



The Sword & The Plow

Newsletter of the Bimillennial Preterist Association

Vol. XV, No. 3 – March 2012

How Do Preterist's View the Kingdom of Christ?

Kurt Simmons

Fulfilled Magazine asked me to respond to the following question. My follows: "Futurism looks for a future, physical kingdom of God here on earth. Preterism, on the other hand, believes that we are in the kingdom now. Based on that, how would you describe the kingdom of God"?

Those who look for a future kingdom typically believe that it will involve modern state of Israel and the restoration of the Davidic throne, which will be extended over all the earth. They believe that the kingdom entails Jesus reigning over earth *from earth*, seated upon an *earthly throne*. This notion grows out of the fact that David reigned over an earthly kingdom whose capital city was Jerusalem. Since Christ was to be the restorer of the Davidic throne, they suppose that Christ must also reign from earth, seated in Jerusalem. But this mistakes the case entirely.

When our first ancestor sinned, God promised a "Seed" - a kinsman redeemer - to save the race. God told the serpent:

"And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." Gen. 3:17

This prophecy, known as the "protevangelium," occupies two levels: On a spiritual level, it looked to the defeat of sin and death. The serpent - a personification of the power of sin and death - would bruise Christ's heel in his crucifixion. But Christ would crush the head of sin and death in his atoning sacrifice and resurrection. On an earthly level, the prophecy describes the enmity between the woman (God's people) and the serpent (the church's enemies). Christ would bring victory to his people, delivering

them out of the power of their enemies. Zechariah, father of John the Baptist, touched upon this latter aspect of Christ's appearance in his "song":

"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began: That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us...that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear." Lk. 1:68-75

It is in Christ's deliverance of his people from their enemies that the "kingdom" exists and is realized. However, it is important that we keep *both* ends of the protevangelium in view. Those who look for a future earthly King and kingdom typically lose sight of the fact Jesus was sent into the world to die for the world's sin. Classic Dispensationalism teaches that Jesus came to establish an earthly kingdom, but when the Jews rejected him, nailing him to a cross, the church-age was introduced as a "stop gap" measure until the Jews are ready to accept Christ and convert *en masse*, at which time Jesus will establish his earthly kingdom introducing a millennial paradise of peace on earth. Dispensationalism's idea of Christ as king upon earth should be compared with the prophet Daniel's depiction of Christ's coronation:

"I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, and all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed." Dan. 7: 13, 14

Kingdom Received at Christ's Ascension

Notice that Daniel's prophecy places Christ's coronation at his *ascension*, not his incarnation or second coming. Jesus' death upon a Roman cross was *foreknown and foreordained* by God; the cross and church of Christ were not "stop gap" measures, but the *eternal purpose* of God to save his people (Isa. 53; Acts 2:23; cf. Isa. 53; Lk. 24:46, 47; Eph. 3:10, 11). The seat of Jesus' kingdom was never intended to be upon earth, but had always been set *in heaven* at the right hand of God. Thus, the reign of Jesus from the heaven is depicted all through scripture. This is particularly true of the "resurrection" Psalms. Psalm

two describes the murder of Christ and the victory of Jesus in his resurrection and ascension. God "begat" Jesus as a Son in his resurrection; he set him as king upon his "holy hill of Zion" (heavenly Jerusalem), and gave him the kingdoms of the world for his inheritance, which he rules with a rod of iron:

"Ask of me and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." Ps. 2:8, 9; cf. Rom. 1:4

Psalm 110 similarly describes Christ's rule from God's right hand in heaven:

"The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies." Ps. 110:1, 2

Psalm 2 and 110 thus describe the reign of Christ; both extend it over the heathen and Christ's enemies; both set it at God's right hand in heaven in precisely the same terms as Daniel's coronation vision. The New Testament epistles and Acts affirm that Psalm 2 and 110 were fulfilled in Christ's ascension (Acts 2:34, 35; 13:33; Heb. 1:13; 12:2; I Pet. 3:22). Moreover, John portrays the heavenly coronation of Christ as an *accomplished fact*, drawing on the imagery and language of Daniel and the Psalms (Rev. 5; 12:5), and Jesus himself indicates present fulfillment of Psalm 2 (Rev. 2:26, 27). Hence, prophecies like Isa. 9:6, 7, which speak of Christ ruling upon David's throne, looked for fulfillment in his resurrection and ascension, not upon earth.

Learn War No More

Some will object that many, if not most, nations are in denial and rebellion of Christ's authority and Sonship: How does this square with imagery of the Messianic kingdom where the nations "beat their swords into plowshares" and learn war no more? Consider this prophecy of Isaiah:

"And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of

Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. "Isa. 2:2-4

This imagery is commonly relied upon by Millennialists as foretelling a time of universal peace on earth under the Messiah. However, this mistakes the passage.

First, it must be pointed out that scripture nowhere foretells a time when all nations willingly submit to Christ. Just the opposite: When Psalm 110 says "*rule thou in the midst of thine enemies,*" it presupposes resistance to Christ's reign. Likewise, when Psalm 2 says the Son will break the nations with a rod of iron and thus urges earth's kings and judges to "*kiss the Son, lest he be angry and ye perish from the way*" (v. 12), it indicates that Christ governs all nations, whether they acknowledge him or not (*cf.* Zech. 14:16-19). Indeed, Isaiah himself says as much when he states that Christ will "*judge among the nations and shall rebuke many peoples*" (Isa. 2:4). Thus, the notion of a time when universal peace will obtain on earth is mere fantasy.

Second, when Isaiah says the nations will "*learn war no more,*" he speaks only of those who walk in his paths; *viz.*, those who obey the gospel. "Learning war" is the opposite of "rest from war." As the Jews obeyed God, he gave them rest from their enemies. But when they disobeyed, war was the result (Jud. 3:8, 11, 30; II Sam. 7:1, 11). "Learning war" therefore is to experience God's chastisement and correction; "rest from war" his reward and favor (*cf.* Jud. 3:1, 2). Hence, Isaiah's imagery of the nations "*beating their swords into plowshares*" applies only to those who "ascend" the mountain of the Lord (receive the gospel), not the nations that remain in rebellion.

