

Eschatology 101

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## Preface

The book of Revelations begins with a blessing. The author writes, “Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.”<sup>i</sup> Then, when we come to the end of the book, we find the words, “I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life in the holy city, which are described in this book.”<sup>ii</sup> For us to look into eschatology,<sup>iii</sup> we need to take seriously this warning. Quite clearly, the author is quoting Deuteronomy 4:2 in the latter passage quoted, however, we hold to this being holy writ. The book of Revelations specifically speaks of a blessing to those who read and hear, and a curse to those who would add or subtract from.

In the case of eschatology in general, I believe that we have the very same blessing and curse. It is a blessing to know and understand the times, for the time is near. However, for they who desire to understand according to human intelligence, they will continue to speculate, and thus add and subtract to attain the curse. Here we have a crucial point. There are only two books in the whole Bible that speak of being sealed: Daniel and Revelations. Concerning the end time pattern, Isaiah also prophesied of a sealed scroll.<sup>iv</sup> The book of Daniel contains the framework for the end times. Jesus even pointed His disciples to the prophecies of Daniel in order to understand what He was saying of the end times.<sup>v</sup>

In Daniel 8:26, we read, “...but seal up the vision, for it concerns the distant future.” Again in Daniel 12:9, we read, “Go your way, Daniel, because the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end.” We find Revelations 22:10 countering that by saying, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near.” Yet, we find in Revelation 10:4, “I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven say, ‘Seal up what the seven thunders have said and do not write it down.’” Thus, we find both an open seal and a closed seal in Revelations. In response, I would like to offer a bit of clarity. To those who desire to take these prophecies and speculate about the near future, the books are closed and sealed. Like insane men, they ‘prophesy’ according to their own visions and lusts. In this, they both ruin the reputation of the prophetic texts, and they also dull the minds of the Body of Christ.

The books are sealed to those who desire to approach them with pride. Yet, to the humble, God will reveal all things. We find in Revelation 5 that the Lamb was worthy to open the seven seals, because he “has triumphed”.<sup>vi</sup> Likewise, for they who desire to understand these things, we must “overcome” as Christ has told all the seven churches. The issue of understanding the end times is an issue of triumph. For those who desire to take hold of these truths for their own gain, or for their own security, they will find that their understanding is darkened. But to the ones that “do not love their lives, even unto the death,”<sup>vii</sup> Christ will reveal to them all the secrets of the visions that have been sealed.

It is at this point that we turn to a question of prologue. In what manner have I written this book? I have two types of chapters: conceptual and Scriptural. The first deals with the concepts in theology<sup>viii</sup>. The second has little comment, and is mostly comparing

Scripture to build the focus of the chapter.<sup>ix</sup> Let me be clear, I strive to support every word with Scripture. The difference is not in the lack of Scripture used, but rather the amount of commentary.

Thus, I desire that we have this understanding from the beginning. As we progress through the concepts, we will be brought to the place where much Scripture can be tersely quoted, and after we have established some foundations from the prophetic texts, we can then go back into some of the deeper concepts of theology. They work together, hand in hand. For this reason, much of what is contained within these pages are not necessarily eschatological subjects. Yet, because I desire to build from the ground up, we need to place them within these pages as prerequisite. This brings me to my final point. Within these pages is an overview of eschatology. I do not dive into much of the symbolism. I don't spend too much time commenting on Scriptures. I don't look at some of the challenging questions, such as why the tribe of Dan is not mentioned in Revelation 7:5-8. I ignore many of the end time discussion, such as the mark of the beast or who the restrainer is in 2 Thessalonians 2.

Here is what I do have within these pages. This is a foundation. Initially, I titled this book "Eschatology 101". After searching for an appropriate title to use "eschatology 101" as a subtitle, I came up with none. Thus, the title remains. But let us remember this: it is eschatology 101, and not anything deeper. In the realm of end time books, many speculate, and very few actually explore what the Scripture says. Within those that explore what the Scripture says, many give multiple mindsets, or they will give their own commentary on the Scripture. It is rare, then, for us to find a book on eschatology that simply asks one question: What does the Bible say? This question is not one of, "What do I think the Bible says," but rather, "What do the Scriptures say?" In this, we compare the Scripture with itself, and we don't look to interpret it based on bias or opinion.

This is both difficult and strenuous, seeing as we all have bias and opinion. As much objectivity as I desire to write this with, I'm certain that my own opinions have seeped into the pages. Thus, I commit this writing to you with a grain of salt. Test everything. If it stands up, and it is indeed what the Scripture says, then no argument will suffice on the Day of Judgment if we desire to ignore what is written. However, if what I have written is only opinion, then I am in deep trouble, for "If anyone adds" or "anyone subtracts words from this book," then "God will add to him the plagues described in this book," and "God will take from him his share in the tree of life." With warning and with blessing, I commend the reader this writing:

Grace and peace in the name of our Lord Jesus. Amen.

