

## THIS AGE AND THE AGE TO COME

In the Gospels Jesus speaks precisely of “*this age*” and “*the age to come*.” “...Whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in *this age* or in *the age to come*.” (Matt. 12:32) “...He will receive a hundred times as much now in *the present age*...and in *the age to come*, eternal life” (Mk. 10:30). “Jesus said to them, ‘The sons of *this age* marry and are given in marriage but those who are considered worthy to attain to *that age* and the resurrection of the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage’” (Luke 20:34, 35).

First, we will define the two ages, then look at them both in depth. “This age” of which Jesus was speaking was the age of the Jewish system, beginning with the giving of the law on Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19, 20), and ending with the destruction of Jerusalem and the entire Jewish system in 70 AD. (Matt. 24, Heb. 10:19). The “age to come,” we believe, began with the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish system and will last until “the end, when he delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when he has abolished all rule and authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death...and when all things are subjected to him, then the son will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to him, that God may be all in all” (I Cor. 15: 24-28). Anything beyond this is what the Apostle Paul designates as “the ages to come” (Eph. 1:21, 2:7), of which nothing is revealed.

Before the beginning of *this age* there was the age of the Patriarchs in which God laid the foundation for the beginning of the Jewish system. The Lord called Abraham, made covenant with him and promised to make of him a great nation and give him the land “from the river of Egypt to the great river Euphrates;” but his descendants would be enslaved for four hundred years, then He would bring them out and they would possess the land promised to Abraham (Genesis 12-16). This promise God made to Abraham was partially fulfilled four hundred years later when God brought Israel into Sinai and gave Moses the law (Exodus 19), thus establishing the Jewish system which Jesus referred to as “*this age*.” God’s purpose in establishing the Jewish system was stated in Exodus 19:5, 6: “Now if you will obey My voice and keep My covenant ...you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” The Jewish nation was to be a priesthood to the world as God’s Holy people. Their failure to do this is pointed out by the Apostle Paul in Romans 2:17-24 where he states what their calling involved and how they had failed, and his conclusion was “the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you! (ver. 24). This sordid history of the nation is described in detail by all the books of prophesy and is summed up in these words: “...they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words and scoffed His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, until there was no remedy.” They spent seventy years in captivity in Babylon only to return to their own land and in a few years were taken into semi-captivity by the Romans. It was during this time of tyranny and domination, “when the fullness of time came God sent forth His son, born of a woman, born under

the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law” (Gal. 4:4, 5). The climax of *this age* is the life, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ as recorded in the four gospels. These events bring *this age* (the whole existence of the O.T. Jewish system) to an end, but in fact the end did not become a reality until 70 AD when Christ fulfilled his prophesy of its destruction (Matthew 24) to completely destroy the nation. Jesus spoke of this judgment the high priest would live to see when he told him: “hereafter you will see the son of man sitting on the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven” (Matt. 26:64). This speaks of the ascension and Jesus given authority and power (Psalm 110:1) and “coming in the clouds of heaven” was a sign of judgment (Isa. 19:1). Jesus said the priest would *see* this take place. The destruction of Jerusalem brought an end to the temple worship the sacrifices and the priesthood as well as the nation itself by the scattering of the people into the nations of the world. This fulfills the words of Jesus spoken to the chief priests and the elders of the people: “Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation producing the fruit of it” (Matt. 21:43). The Apostle Peter identifies this “nation” as the believers: “You are *chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of God’s own possession* so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (I Pet.2:9). Thus, the church has been called to the task Israel failed to do, and what Jesus called *the age to come* has been fully inaugurated. In *this age to come* the church, as Israel, has failed in producing the fruit of the kingdom and realizing the fact that they are a chosen race, a royal priesthood and a holy nation. It has not realized what being God’s holy possession means.

Based on the Scriptures quoted in the first paragraph of this article, most Bible scholar place *the age to come* after the second appearing of Christ and the resurrection of the dead. The contrast Jesus makes with the things of *this age* and *the age to come*, such as there being no marriage or given in marriage, takes place after the resurrection (Luke 20:34, 34). In speaking of the believer Paul states: “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation: old things are past away; behold, all things are become new” (II Cor. 5:17). This means the “new heaven and new earth” (Rev. 21:1) are a present as well as a future reality. The New Creation will exist after the final judgment, but it exists, definitively in the present age, that is in Jesus’ words, *the age to come*. *The age to come*, as we have shown, actually began with the destruction of Jerusalem and continues until “... all things are subjected to him, then the son himself will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to him, so that God may be all in all” (I Cor. 15:28).

That Zion and the heavenly Jerusalem is a present reality and not things that are ours in the distant future is seen in that fact stated in Heb.12:22-24 that we have come “to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of the new

covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.” Since it is true that we have come to Jesus it is true we have come to everything else mentioned in these verses. Myriads of angels in festive assembly are not now instruments of judgment but are “sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation” (Heb. 1:14). We have come to the church of the “firstborn of all creation who is the image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15) whose names are enrolled in heaven’s book of life (Luke 10:20); to God, the judge of all, showing He is dealing with all people, not just the Jews (Rom. 3:12-20); to the spirits of righteous men made perfect. Apart from us the saints of the Old Testament were not made perfect, because they did not receive the promises (Heb. 11:39,40). The law could make no one perfect (Heb. 10:1) but by the offering of Christ he has “perfected for all time those who are sanctified” (Heb. 10:14), but this is in the spirit and we await the perfection of the body (Rom. 8:23).

