The Kingdom of God, Part 3: The Last Kingdom On Earth

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 1

THE LAW OF THE LAND 2
- Defilement of the Land 2
- A Universal Law 3
- The Upside for the Righteous 5

OF PANDEMICS AND GLOBAL WARMING 7
- Of Pandemics 7
- Global Warming 8

THE SIN DEBT PROBLEM 10
- The Accumulated Sin Debt 10
- Judgments to Cleanse the Land 12
- The Great Earthquake to Come 13

DESTRUCTION PAVES THE WAY FOR REBIRTH 15

THE RENEWAL OF THE EARTH 18
- Environmental Reset 18
- Topographical Changes 19

THE REBIRTH OF ISRAEL 21
- To Carve Out A Remnant 21
- The Rebirth of a Nation 23

REBIRTH OF THE SAINTS 24
- Rebirth Through Resurrection 24
- Equipping the Saints, Now and Then 26

THE LAST KINGDOM ON EARTH 28
- A Kingdom Designed to Restrain Evil 28
- A Kingdom of Righteous Government 30

CONCLUSION 32

INTRODUCTION

"Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

People, we have a problem. The earth is about to self-destruct. Like a ticking time bomb, it's only a question of when, not if. And there's no stopping it. Destruction is imminent.

No, I'm not talking about an asteroid collision, nuclear war, or an alien invasion. I'm not even talking about global warming as a *cause* of environmental problems, although to be sure it is a *symptom* of a much more fundamental worldwide problem. Nor am I talking about the end of the world in the sense of the end of history. But I am talking about the ***fact*** that everything you come into contact with on a daily basis is about to be wiped from the face of the earth. And it is absolutely imperative that this happens. Otherwise, the earth just cannot continue. And it *will* continue.

Fortunately, God has it under control. No, He's not simply going to destroy the earth and create a new one. That will happen eventually, of course, but we - and the earth - aren't there yet. Instead, He's going to do what He did the last time He destroyed the earth (by flood) - kill all the people except for a remnant, and remake the surface of the earth to give the remnant a fresh start. In other words, God will perform a global reset.

Except that this time, rather than leaving people to their own devices, God will govern and rule over the reset. Which will produce a far superior result than last time, because the last time is what got us into the mess we have now. And God won't let that happen again. So this time, He's going to be more *hands on* in world affairs. He will inaugurate the kingdom of Christ on earth to make this all possible. This kingdom will be the last kingdom on earth.

Before it can arrive, big changes - *unprecedented changes* - must take place on a global scale. This wicked and corrupted earth is in no condition to host a kingdom of everlasting righteousness. The holiness of God cannot commingle with unrighteousness. Which means that the earth - as a planet - and most of the people living on it, *must die*. Some people - really just a few - will be *reborn*.

All people go through an individual life cycle of birth, life, and death. But here, I want to consider the global cycle of *life, death and rebirth*, and how this will affect the people who go through it. The entire history of the world can be summed up in terms of birth (creation), life, death (flood), rebirth, life, death (earthquake), rebirth, life, death (fire), and re-creation (earth 2.0).

Where we are at *right now* is near the end of the period of life ("this present age") right before the great earthquake. So what I want to talk about is the destruction that will soon be upon us, what that will look like when it comes, and why it is absolutely necessary that it should happen. Then, I will discuss the rebirth that follows it, why it must come, and how the next age will be materially different from the present age in many ways.

Note: This essay is intended as a sequel to my prior essay, *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. If you have not read it, I urge you to read it first, to better understand what we will examine here.

THE LAW OF THE LAND

Defilement of the Land

Judge O.W. Holmes. Jr. once famously remarked, "The life of the law has not been logic: it has been experience." We can confidently say something similar about our world. *The life of the earth has not been righteous (or logical): it has been a (mostly) bad experience*.

When the first people fell into sin, the serpent, the woman, and the man were all separately cursed by God. Tucked inside the curses pronounced on the man was a curse of the earth itself.

> Cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return. (Gen. 3:17-19).

Think about this for a moment. The ground did nothing wrong. But because man sinned, the ground would produce thorns and thistles (not a blessing), and death was introduced to all living creatures. Or, *because of human sinfulness, the earth's physical environment changed.*

What you may not be as familiar with is the fact that this connection between human sinfulness and the physical condition of the earth is an *ongoing* relationship, not just a one time event in the past. Ever since the Fall, ***the earth reflects the sin condition of its inhabitants***. I refer to this principle as the *Law of the Land*. This is first illustrated in the case of Abel, when he is murdered by his brother.

> Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" And the Lord said, "What have you done? *The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground.* And *now you are cursed from the ground*, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth." (Gen. 4:9-12).

Notice there is a direct causal relationship between Abel's blood being spilled on the ground, and Cain being cursed from the ground as a result. Also, Cain's curse goes above and beyond the original curses pronounced on Adam and Eve - he is made a fugitive and wanderer on the earth. There is nothing in the curses pronounced on Adam and Eve about being a fugitive or wanderer. This strongly suggests that every separate act of murder has the potential for inducing separate curses for the perpetrator, above and beyond the original curse of the ground everyone is subject to.

God later confirms this by stating the general rule as part of the laws given to Israel. "You shall not pollute the land in which you live, for *blood pollutes the land*, and no atonement can be made for the land for the blood that is shed in it, except by the blood of the one who shed it." (Num. 35:33).

So, not only does every act of bloodshed (murder) separately pollute the land, but every murder also creates the need for a separate *act of atonement* to set the land right (*i.e.*, like it was before the murder). And the general rule is that atonement can only be achieved by killing the murderer, per the mandate to implement capital punishment in the Noahic covenant. (Gen. 9:6).

Why is this crucially important? Because ultimately, the additional curses imposed on the ground by every act of bloodshed impacts not only the murderer himself individually, but also the entire community where each murder takes place. "You shall not defile the land in which you live, *in the midst of which I dwell*, for I the Lord dwell in the midst of the people of Israel." (Num. 35:34).

God, and His people Israel, all dwelt on the land where any murder in Israel was committed. In principle, the defilement which occurred in the case of murder was not limited to the *person* of the murderer. The defilement also applied to the *place* of the murder. Consequently, everyone who resided on that land was affected - even if they had nothing to do with the murder personally.

However, this is just, in God's view, because every individual living in the land had a responsibility to see to it that the murderer is caught and punished as God's laws required. That is why God established a procedure for atoning for innocent blood when a murderer was not known or could not be found. A heifer was to be sacrificed in a prescribed place, and the elders of the nearest city had to swear that they neither committed the murder, nor knew who did. Then they had to make this plea to the Lord:

> "Accept atonement, O Lord, for your people Israel, whom you have redeemed, and do not set the guilt of innocent blood in the midst of your people Israel, so that their blood guilt be atoned for." So you shall purge the guilt of innocent blood from your midst, when you do what is right in the sight of the Lord. (Deut. 21:8-9).

This principle is the basis of our common law of criminal conduct. Everyone suffers for what the criminal does. A criminal doesn't merely defile himself or his own land, or the person or land of the victim, but also the land of the jurisdiction which is responsible to punish the crime. That is why all criminal actions (lawsuits) in courts today are litigated as *The People v. The Wrongdoers*. Acts which defile the land affect the whole community - if crops suffer, plagues or disaster strike, or the economy falters, it never affects merely the wrongdoers. Everyone (*i.e.*, The People) is affected.

A Universal Law

Perhaps you are thinking what I have just said only applied to the ancient Jews and has no bearing on us today. Certainly, the procedure for atonement provided for in Deut. 21 was peculiar to ancient Israel and does not apply in Gentile nations today. But the principle that bloodshed pollutes or defiles the land is a universal law applicable to all people in all places and at all times.

The general laws of murder go back all the way to Cain and Abel, and the general rule for the atonement of murder (namely, capital punishment) goes all the way back to Noah just after the flood. Both of these pre-date the formation of the nation of Israel by many years and have a universal

application.

In the case of capital punishment - part of the Noahic covenant - that requirement applies to all of the descendants of Noah, which includes everyone alive today. And the initial law of blood polluting the land - by virtue of its existence in the time of Cain and Abel - shows that it is part of the *laws of nature* (*i.e.*, the laws of creation) which are eternal and universal.

This is confirmed numerous times in scripture. In the time of Noah's flood (before the existence of Israel), the whole earth, or all of humanity, was said to be both corrupt and filled with violence. *Violence*, of course, refers to bloodshed. And *corruption* speaks of moral corruption, by which we may infer that the people in Noah's time were guilty of all of the big three offenses against God which defile the earth: *bloodshed, immorality, and idolatry*.

> Now *the earth was corrupt* in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. And God said to Noah, "I have determined to make an end of all flesh, *for the earth is filled with violence through them*. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth." (Gen. 6:11-13).

Similarly, the Lord plainly told Moses that the people of the land of Canaan, which the people of Israel were about to dispossess, had defiled the land because of their immorality. (Remember, the Canaanites had neither been given the laws of Israel, nor were they subject to them.) After listing the various sexual offenses that defiled the land, the Lord made this statement:

> "Do not make yourselves unclean by any of these things, for by all these the nations I am driving out before you have become unclean, and *the land became unclean*, so that I punished its iniquity, and *the land vomited out its inhabitants*. But you shall keep my statutes and my rules and do none of these abominations, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you (for the people of the land, who were before you, did all of these abominations, so that *the land became unclean*), lest the land vomit you out when you make it unclean, as it vomited out the nation that was before you. (Lev. 18:24-28).

