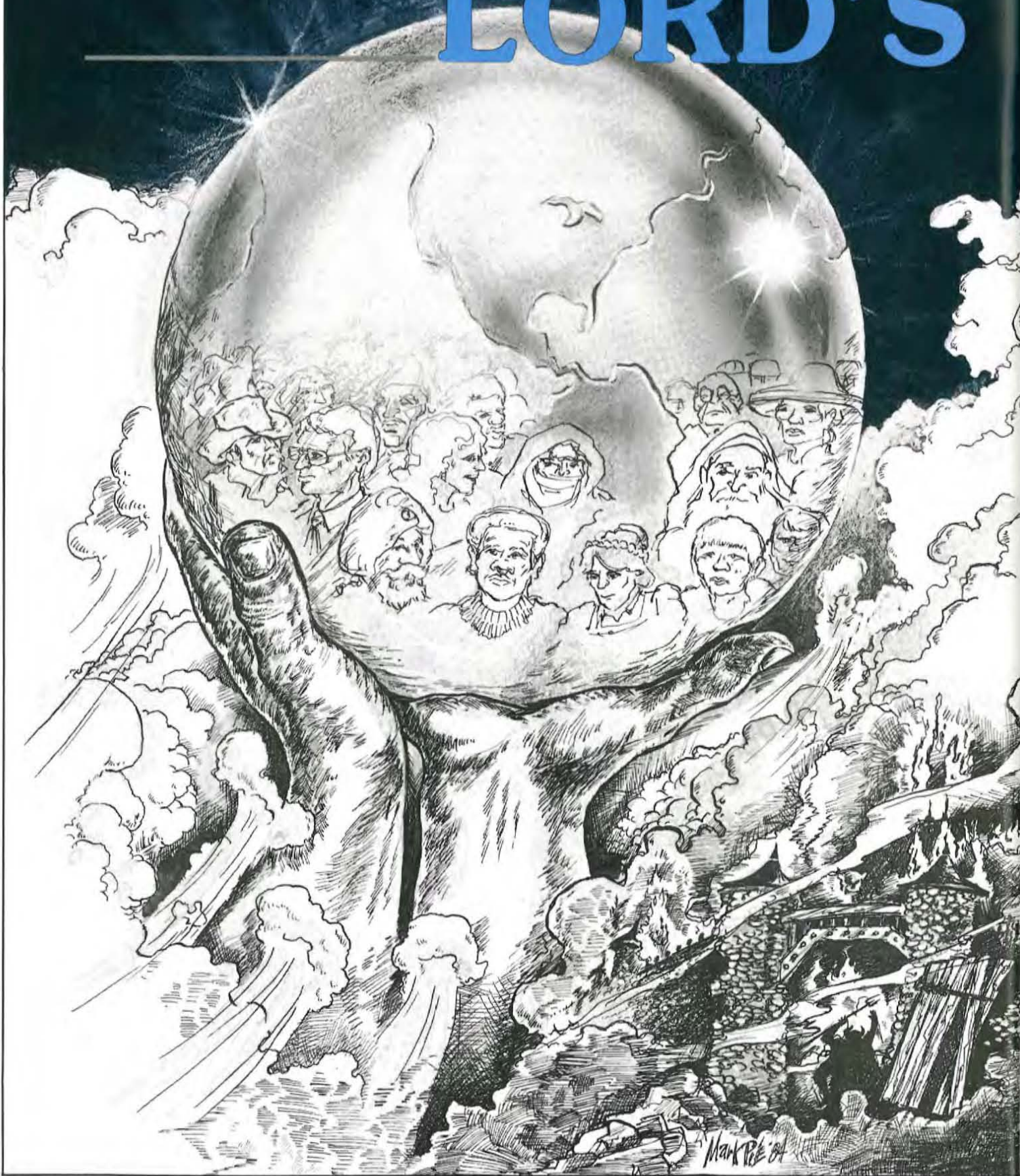


THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S



"Then cometh the end, when He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father."