It is helpful to our understanding the kingdom to think in terms of the Roman Empire. Many nations came under Roman dominion, some willing made alliance and were free; others were conquered and subjected to tribute. Some nations continued in subjection to Rome; others tried to break free and rebel. So with the kingdom of Christ: some nations freely obey the gospel and own Christ as Lord, others are obstinate and rebel. Those that obey enjoy Christ's favor; those that do not experience his wrath.

The Coming of Christ in Wrath

Almost all prophecies that describe Christ's receipt of the kingdom also describe his wrath. Just as Dispensationalists mistake the nature of Christ's kingdom, they mistake the nature of his second coming, in both cases looking for a future bodily and visible manifestation. Preterists believe that the second coming was spiritual (intangible/invisible) and providential; they believe that Jesus' coming in his kingdom in power described God's divine wrath upon the Jews and Romans for the murder of Christ and persecution of his church. Virtually all of the time texts of the New Testament place Jesus' return within the life-time of the first disciples.

"For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works. Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom." Mat. 16: 27, 28

We encourage the reader to consult the following passages, which represent but a few of the many that might be cited, demonstrating the first century return of Christ: Matt. 10:23; 23:36; 24:34; 26:64; Jn. 21:22; Heb. 10:37; Jm. 5:8; Rev. 1:1, 3; 22:7, 10, 12, 20. The reign of Christ manifested in the overthrow of Jerusalem and the Roman civil wars of AD 68-70 did not expend Christ's wrath; they were merely its beginning. The wars and calamities that beset men and nations down through history until even today represent the providential judgment of Christ as he rules the nations above the circle of the earth. Earth's peoples, kings and potentates should therefore heed the warning of the Psalmist, and bow before heaven's king:

"Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him." Ps. 2:10-12.

Conclusion

The kingdom is the dominion of Christ over earth, which he obtained at his ascension.

Questions & Answers

Q: I have a question concerning Death and Hades being thrown into the Lake of Fire in Rev 20. In 1st Corin-15:55-56-Death has been conquered - so Hades is no longer needed. Rev 14:13--"Blessed are those who die in the Lord from now on" --Could this be why Death and Hades were thrown into the Lake of Fire?

A: Hades was needed from Abel until AD 70, when the general resurrection occurred. It was a place where the souls of men were kept pending final judgment/justification. Until the blood of Christ was spilled, there was no once-for-all forgiveness for sin! God provisionally forgave sin, but only on the basis of the work foreordained for Christ. Hence, until that work was fulfilled, the righteous were kept in Hades, but the wicked in Tartarus. These were done away as serving no more purpose after Christ's blood.

There does remain a question whether Tartarus still remains as a place of punishment before souls are annihilated in Gehenna (assuming annihilation is correct). "Death and Hades" in Revelation seem to point to the place of the righteous (paradise Lk. 23:43); the "sea" and "bottomless pit" the place of the wicked (Tartarus II Pet. 2:4). Scripture teaches that men receive just retribution for their sins at judgment, which seems to require that men do not pass from this life into annihilation or nonexistence, but a place of punishment (II Cor. 5:10). If so, then it may be that only "death and Hades" (paradise) was destroyed at the general resurrection, and that Tartarus still exists as a place of punishment before the spirits of men are annihilated. But whether Tartarus exists or not, it does seem clear that there is a place and time of retribution in the next life for the sins committed in this life.

Other than the one possibility mentioned (Tartarus), since sin and death were defeated at the cross and resurrection, there is no further place or need for Hades and it has been destroyed.

Hope that helps.

Q: Greetings to you in the name of Lord Jesus Christ.

Thank You for your reply. I am able to learn what is exactly truth through you.

This evening I meet brother Raju and discussed about Matt. 24. His teaching about Matt. 24, Mark 13, Luke 21, are indicated to Jerusalem destruction which was happened in 70 AD.

Brother I am confused about the signs of second coming which is talk in the town. Would you please help us to study deep knowledge these things? Brother Raju is very is very busy with Bible classes. By God's grace I got this knowledge for two days. Brother Raju told me Brother Kurt is the teacher to everybody. Please help me in study.

May the God of peace be with you.

A: I would be glad to help. Please ask me any question and I will try to answer.

I am not sure what you mean by the signs of the second coming. In Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21, the signs that preceded the Lord's return included 1) famines; 2) earthquakes; 3) wars and rumors of wars; 4) Jerusalem surrounded by Armies (the "abomination of desolation" of Dan. 12:11). These signs preceded the time of the "end" when Jesus returned in vengeance upon the Jews and Romans for his murder and persecution of the church. At the same time Jerusalem was under siege by the Romans, the Romans were involved in a series of civil wars beginning with the death of Nero in AD 68. There were four emperors in the space of little more than one year. This "year of four emperors" (Galba, Otho, Vitellius, and Vespasian) left Italy in ruins and the Roman capital burned. This was Christ's return in wrath upon his enemies.

Hope that helps.

Q: Hey Kurt!

Well, I read all of Allan Turner's articles thus far on Realized Eschatology. He lays out why he thinks you're a gnostic, but it's plainly obvious he hasn't read very such of your material or at least taken the time to try to understand what you're saying. Has he even bothered to ask you what you mean by "the source/seed of sin is the flesh"? That's his big hang up and he adds after it that, "thus, the flesh is inherently evil." (according to you.) It didn't take me but one quick search to find an article you wrote on the King-Frost debate explaining your wording. You even use the Genesis "everything God made is good" passage, just as he did! Well, at least I understand why he thinks that now.