This text makes it clear that immorality committed by any people defiles the land on which they live. Immorality, far from being a victimless crime, affects not merely the individuals committing the acts, but the entire community around them. Immorality makes the land unclean (it becomes defiled), and the natural response of the land is to vomit out, or expel, its inhabitants. This standard applies the same to Israel and all Gentile nations - after all, Lev. 18 speaks of the immorality of the Canaanites, who were Gentiles. It is a universal law of nature.

The same is true with respect to idolatry. Rom. 1:18-25 states that "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men," especially including idolatry. Again, not a Jewish standard, but a universal one, since *heaven* in this context refers to the starry sky which speaks to all the earth equally. (See, Ps. 19:4).

Thus, ancient Israel was judged for their bloodshed, immorality and idolatry the same as the Canaanites were. Their actions made the land God had given them unclean, and by the invading force of other nations, Israel was driven out from its land and expelled. (*See*, Ps. 106:34-39). All of these examples from history foreshadow the final cleansing of the earth.

> For behold, the Lord is coming out from his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity, and the earth will disclose the blood shed on it, and will no more cover its slain. (Isa. 26:21).

Such actions of violence, immorality and idolatry have of course continued unabated ever since ancient times. And a point in time is coming when the earth will disclose, or expose, the sin committed on it.

The Upside for the Righteous

When I say that the earth reflects the sin condition of its inhabitants, this works both ways. In other words, when the inhabitants of a land are righteous, the earth responds in kind. But your initial skepticism of what I am about to say is understandable.

I know that much of what I have said about the *Law of the Land* is counter-intuitive. When the scripture says that *blood pollutes the land*, it doesn't mean if someone spills human blood on the ground, then a chemical reaction or physical process will occur to cause pollution. The law of the land is a *spiritual* principle: the pollution is spiritual, and the defilement of the land is spiritual. The earth responds not from a physical reaction, but in a spiritual sense due to the commission of certain kinds of *sin*. We are not here talking about a type of pollution that can be measured scientifically.

In this day and age of scientific materialism, this may be a difficult concept to accept. But the scripture everywhere repeats and reflects this principle, so much so that the evidence is overwhelming, and we must either accept it, or throw out large portions of the Bible. Take, for example, this text excerpted from Isa. 55:6-12:

> Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. ... For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and *the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands*.

Whether you take this last sentence as literal or metaphorical, the clear indication is that repentance from wrongdoing not only pleases the Lord, but also brings healing, and even joy, to the land itself. Or how about this familiar scripture?

> If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin

> and ***heal their land***. (2 Ch. 7:14).

Ask yourself how this healing is intended to be understood - are we talking about chemical reactions and physical processes, or something else? Again, when Jesus entered Jerusalem the Sunday before He was crucified, was He speaking literally or metaphorically in this text? –

> As he was drawing near - already on the way down the Mount of Olives - the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, *the very stones would cry out*." (Lk. 19:37-40).

Once more, the righteousness or sinfulness of people on the earth has very real consequences in the physical world. Live righteously, and the land will respond favorably. But if a people live wickedly, the land will speak out against them physically. Here I'm speaking of whole communities or nations, not individual people. How else are we to understand the blessings and curses God pronounced on Israel in Deut. 28?

The blessings for obedience to God's laws are not merely spiritual, but also physical and material. "And the Lord will make you abound in prosperity, in the fruit of your womb and in the fruit of your livestock and in the fruit of your ground, within the land that the Lord swore to your fathers to give you. The Lord will open to you his good treasury, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hands. And you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow." (Deut 28:11-12).

On the other hand, the curses for disobedience are also physical and material. As you might expect, they are the opposite of the blessings. "Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the field. Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Cursed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock. Cursed shall you be when you come in, and cursed shall you be when you go out." (Deut 28:16-19).

But it gets worse. Included among the curses: health problems (wasting disease, fever, boils, inflammation, tumors, scabs, itch, madness, blindness, confusion, unknown sicknesses); environmental problems (pestilence, drought, blight, mildew, scorching heat, lack of rain, locusts, worms); oppression, robbery, waste, kidnapings, conquest by enemies, slavery, indebtedness, siege and distress, cannibalism, scattered in foreign lands and dispossessed. (Deut. 28:20-68).

Gosh, I sure am glad the United States (God Bless America!) is a Christian nation, where we don't have to deal with any of those problems, yessirree! I mean, the only things we have to worry about are raging fires, dustbowls, floods, earthquakes, tornados, hurricanes, drug addictions, alcoholism, rampant crime, sex trafficking, child trafficking, riots in the street, pornography, systemic injustice, a faltering economy and a staggering national debt that will bankrupt the nation. Thank God we don't have to worry about violence, immorality and idolatry in the good ole US of A. Or do we?

OF PANDEMICS AND GLOBAL WARMING

Of Pandemics

> Then he said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and *pestilences*." (Lk. 21:10-11).

It's pretty easy, looking at scripture, to see times when God specifically reveals that He punished a particular nation - whether Egypt during the Exodus, or Israel during their captivity - using many of the curses and plagues He said He would send in response to flagrant disobedience of His laws. See, for example, Amos 4:6-11 ("I sent these curses upon you, yet you did not return to me," declares the Lord). And we say, when reading of them, "Oh yeah, God did that."

What is harder is working backwards from a modern disaster or calamity to the root cause. When all we have is the calamity itself, but not any explanation of it from God, what can we say about it? People who have tried to assign specific moral blame for recent physical disasters are always ridiculed as nutcases.

Trying to pinpoint a specific moral cause that produced a specific calamity in modern times is always problematic, or at least is subject to interpretation. Remember that crimes which defile the land affect the entire community which has jurisdiction to discover and punish the wrongdoer. If the local economy starts to falter, there is a crop failure, or a flood strikes, who can possibly say *which* murder(s), *which* immorality, or *which* idol worshipers were the ones whose actions led God to impair the land?

At the same time, if any nation as a whole lived righteously (not perfectly, but relatively speaking), would God send them earthquakes, tornadoes, floods, hurricanes and raging fires? Isn't the whole promise of blessings for obedience also an implicit promise to withhold disasters? Isn't that what *healing the land* necessarily implies? That if a nation turns from its wicked ways, God will make sure blessings will abound, and calamities will not happen?

So what do we say then, when any nation (including our own) experiences not only every kind of natural disaster on a regular basis, but also has insurmountable health problems among the people, environmental problems, rising crime and injustice, national bankruptcy, and such? Can we not say, with some confidence, that there must be one or more underlying moral offenses being committed by the people of that nation on a continual basis, which actions are defiling the land?

There is no such thing as a good tornado, or a good hurricane. I understand that weather phenomena serve a purpose, as it were, of moving air, water, pressure, humidity, etc. They can be explained, in some sense, scientifically. But a tornado is *never* a benefit. A hurricane is *never* a shower of blessing. These things are *always* destructive, not constructive; hurtful, not helpful. So, if you are the least bit inclined to believe that *God is in control of the weather*, then in sending us the weather He does, God may be trying to tell us something.

It may be impossible to say which specific moral offenses "caused" (from God's perspective) some specific disaster, but isn't the presence of ongoing disasters *evidence* of some large-scale moral failing? And if "natural disasters" keep getting worse, and more frequent, isn't that very strong evidence that moral failures are pervasive and unrelenting in a nation or culture? Shouldn't ongoing disasters at least prompt us to ask, "What are we doing as a people, that would incline God to send disasters our way?" Isn't a little self-examination warranted?

And isn't the analysis for natural disasters also applicable to plagues and pandemics? Granted, the latest SARS-CoV-2 (or COVID-19) pandemic is not the only global pandemic in history. Whether it will be worse, or longer lasting, than other pandemics is yet to be determined. The question is whether a pestilence of this type, being worldwide, may be indicative of a global moral failure. After all, there are no good diseases - all plagues are a curse. I put it to you - isn't the recent pandemic in fact evidence that God has a moral indictment against the whole world?

> The Lord will roar from on high ... against all the inhabitants of the earth ... for the Lord has an indictment against the nations; he is entering into judgment with all flesh. (Jer. 25:30-31).

The response of the natural mind is to avoid thinking about God and blame people - but for all the wrong reasons. *It was an experiment gone bad. There was a containment breach. They shouldn't have been doing that kind of research.* But if in fact the virus was *natural* in bats, as has been claimed, who is responsible for creating that natural virus? God. Who is responsible for determining how the virus would spread? God. And if the virus was man-made, who is responsible for the Delta variant? God. Who controls which mutations kill the virus and which mutations help the virus thrive? God.

Do you still think the global pandemic has nothing to do with God? Perhaps - no, Probably - God is sending the world a message. You know - about His laws, and our lack of obedience. But is anyone listening?

Global Warming

Ah, if only the global pandemic were all that the world had to worry about, for as history has shown, all pandemics eventually run their course and then end. But global warming - ack! That could go on for centuries (so we are told).

Conventional wisdom places the blame for global warming squarely on the shoulders of so-called *greenhouse gases*, namely, carbon dioxide (CO_2) and methane (CH_4). The measurement of how much greenhouse gases a person, animal or activity produces is referred to as the *carbon footprint*. Of course, all people and animals expel carbon dioxide into the atmosphere just by *breathing*, and methane is produced by animal manure, and may also be found in digestive gases. Which implicitly makes all people and animals a threat to the environment.

