

The Word of Righteousness

The Economy of God and the Consummation of the Age

The Bible reveals that God has an eternal purpose, an eternal plan, that He purposed in Himself in eternity past according to His good pleasure (Eph. 1:9-11; 3:9-11). In order to carry out His eternal purpose, God has an economy, a household management or administration (οἰκονομία, 1 Tim. 1:4), which is to dispense Himself in His Divine Trinity into His chosen and redeemed people to be their life, nature, element, and essence. In this way we become the same as God in life, nature, and expression but not in the Godhead, as articulated by Athanasius of Alexandria in the fourth century: “The very Word of God...was made man that we might be made God” (*Incarnation* 65). For the accomplishment of His economy, God created man in His own image with a twofold intention—that through God’s dispensing man would become His corporate expression to the entire universe, and that as those who express Him we would represent Him by exercising His dominion over all things, particularly over His enemy, Satan, who rebelled against God (Gen. 1:26; 3:1; 2 Cor. 3:18; Rev. 12:9).

The issue of the divine dispensing of the Divine Trinity is the Body of Christ in the present age (Eph. 1:23; 4:16). At the consummation of this age the building up of the Body will issue in a bride to be presented to Christ at His second coming (Rev. 19:7; 21:2). Spontaneously, the bride of Christ will be manifest as an army, first to cast Satan out of heaven and then to defeat the embodiment of Satan—Antichrist with his armies—at the battle of Armageddon (Eph. 6:11-12; Rev. 12:7-9; 19:11, 14). This will fulfill the prophecy of the stone cut without hands that crushes the totality of human government (Dan. 2:34-35). As we will see, the stone is a corporate composition of Christ and His overcoming, transformed believers. After this, the stone will become a great mountain that fills the whole earth, the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens, composed of Christ as the King with the overcomers as His co-kings (v. 35). Thus, the accomplishment of God’s economy for the fulfillment of His eternal purpose is altogether a matter of five corporate entities—the Body, the bride, the army, the stone, and the mountain (Kangas, “Economy”). In each of these entities, the overcoming believers are the indispensable component and play the vital role, for which they will be rewarded in the coming age.

Dispensations in God’s Economy

God’s great economy will be fulfilled in the fullness of the times (Eph. 1:10), that is, in the fullness of the successive ages of time divinely arranged for the outworking of His purpose. The Scriptures reveal four primary ages, or dispensations, for the consummation of God’s economy.¹ The first was the age of sin before the law, from Adam to Moses (Rom. 5:13-14). The second was the age of the law, from Moses to the first coming of Christ. The third age is from Christ’s first coming to the restoration of all things (Acts 3:20-21). Finally, the fourth dispensation for the final operation of God’s economy will be the age of the kingdom, from Christ’s second coming to the end of the millennium (Rev. 11:15; 20:4, 6). The third age, the present dispensation, is the dispensation of grace and the age of the church (John 1:17; Matt. 16:18; Eph. 1:22b-23). Near the commencement of this age, Jesus told His disciples, “I am with you all the days until the consummation of the age” (Matt. 28:20). The verb form of *consummation*, συντελέω, means “to end completely, accomplish, finish, and complete” (Thayer 606). Thus, *consummation* in verse 20, συντέλεια, indicates that in this age there is a process that will be brought to completion, or fulfillment (Lee, *Prophecy* 68). This process includes Christ’s redemption and the believers’ regeneration, sanctification, renewing, transformation, conformation to the image of Christ, and glorification (1 Pet. 1:3; Rom. 6:19, 22; Eph. 4:23; Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 8:29-30), which issue in the building up of the Body of Christ, the preparation of the bride of Christ, and the formation of a corporate warrior to defeat God’s enemy.

The transition of each dispensation in God’s economy to the following one is marked by certain great operations, or manifestations, of God. At the turn of the first age to the second, God gave the law to Moses on Mount Sinai, accompanying it with fearful signs and warnings—fire, darkness, gloom, whirlwind, the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words (Heb. 12:18-19). From this time on, God’s chosen, earthly people possessed the law as the outward expression of God, presented the offerings as a type of Christ with His redemption and supply, and enjoyed the presence of God in His earthly dwelling place, the tabernacle and temple, but were nevertheless defeated under the ministry of death and condemnation (2 Cor. 3:7, 9). At the turn of the age of the law to the age of grace,

the Word was incarnated in the man Christ Jesus, as the mingling of God and man, to live a God-man life by the divine life and to accomplish our redemption (John 1:14; 3:16; Matt. 2:1-2; Isa. 53:2; John 6:57). From this time on, God's chosen, heavenly people are redeemed, and they receive the ministry of the Spirit and of righteousness (2 Cor. 3:8-9) to enjoy Christ as the life-giving Spirit, who is our life, life supply, and everything (1 Cor. 15:45; John 3:15; Col. 3:4) to produce the church, the Body of Christ, to prepare a bride for Christ, and to form a corporate warrior for Christ that He may have an expression of Himself and that Satan may be crushed under the feet of the local churches as the practical kingdom of God in this age (Eph. 3:21; Rom. 14:17; 16:20).

However, the turn of dispensation from the present one to the age of the kingdom will be more significant and eventful than all the foregoing changes in the ages of God's economy. This great, indescribable change is announced in Revelation 11:15-18 and 12:10, which say,

The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign forever and ever...We thank You, Lord God the Almighty, He who is and who was, because You have taken Your great power and have reigned. And the nations became angry, and Your wrath came, and the time came for the dead to be judged, and the time to give the reward to Your slaves the prophets and to the saints and to those who fear Your name, to the small and to the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth...Now has come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ, for the accuser of our brothers has been cast down.

The changes on earth at that time will be unprecedented. Christ will return in His glory and establish His kingdom. Human government will be crushed, Satan will be bound in the abyss, and righteousness will reign on the earth. Christ's overcomers will reign with Him as His co-kings in the heavenly portion of the kingdom, the saved of Israel will be His priests in the earthly portion, the nation of Israel will be restored according to the prophecies of the Old Testament, and the nations will walk in the light of Christ's glory on the restored earth. All these things will transpire at and after the consummation, the accomplishment and completion, of this age.

The Overcomers and the Turning of the Age

In any particular age, God has a goal to accomplish. When that goal is fulfilled, the age changes. However, whenever the Lord wants to turn an age, He must have some persons as His instrument. In every age-turning work God raises up some overcomers as His dispensational instrument, those who stand with God and defeat Satan's resistance to the

turn (Lee, *Turn* 5-6, 17-18). In the age of sin before the law, God's calling of a new race required Abraham to respond to God's appearing and follow Him to a new land (Gen. 12:1-2; Acts 7:2-3). At the turn to the age of law, Moses received God's calling, forsook the house of Pharaoh, and received the revelation from God on Mount Sinai (Exo. 3:1-4, 10; 19:20; 20:22; Heb. 11:24-26). Later, Samuel listened to the Lord's word to turn the age from the priesthood to the kingship, issuing in the subduing of God's enemies through David and the building up of His glorious expression through Solomon (1 Sam. 1:28; 3:1, 4; 16:13; 2 Sam. 5:12; 7:13-14; 2 Chron. 5:1, 13-14). After Israel became degraded and was carried away into Babylon, Daniel separated himself from the age that followed Satan, joined himself to God's desire through His word, cooperated with God through prayer, and did not care for his own life, issuing in the turn from captivity to the recovery of God's house and God's city (Dan. 1:8; 9:1-4, 17, 20; 6:10, 16, 19-22; Ezra 1:1-3). At the turn from the age of the law to the age of grace, Christ's incarnation was carried out through the cooperation of prepared human vessels, such as Mary, who was an obedient slave of the Lord, Joseph, who followed the Lord's leading to preserve the newborn Jesus, and Simeon and Anna, who waited for the Lord expectantly and adored and announced Him in His human birth (Luke 1:26-27, 30-33, 38; Matt. 1:20-24; 2:13-14; Luke 2:25-38). All these persons were used by the Lord at a critical time in His move throughout the various ages.

Similarly, for the accomplishment of His purpose at the consummation of this age, God will raise up the overcomers, who cooperate with Him for their growth in life unto maturity, are built up as His Body and bride, and overcome Satan because of the blood of the Lamb, the word of their testimony, and their not loving their soul-life even unto death (Rev. 12:11). Before the enlarged Christ as the mountain can fill the earth in the millennial age, the crushing stone must come to destroy the enemies of God. For the coming of the stone, the corporate army of Christ must be formed, and before the army fights for God, she must be presented to Him as His bride. Moreover, before the bride is presented, the Body of Christ must be built up in its intrinsic reality. For all of these, God must have a group of overcomers in the present age who rise up for the fulfillment of His economy. This is the key to the great turn of the church age to the age of the kingdom in the coming one thousand years.

A Faulty Ecclesiology of Ultimate Failure

The prevailing, traditional view of the succession of the ages in God's economy is that of dispensationalism, which derives from the teachings of John N. Darby. Included in Darby's theory of dispensations is the assertion that every age of God's move among man ends in failure. To be sure, the Scriptures show the failure of God's people in every

age. God created Adam with the intention that he and his descendants would be the means for Him to bring forth the new creation. Eventually, however, Adam fell, and at the time of the deluge his race became flesh (Gen. 3:6; 6:3). Later, the Adamic race even became one with Satan in their work at Babel (11:4-9). God came in to choose Abraham so that He could have a new race, a called race, but this race also fell all the way into captivity in Egypt (50:26; Exo. 1:10-14). After calling His people out of Egypt, God gave them the law, the ordinances for their worship and living, and the instructions for building a house for Him. However, this new, called race—the earthly descendants of Abraham—became a failure, forsaking God with His covenant, choosing Satan with his kingdom, and eventually opposing Christ Himself (Jer. 2:13; 11:10; Matt. 16:21; 21:38; 26:4). Even the heavenly descendants of Abraham, the believers in the present age, have become a failure. Many have been defeated in the enjoyment of the Triune God and corrupted by Satan through sin, self, the world, and the religious world (1 John 3:8; Matt. 16:24; 1 John 2:15; Gal. 1:4; 6:14). The later Epistles and the epistles to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 show that already by the end of the first century, the church had become degraded. Thus, the created race, the earthly descendants of Abraham, and the heavenly descendants of Abraham all became a failure in their respective ages (Lee, *Overcomers* 18-19).