Here's a question I'll pose as I try to get him to retract is statements on this topic. He say "We have a heart

problem, that's why we sin." Which I don't disagree with. But think about this. I think that ALL you're saying is that the temptation STARTS in the flesh. desires, even natural ones, then get taken too far. The spirit can CHOOSE to serve the flesh or serve the spirit. When our spirit chooses to serve the flesh is when we sin. That's what we need forgiveness for, so that our spirits can be saved. So, yeah, we have a heart problem. But the temptation came from the flesh. Otherwise, (here's the question), Why was Jesus tempted? James 1:13 says "God cannot be tempted with evil." So again, why was he tempted? Was he not God while on earth? Of course not. It was because he was IN THE FLESH! The source/seed of sin! However, unlike us his spirit was perfect and he served THAT instead of the flesh and did not sin. Thus making him qualified to be our savior. And when we die, we put off our "natural"lesh, are clothed with our spiritual bodies and are made like him, NOT being able to be tempted any longer in Heaven. And our heart/spirit problem is forgiven and made pure. Did I do a decent job of understanding your view on it? does that make sense?

All he's done so far in SIX articles is attack your "neognostic" belief and the satan thing. Which whether he's a "real" supernatural being or not, the same effects and 'powers' exist. Same as the parables Jesus taught, even if the subjects involved were real or personified, the same lesson still applies. I don't see it as that big of a deal. He uses it more as a character attack, "look at this wacko" type thing, to discredit your views. oh well. Such is life. Please let me know about my thinking on the "source of sin is the flesh." I want to be ready to discuss it with him. Also, He has quoted several of your recent "Questions from our readers", so maybe hold off on publishing mine for now ;) haha

A: Thanks for writing. I have never heard of Allan Turner. I am surprised someone is writing about me, let alone six articles. I simply am not important or influential enough to merit that sort of effort. Strange. Maybe you can send me a link to Allan's site.

You have done a pretty good job comprehending my view of the source of sin in the flesh, but not completely. I believe that at the time of creation, God breathed into Adam and Eve, not merely the animating power of his Spirit giving life to inanimate bodies/minds of flesh, but so breathed his Spirit into them as to make them *partakers of his divine image and likeness*. Adam and Eve could not only live above their carnal natures, it was their nature to be good, kind, gentle, loving, faithful, obedient, longsuffering, etc. In a word, all the fruits of the Spirit totally dominated their nature. This direct indwelling of the Spirit was a type of inspiration. However, with the

fall, man lost the direct indwelling of the Spirit and came under the power of his carnal nature and the appetites and desires of the flesh came to dominate his personality. He still had the power of free will and the moral capacity to chose right and wrong, but we are now so totally dominated by our carnality that it is now our first nature to incline toward sin and fleshly gratification and other moral wrongs such as selfishness, anger, hatred, envy, idolatry, etc. At the creation, Adam would have passed his Spiritual nature to his children, who would have been made in his image and likeness, sharing the divine nature implanted in him by God. But when Adam sinned, he lost the direct indwelling of the Spirit, and he lost it for the whole race for all time. Adam's children thus inherit his fallen nature and so incline to evil.

The Puritans had a saying in the New England Primer (an early childhood reader) that "In Adam's fall, we sinned all." I believe this is completely false. God does not impute Adam's transgression to anyone but Adam. We are guilty for our own sins or not at all! What kind of just God would condemn all men and babies based upon what their forebear did? I cannot see it and deny it utterly. In the fall, man lost the indwelling Spirit of God for himself and for his children, but that is all. We still possess free will ("for to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not" - Rom. 7:18) In other words, we can will to do right, but are unable ever to rise above our flesh and perform what we know to be right.

The Spirit of God still prompts men, attempting to lead them into good and away from evil through its influence in our lives and conscience. The Spirit lusts against the flesh and the flesh against the Spirit, as Paul says in Galatians 5. But the direct indwelling of the Spirit is now forever gone. The Spirit now indwells us only indirectly as we yield to its influence, especially through the word of God as it is engrafted upon our hearts. The word of God is the Spirit clothed upon with language, and as we submit to its influence, it acts like a conduit by which the Spirit enters our hearts.

However, we can never totally rise upon our fallen nature or live "sinlessly" while in the flesh. Jesus did not inherit Adam's fallen nature because he was miraculously conceived. His flesh still tempted him, but since he had the direct indwelling of the Spirit, his first nature was to obey it, not his flesh. Also, being God, Jesus apparently had something "extra" that would never allow him to yield to temptation like Adam did.

Hope that helps!

Resisting Civil Rulers for the Lord's Sake

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Must Christians in all cases obey rulers? Most would likely answer "No, there are limits upon the authority of government to order things we are not required to obey."

The example of Peter and John doubtless comes first to mind. When told not to teach or speak in the name of Christ, Peter answered "*Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than God, judge ye, for we cannot but speak the things we have seen and heard*" (Acts 4:19, 20). Arrested a second time for preaching Christ, the Sanhedrin charged Peter and his companions, saying "*Did not we strictly command you that ye should not teach in this name?*" Peter and the other apostles answered "*We ought to obey God rather than men*" (Acts 5:28, 29).

Thus, the rule many settle upon is that, where the commandment of God and the commandment of civil rulers conflict, we must obey God, but in all other cases we are to submit to rulers. Accordingly, some reason that since God does not *command* that we have prayer at school commencement ceremonies or before athletic events, when the government orders us to not to pray (though formerly it was our right), we are required to obey. Likewise with display of the Ten Commandments in public buildings, Manger Scenes on court house lawns, or even teaching Intelligent Design in public schools: since in all these cases God does not *command* us to perform these things, government is free to forbid them and we bound to obey.

This thinking has resulted in the almost complete secularization of American culture, and exposed tens of millions of school children to insidious and destructive doctrines, which undermine traditional values and subvert their faith in Christ and the Bible. Millions of souls that might otherwise be in heaven are now at risk of eternal loss because Christians have surrendered public schools and other public fora to a government hostile to the Christian faith. Is this the will of God? Is it God's will that children and souls be put at risk of eternal loss under the guise of obeying civil rulers? Hardly.