## Chapter 1: Stories

For this writing, I desire to start at the very beginning of our Christian walk. So we'll start with stories. The Old Testament is full of stories. From Joshua to Job are all historical accounts of ancient Israel, and the stories of how God relates to His people. We find the New Testament also containing stories about our Lord and Savior Christ Jesus, as well as the book of the Acts of the Apostles. Other books, such as Genesis, Exodus, and Numbers, also have stories, however, these books also have sections that many Christians call "boring". Whether we're talking about the vast genealogies contained within Genesis, the plans for the Tabernacle, the census in Numbers, or we're talking about the many genealogies in Chronicles, many don't delight in reading these sections. Thus, we focus upon the stories first.

The book of 1 John maps out our spiritual progression in the Christian faith.<sup>x</sup> He speaks to children, because their sins have been forgiven on account of his name and they have known the Father. He speaks to the fathers, because they have known him who is from the beginning; an obvious parallel with the first few verses of his letter. John speaks to the young men, because they are strong, and the word of God lives in them, and they have overcome the evil one. We see here the progression of the Christian faith.

And so, I speak to you children, because you have known the Father. You are fascinated with the stories in the Bible because they reveal to you the Jesus that you know and love, and they reveal the Father's heart and character. The stories in the Bible give us insight into who God is. The Scriptures never tell us outright what God's attributes are. Instead, we read of this God that relates to humanity, and loves them simply for who He has created them to be. We read of David taking down the giant, Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus, God sending plagues to Egypt to deliver His people, and Jesus speaking to the leper, "I am willing," just as He reaches out His hand to heal the man.

These stories stir up something inside us. They stir in us an appreciation and love for God. They cause us to stagger. Who is like our God that will nearly bankrupt an entire nation, Egypt, just so that He can deliver His people from slavery? Would our God truly send fire down from heaven upon a sacrifice on Mount Carmel when one of His prophets prays? We're stirred to ask the question, "Where is the God of Elijah?" These stories stir in us a zeal and passion to see God working in our midst. We desire His power and His love to be manifest in us and through us to a world that is dying and lost, and that doesn't even realize that it is dead and in bondage.

These stories work in us a hope. That hope does not put us to shame, but instead fills our hearts with glory. Jesus is not only our Savior. He is our Rock, our fortress, our protection, our hope in times of need, and He is our all-in-all. We come to love Him and amaze at just how far this God will go in order to protect His children. This God always hears the cry of the oppressed, and the proof is in both the stories as well as our own story. Many times what captures me about David, Elijah, or the apostle Paul (and all the other saints that have gone on before us) is that they are men of like passions. I'm amazed at what God will do through a willing servant, but I realize as well that God is equally willing to work like that through me. He is equally willing to work like that through you.

The stories in the Bible give us a framework for understanding God and His relationship to us. When I first came to Christ, I was fascinated with these stories. I had never heard of the Spirit descending like a dove, or Abram being called out of his family, or David defeating Goliath, or even the trial and crucifixion of Jesus. I had never heard these stories. All I knew was that God is supposed to forgive those that come to Him in repentance. And when I started to read these stories, I started to realize that this God is a personal God. He is a God that speaks, and not simply some far off God that we pray to and hope that He hears.

I speak to you young men, because you are strong, and the word of God is in you, and you have overcome the evil one. To you, these stories are more than just stories. They are patterns. They are types. They are foreshadowing. God has worked out purposes for our lives and for the whole of history, and He has explained it within these stories. We see that David is not simply a man that once upon a time threw a smooth stone and crushed the forehead of the giant Goliath. David is a type that all Christians are to reflect. With our smooth stones that we have gotten out of the creek, that place of prayer where living waters flow from our bellies, and the rock being the word of God – the promise of God – we are not afraid to cast that stone at the devil with all of our passion and intensity knowing at whom we are aiming.

You, young men, know the story of Rachel that cried out to Jacob, “Give me children or I die!” And you look up to heaven and cry with a loud voice, “My God! Give me souls or I die!” We see Joseph and how he goes from being promoted to cast into a pit, back to being promoted under Potiphar, and then once again cast down into a pit. We see that this Joseph is eventually brought up to stand under Pharaoh, and he is second in command over all of Egypt. We see this and understand the pattern for our own lives. We see how God works. Just because we’re feeling downcast now does not mean that we will remain down forever. With David we plead, “Praise the Lord, oh my soul.”<sup>xi</sup>

God has revealed to us the patterns and the types and the symbols that these stories represent. We are not simply to be imitating Elijah because he was a mighty prophet of God, but because we are called to be an Elijah people. We are called to stand against the spiritual powers of darkness. Those that convince men of their false religion, whether it is Hinduism or pseudo-Christianity, we stand against those dark forces that blind them. We give the ultimatum, “May the God that answers by fire be God.” In this, we know in whom we have believed. We trust fully in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We wrestle not in the name of Jesus Christ as though it is some addendum to “amen,” but rather in Jesus’ character. Because we wrestle according to the word and character of God, we are given the victory over the powers of darkness, both personally and in community with other believers.

