

The Day Of The Lord, The Royal Appearing: Part 4

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The Snatching Away or Rapture

Now we come to the fun part, the issue of the 'Rapture' event! This requires some faith, especially when accepting the view that an actual bodily 'snatching away' occurred in the 1st century. Back in the days when I was a dispensational futurist (as well as when I adopted the traditional partial preterist view, which is also part futurist), I was always convinced that the rapture or snatching away was a biblically prophesied event that would involve an actual bodily transformation of the true disciples of Christ, in the blink of an eye, in relation to the Second Advent of Christ. I eventually discarded the popular view of the 'pre-tribulation rapture' of largely dispensationalist teachers, but I have always believed that the NT teaches that a unique spiritual event would occur involving the 'snatching away' of a particular generation of believers in Christ.

When I finally came to accept the Consistent Premillennial Preterist position (cf. note ¹⁸ below), my view of the rapture didn't change, but then there was the problem of how this event could've taken place in the Day of the Lord of 70 AD. After giving this matter much prayer, thought and study, I have come to realise that this scenario is not as far-fetched as it may first appear (for those of faith, that is, with spiritual eyes to see, as any kind of 'rapture' event is totally nonsensical to those without faith!).

So let us begin to consider what the scriptures say about this subject.¹

¹⁵ According to the Lord's word, we tell you that **we who are still alive**, who are left until the coming (*Gk. Parousia*) of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, **and the dead in Christ will rise first.** ¹⁷ After that, **we who are still alive and are left will be caught up** (*Gk. harpazo* – 'snatched away') **together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.** And so we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

(1 Thessalonians 4:15-18 NIV)

Firstly, we must bear in mind that Paul was writing to a particular group of believers in the middle of the 1st century AD. It is this principle of historical context and audience relevance that must be observed if we're to arrive at a correct understanding of the NT.² And Paul was clearly prophesying about a soon-coming event that he himself expected to experience alive ('*we who are still alive*').³

Secondly, let me say something about the term 'rapture', which has become so common in recent times. The word *rapture* comes from the Latin words *raptus* and *rapere*. They essentially mean '*to seize or snatch away violently*' and they form the basis for many English words such as *rape*, *rapid* and *raptor*. It is not really the most suitable word to use to describe the 'catching up' or 'snatching away' that Paul was referring to here, but due to its familiarity and common use, I still use it for convenience. I hasten to add, though, as briefly stated above, that I do not accept any kind of 'pre-tribulation rapture' view, as I believe that such an interpretation is totally unscriptural. This event is clearly tied up with the *one* resurrection event at the *one* Second Appearing of Christ.

The Greek word translated 'caught up' in verse 17 above is *harpazo* and it means 'to snatch, seize or grab with force; i.e. to be 'snatched (away).' It can be used in a negative manner, such as a wolf snatching a sheep; or in a more positive manner, such as snatching someone away from harm. There are three key passages in the NT that help us to see how Paul is using this word in the above text. It can be shown that *harpazo* is describing a physical *and* spiritual 'snatching away' with force from one location to another; and ultimately even a bodily transformation or metamorphosis; from a soulish body to a spiritual body.

Believe it or not, we do have a couple of incidents recorded in the NT where mortal humans were miraculously transported (or snatched) in such a manner.

'Now when they stepped up out of the water, **the spirit of the Lord snatches away** (*Gk. harpazo*) **Philip**, and the eunuch did not perceive him any longer, for he went his way rejoicing. Now Philip was found in Azotus...'

(Acts 8:39-40 Concordant Literal NT)

In this account of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch, Philip was supernaturally snatched away, both bodily and spiritually, and placed in another location, Azotus, quite a few miles from where he had previously been; that is, he was instantaneously transported by the Spirit. What is interesting here is that this was experienced by a mortal flesh and blood human, so how much more so would this be relevant to a group of Christians undergoing a bodily change that would transport them into another realm (or dimension) entirely.

And take note that if it weren't for this account in the NT, we wouldn't have any record that this had occurred. The Ethiopian eunuch, who was a royal official of the queen of that country, witnessed this strange event, yet there isn't any historical evidence (as far as we know) that he wrote these things down when he returned to his country. I say this because many flatly reject the notion of a 1st century rapture due to the lack of historical evidence indicating that any such event took place. (I'll share a few thoughts on this later).

Now here's another very revealing passage.

"² I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was **caught up** (*Gk. harpazo*) **to the third heaven**. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. ³ And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows— ⁴ was **caught up** (*Gk. harpazo*) **to paradise** and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell."

(2 Corinthians 12:2-4 NIV)

In this text, Paul appears to be talking about his own incredible experience of being 'snatched away' in spirit to the very dwelling place of God and His Christ, referred to as 'the third heaven' ⁴ or 'Paradise'. He wasn't even aware of whether this occurred in the body or out of the body (which could lead to a very interesting debate as to what he actually experienced). That is, he was either temporarily taken there while in his body, or it was purely a spiritual experience that occurred out of his body. Nevertheless, he was spiritually 'snatched away' from one location to

another, from earth to heaven. (The OT prophets Enoch and Elijah evidently had a similar experience, although theirs was more permanent; cf. Genesis 5:24; Hebrews 11:5; 2 Kings 2:11-12. They are OT types of the NT 'rapture' event).

Here's another one.

And she brought forth a son, a male, who is about to be (*Gk. mello*) shepherding all the nations with an iron club. **And her child is snatched away (*Gk. harpazo*) to God and to His throne.**

(Revelation 12:5 Concordant Literal NT)

This text from Revelation is part of the vision of the Woman who gives birth to a Male Child. It is describing in symbolic language the major events of Jesus' birth and his resurrection. The Woman is faithful Israel, the true covenant bride, to whom Mary, the mother of Jesus, belonged. The Son is clearly Christ himself who was about to be shepherding (that is, ruling) all the nations with a rod of iron in fulfilment of Psalm 2. The time when Christ was snatched away to God and to his throne, to rule at the right hand of his Father in fulfilment of Psalm 110, was immediately after his resurrection (cf. John 20:17).⁵

Again, this is describing a sudden, powerful bodily transference from one place to another, from one realm to another, from one position to another. And in this particular instance, Jesus was already in a resurrected, transformed, immortal, spiritual body – the Firstfruit of a new humanity.

Therefore, returning to our passage in 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul was declaring that at the time of Christ's Parousia, all those who had previously died (or fallen asleep) in Christ (that is, all those who belonged to him) would be resurrected first at the shout of command from Christ himself (who is also the chief angel of the Lord). Then the living believers, who are elsewhere referred to as the faithful 'overcomers', would be snatched away together with the resurrected ones in clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Thereafter, they would always be with Christ.⁶ And take note that there isn't any mention of them coming back to earth.

As already noted earlier in this series, the Greek word *Parousia* meaning 'presence' was often used in the ancient world for describing a royal visit, where, for example, the emperor would go on a state visit to make an appearance to the people, often being met by an official 'meeting (*Gk. apantesis*) party' first to escort him to the city. This imagery is possibly being used by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, for he uses these two Greek words *parousia* & *apantesis* with this kind of connection - though with a little ironic twist to it.⁷ Be that as it may, the word *parousia* can either be understood as describing a spiritual presence or a visible bodily presence, or both, depending on the context; that is, it is not restricted to just the physical realm of flesh and blood.⁸

Now as for the 'clouds' in 1 Thessalonians 4, these are evidently connecting the glory-cloud(s) of Christ's Parousia with the whole company of believers as they 'meet him in the air.' This was the beginning of their full redemption as sons of God to share in Christ's glory (cf. Colossians 3:1-4). This realm of 'the air' (or atmosphere; *Gk. aer*) was associated in Paul's writings with Satan, who was termed 'the ruler of the power of the air' (cf. Ephesians 2:2). This had to do with Satan's power and

authority over the world-system, which would only be fully subjected to Christ and his people at His Second Appearing.⁹

Therefore it would appear as though Paul was indicating here that the redeemed sons of God would take over Satan's position of authority in the spiritual realm; the position that he previously had before the Day of the Lord arrived. And this was in perfect accord with Daniel 7:21-22, 25-27, as well as the details of Daniel 12, which showed that the kingdom of God (or kingdom of the Son of Man) would be established in heaven *and* on earth¹⁰ after the great tribulation of three and a half years had run its course; that is, it would be fully established at the coming of God to hand the kingdom over to the true holy people of the Most High.