It would be far more accurate to say that the secularization of our public schools and loss of America's Christian heritage is due to sheer cowardliness and the church's luke-warm faith that has made it only too easy to surrender ground God never intended us to yield or give up. Rather than face a fine, prison, or suffer for our faith, we have found it easier to obey the unrighteous decrees of spiritual wickedness in high places, even if it has meant the eternal loss of our own children to the lying and seductive doctrines of atheism and the secular state.

No. It is not God's will that Christians yield one inch to unrighteous and irreligious men in government. Government is ordained for man's good, so that anarchy and lawlessness are held in check. We are therefore to obey government as the institution of God (Rom. 13); we are to obey every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake (I Pet. 2:13). "For the Lord's sake" means for the *furtherance of the gospel of Christ*. Our conduct should so adorn the gospel that civil authorities praise the Christian faith, and afford it the protection and encouragement of the law. In the first century, Jews and other enemies of the gospel spread vicious lies about Christianity, alleging that Christians committed unspeakable acts of sexual impurity in their assemblies; that they were seditious, and disloyal to the state. They sought to enlist the civil power in suppression of the gospel of Christ. Peter therefore instructed Christians to so live as to demonstrate the falsity of these claims and to win the approbation of civil authorities. "*For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men*" (I Pet. 2:15). But ordinances that subvert God's righteous judgment, that overthrow the eternal foundations, ordinances that put darkness for light and evil for good cannot be obeyed for "the Lord's sake," for they contravene the judgments and ordinances of God. In all such cases, Christians are bound to resist rulers.

- Pharaoh commanded the midwives to slay the male children of the Hebrews. The midwives disobeyed and were found favor with God for so doing (Ex. 1:15-21).
- At great risk to her life, Rahab disobeyed the king of Jericho and sent away the spies in peace. For her disobedience she received a

place in the genealogy of Christ (Josh. 6:25; Matt. 1:5; Heb. 11:31).

- Nebuchadnezzar ordered all men to worship his golden idol, which he had made. Shadrack, Meschach and Abednego ignored the commandment of the king at peril of life and limb, and were cast alive into a burning fire. Better to die a martyr than obey an unrighteous decree (Dan. 3).
- Darius commanded that no petition be made to any god for thirty days. Daniel ignored the king's order and prayed anyway. His life was imperiled but he deemed it better to pray to God, than obey the unrighteous decree of a foolish king. Daniel was rewarded for his faithfulness when God saved him from the mouth of the lions (Dan. 6).

Consider: The same commandment to submit to rulers (Rom. 13) is said of wives to husbands (5:24, 33), children to parents (Eph. 6:1, 2), and servants to masters (Eph. 6:5, 6). Yet, in none of these latter cases would we argue the duty to submit is absolute or without limitation. The slave does not owe more duty to its master, a child its parent, or a wife her husband than we owe rulers. If the slave may resist the use of excessive force or cruelty of a master, a child the brutality of a drunken father, or a wife the violence of a

brutish husband (as surely they may), it should be clear to all that the people can resist the unlawful and unrighteous decrees of the civil state. The mantle of authority God has given government is not a license to commit lawless acts or repress of the gospel. Daniel was not commanded to pray to God three times a day with his windows open (Dan. 6:10). He did it merely from habit and by choice. Yet, Daniel disobeyed the king's unrighteous decree. And so should we. Disobedience may entail inconvenience and personal loss, but since when has faithfulness been without risk or cost?

Unless and until Christians are willing to stand for their faith and resist the unlawful decrees of civil rulers who "oppose and exalt themselves above all that is called god or worshipped" (II Thess. 2:4), the decline of public morals will continue, and millions of souls that might otherwise be in heaven, will face risk of eternal loss.

Let civil rulers threaten; let them fulminate, foam, and fury, but let God's faithful flock not surrender one inch of sacred ground to the profane foot of man.



“Come Out and Be Ye Separate, Saith the Lord!”

The Prophecy of Daniel Two

Kurt Simmons

The image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream is among the most important prophecies of the Bible. In it we see the hand of God carefully guiding the progress of history to accomplish his purpose to bring Christ into the world, establish his kingdom, and save mankind. The dream's primary purpose was to serve as a timeline unto the kingdom and coming of the Messiah. The specificity of the vision and the facility with which it enables us to pinpoint the coming of Christ's kingdom makes it unique among the visions of the Old Testament. However, it was remarkable in more ways than this: the vision occurred while the Jews were in captivity and their political institutions and government were non-existent; it was given to the very Gentile king who had carried the Jews into captivity and burned God's own temple, but who later became a worshipper of the one true God; the dream foretold events until an appointed consummation that would mark the transfer of world dominion from Gentile powers unto the Messiah and his people.

Historical Antecedents

The Babylonians rose as an independent power when Nabopolassar ascended the throne of Babylon circa 625 B.C. upon the fall of the Assyrians of Nineveh. Taking advantage of the event, Egypt, which had been subjugated by Assyria, asserted itself and rebelled from Assyrio-Babylonian rule. All Syria came under Egyptian control under Pharaoh Necho. During a campaign by Egypt against the king of Assyria (viz., the Medes and Babylonians), Josiah went forth to engage Necho and was slain (II Kng. 23:29-30; Josephus, *Ant. X*, v, 1). Returning from battle, Necho deposed Josiah's son, Jehoahaz, whom the people had crowned, and set his brother, Eliakim, on the throne instead, changing his name to Jehoiakim. Jehoiakim reigned eleven years in Jerusalem (II Kng. 23:36; II Chron. 36:5"). In or about the fourth year of his reign (605 B.C.), which was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 25:1), Nebuchadnezzar defeated Necho at Carchemish 605 B.C. (Jer. 46:2) and proceeded to conquer Syria and Palestine. By the eighth year of Jehoiakim (601 B.C.), in Nebuchadnezzar's 8th year (601 B.C.), the holy land fell to Babylonian rule and was set under tribute. In the third year of this servitude (598 B.C.), Jehoiakim rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, prompting the latter to return and besiege Jerusalem (II Kng. 24:1; II Kng. 24:1).

