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411 -And After This

1. Introduction

Literal interpretations of biblical prophecy in the mid-nineteenth century led to a new perspective on the end times. These beliefs commonly held by some Bible believing groups have influenced ideas about the end of the world and the second coming. Although these have become popularized as a major component of Christian doctrines they contradict biblical prophecy and the doctrine of the New Testament. One of the problem areas we can identify are statements made by Christ about what would happen after the tribulation he foretold that fell on the Jewish nation.

2. Misconception, misunderstanding & confusion

In the late 1820's J.N. Darby rejected prophecies of the church found in the Old Testament. He proposed a literal interpretation of prophetic statements and developed what has become known as dispensationalism. At the core of his beliefs was a distinction between Israel and the church. What emerged was the idea that Israel represented the physical kingdom of God on Earth, while the church represented a spiritual kingdom. As the doctrine developed a parallel timeline was presented that included a physical restoration of Israel and the throne of David while the church represented a spiritual people, that would include the Gentiles, who would be removed from the Earth prior to the great tribulation that we discussed in previous lessons. The eventual aim of this action was believed to be the establishment of a physical kingdom with Christ sitting on the throne of David.

Such ideas are rooted in a failure to understand the relationship between the physical nation of Israel and prophecies of a future restoration of the same. In the last lesson I reviewed the nature of the kingdom and Christ's role as the head of the church, the kingdom, and his current reign over saved believers. The Jews of the first century held the conviction that the Messiah would return, restore the kingdom of David, and drive out the enemies of God's people. The disciples even asked if Christ was going to restore the kingdom before his ascension (**Acts 1.6**).

Misconceptions and misunderstandings such as this flourished in the first century. Judaizing teachers imposed the idea that elements of the Law of Moses, such as circumcision and keeping the Sabbath, were to be observed. We can understand this if we put ourselves in their place. Circumcision, for instance, was a practice that would separate them from God if not observed. The nature of the new kingdom and its law weren't understood and that confusion continues today. Beliefs such as this have influenced religious teachings as well as political policies intended to preserve Israel. Few Bible believers have been untouched by the concepts promoted by Premillennialism. As I noted in an earlier lesson this has spawned books, movies and even video games dealing with the events of the end times and the rise of a new world order. Efforts are expended to identify the Antichrist, a figure seen to be a charismatic force under the

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influence of Satan who will unite the world and suppress the worship of God.

In this series I've endeavored to show that each of these ideas not only contradicts what the scriptures teach, but they can't be supported by the doctrine of the New Testament, or Old Testament prophecy. Failures to identify the Antichrist, rejection of new technologies as the mark of the beast and attitudes toward those who don't embrace these doctrines have shown the problems inherent in this line of reasoning. Some Premillennialists have cautioned against making such predictions and point out the dangers of repeated mistakes such forecasts produce.

In this lesson I'll summarize problems with the projected timelines and difficulties these produce when we compare them with the scriptures. Finally I'll bring the study to a close by reviewing the flow of spiritual history as recorded in the Bible. The aim is to clarify the simplicity and clarity of the scriptural message as it pertains to the end of the world and what we need to focus on moving forward. In this lesson we'll discuss:

- a. Christ's statements in Matthew 24
- b. The linear nature of God's spiritual timeline
- c. The end

Let's take a look at each of these.

3. Christ's statements in Matthew 24

Premillennial doctrine teaches that a time will come when a figure, identified as the Antichrist, will emerge, unite the world under a single government, persecute Christians and the ban the Bible and suppress any worship of God. A period of tribulation lasting seven years will engulf the world ending with a final conflict - the battle of Armageddon. I've discussed these in detail in previous lessons so I won't cover them here. We'll focus on a statement that Christ makes concerning events that will take place following the tribulation.

As he brings the discussion to a close, Christ states, "***Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken...***" (Matt 24.29). The following verses continue his description of his return and what will take place. Again, I've covered this in detail in previous lessons. Based on these declarations there are some who teach that Christ returned in A.D. 70, which is a discussion for another time. In the lesson on the second coming I noted that there will be no sign of Christ's return (Matt 24.36) so we need to be careful with this passage.

The statement of things happening in the heavens, as I just read, appears to denote an immediate return of Christ at the end of the great tribulation and is used to support the idea of the

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battle of Armageddon as the climax and end of the Satanic world power. A closer examination of this I believe points to something else.