When God created the earth, He wonderfully divided all life into two basic categories - plants and

animals. Animals breathe in oxygen, and breathe out carbon dioxide, while plants do just the reverse, taking in carbon dioxide and expelling oxygen. Thus, the plant and animal worlds perfectly balance each other, with the output of each helping the other to thrive. Thus, when God had finished with His creation, He pronounced it very good. (Gen. 1:31).

But now, pseudo-science has determined that the animal half is, in fact, *not good* and must be curtailed in order to reduce carbon emissions. Particularly the raising of cattle for food, which provides a new argument for not eating meat or dairy. Of course, if successful, these efforts will have a detrimental effect on all plants, which need the carbon dioxide that cattle produces. Such an environmental policy not only attacks the Dominion Mandate (raising domesticated animals for food), but denies the goodness of God's creation, and is ultimately a death sentence for all life.

Meanwhile, God is sitting up in the heavens shaking His head. "Yes, it is people's fault!" But not because we're taking too much dominion, or because God's created order wasn't good enough. Instead, it's our fault because people will do absolutely everything imaginable to avoid having to cut back on our immorality and vices. So rather than look for a moral cure to our defilement of the land, we look to scientific 'cures,' which in the long run only make the problems worse.

People have always found ways to either solve, or find practical workarounds, for local environmental problems. Is your farmland too dry? Dig a well. Divert a stream. Build a dam. Invent new methods of irrigation. But what if it isn't the land itself that is the problem, but the crop you are raising is too vulnerable?

Take the vegetable corn, as an example. Back in the old days, if crops had a rough year, it was feasible to identify the hardy plants, isolate them from the weaker plants, and engage in a process of selective breeding. Over time, people would develop hardy strains of corn to strengthen their crop yield. But that wasn't enough to protect plants from various insect pests, so pesticides were developed. Though some of those turned out to be more harmful to the environment than helpful, so people had to develop safer, but still effective, new pesticides.

At some point that was deemed insufficient, so people decided to genetically modify corn and other foodstuffs to make the genetic makeup of the plants more resistant to pests, all in an effort to preserve or increase yields. Which just brings in a whole new set of environmental problems, including allergic reactions to GMO foods, an increased production of toxins in foods, reduced nutritional value, a release of toxins into the soil, increasing the resistance of pests to pesticides, etc.

So our own actions have created a new set of problems that have nothing to do with the original corn itself, but result from the fact that we continually respond to environmental problems the wrong way. All of our efforts to increase crop yields in the face of environmental problems are merely addressing the symptoms, never the underlying problem, which of course is ***sin***. There was never anything wrong with the corn God gave us - it never needed to be fixed. What needed to be fixed was our sinful behavior which has been defiling the land.

In other words, I believe the evidence indicates that *global warming is primarily a moral problem,*

not a scientific one. You can't use science to fix a moral problem. A moral problem requires a moral solution. You see, those harsh conditions and pests were either sent, or controlled by, God. God controls the weather, the environment, and the world. "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein." (Ps. 24:1).

> "For thus says the Lord God: How much more when I send upon Jerusalem my four disastrous acts of judgment, *sword, famine, wild beasts, and pestilence*, to cut off from it man and beast!" (Eze. 14:21). "And I looked, and behold, a pale horse! And its rider's name was Death, and Hades followed him. And they were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill with *sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts* of the earth." (Rev. 6:8).

The *sword*, of course, refers to wars. But famine, pestilence and wild beasts all speak to the environment. Who is in control of them? God. Who is the one giving authority over these things in Rev. 6:8? God.

And ultimately, it is up to God alone (and He really doesn't need any help from us) to protect and preserve the earth. This is God's world. You, me, we don't need to Save the Planet - it's not our job. Take dominion over the planet, yes. Be good stewards of the planet, yes. But save the planet from the consequences of thousands of years of the build up of burden on the land caused by constant defilement? Nope - we couldn't do that if we tried.

Sure, if people over the centuries had served God and obeyed Him, the current environmental problems could have been alleviated. But they didn't, and *now it's too late*. You see, the defilement of the land over the last few thousand years has been piling up, and it has reached the point where it cannot be eradicated gradually, but must taken care of all at once. And that means judgment - worldwide cataclysmic judgment.

THE SIN DEBT PROBLEM

The Accumulated Sin Debt

The *Law of the Land* has a cumulative effect, not just an immediate one. Over time, as bloodshed goes un-atoned for, and as idolatry and immorality increase unchecked, the defilement of the land begins to accumulate. This accumulation of defilement creates a *sin debt* which burdens the land, weighs it down, and puts the earth under a heavy strain - one that it was never meant to carry indefinitely. This defilement of the land - unless atoned for - never goes away. Every new defilement which is not atoned for just gets heaped on top of the previous defilements.

This has led, and will lead, God to destroy the earth from time to time. At various points in history, the accumulation of defilement on the earth becomes so great that it must be *relieved* (that is, *atoned for all at once*), or else the earth will not be able to contain it. And we are at the brink of such a time right now. That is what I meant earlier when I said the earth is about to self-destruct.

In fact, in all of human history, God will destroy the earth ***three*** times, each time to cleanse the land and reset it. The first and last of these, you are likely already familiar with. But the middle one is the one which is very nearly upon us.

The first one, of course, was the Genesis flood. I already mentioned how the violence and immorality of the people defiled the earth, necessitating God's response. But look at what the results of the flood actually were. *First*, all the wrongdoers were killed. *Second*, the land itself was wiped clean, and the earth's surface was reformed. Keep in mind that the Genesis flood was not like floods of today, where the water recedes and things pretty much return to normal.

Back then, the earth cracked open (think of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge). The vapor canopy covering the earth fell, and the climate of the earth changed (oh no!). Continents moved, and mountain ranges were formed. The water level of the oceans undoubtedly rose (horror of horrors!). Lakes, glaciers, and deep canyons formed where there had been none before. Sediment was piled up everywhere, and the remains of sea creatures were deposited over the entire surface of the earth to become fossilized. From a topographical standpoint, nothing was the same after the flood as it was before.

I believe - based on other biblical examples of defilement and atonement - that the primary effect of the Genesis flood was to atone for the accumulated sin debt on the earth, to wipe the slate clean spiritually as well as physically, and to put the earth in the position of a reset (or fresh start). In destroying the earth, God cleansed it. The final destruction of the earth by fire at the end of time will have the same effect, but be permanent.

For all of its destructive power and effects, the Genesis flood only took care of the sin debt problem temporarily. As soon as people began to multiply again, the defilement of the earth and the accumulation of a sin debt just started up all over again. However, the complete destruction of the present earth and the creation of a new earth will do away with the problem forever, since, sin, death and the curse of the ground will all be eliminated at that time. (Rev. 21:4; 22:3).

Meanwhile, back on the present earth of sin and corruption, the sin debt has been accumulating since the Genesis flood without any atonement, for roughly 4,300 years or so. (At the time of the flood, the sin debt had accumulated for only about 1,700 years.) No, I'm not minimizing the atoning ministry and work of Jesus when I say this. But the atonement He offers through the Church covenant is individual only. Christ did nothing to atone for the earth physically.

Thus, the earth today is under a terrible strain from its accumulated sin debt.

> How long will the land mourn and the grass of every field wither? For the evil of those who dwell in it the beasts and the birds are swept away. (Jer. 12:4).
>
> The earth mourns and withers; the world languishes and withers; the highest people of the earth languish. ***The earth lies defiled under its inhabitants***; for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt; therefore the inhabitants of the earth are

scorched, and few men are left. (Isa. 24:4-6).

Notice how the apostle Paul links the sin debt of the earth with the need for bodily resurrection in Romans. Both the earth and our physical bodies strain under the weight of sin, and the only ultimate solution in both cases is to destroy the present physical form by transformation via rebirth and renewal. In other words, the physical earth and our physical bodies both need to be *reborn*. This is the only way to achieve a permanent reset.

> For we know that ***the whole creation has been groaning*** together in ***the pains of childbirth*** until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. (Rom. 8:22-23).
>
> For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we sigh, being burdened - not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. (2 Cor. 5:2-4).

Judgments to Cleanse the Land

I look at the prophesied judgments God will impose on the earth during the Tribulation in this light. That is, I view His judgments as the means of atoning for the accumulated sin debt, to cleanse the earth and provide a clean slate going forward. He will do this in the same basic manner as He did with the Genesis flood: 1) kill off all the wicked; and 2) remake the surface of the earth.

According to the fourth seal of judgment (Rev. 6:7-8), one fourth of the world's population will be killed by the sword, famine, pestilence and wild beasts. According to the sixth trumpet of judgment (Rev. 9:13-19), four angels commanding an army of 200,000,000 will kill a third of mankind by "fire and smoke and sulphur." Between these two, at least half of the entire world population will be killed during the course of the Tribulation. Actually, the final death toll will likely be much higher, since there will be wars and other causes of death all going on during the same period.

And of course, Jesus will kill all of the armies of the entire world arrayed against Jerusalem (at the battle of Armageddon) merely by the appearance of His coming and the word which comes from His mouth like a sword. (2 Th 2:8; Isa. 11:4; Rev. 19:15-21). This will be in addition to the people killed pursuant to the fourth seal and the sixth trumpet.

Other Tribulation judgments will be specifically directed against the earth's surface. In the first trumpet judgment, one third of the land and trees will be burned up, along with all green grass. With the second and third trumpets, one third of the seas is turned to blood, and one third of rivers and springs are made bitter (that is, toxic). These water judgments are later expanded - with the second and third bowl judgments, all of the oceans and all of the rivers and springs are turned to blood, killing all marine life.