Darby emphasizes this aspect in his teaching concerning the dispensations. In “The Apostasy of the Successive Dispensations” he writes that in every instance of a dispensation there was a “total and immediate failure” (*Writings* 1:125). He teaches that the church age likewise has been a failure even from its beginning:

The facts shew us that it was ever at the outset the failure or apostasy took place; and that it was patience and grace, which bore with and carried it on, but never undid the result of the first failure. So to our shame has it been in Christianity. The state of the seven churches, I think, would shew this sufficiently to have been the case, and the way in which John was left at the close, to awaken the threats of judgment against a declining church...Thus, whatever grace and power from Him that was glorified might effect, this dispensation as well as any other failed and broke off in the very outset. (1:127, 129)

Darby allows that a remnant within the church will remain faithful, but he still asserts that the dispensation of the church age will end in failure:

*At the consummation of this age,
God will raise up the overcomers,
who cooperate with Him for their
growth in life unto maturity,
are built up as His Body and bride,
and overcome Satan.*

The remnant have been preserved all through, and according to the measure of grace and faith have prospered, or have been raised up from depression according to the counsels of God; but the dispensation was gone. (1:129)

It will be said perhaps that there are none but local churches which are responsible [i.e., keep their responsibility], and not the Church universal. What is certain is that God will cut off the Church as a system established on earth. (14:88)

However, even the faithful, those who rightly bear their individual responsibility, will be tainted by the ultimate failure of the whole church. That all ten virgins in Matthew 25:1-13 sleep is taken by Darby to mean that they all became negligent, but five are revived at the Bridegroom’s coming:

The whole professing church has lost the thought of the Lord’s return—even the faithful who have the Spirit...Even the faithful ones had forgotten the coming of Christ. They fell asleep. But, at least, they possessed the essential thing that corresponded to it. The grace of the Bridegroom...awakens them...Forgetful as they may have been, they go in with the Bridegroom to the wedding feast. (*Synopsis* 169-170)

C. I. Scofield summarizes Darby’s view of dispensations as follows:

These periods are marked off in Scripture by some change in God’s method of dealing with mankind, or a portion of mankind, in respect of the two questions of sin and of man’s responsibility. Each of the Dispensations may be regarded as a new test of the natural man, and each ends in judgment—marking his utter failure. (*Dividing* 19)

Charles C. Ryrie, who attempts to blunt the sharper edges of Darby’s writings, speaks of this inevitable failure as a secondary characteristic of a dispensation:

Is failure a necessary part of each dispensation? It is a fact of biblical history that mankind has failed throughout all the ages of time...Sin often seems to come to a climax at certain points in human history, and such climaxes mark the end of the various dispensations...The present age will be climaxed by rebellion and a turning away from God in force...Though the matters of testing, failure, and judgment are not the basics that mark off the dispensations, they seem to be part and parcel of them. (35)

The Crucial Place of the Overcomers in a Complete Ecclesiology

The ecclesiology of dispensationalism maintains that the church age, like all other ages, will end in utter failure. Although a faithful remnant will still be found, they will simply be preserved as citizens of another realm, bearing a minority testimony while awaiting their translation to heaven. However, a crucial factor is missing from this teaching. A complete ecclesiology in the light of God's economy must account for not only a preserved remnant but also the overcomers as the dispensational instrument for the turning of the age. After the failure of the Adamic race, the chosen race, and the degraded church, the Lord Jesus came in the book of Revelation to call for overcomers. He calls for the overcomers seven times in His epistles to the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3, in order to consummate His economy and bring in the kingdom of Christ and of God (11:15). With the race of Adam, God suffered a loss; with Abraham's descendants of dust, God suffered a loss; and with Abraham's heavenly descendants, God also suffered a loss. However, with the last group of people, the overcomers, God gains the victory (Lee, *Overcomers* 19-20).

Because of this, the ecclesiology of dispensationalism is incomplete and comes short of the final revelation in the Bible. God's economy in this age is not annulled, and the church is not altogether defeated. Although the degradation of the church from the first century to the present time is a fact of history, throughout the centuries there have been groups of overcomers, although many times hidden to man but not to God (Rom. 11:4). At the end of this age there will also be the overcomers who will gain the victory, consummate God's economy, accomplish His purpose, and bring in His kingdom. In this age they live in the reality of the Body of Christ and are being prepared to be the bride of Christ. At the Lord's coming, they will be His army and the corporate crushing stone, and in the coming age they will be the corporate mountain that fills the whole earth in the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens. Thus, the Lord's ultimate victory at the end of this dispensation and the unprecedented turn from the age of the church to the age of the kingdom are altogether a matter of the overcomers as Christ's dispensational instrument.

Although God is operating in the history of man and the world situation in these latter days, the turn of the age still awaits the building up of the overcomers as the intrinsic component and high peak of the Body of Christ. When the Body is built up, the prophecies concerning the end of the age will all be fulfilled in rapid succession. The overcomers will be raptured to the presence of the Lord, Christ will marry His bride, the great tribulation will commence, Antichrist will rise up to oppose God and persecute His people, Israel will face its final desperate

plight, the bride of Christ will descend as the army to defeat Antichrist and his armies, and Christ will establish His kingdom in the coming age of one thousand years. All these events depend on the building up of the Body and the preparation of the bride today, which is primarily the function of the overcomers. The foregoing constitutes a more accurate view both of the church and of the prophecies in the Old and New Testaments, in the light of God's economy, at the consummation of this age, confirming that all study of the prophecies in the Bible must be directly linked to the economy of God.

The Body of Christ in Its Intrinsic Reality

For the consummation of the present age, the believers are being built up together as the Body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23; 4:16). When we speak of the Body, we refer to something more intrinsic than the church. The church (ἐκκλησία) as the called-out ones meeting practically in oneness may be considered a frame, within which is the divine life of God as the content and reality. The Body of Christ is the church considered from this divinely organic view. Corporately, the many sons of God are the church; organically they are the Body of Christ. The church takes the Body of Christ as its organic factor and intrinsic significance. Without the Body, the church is lifeless and is a mere organization. Thus, the church as the Body of Christ has both an outward, practical appearance and an inward, divine reality. The highest peak of God's economy is the reality of the Body of Christ, the Body in its intrinsic reality (3:9; 4:4-6, 16; Lee, *Blending* 30). This reality is attained and lived out by the overcomers.

God's economy is that God became man so that man may become God in life and in nature but not in the Godhead to produce the organism of the Triune God, the Body of Christ, which consummates the New Jerusalem (John 1:14; Rom. 8:3; 1:3-4; 12:4-5; Rev. 21:2). This is for God "to make Himself one with man and man one with Him, thus to be enlarged and expanded in His expression, that all His divine attributes may be expressed in human virtues" (Lee, *Ten* 14). God became man through the process of incarnation; man becomes God through the processes of God's organic salvation—regeneration, sanctification, renewing, transformation, conformation, and glorification. In order to fully partake of this salvation, the believers must grow in the divine life. The divine life was dispensed into us as a seed through regeneration, and now it must grow unto maturity through our cooperation with the life seed (Matt. 13:3, 23; Mark 4:26-28; Heb. 6:1; 1 Pet. 1:23; 1 John 3:9). The issue of this full growth is the Body of Christ. Thus, the Body grows with the growth of God (Col. 2:19), that is, with the increase of God as life. This is the Body of Christ in its intrinsic reality.

In order to carry out this great economy, God intends to

dispense Himself in His Divine Trinity into His chosen and redeemed people. It is by this dispensing that the organic Body of Christ is produced, constituted, and built up. To this end, Paul charged the believers to walk in the mingled spirit—the divine Spirit mingled with our regenerated human spirit (1 Cor. 6:17; Rom. 8:4), and he also prayed that the believers would be strengthened through His Spirit into their inner man, that Christ may make His home in their hearts through faith, that they would apprehend with all the saints the vast dimensions of Christ to know the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ, that they would be filled unto all the fullness of God (Eph. 3:16-19; 1:23). In this way, the Body of Christ becomes the mingling of the processed Triune God with the regenerated believers, a divine-human constitution of the Triune God with the believers in Christ, and a mingled living, in the eternal union, of the regenerated, transformed, and glorified tripartite God-men with the Triune God in the resurrection of Christ.

God's aim in His economy is to have a group of human beings who have His life and nature inwardly and His image and likeness outwardly. They are a corporate entity, the Body of Christ, to be one with Him and live Him for His corporate expression (Gen. 1:26; John 3:14; 2 Pet. 1:4; Eph. 4:16). God sent His Son to be a man and to live a God-man life by the divine life, the life of the Father (John 5:19; 14:10). Subsequently, the reality of the Body of Christ is the reality in Jesus, the actual condition of the life of Jesus as recorded in the four Gospels, duplicated in His many members as the corporate living of the perfected God-men. These are genuine men who live not by their own life but by the life of the processed God, whose attributes are expressed through their virtues, to the extent that they become Jesus living again on the earth in His divinely enriched humanity (Eph. 4:20-21; Gal. 2:20; Phil. 1:19-21; Recovery Version, Acts 28:9, note 1). This requires that they deny their self, not love their soul-life, and live a life of conformity to the death of Christ through the power of the resurrection of Christ (Matt. 16:24-26; Phil. 3:10) in order to have a corporate, Christ-magnifying, God-man living. This reality will close this age, the age of the church, and will bring Christ back for Him to take, possess, and rule over this earth with the perfected God-men in the kingdom age. Because the overcoming God-men are perfected, completed, and consummated in the church age, they will reign with Christ for a thousand years (1:19-21; 3:10-14; Gal. 2:20; Rev. 19:7-9; 20:4-6; Matt. 28:20; Lee, *Blending* 34-35, 44-45).

The Overcomers and the Reality of the Body of Christ

Without the growth in the divine life unto maturity, a walk in the mingled spirit to produce a divine-human constitution, and the corporate living of the perfected God-men, the Body of Christ cannot be produced in a real and practical way. Therefore, God calls His overcomers to cooperate with Him to become the reality of the Body in this age. Mount Zion was the city of King David, the center of the city of Jerusalem, where the temple as God's dwelling place on earth was built. Zion within Jerusalem typifies the overcomers, the perfected and matured God-men, within the church as the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb. 12:22; Rev. 14:1-5). As the highlight and beauty of the holy city, Jerusalem, Zion typifies the overcomers as the high peak, the center, the uplifting, the strengthening, the enriching, the beauty, and the reality of the Body of Christ (Recovery Version, Psa. 48:2, note 1).