I speak to you fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. You know that He that shows the end from the beginning. You see in the stories of the creation how they parallel the end times. You see the whole of Scripture, from beginning to end, and therefore are able to recognize the end-time paradigm contained within the stories of the Bible. Your sight is deeper than that of the young men. They who are able to recognize the significance of the patterns put forth in the stories see further than they realize, but they don’t see the whole of it. When we read of Esther and Mordechai, we are

reading an end time message about an antichrist figure that desires to kill all of the Jewish people. From their birth, there has been a demonic spirit that desires their death.<sup>xii</sup>

You, oh fathers, know and see the distinction between the purposes of God and the intentions of men. You can ask with Elijah, “How long, O Israel, will you waiver between two opinions?” You have spiritual depth and clarity. You see the end from the beginning, and therefore are able to discern the true from the false. Because you know God’s original intention, for you know Him who is from the beginning, you are able to discern the pattern that God has given for the Church today. Whether we are truly living according to that apostolic and prophetic Body that we’re called to be, or whether we’re content to live far beneath the glory of God, you know.

These stories are living realities in your midst. You see and perceive them as more than history. They are more than patterns. They are the prophetic intention of God for all of time and history, and you are able to speak words and instruction to build up and edify the saints. The words that you speak are from the heart of God, and therefore they equip the Body for her ultimate intention and call. You see past the dimensions of “local church” and into the dimension of Church as God has prescribed it. You see and understand that a Body that is fascinated with self will continue to neuter self.

You see the breadth of insight regarding the Church and her ultimate purposes for her nation, against the principalities and powers, and unto the Jewish people. The Bible tells one story, and it is an unfolding story to the consummation of the age. Every detail to that consummation expresses another pattern and type of the ultimate confrontation at the end of the age between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness. The whole of the Scripture is livid with every sort of type and pattern to help us in understanding both God and His purposes, which ultimately helps in understanding who we are in God and the purposes that we have in Him.

## Chapter 2: All of Scripture

Just like in the previous chapter we went from being a child to being a father, I would also like to address the subject of Scripture in this fashion. We often think of the Bible as being the “good book.” There are cute clichés about how it is the B-I-B-L-E, the Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth. We see it as a manual. There are all sorts of silly and trivial ways that people view the Bible, but what exactly is the correct way of viewing Scripture?

For myself, when I first came to Christ, I knew nothing. I read the smaller books of the Bible so that I could read through the whole of it in one sitting. Then, I moved on to trying to read larger books. When I was about a month along in my faith, a friend of mine set me up as a leader of a Bible study. I panicked. In order to know *something* to talk about, I read the book of Job. Did I mention that I read it in one night? I went to that Bible study having my head full of the book of Job, not knowing anything of what the book was even talking about, and why were these three friends making God upset? It seemed like they had legitimate arguments. And why was Job allowed to suffer? I don’t get it. I had just experienced a God that *loves* and is willing to forgive.

I was wrestling with the story, because this Job character was a righteous man. How is it that God would allow for the righteous to suffer so terribly, and yet I, myself, who was a terribly wicked sinner, was given grace and charity? I told the story of Job. And then I asked my questions. I did not have one answer to give to those questions. I was a babe, and I had never heard any of these things. The questions staggered my listeners. They didn’t have answers either. At least, most of them didn’t have answers. There was only one who did. He took up the challenge to explain how the book of Job is about a man that is being accused by Satan, and God trusts him. He explained how the righteous are persecuted simply because they are righteous and the unrighteous need no other excuse. He explained how God then used this as an opportunity to show Job that even though He trusted Job, Job did not trust God.

This Bible study was possibly the worst thing that anyone could have ever come up with. Who in his or her right mind would ask someone so young in the faith to speak on something so critical? Yet, God brought me through it. I learned a lot. In spite of knowing very little, and having no one willing to sit down and teach me, I was placed before people in a way that I was supposed to communicate biblical truth. It was with this that I started pouring through the Scripture.

Those first few years, I found myself reading about a God that is merciful. Even when I read Leviticus, I found a Jesus that was our ultimate scapegoat. He is the fulfillment of our drink offering, our burnt offering, our meal offering, and even a fulfillment of our feasts. I found in Christ the ultimate sacrifice for my sin. I began to see and understand that this God is not some New Testament Jesus, but once and for all. He has always had the same character and never changed. I found Jesus in the Bible, and I knew that this was the word of God because I had an extra-biblical source to prove it: a personal relationship with that risen Savior. For you who are young in the faith, the whole of Scripture speaks to you about this risen Savior and His love for you. God has saved you, and you are eternally grateful.