I include these water judgments as part of God's cleansing of the earth for two reasons. *First*, the Genesis flood covered all lakes, rivers and oceans just as much as the land areas, indicating they bore the sin debt of the earth as much as the land in the past - so why not in the future?

Second, turning the oceans and rivers to blood is symbolic of the bloodshed which has taken place on the earth. Which is to say, bloodshed committed *anywhere* on the globe ultimately defiles the waters of the earth as much as the land, because it is all *one earth*. Plus, killing all marine life will impact people worldwide (via starvation) regardless of where the bloodshed occurred - a global response to a global problem.

Earlier, when we looked at past instances of the land vomiting out its inhabitants, sometimes this meant people being killed by conquest, other times it meant the people would have to relocate. Thus Israel, when it was judged for disobedience, was not slaughtered, but dispersed. However, these instances were localized to a rather small area of land compared to the whole earth.

I don't see a relocation option playing out in the Tribulation - with the whole world under judgment, there will be nowhere to go to escape it. At that time, expulsion from the land will mainly mean death for the land's inhabitants.

Nevertheless, I believe these judgments on the earth will not be implemented simply to punish the people as a form of retribution. God's judgments seem to me to be intended to cleanse the earth of its sin debt, to make a clean slate for the inauguration of the kingdom of Christ. Although, it is likely they will also have a punitive effect, because many judgments will fall primarily on the wicked.

The Great Earthquake to Come

All of God's Tribulation judgments on the land, severe as they will be, pale in comparison to the granddaddy of all the judgments on the earth, the great earthquake. Earlier I mentioned God will destroy the earth three times. I named the first (by water) and the last (by fire), but left the second one until now. It will be the largest earthquake of all time, and also the last. Because it will be upon us soon, let's look at it in some detail.

> Behold, the Lord will ***empty the earth*** *and make it desolate*, and he will ***twist its surface*** and scatter its inhabitants. ... The earth shall be utterly empty and utterly plundered; for the Lord has spoken this word. ... Terror and the pit and the snare are upon you, O inhabitant of the earth! ... For the windows of heaven are opened, and *the foundations of the earth* ***tremble***. The earth is utterly broken, ***the earth is split apart, the earth is violently shaken***. The earth staggers like a drunken man; it sways like a hut; its transgression lies heavy upon it, and it falls, and ***will not rise again***. (Isa. 24:1-3, 17-20).
>
> But on that day, the day that Gog shall come against the land of Israel, declares the Lord God, my wrath will be roused in my anger. For in my jealousy and in my blazing wrath I declare, On that day there shall be ***a great earthquake*** in the land of Israel. The fish of

> the sea and the birds of the heavens and the beasts of the field and all creeping things that creep on the ground, and *all the people who are on the face of the earth, **shall quake*** at my presence. And ***the mountains shall be thrown down**, and the cliffs shall fall, and every wall shall tumble to the ground*. (Eze. 38:18-20).

This great earthquake is also mentioned twice in Revelation.

> When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was ***a great earthquake***, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood ... and ***every mountain and island was removed from its place***. (Rev. 6:12-14).

> The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, "It is done!" And there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and ***a great earthquake such as there had never been since man was on the earth***, so great was that earthquake. ... And ***every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found***. (Rev. 16:17-20).

I am convinced that all of these scriptures refer to the *same* earthquake. This earthquake will occur at the very end of the Tribulation - very possibly the final event of the Tribulation before Jesus returns.

Notice that Eze. 38 is a description of the battle of Armageddon, which occurs right at the close of the Tribulation when Jesus returns to defeat the enemies of God. Similarly, the earthquake occurs at the *end* of the seal judgments in Revelation, and at the *end* of the bowl judgments, indicating that it occurs at the end of the Tribulation. (Realize that the seal judgments, trumpet judgments and bowl judgments do not all run after each other in a linear sequence. The seals, trumpets and bowls all separately run through the entire period of the Tribulation, and some events are mentioned twice.)

I have also highlighted language in each text showing that the earthquake described can only ever happen ***once*** - which should also tell you that it hasn't happened yet. So in Isa. 24, the earth is shaken to the point of making it *empty and desolate*. How many times has that happened so far in history - worldwide? Never yet. Eze. 38 and the verses in Revelation all state that the mountains will be thrown down and removed. Has an earthquake like that ever happened? Nope - the mountains are still there. How many times can this possibly happen? Only once - once the mountains are gone, they're gone. As Isa. 24 puts it, the earth will never *rise again*.

Rev. 16 says this earthquake will be the largest in all of history, so it can only happen once. The evidence is pretty convincing - these scriptures all describe the same earthquake. Isa. 40 speaks of this same earthquake, and directly links it with the revealing of Christ at the Second Coming:

> ***Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level***, and the rough places a plain. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken. (Isa. 40:4-5).

So to the extent the Genesis flood altered the surface of the earth forever, including tectonic shifts and the formation of the mountain ranges, the great earthquake will have the same global impact, but largely in reverse. That is, the flood formed the mountains, and the earthquake will destroy them. The net effect will be to wipe the surface clean, to atone for the defilement of the earth which has built up since the flood, and present a clean slate for the inauguration of the kingdom of Christ.

But not only will the great earthquake cleanse the earth from the sin debt, it will also have the effect of removing all the works of mankind from the earth. Think about it - every mountain and hill will fall, every cliff will fall, every valley rise up, and every island will flee away. According to Eze. 38, *every wall will tumble*. So, what do you think will happen to all of the buildings on the earth? They will crumble - every last one of them. Nothing built by man will be left. And this is as it should be.

> At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of things that are shaken - that is, ***things that have been made*** - in order that the ***things that cannot be shaken*** may remain. Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken. (Heb 12:26-28).

Here, Hebrews draws a clear dividing line between the things made by people and the things made by God. The things made by people *can* be shaken, and will be *removed*. But the things made by God *cannot* be shaken, and will *remain*.

That's pretty sobering, isn't it? To think that everything mankind has built in all of history is of no use to God when the kingdom of Christ comes. That the only way to do things right is to eliminate everything done in the past. So everyone of us can rest assured that everything we have physically built on earth in our lives will inevitably come to nothing in the sight of God.

Make no mistake - I'm not just talking about physical structures, and I don't think the scriptures are, either. Nations and their governments - symbolically represented throughout scripture as mountains - will also be shaken and removed. Institutions, economic systems, the military-industrial complex, and organizations of every kind formed by people will be shaken and removed. Including every religious organization, church and ministry on the face of the earth. None will survive, as none of them will be needed in the Millennium.

DESTRUCTION PAVES THE WAY FOR REBIRTH

Perhaps you have been told when the Tribulation wraps up, all that will be left is the final judgment and the end of history. It may seem logical, given the staggering amount of death and destruction taking place during that time. You might think things can be fixed only by God's creation of a new heavens and a new earth. However, *this is not what scripture indicates*. The final judgment and the end of history will still be a thousand years down the road. Meanwhile, the earth and humanity will go through a period of rebirth and renewal.

> And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the

> kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been *thrown down*, who accuses them day and night before our God. (Rev. 12:10).
>
> Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and *bound him* for a thousand years. ... Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. ... *They came to life* and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. (Rev. 20:1-4).

These two texts from Revelation describe how the devil will be imprisoned for a thousand years, so that Christ can rule the earth unopposed in the most glorious, and the final, kingdom on earth. You may have learned in Sunday School, or been taught from the pulpit, that the kingdom of Christ will be exclusively spiritual, heavenly, or supernatural. Not so. It will be physical, political, and earthly.

I gave two reasons for this in *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. First, I believe God wants to demonstrate a progression in terms of the physical manifestation of the kingdom of God. Second, I believe the Millennial kingdom of Christ will be a type of Sabbath rest - a millennium of relative rest compared to the prior six millennia of human history.

To these, I can add a third reason - God wants to keep His promises to Israel and prove Himself to not be a colossal liar. By which I refer to the many promises to Israel throughout the centuries that it will undergo a physical restoration and transformation on the present earth. If God doesn't do that, He will be the greatest liar in history - and *God is no liar*. (Num. 23:19; Heb. 6:18).

So instead of destroying the earth in its entirety immediately after the Tribulation, God will cause the earth and everything on it to go through a process of rebirth and renewal. Actually, the theme of giving birth - especially the *travail* of giving birth, or birth pains - is a fairly common one in scripture, particularly in prophecy of the end times.

> And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was pregnant and was crying out in ***birth pains and the agony of giving birth***. ... She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne. (Rev. 12:1-2,5).

Here, the word picture describes Israel as a woman giving birth to the Christ child. But its placement in Revelation is not looking back to Christ's First Advent, it is looking forward to His Second Advent, when He will rule the nations with *a rod of iron* (more on this later). For now, though, Christ has been *caught up to God* and sits at the Father's right hand, waiting to receive the kingdom promised to Him. (Ps. 110:1; Lk. 19:12-15; Heb. 10:12-13). In this context, the birth described in Rev. 12 relates to the coming kingdom of Christ.

Earlier I quoted from Rom. 8:22, "that the whole creation has been groaning together in ***the pains***

of childbirth until now." Similarly, when Jesus was describing the events leading up to his return, He said, "All these are but the beginning of the ***birth pains***." (Mat. 24:8. Also, Mk. 13:8). These scriptures all point to the birth of the Millennial kingdom of Christ.