The Lord's coming will be at the time of the completion of the building up of the Body in its intrinsic reality. The teaching of Darby and his successors concerning the Lord's coming is based on the passing of successive dispensations as consummated by their respective failures. However, the more accurate teaching concerning the Lord's return and the consequent turn of the age is based upon the perfection and maturity of the overcomers. Throughout the centuries of the church age, the majority

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of believers, although genuinely saved and regenerated by the divine seed, have not been characterized by daily walking in the mingled spirit, practicing the one spirit with the Lord, allowing Christ to make His home in their hearts, denying their soul-life to live the God-man life, and growing unto maturity. This is also the condition of the majority of Christians at the present time. We do not need to consider the finer points of theology to come to this conclusion; it is simply an observable fact of history. Darby's words seem harsh, but in them we may recognize the true situation of the degraded church:

The Church—once beautiful, united, heavenly—has lost its character, is hidden in the world; and the Christians themselves—worldly, covetous, eager for riches, honour, power—like the children of the age. It is an epistle in which one cannot read a single word of Christ... We ought to be profoundly grieved at such a state of the Church in the world, because it no way answers to the heart and love of Christ. Men rest satisfied in being assured of their eternal salvation.² (14:85-86)

What the Lord desires today is the reality of the Body of Christ. Although the world situation points to the soon coming of the Lord, unless there is a substantial, intrinsic expression of the Body, the Lord Jesus will not return. For this reason, in Revelation 2 and 3 the Lord calls the overcomers to rise up above the degraded situation. In 3:12 He says, "He who overcomes, him I will make a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall by no means go out anymore." Only the aggregate, the totality, of the overcoming God-men will be built up as the reality of the Body of Christ, the Zion within Jerusalem, the vital ones within the churches, who have been perfected and matured. This will afford the Lord the way to return to the earth in victory. For this, the overcomers will be rewarded in the coming age, but those who remain in the degraded situation will suffer loss (1 Cor. 3:15). May we all see the Lord's need for the overcomers, and may we aspire to be built up as the Body in its intrinsic reality.

The Maturity and Love of the Bride of Christ

At the same time that the Body is being produced by the overcomers' experience of the divine life, the bride of Christ is being prepared for His satisfaction and rest in love. Just as Eve was built from a rib taken from Adam in his deep sleep, the bride of Christ is built from the unbreakable, indestructible eternal life of Christ released in His death and imparted in His resurrection (Gen. 2:21-23; Heb. 7:16; John 19:34; 12:24; 1 Pet. 1:3). Likewise, just as Eve was brought back to Adam, the church produced out of Christ will be presented to Him (Eph. 5:27). This will take place at the time of the perfection of the bride, the coming of Christ as the Bridegroom, her rapture to Him, and the marriage of the Lamb (John 3:29; Matt. 25:6; Rev. 19:7). In this way the marriage of the Lamb is the issue of the completion of God's New Testament economy, which is to obtain for Christ a bride, the church, through His judicial redemption and by His organic salvation in His divine life (Kangas, "Preparation"). Thus, the preparation of the bride is crucial for the consummation of this age and the return of Christ.

The readiness of the bride depends on the maturity of the overcomers, who are built together corporately. In the New Testament the word *mature* is used to refer to the believers' being full-grown, matured, and perfected in the life of God, indicating that we need to grow and mature unto perfection in the divine life (Matt. 5:48). Therefore, the believers must grow to become a full-grown man, arriving at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:13; Col. 1:28). For this, the lovers and seekers of Christ need to pursue the growth and maturity in His life (Phil. 3:12-15).

To be matured in this way is equivalent to being deified in the life and nature of God, as Athanasius said, the incarnated

Word "has become Man, that He might deify us in Himself" (*Letters* 576). Leviticus 19:19 says, "You shall keep My statutes. You shall not let your cattle breed with a different kind; you shall not sow your fields with two kinds of seed, nor shall a garment made of two kinds of material come upon you." Just as the beasts of the field are proscribed from breeding with another kind, how much more does the One who created them seek His counterpart from His same species. The rib from Adam's side was built into Eve as his complement and counterpart; in like manner, God in Christ is being wrought into man with His life and nature so that man can be the same as God in species, life, nature, and appearance in order to match Him as His counterpart. How regrettable it is that many Christians today neglect their intrinsic match of life and nature with God, seeing only their justification by faith while awaiting a fellowship with Him in eternity in and by their human life and nature alone!³

The church as the bride is a matter of satisfaction and rest in love. Both the maturity and building of the bride are intrinsically related to love, as indicated by 2 Peter 1:5-7, in which the growth, development, and ultimate maturity of the life within the believers consummate in the divine love (*ἀγάπη*), which God is in His nature (1 John 4:8, 16). The source of all love is the Bridegroom (v. 19; Rom. 5:5). As a response to His love, we love the Lord by appreciating Him (S. S. 5:10-16), setting our whole being on Him (Rom. 8:6; Col. 3:2), opening our whole being to Him (Rom. 9:23; 2 Cor. 4:7), enjoying Him (Phil. 4:4; 1 Pet. 2:3; Psa. 34:8), giving Him the preeminence in all things (Col. 1:18; Rev. 2:4), being one with Him (1 Cor. 6:17), living Him (Gal. 2:20; Phil. 1:21), and becoming Him (Gen. 2:23; 1 John 3:2). An ancient hymn says, "What e'er thou lovest, man, / That too become thou must; / God, if thou lovest God, / Dust, if thou lovest dust" (*Hymns*, #477). As we love the Lord in all the foregoing ways, we become the same as He is to be His counterpart (Kangas "Preparation").

The Righteousness and Beauty of the Bride

Revelation 19:8 says of the bride, "It was given to her that she should be clothed in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteousnesses of the saints." The righteousnesses here are not the righteousness that we received for our initial salvation (1 Cor. 1:30). The righteousness we received for our salvation is objective and enables us to meet the requirement of the righteous God, but the righteousnesses of the overcoming saints are subjective (Phil. 3:9) and enable them to meet the requirement of the overcoming Christ. The fine linen in Revelation 19 corresponds to the wedding garment in Matthew 22:11-13, which signifies the Christ whom we live out and who is expressed through us in our daily living as our surpassing righteousness (5:20; Rev. 3:4-5, 18). By the process of Christ

stitching Himself in our inner being, particularly in our soul, our being becomes transparent and crystal clear, and we become qualified to meet the coming Christ as His bride and be joined to Him in His wedding feast.

As the bride, the church also needs beauty. The beauty of the bride in Ephesians 5 is for the presentation of the bride. Verse 27 says that Christ will “present the church to Himself glorious, not having spot or wrinkle or any such things, but that she would be holy and without blemish.” In Song of Songs 4, Solomon as a type of Christ says, “Oh, you are beautiful, my love!... You are altogether beautiful, my love, / And there is no blemish in you” (vv. 1, 7). The beauty of the bride is the shining out of Christ from within her. What Christ appreciates in us is the expression of Himself. *Spot* in Ephesians 5 signifies something of our fallen, natural life, which destroys, ruins, corrupts, defiles, and mars the church (1 Cor. 3:17). *Wrinkle* relates to the oldness of the old man (Rom. 6:6). To be holy is to be saturated with Christ and transformed by Christ, and to be without blemish is to be spotless and without wrinkle, having nothing of the natural life of our old man. Thus, to be beautified to be the bride of Christ requires that we actively cooperate with the inward operation of the processed God in our being (Phil. 2:13) to be sanctified, cleansed, washed, transformed, matured, and built up in the life of Christ.

The Bride of Christ Being Composed of the Overcomers

The coming of the Lord at the end of this age awaits and depends upon the preparation of the bride, and the readiness of the bride depends on the maturity of the overcomers. For their role in the consummation of the age, the overcomers who constitute the bride will receive the great reward of participating in the wedding feast of the Lamb. Revelation 19:7-9 says,

Let us rejoice and exult, and let us give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And it was given to her that she should be clothed in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteousnesses of the saints. And he said to me, Write, Blessed are they who are called to the marriage dinner of the Lamb. And he said to me, These are the true words of God.

Here, the wife, the bride of Christ, consists of those who have allowed the Lord to operate in their inner being and have lived Him as their subjective righteousness. Hence, the bride in Revelation 19 consists only of the overcoming

believers, while the bride, the wife, in 21:2 is composed of all the saved saints after the millennium for eternity. A bride is mainly for the wedding day, while a wife is for the entire life. Accordingly, the New Jerusalem will be manifest in two successive stages. In the coming age of the kingdom, the New Jerusalem will be the bride of Christ for one thousand years in its initial and fresh stage. As such, it will be a reward to the overcoming believers who will be rewarded with the full enjoyment of Christ and of what they have become in Christ. After the millennium, all of the believers will join the overcomers to consummate and complete the New Jerusalem in full as the wife of Christ in the new heaven and new earth for eternity (v. 9).

The marriage dinner of the Lamb in Revelation 19 is the wedding feast in Matthew 22:2, which will be a reward to the overcoming believers. Only the overcomers will be called to it. Not all the saved ones will participate in it, but after being dealt with by the Lord in the kingdom age, they will participate in the New Jerusalem for eternity. Hence, to be called to the marriage dinner of Christ, which will usher the overcoming believers into the enjoyment of the millennium, is to be blessed. As the matured and perfected ones, the overcomers will be rewarded by an early rapture and the joy of the wedding feast. Stanzas 2 and 4 of *Hymns*, #1314 proclaims the love and anticipation of the bride:

Oh what an hour sweet /
When Bride and Bridegroom
meet / And love surpassing
comprehend... / 'Tis but a moment now; / Thou, our
Lord Bridegroom, Thou / Soon wilt return to claim Thy
Bride. / O Hallelujah! / 'Tis this we long for, / And Thou
too wilt be satisfied.

How regrettable it is that millions of Christians have been taught that Christ's objective righteousness for their justification by faith forensically qualifies them not only for their eternal salvation but also for the marriage of the Lamb and the thousand-year wedding feast. Because of this, many will appear before the Lord at His judgment seat without the required wedding garment stitched into their being by the subjective operation of Christ, and they will be excluded from the joy of the Lord in the kingdom.

The Formation of the Army for the Defeat of the Satanic Will

In Genesis 1:26 God says,

Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness;

*The believers must grow
to become a full-grown man.
For this, the lovers and seekers
of Christ need to pursue
the growth and maturity
in His life.*

and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of heaven and over the cattle and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.