BY ERN BAXTER

When I was a young boy, I was a soloist in our school's sixty-voice boys choir. One day, our choir leader taught us a hymn that I've remembered ever since, especially one particular line: "Let God be in my head and in my understanding."

I belong to a generation of people who have talked about God in their hearts. But I've come to see that I need God in my head too. I find myself praying again and again, "God, be in my head and in my understanding. God, use my mind as a repository for ultimate truth."

One important reason why I believe we must stretch our minds and understanding is so that we can comprehend God's ultimate purpose in history, which is often referred to as eschatology.

Eschatology is not, as some would say, a particular theory concerning the outcome of history; rather, it is the study of every phase of the end of the world as it is revealed in the life of Jesus Christ. It begins with the inauguration of the kingdom of God at Jesus' birth and ends with the consummation of the Kingdom at His second coming.

The word *eschatology* stems from the Greek word *eschatos*, which is translated "last." Traditionally defined as "the doctrine of the last things," the word *eschatology* occurs about 50 times in the New Testament. The usual understanding of *eschatology* as the last things or days is that it pertains to the future, but that is not the meaning of *eschatology* as it is used in the Scriptures. In

the Bible, it is descriptive of the total time period between Christ's incarnation and His second coming. It refers to a definite time, either lengthy or limited. Hebrews chapter 1 says, for example, that Christ was manifested and revealed in *eschaton*, or in "these last days" (v. 2). And in 1 Peter 1:20 we read that it was for our benefit that Jesus was re-



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vealed in *eschaton*, or in "these last times."

The Bible also tells us that this current age is the one that terminates the ages; all prior ages are fulfilled in this climactic age. Jesus refers to this in the Gospel of John: "Of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day" (Jn. 6:39). The writer of Hebrews says, "[God] hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son" (Heb. 1:2);

and "Now once in the end of the world hath he [Jesus] appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Heb. 9:26).

Our Lord Himself categorically states that He is the fulfillment of the hope of the people of God, the "amen" to all of God's promises. He says in Revelation chapter 1, "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending" (v. 8); "I am . . . the first and the last" (v. 11).

The Meaning of It All

So then, what is God's purpose in history? The answer is victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. We see this as early as the garden of Eden and then in God's promise to Abraham.

Beginning with creation, we find God's victory over sin, for no sooner had man fallen than God made a pronouncement of His intention. In dealing with the serpent's deception, God says to him, "Cursed are you," putting an everlasting curse upon Satan (see Genesis 3:14).

Then in the New Testament that curse is fulfilled. Satan's future was settled once and for all at Calvary, where Jesus Christ destroyed principalities and powers and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in His cross (see Colossians 2:15).

This is further verified in 1 John 3:8, which says, "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." This is a truth that we should fix firmly in our hearts as we do battle with Satan's dying efforts. Because of Jesus' victory, Satan is defeated,

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and we are the army that is running him to hell. The gates of hell shall not prevail against us. God has made us His instruments to effect Satan's defeat in history and establish Jesus as the true ruler of history.

As we move on from God's redemptive pronouncement in the garden, we come to that significant period in history when He starts a new dimension of His purpose in the man called Abram, who was eventually called "the father of the faithful." Speaking to Abram, or Abraham, in Genesis 12:1-3, God says that through him and his seed all the families of the earth will be blessed. That fulfillment is referred to in Romans 4:13:

For the promise, that he should be heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

The promise made to Abraham and his descendants was that they should possess the earth. It remains God's intention that the seed of Abraham should possess the earth. Jesus confirmed that promise when He said that the meek shall inherit the earth (see Matthew 5:5). Hebrews 11:10 says Abraham "looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." That's the city that has been coming down from heaven for 2,000 years—the new Jerusalem.

It will not stop coming until it has engulfed the entire earth, until the earth becomes the scene of the government of God, and our often-repeated prayer "Thy kingdom come" has been fully answered.