For the young men, you read the Scripture and you find that it gives purpose to your life. Not only do you find Christ in all things, but now also you find yourself in those same Scriptures. Jesus laid down His life as a living sacrifice to the Father, and so we too are called to lay down our lives as living sacrifices. This idea of finding God's purposes for our lives is not constituted upon pride or ego-centrism. It is founded upon the revelation that there is more to life than work, food, defecation, sleep, school, make a name for self, be successful, have kids, buy a home, and all the other things that society tells us are "proper."

Our whole culture is set up around the idea of perpetuating the system. I'm born, I learn to walk, talk, and eat, I become potty trained, and I am now officially a "toddler." From there, I learn how to tie my shoes, I learn to read, I learn basic everyday things that give me a little more independence, and it is at this point that I am now old enough for Kindergarten, where I will continue for the next 13 years of my life to learn what the government classifies as necessary. At the age of about 10 or 12 I start to change; that change is called puberty. As I continue to grow through adolescence, I stop relying so heavily upon my parents. I might get a job, I consider what I'm supposed to do with my life, I look into colleges, I start dating, etc.

It is after college that I am supposed to get a "good job." What is a good job? It is a job that pays well. Somewhere between graduating High School and turning 30, I should be able to find a wife, move out of apartment living and into a house, begin to pay off my school debt, have a child or two, and continue to strive to move up in the corporate ladder. It is when I have a child that I then begin to train them up in the same process that I have now gone through. They grow up to be 18, and I begin to help them in their process of being an adult and moving out into their own lives. They have children, and I become a grandparent. I then give my whole life savings away to that grandchild, because I never knew when I had my own children how much I can love a child. I then grow to the age of retirement, and I live the rest of my life (hopefully) in my home until I pass away. That is supposed to be "life."

Yet, for the young man in the faith, you read the Bible. You find in the Scripture a different pattern. God requires that we put our trust in Him, and not in a system. We are called out of Egypt, which is out of the worldly system that binds us to death. Against logic and against rationale, we pursue a different kind of living. We pursue the lifestyle of love. That lifestyle is characterized as the righteous in Proverbs by saying, "Wealth is worthless in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death."<sup>xiii</sup> This man is generous, even when he has nothing.

We begin to experience in our youth a different kind of humanity. That humanity was God's ultimate intention from the beginning. We see the pattern that has been laid out in front of us, lived out in the man Christ Jesus, and we pursue that heavenly glory. Whether by definitive foolishness or by supreme sound judgment, we give ourselves over to the lifestyle that declares, "Either God is God, or I perish." We hold onto the promises that "the Lord does not let the righteous go hungry,"<sup>xiv</sup> and if we "seek first His kingdom, all these things will be added."<sup>xv</sup> Though the world finds this to be absolute insanity, we find that the Scriptures teach one message of this lifestyle being authoritative reality. We cling to the insanity in faith, hoping against hope, because God is God, and He does not lie.<sup>xvi</sup>

It is in our youth that we discover that God has chosen every person for a destiny. We have personally been chosen to fulfill God's ultimate purposes, even if those ultimate purposes are to be objects of wrath. I have been run out of every congregation that I've desired to be a part of. I can look back and honestly say that there are times where I have been the cause of such things, but there is always something beyond that. The reason that I'm run out, and that my wife and I together are also quite the team at causing an offense, is because we just seem to be the very ones that God desires to use in order to display the sin of those that we come in contact with. I have been foolish in the past, but even with that foolishness there is an obvious undertone of truth and reality.

It is God that forms the clay, and we simply conform to what He has made us to be. This is ultimate freedom. Some define freedom as the ability or "choice" to do what you want. That isn't freedom; it is slavery. Freedom requires that we are bound by one thing, and one thing alone: the very core of who we are. We live from the reality of the very fabric of our being. That essence, that when you strip away all of the personality, reflexes, habits, ambition, goals, hopes, circumstances, and all these sorts of things that define the person we are today, but ultimately are outside forces – it is that essence from the very center of your soul that defines who you are. When that absolute center of who you are is yielded to Christ, and you live from that source and that source alone, then you are free.

No longer are you bound by reactions to things you cannot control. No longer do you find yourself in a place where you are lacking. You have overcome the evil one, because Satan cannot destroy who you are in Christ. Those decisions that we make, and the reaction to how we're treated or mistreated, create bondage upon us. Blatant sin, such as addictions, fits of rage, and perverse speech, are manifestations of a deeper issue. Those deeper issues need to be engaged and wrestled against. We find in the Scripture alone the very thing necessary to do so: the crucified life.

By claiming that our life is no longer our own, we overcome all things. We submit self to a place of foolishness. It is in that mode of living, where we aren't sure how we're supposed to continue to live life that causes all of these root issues to bubble to the surface. Living a life of comfort and luxury does not lend itself to seeing the truth of our hearts. We need to throw away our televisions. We need to unplug the internet. We need to get away from all of the conveniences of perfectly temperate homes all year long. When we find ourselves uncomfortable, whether because we can't afford meat or because we no longer have entertainment to keep us busy through the day, it is in those moments that reality looks us in the face. The person you are when there is no longer convenience and ease is who you are in actuality.