God created a corporate man not only to express Himself with His image but also to represent Him by exercising His dominion over all things. God's intention in giving man dominion is to subdue His enemy, Satan, who rebelled against Him; to recover the earth, which was usurped by Satan; and to exercise God's authority over the earth in order that the kingdom of God may come to earth, and the glory of God may be manifested on the earth (Matt. 6:10, 13). God's intention is fulfilled not in Adam, the first man, but in Christ as the second man, the new man, comprising Christ Himself as the Head and the church as His Body (1 Cor. 15:47; Eph. 2:15; 1:22-23). It is fully fulfilled in the overcoming believers, who live Christ for His corporate expression and will have authority over the nations and rule as co-kings with Christ in the millennium (Rev. 2:26-27; 20:4, 6; Recovery Version, Gen. 1:26 note 5).

Satan's will is set against God's will (Isa. 14:12-14); this conflict of wills makes spiritual warfare necessary. The struggle for God's kingdom against the satanic rulers and authorities involves spiritual warfare on earth, the spiritual powers in the air, and even war in heaven (Matt. 6:10, 13; Eph. 6:11-12; 2:2; Rev. 12:7). How astounding is the concept of war on earth, war in the air, and even war in heaven! The battle to subdue the satanic will and defeat God's enemy is a universal warfare, the conflict of the ages that touches every realm in the universe. For this reason, from the time of Samuel to the prophets, the name of God is Jehovah of hosts. First Samuel 17:45 speaks of "Jehovah of hosts, the God of the ranks of Israel." Hosts are armies, and ranks are battle arrays. The Bible reveals God as Jehovah of armies, the God of the battle arrays of His people. The Redeemer (Isa. 47:4), the Husband (54:5), the Portion of Jacob (Jer. 51:19), the Builder of His house (Hag. 1:7-8, 14; Zech. 1:16; 4:6, 9), the Sender and the sent One for the recovery of His kingdom (2:8-9, 11), and the King in the coming millennial kingdom (14:16) are all Jehovah of hosts, the One who fights against His enemy.

According to Revelation 19:11-21, Christ will come as a fighting General with His bride, the overcoming believers who are His army, to fight Antichrist, the kings under him, and their armies at Armageddon. When Christ comes to fight, He will come as the Son of Man (Matt. 26:64; Rev. 14:14), and as the Son of Man He will need a counterpart to match and complete Him; this counterpart will be His bride. Before Christ comes openly in power, He will have a wedding, uniting His overcomers to Himself as one entity (19:7-9). Following this, verses 11 to 16 announce the coming of Christ, the Word of God, to battle Antichrist

and his armies. Verse 14 says, "The armies which are in heaven followed Him on white horses, dressed in fine linen, white and clean." The battle dress of fine linen in verse 14 corresponds to the wedding garment of fine linen in verse 8, indicating that the bride of the Lamb is now the army of the Lamb. The wedding garment of the bride—Christ lived out of us as our daily righteousness—qualifies us not only to attend the wedding but also to join in the army to fight along with Christ against Antichrist in the ultimate war, the war at Armageddon.

Just as the Husband of the bride is the God of armies, the bride of the Husband now becomes His corporate warrior (17:14). Joel 3:11 says, "Hurry and come, / All you surrounding nations, / And be gathered. / There cause Your mighty ones to descend, O Jehovah!" The mighty ones are Christ's overcomers, who will return with Christ as His army to defeat Antichrist and who will be His co-kings in the millennium. Having just joined Himself to His bride, Christ will not leave her to do battle. When He comes, He will come with her as His overcoming corporate army.

The Body is for God's move, the bride is for His satisfaction, and the army is for His victory. The one Christ will marry is one who has been fighting the battle against God's enemy for years. One of the requirements of the bride is that she know how to fight. The bride is an expert in war, not only a female who loves, but also a man-child who fights (Rev. 12:5, 7). The bride as a warrior is typified in Song of Songs. In expressing appreciation for the loving seeker, Christ in type says, "You are as beautiful, my love, as Tirzah, / As lovely as Jerusalem, / As terrible as an army with banners" (6:4). Tirzah and Jerusalem signify God's sanctuary, God's dwelling place, on earth. The lover of Christ becomes mature in the riches of the life of Christ so that she becomes the building, the sanctuary, of God. In the eyes of God she is as beautiful as Tirzah and as lovely as Jerusalem. However, to the enemy she is as terrible as an army with banners. Banners indicate a readiness to fight and are also a sign that the victory is won. A terrible army signifies that the overcomers of the Lord terrify God's enemy, Satan, in their fighting the battle for God's kingdom (Recovery Version, S. S. 6:4, notes 1 and 2).

In the universe there are three wills—the divine will, the satanic will, and the human will. Spiritual warfare has its source in the conflict between the divine will and the satanic will. To become the terrible army in this universal conflict, the overcomers use their human faculty of will to be pliable to the Lord but strong toward the enemy. Verse 5 goes on to say, "Your hair is like a flock of goats / That repose on Mount Gilead." Flowing hair like a flock of goats signifies submission and obedience through God's feeding (1 Cor. 11:5, 10). Song of Songs 4:4 says, "Your neck is like the tower of David, / Built for an armory: / A thousand bucklers hang on it, / All the shields of the

mighty men.” Although the lover of Christ is beautiful in her having a will that is submissive to Christ, she is also rich in the power for battle. To be the beautified bride of Christ and His victorious army, we must be renewed and transformed in our will to stand with God’s will and oppose the satanic will.

Isaiah 13:4 says, “The sound of a tumult in the mountains, / Like that of many peoples! / The sound of an uproar of the kingdoms, / Of nations gathered together! / Jehovah of hosts is mustering / An army for battle.” For the consummation of this age, Christ is mustering His loving, faithful bride-army. Through His incarnation and human living, Christ defeated Satan, and Satan had nothing—no ground, no chance, no hope, no possibility—in Him (Matt. 4:10-11; John 14:30). Then on the cross Christ judged, cast out, and destroyed Satan and his works (3:14; 16:11; 12:31-32; Heb. 2:14; 1 John 3:8). After the war in heaven Satan is cast to the earth, prior to the millennium he is bound and cast into the abyss, and after the millennium he is cast forever into the lake of fire to be tormented day and night forever (Rev. 12:9; 20:2-3, 10). “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign forever and ever” (11:15). “They overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they loved not their soul-life even unto death” (12:11). All of the foregoing truths are the word of the testimony of the overcomers, who fight the enemy in this age and will return as Christ’s vanquishing army at His second coming in power. Thus, the formation of Christ’s army is for the consummation of the age and the turn of dispensation to the age of the kingdom.

The Dominion over Earth and the Progressing Fall of Man

As we have seen, God created a corporate man not only to express Him with His image but also to represent Him by exercising His dominion over all things (Gen. 1:26). Verse 28 says, “God blessed them; and God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion.” *Subdue* implies that a war is raging on earth between God and His enemy, Satan. Whoever gains the earth will have the victory. Thus, man was created by God to subdue, to conquer, the earth and recover it for God. To this end, the Lord Jesus taught His disciples to pray, “Your kingdom come; Your will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth” (Matt. 6:10). The testimony and practical

reality that God seeks is that “the Most High is the Ruler over the kingdom of men,” and “the heavens do rule” (Dan. 4:17, 26), so that He is not only the God of heaven but also the Possessor and Lord of heaven and earth (Ezra 5:12; Gen. 14:22; Matt. 11:25).

Prior to the fall of man, Adam lived by the intuition in his spirit (*neshamah*, Gen. 2:7; cf. Prov. 20:27), so that he may have the direct sense of God and direct knowledge from God to be ruled by God directly. After man’s fall, man lost God’s direct rule and came under the rule of his own conscience through the sense of right and wrong (Gen. 3:7-10). After this, however, most men did not live by their conscience, resulting in the condition prior to the flood, in which man became flesh and his wickedness was great in the earth (6:3, 5). Because of this further failure, God authorized man to act as His deputy authority in ruling over other men. This was the beginning of human government to maintain peace and security in human society so that God may have the time and the opportunity to move in man for the spread of His kingdom (9:6; Rom. 13:1).

Spiritual warfare has its source in the conflict between the divine will and the satanic will. The overcomers use their human will to be pliable to the Lord but strong toward the enemy.

However, Satan, in his evil plot to usurp the rulership of the earth, also took the opportunity to operate in men, who were collected into one unit under human government, molding them to be one in opposition to God. This began to take place at Babel, where Satan utterly usurped God’s ordination of man’s rule over other men (Gen. 11:1-9).

Genesis 10:8-12 tells us that Babel, in the land of Shinar, was the beginning of Nimrod’s kingdom. Nimrod, the first type of Antichrist, was the first leader of men to oppose God. Thus, human government formed in opposition to God began with Nimrod and will end with Antichrist.

Human Government under the Usurpation of Satan

From its beginning to its termination, human government has done and will continue to do three things: rebel against God, exalt man, and worship idols (11:4, 9). The rebellion at Babel was a collective denial of God’s right and authority, instigated by Satan, the primeval rebel against God’s kingdom. Satan said, “I will ascend to heaven...I will exalt my throne...I will sit...I will ascend...I will make myself like the Most High” (Isa. 14:12-16). Because of his rebellion through self-will, Satan became God’s adversary, God’s enemy (Zech. 3:1-2; Rev. 12:9; 20:2). Moreover, Satan’s ambition for position became the motivation of all the rebellions recorded in the Scriptures, such as the rebellion of Miriam and Aaron, of Korah and the two hundred

fifty leaders, of Absalom, and of many others (Num. 12:1-2; 16:1-3; 2 Sam. 15:10-12). Man's further fall at Babel was a fall from human government under God's authority to a collective rebellion of the whole human race against God under Satan's instigation.

Most authorities associate the name *Nimrod* with the Hebrew *marad*, "to rebel," or with the specific meaning of "we will revolt" (Hamilton 338; Keil 165). The Hebrew word signifies to be "bold and audacious in acts of rebellion or disobedience" (Brown 597). Nimrod was "a mighty one on the earth...a mighty hunter before Jehovah" (Gen. 10:8-9). Keil points out that *before Jehovah* signifies "in defiance of Jehovah," thus, a "mighty hunter against the Lord," a hunter not of beasts but of men in the establishment of an imperial kingdom by tyranny and power (166). Josephus writes that Nimrod even vowed revenge on God for destroying his forefathers in the flood (79). Thus, the collective conspiracy of rebellious, fallen man against God began with the "Titanic heaven-defying undertaking" at Babel under the corrupt human government of Nimrod (Lange, quoting Delitzsch, 359). Simply stated, the issue of the rebellion at Babel was that man corporately and formally took from God the ownership and authority over all things so that he may do as he pleased. Thus, the denial and rejection of God's authority are chief characteristics of the institution of fallen human government.