Most Christians are familiar with the concept of a second birth, or a spiritual rebirth. "Jesus answered him, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.'" (Jn. 3:3). The process of second birth follows a rule, "But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual." (1 Cor. 15:46). However, don't think of *spiritual* as implying *non-physical*. Instead, it is the concept of first comes the sinful (natural), and then comes the holy (spiritual) - but the holy can still be physical.

I want to discuss four aspects of second birth, or a spiritual rebirth/renewal, which will all follow the Tribulation, and which together will usher in the Millennial kingdom of Christ. Each of these will follow the rule that the natural (sinful) comes first, and the holy (spiritual) comes after. And each of these is directly tied to *the future work and ministry of Christ*.

1) The present earth, subject as it is to the curse brought on it by fallen mankind, will not be completely reborn until God destroys the present creation and makes new heavens and a new earth, holy, incorruptible, and no longer under any curse. However, after the Tribulation's cleansing of the earth from its accumulated Sin Debt, the present earth will be *renewed* (made clean, but still under the curse of the ground) for the benefit of Christ's kingdom.

2) The nation of Israel will be spiritually reborn. Israel was, and always will remain, an entity which is merely an extended family, being defined as the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Faith, belief and redemption were never part of the equation for determining whether someone was a Jew. But all that will change at the Second Coming, when every Jew will be saved, that is, spiritually reborn. In addition, the *land* of Israel will be radically transformed and renewed.

3) The saints of the Church will be physically reborn with a *spiritual body*. You may think that is a contradiction, but it isn't. What I mean is that all believers in Christ will, at the Second Coming, be physically resurrected, and receive a new body of *flesh and bone*, to replace their former bodies of *flesh and blood*. These new bodies, though physical, will be immortal, sinless, and incorruptible - which makes them spiritual physical bodies.

4) The kingdom of Christ will be born when Jesus returns. In some sense, it will be a second manifestation (or second birth) of the kingdom of God which was first manifested in the kingdom of ancient Israel. But this new kingdom will be much improved, being clothed in righteousness, rather than idolatry and rebellion. After all, ancient Israel was ruled by sinful men, whereas the new kingdom will be ruled by a sinless Christ. It will not be the ultimately perfect manifestation of the kingdom of God for all eternity, but it will be the last, and best, kingdom on earth.

With this context in mind, let's look at the soon coming renewal of the earth.

THE RENEWAL OF THE EARTH

Environmental Reset

If you have ever seen a 'post-apocalyptic' movie, imagining what the world would look like after a global catastrophe, it is always a dismal picture. Typically, the landscape is barren, with water, food and other necessary resources being scarce. Technological advancements are thrown back a hundred or a thousand years, and humanity is reduced to a primitive tribal warfare state. Or, in some versions, all of civilized humanity is reduced to a single city under a huge dome, or within a huge wall, and the rest of the earth is untamed, dangerous, and uncivilized.

However, when God destroyed the earth and everyone living on it during the Genesis flood, that was not the experience which greeted Noah and his family upon leaving the ark. In some ways, the earth would have seemed foreign to them. Mountains existed where none were before, and storms were now a regular part of life (remember, there were no storms, or even rain, before the flood). And the animal kingdom had suddenly become more hostile.

Yet the earth itself, and all living things, must have recovered very quickly. Noah and his family did not lack for food, clothing, or shelter. God commanded them to begin eating meat, so the animals must have started reproducing rather quickly, and they did not all simply scatter and leave the people hungry. Ostensibly, the flood would have wiped out or covered over all the plants with sediment, yet undoubtedly the plants started to grow and spread again very quickly after the flood.

With the formation of the mountains also came the formation of desert areas which had not been there before. Still, on the whole, the surface of the earth did not dry up and die, but started to flourish again with the spread of plants, animals and people. Nor did people regress to a barbaric or primitive state, though they most likely started out living in caves until other homes could be built. Once the earth was cleansed, nothing remained to prevent it from becoming revitalized.

I suggest that the same thing will take place after the Tribulation, when the earth will endure horrific environmental disasters. Worldwide, land will be burned and vegetation destroyed, the oceans will be polluted and marine life killed, and fresh water sources will become toxic. People worldwide will be scorched, afflicted with boils and various plagues, tortured, and ultimately billions will be killed. And their dead bodies will lie on the ground like dung.

> "And those pierced by the Lord on that day shall extend from one end of the earth to the other. They shall not be lamented, or gathered, or buried; they shall be dung on the surface of the ground." (Jer. 25:33).

It is impossible to say how many people will survive the Tribulation as mortal human beings, but it could quite possibly be in the millions - we just don't know. No matter how many there are, however, God is not going to allow them to survive, only to let them die of starvation, exposure, or disease immediately after. The earth, having been cleansed, will be environmentally reset to once again sustain life and allow all living things and people to flourish.

And I am sure this environmental reset, whatever else it may include, will reset the climate of the earth and take care of any global warming problems. To whatever extent the earth's climate has been off kilter, it got that way because of mankind's continual sinning without regard for the effect of the *Law of the Land*, as I observed earlier. After all, the earth's climate is controlled by God, not by people. "While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease." (Gen. 8:22).

In any event, a worldwide kingdom of the Christ in which righteousness will dwell cannot be established on a defiled earth. "Rejoice with him, O heavens; bow down to him, all gods, for he avenges the blood of his children and takes vengeance on his adversaries. He repays those who hate him and ***cleanses his people's land***." (Dt. 32:43).

Even the aftermath of the battle of Armageddon must be cleansed from the land of Israel at the beginning of the kingdom of Christ. Although this will be carried out by people, not God.

> "On that day I will give to Gog a place for burial in Israel ... east of the sea. ... For seven months the house of Israel will be burying them, in order to ***cleanse the land***. All the people of the land will bury them, and it will bring them renown on the day that I show my glory, declares the Lord God. They will set apart men to travel through the land regularly and bury those travelers remaining on the face of the land, ***so as to cleanse it***. (Eze. 39:12-14.)

Topographical Changes

Not only will the earth be cleansed after the Antichrist and the kingdom of Darkness are put down, it will also be *reshaped* in a number of ways. I believe these topographical changes are all meant to indicate that the earth has been cleansed. No one will be able to physically *see* the sin removed from the land. Instead, what they will see is that the land has *changed*, and this will be evidence that it has also been cleansed.

Worldwide, of course, the effects of the great earthquake will be to tear down all the mountains, raise up all the valleys, and remove all the islands. And this will hold true for walls and buildings built by people, as well - all of them will be thrown down. Rev. 16:19 adds, "The great city [*i.e.*, Jerusalem] was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell [*i.e.*, completely]." These are all things the people of the world will be able to see, and infer a spiritual change.

However, most of the topographical changes to the earth at the beginning of the Millennium that scripture tells us about concern Jerusalem and Israel. For example, Zch. 14:4 tells us that when Jesus returns to earth, "On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley, so that one half of the Mount shall move northward, and the other half southward."

Concurrently, according to Zch. 14:10, "The whole land [of Israel] shall be turned into a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem. But Jerusalem shall remain aloft on its site ..." Isa. 2:2 adds,

"It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills."

In other words, the whole world will have been flattened by the great earthquake - *except* for Jerusalem, and in particular the Temple Mount, from which Jesus will rule and reign over the whole earth. Don't you think the people living at that time will notice the symbolism of the throne of Christ sitting on literally the highest mountain in the world?

Several times Isaiah mentions a highway that will stretch from Egypt to Assyria during the Millennium, which of course will run the entire length of the land of Israel. (Isa. 11:16, 19:23, 35:8, 40:3, 49:11, 62:10). The highway will be called the Way of Holiness, and it will belong to the redeemed of God. (Isa. 35:8). This is the one prophesied in Isa. 40:3 and Isa. 49:11 - "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God." The key feature being that the highway will be straight and level, which would be impossible to build now, while the terrain is so mountainous.

Other changes are coming, as well. According to Zch. 14:8-9, "On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea and half of them to the western sea. It shall continue in summer as in winter. And the Lord will be king over all the earth." In other words, water will flow from Jerusalem in two directions - west to the Mediterranean, and east to the Dead Sea.

To get a fuller picture of the water flowing towards the Dead Sea, we must turn to Ezek. 47:1-5, which describes water flowing from underneath the threshold of the temple. The river is described as ankle deep 1,000 cubits from the temple, knee deep at 2,000 cubits, waist deep at 3,000 cubits, and too deep to pass at 4,000 cubits (about 7,000 feet) downstream. And it should be no surprise that the living waters flowing into the Dead Sea will have a healing and restorative effect.

> "This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah, and enters the sea; when the water flows into the sea, the water will become fresh. And wherever the river goes, every living creature that swarms will live, and there will be very many fish. For this water goes there, that the waters of the sea may become fresh; so everything will live where the river goes." (Ezek. 47:8-9).

The Dead Sea, of course, is called that because it is toxic to life - no marine life can live in its waters. But when people see that change, so that life flourishes where formerly nothing could live, they will know that the environment has not merely changed, it has been cleansed. In fact, the whole land of Israel will be unusually blessed, environmentally.

> "Behold, I will bring to [Israel] health and healing, and I will heal them and reveal to them abundance of prosperity and security. I will restore the fortunes of Judah and the fortunes of Israel, and rebuild them as they were at first. I will *cleanse* them from all the guilt of their sin against me, and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me. (Jer. 33:6-8).

