

# God Rules In The Kingdom of Men!

*In this article about Bible prophecy, John Shepley explains that God is in control of the world and has a glorious plan for its future.*

*As this article unfolds he will consider what prophecy is and look at some of the things it says about the Time of the End. Even though the immediate future for the world looks quite depressing, the good news is that there is a sure promise of a better time to come, when God's kingdom is established here.*

## God in Control

One of the fallacies of human governments today is that they think they are in control. This, of course, is brought about by humanistic thinking that man is the master of his own destiny. Even though the problems which confront civilization today seem insurmountable, man is confident in his own ability to solve them and bring about a better world.

The Bible, however, gives us a different and more realistic perspective. It shows us that God is in control and that events in the world are unfolding according to His predetermined plan.

At a time of national unrest when the future of the nation of Judah seemed to be in the balance, the prophet Isaiah gave this word from God:

*“Remember this, and show yourselves men; recall to mind, O you transgressors. Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure,’ Calling a bird of prey from the east, the man who executes My counsel, from a far country. Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it” (Isaiah 46:8–11)*

*“For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:10–11).*

Although these words were spoken specifically about ancient kings . of Assyria, Babylon and Persia . who went about trying to accomplish their own desires, they give us a timeless insight into the fact that it is God who is really in control.

## Ruler of Kings

Daniel Chapter 4 gives us another wonderful insight into how God is in control. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon



was a hugely powerful ruler at a time when there were few limitations to what a king could do.

One day he had a dream about a great tree which gave food and shelter to the beasts of the field and the birds of heaven. In his dream he saw a watcher come down from heaven proclaiming that the tree be cut down and then he heard these astonishing words:

*“Nevertheless leave the stump and roots in the earth, bound with a band of iron and bronze, in the tender grass of the field. Let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let him graze with the beasts on the grass of the earth. Let his heart be changed from that of a man, let him be given the heart of a beast, and let seven times pass over him. ‘This decision is by the decree of the watchers, and the sentence by the word of the holy ones, in order that the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest of men’” (Daniel 4:15–17).*

### **The Interpretation**

Daniel interpreted the dream and told the king that it was about him, and his future prospects. If he was proud of his rulership, he was to be humbled until he had learned the truth about God’s supreme control over all human affairs.

It came to pass twelve months later, when Nebuchadnezzar’s heart was lifted up with pride, that this dream became reality:

*That very hour the word was fulfilled concerning Nebuchadnezzar; he was driven from men and ate grass like oxen; his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair had grown like eagles’ feathers and his nails like birds’ claws. And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever: for His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, “What have You done?”” (Daniel 4:33–35).*

Nebuchadnezzar . the absolute monarch . came to realise that God is actually in control and that all human rulers are subject to His direction. The importance of these words is abundantly clear. It is God who rules in the kingdom of men and gives it to whomsoever He will.

*He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding (Daniel 2:21).*

These words are just as valid today as when they were first written. The rulers of today are also set up and removed by God according to His will, so that His purpose will be accomplished.

This is something we have always to take into account as we consider the time of the end.

## What is Prophecy For?

Webster's Dictionary defines prophecy as "a foretelling; prediction; a declaration of something to come". It continues by rightly saying:

"As God only knows future events with certainty, no being but God or some person informed by Him, can utter a real prophecy. The prophecies recorded in Scripture, when fulfilled, afford most convincing evidence of the divine origin of the Scriptures, as those who uttered the prophecies could not have foreknown the events predicted without supernatural instruction".

This is what the Apostle Peter says:

*... no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20–21).*

As we have already seen, God is the controller of all past, present and future events. He knows the future and will make it happen. In this way Bible Prophecy is history written in advance.

### Short and Long Term

A Bible prophet often had a twofold role. He was a mouthpiece for God in (1) instructing His people and (2) in foretelling events that would certainly come to pass. In this series we are concentrating mainly on the latter aspect. According to the two tests of a prophet given in the book of Deuteronomy (13:1-3 and 18:21-22), a true prophet was one who:

- Taught things consistent with the rest of what God had revealed, and
- Gave a short-term prophecy which came true.

There are different types of prophecy. Some are "short-term" which established the prophet's credentials; many are "long-term" and extend into the near or distant future from the prophet's own time. Often the prophecies were a combination of both, with sometimes dual or even multiple fulfillments.