The second chief characteristic of Babel is the exaltation of man over and apart from God. At Babel, man forsook God and replaced Him with a man-made and godless culture. *Come, let us* in Genesis 11:3-4 is equivalent to *I will* in Isaiah 14:13-14, exposing that man's collective self-exaltation has its source in the self-exalting Satan. Thus, man's decree at Babel was a declaration of independence from God, and the tower in particular was the banner and display of man's independence. Such self-exaltation is the pride of man in the confidence in and labor of the flesh (1 Tim. 3:6). God's purpose is to build up New Jerusalem, in whose center is the tree of life, signifying our eternal dependence on Christ as our life supply (Rev. 21:2; 22:2; Gen. 2:9), but to forsake God and be independent of Him is in the principle of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (v. 9). Nimrod's establishing of cities was the continuation and strengthening of human civilization in independence from God and apart from Him, which began with Cain (4:17).⁴

Genesis 11:4 says, "Let us make a name for ourselves." This again demonstrates that the tower at Babel was built by self-exalting man for the declaration of his rebellion and opposition against God. To make a name is for one's own glory. Jehovah led His people "to make for Himself a name forever," to make for Himself "a glorious name" (Isa. 63:12, 14; Jer. 32:20). For man to make a name for his own self-glory, self-exaltation, and self-magnification is

to deny God's name and usurp His glory. This is the principle of Antichrist, who will exalt himself and magnify himself above every god (Dan. 11:36). Therefore, the building of the tower of Babel signaled the "apotheosis of humanity" (Lange 368).

The third characteristic of Babel is idol worship. The name *Babel* is thought to derive from Akkadian *Bab-ilu*, "the gate of god," referring most probably to the god Marduk (Merodach, Jer. 50:2).⁵ The plural, *Bab-ilani*, "the gate of the gods," is the source for Greek Βαβυλων. According to historical records and archeological evidence, the city and tower of Babel were full of names of idols (Kramer 32). Nimrod invented the pagan, idolatrous system of worship. Cush, the father of Nimrod, also played a great part in this satanic invention, as did Semiramis, the mother of Nimrod and his wife by incest. The worship of Nimrod, Cush, and Semiramis can be found in many pagan religions throughout Asia, Africa, and Europe. Alexander Hislop develops this fact in great detail, showing that pagan gods of many names are actually Nimrod himself, whose story took on different details as it spread through the ancient world (5, 21-40). Hislop demonstrates this also for Cush and Semiramis, who was worshipped as the queen of heaven, the mother of the gods, Venus, and Artemis, among others (Jer. 7:18; Acts 19:27-28).

At Babel man followed Satan, exalted himself to oppose God, rejected God's name, denied God's right and authority over man, and fell into idolatry. This collective rebellion of the whole human race against God under Satan's instigation was conceived, formed, and administered under the Satan-usurped human government first led by Nimrod. The kingdom of God is the representation—through the redeemed, regenerated, transformed, and overcoming believers—of God's glorious dominion over the earth, culminating in the enlargement, expression, and reign of the Triune God in the kingdom's manifestation in the coming age and the New Jerusalem in eternity. At Babel, however, human government became the representation, through fallen man, of Satan's rebellious usurpation of the earth, culminating in the embodiment of Satan himself, Antichrist, who will oppose God's government to the uttermost by fighting against Christ directly.

The Vision of the Great Human Image

The issue of the great spiritual warfare is who will have the right and the authority in the universe and on earth in particular—God through His overcoming believers in His kingdom, or Satan through rebellious man collected under fallen human government. The most complete picture of human government in the eyes of God is found in the visions of Daniel. The first vision in the book of Daniel is that of the great human image and its destiny (2:31-45), which is the basic and controlling factor of the entire

prophecy of Daniel. This great image signifies the aggregate of human government throughout human history, from the beginning of human government at Babel, as signified by the head, to the termination of human government in human history in the Roman Empire with its last ten kings (Rev. 17:12), as signified by the ten toes.

The head of the image, being of fine gold, signifies Nebuchadnezzar, who rebuilt Babylon and reestablished its preeminence (Dan. 2:32, 37-38). The golden head represents a single entity from the time of Babel under Nimrod to Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar. Babel in the land of Shinar was the first government formed by man in rebellion to God. Centuries later, Babylon dominated Mesopotamia in its first, Canaanite dynasty, most noted for the reign of Hammurabi, the lawgiver. Close to a millennium later, the Neo-Babylonian, or Chaldean, Empire was raised up by Nebuchadnezzar, the “destroyer of nations” (Jer. 4:7), who laid Nineveh in ruins, struck down Egypt, destroyed God’s temple at Jerusalem, and brought the holy vessels for the service of God into his temple of idols. Because Babylon was the extension of Babel, it was the first, primeval, chief, and all-encompassing empire until the time of the Medes, and all later manifestations of human government derive their basic principles and elements from it. The development of Babylon conditioned the historical and cultural advance and political character first of Western Asia and eventually of Europe and the whole world (Winckler 3, 6). Moreover, pagan religions throughout the world find their source in the mystery cults of Babylon (Rev. 17:5), where idolatry was first revealed by Satan and his fallen host so that the world may be both taught and ruled by the evil one (Pember, *Mysteries* 396; *Antichrist* 77-78). For this reason, all human empires are subsumed under Babylon, which is joined to and identified with Satan (Rev. 18:2-3, 9-10, 21; Isa. 14:4, 12-14). In the eyes of God, the whole of human government from Nimrod to Antichrist is Babylon.

The breast and arms of the great image in Daniel 2, being of silver, signify Medo-Persia (vv. 32, 39). Fighting under the banner of a biting snake, the Medes were infamous for their aggressive hostility. In 550 B.C. Cyrus the Great of Persia absorbed the Medes into a united Medo-Persian Empire. Soon afterward he conquered Babylon, probably during the blasphemous, debauched revelry of Belshazzar, placing Darius the Mede to rule over it (5:1-4, 28, 30-31; Isa. 13:1, 17; Jer. 51:11). Later, under Darius the Great (Ezra 4:5),⁶ the Achaemenid Persian Empire became the

largest empire of classical antiquity, spanning three continents and stretching from India to Libya to the shores of Europe. This may be considered the beginning of world empire, which became the characteristic of subsequent human governments.

The abdomen and thighs of the image in Daniel 2, being of bronze, signify Greece, including Macedonia, which ruled “over all the earth” (vv. 32, 39). After taking the throne at the age of twenty, Alexander the Great reunited Greece, defeated the Persians, captured Egypt (where he was called the son of Zeus-Amun), and invaded India, earning the titles of King of Macedon, Shah of Persia, and Pharaoh of Egypt. His conquest of the known world was swift and fierce. The enduring influence of Greece upon Western civilization is known to all. The third part of the great human image strengthened human government with the continuation of world empire—the unification of rule over a vast extent—and democracy, a new form of rule by the consent of men apart from God. It also created much of the basis of Western culture as a whole with many other

Who will have authority in the universe and on earth— God through His overcoming believers in His kingdom, or Satan through rebellious man collected under fallen human government?

achievements and innovations, including the pursuit of the perfection of human intellect, expressed in the arts and literature; formal philosophy, the systematic challenging of beliefs and posing of questions without answers; the theater, the beginnings of stage performance and the paradigm for public entertainment; and the spectacle of sports and the veneration of athletes, granting

Olympic victors high positions in society and government. The abdomen and thighs of the great image form the core of the further development of man’s government and culture apart from God and in rebellion to Him.

The Culminating Portion of the Great Image

The legs of iron and the feet partly of iron and partly of clay on the image in Daniel 2 signify the Roman Empire with its last ten kings (v. 33). Verses 40 and 41 say,

There will be a fourth kingdom as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron crushes and shatters everything; and like iron that smashes all these, it will crush and smash. And in that you saw the feet and the toes, partly of potter’s clay and partly of iron, the kingdom will be a confused mass; but there will be some of the firmness of iron in it, for you saw the iron mixed with the earthy clay.

The two legs of iron signify the western and eastern divisions of the Roman Empire, and the feet and the ten toes

signify the nations in the period after the fall of Rome and before Christ's second coming. These nations are partly autocratic (iron) and partly democratic (clay). The ten toes of the image signify the ten kings of the revived and restored Roman Empire under Antichrist (Rev. 17:12). The Roman Empire crushed, shattered, and smashed the nations to form the greatest human empire in history, which will be revived just prior to the end of this age.

That the Roman Empire is one with Satan and culminates with Antichrist, the embodiment of Satan, is seen in Revelation. Verse 1 of chapter 13 says, "I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns ten diadems, and on his heads names of blasphemy." Likewise, 17:3 says, "I saw a woman sitting upon a scarlet beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns." The beast is Antichrist, who comes up out of the abyss (11:7). The ten horns are the ten coming kings, corresponding with the ten toes of the great image. These will be raised up in the revived Roman Empire before the great tribulation and will be one with Antichrist in opposing God and persecuting His people, the Jews and the believers. The seven heads signify both the seven hills of Rome (17:9) and seven Caesars of the Roman Empire. Verse 10 says concerning the latter, "Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come." That the first five "have fallen" means that they died unnaturally. These are Julius Caesar, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero, all of whom either were murdered or committed suicide before John wrote Revelation. The sixth, Domitian, who was also murdered, was living when this book was written; therefore it is said of him that he "is." "The other," the seventh, is Antichrist, who had "not yet come" at that time (Lee, *Revelation* 600). Each of these assumed, or will assume, deity, claiming to be God and forcing people to worship him as God.

Revelation 12:3 says, "Behold, there was a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns." The great red dragon, of course, is Satan, the culmination of the serpent in Genesis 3. Thus, the seven heads and ten horns are those both of Antichrist and of Satan, indicating that Satan and Antichrist are one. All the above prove that the Roman Empire, Antichrist, and the ten kings are one with Satan. This is the culmination of human government in the eyes of God. Such a satanic entity will make war with the Lamb (17:14), fighting directly against Christ at the battle of Armageddon. What an evil consummation this is! To be sure, fallen, satanic human government and the kingdom of God cannot coexist on the earth.