Scripture specifically tells us that some nations - notably those that persecuted Israel in the past - will be made desolate. Thus, Egypt will be made desolate for 40 years and its people exiled (Eze. 29:1-16), and the Nile River will be dried up (Isa. 19:5-8). The land of Edom (southern Jordan) will be made a perpetual waste (Isa. 34:5-14; also Eze. 35:1-15). Similarly, Babylon will be a perpetual wasteland. (Jer. 51:26, 60-64).

On the other hand, scripture tells us that certain nations in addition to Israel will be restored. For example, Moab (central Jordan) (Jer. 48:47); Ammon (northern Jordan) (Jer. 49:6); Elam (southwest Iran) (Jer. 49:39); as well as Sodom and Samaria (Eze. 16:53).

As for the rest of the world, scripture only gives a few clues. I suspect one of the consequences of the mountains and valleys all being made level will be to make much more of the earth's surface mild in climate, and more livable and suitable for agriculture, etc. That doesn't necessarily mean the rest of the earth will be lush like a garden, but it might eliminate many climactic extremes worldwide.

THE REBIRTH OF ISRAEL

To Carve Out A Remnant

Remember that the *Law of the Land* has two sides. Certain kinds of evil behavior defile the land and cause it to be burdened above and beyond the original curse of the ground. Conversely, the land rejoices when it is inhabited by the righteous. We have just seen how the earth, by a process of destruction and renewal, will shed the defilement of the present age before the next age begins. Now it is time to shift focus to the arrival of two groups of righteous *persons*, whose presence will help deter future defilement of the earth in the Millennium.

The first of these is the rebirth of Israel. I am not here talking about the *land* of Israel, but its *people*. The two go hand-in-hand, of course. One of the most prevalent themes in all of biblical prophecy is the regathering of the Jewish people, the restoration of their homeland and possessions, and the fact they will at last recognize Jesus as their Messiah in a national spiritual rebirth. For example, see Ezek. chap. 34, 36 & 37.

I am convinced these many prophecies are meant to be taken literally, and have no application to the Church as a successor-in-interest to Israel. The prophecies are repeated way too often to be misunderstood in a merely spiritual or allegorical sense. Besides, the prophecies specific to the Church, *i.e.*, the saints in Christ, are completely different (and this is what we will examine in the next section). Additionally, God went to considerable length to provide some guarantees that His promises were meant for *literal* Israel.

> Thus says the Lord, who gives the sun for light by day and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night: ... "If this fixed order departs from before me, declares the Lord, *then* shall ***the offspring of Israel*** cease from being a nation before me forever." (Jer. 31:35-36).

In other words, as long as the fixed order of the moon and stars (*i.e.*, outer space) remains, the nation of Israel will not cease to exist in the program of God. This not a reference to 'spiritual Jews' (those who exercise the faith of Abraham), but to *biological Jews* (the physical descendants of Jacob). Similarly, both the throne of David (the throne of national Israel) and the Levitical priesthood shall not cease as long as day and night continue.

> The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: "Thus says the Lord: If you can break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night will not come at their appointed time, *then* also my covenant with David my servant may be broken, so that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne, and my covenant with the Levitical priests my ministers." (Jer. 33:19-21).

As I indicated above, the restoration of Israel will be both physical and spiritual. Thus, the apostle Paul tells us, "And in this way ***all Israel will be saved***, as it is written, 'The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob; and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.'" (Rom. 11:26-27, quoting Isa. 59:20-21).

When Paul speaks of *all Israel*, he does not mean every person who claims to be a Jew leading up to the Tribulation, also known as *the time of Jacob's trouble*. Israel, as a nation, is going to be tested and refined during the Tribulation - meaning that God will choose those people whom He wants for Himself. Thus, we are told in Ezekiel,

> "For thus says the Lord God: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. ... And *I will judge between sheep and sheep*. And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd." (Eze. 34:11-12, 22-23).

The result of this refining process is that only a *remnant* of the Jews will survive the Tribulation and enter the Millennial period. "Then I will gather the *remnant* of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply." (Jer. 23:3). This is confirmed in Isaiah and elsewhere.

> In that day the ***remnant of Israel*** and the survivors of the house of Jacob will no more lean on him who struck them, but will lean on the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God. For though your people Israel be as the sand of the sea, *only a remnant of them will return*. (Isa. 10:20-22).

According to Zechariah, this remnant will be one-third of the Jews "in the whole land."

> "In the whole land, declares the Lord, two thirds shall be cut off and perish, and one third shall be left alive. And I will put this third into the fire, and refine them as one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested. They will call upon my name, and I will answer

> them. I will say, 'They are my people'; and they will say, 'The Lord is my God.'" (Zch. 13:8-9).

So, looking back to Rom. 11:26, when Paul says *all Israel will be saved*, he means all the Jews who are part of the remnant surviving the Tribulation.

The Rebirth of a Nation

Israel, as a nation, was never founded on, or governed by, a covenant of faith. Sure, it was the Lord's goal for Israel that they would become "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." (Exo. 19:6). But being a Jew was never a matter of individual faith or belief. It was simply a matter of whether a person was a biological descendant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. A Jew, following the ceremonial and religious laws of Israel, might come to a *saving faith* in the Lord, but whether a person did or didn't had no bearing on whether they were any more or less a Jew.

Because Jewishness was a matter of ancestry, not faith, God has always dealt with the Jews in a national, or corporate, capacity. Meaning that God has always dealt with the Jews *as a group*. Sure, the Lord has appointed individual Jews to particular tasks, and whether a Jew decided to exercise faith towards God always was and is an individual decision.

But when the Law was given to the Jews through Moses, it was given to them as a group. When the Jews agreed to be obedient to God's covenant with them, they did so as a group. When they left Egypt and spied out the Promised Land, they did so as a group. No one broke off from the nation and went their own way. When they wandered in the wilderness for forty years, and then finally entered their homeland, they did so as a group.

When the Jews were disobedient, they generally did so as a group. When God punished them and sent them into exile, He treated them as a group. When the Jews were dispersed among the nations, they did so as a group - God made no exceptions. When Jesus came and claimed to be the Messiah, the Jews rejected Him as a group. When Paul described how a partial hardening had come upon the Jews (Rom. 11:25), it happened to them as a group. And when the Jews are refined in the time of Jacob's trouble, it will happen to them as a group.

It should therefore be no surprise that when salvation eventually comes to the Jews, it will happen to them as a group. In fact, salvation will come to the Jews *in a single day*, being the day of the Second Coming, when Jesus will re-appear and be recognized by the Jews as the Messiah.

> "Before she was in labor she gave birth; before her pain came upon her she delivered a son. Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall a land be born in one day? ***Shall a nation be brought forth*** in one moment? For as soon as Zion was in labor she brought forth her children. Shall I bring to the point of birth and not cause to bring forth?" says the Lord; "shall I, who cause to bring forth, shut the womb?" says your God. (Isa. 66:7-9).

Notice how Isaiah returns to the theme of birth, which in this context indicates a *rebirth*. Not only will all Israel be saved, they will be *reborn as a nation*, *i.e.*, as a group. The end goal of which, often repeated throughout the scriptures, is that "they will be my people, and I will be their God."

> "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And ***I will be their God, and they shall be my people***. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." (Jer. 31:31-34). Also quoted in Heb. 8:8-12.

At this point, it won't simply be that the Jews are saved, but they will also have *special knowledge*. "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts." All people have a portion of God's laws written on their hearts, telling them what elementary things are right and wrong - this is what we call a *conscience*. But a conscience can be hardened or even blocked, and of course a conscience is only ever a *very small portion* of God's laws. But Jews in the Millennium will have a much more complete, perhaps even a perfect, knowledge of God's laws.

For this reason, Gentiles will seek them out for their knowledge, and their closeness to God. "Thus says the Lord of hosts: In those days ten men from the nations of every tongue shall take hold of the robe of a Jew, saying, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.'" (Zch. 8:23). At this point the Jews will truly become *a kingdom of priests and a holy nation*, fulfilling Exo. 19:6.

> But you shall be called the priests of the Lord; they shall speak of you as the ministers of our God; you shall eat the wealth of the nations, and in their glory you shall boast. (Isa. 61:6).

This does not mean that the Millennial Jews will be perfect, or sinless. They will still have mortal bodies of flesh and blood that the apostle Paul calls a *body of death*. (Rom. 7:24). Just as a saved person today is still susceptible to sin, so will they. Nevertheless, they will fulfill the promise of scripture, "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth." (Acts 13:47, quoting Isa. 49:6).

REBIRTH OF THE SAINTS

Rebirth Through Resurrection

Scripture is clear that believers in Christ are destined for two rebirths, not just one. The first is when our spirits are renewed, or made alive, by the regeneration of the Holy Spirit of God. (Jn. 3:3-7; Tit. 3:5). This occurs during our present lives at the point of salvation. The second is when our bodies

are made immortal in the resurrection at the appearing of Christ. The key is to recognize that the resurrection of the body is also a form of rebirth.

Both of these rebirths follow the rule, *first comes the natural, then the spiritual*. Thus, when anyone is first born, they possess a sinful spirit, sometimes called the sin nature. Then, when our spirit becomes regenerated by God, we possess a spiritual nature, or renewed spirit. Similarly with the body - our bodies are at first natural, sinful, corrupt and mortal. But at the resurrection, we will be given new bodies which will be spiritual, holy, incorruptible and immortal.

> So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. ... It is sown a natural body; it is raised a *spiritual body*. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. ... Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. *For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality*. (1 Cor. 15:42, 44, 51-53).