At the beginning of his prophecy Christ told the disciples, “*And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows.*” (Matt 24.6-8).

The Messiah was sent into the world at the “*fulness of the time*” (Gal 4.4), a period that would produce the results God had planned. Jesus was crucified, resurrected and ascended to his Father. The church was established on the day of Pentecost and the Gospel was preached throughout the world over the next several decades. The Pax Romana, or Roman peace, that prevailed in the world at the time was the perfect environment for the spread of the new message. The Greek language spoken almost universally through the Roman world provided a medium of expression accessible to a majority of nations. The presence of the Holy Spirit and the miraculous gifts bestowed on the apostles and later to those they imparted gifts to, made it possible to confirm the word, complete the revelation and convey that to others through the ability to communicate in a variety of other languages as we see from the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 onward.

As the first century progressed, opposition to the Gospel grew and eventually led to widespread persecutions. The political climate of Rome eroded during the time of emperors such as Nero leading to upheavals in the government. Germanic tribes and others began to revolt against the authority and control of Rome so that by the end of the first century there was unrest in almost every part of the empire. The Pax Romana that favored the early spread of the Gospel waned and was replaced by oppression and tyranny. The wars and rumors of wars Christ spoke of came about shaking the foundation of the peace that had existed.

Historical fact, and the events leading to the eventual downfall of the Roman empire, span several centuries. The church grew, doctrine was changed leading to the rise of apostasy. In the fourth century the emperor Constantine ordered the bishops of the church to meet at Nicea resulting in the Nicene creed, the first extra-biblical document declaring the doctrine of the church. Constantine wished to use the relative stability of Christians to influence the culture of the time. Developments in the church and the emergence of the Holy Roman empire brought on the dark ages, a time when the church controlled thought and access to the Bible.

The second coming of Christ didn't take place in A.D. 70, and it hasn't happened yet. As we saw from the discussions of the second coming there would be no sign of Christ's return. Throughout the New Testament, including the book of Revelation, there are warnings to remain faithful. Prophecies of the nature of the apostasy are found in Paul's writing to the Thessalonians

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as he also addressed false teachings concerning Christ's return. Examining the information in the New Testament we can see a timeline that doesn't match ideas set forth by the Premillennial doctrine. In addition to that we see that Christ's statement in **Matthew 24** reveals that unrest would continue in the world following the tribulation that befell the Jewish nation. Returning to that information we see a linear timeline which ends with the Lord's return, judgment and the destruction of the physical universe.

4. The linear nature of God's spiritual timeline

We're able to take a global review of God's plan to save mankind and the various stages of it's development. As we do this we're able to understand the place the physical nation of Israel occupied in that plan and the role the spiritual kingdom, the church, fulfills. We refer to this overall series of events as the scheme of redemption which includes physical as well as spiritual developments brought about by God against the backdrop of the rise and fall of various world powers.

Sin entered the world through the transgression of Adam and Eve. God promised the seed of the woman would one day bruise the head of the serpent, Satan, to accomplish reconciliation with all of humanity. In time, Abraham was chosen by God, because of his faithfulness to the Lord's directives. His seed, the nation of Israel would return to the land that was promised. As Moses prepared the children of Israel for his death, he prophesied of a time when they would fall away and detailed what would happen. The nation grew, chose a king and allowed themselves to become like the nations that God drove out before them. The prophets however assured the people that in spite of the punishment from God they would be preserved. That preservation was to prepare the world for the coming of the Messiah which would take place during the time of kings described in the dream of Nebuchadnezzar interpreted by Daniel.

Removed from the land for seventy years, the exile comes to an end. Cyrus issues a proclamation and provides the means for the Jews to return to their land, rebuild their temple and repopulate the area. The kingdom however is changed. There will no longer be a king on the throne that would restore the nation as it was under the reign of David. The Jews had broken the covenant God made with their forefathers and through prophets such as Jeremiah, God told of a new kingdom with a new law that would be established. The new kingdom would be for all nations, not just the Jews, fulfilling the promise God made to Abraham that his seed would be a blessing to all families of the Earth.