The Foundation of Victory

But the foundation of this his-

toric victory is not to be found in something in the future; rather, it is rooted in something in the past, that is, Christ's person and work, what He accomplished in His *first* coming.

Many Christians know more about the second coming than the first, but without the first coming, there would be no second. The second is the consummation of the first. We are to preach the first and refer to the second, not



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preach the second and refer to the first.

If we are caught in a "second coming syndrome," we need to change our ways. Nowhere does the Bible say the preaching of the second coming is the power of God unto salvation. It says the *gospel* is the power of God unto salvation (see Romans 1:16). And the gospel is the historical fact that

"Christ died for our sins ac-

ording to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and rose again the third day according to the scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3-4).

This is the gospel, Paul says, "by which also ye are saved" (1 Cor. 15:2). We should let the first coming, that is, when God became incarnate, grip our hearts. That in itself is a mind-boggling revelation—that the God who made the universe, and who upholds all things by the word of His power, that very God nestled in the virgin womb of a little peasant girl was born a human being and became one of us. The second coming pales in majesty beside the incarnation. The incarnation is the magnificent invasion of God into history through Jesus Christ!

The Person of Jesus

For 33 years this human yet divine being walked across the stage of history. With His impeccable life, His majestic poise and bearing, the wisdom of His words, the delightful balance of His personality, His submission and obedience to the Father, He came striding into history superior to every other human being. He came not by evolution, but as the incarnation of God in the flesh. The Apostle John says, "We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (Jn. 1:14).

In Jesus Christ, God Almighty condescended to appear in human form and present Himself before men as the divine ideal for ultimate manhood. During all His earthly years, Jesus was subjected to the scrutiny of His Father. Three times from heaven the Father did for Jesus what He had done for no other man in all history—He opened heaven and said, "This is My Son and I like what I see." The Father found no flaw in His Son.

John, Jesus' cousin, standing in the muddy waters of the Jordan, pointed to Him and said, "Look, everyone. There goes the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world" (see John 1:29).

Now this is the thing to remember: If Jesus Christ—the Logos, the Son, the second person of the trinity—had become incarnate and had moved among men in perfection only to go back to heaven and leave us with the picture of what man could aspire to be but never become, then man would have lived out his days in despair. But He didn't come just to show us what God is like, He came, as the Nicene Creed so majestically states, "for us men and for our salvation."

When Jesus was transfigured and stood with Moses and Elijah, Peter was overwhelmed by what he saw. He had seen Jesus do many miracles but he'd never seen Jesus like this. To Peter, this was it! He wanted to remain on the mountain and build monuments to Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. If He had listened to Peter, Jesus would have been kept there forever. We could have come and worshiped Him, then died and gone to hell. We could have come and taken away souvenirs from the mountain and then died and gone to hell. But Jesus left that mountain of majesty for a mountain of humiliation, where He was nailed to a cross. Then, having died for our sins, He took with Him a great host of sons and daughters into the presence of the Father and said, "Here I am, Father, and the children Thou hast given Me" (see Hebrews 2:13).

The Work of Christ

The Christ of the transfiguration is majestic, but only the Christ of Calvary is redemptive. What did He do for us? Look at the list:

1. He tasted death for every man. Christ died for our sins.
2. He defeated Satan. The prince of this world is judged and he remains judged.
3. He judged the world. This world system, trying to function apart from God, is a cursed city. It's a doomed metropolis waiting for its end. But emerging out of it is another city that is eternal in nature.
4. He became Lord of all: the



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Church, the Communist nations, the capitalist nations, the Third World nations. He is Lord of the nations and has commissioned us as His representatives to go and to bring under His rule the nations over which He became Lord as a result of His *first* coming—not His second.

5. He created a new race, a new species. We are not just reformed human beings, not just some old patched-up species. We are a brand-new race. For when Jesus

Christ stepped out of Joseph's tomb on that first Easter morning, He did so as the firstborn from among the dead, the beginning of a whole new kind of being, consisting of that which is both human and divine.