But there is still a deeper insight. You, who are fathers, you don't just see your own purpose in Scripture. You don't only hear the voice of God beckoning you to be who He has created you to be. You see God's eternal and cosmic purposes for all of humanity and all of creation. When you view the big picture from Genesis to the New Heaven and New Earth, you find that God has pressed one question alone: How do I live in unadulterated communion with my creation? That one question branches off into every other aspect of theology. To understand the answer to that one question is to understand everything, because it relies first and foremost upon the heart and character of God.

God has established an eternal plan of redemption for all of creation, of which we are only a part, and that eternal plan of cosmic redemption is unfolding even at this very moment. Asking the “why” and the “how” questions are to seek the face of God Himself. He is intimately tied up with His ultimate purposes for all things. Those purposes are the reason for my writing. As an introduction, we need some very basic understanding. We need to know that the stories in the Bible are patterns of that ultimate consummation at the end of the age. We need to know that the Bible gives one testimony. We need to understand that God has placed this at the heart of every verse and every passage.

The whole of the Bible paints a portrait, of which all of the different ins and outs of theology string together to form the beautiful tapestry of God. When we seek to know any subject in the faith, we must first and foremost seek to know the end from the beginning, and the beginning from the end. From that large overview of the cosmic redemption and eternal perception we come into a better foundation of understanding all other subjects. To teach these things is to teach Christ, because they are His ultimate purposes. God does not desire what is not a reflection of Him. So, to seek an answer to these eternal and weighty matters, we are pressing ourselves into a very tight space.

This will either cause you to grow up quickly, or cause you to reject everything that I am personally standing for. I hope that the statement can be said of me, as God told Samuel, “They do not reject you, but instead they reject me.”<sup>xvii</sup> This message of the cosmic redemption of all things is one that causes much chafing, because it rubs our face in the grit of judgment, apocalypse, devastation, fear, and torture. It causes us to turn aside and see the bush that is burning, but is not consumed. That bush is a symbol of the Christian life. Ultimately, it is not just you or I, but the corporate people of God that is on fire. It is painful to consider severe devastation and agony to come upon the ones we love. It is even more difficult when the ones we love, and the people that we love, have been made into idols.

God’s eternal purposes search for a time when every people group, and every nation, will come to Him and offer sacrifices of praise unto Him. As the Scripture unfolds, we find that God has selected a certain people, Israel, to be His people. He has selected a certain Land, Canaan, to put His dwelling. He has selected a certain city, Jerusalem, from which to rule and reign over all nations of the earth. If we have a problem with that people, that land, that city, or God’s specificity, then we have a problem with God Himself. These are not issues of real estate or redemption of whoever is willing to come unto Christ. These are issues of the very nature of who God is.

### Chapter 3: Theocracy

What is theocracy? *Theos* is the Greek word meaning “god.” We know what democracy is: government ruled by the people. Theocracy is a government ruled by God. When we’re expressing the Kingdom of God, we’re expressing the rule of God. Jesus has Himself called the Gospel “the Gospel of the Kingdom.”<sup>xviii</sup> This is very possibly the central theme of all of Scripture. We aren’t talking about some sort of ethereal utopia when discussing the Kingdom of God. Instead, we’re speaking of a reality.

Paul said that the Jerusalem from above is our mother.<sup>xix</sup> Even before the New Heaven and New Earth there is apparently a ‘New Jerusalem.’ Jerusalem is the symbol and statement of God’s ultimate intention. When you read Psalms or prophetic Scriptures that say something like, “Come, let us go up to Jerusalem,” it is because Jerusalem has become the fulfillment of God’s ultimate intention. Though it is a literal city, and many Scriptures are to be translated as a people going up to that literal city, it is also a symbol. We are to be the Jerusalem of God according to Revelation 21<sup>xx</sup>. The Bride of Christ is called the New Jerusalem that comes down out of heaven.

It is that Bride that comes down that is being expressed when Hebrews 12:22 says, “But ye have come unto Zion...” It is not saying that we have somehow achieved a super-spiritual place, but instead have achieved a reality. By being in Christ, we are no longer strangers and pilgrims without home. We have come unto our home, and our home is Zion. Our home is not here upon this earth. It is heavenly. That heavenly reality has a certain character and quality about it.

We read in Colossians 3:17, “Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.” This is our mandate. We are of a different kingdom. Our life should be lived through a different society. The homes we buy for ourselves, the type of clothing we wear, the occupations or careers that we are employed by, what we do with our money, and how we spend our time should all be considered in light of the Kingdom. God’s people have a certain culture about them. We need to know what that culture is.