Jesus was brought into the world through the power of the Holy Spirit and began preaching the good news of the kingdom. His disciples, guided by the Holy Spirit, preached the remission of sins in the name of Christ for the first time on the day of Pentecost. Over time gentiles were converted beginning with Cornelius the Roman centurion then carried to the gentile world, primarily through the work of the apostle Paul. As the first century came to an

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end, the last living apostle, John, records the book of Revelation. Miraculous spiritual gifts slowly fade from the world as the written word is completed and eventually compiled as the New Testament which we have today.

The church, like God's people before them, allowed false doctrines and ideas to infiltrate the teachings and practice of the church. The apostate church grows, gains power and is the primary force in the Western world for centuries until a time when individuals studying the scriptures realized that the only doctrine that should be preached and practiced is found in the inspired word. Over the centuries, God's providence has preserved the word so that we have access to it today.

Bible students and teachers continue to misunderstand the relationship of the physical nation of Israel and the church. The message is clear however and still stands as the final authority in worship and doctrine. It's difficult to come to terms with the fact that we're living in the final age of the world, an age in which the completed revelation of God's will exists in place of miracles, inspired prophets, visions and manifestations of supernatural power. The presence of the revealed word is powerful and will guide, instruct and solidify our faith if we'll read, study and practice only those things that have been delivered.

The message is simple. God's work is complete. There's no need for further revelation (**Jude 3**) and there won't be any. True faith is founded on the word of God, and, like Abraham, we must follow what's been given to us. Bible believers seek assurance and confirmation of God's presence and power, but rely on subjective interpretations and feelings to bolster their conviction. While some seek such experiences, they reject the word, substituting ideas such as Premillennialism for what the scriptures plainly teach.

In a previous lesson I examined the symbolic use of the sun, moon and stars to refer to the powers of the world. A review of that lesson will demonstrate how these elements are used by God to denote upheavals and changes in the governments that rose, became evil but were used at times by God to depict his judgment against them. Physical signs, stated symbolically, as they are in **Matthew 24** by Christ, represent the turmoil that took place in the Roman world as can be verified historically. These can't be used as indicators of Christ's return as there will be no warning or sign to signal it's approach. Although these interpretations make a good story, they create confusion when taken as literal signs as we've discussed. In our time the only event that hasn't taken place is the second coming of Christ which will happen when we least expect it.

5. The end

The final event spoken of in the scriptures is the return of Christ who will judge the world, present the faithful to his Father and destroy the physical universe. We've examined the ideas currently held about what will happen as time goes on, but we'll see that such expectations

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will fail as the scriptures reveal. Our need is to understand what the Bible teaches and follow the patterns of service contained therein. If we do that, we have the assurance of a home with God and Christ throughout eternity. The biggest obstacle we'll have to overcome is our own misunderstanding, misinterpretation and faulty practice spiritually.

6. Conclusions

We can construct a spiritual timeline of God's plan to save mankind and place physical events that took place as that plan was brought to its conclusion.

- a. God created the world & humans in sinless perfection
- b. Adam and Eve introduce sin into the world
- c. God imposes consequences which affect all humanity
- d. God declared that Satan's power would be defeated
- e. Humans multiplied, sinned & were destroyed by the flood
- f. The flood is a type of baptism which saves us today
- g. God chose Abraham to bless the world due to his faith
- h. Abraham's seed grew & in Egyptian bondage for 430 years
- i. Moses, a type of Christ, delivered the people & God's Law
- j. Israel grew, sinned and broke the covenant with the Lord
- k. Prophets such as Jeremiah foretold of a new kingdom and law
- l. A remnant of God's people returned after seventy years of exile
- m. The temple was rebuilt & is a type of the new kingdom, the church
- n. The Messiah was brought into the world at the fulness of time
- o. Christ chose disciples, later the apostles, to continue his work
- p. On Pentecost Jesus was preached & the church established
- q. The new kingdom, the church, was opened to all
- r. The Holy Spirit guided writers to record the final revelation
- s. The providence of God preserves the word in the world today
- t. The new kingdom is spiritual in nature with Christ as king or head
- u. The kingdom and word will remain until Christ returns
- v. At the end Christ will judge the world & reward the faithful
- w. The physical universe will be destroyed
- x. The church is presented to God
- y. The faithful live with Christ & God throughout eternity

The message of the New Testament is simple and direct. The physical nation of Israel served the purpose for which it was established and was replaced by the spiritual kingdom, the church. Today, anyone who wishes to be a child of God can do so by reading and following the instructions we've been given to be saved, live faithfully and enjoy the eternal home that's been promised.

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