The Vision of the Bestial Nature of Human Government

In Daniel 2 human government on the earth is signified by a great human image full of glory and splendor. The head

is of gold, and each successive part is made of different metals, from silver to bronze and eventually to iron. In man's eyes these four metals represent four great human governments and cultures. However, Daniel's vision in chapter 7 portrays human government in a much different way. Instead of four different metals, he saw four cruel beasts. The first was like a lion and had the wings of an eagle, signifying Babylon with its king, Nebuchadnezzar (v. 4). Its being like a lion, the king of beasts, signifies that it was the most fierce and cruel, and its having the wings of an eagle, the king of the fowls, signifies that it was in the air, which belongs to Satan, the ruler of the air (Eph. 2:2), and that its move was swift.

The second beast resembled a bear raised up on one side, having three ribs in its mouth between its teeth, signifying Medo-Persia (Dan. 7:5). Its resembling a bear signifies that it was not as strong and swift as the lion but that it was still fierce and cruel. Its being raised up on one side signifies that Media and Persia became one dominion. The three ribs in its mouth signifies that three kingdoms, Babylon, Asia Minor, and Egypt, were devoured by it.

The third beast was like a leopard, having four wings of a bird on its back, signifying Greece with its king, Alexander the Great (v. 6). Its being like a leopard signifies that it was fierce, cruel, and swift. That it had four wings of a bird on its back signifies that it was swift by means of its four generals who became the heads of four kingdoms. Verse 7 says,

After this I watched in the night visions, and there was a fourth beast, dreadful and frightful and exceedingly strong; and it had large iron teeth; it devoured and crushed and trampled down the remainder with its feet; and it was different from all the beasts that were before it; and had ten horns.

This signifies the Roman Empire, and specifically Antichrist, the last Caesar of the Roman Empire. This is the beast revealed in Revelation 13:1-2. That the beast had large iron teeth and claws of bronze, and that it devoured the remainder, signify that it had great power to devour and crush nations, to devour even the whole earth, tread it down, and crush it (Dan. 7:19, 23). The ten horns signify the ten kings of the revived Roman Empire (v. 24). That this beast is different and is simply called the "fourth," not having an appearance like any other animal, indicates that the Roman Empire altogether surpassed its predecessors in being dreadful, frightful, and exceedingly strong. As we have seen, this beast is one with Satan, the great red dragon (Lee, *Daniel* 53-56).

Daniel 7:8 says concerning the ten horns of the fourth beast, "There was another horn, a small one, which came up among them; and three of the first horns were uprooted from before it. And there were eyes like the eyes

of a man in this horn and a mouth speaking great things.” The small horn is Antichrist, who will come up among the ten kings, and before him three of them will be destroyed. In this way Antichrist will become the strongest horn. That the small horn had eyes like the eyes of a man signifies that Antichrist will have sharp sight to perceive things and a mouth to speak great things against God (v. 25; Rev. 13:5-6). The foregoing clearly tells us that although in the eyes of man human government and culture are great and full of glory and splendor, in the eyes of God they are bestial, culminating at the end of this age in an unspeakable beast, who is one with Satan to blaspheme God, persecute the saints, and usurp the rule of earth. Such a beast must be slain, destroyed, annihilated, and given to the burning fire (Dan. 7:11, 26) before the kingdom of God and Christ can be manifested on the earth.

Bestial Human Government Culminating in Antichrist

The bestial nature of human government is further portrayed in the vision of the ram and the male goat in Daniel 8. The ram with unequal horns in verses 3 and 4, corresponding to the second beast in 7:5 and to the breast and arms of silver of the great human image in 2:32, signifies Medo-Persia (8:20). That the ram pushed westward, northward, and southward signifies that Medo-Persia conquered Babylon to the west, Assyria to the north, and Egypt to the south. That no beast could stand before it and that it did as it pleased and became great indicates that Medo-Persia had no fear of God and became arrogant in itself.

Verses 5 through 7 speak of a male goat that came from the west without touching the ground, having a conspicuous horn between his eyes. He ran toward the ram in his mighty wrath, struck the ram, broke his two horns, threw him to the ground, and trampled him. The male goat, corresponding to the third beast in 7:6 and to the abdomen and thighs of bronze of the great human image in 2:32, signifies Greece with Alexander the Great (8:21; Javan is Greece.). Its coming from the west signifies that it came from Europe, and its coming without touching the ground signifies its swift movement over the face of the earth. The conspicuous horn between the eyes is Alexander, who was distinguished by his intelligence. Alexander also became arrogant in himself, but at the height of his power he died suddenly at the age of thirty-two.

After the great horn was broken, four conspicuous ones came up toward the four winds of heaven, that is, four

kingdoms rose up out of the original one (vv. 8, 22). In the place of Alexander the Great, his four generals—Cassander, Lysimachus, Ptolemy, and Seleucus—formed kingdoms in Macedonia, Asia Minor, Egypt, and Syria and central Asia, respectively. This was the continuation of the Grecian Empire in the Hellenistic Period, which prevailed until the time of Cleopatra, when the last of Alexander’s empire came under the rule of the Romans.⁷ Shortly after the division of the empire into four kingdoms, Lysimachus took the kingdom from Cassander, and Seleucus in turn conquered Lysimachus. This amalgamated Alexander’s empire into two dynasties, the Ptolemaic in Egypt and the Seleucid in Syria. The Ptolemaic and Seleucid kings are known as the king of the south and the king of the north, respectively, who used Israel as a thoroughfare and battleground in order to wage war against each other, causing great distress and much suffering for the people of God (11:5-20; 10:1). This is especially the case with the despicable Antiochus Epiphanes, king of Syria (11:21), whose armies profaned the sanctuary at Jerusalem, removed the daily sacrifice, and set up the abomination that desolates

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(v. 31). Antiochus absolutely forbade sacrifices, circumcision, and the keeping of the Sabbath. He even went so far as to erect an altar to Zeus on the altar of burnt offering in the temple. Moreover, he set up his own image in the temple, sacrificed a sow on the altar, and sprinkled its blood in the temple. He forced the holy people to worship the idol and eat pork, and he seduced young men to com-

mit fornication in the temple. In all these evils Antiochus Epiphanes typifies Antichrist, who will appear in the last week of the seventy weeks, that is, at the end of the present age (9:27; Rev. 13:1-7; Recovery Version, Dan. 11:31, note 1). Once again we see that fallen human government, the beasts of Daniel 7 and 8, culminate in Antichrist, who will be one with Satan’s goal to war against the true temple—Christ as God’s embodiment (John 2:19, 21) and the Body of Christ as His enlargement (1 Cor. 3:16-17; Eph. 2:20-22).

An Extension of Life Given to the Human Empires

According to the vision of the human image in Daniel 2, in the sight of God all human government throughout history is composed of four empires: the Babylonian Empire, the Medo-Persian Empire, the Macedonian-Grecian Empire, and the Roman Empire. Daniel 7:12 says, “As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but an extension of life was given to them for a season and a time.” The dominion and authority of Babylon, Persia, and

Greece were taken away by each succeeding empire, culminating in the Roman Empire. Nevertheless, their life, that is, their culture, has been extended and still remains. As each empire was defeated, its culture was adopted by the following one. Today the world's culture is characteristically Roman, yet, being an accumulated culture, it contains the cultures of the Babylonians, Persians, and Greeks.

The beginning of human government was at Babel, which was built by Nimrod, and the ending of human government will be the revived Roman Empire under Antichrist. Although the form and appearance of the Roman Empire have vanished, the culture, spirit, and essence of the Roman Empire continue to exist today, especially in the matters of law, politics, and government.⁸ The periods of history signified by the first three parts of the great human image and by the two legs of the fourth part have been fulfilled, but the period signified by the ten toes has not yet been fulfilled. Rather, it will be fulfilled at the end of the present age. At the beginning of the great tribulation, the form and appearance of the Roman Empire will be restored under Antichrist, the last Caesar of the Roman Empire, who will be supported by ten kings. Thus, the aggregate of human empires that began with Nimrod at Babel will consummate with Antichrist and his ten kings (Recovery Version, Dan. 2:32, note 1 and v. 33, note 1).

Daniel 10:13 and 20 tell us that over the kingdoms of Persia and Greece (Javan) there were evil angelic princes who fought to withstand Michael, the archangel. This view of the spiritual struggle behind the scenes reveals that Satan's kingdom of darkness is behind the nations, and he is one with the powers of the nations. Satan's rebellion, struggle, and usurpation cause the present age to be "man's day" (1 Cor. 4:3), not God's day. Because of this, human government on the earth is altogether not compatible with the manifestation of the kingdom of God and Christ. Therefore, the Lord is seeking and raising up His overcomers, who see the true situation of the universe, are kept from the world, and are prepared for Christ's coming to turn the age, crush the aggregate of human government, and bring in the eternal kingdom of God to fill the whole earth.

The Consummation of the Age Centering on Europe

The prophecies in Daniel and Revelation make it clear that the events of the consummation of this age will be centered on Europe. To see this, we must begin with Noah's prophetic blessings and curse to his three sons—Shem, Japheth, and Ham. Genesis 9:25-27 says,

Cursed be Canaan [the son of Ham]: / A servant of servants / Shall he be to his brothers. / And he said, Blessed be Jehovah, / The God of Shem; / And let Canaan be his

servant. / May God enlarge Japheth, / And let him dwell in the tents of Shem, / And let Canaan be his servant.

Ham's descendants were cursed because Ham exposed the failure of God's deputy authority (v. 22) and thus touched God's government in a wrong way. Shem and Japheth were blessed because they respected God's government, covering the failure of the deputy authority (v. 3). Shem, the forefather of the Jews, was blessed to have God as his God and to possess the "tent," the dwelling place of God, which ultimately is Christ and the church and will consummate in the New Jerusalem (John 1:14; Eph. 2:21-22; Rev. 21:3). Japheth's portion was to be enlarged by God and to dwell in the tents of Shem. To enlarge (from Hebrew *patah*) is to make spacious and wide (Brown 834). Although this prophecy required centuries to be fulfilled, history has borne out that the sons of Japheth have been enlarged and have grown expansively to dominate the affairs of man, particularly in governmental power, science, and art, including the skills and trades.