To be in the Kingdom of God, we must yield ourselves fully to that Kingdom. Nothing is our own. Everything is unto Jesus. To be Kingdom minded is to be heavenly minded. There is no difference in terms. The Kingdom of God is heaven. Theocracy is the government of God. God rules from Zion. Currently, Zion is a heavenly reality, but it will soon be married to the earthly Zion. When Christ returns, He shall rule and reign from that locality over all of the families of the earth. We will be united with Him to rule and reign for 1000 years. The only thing necessary to achieve that calling is to come unto Zion. We put away all hindrances and the sin that so easily entangles us, and run the race with full passion.<sup>xxi</sup>

The New Heaven and New Earth are barely described at all in Scripture. The reason for this is twofold: it is something so holy that God does not reveal its majesty to those that have not also endured great struggle, and we only see through a glass darkly. John was not able to describe the New Jerusalem coming out of heaven with language that we would understand. He looked for symbols and metaphors in order to explain what

he saw. The glory that Saint John beheld was more than language can express.<sup>xxii</sup> It is that glorious City that we are currently seated in.<sup>xxiii</sup>

Who of us truly believes that? It is that belief, that we have come unto Zion, that actually keeps us and saves us from deception. It keeps us from falling away, and it saves us from anything less than that glory. Anything less than the glory of God is apostasy, because the glory of God is in you<sup>xxiv</sup>. It is the love of that reality, the glory of God, which is the love of truth.<sup>xxv</sup> God's glory is Truth. It is ultimate reality, which is to say ultimate truth. When I say that anything less than the glory of God is apostasy, what I am communicating is that any settling for something less than truth and reality is a false ground to live our lives from.

We actually pay a much higher price than we could know for such settling. It is a difficult thing to follow God. The Sermon on the Mount displays the impossibility of following Christ in our own ability. It actually takes the Spirit of God to walk in obedience to God. It is obedience to that Spirit, which is always obedience to the Scripture, that will keep us in the days to come. How do we make it through these hard times that are about to come upon us? We live like Jesus told us to.

If we were to only take the Sermon on the Mount and live according to those words, our lives would be completely other than what we have ever subjected ourselves to. That alone is enough to constitute that we are of a different kingdom. But if we don't live like that *now*, why should we believe that we would live like that *then*? At what time do you think that somehow the Holy Ghost will fall and "all of a sudden" you will be able to endure until the end? This is deception, dear children. We deceive ourselves if we think that we can currently live in luxury and comfort without there being severe repercussions in the soon coming future.

### Adopted as Children of God

In the question of what it means to be a part of the Kingdom of God, one of the most often quoted verses is found in Luke 17, "...the kingdom of God is within you."<sup>xxvi</sup> There is something that chafes me about this flippant quotation. It preaches 'good', but it simply is not true. The context that we use in saying that the Kingdom of God is within you is incorrect. Jesus was making a point here. He was saying that currently, at that time, the Kingdom of God was among them. It was within in the sense of among, or in the middle. The Kingdom of God is fully come when Christ Jesus rules and reigns from Zion over Israel, and Israel over all of the nations of the world. The statement is being made that the Kingdom has come, because Christ is here.

There is a conflict that is being expressed throughout the Scripture. The Kingdom of God is expressed from the beginning to the end. There are literal kingdoms. There is the Kingdom of Light, and the Kingdom of Darkness. Those two kingdoms are at enmity with one another. Our adoption into the Kingdom of Light is a salvation from the one kingdom and into the other. While we were once given over to the sinful habits of the flesh, and were bound under the power of the devil, which is death, we are liberated and made free from both death and sin by the blood of Jesus Christ.

Each kingdom symbolizes a wisdom. By wisdom, I mean value system. The one kingdom, the kingdom of darkness, promotes self. We were at one time governed by that selfish wisdom. Now, because we are children of Light, our chains of selfishness have been broken off. The Kingdom of God is governed by selflessness. We have the two wisdoms symbolized in the two trees within the Garden of Eden. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil is a symbol of this world's wisdom, handed over to the kingdom of darkness, and ruled over by the same serpent, the devil, that deceived Adam and Eve into taking that fruit. The tree of life symbolizes the heart and character of God – humility and sacrifice.

The tree of the knowledge of good and evil is about coming to our own conclusions. While Jesus said that no one is good but God alone, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil tells us that humanity is sufficient. That tree tempts us to use our own intelligence to discover the things of God. Yet, it is the tree of life that says our intelligence can't comprehend the things of God. To take of the tree of life is to take up our crosses and follow Christ. Even in our understanding and knowledge, we forfeit our own opinions to take up what it might be that God would reveal. His thoughts are higher than our thoughts, and His ways are higher than our ways, but we have the mind of Christ.<sup>xxvii</sup> To be ruled by the Kingdom of God, we must come out from our old mindsets and habits to be ruled by a different mindset and government.