We must bear in mind that these were spiritual events related to another realm or dimension that were only visible to those who experienced it. Jesus had said that his kingdom was not of this world, and that the kingdom of God would not come via normal human observation.

Jesus said, "**My kingdom is not of this world.** If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. **But now my kingdom is from another place.**"

"You are a king, then!" said Pilate.

Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."

(John 18:36-37 NIV)

Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "**The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed**, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is in your midst."

(Luke 17:20-21 NIV)¹¹

Immortality & Incorruption

Returning to the theme of the resurrection in the Day of the Lord, Paul went on to reveal further details of these things in his subsequent letters. One of the most significant texts is found in his first letter to the Corinthians, in the great resurrection chapter of 1 Corinthians 15.

⁵⁰ **I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God**, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹ Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— ⁵² in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³ For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. ⁵⁴ When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

⁵⁵ "Where, O death, is your victory?
Where, O death, is your sting?"

(1 Corinthians 15:50-55 NIV)

First comes the emphatic statement that '*flesh and blood* (that is, mortal flesh) *cannot inherit the kingdom of God*'; neither can the perishable (or corruptible) inherit the imperishable (or incorruptible). Simply stated, the normal physical flesh and blood body of humanity, which is corruptible, both physically and morally, cannot partake of the spiritual kingdom of God. The only way that a human body can enjoy age-abiding life in the very presence of God in another dimension is through a resurrection to immortality and incorruption for those who have died, and a change or metamorphosis into immortality for the living. (We shall consider the subject of immortality in further detail a little later, to avoid digressing too much at this point).

Paul then revealed the mystery (Gk. *musterion*; meaning 'something hidden now revealed') of what would take place for the faithful followers of Jesus during Christ's Appearing. He again confirms the truth of what he had revealed in 1 Thessalonians 4 that some of them would live to see the Day of the Lord, for he said '*we shall not all sleep*' meaning that they wouldn't all die (cf. Matthew 16:27-28). And take careful note here that he didn't say '*they shall not all sleep*,' referring to a future generation of Christians, but he said 'we shall not all sleep,' speaking of that 1st century generation.

Then he revealed the awesome truth that they would all be changed or transformed – in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For at the sounding of the trumpet ¹² at Christ's Parousia, the dead in Christ would be raised imperishable, while the living ones would be changed. That is, the soulish, corruptible, mortal body of the believer would be changed into a spiritual, incorruptible, immortal body of a new order of humans.

Paul elaborates further on these things in 2 Corinthians 5 where he likens this bodily change not only to that of a temporary tent ('this earthly tabernacle') being replaced by a permanent temple ('a building from God, a heavenly house'), but also to that of putting on new clothes.

For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. ² Meanwhile we groan, **longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling**, ³ because **when we are clothed**, we will not be found naked. ⁴ For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because **we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life**. ⁵ Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

(2 Corinthians 5:1-5 NIV)

When the mortal body is swallowed up by the life of the spiritual immortal body, then the scriptures would be fulfilled; '*Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death & hades, is your victory?*' (cf. Isaiah 25:7-8; Hosea 13:14).

This is the very transformation Paul spoke of in his letter to the Philippian Christians also; that of a lowly, humble, infirm body being changed into a glorious body.

²⁰ **But our citizenship is in heaven.** And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, **will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.**

(Philippians 3:20-21 NIV)

This resurrection & transformation would occur in a split second – *'in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye.'* The Greek word translated 'flash' in 1 Corinthians 15:52 above is *atomos* from which the English word *atom* is derived. It literally means 'something that is indivisible;' that is, something occurring in the smallest moment of time, in an instant, in a flash; in the blinking (twinkling) of an eye. Paul was saying that this event would occur so fast in human terms that literally if you blinked you would miss it! It is also very interesting to note that Jesus likened his Appearing & Parousia to a flash of lightening ¹³ (cf. Luke 17:24; Matthew 24:27).

This is the very same event that Paul referred to as *'the catching up'* or *'snatching away'* in 1 Thessalonians 4. The dead in Christ would be raised, and the living ones who had endured to the end of that period would be changed, so that both groups together would be snatched away to meet the Lord. Only at this juncture, after this event in the Day of the Lord, could it be said that the state of Death and Hades had been fully defeated and finally abolished. (Again, this appears to be talking about the spiritual state of things in the spirit world (or spiritual dimension); hence, it is not out of the question for these things to have already occurred in the other world.)

The Subjection of All

The NT reveals that, at the coming of the Son of Man to establish his kingdom (i.e. at the Second Appearing of Christ in the Day of the Lord), the spiritual powers of the heavens headed up in Satan, the Adversary, would be brought to nothing or nullified. That is to say, they would be made a footstool for his feet and brought into full subjection to the will of God (e.g. Romans 16:20; Hebrews 10:13; 12:27-29; 1 Corinthians 2:6; Mark 13:25-26; see also Isaiah 24:21).

This is not to say that the reign of Christ over the nations would be free from rebellion and sin, for it had been prophesied that he would still reign in the midst of his enemies with a rod of iron (cf. Psalm 2 & 110; Revelation 19:11-16); *but of the increase of his power and kingdom there will be no end.* It was also revealed that the true holy ones (the 'saints') of God, the chosen new covenant people of the Messiah, the true Israel of God, would co-rule with Christ in his kingdom for the ages to come (e.g. Romans 8:17; 2 Timothy 2:10-12; Ephesians 2:6; 3:21; Revelation 3:21; 22:3-5).

Revelation 19:11-21 portrays the Second Appearing of Christ with the armies of heaven to bring judgment to both men and spiritual beings.¹⁴ The two spiritual 'beast' powers are destroyed in the metaphorical Lake of Fire, while many humans are killed. Then in Revelation 20:1-3, we are shown the binding of Satan 'the Dragon' where he is seen to be locked in the spiritual prison-house of the Abyss to

be restricted from deceiving the nations any longer during the coming 1000-year-reign of Christ and his people. Then in verses 4-6 we are told about the First Resurrection group of the followers of Christ who are raised to life to inherit the kingdom as kings and priests, pictured as rulers seated on thrones.¹⁵

⁴ I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. **They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years.**⁵ (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) **This is the first resurrection.**⁶ Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, **but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.**

(Revelation 20:4-6 NIV)

These very same things were prophesied in the vision of the beasts in Daniel 7, which is such a key chapter in biblical prophecy and eschatology.

⁹ "As I looked,

thrones were set in place,
and **the Ancient of Days took his seat.**

His clothing was as white as snow;
the hair of his head was white like wool.
His throne was flaming with fire,
and its wheels were all ablaze.

¹⁰ A river of fire was flowing,
coming out from before him.
Thousands upon thousands attended him;
ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him.

The court was seated,
and the books were opened.

¹¹ "Then I continued to watch because of the boastful words the horn was speaking. **I kept looking until the beast was slain and its body destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire.**¹² (The other beasts had been stripped of their authority, but were allowed to live for a period of time.)

¹³ "In my vision at night I looked, **and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence.**¹⁴ He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

(Daniel 7:9-14 NIV)

We took some time considering Daniel 7 earlier, but let me just highlight some important points here. A close consideration of this vision reveals the following scenario. At the coming of the Ancient of Days, the 'little horn-beast' power or kingdom is judged and cast into the fire (which occurs after a three-and-a-half-year domination over the people of God, the great tribulation). At the same time, it is said

that the other beast-kingdoms are spared the fire at this judgment, but their authority is taken away.

This is ultimately a heavenly judgment scene involving spiritual powers where the divine court passes judgment in favour of the Son of Man and the holy people of God.

The Son of Man (a human messianic figure) is seen approaching the divine throne-room surrounded by the clouds of heaven (that is, the glory-cloud). This heavenly presentation of the Son of Man (and his people) evidently occurs *after* the Second Advent itself, and is a consequence of it. At the same time that he is presented before the throne of God to receive authority, power, glory and a universal kingdom, the holy people of God (the true Israel) are also seen to be possessing the kingdom and sitting on thrones.

In the subsequent verses of the angelic interpretation, '*the coming of the Son of Man with the clouds of heaven*' becomes parallel to *the holy people of God possessing the kingdom*. Take special note of verse 27; the kingdom of the Son of Man is shared with the holy people of God.

¹⁸ But the holy people of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever—yes, for ever and ever...

