the Cross is for our sins; His death breaks the power of darkness and transfers us into His kingdom of light (Colossians 1:13-14).

²⁷ Because of the Triune nature of God, we know God as God in loving, interpenetrating, self-giving relationship (I John 4:8-16). His being is being, not in isolation, but in fellowship. The pristine purity of this communion is what Scripture means by stating that “God is light, God is holy.” That God is being in relationship has profound implications for human freedom, implications beyond the scope of this essay. In brief, what stands out as we read Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, is that God seeks to establish a personal relationship with humanity. God the Father has accomplished the means of that relationship through His Son by His Spirit. Although this relationship is initiated by the Trinity, by the One God in the mutual indwelling of three persons, it must be sustained by a reciprocal response of the individual. See John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985) and Timothy A. Dearborn, “God, Grace and Salvation,” in *Christ in our Place: The Humanity of God in Christ for the Reconciliation of the World – Essays presented to James Torrance*, ed. Trevor Hart & Daniel Thimell (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1989), pp. 265-293.

²⁸ As the number of the sands of the sea and the stars of the sky – see God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 13:14-17.

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things²⁹ by His gospel and His Holy Spirit that, in the end, every mouth will confess will most assuredly that Christ *saved the cosmos*, that He is Lord of all, to the glory of the Father (Philippians 2:5-11). Referring to John 3:16, the Calvinist theologian Benjamin B. Warfield (1851-1921) said early in the 20th century:

The love here celebrated is, we must remember, the love of *God* -- of the Lord God Almighty; and it is love to the *world* -- which altogether “lies in the evil one.” It is a love which is great, and powerful, and all-conquering; which attains its end, and will not stand helpless before any obstacle. It is the precise purpose of the passage to teach us this, to raise our hearts to some apprehension of the inconceivable greatness of the love of God, set as it is upon saving the wicked world ... You must not fancy, then, that God sits helplessly by while the world, which He created for Himself, hurtles hopelessly to destruction, and He is able only to snatch with difficulty here and there a brand from the universal burning ... Through all the years an increasing purpose runs, one *increasing* purpose: the kingdoms of the earth become ever more the kingdom of our God and His Christ. The process may be slow; the progress may appear to our impatient eyes to lag. But it is God who is building; and under His hands the structure rises as steadily as it does slowly, and in due time the capstone shall be set into its place, and to our astonished eyes shall be revealed nothing less than a saved world.³⁰

In Christ, a new order of things arrived – a new administration of the government of the world and the rule of the heavens over the earth (Isaiah 65:17; 66:22; II Peter 3:10-13).³¹ As Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892), the 19th-century prince of preachers, said, “We have come into a new world altogether; a world far more grand than that which nature reveals ... The new-born soul beholds ‘new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.’ That text has come true to some of us.”³²

²⁹ “All things” (τὰ πάντα: ta panta) is a phrase that Paul often uses to describe the cosmos (Colossians 1:16-20), all things in heaven and earth, all things visible and invisible (every atom of space and every person in it), including thrones (θρόνοι: seats of kings) or dominions (κυριότητες: mighty ones) or rulers (ἄρχαι: heads or beginnings) or authorities (ἐξουσίαι: authorities). See also I Peter 4:7; Matthew 17:11; Acts 3:21; Revelation 21:5.

³⁰ Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Saviour of the World* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, [1916] 1991), pp. 122-125. Warfield’s eschatological perspective allowed him to incorporate that belief that the people of God, the elect ones for whom Christ died according to scholastic Calvinist doctrine, will eventually encompass the entire globe, collectively and substantially. See also Benjamin B. Warfield, “The Millennium and the Apocalypse,” in *Biblical Doctrines* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, [1929] 1988), pp. 643-664.

³¹ Isaiah 65 and 66 are the two places in the Old Testament where the new heavens, the new earth, and a radically new Jerusalem are mentioned in promise, and these passages must be what Peter had in mind in the third chapter of his second epistle. A careful reading indicates that the eternal state may *not* be in view. We see Isaiah speaking of birth, aging, death, home construction, agriculture, and worship. Not all of this can be mere imagery. The elements (II Peter 3:10) that are to be dissolved are *not* elements of the physical world (atoms) or the chemical elements of the periodic table. They are the same elements spoken of in Galatians 4:1-11 and Colossians 2:8-20. The same Greek word, *stoicheia*, is used in all three passages. In Galatians (v. 3 and v. 9), Paul is referring to the rudimentary principles of the law that will be skewed without regard to Christ, who is the consummation of the law (Matthew 5:17-20). In Colossians (v. 8 and v. 20), Paul speaks of the sufficiency of Christ for all of life, the substance, in contrast to the rudimentary principles of the cosmos. These principles are the ground of the empty deception and bondage of false wisdom, the transitory shadows of the keeping of Hebrew festivals, self-abasement, visions of the fleshly mind, and prohibitive decrees.

³² Charles Spurgeon, Sermon No. 2197, on Romans 6:4, p. 189, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, Vol. XXXVII; cf. Vol. XXXIII, p. 449.

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