It always amazes me to find people that claim they are ambassadors of heaven, and yet their lifestyle is completely contrary to my own. In a sense, I don't believe that God truly cares all that much about what cereals we buy, what kind of clothes we wear, what kind of music we listen to, and those sorts of things. Yet, there is a sense in which what makes up our lifestyle – the home we live in, how many clothes and shoes we own, whether we go out to eat regularly or cook at home, how we spend our money, what we lend our time and devotion to, etc – should be governed by a different culture than the one we've been taught.

Discussing with speakers who travel, it doesn't take long before you realize that staying at people's homes is quite revealing as to whether or not they have truly been given to the Kingdom of God. Some homes have a closet so full of jackets and coats that are never even worn that the speaker can't find room for his own coat. Some provide a massive meal for the speaker, and others will set the plate with the allotted portions and don't you dare ask for seconds. Some people live in homes that are barely big enough for their families, because they want to be conservative and use their money in better ways. Others live in homes that have many more bedrooms than they have people living there. How is it that there is such a massive difference?

From what tree are we gaining our opinions? What kingdom is telling us how to live? The tree of the knowledge of good and evil is a selfish tree. It symbolizes self-preservation. The branches go out and develop into self-promotion. The fruit is self-gratification, which, when we eat it, we find that the seeds bring forth death. The tree of life is a cross. It symbolizes sacrifice. The branches go out and develop into humility. The fruit itself is death, but the seeds bring forth eternal life. When we attempt to take of the fruit of that tree in selfish motive, we find that we are all the more practicing the values of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In order to obtain life we must lose life. It seems absolutely absurd.

Everything in the world tells us that we gain life by preserving and maintaining life. Why do you think such practices as botox and other forms of plastic surgery are popular? To the world, and in the natural, we assume that life is actually about doing things and having toys and taking adventure. Enjoying life means vacation. It means retirement. It means playing games. It means having fast moving vehicles. We eat, drink, and are merry, for tomorrow we die.<sup>xxviii</sup> Yet, the tree of life expresses to us that we are not truly living until we have truly died.

Adoption into this kingdom means passing from death to life. We were once dead in transgression and sin.<sup>xxix</sup> We were once enslaved by our lusts and greed. God has brought freedom to the captive,<sup>xxx</sup> and life to the dead.<sup>xxxi</sup> No longer are our lives lived under the bondage of sin and depravity.<sup>xxxii</sup> Instead, we are now given ultimate hope. We are children of God.<sup>xxxiii</sup> Our inheritance awaits us.<sup>xxxiv</sup> With the new birth, we have been brought into a kingdom that is not like the kingdom we've lived in up to this point. Everything about it is contrary. But we know that even though we live contrary to the way of the world, and indeed at enmity with the world,<sup>xxxv</sup> we have a better inheritance that will endure.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

Adoption is about coming into the Kingdom of God. It is about discovering the Father that has so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.<sup>xxxvii</sup> It is about coming to the light so that the darkness might be exposed,<sup>xxxviii</sup> and we might have sublime freedom. To be adopted is the first stage of discovery. We're now exposed to a new and different reality. This reality is invisible, and yet more tangible than the false reality that the culture around us lives in and promotes. Our adoption pushes back the kingdom of darkness, and it fixes us to be brought into the Holy City where there is no night, and no darkness.<sup>xxxix</sup> It might be the first step, but that first step is a doozy.

### A clash between light and darkness

The Kingdom of God is a Kingdom of Light.<sup>xl</sup> The opposite is the kingdom of darkness. We don't need to point fingers or play the "blame game" to figure out what nations and peoples are in what kingdoms. The truth is that there are only these two. Neither are a physical reality (yet), and both are also spiritual conditions. It is a condition to be in the Kingdom of God. You cannot do anything to get yourself in or out of that by your own strength and ability. It is of grace that you are saved, and not of works.<sup>xli</sup> Likewise, "we were born dead in our sins and transgressions, in which we used to live when we followed the ruler of the kingdom of the air."<sup>xlii</sup>

Some have argued that to walk according to the light, as written in 1 John, is a statement of walking in purity. This is not true. When we look at the gospel of John we find a conversation with Jesus and Nicodemus. In this conversation, Jesus makes a remarkable statement: "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved the darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."<sup>xliii</sup> Walking according to the light is not about

purity, but about transparency. We are open and honest. We don't hide ourselves. We can see, because we are willing for others to see us.<sup>xliv</sup>

Those that are righteous will discern the times. They will know whether what is written in this book is true or not.<sup>xlv</sup> It takes righteousness to know truth, not intelligence. If we are of the light, then we will be discerning. It doesn't take any kind of wand waving or cultivation of the Spirit. Yes, it is a gift, but ultimately we are all called to "discern the spirits."<sup>xlvi</sup> If we cannot practice discernment in our own lives now, then how shall we discern at the end when everything will be done to fool even the elect?<sup>xlvii</sup>

This battle between light and dark has been going on from the beginning. What God had originally allowed to remain upon the earth and called it 'very good,' Satan has now manipulated darkness into something abominable. What was intended to cloak God so that He might have fellowship with humanity has been perverted in order to blind and deceive humanity. But now God has brought into the world the Light, and so we are all without excuse.<sup>xlviii</sup> Those that reject the Light do so because they love darkness. It has nothing to do with 'not knowing.'