Let's consider Psalm 2 as an example, the full text of which is shown opposite. This is a Psalm of David which clearly had a primary fulfilment in his own day. He was God's anointed king

### Psalm 2

1. *Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing?*
2. *The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying,*
3. *"Let us break their bonds in pieces and cast away their cords from us."*
4. *He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall hold them in derision.*
5. *Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, and distress them in His deep displeasure:*
6. *"Yet I have set my King on My holy hill of Zion."*
7. *"I will declare the decree: The Lord has said to me, 'You are My Son, today I have begotten you.*
8. *Ask of Me, and I will give you the nations for your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for your possession.*
9. *You shall break them with a rod of iron; you shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel."*
10. *Now therefore, be wise, O kings; be instructed, you judges of the earth.*
11. *Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling.*
12. *Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in him.*

and, under the hand of God, his capital was established in Jerusalem (Zion). This did not happen immediately; first David had to fight many wars with the nations round about who challenged his rule. Eventually they became subject to him and accepted the rulership of the king that God had set upon what God describes as “*my holy hill of Zion*” (Psalm 2:6). The psalm refers to that process of submission to God’s intended purpose.

### **First Century Application**

It may come as a surprise if you are unfamiliar with the New Testament, but this same Psalm . rooted in the history of David’s conquest of Jerusalem . is given a first century application by the inspired apostles of Jesus. They had been opposed by the Jewish religious leaders who had commanded them not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:18). The apostles refused that request and when they returned to the others this was what was said:

*They raised their voice to God with one accord and said: “Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, who by the mouth of Your servant David have said: ‘Why did the nations rage, and the people plot vain things? The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against His Christ.’ For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done” (Acts 4:24–28).*

So verses 1 and 2 of Psalm 2, at the very least, also had a fulfilment in the first century in the plot to do away with Jesus. Again we see that God is in control.

### **Future Application**

But the prophetic nature of that Psalm is not exhausted by that First Century application. It has a future fulfilment.

Its latter day fulfilment predicts a time to come when some nations will oppose the rulership of King Jesus when he establishes Jerusalem as the capital of the Kingdom of God, as we shall see in later articles. God has a plan for this world and He will bring it to pass.

With some prophecies . such as those already fulfilled and some future ones, like those concerning the return of the Lord Jesus Christ . we can be dogmatic about their fulfilment. With others . such as those which concern events prior to the Lord’s return . we cannot be dogmatic as to how and when they will be fulfilled. For prophecy is primarily a tool to help build up our faith when we see how God has fulfilled His Word, and is still fulfilling it to the very letter. This gives us great confidence that those prophecies yet remaining will also be fulfilled in their entirety. It can also give us a wonderful insight into the plan and purpose of God.

## The Time of the End

There are many books and films that predict cataclysmic events happening to this world, things that would bring it to the brink of destruction. There are so many scenarios which portray the end of the world. With the spectre of global terror, the rampant spread of infectious diseases, man-made environmental disasters and other natural catastrophes, many believe that the days of civilisation as we know it are truly numbered. The Bible does in fact speak of a time coming on earth when there will be no way out for some people:

*There will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken (Luke 21:25–26).*

These are the words of the Lord Jesus, part of a prophecy he gave upon the Mount of Olives near Jerusalem when he was asked about events in the world just prior to his return.



The original word translated “*perplexity*” literally means “*at a loss for a way*” with the sense of being at one’s wits end, not knowing how to proceed, or without resources. The prophet Daniel describes this time like this:

*At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book (Daniel 12:1).*

### Scriptural Expression

The “*Time of the End*” is actually a Scriptural phrase which occurs five times in the Book of Daniel. Here are two of those occurrences: “*But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase*” (Daniel 12:4);

*And he said, “Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end” (Daniel 12:9).*

This is a time when God will once again openly intervene in the affairs of this world, in order to save it from destruction and establish His righteousness in the earth. This time is referred to in many ways in Scripture with phrases such as “*the last days*”, “*the day of the Lord*” and the “*end of the age*” also being used.

*... knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation” (2 Peter 3:3–4);*

*But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up (2 Peter 3:10);*

*Now as (Jesus) sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:3)*

We will look at these and other events concerning this time in more detail later on in this series. For now, let us note that God will bring His purpose about through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what the Apostle Paul told the philosophers of Athens when he was invited to address them:

*Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising him from the dead" (Acts 17:29–31).*

## **Will the Earth be Destroyed?**

As the prophet Daniel foretold, there is a time of trouble coming on earth that will bring it to the brink of destruction.

