

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Man's Kingdom and God's

I Daniel was grieved in my spirit in the midst of my body, and the visions of my head troubled me. I came near unto one of them that stood by, and asked him the truth of all this. So he told me, and made me know the interpretation of the things. These great beasts, which are four, are four kings, which shall arise out of the earth. But the saints of the most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever. (Daniel 7:15-18)

A rather common view of contemporary Christians, particularly those holding to a dispensational view of end-times, is that Satan is now fully in charge of this world. With nearly endless variation from one believer in this view to the next, the idea is that Satan is now ruling, but God shall take His dominion back from Satan at the "rapture" and during the millennium. To be quite honest, this view cannot be supported by Scripture. I can readily find passages that tell us that God has given authority over the natural world in which we live to man (Psalm 8 as just one of many such examples), but I can find no passage that says God has given such authority over to His arch-enemy Satan. Satan may well claim such a position, but, as is always the case, the smoothest liar of all time cannot justify His claim.

In our study passage we see a heavenly scene that unfolds as the victorious, resurrected, and now glorified Jesus ascends back into heaven's glory, is welcomed there, and seated on His throne. If He isn't presently the "...King of kings, and Lord of lords..." (1 Timothy 6:15), what is the significance of His sitting on heaven's throne? Is He ruling over a non-existent world or kingdom? Or is He ruling over God's universe?

Why would Daniel be grieved in spirit and troubled at the news that Jesus ascended back into heaven, wholly successful in His work? The three contemporary prophets who lived through the Babylonian exile, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, frequently refer to "my people" in their writings. Daniel uses this term in 9:20, but you will find several indirect references in his book to his, the Jewish people.

In our study passage and its context we see four specific references to "the saints of the most High." Daniel thus broadens the scope of God's blessings beyond one nation, the Jewish people.

*And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that **all people, nations, and languages**, should serve him: his dominion is*

an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed. (Daniel 7:14)

I added bold emphasis to the words that make this point. We should view this verse as a rather troubling revelation to Daniel. There seems to be an underlying question, "But what about my people?" The fact is that Daniel's people shall no longer enjoy their "favored nation" status with God after they reject their Messiah, God Incarnate. What does Jesus say just before His arrest and crucifixion regarding this nation?

Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. (Matthew 23:38-39)

In God's spiritual "kingdom" from the ascension of Jesus till the Second Coming blessings and favors do not fall on people because of race or culture, but because of His grace and their "gracious" response in acknowledging His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. I believe the absence of a special place of blessing for the Jews in God's revelation to Daniel explains the prophet's concern and grief.

But the saints of the most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever. Do not forget the context of this verse, the First Advent and Jesus' ascension, not the Second Coming. Paul affirms this same truth.

For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. (1 Corinthians 15:25-26)

According to Paul, Jesus presently reigns and shall continue to reign till His last enemy, death, is destroyed. An old poet/hymn writer captures this truth clearly.

His own soft hand shall wipe the tear
From sorrow's weeping eye,
And pains, and groans, and griefs, and fears,
And **death itself shall die.**

God has not promised that His kingdom, that unique kingdom seen and possessed only by the "...saints of the most High..." shall be called by a certain name or that it shall perpetually exist in a certain country or geographic area, but He has promised that it surely shall survive until the Second Coming.

*Unto him be glory in the church by Christ
Jesus throughout all ages, world without end.
Amen.* (Ephesians 3:21)

I love it when a preacher is so enthused about a truth he preaches that he "Amens" his own point, but I love it far more when an inspired apostle does so. This simple verse refutes every claim made by the various pseudo-Christian groups that Biblical Christianity wholly died out, disappeared from the earth, and God called their founders to re-establish it. It also refutes pessimistic notions that the Lord's church shall ever cease to exist. The kingdom that Jesus "set up," not created, during His time on earth still exists, and shall continue to exist until the Second Coming, "...world without end."

But the saints of the most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever. Daniel does not teach that the saints shall dispossess these four world empires. He rather teaches that the saints shall be more concerned with their heavenly kingdom than with human, temporary, and failed kingdoms.

While Scripture uses various terms that relate to God's "kingdom" in a variety of ways, in the context of spiritual matters Paul defines it quite simply.

*For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink;
but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the
Holy Ghost.* (Romans 14:17)

God's "kingdom" that is uniquely occupied by "the saints of the most High" is not so complex or convoluted that one needs the intelligence of a rocket scientist to understand it. Rather God reduces its essential and defining quality to such simplicity that a little child can grasp it. People who honor God—and people whom God honors—are people who understand and live by the three essential criteria named in this verse.

1. Righteousness. They don't simply talk the talk on Sunday morning. They live it 24/7. They need not constantly boast of how they live. They do understand that the kingdom of their homeland does not belong to them. It is not all about them and what is good for them. They so fully understand that this kingdom is God's unique possession that they pay no heed to themselves—they deny themselves—and live for Him; live for Him according to His rules not their own private rules.
2. Peace. A self-centered "saint" is the most miserable, un-peaceful person you'll ever meet. The more we forget self and work to serve others the more we discover this pervasive peace that characterizes a faithful person, a true "saint" in God's kingdom.
3. Joy in the Holy Ghost. The true "kingdom" saint does not realize joy at personal successes or attainments, but rather in God. The whole populist paradigm of conservative Christianity today, characterized by the MacArthur controversial "lordship salvation," with its incessant—nearly obsessive—focus on "assurance of salvation," breeds self-focused, self-righteous people who exude anything but such abiding joy as Paul here defines. If I become obsessed with gaining personal assurance of my salvation, it is one small step to my using this same tool to control others by either giving or withholding my assurance to them of their salvation, a tool to control them, not a Biblical vehicle of godly, "kingdom" discipleship. *And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.* (Acts 5:41) If it weren't so pathetic, the scene would be hilarious; to see a man preach on "joy in the Holy Ghost" with such a somber face that one might conclude a smile would cause his face to crumble into a thousand pieces. God's joy, "joy in the Holy Ghost," is pervasive and life-changing. It does not build on favorable circumstances, on a good return on your retirement investments, or on the kudos of people you admire. It does not depend on the person we married or on the region where we live. It builds on our relationship with God.

Daniel has much to teach us. We need to be better students in the "Daniel School," and we need to stop glorifying our degrees from "Jonah School."

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Worship service each Sunday 10:30 A. M.
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