Genesis 10:2-5 tells us that the sons of Japheth were Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras. Gomer may correspond to the Celts, Franks, Gauls, Galatians, Cimmerians on the northern Black Sea coast (today's Ukraine), and Phrygians in western Asia Minor. Magog, along with Gog in the "remotest parts of the north" (Ezek. 38:2-3; 39:1-2, 6), must be today's Russia, which in ancient times was home to the Scythians and certain of the Goths. Madai corresponds to the Medes, and Javan first to the Ionians and then to all Greeks along with the Macedonians, Sicilians, Silesians, and Cypriots. Tubal and Meshech are both associated with Magog and include the western Siberians, Bithynians, Iberians, Spaniards, and Slavs in general. Tiras may correspond to the Thracians in Bulgaria and European Turkey and the Etruscans in Italy. With the exception of the sons of Madai, all these peoples migrated throughout the European continent and populated it. Thus for the most part, the sons of Japheth are the Europeans, whom God enlarged throughout the earth, fulfilling the prophecy of Genesis 9:27 (Hamilton 332; Josephus 81; Scofield, Bible 16-17).

As we have seen, the first great empire was raised up by Nimrod, a grandson of Ham. Thus, Satan-usurped human government began with the line of Ham and Cush. Nebuchadnezzar, on the other hand, was Chaldean, which is Semitic, indicating that he may have descended from the line of Shem. However, when God turned the age from the head of gold to the breast and arms of silver, He chose the Medes and Persians of the Aryan, or Indo-Iranian, branch of the descendants of Japheth (Herodotus 439; Miller 127). This had much historical significance, because from the time of Cyrus to the end of the present age, human empire has been and will be the purview of the enlarged race of Japheth. The Greek conquest of the

Persian Empire was even more significant, because now “civilization moved westward instead of toward the Near Orient. At this point the westward expansion of the Persians was halted, and Western civilization took on its Greek complexion,” classifying this change of empires as one of the great turning points in history (Snyder 5). From that time forward, human empire would belong to the people of Europe. At the consummation of this age, the governmental power of the world will still center around these people, whom Antichrist will gather into his brief kingdom. By this we can see the strategy of Satan to deceive, corrupt, and usurp the European people in preparation for the coming of Antichrist, and we can also see the crucial significance of the Lord’s move in Europe to prepare some from among this same people for the coming of Christ to smash and crush the aggregate of human government and usher in the age of the kingdom.

Daniel 7:2-3 tells us the four great bestial empires came up from the sea. On the one hand, the sea signifies the peoples, multitudes, and nations of the Gentiles (Rev. 17:1, 15; Isa. 57:20), but on the other hand, the specific name of the “Great Sea” is used, referring to the Mediterranean Sea, which became the center of human culture. Revelation 13:1 says, “I saw a beast coming up out of the sea.” Again, this is the Mediterranean Sea, indicating that Antichrist will come from one of the Gentile nations around it. Daniel 7:7-8 tells us that Antichrist is the small horn coming up among the ten horns on the fourth beast, indicating that he belongs to the revived Roman Empire. However, that he is fully typified by and closely associated with Antiochus Epiphanes in 8:8-12 and 11:36-39 may also indicate that he will be Greek in origin. All this further convinces us that the kingdom of Antichrist will be European, corresponding to the lands that constituted the Roman Empire.

The resurgence of a Roman Empire in Europe has been sought after since the time of Charlemagne and the establishment of the Holy Roman Empire⁹ and has been the goal of European tyrants as recently as the twentieth century. Moreover, the spiritual condition in Europe of “post-Christian” philosophy, aggressive atheism, revived paganism, and God-rejecting humanism is also paving the way for the acceptance of a great leader who magnifies himself above every god and speaks extraordinary things against the God of gods (v. 36). However, Christ will not be defeated in Europe. This part of the earth is not yet the land of Antichrist, and the Lord has not conceded it. Rather, the

earth is still the Lord’s, and all its fullness (Psa. 24:1). In preparation for the consummation of this age, there must be golden lampstands in Europe to bear the testimony of Jesus before the Antichrist comes (Rev. 1:12, 20, 2). To this end the Lord will move in Europe to raise up overcomers, who preach the gospel, teach the truth, build up the local churches as the reality of the Body of Christ, prepare the bride, and are formed into an army. Against the dark background of human government and godless culture, how beautiful are the feet of those who announce the news of good things (Rom. 10:15; Matt. 24:14)!

The Stone to Crush the Aggregate of Human Government

The central thought of the book of Daniel is that the ruling of the heavens by the God of the heavens (4:26; 2:37, 44) over all the human government on earth matches God’s eternal economy for Christ to terminate the old creation for the germination of the new creation and to smash and crush the aggregate of human government and establish the eternal kingdom of God (Lee, *Daniel* 4). Verses 34 and 35 say,

*The Lord is seeking
and raising up His overcomers,
who see the true situation of the
universe, are kept from the world,
and are prepared for Christ’s
coming to turn the age.*

You were watching until a stone was cut out without hands, and it struck the image at its feet of iron and clay and crushed them. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed all at once, and they became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; and

the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

The destiny of the great human image is to be crushed by a stone cut out without hands. This stone is Christ. Through His crucifixion Christ was cut (engraved) by God by being put to death (Zech. 3:9; Acts 2:23), and in His resurrection (v. 24) He was cut out to be a stone in three aspects: To the believers, He is the living stone, foundation stone, cornerstone, and topstone for the building up of the church (1 Pet. 2:4, 6; Isa. 28:16; Matt. 21:42; Zech. 4:7); to the unbelieving Jews He is the stumbling stone (Isa. 8:14; Matt. 21:44; Rom. 9:33); and to the Gentiles, the nations, He will be the crushing stone to destroy the totality of human government (Matt. 21:44).

When human government reaches the stage of the ten toes—Antichrist and his ten kings—it will fight against God directly. Near the end of this age Satan will join himself to Antichrist, and Antichrist will welcome

him. Inspired by the devil, Antichrist will gather together a multitude of evil persons to be his army. The ten kings will have one mind with Antichrist to make war with the Lamb of God (Rev. 17:13-14; 19:19). Without a vision of God's economy and the human situation at the consummation of this age, such a thing would be impossible to conceive! However, a special court with God's throne as the center, has been set up in the universe particularly to judge the aggregate of human empires (Dan. 7:10), and everything that is judged by this court will be cast into the burning fire. In the sight of God, the army of Antichrist will be the grapes trodden in "the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty" (Rev. 19:15). The great winepress of the fury of God is the war at Armageddon (16:12-16). There Christ will descend to strike the great human image at its toes, crushing it from the toes to the head. At this time, the cumulative culture of all the empires signified by the gold, the silver, the bronze, the iron, and the clay will be crushed. Moreover, the beast, Antichrist, the embodiment of Satan, will be cast alive into the lake of fire (19:20). In this way, the Lord will clear up the entire old creation.

Christ's smashing of human government can also be seen in the vision of the four horns and four craftsmen in Zechariah 1:18-21. The four horns are the four kingdoms with their kings—Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and the Roman Empire—that damaged and destroyed the chosen people of God. The four craftsmen are the skills used by God to destroy these four kingdoms with their kings. Each of the first three kingdoms was taken over in a skillful way by the kingdom that followed it. Who then will deal with the fourth horn, the final kingdom? It is the fourth Craftsman, Christ as the stone cut without hands, who will crush the restored Roman Empire and thereby crush the entire great human image as the totality of human government at His coming back.

Becoming the Corporate Smashing Stone

If only for the prophecy of Daniel, we may conclude that the stone cut without hands is the Lord Jesus alone. However, when Christ comes as the crushing stone, He will not come alone. Rather, He will come with His overcomers, who will be both His bride, His increase, and His "mighty ones" (Joel 3:11), His army. Revelation 17:14 tells us that when the Lamb overcomes Antichrist and the ten kings, the overcomers—those who are called, chosen, and faithful—will be with Him. Daniel 2 speaks of Christ coming as a stone, but Revelation 19 speaks of Christ coming as the One who has His bride as His army. During the church age, Christ is building up the church to be His bride. Before He descends to the earth, Christ will have a wedding, in which He will marry the overcomers (vv. 7-9), those who have been fighting against God's enemy for years and who have already overcome the evil one

(12:11). After His wedding, He as the Husband will come with His newlywed bride to destroy Antichrist and the ten kings. Thus, the stone, the bride, and the army are one.

Paul tells us that the believers as God's planted and cultivated land become God's building of precious stones (1 Cor. 3:6, 9, 12). Peter likewise speaks of stones for the building of God. In 1 Peter 1:23 he says that we have been regenerated by the incorruptible seed through the living and abiding word of God, and in 2:2 he exhorts the believers to long for the guileless milk of the word that they may grow unto salvation. Right away, though, Peter changes his metaphor from a seed to a stone: "Coming to Him, a living stone, rejected by men but with God chosen and precious, you yourselves also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house" (vv. 4-5). As life to us, Christ is the seed, and for God's building He is the stone. After receiving Him as the seed of life, we need to grow by feeding on the milk of the word so that we may experience Christ as the stone living in us. In this way He will make us also living stones, transformed with His stone nature, that we may be built up with others as a spiritual house upon Him as both the foundation and the cornerstone (Recovery Version, v. 4, note 1).

In the Gospels, the Lord Jesus changed Peter's name from Simon to Peter, denoting a stone (John 1:42). However, Peter did not yet have the reality of being a stone. Rather, he continually exhibited his clay nature in dealing with the Lord, his fellow disciples, and others. Only after Jesus was crucified, resurrected, and breathed Himself into Peter to dwell in him (14:20; 20:22) did Peter begin to experience transformation into a precious stone. Because of this transformation in the divine life, the Peter we see in Acts is solid and substantial (2:14, 38-40; 3:12-26), and even the more, having grown to maturity in life, Peter in his Epistles is weighty.¹⁰ By this point, the Lord's prophecy concerning Peter being a stone had been fulfilled. In eternity, Peter the precious stone will be one of the foundations of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:14, 19). By coming to Christ as the living stone to drink and taste Him through His word, we also are becoming living, solid, and weighty stones. By the end of this age, the overcomers will have been built with Christ and with one another to become the corporate Christ, who at His coming will be the corporate crushing stone. This stone—Christ with His weighty overcomers—will be the means for Christ's universal judgment on the aggregate of human government from Antichrist back to Nimrod, thus ending the age of man's government on earth in the old creation and initiating the age of God's dominion over the entire earth in the millennium and in the new heaven and new earth for eternity.