*At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt (Daniel 12:1–2).*

### **Survival or Destruction?**

Will the earth survive or will it, and every living thing upon it, be destroyed? Some people think that the earth's days are numbered and fear for its future survival, but they need have no such concerns.

Although there is a time of judgement coming on this earth, the Bible is quite definite that the earth itself will not be destroyed; that it will survive. And as this is a promise that God has made in His Word, the Bible, we can be absolutely sure about it. Here are some of those promises:



- *One generation passes away, and another generation comes; but the earth abides*

- *For thus says the Lord, who created the heavens, who is God, who formed the earth and made it, who has established it, who did not create it in vain, who formed it to be inhabited: "I am the Lord, and there is no other" (Isaiah 45:18);*
- *The heaven, even the heavens, are the Lord's; but the earth He has given to the children of men (Psalm 115:16);*
- *Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5).*

Notice the last passage in particular, for it is a promise made by the Lord Jesus to all faithful believers. This is the promise of an everlasting inheritance here on earth, not a promise of life in heaven.

## **Saved How?**

It is God's intention to stop the present decline which now affects most aspects of human existence, before it goes too far. He will send His Son to save His people from destruction and to set up His kingdom on this earth.

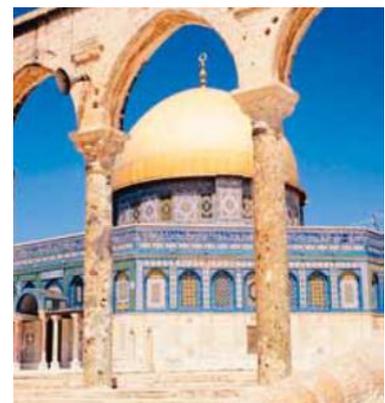
The establishment of that Kingdom will, in time, restore this earth to the condition it was at the time of creation. This is what the apostle Peter said on the day of Pentecost to those Jews who were willing to listen:

*Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began (Acts 3:19–21).*

## **Glorious Future**

The physical earth will survive the time of trouble that is coming on this world and will yet have a glorious future. There are many descriptions of this time which is spoken about by God's prophets and they are written to give us great hope and encouragement. For example, God says through His prophet Isaiah:

*Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:2–3).*



*A new temple is to be built in Jerusalem when the "restoration of all things" takes place*

## **God's Gracious Purpose**

We will consider more of these things in due course, as this series continues. For now, we can satisfy ourselves with the knowledge that, even though we are living through the beginning of a time of trouble such as never has been known before, God has a plan for this earth and He will surely bring it to pass. For it is God's ultimate and declared purpose to fill this earth with His glory.

*But truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord... (Numbers 14:21);*

They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:9);

*For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea (Habakkuk 2:14).*

## **The Time of the End**

The prophet Daniel speaks of the time prior to the Lord's return as a time of trouble such as never has been: a time which will culminate in the resurrection of the dead (Daniel 12:1-3). The record goes on to say:

*"But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase" (12:4).*

There have been many suggestions as to what these words mean. Some take them to mean that there will be an increase in understanding of the Word of God at this time, particularly of the prophecies concerning the last days as world events unfold. Others take them to indicate the hectic pace of modern life and the explosion of knowledge which is a feature of our technological age. The New International Version translates the last part of this verse as *"Many will go here and there to increase knowledge"*.

## **Other Predictions**

The apostles also speak of this time immediately prior to the return of the Lord. This is what Paul wrote:

*Know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: for men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! (2 Timothy 3:1-5).*

How well these words describe our age, for we live at a time when there has been a sharp decline in the standards of morality as well as of religious faith. A large proportion of people seem only to be concerned about themselves and this is portrayed in the way they treat others. Self-centredness is a characteristic of this age, a vice from which all other vices flow. Decline in belief and practice of the Word of God has led to this downward slide, for it removes the standard of behaviour which is acceptable and the responsibility to try to live according to it. Even those who have some sense of godliness in their lives often deny it by the way they live. The Apostle Peter confirms this decline in faith:

*... Knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation (2 Peter 3:3–4).*

There are many people today, particularly among the so-called Christian countries, who leave God out of their lives altogether. Some, if not most, of the younger generation have almost no idea of any basic Bible teaching, or Bible stories for that matter. The inroads made by the theory of evolution has to a large extent removed any sense of responsibility to a Supreme Being from peoples lives. Most treat the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ as a hangover from another era, believing that the world will continue as it always has done and that mankind and science will solve all the problems confronting this world.