Nebuchadnezzar took the city, slew Jehoiakim, and carried Daniel and his fellows, including Ezekiel, into captivity ([Dan. 1:1-6](#); cf. Josephus, *Ant. X*, vi, 3). After the siege, word reached Nebuchadnezzar that his father, Nabopolassar, had died. Nebuchadnezzar thus hurried back to Babylon where he acceded to the sole principate as absolute monarch of the realm (Josephus, *Contra Apion*, I, ixx). In the second year of his sole principate, God visited Nebuchadnezzar with a dream ([Dan. 2:1](#)).

The Dream and its Interpretation

In his dream, Nebuchadnezzar saw an image in human form, whose head was gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of brass, and its legs of iron and feet partly of iron and partly of clay. He saw until a Stone cut out without hands smote the image upon its feet, reducing the whole to shards. The Stone that smote the image thus grew into a great mountain, filling all the earth. Daniel interpreted the vision, saying that the image's four divisions were four world empires that would obtain until the kingdom of God and Christ, whose dominion would supplant all other kingdoms and endure forever. The main issues presented by the vision are:

- 1) The Last Days and Coming of Christ
- 2) The identity of the four empires and their duration
- 3) The symbolism of the metals and materials comprising the image's body
- 4) The nature and timing of the kingdom

The Last Days and Coming of Christ

Daniel is a book of time-lines. Chapter seven provides a time-line in the form of four beasts, which depict four world empires to the persecution under Nero (the "little horn") and the second coming of Christ and the kingdom of heaven; chapter nine provides a time-line in the form of 490 prophetic years until the death of the Messiah and the destruction of Jerusalem; chapters 10-12 provides a time line from the kingdom of Persia until the rise of the Roman power, the fall of Jerusalem, and the resurrection of the dead. The present chapter is a time-line in the form of four world empires that would appear until the coming of Christ and the establishment of his kingdom. The kingdom and resurrection are joined many times in the New Testament ([Matt. 16:27, 28](#); [II Tim. 4:1](#)) so that the mention of the kingdom here should be understood to

embrace also the resurrection. And because the resurrection was tied to Christ's second coming, we may know that that Nebuchadnezzar's dream also includes this.

The idea that Nebuchadnezzar's dream reaches to the second coming is not new, but has been current in the church from at least as early as Jerome (AD 347-420), whose commentary on Daniel is one of the earliest in our possession, and the first to attempt an expository interpretation (versus a homiletic or allegorical). Jerome believed that Daniel's assignment of Nebuchadnezzar's dream to the "latter days" implied that the vision entailed the "end of the world":

"Now either these 'last days' are to be reckoned from the time when the dream was revealed to Daniel until the end of the world, or else at least this inference is to be drawn, that the over-all interpretation of the dream applies to that final end when the image and statue beheld is to be ground to powder."

"We would refute those who think the world will never be destroyed. For never would any days be called 'the last days' if the world were everlasting." Comments at vv. 28, 29.

The assumption that the end of the world implies the end of the cosmos has created immense confusion in the church down through the centuries. But the end of the world and end of the universe are not the same thing. We agree with Jerome that the image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream portrays the end of the world. We disagree that this implied an end of the cosmos. Rather, the point of the imagery is that the world that was under dominion of the Gentile powers would come under the dominion of Christ, as indeed it has. The correct view is that the "latter days" signified the closing days of the era preceding the kingdom of Christ, and was marked by the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70.

"The Old Testament prophets contemplated the appearance of the Messiah and the going forth of the new word of Jehovah as occurring 'in the end of the days' – that is, the last days of the eon or dispensation under which they were living...This 'end of the times' belongs, not to the era of the new dispensation, but to the concluding days of the old...It is a serious error, therefore, when learned exegetes persist in assuming that the phrase 'the last days,' as employed in the Scriptures, means the period of the new Christian dispensation." [\[1\]](#)

This is not new. Several church fathers saw distinctly that the "latter days" were tied to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Eusebius of Caesarea is probably the most famous:

"For we must understand by 'the end of the days' [viz., 'the last days,' LXX] the end of the national existence of the Jews. What, then, did he say they must look for? The cessation of the rule of Judah, the destruction of their whole race, the failing and ceasing of their governors, and the abolition of the dominant kingly position of the tribe of Judah, and the rule and kingdom of Christ, not over Israel but over all nations, according to the word, 'This is the expectation of the nations.' " [\[2\]](#)

The Identity of the Four Empires and their Duration

The identity of the Four Empires is not greatly in dispute. Liberals try to impugn the authenticity of Daniel by charging that it is a pseudo-epigraphical forgery, written during the period of the Greeks shortly after the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes and describes the valor and victory of the brothers Maccabee. This view has been completely discredited long, long ago, so we will not stop to address it here. [\[3\]](#) Daniel provided the starting point for identifying the succession of empires when he stated that the image's head of gold represented Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon. With this information in hand, it is a simple matter to identify the succession of world empires. The four world empires preceding the kingdom and coming of Christ were:

Babylonian	598-539 BC
Mede-Persian	539-330 BC
Greco-Macedonia	330-188 BC
Roman	188 BC – AD 70
Total =	668 years

Babylon fell to the Medes and Persian in 539 BC during a siege of the capital city led by Cyrus the Great, who diverted the city's water courses, allowing his soldiers to gain access and take the city by surprise while it was feasting and carrying on as if it were impervious to defeat. Taken from the sole accession of Nebuchadnezzar, the period assigned to Babylon would represent 59 years, a length proportioned to the size of the head as against the rest of the body.

The Mede-Persian Empire suffered defeat to Alexander the Great. Alexander crossed the Hellespont in 334 BC and in 330 BC took the Persian capital of Persepolis,

which he burned to the ground. The chest and arms would thus represent a period of 209 years.