6. He established a victorious reign. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:25, "For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet."

I'm saying that the *first* coming is the important coming, the meaningful coming. The *first* coming is the coming that we must preach. What do we know about the second coming apart from the fact that He's coming again?

All Authority on Earth

Jesus' victorious reign means that all authority opposed to Him must be subjugated to Him before the end comes. We read in 1 Corinthians 15:22-24:

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the first-fruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power.

When Jesus arose from the dead, He said to His disciples, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Mt. 28:18 NAS). That means in the United States of America, Jesus Christ has all authority. In the Soviet Union, Jesus Christ has all authority. In China, Jesus Christ has all authority. It means there isn't a better gospel coming. There isn't a better Jesus yet to be revealed. There isn't a greater redemption waiting to be unveiled. It's done. It's finished. When Jesus cried on the cross,

"It is finished," He said it all.

I am declaring that the gospel is destined to be victorious in time, space, and history; and that Jesus Christ will remain in heaven until all things spoken of by the prophets have come to pass. That means that the redeemed community is destined in history to become the visible representation of Jesus Christ's authority on earth, and that all nations will one day walk in the light of His authority.

Continuing in 1 Corinthians chapter 15, verse 26 says, "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death."

We must remember that the demise of the last enemy, death, has been reserved for a certain clearly defined event of God. Death will be destroyed in the act called the Parousia, or the second coming of Christ. At that point in history, when all things have been subdued by Christ, the last enemy will be defeated.

We are redeemed, but not yet glorified. And we will not be glorified until that point described in history as the last trump, the coming of the Lord, and the resurrection from the dead. Only then will our mortality give way to immortality and our corruptibility to incorruptibility.

What God Is Doing

Putting all this of what God is doing on the earth in a more practical context, let me quote from a book by C. Peter Wagner, a professor at Fuller Theological Seminary.

We are in the springtime of Christian missions. The last couple of decades of the twentieth century hold forth more promise for the dynamic spread of the Christian faith around the globe than any other period of time since Jesus turned the water into wine... Yes, the ice of the

wintertime is thawing and the grass is turning green. The decade of the seventies saw some of the most significant advances in world missions yet recorded... each day welcomes a net increase of at least 78,000 Christians on this planet... In many parts of Latin America the Protestant churches are growing three times the rate of the popula-



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tion. Back in 1900, only 50,000 Protestants were to be found in Latin America. The number passed 1 million in the 1930s, 2 million in the 1940s, 5 million in the 1950s, 10 million in the 1960s, and by 1980 the figure was over 20 million. Some predict that by the end of the century there will be 100 million Protestants in Latin America... In East Africa, a little group of 10 that split

from the Catholic church in 1962 has grown to 150,000... One hundred years ago there were no churches in Korea. Now in the city of Seoul alone there are 6,000... Unquestionably, the greatest surprise in world Christianity in recent years was the discovery of church growth in China. When the missionaries were expelled in 1949-50 and the bamboo curtain fell, hopes were not high. At the time there was a total of about 1 million Chinese believers... now even conservative estimates range between 30 and 50 million.¹

We see in the Scriptures God's purpose in history and we see it being manifested on earth even now. Jesus Christ is on the march. The King of kings is taking over. The world has run out of options, but the eternal light is shining ever brighter. The kingdom of God is on its way. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. □

Footnote

¹*On the Crest of the Wave* by C. Peter Wagner. Copyright 1984 by C. Peter Wagner. Published by Regal Books, Ventura, CA. Used by permission.

Ern Baxter, a longtime leader in the charismatic renewal, pastored one of the largest evangelical churches in Canada for twenty years. Since that time, he has traveled extensively in ministry throughout the United States and abroad. Ern is a member of the Integrity Communications Board of Directors. He and his wife, Ruth, recently moved to San Diego, California, where he is involved with South Coast Christian Fellowship. His time is divided between working with the fellowship and continuing his traveling ministry.