Jesus is the Light, which is also the light of men.<sup>xlix</sup> He came into this dark world to set free the blind, the captive, and the enslaved. He is our Moses that went to the Pharaoh, which is the devil, and proclaimed, "Let my people go!" Our exodus from darkness into His marvelous light<sup>1</sup> is characterized by our new identities. He has given us all new names in Heaven,<sup>li</sup> so that we might walk according to the righteousness that He has given us instead of the old sinful habits. We are new creations, and therefore we are no longer objects of darkness.<sup>lii</sup>

His sheep hear His voice,<sup>liii</sup> and anyone that is still in darkness without understanding has only himself or herself to blame. Jesus told us that He would give us the Holy Spirit to "tell us what is yet to come."<sup>liv</sup> He also told His disciples that He does not consider us servants, but friends.<sup>lv</sup> You tell your friends even the secret things, and so we ought to be able to discern the times. As we have faith to believe for it, to that extent God can reveal His plans and purposes.

In the end, only light remains. Light prevails over the darkness. It doesn't matter how bad it gets, we can remind ourselves of this and rejoice. Good always defeats evil. It is inherent in the wisdom of God. We can go to our own deaths and martyrdoms with joy knowing that what is to come will surpass anything that we can think, feel, or imagine in this life. Even in martyrdom we show light in the darkness. Our lives are lived in a way that display the Kingdom of Light to a world that is in darkness. Likewise, our deaths shall also display God's Kingdom and His power.

We do not fear, because fear comes from a lack of faith. Perfect love casts out fear.<sup>lvi</sup> But why does perfect love cast out fear? It casts out fear because we know in whom we have believed. God is our judge, and we know how He shall judge us. Because we know that there is no judgment or destruction coming upon us (also known as the second death), we shall not fear. Love has been perfected in us, because we know that Christ has loved us. He has loved us, and we have loved Him. If we remain in that love and do His commandments, then we shall never fear. His command is to love one another. In perfect love, fear is driven out.<sup>lvii</sup> This is the wisdom of God. We overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony.<sup>lviii</sup> Our testimony is not our own,

but Christ's. It is the testimony of His redemption. "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."<sup>lix</sup> When the enemy tries to overcome us, we have victory even in our death, because light overcomes the darkness, and darkness cannot overcome the light.

### Who will rule over this cosmos?

This is at the heart of the Gospel. Many times we think that the Gospel is somehow a formula to get saved. We think that the Gospel is a magic genie lamp that if we pray a prayer, and 'believe the gospel,' that God is then bound by His word to save us. The Gospel in the first century was about how Jesus overcame the devil.<sup>lx</sup> The question wasn't about how do we get to be saved, and therefore enjoy heaven when we die. The question was, "Who will rule over this cosmos?"

During the time of Jesus, Caesar Augustus ruled.<sup>lxi</sup> The Roman Empire stretched from Britain to India. It was the known world. If there were a people that were known, Rome took them over by force. This is a physical depiction of a spiritual reality. The devil has taken this world by force, and has challenged God. Satan has proclaimed that he desires the Throne of heaven, but that Throne cannot be occupied by anyone other than God.<sup>lxii</sup> So the whole of the Bible is speaking of this drama. Who will rule over this cosmos: God or Satan?

It isn't enough to explain that God will defeat Satan. Eschatology explains how and why God is now able to dwell on the earth. There is a coming Kingdom where Heaven and Earth shall marry. How does that take place? Why does that take place? These are the questions of eschatology. It searches to understand the Bible as a whole instead of isolating individual passages. We aren't so caught up in asking when the end will come, who will be the Antichrist, whether the Pope will be the false prophet or the Antichrist, or whether all of this fits into past history. We aren't trying to figure out how much of the Book of Revelations has been completed and how much of it is future. Instead, our primary purpose and intention is to seek to understand the heart of God.

There is a coming Kingdom. Either Satan will rule over the whole world, or God will rule over the whole world. If Satan is able to foil the plans of God, then Christ Jesus does not return. God has both established that a very peculiar and specific plan should unfold, and also stacked the cards against Him. He has made sure that when everyone sees that He will defeat Satan that there will be no excuse or question. God is real, and He has come to dwell among us. He establishes His Kingdom, and any nation that rejects that Kingdom will be cut off from the face of the earth.<sup>lxiii</sup> To understand the purposes of God is to understand His heart. That is the foundation of all of our studies.

To reject Christ and His Kingdom upon this earth is to reject God Himself. Nothing else can play out before you to convince you to repent. It is at that moment that the only thing that awaits you is judgment. Your condemnation is already present, because to reject the light is to beg God for hellfire. Everything revolves around His Kingdom. "And this Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come".<sup>lxiv</sup>

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