The Greco-Macedonia Empire yielded to the power of Rome about 188 BC, at the treaty of Ampanea, following the defeat of Antiochus III the Great at Thermopylae (191 BC) and Magnesia (190 BC), or at latest, the third Macedonian war with Perseus (168 B.C.). This would assign a period of about 142 years to Greek domination.

The Roman Empire did not fall until 476 AD, but the vision is unconcerned with events beyond AD 70. The point of the imagery is not when the empires ceased totally to exist, *but when their dominion was surrendered to a greater power*. Babylon did not cease to exist when conquered by Cyrus in 539 BC. Indeed, it continued until Alexander's time and beyond. So with the rest of the empires mentioned. It is dominion that is at issue, and after AD 70 world dominion belonged firmly to Christ. Thus, the period represented by the legs and feet would be from approximately 188 BC to AD 70, or about 258 years.

With AD 70 as our terminus and the monarchy of Nebuchadnezzar as the beginning, the whole period of the image would be 598 BC – AD 70, or 668 years. We feel that the overall proportion of the image's members to the length of the empires they represent bear an overall and important correlation that corroborates this interpretation. Those who attempt to extend the toes down to our modern era find themselves with toes which represent a period approximately four times that of the rest of the body combined. As this would destroy all proportion in the image, it argues against attempts to extend the vision beyond AD 70.

The Symbolism of the Metals

In his book *The Prophecies of Daniel 2*, my friend John Evans argues that the materials in the image bear an actual, historical relation to the kingdoms they represent. Thus, Babylon was known as the golden city; Persian, he asserts, was known for the silver coinage with which it paid its army; Greece for the bronze prow of its war ships used to ram enemy vessels, and Rome for its use of iron. The clay in the feet and toes, he argues represents the Jews from the time of Roman dominion in Palestine. However, we do not feel John has made his case for historical identity of the materials with the kingdoms they represent. This is particularly true of his assignment of clay for the Jews, for here there is no historical association at all. Rather, he builds his case upon an asserted *Biblical* association.

[Jeremiah 18:1-10](#) contains a parable in which God sent the prophet to the potter. When the pot he was making was marred in the potter's hands, he made it into a new vessel as seemed best to the potter. The incident became an object lesson for Judah that the nation was an earthen vessel in God's hands. Having become marred or ruined by their rebellion and sin, God would remake or destroy Judah as seemed best to him. On this basis, John concludes that the Jews represent the clay in Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

Obviously, this is not an historical association, but a Biblical one, and therefore incongruent with the hypothesis. More importantly, however, is the fact that the clay in the parable did not represent the Jews to the exclusion of earth's other people and nations. Jeremiah is very clear that the clay in the parable stood for all humanity and the nations of the world in God's hands:

At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them" ([Jer. 18:7, 8](#))

Thus, the parable is applicable with equal force to all nations, not just the Jews; there is no historical or Biblical association to support the idea that the clay in Nebuchadnezzar's dream represents the Jews. But if there is no historical association of clay with any particular nation, then we feel the argument as to the metals is equally invalid. For the rule by which we interpret one we must interpret all. If the historical association does not explain one, it does not explain any. To our mind, the better view is that the metals were chosen for the universal symbolism associated with their glory and value, and that these in turn reflect the nature and quality of the kingdoms these represent.

Gold is the most precious metal. It is a universal symbol of prosperity and wealth. Gold is incorruptible; it does not rust or tarnish. It is used in ornamentation of buildings, art, and the body. Gold is universally sought and accepted as a store of value and a medium of exchange. Silver is more common than gold and is next in value. It too is a symbol of wealth, and is universally employed as a store of value and medium of exchange. Brass has some of the beauty of gold and silver and has been used in coinage, but is of vastly lesser value. Its qualities and appearance are such that it is employed in common instruments and usages where men want to combine both beauty with utility and strength. Iron is the most common metal. It possesses strength and utility, but lacks beauty and other qualities normally associated with glory and

splendor. Because iron is easily corrupted and overly abundant, it is a poor store of value and is therefore unsuitable as a medium of exchange. Clay is the stuff of common utensils. It is easily molded and formed, and just as easily broken. It possesses the least strength and is the least stable and enduring material, being the most susceptible to spoilage and breakage.

Thus, the image is composed of metals that decline in value and glory even as they descend from the head to the feet. They also decline in permanence and incorruptibility as they increase in abundance and grow more common. Gold is the most esteemed and desired, iron and clay the least of all.

In construction of the tabernacle and temple, this same declension is seen. The nearer to God and the Holy of Holies, the more precious metal was employed. The further from God, the more common metals were used. Thus, gold adorned the ark of the covenant and overlay the cherubim of glory. A golden censor was used for the golden altar of incense just outside the Holy of Holies ([Ex. 37:1-9](#); [II Chron 3:3-11](#); [Heb. 9:4](#)). Silver was used for the lamp stands and tables ([I Chron. 28:15-17](#)); brass was used for the altar of burnt offering and the brazen sea in the court yard ([II Chron. 4:1-5](#)); but the doors and joinings of the outer gates were of iron ([I Chron. 22:3](#)). Obviously, this arrangement was based upon the symbolic associations of the metals, so that what was best was placed nearest to God.

Applied to the image, we would suggest that metals and corresponding body parts portray the character and political constitutions of the kingdoms and that they were 1) precious and valued as they gave glory to God, but base and disesteemed as they resisted and opposed him; and 2) glorious and noble the nearer they approximated the absolute monarchy of God and Christ, but inglorious and ignoble as they declined there from.

