

# God's Millennium

Already the countdown for the year 2000 is ticking. This April will be exactly 1000 days until the Millennium. The Evangelical Alliance wants to make sure that each day is "covered in prayer." Their purpose is to sound a clear message about the birth and mission of Jesus—amidst all the celebrations with the Millennium Expo in Greenwich—and all over the world. Web sites on the internet on the Millennium theme abound. The pope calls it the "Great Jubilee" for the uniting of all Christians (THE POPE SPEAKS, Vol. 42, March/April '97). As the millennial fervor intensifies, some scholars and religious leaders worry that "apocalyptic visions can become as destructive as they are inspiring" (US NEWS & WORLD REPORT, December 15, '97). Talk of "Armageddon" swirls....

In the secular world—amidst grand preparations for parties and commercial enterprising—some would point out that "for the first time in history virtually everyone on earth knows it's coming" (NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC, "Making Sense of the Millennium," January 24, '98). (While other cultures have kept their own calendar, worldwide use of the Christian calendar did not begin until the late 1800s.) The Millennial Foundation—among numerous other organizations—is working toward a utopia they believe can be achieved by science. Other scholars would say the date 2000 A.D. is "precisely arbitrary" (S.J.Gould, QUESTIONING THE MILLENNIUM: A RATIONALIST'S GUIDE TO A PRECISELY ARBITRARY COUNTDOWN). In any case, a deep sense of longing and waiting for a better world, "a new global order," apparently surfacing at our millennium's end. All of man's history has been one long groan for a time of peace, harmony and happiness. Is this desire merely for a utopia (Gk. lit. *no place*) that will never come? Where does the idea of a thousand years come in?

## Early Christian Expectations

The "Millennium" idea is specifically Judeo-Christian. During the first century, the Christian church held firmly to the Apostolic teaching of the second coming of the Lord Jesus, and the establishment then of the long-promised kingdom of God with its rule of righteousness. All faithful Christians would then share in reigning with Christ and blessing the people of earth for "a thousand years" (Revelation 20:2-4). This belief so coincided with the Jewish belief in a Messianic kingdom on earth where Jews would be a "light to the Gentiles" that Jewish disciples assumed Jesus was immediately setting up his millennial kingdom. And the first order of business, they reasoned, was throwing off Roman oppression (Acts 1:6).

As a result, Jesus needed to explain "because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear" (Luke 19:11) that he would first have to go away. Then, he taught by parable that he would afterwards "return" to set up his kingdom (Luke 19:12-15). However, Jesus did not say how long before he would return. In fact, no one would know the "day and hour" beforehand (Mark 13:32). But then he gave them signs that they should watch for at the end of the age to indicate that he had returned. "What shall be the

sign of thy coming [presence, Gk. parousia] and the end of the world [age]?" (Matthew 24:3) The reason they would need signs was because his return would not be obvious: he would not return visibly in the flesh. "My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (John 6:51). Apostle Paul later explained that the "day of the Lord" might overtake them as "a thief in the night" (1 Thessalonians 5:1-6). They might be sleeping and not know the "thief" was already in the house. "Therefore let us not sleep as do others."

## Too Long to Wait for the Millennium

While Christians clung to the promise of this Millennial Kingdom, many soon grew tired of being persecuted and just waiting. When the kings of earth proposed an alliance with Christians, the church "married" them and set up their own kingdom. The then prevailing idea of the millennium was adjusted to say that Jesus Christ would come after the Millennium. Thus the church became apostate and enjoyed its own millennium of power—roughly from the ninth to the nineteenth centuries. But at the close of World War I, when the church-state governments of Europe collapsed, Christians generally gave up on saying the kingdom had come and again were looking for Jesus Christ to come and set up his Millennial Kingdom.

## Apocalyptic Prophecy

But very lurid apocalyptic events—based on Daniel and Revelation—were called upon to shake up people into preparing for the return of Jesus to set up his Millennial Kingdom. Intellectuals and thinking people were turned off by prospects of beasts, falling stars and an antichrist superman wielding power and deluding the whole world. But don't the Scriptures tell us about beasts, stars and the antichrist? The beasts originate in the book of Daniel. And God gives us a clue for decoding what these beasts are. Daniel identifies Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, as the head of gold on the image he dreamed about (Daniel 2:38). The dream of this image of four parts is parallel to yet another dream Daniel had of four beasts. The "head of gold" was the Babylonian empire dominating over Israel; then the first beast was the Babylonian empire dominating over Israel, God's people. Beasts are, therefore, governments!