²¹As I watched, this horn was waging war against the holy people and defeating them, ²² **until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the holy people of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom...**

"The holy people will be delivered into his hands for a time, times and half a time. ²⁶ But the court will sit, and his power (*that of the little horn beast*) will be taken away and completely destroyed forever. ²⁷ **Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven will be handed over to the holy people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him.**

(Daniel 7:18, 21-22, 25b-27 NIV)

This exact same scenario is revealed in Revelation chapters 19-20 as shown above, where the Second Appearing of Christ results in the defeat of his enemies followed by the First Resurrection¹⁶ of those who are to co-rule with Christ seated on thrones. This is the time that the holy people of God, the true bride of Israel, becomes married to Christ and fully inherits the kingdom in all its glory. This is the ultimate meaning of '*the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.*'

When Jesus told the Jewish Sanhedrin shortly before his execution that '*from now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven*' he was telling them, as representatives of the tribes of Israel, that He was the one who would fulfil the prophecies of Psalm 110 and Daniel 7 (cf. Matthew 26:64); and as we've already seen, this was to occur in two stages within one generation. By the time of Jerusalem's destruction in 70 AD, within that generation, all these things concerning the Day of the Lord had occurred.

In 1 Corinthians 15:20-28, in the middle of the great resurrection chapter, the apostle Paul wrote about this subjection of all powers to God through the ministry of Christ. Here is the passage taken from a more literal rendering.

20 And now, Christ hath risen out of the dead -- **the first-fruits of those sleeping he became**, 21 for since through man [is] the death, also through man [is] a rising again of the dead, 22 for even as in Adam all die, so also in the Christ all shall be made alive, 23 and each in his proper order, a first-fruit Christ, afterwards those who are the Christ's, in his presence, 24 **then -- the end, when he may deliver up the reign to God, even the Father, when he may have made useless all rule, and all authority and power** -- 25 for it behoveth him to reign **till he may have put all the enemies under his feet** -- 26 the last enemy is done away -- death; 27 for all things He did put under his feet, and, **when one may say that all things have been subjected**, [it is] evident that He is excepted who did subject the all things to him, 28 **and when the all things may be subjected to him**, then the Son also himself shall be subject to Him, who did subject to him the all things, that God may be the all in all.

(1 Corinthians 15:20-28, Young's Literal Version)

Until very recently, I used to view this text quite differently in regard to not only the timing of 'the end' or 'the consummation', but also as regards the true nature of the subjection that Paul was talking about.¹⁷ I was greatly challenged by the view of the nineteenth-century theologian James Stuart Russell in his book *The Parousia*. Even when I wrote my *A Further Introduction To Prophetic Studies* not too long ago, I hadn't accepted his view of this passage & the consummation. After much study and contemplation, I now believe J. S. Russell was essentially correct – this 'consummation' and subjection occurred at Christ's Parousia in the Day of the Lord of 70 AD.¹⁸

One thing is very clear from verse 23 - Paul connected the resurrection of believers in Christ with the Presence (Parousia) of Christ, that is, the Second Advent. Then, or thereafter (Gk. *eita*), Paul says 'the end' (or consummation) would occur, which would bring about the subjection of all spiritual powers to Christ and His Father; and due to the resurrection having begun, even Death and Hades would be destroyed or done away.

I think the key to understanding what Paul was really saying here (as Russell suggested) is to grasp the idea of the Theocratic kingdom, from its birth in the OT era through the nation of Israel, and on to its NT fullness or completion in the New Covenant kingdom of the Messiah. And as James Russell showed so clearly in his book, all of the NT writers talked about *the same soon-coming Day of the Lord*, an era that would close, conclude and end the old covenant age – which would simultaneously introduce a coming new age and a new order in a New (Covenant) Creation in fulfilment of all OT prophecy. This would become a reality in the spiritual realm; it would consist of a radical change in the heavens and the earth. I believe this is the key to understanding these things – they are ultimately revealing a spiritual heavenly reality.

If Paul were talking about another 'end' in the distant future, this would've been the only place in his writings where he would've done so.¹⁹ Be that as it may, here is a brief summation of what I presently believe Paul was saying in 1 Corinthians 15:22-28.

The Kingdom of the Father & the Son

At the Parousia, the kingdom of heaven was consummated in the marriage of Christ and his Bride (the Bride being specifically that 1st century generation of Christ's followers who had been regenerated by the Holy Spirit; that is, the true Israel of God, composed of both Jew and Gentile). All Christ's enemies were subjected to him (especially Satan and his kingdom); and Death and Hades were abolished due to the resurrection of the righteous and the unrighteous, followed by the judgment. The Son then handed over the perfected kingdom to the Father and subjected himself to God so that God would be all in all (his people).

Subsequently, the Father, and the Firstborn Son, and all the redeemed sons of God have been reigning over all the nations ever since, and will continue to do so 'for the ages of the ages' (meaning 'for all the ages of all the ages', commonly rendered *forever and ever*). This is what Paul called 'the administration of the fullness of the times' (a more literal rendering; cf. Ephesians 1:9-10). At this time, many are invited to the wedding feast/kingdom of God/New Jerusalem as those of the nations who are healed, and who bring their honour and glory into the city to join with the rest of God's family who are reigning in life (cf. Revelation 21:22 - 22:6). The reign of God and his Christ, though, will never actually end (Luke 1:33).

I firmly believe that this is what Paul was talking about, and that this is the overall picture that the NT writers were portraying. The problem for many is the issue of Christ handing over the kingdom to the Father (verse 24). I believe that the giving up of the kingdom to the Father here is one and the same as saying that the people of God (the bride) are presented to the Father as a consummated kingdom. The Son doesn't stop reigning at this point, as is sometimes suggested (as I have done so in the past); it's just that the emphasis is placed on the Father being 'all in all' in the consummated kingdom originally promised to Israel. And this consummation is being pictured in the New Jerusalem/New Creation of Revelation 21 and 22, which even now already exists.

Let me briefly provide some good biblical evidence for this, which should clarify what I'm saying.

At Sinai, the seed of God's kingdom was established with Israel being 'a kingdom of priests.'

⁵ " 'Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, ⁶ **you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.**' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."

(Exodus 19:5-6 NIV; see also Psalm 95:3,6-7; 145:1, 10-13)

In time, the city of Jerusalem became the capital of God's kingdom on earth where he placed his Name and Presence.

³⁴ "But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; ³⁵ or by the earth, for it is his footstool; **or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King.**"

(Matthew 5:34-35 NIV)

In Revelation 17:18 Jerusalem is symbolically portrayed as the harlot, mystery Babylon, and at the time Revelation was written (before 70 AD) this 'great city' was said to have a kingdom over the kings of the earth.²⁰

¹⁸ The woman you saw is **the great city that rules over the kings of the earth...**"

²⁴ "In her was found the blood of prophets and of God's holy people, of all who have been slaughtered on the earth..."

⁸ "...Their bodies will lie in the public square of **the great city**—which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt—where also their Lord was crucified."

(Revelation 17:18; 18:24; 11:8 NIV)

It was this kingdom of God that was taken away from the Jews in the Day of the Lord in 70 AD. Jesus had prophesied of this in his parabolic teaching during his final days of public ministry in Jerusalem.

⁴³ **"Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.** ⁴⁴ Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed..."

⁷ **"The king** was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city."

(Matthew 21:43-44; 22:7 NIV)

The OT prophecies about the coming Messiah indicated that the kingdom of God, also called the kingdom of the heavens, would be fully established in a greater sense through the coming of the Son of Man, who would also fulfil the promises given to David. This Son of David would also be the Lord himself, the Son of God (e.g. Isaiah 9:6-7; 1 Samuel 8:6-8; 2 Samuel 7: 12-16; Matthew 22:41-45).

The kingdom of the Son of Man would become the kingdom of the Father under the New Covenant/New Creation, which would be consummated in the resurrection/transformation of the bride, the Israel of God, the body of Christ. They would be the holy nation of God offered as firstfruits of a great harvest to come. This consummation would occur at the Parousia of Christ and the destruction of old covenant Israel, when the living Stone from heaven would crush his unrepentant enemies (cf. Daniel 2:44-45; 7:13-14, 26-27; 12:2, 7b, 13; Matthew 13:37-43; 26:28-29).