Monarchy, Aristocracy, Republics, & Democracies:

Political Constitutions of the Four World Kingdoms

In our commentary on Daniel, we take the view that Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon served as something of a foreshadow ("adumbration") and type of the sole monarchy of Christ, in the manner Solomon's golden reign did before him. Daniel calls Nebuchadnezzar "king of kings" even as John calls Christ "King of kings and Lord of lords" ([Dan. 2:37](#); [Rev. 19:16](#)). God gave Nebuchadnezzar "a kingdom, power, strength, and glory" even as Christ was given a kingdom "power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing" ([Rev. 5:12](#); [11:15](#)).

Nebuchadnezzar is the head of gold ([Dan. 2:38](#)) even as Christ is head over his body, the church, and head over all mankind ([I Cor. 11:3](#); [Eph. 1:22-23](#)). The sole, absolute monarchy of Nebuchadnezzar is therefore most like the absolute monarchy of the reigning Christ in terms of the glory and power attached to his government. However, as we descend through the image's body, the monarchical power grows more and more attenuated. The Mede-Persian monarchy was not absolute, but offset by its nobles, as seen in their designs against Daniel under Darius the Mede, and the resistance Cyrus, Darius, and Ahasuerus experienced in allowing the Jews to return and rebuild the temple ([Dan. 6](#); [11:1](#); [Ezra 4:5](#)).

The Greek's are known for their devotion to democratic government, which they identified with political liberty. However, history shows that democracy is the most unstable form of government of all, bounded only by the fickle will of the masses. The golden glory of Nebuchadnezzar's sole monarchy was further diminished by the division of the Greco-Macedonian Empire at Alexander's death between the four warring monarchies of Macedonia, Thrace, Syria, and Egypt. Rome is represented by iron, the most *common* and *corruptible* metal. Rome was a republic, which differs in theory from a democracy in that it is governed by a written law (the "twelve tables") or constitution. The Roman people trace their descent from the Greeks and therefore abhorred monarchy, and viewed their political liberty as existing in direct administration of the government by the "senate and people." However, as with the Greeks, Roman history was marred by class antagonisms, parties, and continuous upheaval and civil war. Even during the period of the empire, Rome was still in form, if not in fact, a republic in which the emperor shared power with the senate. Our view is that the legs of iron point to the period of the republic, and that the feet of iron mingled with clay point to the period of the empire and Rome's direct administration of subject peoples through proconsuls of senatorial rank. The clay is the common mass of humanity and nations of the empire; the iron, Roman rule. The iron and clay do not mix, signifying that the sovereign and subjects exist in mutual antagonism and do not adhere to one another.

The kingdoms of the image thus represent a scale ranging from absolute monarchy (Nebuchadnezzar), to mixed monarchy-aristocracy (Mede-Persian), the divided empire of Alexander (Greece) to democratic and republican governments (Greece and Rome). The glory of sole monarchy most approximates that of Christ, and is portrayed as the most resplendent by the head of gold, whereas republican government is represented by the common and corruptible metal of iron.

The Character and Quality of the Kingdoms

As it happens, the form of government was also mirrored by the glory they returned to God. Nebuchadnezzar converted and became a worshipper of the Most High God ([Dan. 4:37](#)). Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes acknowledged God, released the captives and gave order to rebuild the temple, even financing its construction and sacrifices. However, the Greeks and Romans only bruised and crushed God's people and opposed his worship (not unlike the condition into which America is declining). Ptolemy Philopater entered the temple and attempted to compel the Jews in Alexandria to abandon the worship of God, and to annihilate the race from among his people. Antiochus Epiphanes carried the outrage still further, setting an idol in the Jerusalem temple and defiling the altar with swine's blood, and persecuting to death the people of God. And Nero carried the outrage to its very height and pitch as the great eschatological persecutor of the church and gospel, whose name was synonymous with the beast. Thus, if the metals reflect the glory associated with the kingdom's respective political constitutions, they seem also to bear some relation to the moral condition of their leaders as they embraced or resisted the religion of God.

This is not to say that republics and democracies are invariably bad or opposed to true religion, and that monarchies are invariably good and friends of the gospel. The Greek monarchies that grew up after the death of Alexander were great persecutors of God's people and cannot be characterized as republics or democracies. Even so, it is difficult to resist the conclusion that governments and cultures that pander to popular will and the universal suffrage of unenlightened masses tend to undo a nation's morals and institutions, resulting in lawlessness and rebellion to the government of heaven and the gospel of Christ; and that monarchies, because they do not depend upon popular will to rule, can restrain the licentious will of the masses, assuming the rulers so minded. In ancient Israel, the hereditary priesthood of Aaron may have been intended to serve this purpose. However, this philosophical inquiry is beyond the pale of the present discussion and we must hasten ahead.

Nature and Timing of the Kingdom

Many futurist paradigms assume that the kingdom and coming of Christ would be physical and political, ruling over earth's people's from Jerusalem. For this paradigm to be valid, the kingdom must be future, for thing anticipated or expected has yet to manifest. Against this view, however, is the immutability of God's prophetic word, which placed the coming of the

kingdom in the days of the Roman Caesars. Jacob's prophecy to his sons placed the coming of "Shiloh" and the kingly sceptre in Messiah's hand in the "latter days" ([Gen. 49:1,10](#)). Balaam placed the coming of the "Star and Sceptre of Jacob" in the time when Chittim (the Romans) afflicted Eber (the Hebrews) ([Num. 24:17, 24](#)). Isaiah tied the coming of the kingdom to the birth of Christ, saying, "unto us a child is born...of the increase of his government there shall be no end" ([Isa. 9:6, 7](#)) At his conception, the angel told Mary that God would give him the throne of his father David, and that he would reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end ([Lk. 1:32, 33](#)). Jesus began his ministry with the announcement that the "time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel" ([Mk. 1:15](#)). He told his disciples "There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom" ([Matt. 16:26, 27](#)). At the conclusion of his ministry before his ascension, Jesus said "all power in heaven and in earth" ([Matt. 28:18](#)). He was given a kingdom, power, and glory ([Dan. 7:13, 14](#); [Rev. 5:12](#)), and sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven as co-regent in the government of the world, and now rules the nations with a rod of iron ([Acts 2:33](#); [Rev. 2:27](#)). Unless all of this scripture, which cannot be broken, is to be ignored, then we must accept that the kingdom came in the days of the apostles and the rule of the Roman Caesars.