## **Anti-Semitism**

Another sign that we are in the time of the end is the rise once again of anti-Semitism. Sadly, hatred of the Jews has plagued them through their long period of dispersion. Time after time they have been made the scapegoats for many problems experienced by various nations. It came to a head during the Nazi persecution of the Jews prior to, and during, World War II, culminating in the holocaust. After this there was a measure of sympathy among the nations of the world, which was a contributing factor in the reestablishment of the Jewish State.

Once again, however, we see anti-Semitism raising its ugly head, particularly among the nations of Europe, with many blaming the Jews for the current turmoil in the Middle East. A lot of this is being fuelled by Middle Eastern immigrants, with many asserting that if there were no Israel there would be no terrorism. This too, is a fulfilment of Bible prophecy, for the prophets foresaw that the nation of Israel would become more and more isolated among the nations of the world, prior to the Coming of their Messiah.

## **Jerusalem – A Heavy Stone**

The last few chapters of the prophecy of Zechariah relate to the time of the end. This is clear from the fact that the phrase "*on that day*" occurs no less than sixteen times in the last three chapters (12-14).

We will consider different sections of these chapters at various times during this series, but for now we will concentrate on one particular sign which God gives through His prophet which will be a feature of the time of the end. It concerns the city of Jerusalem.

Jerusalem, or Zion, as it is also known, has a special place in the purpose of God for He has chosen it for His dwelling place:

*The Lord has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His dwelling place: "This is My resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it" (Psalm 132:13–14).*

It is from this city that God's appointed king will reign in righteousness (Psalms 2:6 and 48:2) and from here His law will go forth to the ends of the earth (Isaiah 2:3, Micah 4:2). Before this happens however, Jerusalem is to be a sign to



the world that the return of the Lord is near. This is what we read in the early verses of Zechariah chapter 12:

*Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of drunkenness to all the surrounding peoples, when they lay siege against Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall happen in that day that I will make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for all peoples; all who would heave it away will surely be cut in pieces, though all nations of the earth are gathered against it (Zechariah 12:2–3).*

Jerusalem is to be a cup of drunkenness to all the surrounding peoples and a heavy stone for all people, and all who burden themselves with her will hurt themselves. The Authorised Version refers to Jerusalem as “a burdensome stone”. Jerusalem will become the focus of all the nations of the earth and it will become a burden to them. And isn't this just what we see today? Jerusalem is hardly ever out of the world news. The city was under foreign domination for millennia. Back in 1947 when the recently formed United Nations voted on the partition of Palestine between Jews and Arabs it was intended that Jerusalem become an international city.

The subsequent War of Independence in 1948 saw Jerusalem divided between Jew and Arab with Israel occupying the New City and Jordan the Old City. This situation changed again with the Six-Day War in 1967 when the entire city came under Jewish control and in 1980 it was proclaimed as the capital of Israel.

### **Continuing Controversy**

The decisive victory of the Israelis in 1967 did not, however, end the controversy over the future of Jerusalem.

In fact tensions have continued to intensify since that time. Why is it that Jerusalem features so largely in today's world news? Why are so many nations concerned about it?

Under normal circumstances such a city should be of little interest to anyone; but Jerusalem is no ordinary city for it is sacred to three world religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

- The Jews insist that it is their ~~undivided~~ and ~~eternal~~ capital and that they will never give it up.
- The Palestinians want it as the capital of a Palestinian State.
- The Christians want it as an international city.

There have been many attempts to bring peace to the Middle East. All of these have so far failed because Jerusalem is always the stumbling block in any negotiations. It continues to be a heavy stone to all those who attempt to bring about a solution. Tensions will continue to rise and will eventually boil over when world opinion turns heavily against Israel, as is becoming evident today. Nations will act in a united attempt to bring about a permanent solution to the Middle East conflict. When they come against Jerusalem they will initially succeed. Man however is not in control of the future of Jerusalem, God is. This is what the prophet Zechariah says:

*Behold, the day of the Lord is coming, and your spoil will be divided in your midst. For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; the city shall be taken, the houses rifled, and the women ravished. Half of the city shall go into captivity, but the remnant of the*

*people shall not be cut off from the city. Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle (Zechariah 14:1–3).*

It is God who will solve the Middle East problem. For now, what we see happening with regard to Jerusalem . the heavy stone that burdens all who concern themselves with her . is a sign that the time of God's intervention in the affairs of this world is drawing near.

**By John Shepley**

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