

# THE BAPTIST HOUR

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## *The Eternal Kingdom*

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## The Eternal Kingdom

SCRIPTURE—Revelation 11:15-18

TEXT—“*The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever*”—Revelation 11:15.

On July 4 President John F. Kennedy issued what has been called a “**declaration of interdependence.**” It was a call to the nations of western Europe to move toward a coalition of nations patterned after the union of the several states comprising the United States. The hope behind this proposal is that these two great unions could become the most powerful force in history working for a solution to the problems facing our modern world.

Neither my ability nor inclination invites a judgment as to the merits of this proposal. But it does serve to point up the desire within the heart of man for that day when men “*shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: [when] nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more*” (Isa. 2:4).

Is this just an empty, poetic dream, or will it some day become a reality? In modern times many efforts have been exerted to make it the latter. It produced an ideal in the heart of Woodrow Wilson, an ideal which fell short of fruition in the downfall of the ill-fated League of Nations. It led Wendell Wilkie to coin the famous phrase “One World.” Some speak today in terms of a World Federation. The United Nations expresses the desire of many nations to produce such a world by providing a forum for debate and an international military unit to enforce its decisions. But confusion and near-chaos continue to plague the world.

What does the Bible say about this? It holds forth no such hope to be realized through political maneuver or military might. But it does foresee the day when the sovereignty of this world shall bow to the rule of one King. It prophesies the day when

*“the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever”* (Rev. 11:15).

The book of Revelation is a book of mystery. If you read it with enlightened imagination you catch the mighty sweep of history past, present, and future (1:19). It depicts the cosmic struggle between good and evil, righteousness and unrighteousness, God and Satan. The central figure in this panorama is Christ, the *“Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending . . . which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty”* (1:8). And its central message is victory for Christ and those who are His.

The climax of the book is found in Chapter 11, verse 15. *“The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.”*

As we consider these majestic words, let us note, first, the sovereignty; second, the struggle; third, the serenity.

**First, consider the sovereignty.** *“The kingdoms of this world.”* So reads the King James Version. But the Greek word is singular, not plural. It may more aptly be translated *“sovereignty.”* It does not refer to many kingdoms, but to one sovereign rule over the world. So we may read our text *“The sovereignty of this world is become the sovereignty of our Lord, and of his Christ . . . .”*

Now what is *“the sovereignty of this world?”* It means the rule of Satan in this world, a rule which is evident in both the nations of the earth and the hearts of individual men. Jesus called Satan *“the prince of this world”* (John 12:31). This does not mean that God is not sovereign in the universe. It refers primarily to the power of Satan as expressed in history. That Satan’s power is evident everywhere in history needs no proof at this point.

But our text points to that time in history when the sovereignty of God in Christ replaces the sovereignty of

Satan. The verb "become" means to come into being. The tense of the verb is called the aorist, and expresses what is called point action. In short, it says that at a given time in history God asserts His sovereignty. Now to what times does it refer?

**It does not refer to God's sovereign rule in His universe. For that is eternal.** It did not come into being, for it always has been. Some say that it speaks of the end of the world, when Satan shall be cast into the lake of fire and Christ shall reign supreme. But there is good reason to think otherwise.

Note that this verse does not come at the end of Revelation or immediately after the scene of judgment (Rev. 20), as such a view would seem to indicate. Rather it comes almost in the middle of the book. To me this is significant.

Furthermore, the verb "become" will bear examination. While it could be translated as a present perfect tense with a future effect, the more natural rendering would be a past tense, or "became." If this be true then we must look to a time prior to the writing of the Revelation. At a given point of time in past history *"the sovereignty of this world became the sovereignty of our God, and of his Christ . . . ."* And if we look for such a time what would seem to be the most logical one?

**To me this point of time would be the incarnation of God in the person of Jesus Christ.** In passing it is of interest to note that Revelation 12 gives an apocalyptic account of the birth of Jesus.

But when we look at the record of the incarnation what do we find? When the angel Gabriel came to Mary he said, *"And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS . . . . and of his kingdom [sovereignty] there shall be no end"* (Luke 1:31-33). When John the Baptist announced the Christ he said, *"Repent ye: for the kingdom [sovereignty] of heaven is at hand"* (Matt.

3:2). He did not say that it was coming. He said, "It is at hand. It is here." In short, when the King came, His sovereignty was declared. God who is sovereign in the universe entered history to declare His sovereignty there as well.

It was not a sovereignty which went undisputed. For Satan did not immediately capitulate, nor has he yet done so. But his right to sovereignty was denied by a sovereign God. And in the ensuing struggle God will be victorious.

**Second, note the struggle.** "*The sovereignty of this world became the sovereignty of our Lord, and of his Christ . . .*" "Lord" in this text refers to God. "Christ" is the Messiah, the anointed of God, by whose redemptive work Satan will be dethroned and man redeemed. Both "Lord" and "Christ" refer to God in two different revelations of Himself. And as we focus our thoughts upon Christ, we are brought into the realm of history where Christ was Jesus in the flesh.