The resurrection of the dead was even foretold in the Old Testament, and when it was, it compared the resurrection with giving birth. In other words, not only our spirits, but also our bodies, will be born again.

> Like a pregnant woman who writhes and cries out in her pangs when she is near to giving birth, so were we because of you, O Lord; we were pregnant, we writhed, but we have given birth to wind. ... *Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise*. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and ***the earth will give birth to the dead***. (Isa. 26:17-19).

I stress that the resurrection of the body is a form of rebirth, because there is a tendency in Christian circles to view the resurrection as *the end*. Whereas, *birth is always a beginning*. And no, I don't mean that the resurrection is the beginning of eternity, because *that comes later*. The resurrection is the beginning of a new chapter for all believers *on earth*, before eternity sets in.

I am referring specifically to the one thousand year long kingdom of Christ on earth, the Millennial kingdom. The period when the saints will rule and reign with Christ. (Rev. 20:4-6). A period of time in history, on earth, before eternity sets in and time is no more. It wouldn't make much sense measuring a thousand years once time has ended, would it? If that was the intended meaning, God was perfectly capable of saying that the saints would rule and reign with Christ *forever*.

And of course, God does say that exact thing elsewhere (Rev. 22:5) - *after* the new heavens and new earth have been made. But the resurrection, and the kingdom of Christ, both come *before* the new heavens and the new earth.

Equipping the Saints, Now and Then

In *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, I noted that Jesus will likely assign each resurrected saint a specific government job, which is how they will *rule and reign* with Christ in the Millennium. I also used the Parable of the Talents to conclude that positions in the government of Christ will be distributed on the basis of merit, not randomly. Which strongly suggests that each believer has a certain hand in determining the extent of their own reward.

Let me now expand on that analysis, and suggest a possible direction for understanding what God may expect the saints to be doing. We know that historically, God has always equipped his people to be able to do the tasks He assigned to them. We can also observe that as time goes by, the immediate beneficiaries of performing those tasks keeps expanding.

Thus, in the beginning, God gave people dominion authority, as well as the duty and ability to have children. The primary beneficiary of which was the *family unit* - not civil government, nor society at large, and certainly not the global community. Then, when God set apart the people of Israel, He gave certain individuals skills and abilities to design and fabricate everything necessary for the tabernacle and the priesthood. At root, these skills served a *national* purpose - broader than the family, but not global either.

It should be no surprise that God has used this same pattern with respect to the Church, where He gives to each believer certain gifts serving a worldwide *body of Christ* purpose.

> To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit *for the common good*. (1 Cor. 12:7). And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, *to equip the saints for the work of ministry*, *for building up the body of Christ*. (Eph 4:11-12).

In other words, God gives to people spiritual gifts and spiritual offices to equip the saints in the present age, before Christ returns. Might He also do something similar in the *next age*, that is, the Millennial kingdom of Christ? Recall the Parable of the Talents, especially Luke's version:

> He said therefore, "A nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and then return. Calling ten of his servants, he gave them ten minas, and said to them, 'Engage in business until I come.' ... When he returned, having received the kingdom, he ordered these servants to whom he had given the money to be called to him, that he might know what they had gained by doing business. The first came before him, saying, "Lord, your mina has made ten minas more." And he said to him, "Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities. ... I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away." (Lk. 19:12-13, 15-17, 26).

Now this parable, like all parables, uses a symbolic story to illustrate something in real life. The *minas*, or *talents* (in Matthew's version), are essentially units of money. Most people understand this parable is not simply about making money, but has to do with taking what God has given us and

using it for the Lord's sake, or His kingdom's sake, until He returns. Those who do little or nothing with the things God gives us for the sake of the kingdom are lazy and worthless servants of God, who can expect little or no reward when the nobleman (*i.e.*, Christ) *returns with His kingdom*.

Because of the context of this parable - it is told by Jesus to His followers regarding the kingdom of God - it seems reasonable that it relates to the use of those things which God has given us *as* believers, *as* followers of Christ, *as* members of the kingdom of God. And what are those things, exactly? They are the spiritual gifts and offices conferred for building up the body of Christ. (No, the Parable of the Talents has nothing to do with how many people you have witnessed to, or brought to Christ.)

In other words, how well we use our spiritual gifts and offices *now*, will determine the extent to which we are rewarded in the kingdom *later*. Which can be a bit scary, if you don't know what your spiritual gift is and haven't used it much. Or, even more scary, if you know what your spiritual gift is, *but your church won't let you use it*, either openly or at all. Have you considered the possibility that if your church restricts the use of your spiritual gifts, it may be denying you a reward in the kingdom of Christ?

Are you a teacher, but your church won't give you a classroom? Do you receive words of knowledge or wisdom, but your church doesn't believe God can speak to you directly? Do you have the gift of prophecy, which the apostle Paul said is highly desirable (1 Cor. 14:1-4), but your church construes Heb. 1:1-2 so as to deny all prophecy in the Church Age? Perhaps you want to plant churches as an apostle, but your church only allows that to be done by members of the clergy? Is your church pushing everyone to be an evangelist, when scripture clearly indicates only *some* (very few) are called to that task? (Eph. 4:11).

Does your church have a class, a program, or *anything*, which it offers to all members to help each person determine their own spiritual gift(s)? And then let you decide how you can best use that spiritual gift in the church when it has been practiced and developed? No?? Then what are you doing in that church, anyway? Wow, it's so great that you love the music and the fellowship - *you lazy and wicked slave*. Oops - not my words. Blame Jesus. (Mat. 25:26).

Now for a possible extrapolation of this analysis for your consideration. *What if* the spiritual gifts God gives you in the present age will be the exact same gifts He expects you to use in the Millennial kingdom? Do I know for certain this will be the case? No. What does the scripture say? ***"For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable."*** (Rom. 11:29).

Granted, Rom. 11:29 is part of a larger text dealing with the salvation of Israel. However, I submit to you that *the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable* is a **general rule**. This general rule does not *originate* with a consideration of Israel. It's easy to identify the *calling* of Israel as a nation, but what in the world are the *gifts* of Israel, really? Perhaps the case of Israel is merely one example that *illustrates* the general rule. The case of Israel is not the *limit* of the rule.

A similar scripture is, *God is not a God of confusion*. (1 Cor. 14:33). Sure, the immediate context

there is orderly church worship. But is God only that way in a church worship context, and is everywhere else a God of confusion? Or is church worship merely one example of a general rule that God is *always* not a God of confusion, no matter the context?

What I am suggesting is that the spiritual gifts of the saints in the Church Age may transcend the resurrection and carry over into the next age. It's not so far fetched - the calling of Israel as a special nation set apart from the rest of the world most clearly transcends this present age and carries over into the next. It's something to consider.

In any event, the physical rebirth of the saints will give them a new purpose. No longer will it be the purpose of the saints to carry out the Great Commission, for that will end when the saints are united with Christ in the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, *i.e.*, when they are resurrected. The Great Commission may or may not still apply to those mortal Gentiles living in the Millennium who profess a belief in Christ, but it very likely will no longer apply to resurrected saints. Again, this is not far fetched. We already know the Dominion Mandate will no longer apply to the resurrected saints - Jesus said so. (Mat. 22:30 - no marriage among saints in the Millennium).

The resurrected saints will have the *new mission* to govern the Gentile nations as agents of the government of the kingdom of Christ. The new mission of the saints will not be family based, limited to only one nation, or even just to believers in Christ. Rather, their new task will comprehend governing all of the nations of the world other than Israel itself. See how the tasks God calls His people to perform keep expanding in each new age?

THE LAST KINGDOM ON EARTH

We have seen how the theme of destruction paving the way for rebirth will play out in three ways, so far. *First*, the surface of the earth must be destroyed and reshaped in order to renew it in preparation for the kingdom of Christ. *Second*, the Jewish people will need to be pruned down to a mere remnant before the nation of Israel can be spiritually reborn. *Third*, the saints will all need to experience the death of their mortal bodies and be physically reborn with an immortal body in order to inherit the kingdom of God.

Then *fourthly*, Christ will utterly destroy the kingdom of darkness, which now holds the governments of the world in a death grip, so the world can give birth to a worldwide government of righteousness. This new government, spoken of in Isa. 9:6-7, is the Millennial kingdom of Christ, and it will become the last kingdom on earth. I will describe the demise of the kingdom of darkness in more detail in my next essay, *The Kingdom of Darkness*.

A Kingdom Designed to Restrain Evil

After Jesus conquers evil, one of the primary purposes of His Millennial kingdom will be to *restrain evil*, because at this point in time evil will not be completely eliminated yet. Thus, the government of Christ will hold back the destructive forces of evil, particularly those associated with idolatry, immorality and violence. In other words, to prevent the type of ongoing defilement of the earth that

has characterized the present age. To prevent the accumulation of a global sin debt which would, of necessity, begin to destroy the peace, prosperity and safety of the people living at that time.

It is not enough that the earth and its people will be cleansed in one fell swoop via the Tribulation and the Second Coming. That cleanliness must be *maintained*.

The scripture tells us clearly that this period will be a time when the glory of the Lord will fill the earth. (Hab. 2:14). And the devil and his angels will be imprisoned the entire time. (Rev. 20:2-3). However, that does not mean the Millennium will be free from sin. The curse of the ground will still attach to the earth, and people will still be born with a sin nature, separated from God. Yes, Christ will bring salvation to all the Jews, but to the Gentiles - eh, not so much. They will have the opportunity to know Jesus as Savior, but the fact is that most will not.