The Mountain That Fills the Whole Earth

At the end of the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream,

Daniel says, “The stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth” (2:35). The great mountain signifies the eternal kingdom of God, which will fill the whole earth forever (v. 44; 7:13-14). For a stone to become a mountain is an increase. Since the stone is Christ, the increase of the stone into a great mountain signifies the increase of Christ. The church today is Christ’s increase in life, but the eternal kingdom of God is Christ’s increase in administration. As the stone, Christ is the centrality of God’s move, and as the mountain, He is the universality. He is the all-inclusive One, the One who fills all in all (Eph. 1:23).

John 3:29-30 says, “He who has the bride is the bridegroom...He must increase, but I must decrease.” The increase of Christ in verse 30 is the bride in verse 29. Just as Eve was the increase of Adam, the life we receive by regeneration makes us, the believers, the corporate bride for Christ’s increase. The parable of the seed in Mark 4:26-29 reveals how the kingdom of God is the increase of Christ. Verse 26 says, “So is the kingdom of God: as if a man cast seed on the earth.”

This seed is Christ as the embodiment of the divine life. According to this parable, this seed sprouts, grows, bears fruit, matures, and brings forth a harvest (vv. 27-29). From the time Christ came to sow Himself into the soil of humanity, He has been growing and increasing. Eventually, this increase will become the great mountain that fills the whole earth to be the eternal kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God is Christ as the seed of life sown into us, growing in us, spreading in us, and maturing in us until there is a full harvest—the manifestation of the kingdom. The kingdom of God is the God-man, the Lord Jesus, sown as a seed into the believers and developing into a realm over which God can rule as His kingdom in His divine life (Luke 17:20-21; Mark 4:3). Regeneration is the entrance into the kingdom of God, and the growth of the divine life within the believers is the development of the kingdom (John 3:3, 5; 2 Pet. 1:3-11). After Christ as the seed has been sown into the believers, it will grow and develop in them into the kingdom of God, which is for the fulfillment of God’s eternal purpose and also for their blessing and enjoyment (Col. 1:13).

The coming of Christ will be the landmark that closes human government and brings in the kingdom. After coming to crush the aggregate of human government, the corporate Christ—Christ with His overcoming bride—will

become a great mountain to fill the whole earth, making the whole earth God’s kingdom for His eternal dominion. Thus, the great human image will be replaced with the eternal kingdom of God on earth. At this point a great declaration will be made: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign forever and ever” (Rev. 11:15). Daniel 7:18 tells us, “The saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, indeed, forever and ever.” This will be the greatest dispensational change in the history of God and man. Psalm 2:1-9 declares,

Why are the nations in an uproar, / And why do the peoples contemplate a vain thing? / The kings of the earth take their stand, / And the rulers sit in counsel together, / Against Jehovah and against His Anointed: / Let us break apart their bonds / And cast their ropes away from us. / He who sits in the heavens laughs; / The Lord has them in derision. / Then He will speak to them in His anger, / And in His burning wrath He will terrify them: / But I have installed My King / Upon Zion, My holy mountain... / Ask of Me, / And I will give the nations as Your inheritance / And the limits of the earth as Your possession. / You will break them with an iron rod; / You will shatter them like a potter’s vessel.

Psalm 2 tells us that Christ, the King in the kingdom, will possess the nations and rule them with an iron rod. Revelation 2:26-27 says,

He who overcomes and he who keeps My works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations; and he will shepherd them with an iron rod, as vessels of pottery are broken in pieces, as I also have received from My Father.

As God gave Christ authority to rule over the nations, Christ gives the same authority to His overcomers. This will be fulfilled in the manifestation of the kingdom in the millennium, which will be Christ’s reign as King and a great reward to His overcomers as His co-kings.

The Word of Righteousness for the Fulfillment of God’s Plan

The present dispensation, the age of the church, is reaching its consummation. Under the hand of the sovereign God, who deposes kings and causes kings to ascend (Dan. 2:21), the outworking of the geopolitical situation corresponding to the prophecies of the end times is under way. These events at the approach of the final days of this age

Christ, as the stone cut without hands, will crush the restored Roman Empire and thereby crush the entire great human image as the totality of human government at His coming back.

will not be altogether hidden from those who seek the Lord with insight (Amos 3:7). However, the outward situation of the world must be matched by the inner, intrinsic, mysterious building up of the Body of Christ and the preparation of the bride. When the Body is built and the bride prepared, the subsequent events will take place in rapid succession. The overcomers will be raptured, Christ will marry His bride, He will descend with His bridal army to destroy the totality of Satan-instigated human government, and He will increase as the eternal kingdom on the earth. This will be God's greatest and most important dispensational move for the accomplishment of His economy and the fulfillment of His eternal purpose.

The church today as a whole has become degraded, a time of increasing apostasy is approaching, and Satan will operate in evil, fallen men to pose a fierce resistance to the turn of the age. Therefore, God will raise up a group of overcomers who rise up above the degradation to attain His purpose and fulfill His demand. These will gain the victory, consummate God's economy, and bring in His kingdom. Peter says that we not only expect but can hasten the coming of the day of God (2 Pet. 3:12). The Lord's ultimate victory at the end of this dispensation and the turn from the age of the church to the age of the kingdom are waiting for Christ's dispensational instrument, the overcomers. Those who cooperate with the Lord's grace in this way will be rewarded with an early rapture prior to the great tribulation, they will take part in the marriage of the Lamb, and they will come with Christ as His army to be the corporate crushing stone to defeat the embodiment of Satan in the battle at Armageddon. Then they will become the enlargement of Christ in the manifestation of the kingdom in the coming age of one thousand years to feast with the Lord and rule with Him as His co-kings.

However, not all the believers will participate in God's final move to turn the age. Many genuine believers will fail to see the vision of God's economy, and some will even oppose it and speak evilly of it. Many others will be bound by the affairs of this age, remain in complacency, and not rise up to follow the Lord in His up-to-date move. These will miss the crowning glories of Christ's satisfaction and victory at the end of this age and in its turn to the age of the kingdom. Only after the millennium will they join Christ and the overcomers to share in His glory and reign over the new heaven and new earth for eternity. This is the solid food, the word of righteousness in the New Testament (Heb. 5:13). May we, who may yet live to see the Lord's return, come to Him with an increased desperation and receive the prophetic word, which has been made more firm, to which we do well to give heed as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in our hearts (2 Pet. 1:19), that we may be constituted with the organic reality of the Body, the love

of the bride, the skill of the army, the weight of the stone, and the reigning of the mountain.

by John Campbell

Notes

¹To identify four dispensations is the broadest, most economical view of God's successive moves in history. C. I. Scofield and others further subdivide the first dispensation into four, for a total of seven dispensations (Scofield, *Dividing* 19-23; Ryrie 51-57). This difference, to us, is a matter of generality and not of contention.

²This latter statement indicates that Darby is speaking here of the genuine church, composed of eternally saved believers, not merely the appearance of the church, within which tares have been sown (Matt. 13:25).

³Please see "Deified to Be the Bride of Christ," *Affirmation & Critique*, VII.2 (Oct. 2002): 95-99.

⁴*Civilization* derives from the Latin *civis*, referring to citizenship in an organized community, such as a city or city-state. In the fallen sense, to "civilize" is to form man into godless cities—in pride, self-reliance, independence, and rebellion to God—according to the principle of Genesis 4:17 and 10:10.

⁵This, of course, is the historical etymology. The derivation of *Babel* from Hebrew *balal*, "confuse," is the inspired interpretation of the divine revelation.

⁶Darius the Great (Ezra 4—6) is neither Darius the Mede (Dan. 5:31; 11:1) nor Darius the Persian (Neh. 12:22). The biblical and historical identification of rulers by the names of Darius, Xerxes, Ahasuerus, and Artaxerxes pose many difficulties.

⁷The Seleucid rulers of Syria, such as Antiochus Epiphanes, and the Ptolemaic rulers of Egypt up to the time of Cleopatra were all Hellenistic—Greek by blood and history—as the continuation of the Grecian Empire of Alexander, making them all part of the third beast in the prophecy of Daniel.

Throughout this article we are using the simpler, popular names of ancient rulers. More formally speaking, the figures we mention here include Nebuchadnezzar II, Cyrus II (the Great), Darius I (Hystaspes, the Great), Alexander III (the Great), Antiochus IV (Epiphanes), and Cleopatra VII.

⁸The abundance of Roman iconography in royal houses and modern government buildings alone is remarkable. In Hampton Court Palace, for example, the residence of English monarchs since Henry VIII, busts of the twelve Caesars prominently keep watch over the courtyards; Nero overlooks the front entrance. The palace also displays "The Triumphs of Caesar," a set of nine Renaissance paintings depicting the triumphal parade of Julius Caesar. In the chamber of the United States Congress, the lawmakers sit in session facing the national flag flanked on either side by Roman fasces. The classical formula SPQR (*Senatus populusque Romanus*, "The Senate and the Roman People") is

still the motto of the city of Rome and appears on its coat of arms, and modern variants of it can be found on government houses and other prominent buildings throughout Europe. There are very many such indications of the veneration and proliferation of Roman law, politics, and government throughout the Western world. Historian J. M. Roberts writes,

Rome did not cease to influence history with the disappearance of formal empire in the west. For nearly another 1,000 years an empire calling itself 'Roman' would live on at Constantinople. In the west itself there would still exist even in 1800 something called the 'Holy Roman Empire'. Some Christian clergymen still today wear costume based on that of the Roman gentleman of the second century AD. European universities still use Latin when they wish to add a special solemnity to their ceremonies. Paris, London, Exeter, Cologne, Milan and scores of other towns and cities are all important centres, just as they were in Roman times. Much of the map of Europe has still the shape the Romans gave it by planting their garrisons and building roads...Such things provide plentiful clues to the extent and variety of the empire's impact. (73-74)

⁹The seal of Charlemagne bore the legend *Renovatio Romani imperii*, "the renewal of the Roman empire" (Roberts 110).

¹⁰Consider, for example, Peter's word concerning life, godliness, and the growth and development by life unto the rich entrance into the eternal kingdom in 2 Peter 1:3-11. The revelation and experience with which Peter speaks point to his deep participation, transformation, and weight in the divine life.

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