Now let me refer you once again to the account in Revelation. We have noted that our text comes in the middle of the book. Immediately thereafter we read of the birth of "*a son [best texts], who was to rule all nations . . .*" (12:5). Verse 5 says that this son was caught up to God, which suggests Jesus' ascension after His resurrection. But His right to rule was contested. The revelator pictures war in heaven. This seems to be a renewed attack by Satan after Christ's return to heaven. Satan is cast out and into the earth, where the conflict continues. But there is a difference. Whereas the war against Satan in heaven was waged by "*Michael and his angels*" (v. 7), the conflict on earth is waged by the people of Christ. "*And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death*" (v. 11).

Now in the midst of this account is a most interesting verse. "*Now is come salvation, and strength, and the*

*kingdom [sovereignty] of our God, and the power of his Christ . . . ."* (v. 10). This is a summation of the established sovereignty of "God, and of his Christ." We realize that we are dealing here with apocalyptic language. But the imagery is clear. It depicts the conflict between Christ and Satan, a conflict which began on earth, continued in heaven, and then culminates on earth in the person of the people of Christ.

Now when we turn to more earthly things what do we find? God declared His sovereignty in history at the birth of Jesus. Immediately, in the person of Herod, Satan sought to kill Jesus and thus retain his sovereign rule in the world. Failing here, he sought to deter the purpose of God. The initial direct encounter between Jesus and Satan was in Jesus' first temptation experience. Satan offered to give Jesus the sovereignty of the world in return for one act of worship. Had Jesus agreed, Satan still would have been sovereign. But he refused. In one way, and only one, could Satan's sovereignty be destroyed. And though Satan repeatedly sought to turn Jesus aside, He ever set His face toward the cross.

On the cross Jesus paid the price for sin, the fruit of Satan's sovereignty in history and in men. Then in His resurrection Jesus broke the power of Satan as He conquered death. Henceforth Satan's sovereignty was destroyed. We have seen that Revelation pictures Satan as storming heaven only to fail. Henceforth the struggle continues on earth, as Satan seeks to maintain his sovereignty over men.

Now to you this may appear to be fanciful reasoning. But which of you can say dogmatically what struggle goes on in the spiritual realm between the forces of Christ and Satan? Paul reminds us that "*we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against . . . . the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places [in the heavenly places]*" (Eph. 6:12).

So returning to Revelation what do we find? In Revelation 11:15-19 God

declares His sovereignty over the world. The remainder of the book depicts in picture language the conflict between the sovereignty of God and that of Satan, ending in the victory of God in Christ. And central in this struggle in the realm of history is the people of Christ. In a sense before the battle begins victory is promised to the people of Christ. For "*the sovereignty of this world became the sovereignty of our God, and of his Christ . . . .*" The struggle will be hard and furious. But victory is assured.

*“. . . . they overcame by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony . . . .*" The sovereignty of God has been established in the heart of every one who has been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb. By their testimony to Christ's saving power Satan is being dethroned, and the sovereignty of God is being established in the lives of others. And so the struggle goes on.

The promise of God's sovereignty, then, is not something for which we can sit and wait. We are a part of the struggle. We are soldiers of the cross. At times the battle may seem to go against us. But victory is assured. We shall be more than conquerors in and with Christ. "*For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet*" (I Cor. 15:25).

**Third, consider the serenity. “. . . . and he shall reign for ever and ever.”** Yes, the prophet Isaiah foresaw that day when peace would be universal. Not swords and spears but plowshares and pruning hooks. Not war but peace. He was speaking of the reign of Christ, when His sovereignty will no longer be contested by Satan. When "*he shall reign for ever and ever.*" In the midst of struggle we long for that time to come.

But you do not have to wait for that day. You can know it now. For the moment that Christ becomes sovereign in your life, you will know the peace of God which passes understanding. Peace is not something around you but something within you. You can know peace in a storm. Or

you can experience conflict in serene surroundings.

Someone has said, "Peace doth not dwell in outward things, but within the soul; we may preserve it in the midst of bitterest pain, if our wills remain firm and submissive. Peace in this life springs from acquiescence, not in an exemption from suffering."

But another has said it better. "*Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee*" (Isaiah 26:3). Jesus said, ". . . . *in this world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world*" (John 6:33). "*Peace I leave with you: my peace I give unto you. Not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid*" (John 14:27).

For "*the sovereignty of this world became the sovereignty of our God, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.*"

Would you like to be in this kingdom? You can. But first, the kingdom must be in you.

This sermon leaflet is free. However, if you wish to share in the cost of printing and distribution our address is: THE BAPTIST HOUR, P. O. Box 12157, Fort Worth 16, Texas.

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