So how, exactly, will Jesus restrain evil during this time? Clearly, it will not be brought about by the proclamation of the gospel. I say *clearly*, because evangelism is a ministry of grace, and merely leading people to become believers does not ensure a change in behavior patterns. When I say evil must be *restrained*, I'm talking about *law enforcement*, which is not a ministry of grace, but of law.

Real restraint will arise from the imposition of good government - and when I say *good* government, I mean *strict* government. Using the power of the sword. More on that in a bit. But this idea of the salvation of society and the restrain of evil through the transformation of government is not new. Why, that is the promise that was made just a few short years ago, by a wannabe messiah:

> I am absolutely certain that generations from now, we will be able to look back and tell our children that this was the moment when we began to provide care for the sick and good jobs to the jobless; this was the moment when the rise of the oceans began to slow and our planet began to heal; this was the moment when we ended a war and secured our nation and restored our image as the last, best hope on Earth. (Barack Obama, June 3, 2008).

Of course, we know what the scriptures have to say about such matters: "Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not believe it. For false messiahs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect." (Mat. 24:23-24).

When the real Messiah returns, the Gentile nations will need real governing, which is to say, a government which will not allow evil to proliferate, but keep a lid on it. And if you have been given to understand that none but the righteous will enter the kingdom of God, those scriptures refer to the eternal kingdom after the creation of the new heavens and new earth. For the Bible very clearly describes people who will survive the judgments of the Tribulation, and enter the Millennium even though they are *unsaved*.

> "Assemble yourselves and come; draw near together, ***you survivors of the nations***! ... Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.

> ... 'To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance.'" (Isa. 45:20, 22-23).

Note that when the scriptures say *every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess* that Christ is Lord (Rom. 14:11), this refers to ***political allegiance***, not a salvation experience. Christ will undeniably be the King of the world, and none will be able to depose Him militarily, but this does not mean every person on earth will confess Him as their Savior. He will simply be, to the Gentiles at that time, the world leader of the government system then in power.

> Then ***everyone who survives of all the nations*** that have come against Jerusalem shall go up year after year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Booths. And if any of the families of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, there will be no rain on them. (Zch. 14:16-17).

What does this scripture mean, except that the nations will need to be *coerced* into paying a religious tribute to the Lord, because they will not do so voluntarily out of love? The scriptures only indicate that the Jews living in the Millennium will be saved spiritually - it says nothing about the salvation of the Gentiles other than the Jews will be a light of salvation to them, and they will be able to choose Christ if they want.

But when the Millennium ends, and Satan is released from his prison to deceive the nations from around the world, whose number is like the sand of the sea, who do you think those people will be? They will be the *unsaved* mass of Gentiles living at the end of the Millennium, who bow the knee and confess that Jesus is Lord (*i.e.*, King), *but have remained spiritually lost by their own choice*. The mere fact that Satan is imprisoned, Jesus is visibly present on earth, and the Millennium will be a time of unparalleled peace, safety and prosperity will not lead to a mass conversion of Gentiles.

Proving once and for all that people do not refuse Christ as Savior for a lack of knowledge or opportunity. Rather, even knowing the truth, they will choose to refuse Christ anyway, and prefer to be eternally lawless. And isn't that exactly what the scripture has said all along? See, Rom. 1:18-20; 2 Th. 2:9-11. Anyone who tells you that people remain unsaved because no one has shared the gospel with them, *is a liar*.

A Kingdom of Righteous Government

Consequently, in spite of the fact that Jesus will be King of the world, the world (that is, the Gentile nations) will nevertheless need a strong government to keep them in check and restrain evil. That government will be headquartered at Jerusalem, where Jesus will exercise not only executive, but also legislative and judicial power, by issuing laws and deciding disputes between the nations.

> It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways

> and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. (Isa. 2:2-4). (The same, almost word for word - Mic. 4:1-3).

At the national level, because all nations will serve Christ and be ruled by the saints of Christ, any disputes normally leading to war will be resolved and all wars will cease. But at the individual level, the unsaved masses of people will need a firm hand to restrain personal wrongdoing. How will Jesus accomplish this task? Will He rule the people with kindness, love, grace and mercy? You know, *as a ministry of good works*? Not quite.

> I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and *I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession*. You shall *break* them with ***a rod of iron*** and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." (Ps. 2:7-9).

Well sure, at Armageddon Christ will smash the nations and utterly defeat them. But certainly, afterwards He will use a gentle hand? Nope, afraid not.

> Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. ... From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and *he will rule them* with ***a rod of iron***. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. (Rev. 19:11, 15).

So, at the appearance of His coming, Christ will *break* the nations and dash them to pieces. Then after that He will *rule* the nations by the same standard, that is, via a rod of iron. And the saints, who will rule with Christ under His supreme authority, will use the same methodology.

> "The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with ***a rod of iron***, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father." (Rev. 2:26-27).

To the unsaved Gentiles, the rule of Christ and His saints will seem oppressive and suffocating. A *rod of iron* suggests a very strict government, where lawlessness is not tolerated or winked at. The saints will not be able to be bribed, extorted or threatened. The letter of the law will be enforced without exception or disparate treatment. Criminals will not be able to manipulate or corrupt the legal system. The power of the sword will not be wielded in vain.

From Christ's standpoint, of course, the rod of iron is simply the way to prevent defilement and pollution of the land, so that righteousness can flourish over the whole earth. It is merely the means of maintaining a clean earth, so that the kingdom of Christ does not degrade over time. Christ will

not rule this way to be overly harsh, punitive or oppressive. He will do this because He will have no other choice, for the sake of the kingdom. He will do this in order to delay the final return of evil until the very end of the earthly kingdom.

After all, once the Millennium is well under way, the current cycle of life, death and rebirth for the entire world will be complete. From that point onward, the earth will enter into a new cycle of life, death and rebirth. When the devil is released from his prison and leads the nations in a final rebellion at the end of the Millennium, there will be one last destruction of the earth by fire - this one being a total destruction, not merely a cleansing of the earth's surface. This time, the earth and the heavens will be totally dissolved (2 Pet. 3:10-12), and the earth will be re-created entirely.

And it is absolutely necessary that this should happen, because it is the only way to rid the world and its people from sin and death, and from the curse of the ground, finally and forever. For behold, all things will become new. (Rev. 21:5).

CONCLUSION

People often have a picture in their minds that the great work and ministry of Jesus Christ was completed on the cross. There are several reasons for this. *First*, Jesus said "It is finished," at the time of His death. (Jn. 19:30). *Second*, even before this, as part of His high priestly prayer, He said that He had accomplished the work that the Father had given Him to do. (Jn. 17:4). *Third*, at least six times the New Testament states that the redemptive work of Christ was done "once for all," so that no part of it would need to be repeated by anyone. (*See, e.g.*, Rom. 6:10; Heb. 10:10; Jud. 3).

All well and good, as far as it goes. Namely, that the redemptive work of Christ was finished 2,000 years ago, and with this I heartily agree. But then people make the unfortunate mistake of assuming there is no ***non-redemptive work*** of Christ left for Him to do on earth. That all Jesus has to do to inherit His kingdom is to welcome the saints into heaven at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, and then He and we all go to heaven for eternity. But that is very clearly *not what the scriptures say*.

The Bible clearly indicates that the man whose name is the Branch (Jesus Christ) will build the temple of the Lord, and will sit and rule on his throne. He will sit on the throne *both as priest and as king*, and bring peace between the two offices. (Zch. 6:12-15). Similarly, much of Heb. 7 is devoted to comparing Jesus with Melchizedek, who was king of Salem (*i.e.*, Jerusalem), and priest of the Most High God. And who will Jesus be during the Millennial period, but *king* of Jerusalem and *priest* of the Most High God?

The difference between the Millennial period and now as far as the ministry and work of Christ is concerned is this: Jesus has not yet been made king. Jesus expressly denied that He was coming as a king when He died on the cross ("my kingdom is not of this world"). (Jn. 18:36). So we may safely conclude that the death, burial and resurrection of Christ fulfilled or completed His work and ministry as *priest*, but did absolutely nothing to complete His work and ministry as *king*. And when Jesus comes into His kingdom to rule as king, it will necessarily be ***on earth***.

What I have tried to show you in this essay is that this is no small thing, no merely perfunctory task, for Jesus to come into His kingdom. This will be a major task, equal in greatness to His ministry as priest, as it will affect billions of lives and profoundly alter the course of history.

Jesus will need to judge the earth and all its inhabitants to clear the slate for a kingdom of righteousness. The vast accumulated sin debt of the earth must be paid and wiped clean. All the truly wicked will be judged and killed. The surface of the earth will be remade and reformed to suit His purposes. All the physical accomplishments and works of people will effectively be eradicated. A remnant of both Jews and Gentiles will be preserved, consisting of people that God alone will choose.

True, salvation will come to the remnant of Jews surviving the Tribulation, but this is merely a means to an end. Namely, that the nation of Israel will be restored as a righteous kingdom, and its people will be positioned to serve their king as ministering agents. The program of redemption available to the Gentiles will be the same as it is now - that work having been completed once for all. Meanwhile, the Gentiles will be subjected to a new global government presided over by Jesus Christ in the flesh, who will rule the Gentiles with a rod of iron. And the saints, who will have been liberated from their mortal bodies of death, will rule and reign together with Christ.

It is my hope that you will see how absolutely vital it is for the plan of God that these things must take place. And that the work of Christ has most assuredly not all been completed, insofar as He is to be the king of the world.

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