The ultimate fulfilment of God's kingdom is the new nation of the Israel of God being made a royal priesthood with Christ as Chief Priest and King.

⁵ "...and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, ⁶ **and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen...**"

⁹ And they sang a new song, saying:

"You are worthy to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
because you were slain,
and with your blood you purchased for God
persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.

¹⁰ **You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God,
and they will reign on the earth."**

(Revelation 1: 5-6; 5: 9-10 NIV)

These king/priests are also pictured as the First Resurrection group in Revelation 20:6.

In Philippians 2:6-11, Paul spoke of Christ's previous position as the Son of God ruling over the old covenant kingdom (i.e. the theocracy of Israel), along with his role as Messiah/Son of Man, and his exaltation back to the right hand of God (see also John 17:1-5 and Hebrews 1:8-13).

"...Christ Jesus:

⁶ Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own
advantage;

⁷ rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.

⁸ And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!

⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,

¹⁰ **that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,**

¹¹ **and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father."** (NIV)

This exaltation of Jesus Christ as Lord encompasses all creation and all sentient beings (human beings and spirit beings), resulting in the subjection of all to Christ for the glory of God the Father. The emphasis on God as Father indicates that all the sons of God will share in this process of subjection through the rule of the kingdom of the Father and the Son (cf. Matthew 13:43; Romans 8:18-21).

Yet this process can only begin when the people of God are resurrected and transformed at the Parousia of Christ. And the whole message of the NT writers points to this occurring in the 1st century Day of the Lord in relation to the judgment

upon Jerusalem, the temple and the Jewish nation. As the Old disappears, the New begins (cf. Hebrews 8:13; 9:10).

Life in the Kingdom... or Death

In 2 Timothy 1:10, Paul stated that the abolishing of death, along with the giving of life and incorruption, had been brought to light through the gospel of Jesus Christ. That is to say, the OT hadn't revealed the details about eternal life, and the subject of immortality and incorruption. Only the NT reveals the truth about the true nature of death, and the resurrection to immortality in a spiritual kingdom, the new creation. In fact, much of what the OT had to say about the Messiah's coming kingdom was often described in earthly, worldly terms that Israel could relate to, but it was only after the arrival of Jesus as the Messiah (particularly after his resurrection) that the Holy Spirit began to reveal the truth about what all these things really meant.

The Greek word *athanasia* means 'deathlessness', and should be translated as **immortality**, while the Greek word *aphtharsia* means 'without decay', translated as **incorruption** (*aphtharton; aphthartos* = incorruptible or imperishable). These words are only used in a handful of passages in the NT.²¹ The NT reveals that the problem of Sin and Death affects all humanity spiritually, morally and physically. As we have noted above in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul declared '*that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God*', and neither does the corruptible (or perishable) inherit the incorruptible (or imperishable). Hence for believers in Christ to inherit the kingdom of God (i.e. to receive eternal life) there needs to be a resurrection/transformation into a spiritual body that is immortal and incorruptible. Only this change will result in victory over Sin and Death – spiritually, morally and physically (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:50-57; also 42-44).

Primarily the '*incorruption*' of the spiritual body deals with Sin (sin being moral corruption and spiritual death), while the '*immortality*' deals with Death (not only physical death, but the spiritual death that is the absence of true life). In every instance where these words are used in the NT they only refer to either God himself, or Jesus (after his resurrection) or believers in Christ as the true children of God; that is, immortality and incorruption are not specifically promised to anyone else outside of Christ at the resurrection and judgment. There is no such thing, biblically speaking, as the inherent immortal soul. God himself, as the Source of all life, alone has immortality, yet the life within himself is shared with his Son, Christ Jesus (cf. 1 Timothy 6:15-16; 1 Timothy 1:17; John 5:26); and subsequently to all those who are in Christ (cf. John 3:36; 5:28-29; 1 John 5:11-12; 1 Peter 1:23-25).²²

One of the most revealing texts about the destiny of all humans at the judgment is Paul's description in Romans 2:5-11.

⁵ But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. ⁶ God "will repay each person according to what they have done." ⁷ **To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality (Gk. *aphtharsia*; incorruptibility), he will give eternal life.** ⁸ But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. ⁹ There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for

the Gentile; ¹⁰ **but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good:** first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. ¹¹ For God does not show favoritism. (NIV)

Paul reveals here that those who persist in good works while seeking *glory, honour and incorruption* will be given eternal life (i.e. age-abiding life, the life of the ages, which is *immortality*). According to the rest of Paul's teaching, this is clearly referring to believers in Christ. He also says that they will receive *glory, honour and peace*. Glory and honour are common themes throughout the NT used in relation to Christ and his people in God's kingdom. In some respects, the 'peace' here seems to be parallel to the 'incorruption' of verse 7.

On the other side, Paul reveals that those who reject the truth and follow injustice (or evil), these will be given God's wrath and anger, along with affliction and distress. Elsewhere in the NT, this is described in such terms as eternal punishment, darkness forever, everlasting destruction, and the second death, metaphorically called Gehenna (or the eternal fire) & the Lake of Fire (cf. Matthew 25:41, 46; 13:41-42; Mark 9:43-49; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9; Jude 7, 13; Revelation 20:14-15).²³ In a nutshell, those who have the Son have life, while those who do not have the Son will not see life, for the wrath of God remains on them (cf. John 3:36; 1 John 5:11-12).

It is interesting to note that in relation to this, Paul talks about sowing and reaping in Galatians 6:7-9.

⁷ Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. ⁸ Whoever sows to please their flesh, **from the flesh will reap destruction** (Gk. *phthora*); whoever sows to please the Spirit, **from the Spirit will reap eternal life**. ⁹ Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. (NIV)

The one who sows for the flesh, from the flesh will reap *corruption*, while the one who sows for the spirit, from the spirit will reap *eternal life*. The 'corruption' is placed over against 'eternal life'. The apostles used terms such as 'corruption' (Gk. *phthora* or *phtheiro*) and 'destruction' (Gk. *apoleia*) to describe the justice or punishment that God would use against the wicked (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:17 and 2 Peter 2:12-13 in the literal Greek).²⁴ It is in relation to this process of judgment and loss that the '*weeping and gnashing of teeth*' occurs, so often spoken of by Jesus in his parables (e.g. Matthew 8:11-12; 24:50-51; 25:29-30). Therefore, it truly matters how we live, for not everyone is promised an inheritance in the kingdom of God upon physical death.²⁵

The Soon-Coming Day

At this point, you may be asking, "If the NT was written to the 1st century Christians before 70 AD, and the Second Advent, resurrection and judgment in the Day of the Lord occurred in about 70 AD, then what does the NT say to all post-AD 70 Christians?" This is a good question, and a very important one. I asked this many times myself when I began to accept this view. (There are other important issues and objections that are often raised, but I plan to deal with some of these in a series of shorter articles).

Essentially, the teaching of Jesus and the apostles contained in the NT has to do with the spiritual kingdom of God, and how God's New Covenant children are to live in this kingdom in fellowship with God the Father, and Christ Jesus his Son. The core teaching of the NT is applicable now just as much as it was in the 1st century AD.²⁶ The main difference is that the promised resurrection & judgment, which would occur at the Second Appearing of Christ to fully establish his spiritual kingdom at the end of the old covenant age, was promised to occur in that 1st century generation, at the time when Jerusalem and the temple were to be desolated.

This Day of the Lord was still future when the NT was originally written (and none of the NT writers mentioned the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple as a past event – a silence that is pretty deafening, even in the book of Revelation). Nevertheless, from our perspective, these events are now past. A momentous change has occurred in the worlds of both angels and men.

Let us consider a few examples (among many) that reveal how unique the expectation of the pre-AD 70 Christians was.

⁷ Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift **as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.** ⁸ He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless **on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

(1 Corinthians 1:7-8 NIV)

These Corinthian Christians were eagerly waiting for the revealing of the Lord Jesus Christ on the Day of the Lord, which was to occur at the soon-coming end of the age. Paul also promises them that Christ would keep them firm (i.e. help them to endure and be faithful) until the end. The 'end' here is not the end of their individual lives, for then it would be said that they should remain faithful until death (cf. Revelation 2:10). It is the approaching end of the age that is meant, the Day of the Lord Jesus Christ, when he would be revealed from heaven to them in the greatest Theophany of all time. Passages like these are unique to the 1st century AD, *for the Day was already then approaching* (cf. Hebrews 10:25; Romans 13:11-12).