The Hebrews had to be told they had “come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.” Are we any more aware of this truth than they were, and does it really make any difference? “You *have come*” means “God has blessed us with *every* spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ” (Eph. 1:3) and that “His divine power has granted to us *all things* pertaining to life and godliness through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence” (II Pet. 1:3), and we have received the Spirit from God that we might know the things freely given to us by God...we have the mind of Christ” (I Cor. 2:12, 16). The problem is the religious world of today does not believe this. They have been told that all these blessings come only after we die, and we cannot realize them in the here and now. We are not “marching to Zion,” we are already there, and we are not going someday to “the city of God” we are now dwelling in it. Abraham looked for it; the prophets spoke of it, the Psalmist sang about it, the Hebrew writer describes it as a reality and Revelation describes it in symbols. The problem of conservative Christianity is we don’t really believe we have *come* to Mt. Zion, the city of the living God. Paul makes it plain in Romans 8:23,24 that our hope is not something we realize “when I die hallelujah by and by” but our hope is that God will raise us from the dead as he raised Christ and will redeem this body along with the redemption of the earth.

Zion was a place, where the ark of God reflected the glory of His presence. Zechariah speaks of that day in these words: “In that day there will be inscribed on the bells of the horses, ‘HOLY TO THE LORD’ and the cooking pots in the Lord’s house will be like the bowls before the altar, and every cooking pot in Jerusalem and in Judah will be holy to the Lord of host, and all who sacrifice will come and take them and boil in them” (Zech. 14:20,21). The expression “holy to the Lord” was the inscription on the miter of the High Priest, who alone could enter the Holy Place and stand in the glory of the Lord before the ark. Zechariah is saying there is a day coming when the people of God, at business, driving through the streets, cooking in the kitchen and going about their daily tasks, would be inscribed (or described) as those who live within the veil, in the very presence of the glory of God and all secular and spiritual division will be gone and all will be spiritual. So, when the Hebrew writer says we “have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” he isn’t speaking of something far off in the future of eternity, but the glory of God that His people know and experience Zion and experience the presence and glory of God that is available to all.

David Chilton in his book *The Days of Vengeance* states it in these words when commenting on Revelation 21:9,10: “The Bride is not just *in* the City; the Bride *is* the City. John’s clear identification of the City as the Bride of Christ serves another demonstration that the City of God is a present as well as future reality. We are the New Jerusalem *now*, as the Bible categorically tells us: “you have come to Mt. Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem...” (Heb. 12:22).” If we don’t accept that we have already come to Zion, the City of God, and that the New Jerusalem is the church we miss the blessings of God in this life and fail to see what we have in Christ *now*. If the greatest blessings of God are “over there” and we must die to reap the full benefits of God’s blessings then victory comes at death and ironically our enemy brings the victory and the grave becomes our idol, as the giver of life. By believing “I won’t have to worry anymore” (we do not worry any more now or at least we are commanded in Philippians 4:6 and the sermon on the Mount to not worry); “Everybody will be happy over there” (we are to be happy, even joyful as we enjoy the blessings of God here); “O, land of rest for thee I sigh” (He is our rest now); “I’ve got a mansion” we are a mansion of God, His dwelling place on earth); There will be peace in the valley for me some day” (Jesus has already given us his peace, John 14:27); “I’ll fly away” (God said *stand* not *fly* away). As much as we dislike the contemporary music that has taken much of the religious community by storm, we will say that it has little to say about our rewards “over there,” in contrast to most traditional hymns and songs. On the other hand, we would say it has little to do with “teaching and admonishing one another” concerning the blessings available to the believer in the here and now. These words are not meant to take away anyone’s comfort or joy in singing either kind of music, rather it is to simply point out the blessings of God are not all realized after we die.

Perhaps the text used most to say all the blessings are “over yonder” and that we are not living *in the age to come* is I Corinthians 2:9, a very much used text at funerals: “Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man all that God has prepared for those who love Him.” The trouble is the next verse is seldom read in conjunction with this great promise: “for to us God revealed them through the Spirit for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God.” The things Isaiah was speaking of, according to Paul, have been revealed to us so we can know them *now*. He further states: “now we have received the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely give to us by God” (ver. 12). Making the *age to come* all in the future robs us of the promise for the present.

All this is not to say all the blessings of God are in this life, rather it is to show us what we have here and now as we are “waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body” (Rom. 8:23). The Apostle John says: “See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God, and such we are. For this reason, the world does not know us because it did not know him. Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not yet appeared what we shall be. We know that, when he appears, we shall be like him, because we shall see him just as he is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (I John 3:1-3). This is “the hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us” (Heb. 6:19, 20).