Out of the fourth "terrible" beast pops up a "little horn" "with a mouth speaking great things" and makes "war with the saints" for three and one half symbolic "times" (or 1260 "years," mar. NAS Daniel 7:7, 21, 25). How interesting that also in Revelation a leopard-like beast appears with a "mouth speaking great things" and also "makes war with the saints" (Revelation 13:2-5). What emerged first as a little power ("horn") out of the Pagan Roman government later becomes a beast in its own right, the "Holy Roman Empire." Surprising to many is the fact that papacy historically has wielded civil power as a government. In fact, the Catholic church claimed to be Christ's Kingdom on earth. But for 300 years Protestants identified papacy as the "antichrist" (*anti = in place of*). Papacy's Kingdom took the place of Christ's Millennial Kingdom. *The antichrist has already come!* And the antichrist has already been "revealed"—the prerequisite *before* the Second Coming (2 Thessalonians 2:1,2). But the world is deceived now—expecting a single

superman antichrist to appear in Jerusalem to deceive everybody before Christ returns in the flesh.

## The Second Coming

According to a recent Associated Press poll, nearly one out of every four Christian adults—an estimated 26.5 millions people—expect Jesus to arrive in their lifetimes (Springfield, OH, NEWS-SUN, October 26, '97) With the approaching new millennium, many feel a special sense of urgency—expecting to be soon "raptured" to heaven. Sadly, they also believe those who are not Christians would be doomed eternally. Consequently, these feel an additional sense of urgency to save as many souls as possible...friends, relatives, people in Africa, India, China.

Critics may point out that Christians have many times been aroused through the centuries to believe that Jesus was about to return to set up his Millennial Kingdom. *What is so different about now?* By the way, what happens to the billions who are not ready for this Kingdom?

What is different now is that *Jews have returned to their ancient homeland* - this was a "sign" Jesus gave to his disciples (Matthew 24:32,33). It was a sign that he would be present and that soon the world would be blessed (as in "summer") in his Kingdom. He gave other signs too. There would be "great *tribulation* such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time" (Matthew 24:21). This agrees with what the Apostle said, "The day of the Lord cometh upon them as *travail* upon a woman with child" (1 Thessalonians 5:3). "Travail" is in spasms. Daniel also explains that when Michael ("*who as God,*" Jesus) stands up, he would not only stand up for Daniel's people Israel, but that "there shall be a time of *trouble* such as never was since there was a nation" (Daniel 12:1).

Therefore, when Christ begins to reign, "the nations were angry" (Revelation 11:15-17). There is trouble. This century has seen unprecedented global trouble. This century has also seen the restoration of Israel—and even Jerusalem. The other two signs of Jesus standing up to reign and take authority are: (1) "Many shall run to and fro"; (2) "Knowledge shall be increased" (Daniel 12:4). Who can question the incredible and unprecedented advances in technology in the last century? By these "signs" we know Christ has already come. Those who are not "sleeping" should be able to see these signs and "lift up their heads and rejoice; for your deliverance draweth nigh" (Luke 21:28).

## After Armageddon - World Peace

Rather than just a few Christians being saved and the rest of the world being condemned, the Scriptures describe the purpose of the Millennial reign of Christ as the time to bless all mankind—friends, relatives, the people of Africa, India, China—everyone. The Prophet Zephaniah describes this gathering of the nations to Armageddon and the pouring out of his anger—and also what happens afterwards. "My determination is to gather the nations...to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger, for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire [symbolic of destruction of society] of my jealousy. For

then will I turn to the people [who do *not* know God's truth] a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent" (Zephaniah 3:8,9).

While God's Millennium begins with trouble and travail because he sends His Son as a conquering King invading Satan's world - the results will be glorious and satisfying. When the whole groaning, waiting creation sees the "manifestation of the sons of God" (Romans 8:19-22), God's Millennium will satisfy the "desire of all nations" for peace and happiness (Haggai 2:7). People will say, "Lo, this is our God, we have waited for him." God's Millennial Kingdom is not a utopia after all, but also a Paradise on earth. In fact, we can see visible signs in the earth that God's Millennium is already being established.

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