Here's another one.

⁶ being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion **until the day of Christ Jesus.**

(Philippians 1:6 NIV)

Again, Paul was promising the Philippian Christians, with great confidence, that the good work that the Spirit of God had already begun among them would be carried on to completion until the Day of Christ (i.e. the Day of the Lord). Now why would Paul say this, as a prophet and apostle of God, if the Day of Christ were not going to occur within their generation? If this was an unattainable goal for them, then Paul was totally wrong! God had begun a work in *them*, the Philippian believers; and this work would only be completed at the Day of Christ.

Moreover, if this was to be applied to every generation of believers since then (as is commonly taught) then tens of thousands of Christians have been disappointed – for even now, according to this view, this confident expectation has not occurred! This must mean that the good work of God amongst the Philippian Christians has still not been completed for we are still waiting for the Day of Christ! This sounds like the proverbial donkey following the carrot on a stick to eat it – it never happens!

Moreover, Paul also made it clear to the Corinthians that the world in its present form was passing away, and they were to be prepared for the end of the age.

²⁹ What I mean, brothers and sisters, **is that the time is short.** From now on those who have wives should live as if they do not; ³⁰ those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; ³¹ those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. **For this world in its present form is passing away.**

(1 Corinthians 7:29-31 NIV)

Again, if this passage is to be applied to all generations since then, it doesn't make any sense. According to this view, it would mean that Paul was wrong, for the time was not really short, and the form of the world has not passed away, because the Day of Christ has not occurred. Why should believers of every generation since then live as though they had no wives or possessions? What would be the point in saying such a thing? It would also mean that this world is taking thousands of years to pass away!

No! I do not believe that Jesus and the apostles were wrong. These things happened just as they said they would, but not in the manner that is commonly supposed. I am fully convinced that the key to opening the door of understanding in these things is to bear in mind that *all this has to do with a heavenly spiritual reality co-existing alongside human history on earth.*

Now if these events have truly occurred (in the Day of the Lord of 70 AD), as I believe the biblical evidence indicates, this means that the spiritual kingdom of God has been fully established, and the state of the dead has changed due to the resurrection and judgment having begun. It is the same kingdom, the same God, the same Christ, it's just that the things that the NT believers were waiting for has now begun – and it continues on! A great harvest of the nations has been entering in to the New Jerusalem ever since!

["Blessed are the Dead... in the Lord"](#)

The vision of Revelation reveals the following about the status of the true followers of Christ since the AD 70 Day of Christ.

¹³ Then I heard a voice from heaven say, **"Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on."**

"Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them."

(Revelation 14:13 NIV)

This verse is often overlooked. It is given in the context of a glancing forward to the fall of mystery Babylon the Great, the harlot (unfaithful Jerusalem), and the judgment upon those who worship the beast (the Roman pagan system). These judgments are later revealed as occurring in relation to the Second Advent of Christ (cf. Chapters 17-19). As shown earlier, the book of Revelation reveals that these things are said to be near in the 1st Century. Therefore, this blessing upon the dead who die in the Lord *from now on* (or henceforth)²⁷ was a specific blessing that was to occur in relation to the soon-coming Day of Christ.

The Spirit of God then adds in agreement that henceforth, dead believers would rest from their labour, for their deeds (or acts) would follow them. Now elsewhere in the NT, the entering into the rest of God, and the rewards of the believer's acts at the judgment-seat of Christ, are associated with the resurrection and judgment at the establishing of Christ's kingdom in the Day of the Lord (cf. Hebrews 4:1-13; 2 Timothy 4:8; 1 Timothy 5:24-25). This strongly suggests that the state and position of the dead in Christ from the Day of the Lord onwards would be a blessed state and position not previously experienced before this time (apart from in spirit, by faith, as a foretaste and deposit of what was to come; i.e. 'the already/not yet' principle; cf. 2 Corinthians 5:5; Ephesians 1:13-14).

This can only mean one thing: the subsequent followers of Christ (since 'the First Resurrection' in AD 70) no longer sleep in death, but now receive their spiritual bodies upon death, thereby immediately entering into the inheritance of the kingdom of God (i.e. to fully experience the rest of God); while at the same time they also receive their rewards for works of service. This would then indicate, as Paul had already said in relation to the resurrection of believers ("*each in his own order*" or company - *Gk. tagma*), that the future generations of believers would continue entering in after the first group had done so at the Parousia (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:23; concerning the immortal body, see 2 Corinthians 5:1-10).

⁹ Then the angel said to me, "Write this: **Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!**" And he added, "These are the true words of God."

(Revelation 19:9 NIV)

This verse indicates that many will be invited to the wedding feast of Christ and his bride, the true Israel of God. The wedding feast is a metaphor for the full establishment of Christ's kingdom in the Day of the Lord. It is possible that the guests here were referring to believers from previous generations of the OT era who would join with the 1st century believers at the wedding feast (cf. Hebrews 11:39-40). Even if that were the case, it is bound to include all believers since then who are continually being invited to the glorious wedding feast of Christ's heavenly kingdom.

⁷ Those who are victorious **will inherit all this**, and I will be their God and they will be my children...

²⁴ The nations will walk by its light, **and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it.** ²⁵ On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will

be no night there. ²⁶ **The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it.** ²⁷ Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

(Revelation 21:7, 24-27 NIV)

These last two passages are taken from the vision of the New Heavens and the New Earth, and the New Jerusalem (i.e. the new covenant New Creation). In this first text we are told that the faithful overcomers in Christ 'will inherit all these things' of the new creation order. Then in relation to the holy city, the New Jerusalem, which is described as the bride and wife of the Lamb, we are told that the *nations of the earth* will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendour into it. It is also said that the glory and honour of the nations will be brought into the city, and only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life will enter it.

The New Jerusalem is clearly describing the spiritual and heavenly blessings of the people of God in the new covenant kingdom, symbolising the glory and beauty of a heavenly reality. We are being shown here that its light will guide believers from all the nations of the earth, and these believers, as kings and priests, will bring their splendour, glory and honour into the city, to join with the Israel of God in the wedding festivities of the consummated kingdom in a heavenly reality.

"...And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. ³ No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and **his servants will serve him.** ⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. **And they will reign for ever and ever** (*Gk. 'for the ages of the ages'...*)"

¹⁴ "Blessed are those who wash their robes, **that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city.**"

(Revelation 22:2c-5, 14 NIV)

As the description of the New Jerusalem continues in symbolic form, we are also told that the leaves of the tree of life are for the healing of the nations, whereby the curse of God, begun way back at the time of Adam, would be no more (cf. Genesis 3:13-24). This is none other than Paradise Restored. The reign of the servants of God 'for the ages of the ages' is also emphasised here. This reign of the holy people of God becomes parallel to the reign of the kingdom of God and of Christ, which is also referred to in a temporal sense as a thousand-year-reign in relation to earth history (cf. Revelation 11:15-16; 20:6).²⁸

Now take special note of what immediately follows this vision of the new Jerusalem/new creation.

⁶ The angel said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God who inspires the prophets, sent his angel **to show his servants the things that must soon take place.**"

⁷ **“Look, I am coming soon!** Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this scroll.”

(Revelation 22:6-7 NIV)

These things were soon to occur in the 1st century AD. And the coming of the Son of Man and his kingdom were also said to be soon.²⁹ For this to make any real sense at all, all these things must've begun in AD 70 at the end of the old covenant age, at the beginning of the new order.³⁰

Summary

I'd like to close this series with some quotes from James Stuart Russell, who sums up precisely the view that I have attempted to expound in this series of articles. This is what he had to say about the critical events of the Day of the Lord that transpired in 70 AD.

“There is reason to believe that the true significance and grandeur of that great event are very little appreciated by many. The destruction of Jerusalem was not a mere thrilling incident in the drama of history, like the siege of Troy or the downfall of Carthage, closing a chapter in the annals of a state or a people. It was an event which has no parallel in history. It was the outward and visible sign of a great epoch in the divine government of the world. It was the close of one dispensation and the commencement of another. It marked the inauguration of a new order of things. The Mosaic economy,—which had been ushered in by the miracles of Egypt, the lightnings and thunderings of Sinai, and the glorious manifestations of Jehovah to Israel,—after subsisting for more than fifteen centuries, was now abolished. The peculiar relation between the Most High and the covenant nation was dissolved. The Messianic kingdom, that is, the administration of the divine government by the Mediator, so far, at least, as Israel was concerned, reached its culminating point. The kingdom so long predicted, hoped for, prayed for, was now fully come. The final act of the King was to sit upon the throne of His glory and judge His people. He could then ‘deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father.’ This is the significance of the destruction of Jerusalem according to the showing of the Word of God. It was not an isolated fact, a solitary catastrophe,—it was the centre of a group of related and coincident events, not only in the material, but in the spiritual world; not only on earth, but in heaven and in hell; some of them being cognisable by the senses and capable of historical confirmation, and others not...

