

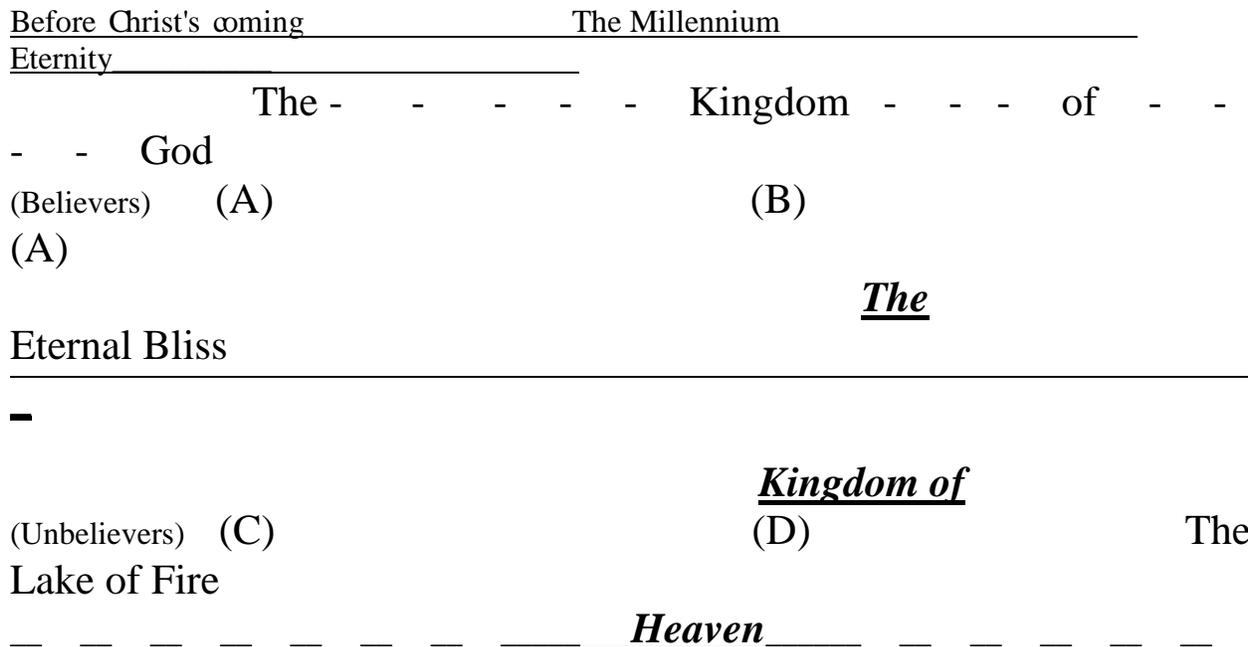
The Blessed Hope -- Some Terms to be Defined

Two people can read the same verse and get different ideas from it for, often, the words do not mean the same thing to the one as they do to the other. The story is told of one pastor who had emphasized water baptism to the point that, whatever his text, he usually ended up preaching on water baptism. It was said of him, "Whenever he sees 'baptism' he thinks 'water' and every time he sees 'water' he thinks 'baptism'."

It seems that some Mid, "Pre-wrath," or Post-Tribulationists have come to the place where every time they see "kingdom" they think "Millennium," and every time they see "tribulation" they think "Great Tribulation." They also want to tie down the expression "the Day of the Lord" to a brief period at the very close of "the time of Jacob's trouble" when God Himself is pouring out judgments direct from heaven. Does Scripture justify these definitions of the terms?

The Kingdom of God

It seems clear that the "kingdom of God" and the "kingdom of heaven" are related, but not identical. The kingdom of God denotes His governmental relationship to believers of all ages. It is spiritual in connotation. The kingdom of heaven, however, is political in character. It has to do with His reign over all men, saved and unsaved, who are on earth during a specific one thousand years of earth's history. These two overlap when believers who are on earth during that thousand years are in view. Believers alive on earth during that time will be in both kingdoms.



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At "(A)" both Jewish saints and members of the Body of Christ are in the kingdom of God because they are saved, but not in the kingdom of the heavens, which is limited to the 1,000 years of the Millennium. At "(B)" they are in both kingdoms. As for the unbelievers (both Jew and Gentile) they are in neither kingdom, neither at "(C)" nor in eternity. At "(D)" they are in the kingdom of the heavens (because they are alive during the Millennium) but not in the kingdom of God (because they are not saved).

Passages relating primarily to believers in the Millennium may (and often do) use either expression.¹ After all, one witness may tell about an accident on First Street and another a collision on Main Street, and both be describing accurately, to the same event -- IF it happened at the intersection of First and Main.

Clearly the concept "the kingdom of God" is not limited to a political kingdom on earth in the future. Weigh the following considerations:

-- God is called the "King Eternal" in 1 Timothy 1:17. If His kingdom comes into existence only after the return of Christ, He has been a King without a kingdom all this time.

-- We have a citizenship. This necessitates a kingdom of which we are citizens. It is not a citizenship in the millennial kingdom, for our citizenship is specifically said to be "in heaven" (Phil. 3:20). "Kingdom saints" are citizens of this spiritual kingdom, even before there is a millennial kingdom in existence, for we are "fellow citizens with the [evidently Jewish] saints" (Eph. 2:19), and later they, in resurrection, will also be citizens of the millennial kingdom (Matt. 8:11).

-- Paul was preaching the kingdom of God during the time he was writing Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. The absence of references to the millennial kingdom in these epistles indicates the words in Acts 28:31 refer to a completely different concept -- one which is in harmony with his written ministry during that time.