The timing of the kingdom is further corroborated by the ten toes of the feet for these clearly mark the time of the kingdom's coming. We believe the toes are best understood as the ten senatorial provinces created by Augustus Caesar in 27 BC. These provinces were in a settled condition, without legions to defend them. The provinces retained by Augustus were on the borders and required military force to govern. Dio Cassius explains: "His professed motive in this was that the senate might fearlessly enjoy the finest portion of the empire, while he himself had the hardships and the dangers; but his real purpose was that by this arrangement the senators will be unarmed and unprepared for battle, while he alone had arms and maintained soldiers."^[4] These ten provinces became a permanent, identifying feature of the empire, weak but distinct among the body's members:

"In 27 B.C. the provinces had been divided into two classes, Imperial and Senatorial, 'provinciae Caesaris,' and 'provinciae Senatus' or 'populi.' The latter were ten in number, Africa, Asia, Bithynia, Achaea, Illyricum, Macedonia, Crete and Cyrene, Sicily, Sardinia, and Hispania Baetica...The Imperial provinces in 27 B.C. were Gaul, Syria, Cyprus and Cilicia, and Hispania Citerior. The number was increased subsequently

by the division of single provinces into two or more, and by the inclusion of all provinces constituted after 27 B.C., e.g. Moesia, Pannonia, and Dalmatia.”^[5]

Conclusion

The dominion of Christ is firmly established over the earth and he rules the nations with a rod of iron.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, use of an image reminds us of an *idol*, which points, first, to the Gentiles and signifies the allotted time of their government and dominion over the world vis-à-vis the people of God; a dominion that would end with the kingdom and coming of Christ; second, use of an idol suggests a specific era in world history. Paul said God “winked at” Gentile worship of idols in other eras, but with the gospel call commands all men everywhere *to repent*, showing that the worship of idols was marked by Christ to be rooted out of the nations and all men called to worship of the true God ([Acts 17:22-31](#)). Hence, as idolatry is now largely extinct in the civilized world and few men fall down before images or worship them as gods, the image is plainly seen *not* to reach unto the modern era. Since the kingdom would root these evils out, the kingdom is necessarily come.

The kingdom is the time when world dominion would become Christ’s, as depicted by the Stone smiting the image and growing up into a mountain, filling all the earth. We believe that the Stone smote the image in the first century events marked by the destruction of Jerusalem and Roman civil wars. Bishop Lightfoot put it like this:

“Whereas the Jews would not own Christ before for the Son of man, or for the Messias, then, by the vengeance that he should execute upon them, they and all the world should see an evident sign, that he was so. This, therefore, is called ‘his coming,’ and ‘his coming in his kingdom;’ because this did first declare his power, glory, and victory, on that nation that had despised him...not only in the horrid civil wars among the Jews, but also in the great concussions in the Roman empire, in the wars betwixt Otho and Vitellius, and betwixt Vitellius and Vespasian (of which the Roman historians, especially Tacitus, are very large); the like to which, there had not been before, even to the sacking of Rome itself, and the burning of the Capitol.”^[6]

After the destruction of Jerusalem and the Roman civil wars, the church went on to dominate the world. In the Byzantine empire of the east, Christianity became the very heart of its culture for over 1,000 years. In the west, and more especially England, Christianity was the dominate force in the development of civilization almost from the start.

NOTES:

[1] Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Apocalypics*, (1898, reprinted Wipf and Stock Publishers, Eugene, OR, 1999), p. 361. “Daniel’s prophecies of the latter days concern the future history of Israel down to AD 70, and do not directly deal with the gospel era (except as general principles). The same is true of Zechariah 9-14. Arguably every instance of ‘last days’ and ‘last hour’ in the New Testament also refers to the end of Israel’s history down to AD 70.” (James B. Jordan, *The Handwriting on the Wall* (American Vision, Powder Springs, GA, 2007), p. 20) Jordan makes the common mistake of interpreting the latter days in overly narrow terms, applying them exclusively to Israel. The vision here and in chapter seven concern the succession of *world empires* from Babylon to Rome and make no mention of Israel at all; likewise, Balaam’s prophecy of the last days also involved Rome, Moab, and Asshur ([Num. 24:14, 24](#)xe "Num. 24:14, 24"), and Jeremiah speaks of God’s gathering the captivity of Elam, Moab, and Ammon in the last days through the gospel ([Jer. 48:47](#)xe "Jer. 48:47"; 49:6, 39xe "Jer. 49:6, 39"). Hence, although the last days would mark the end of the Jewish nation and it is to this that the phrase often refers, the latter days were not Israel-specific.

[2] Eusebius, *Demonstratio Evangelica*, VIII, ccclxxv; Ferrar ed.

[3] Edward Chandler, Lord Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, *A Vindication of the Defense of Christianity from Prophecies of the Old Testament* (1728). For a free on-line edition www.danielstudies.info.

[4] Dio Cassius, LIII, ii-xii; Loeb ed.

[5] Thomas Marris Taylor, *A Constitutional and Political History of Rome* (Methuen & Co., London, 1889), 464. “Africa, Numidia, Asia, Greece with Epirus, the Dalmatian and Macedonian districts, Crete and the Cyrenaic portion of Libya, Bithynia with Pontus which adjoined it, Sardinia and Baetica were held to belong to the people and the senate; while to Caesar belonged the remainder of Spain,— that is, the district of Tarraco and Lusitania,— and all the Gauls,— that is, Gallia Narbonensis, Gallia Lugdunensis, Aquitania, and Belgica, both the natives themselves and the aliens among them.” Dio Cassius, LIII, xii; Loeb ed.

[6] John Lightfoot, *Harmony of the New Testament, The Complete Works*, Vol. 3, pp. 141, 142.