...As the result of the investigation we are landed in this dilemma: either the whole group of predictions, comprehending the destruction of Jerusalem, the coming of the Lord, the resurrection of the dead, and the rewarding of the faithful, did take place before the passing away of that generation, as predicted by Christ, taught by the apostles, and expected by the whole church; or, else, the hope of the church was a delusion, the teaching of the apostles an error, the predictions of Jesus a dream.

There is no other alternative consistent with the fair grammatical interpretation of the words of Scripture... We are compelled, therefore, by all these considerations, and chiefly by regard for the authority of Him whose word cannot be broken, to conclude that the Parousia, or second coming of Christ, with its connected and concomitant events, did take place, according to the Saviour's own prediction, at the period when Jerusalem was destroyed, and before the passing away of ‘that generation.’”

(James Stuart Russell, taken from *Summary and Conclusion in The Parousia*)

[I plan to deal with some of the major objections to this preterist view in an upcoming series of shorter articles.]

Endnotes

¹ James Stuart Russell also held to the view that I am expressing here (cf. *The Parousia*, pp. 165-169, 208-211). I have recently discovered that a number of Preterist writers also hold to this view. I am very much in agreement with the position of Baptist theologian Ian D. Harding expounded in his book *Taken To Heaven In A.D. 70* (2005, International Preterist Association, Inc.). I also have a pre-publication article by Edward Stevens called *Silence Demands A Rapture*. In this article Stevens mentions four biblical scholars from the late 19th and early 20th centuries who held to this view of a 1st century Rapture, namely, J. S. Russell, Milton S. Terry, Richard Weymouth, and Ernest Hampden-Cook.

It needs to be noted, though, that I do not agree with Ed Stevens view on all points as he holds to the modern 'full preterist' position, which I do not accept. For instance, I do not accept that a) the Millennium occurred before 70 AD; or b) that the Rapture occurred over a three-year period; or c) that all those calling themselves Christians experienced this event (it was promised only to faithful Overcomers). Unlike the modern full preterist view, I do not believe that *all* biblical prophecy has been fulfilled (though I accept that most of it has been). For alternative Preterist views on the Rapture, see *Five Views of the AD 70 Rapture* by Walt Hibbard.

² Correct grammar and syntax (i.e. accurate translation) is very important, but this by itself is not enough when seeking to correctly interpret Scripture. The textual and historical context needs to be correctly understood also, which is not always an easy task, particularly as the Bible was written and compiled in ancient times.

³ It is evident that later in his ministry, Paul realised that he wouldn't be among those who would remain alive at the Parousia of Christ, and that instead he would die a martyr. Nevertheless, in accordance with his teaching in 1 Thessalonians 4, etc, he still expected to witness the event by being resurrected first with the rest of the 'overcomers' before the living believers were changed and gathered together to meet with Christ (cf. 2 Timothy 4:6-8; Revelation 2:10-11, 26-27).

⁴ The Hebrew word for 'heaven' or 'heavens' is *shahmahyim* while the Greek word is *ouranos*. The Jews (in accordance with the teaching of the Old Testament), as well as other ancient peoples, generally understood the world as a three-tiered model; 1) *heaven*, 2) *earth* and 3) *under the earth* (cf. Philippians 2:10; also Revelation 5:13 where the sea is added also). There was also a belief in three heavens. In Scripture, the word 'heaven(s)' can refer to either a) the atmosphere of the earth (i.e. the sky or the **First Heaven**); or b) stellar space (i.e. the universe or the celestials; the **Second Heaven**); or c) the spirit realm where the dwelling place of God is situated (i.e. the **Third Heaven**; cf. 2 Corinthians 12:1-4), where also the spirit beings or 'angels' dwell. This is especially the case in the phrase 'Kingdom of the heavens.' Heaven in general is essentially describing that which we see when we look up. Of course, 'looking up' is a relative term because we are situated on a sphere hanging in space! It would be more literally accurate to say 'looking out' rather than 'up.' Nevertheless, from our position on earth, as the ancients would understand it, this is looking *up*.

There are also two special phrases in Hebrew: a) **Heavens of the heavens** (Psalm 68:33); and b) **Heaven of the heavens** (2 Chronicles 2:6). The first primarily refers to *the Second Heaven* (i.e. stellar space, although it could also include *the First Heaven*, i.e. the sky because the stars and the sky are interconnected; hence the phrase probably includes both.

The celestials or starry hosts are often figured as the spirit world and its inhabitants). This corresponds with the Hebrew (and Greek) phrases transliterated '*holies of the holies*' and '*eons of the eons*' (or '*ages of the ages*' commonly rendered '*forever and ever*'). The second phrase b) above refers to the dwelling place of God (i.e. the spirit realm or the heavenly Temple of God). It is often translated as '*the highest heaven*.' This corresponds with the Hebrew (and Greek) phrases transliterated '*Holy of the holies*' and '*Eon of the eons*.' This is not without significance, though these idioms should not be pushed too far to form a speculated scheme of the ages of time, which I myself have done in the past.

⁵ The heavenly enthronement of Jesus evidently occurred almost immediately after His resurrection, and it was confirmed in a more visible sense at His Ascension before the Apostles (cf. John 20:17; Matthew 28:16-20; Acts 1:6-12; 2:31-36; Revelation 12:5). The following years saw a transition from the old covenant age to the new covenant age. This transition was completed by 70 AD through the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in the Day of the Lord, just as the prophecies of Daniel had indicated (cf. Daniel 9:26; 12:7).

This transitional era leading up to 70 AD was also the time when Satan had been dethroned and 'hurled to the earth' to eventually cause 'the great tribulation' that was the Roman/Jewish war of 67-70 AD (cf. Revelation 12:7-13; 20:1-3). Many of the NT epistles refer to this initial defeat of the spiritual powers of darkness, which had been caused by the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, although a few texts refer to the then-approaching 70 AD victory (e.g. Romans 16:20; Hebrews 12:27-29). By the end of the age, the two-stages of Christ's first and second comings were completed for Israel, and the reign of Christ and his people over the nations had fully begun.

⁶ See also Mark 13:27 where it is emphasised that Christ's elect would be gathered together from '*the extremities of the earth and the extremities of the heavens*.'

⁷ Cf. N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, (SPCK, 2003), pp. 217-218; & *Surprised By Hope* (SPCK, 2007), pp. 141-145. (Tom) Wright suggests quite strongly that Paul was using the 'visiting emperor' metaphor in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17. He thus interprets the 'meeting' of God's people with Christ at his *parousia* as the first stage of a process that involves the people escorting Christ back to earth from whence they came. I disagree with Wright here, as I do not see this whole scenario clearly expressed in the biblical text; and I therefore think that he is pushing this particular metaphor too far. The irony here is that Christ is actually being viewed as visiting and rescuing his people so as to 'escort' them back to his 'place' via an 'ascension' of their own (hence, 'the clouds' motif & the meeting in the air imagery; cf. John 14:3; Acts 1:9-11; Revelation 11:12). See also F. F. Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments* (Revised Edition, Marshall Pickering, 1991) pp. 58-60.

⁸ There are many OT texts that speak of God's 'presence' or 'coming' in the form of historical judgments, even though He did not physically or bodily appear in a worldly, fleshly sense (e.g. Isaiah 19:1; Psalm 68:1-2, Micah 1:3-4; Nahum 1:5-6). In many of these texts, the Hebrew word often translated as 'presence' (*paniyim*) is literally 'the face of' - and yet these 'appearances' have nothing to do with the physical, bodily presence of God at all that is normally observable to the human senses! It is therefore biblically correct to apply this meaning to the 'royal presence' or Parousia of Christ in the Day of the Lord, as Jesus himself did (cf. Luke 17:20-25).

⁹ There are those who believe that Satan is not a personal being, but I fail to see how the following texts from the NT could *not* be applied to a personal spiritual being or entity. The NT clearly reveals the following. At the beginning of Jesus' ministry he was tempted by Satan (meaning 'adversary'), also called the Devil (meaning 'slanderer' or 'accuser'). At this point in time, Satan had the spiritual power and authority over the kingdoms of the world, and he also had the power (under God) to give them to whoever would worship him (cf. Luke 4:5-8). It would appear as though Satan received this authority after the failure of

Adam and Eve, at the very beginning of the history of God's covenant people, when he took on the guise of 'the serpent' (cf. Genesis 3; Revelation 12:9; 2 Corinthians 11:3; 1 Timothy 2:13-14).

During Jesus' ministry, Satan's authority and kingdom were under threat due to the power of God's Holy Spirit being present within Christ (Luke 10:17-20; Matthew 12:28-29). Due to the death and resurrection of Jesus, Satan and his angelic forces (also called demons) were defeated. As a consequence of this, Satan lost his position as prince (or ruler) of the world, while Christ himself took over this position as the Ruler not only of the earth or kingdoms of the world, but of heaven also (cf. Matthew 28:16-20; John 12:30-32; 1 Corinthians 2:6-10; Colossians 2:15; Revelation 12:3-4, 7-13). During the period from Christ's Ascension to the Day of the Lord in 70 AD, Satan and his forces caused havoc in the earth, leading to 'the great tribulation' of 67-70 AD (a period of three and a half years; or 'time, times and half a time').

This period culminated in the Second Advent, along with the resurrection and judgment, when Satan and his kingdom were fully subjected to Christ and the restored Israel of God, in fulfilment of Daniel 7:8-14 & 25-27 (cf. Romans 16:20; 1 Corinthians 6:2-3; 1 Corinthians 15:24-28; Revelation 11:15-18; 20:1-6, 11-15). Since that time, Satan has been 'bound' during the '1000-year-reign' of Christ and his people in the New Creation (Revelation 20:1-6; 21:1-22:7). Even now, Satan's then future 'loosing' may have already occurred.

¹⁰ It is very interesting to note that the Bible talks about the heaven and the earth in relation to the activities of invisible spirit beings. Take for example the following. In the OT, Satan was seen to have access to the throne room of God, while at the same time roaming to and fro throughout the earth (Job 1:6-7; 2:1-2). In the NT, Jesus revealed that in relation to his kingdom the disciples would see heaven opened with the angels of God ascending and descending between heaven and earth, with Christ himself as the metaphorical stairway to heaven (John 1:50-51; cf. Genesis 28:10-15).

The NT also shows that the chosen people of God in Christ would co-rule with Christ in the heavens and on the earth (see Matthew 5:5; 6:10; Revelation 5:10; 11:15-17; also 1 Corinthians 6:2-3; Revelation 2:13; Romans 8:17-21). I think that it is evident from these texts that the reign of God's people *on the earth* has to do with a spiritual, and somewhat heavenly, reality; [even though it is true to say that the unfolding generations of Christ's followers since 70 AD are situated on the earth - meaning the successive generations of living Christians in mortal bodies, before their individual death and their moving on into the spiritual dimension].

¹¹ The word translated 'observed' in this passage is the Greek word *parateresis*. The Concordant Literal NT translates it as 'scrutiny'. Vine's Expository Dictionary says it means 'attentive watching.' This word can be used negatively (as in Luke 6:7 to describe the negative critical eye of the Pharisees) or otherwise. It basically means to keep a close eye on something. In the context of Luke 17:20-37, I would say it is better to understand this as 'close human observation with the eyes.' Jesus' subsequent comments that people would not say 'Here it is' or 'There it is' confirms this view. The Jews were looking for a worldly, political kingdom, but Jesus tells them it would be otherwise; and its arrival would not be seen by normal human observation, no matter how much one looked for it.

The latter part of verse 21 reads more literally "*the kingdom of God is in the middle of you.*" This could be understood as 'within you' or 'in your midst.' It can apply both ways, with different versions using one or the other. Nevertheless, it would seem to me that the context leans more towards '*in your midst*' or '*among you*' as Jesus was addressing the Pharisees; and I don't believe he was telling them that the kingdom of God was within them! Yet the kingdom was definitely in their midst, for the King was already in front of them.

¹² There are many figurative applications of the blowing of trumpets in Scripture. As we have already seen, both Paul and Jesus referred to the blast of the trumpet in connection with the resurrection at Christ's Second Advent (cf. Matthew 24:31; John 5:28-29; 1 Thessalonians 4:16). In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul refers to '*the last trumpet*' implying a sequence of trumpet blasts. I think there is good reason to believe that Paul was metaphorically referring to the blasts of the two silver trumpets that were used for signalling the community of Israel, as God's people, to assemble together and to move camp when they were travelling en route to the Promised Land (cf. Numbers 10:1-7). The moving of the camps would occur in four stages - east, south, west and north, though some translations omit the last two stages.

It would appear as though Paul was describing the assembling together of the true Israel of God at Christ's Appearing. This gathering was to occur in two main stages, although it would involve many being gathered from the east and the west, the north and the south (cf. Matthew 8:11). The dead in Christ would be raised first, and then the living ones would be changed into immortality at the last trumpet. Thereafter, the whole assembly/army of God, surrounded in the glory-cloud, would move out together to fully enter into their eternal inheritance, with Christ at the head with his angels.

It is also evident that 'the last trumpet' has some kind of relationship to '*the seventh trumpet*' of Revelation 11:15-19, but it is highly unlikely that Paul was directly referring to that trumpet as the vision of Revelation had most probably not been given at the time Paul wrote 1 Corinthians. Nevertheless, as a whole the NT reveals that the Feast of Trumpets, which occurred on the first day of the seventh New Moon, was to be fulfilled in the resurrection event at Christ's Second Appearing.

¹³ It has to be admitted that the few texts that talk of Christ's Parousia being seen by humans do have their difficulties when attempting to expound these things from a preterist perspective, though I do not believe that these difficulties are insurmountable (e.g. Matthew 24:30; 26:64; Revelation 1:7.) Nevertheless, concerning the lightening motif, every other instance in the NT that refers to 'lightening' is referring to spiritual, heavenly occurrences. Note especially Luke 10:18 and Matthew 28:2-4; the first refers to the fall of Satan due to Christ's victory, and the second has to do with an angel (or heavenly messenger) that appears at the tomb of Jesus at His resurrection. The book of Revelation also contains many references to lightening, usually referring to heavenly judgment. Cf. also Ezekiel 1:1-4, 13-14. It would appear that Jesus was getting this imagery from texts such as Psalm 18:9-13. The Parousia of Christ and the accompanying resurrection were evidently spiritual, heavenly manifestations that were to occur with great speed - in relation to the normal space-time universe we inhabit.

¹⁴ The common partial-preterist interpretation of this text usually views this 'coming' of Christ as applying to the judgment upon Jerusalem in 70 AD, although this view rejects the notion that this is also the Second Advent. If this view were correct, then the Second Advent would not be portrayed in detail at all in the vision of Revelation! On the other hand, the 'premillennialist' interpretation views this passage (correctly in my opinion) as picturing the Second Advent, but they then apply it all to the future, often in a worldly, literalistic manner. If this view were correct, then Christ's kingdom reign would not as yet have been established! Yet the NT nowhere teaches that Christ's kingdom, which was 'near' or 'at hand' in the 1st century, was to be postponed for thousands of years.

¹⁵ There is a dilemma with verse 5a of Revelation 20. Most versions put this sentence in parenthesis like so: (*The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.*) This appears to be saying that the Great White Throne judgment of verses 11-15 occurs after the 1000 years, implying two resurrections, one at the beginning of the 'millennium' and one at the end. Nevertheless, this contradicts all of the other biblical texts that speak of this subject. There is good reason to accept the view that verse 5a was probably not included in the original vision written down by John. Some earlier manuscripts

do not contain this sentence. I have yet to do further research on this, but omitting this sentence from verse 5 does help the text to flow much better without causing any contradiction with other passages.

Duncan W. McKenzie deals with this issue in his book *The Antichrist and the Second Coming: A Preterist Examination – Volume II: The Book of Revelation*, pp. 374-392, (Xulon Press, 2012). McKenzie cites David Aune, G. K. Beale, R. H. Charles, and James Parkinson among those who have highlighted this apparent discrepancy. For further details on the connection of Revelation 20 with Daniel 7, see note 9 above.

¹⁶ The phrase 'the First Resurrection' is probably related to other NT phrases such as 'the assembly of the *firstborn*' (Hebrews 12:23) and those who were '*firstfruits*' (Romans 8:23; James 1:18 & Revelation 14:4). These descriptions were especially applicable to that 1st century generation of believers who were the 'first' among many to follow.

¹⁷ I plan to expound on this passage in detail in an upcoming series of articles entitled *Is Universal Salvation Explicitly Taught in the NT?* In my previous writings, particularly those found in the Archives, I accepted the common 'universalist' interpretation of verses 22 & 28 - "for even as in Adam all die, so also in the Christ all shall be made alive" and "...that God may be all in all" - where 'the all' here is viewed as referring to all mankind, i.e. every single human being. I now question this interpretation due to the over-arching context; Paul was clearly focusing on the totality of believers, and never once mentions the rest of humanity - not here anyhow.

¹⁸ J. S. Russell was not a 'Full Preterist', and neither am I. The modern full preterist position may seem very similar, but there are some marked differences. Yes, Russell viewed the Second Advent as occurring in 70 AD, but contrary to the full preterist position, he saw this as *the beginning* of the 'millennium' and not its end. All spiritual powers are subjected to Christ at the beginning of his reign with his people. Nevertheless, in relation to earth history, there is yet a consummation event after the symbolical 1000-year-reign has finished (cf. Revelation 20:7-10). This view is termed *Consistent Premillennial Preterism*; although it would be more accurate to say Premillennial/Amillennial Preterism; for it recognises the 'premillennial' pattern of Revelation 19-20 (i.e. Second Advent --> First Resurrection --> 1000-year-reign), while at the same time largely accepting the 'amillennial' hermeneutic of a current *heavenly* reign of Christ and his people over the nations, viewed as a *symbolic* '1000-year-reign' leading to a future consummation of world history. For further illustration of this, see my chart *Two Ages/Two Realities*.

¹⁹ It is still possible that 'the consummation' (Greek 'finish'; *teleo, telos*) of 1 Corinthians 15:24 is referring to the period of the 'finishing' of the 1000 years, and Satan's final judgment in the Lake of Fire revealed in Revelation 20:7-10. Nevertheless, Satan was previously subjected to Christ at the Parousia, *before* the 1000 years, as it was then that he was imprisoned in the abyss (Revelation 20:1-3). This was also the time when the spiritual 'beast and false prophet' were cast into the fire (cf. Revelation 19:19-21; also Daniel 7:11). I believe that all the biblical data, from a preterist viewpoint, points to AD 70 for the consummation - at least that of the consummation in the heavenly realms in relation to the establishing of the promised kingdom of God. The consummation in the earthly realm, as far as human history is concerned, is still future. It is still possible, maybe probable, that a few 'day of the Lord' texts could indeed be referring to the ultimate day of judgment and wrath for the whole world when God 'consumes all his enemies with fire from heaven' at the consummation of world history (e.g. Revelation 20:9; 2 Peter 2:6; 3:7; Zephaniah 1:18).

In my previous writings, particularly those in the Archives, I saw a three-staged element to the resurrection order of 1 Corinthians 15:23-24: a) Christ the Firstfruits, b) those who are Christ's at (or in) his Presence (that is, all believers at the Parousia), and c) the rest of humanity at a distant Consummation. I have recently had to seriously reconsider this view.

Even though it is not impossible that 'the consummation' may refer to a third stage of resurrection, it is not explicitly revealed in the text, and is therefore unlikely. On the other hand, if Revelation 5a is genuine (see note 15 above) then 'the rest of the (unbelieving) dead' could be this third stage, at the end of which, Death and Hades are destroyed in the 'Lake of Fire' as are all those who enter 'the Second Death'.

²⁰ A popular interpretation of 'mystery Babylon' in Revelation is that it symbolised Rome, but there have been many others who have shown the weakness with this position. They in turn have put forward the view that this 'Babylon' initially represented Jerusalem and the old covenant temple system. I totally concur. For example, see J. S. Russell, *The Parousia, Part III - The Parousia in the Apocalypse, The Sixth Vision*; David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance* (Dominion Press, 1987), pp. 170-185; Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *The Book of Revelation Made Easy*, (American Vision Press, Second Edition 2010), pp. 73-89; Duncan W. McKenzie, *The Antichrist and the Second Coming: A Preterist Examination - Volume II: The Book of Revelation*, (Xulon Press, 2012), pp. 203-286. See also my archived article *Who is Secret Babylon the Great? When I originally wrote it, I had begun to see something of this interpretation, that Jerusalem was mystery Babylon, from my own personal study.*

²¹ *Athanasia*: 1 Corinthians 15:53, 54; 1 Timothy 6:16; *Aphtharsia*: Romans 2:7; 1 Corinthians 15:42, 50, 53, 54; Ephesians 6:24; 2 Timothy 1:10; *Aphthartos*: Romans 1:23; 1 Corinthians 9:25; 15:52; 1 Timothy 1:17; 1 Peter 1:4, 23; 3:4. Taken from Appendix II of *Raised Immortal: Resurrection & Immortality in the NT* by Murray J. Harris, (1985, Eerdmans Publishing).

²² For a thorough, detailed examination of these issues of death, immortality and resurrection, see *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, N. T. Wright, (SPCK, 2003); *Raised Immortal: Resurrection & Immortality in the NT*, Murray J. Harris, (1985, Eerdmans Publishing); & *The Fire That Consumes*, Edward William Fudge, (Third Edition, 2011, Cascade Books), which also deals with the nature of final punishment and conditional immortality. I plan to be considering these things in an up-coming article entitled *What's the Deal with Death?*

²³ For over 15 years, I believed and taught the doctrine of Universal Reconciliation, as attested in the archived articles on my site, but from about January 2013, this changed. After a fresh study of the whole subject of death, resurrection and final punishment, seeking to understand the original biblical and historical context, I came to the conclusion that this view was unsupported from the biblical evidence understood in its original context. I am presently convinced that the view known as Conditional Immortality or Annihilationism is the best way of understanding the biblical texts on this rather difficult subject. I have found the work of Edward William Fudge invaluable in helping me to confirm this understanding as presented in his thorough treatment of the subject in his book entitled *The Fire That Consumes* (Third Edition, 2011, Cascade Books). Many renowned biblical scholars and theologians have openly accepted this view, rejecting the more traditional position of Eternal Conscious Torment.

²⁴ I don't intend to deal with this subject in-depth here, but I plan to be considering these things in more detail in an up-coming article entitled *What's the Deal with Death?*

²⁵ See for example: 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:5-7; Colossians 3:5-6; Revelation 21:7-8; 22:14-15.

²⁶ This is where I would differ from some of the views of modern 'full preterists' in regard to how we should apply the NT to post-AD 70 Christians.

²⁷ The Greek *ap' arti* (i.e. *apo arti*) usually translated as 'henceforth' or 'from now on' literally means "from now", either as a positive or a negative (cf. *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, (Thomas Nelson, 1985). Along with Revelation 14:13, there are a few

important texts in the NT that use this phrase to indicate a specific change within time in relation to spiritual matters (e.g. Matthew 26:64; Luke 22:69; 2 Corinthians 5:16).

²⁸ As noted above, I am strongly persuaded that the 'Millennium' of Revelation 20 is concurrent with the New Creation of Revelation 21-22; that is, they are two aspects of the same thing. OT prophecies such as Isaiah 60-62; 65:17-25; 66:12-24 are seen to ultimately have a spiritual, heavenly fulfilment in the NT new Jerusalem, along with elements of an earthly fulfilment (e.g. marriage, sin and death) alongside the spiritual reality of a new creation. Many scholars and commentators have viewed these texts this way (e.g. George R. Beasley-Murray, Revelation, in the *New Bible Commentary* (21st Century Edition)).

²⁹ The book of Revelation opens and closes with statements such as 'the time is near' 'what must soon occur' and 'what is about to take place' (cf. 1:1, 3, 19; 22:6, 6-7, 10, 12, 20.) See *Table 3: Time Indicators in Revelation*.

³⁰ For information about the early date for the writing of Revelation (i.e. before AD 70), see Note 25 of Part Two of this series.

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