-- Paul uses the words when he has a local situation *at that time* in view. "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Romans 14:17). Paul was not describing the characteristics of a kingdom in the distant future. He was pointing out the spiritual nature of the kingdom of God *now*. It is interesting that he mentions *righteousness* and *peace* as being outstanding aspects of the kingdom of God, for Christ, though a Priest after the order of Melchizedec, is (now), like Melchizedec, also a *King* -- King of *Righteousness* and King of *Peace* (Heb. 7:2, 3). Also Paul states, "the kingdom of God is not in word but in power -" (1 Cor. 4:20). It relates to power *at that time* in the lives of the true ministers of Christ -- not power later establishing a worldwide political kingdom.

-- The kingdom of God is being entered into now, rather than in some future day. When

¹While the other Gospels uniformly use the expression "kingdom of God" (having the millennial kingdom as related to *believers* primarily in view), Matthew (with the millennial kingdom specifically in focus -- presenting Christ as its King) normally speaks of the "kingdom of *heaven*."

Paul told the believers in Iconium, Lystra, and Antioch they "must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22), he was referring to what took place at the time of their conversion. He was warning them that becoming a Christian did not mean their lives would henceforth be a "bed of roses." Instead they would have tribulation, much tribulation. He could not have meant they must go through the *Great Tribulation*, for they lived (as we now know) over 1,900 years too soon for that. We can know what Paul meant if we look at 1 Thess. 3:3, 4. "No man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto. For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should *suffer tribulation*; even as IT CAME TO PASS." He had warned them of coming tribulation, as he did those in Acts 14:22, but they had already experienced it! There is no reference in either passage to the Great Tribulation -- which is even yet in the future. As the tribulation of which he had warned them was then present, the kingdom of God must have been a contemporary kingdom.

"Tribulation" and "The Great Tribulation."

Eliphaz once remarked, "Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward" (Job 5:7). Israel has faced trouble, often exceedingly severe trouble, all through her recorded history. Read carefully through the book of Lamentations as one sample of what they have endured in the past. But there is a particular time yet future which is called specifically "the time of Jacob's trouble" (Jer. 30:7).

Oswald T. Allis protests the application of Jeremiah 30:7 to the Great Tribulation. He writes: "'Great' may be used in the sense of 'long' (great in length); and this is favored by the word 'time' which follows. This prophecy was probably uttered before the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. There is no reason for believing it refers exclusively to a brief period of 3 1/2 years which are still wholly future. The time of Jacob's trouble, or affliction, if reckoned, as it may well be, from that destruction of Jerusalem which took place in Jeremiah's day, has been incomparably long; it still continues; and the end is not yet. The times of the Gentiles have been, and will continue to be until their close, a time of trouble for Jacob." ²

The passage says, "The day is great, so that none is like it." As Allis notes, the conclusion of that time coincides with the end of the "Times of the Gentiles." The day closes, not with the return of Israel to the land as recorded in Ezra and Nehemiah, but at the return of Christ. It involves no more enslavement for Jacob (Jer. 30:8) and the resurrection of David to be their king (Jer.30:9). A return from captivity will bring them to a place where they will be in rest with none to make them afraid (this surely could not be said of the return recorded in Ezra and Nehemiah --Jer. 30:10). There will also come the *full end* of *all nations* to which they have been scattered (Jer. 30:11). However the preceding verses indicate it is not the *length* of the day, but its *intensity* that is great. "*For thus saith the LORD; We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace. Ask ye now, and see whether a man doth travail with child? Wherefore do I see every man with his hands on his loins, as a woman in travail, and all faces are turned into paleness?"* (Jer. 30:5, 6).

² "Prophecy and the Church" by Oswald T. Allis. Published by the Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1955. Page 209.

Jeremiah 30:7 describes a day which is *great* so that *none is like it*, while Matthew 24:21 speaks of a *great* tribulation, "*such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.*" Unless they speak of the same time, they are mutually exclusive! Therefore the two must be identical. This being true, the Matthew passage, pointing to a specific beginning, in the future at the time Christ spoke the words (24:14 ff), and still future today, proves that the "time of Jacob's trouble" does have the Great Tribulation in view.

Tribulation (the Greek word θλιψις) was promised to the apostles (John 16:33). Paul uses the word twenty four times and speaks of it as a characteristic of the true believer's life. Not once does he use this word in regard to the future Tribulation, though many of the verses involved would prove helpful to anyone going through that time of distress. But there is a time which is singled out as the greatest period of tribulation the earth will ever see. It is a short time, for if it were not cut short the severity of it would bring about the destruction of all flesh (Matt. 24:21, 22). It is called "the Tribulation, the Great [one]" (Literal Greek of Rev. 7:14).

Every believer of every age will suffer tribulation, but only those, both believers and unbelievers, who are alive during the last half of the seventieth week of Daniel chapter nine, will go through the Great Tribulation. This period of extreme suffering for mankind will begin with the setting up of the abomination of desolation in the future temple in Jerusalem (Matt. 24:15, 21) and will be brought to a conclusion with the outpouring of the vengeance of God at the close of the seven years. Teachers often refer to the entire seven years as the "Tribulation Period," for there will be tribulation even during the first half of that time -- before the Great Tribulation itself begins.³

It is important to realize the vast difference between enduring tribulation, and being in the "Great Tribulation" (or even in the "Tribulation"). The former is the experience to some degree of every saint, while the latter will be the fate of only those who happen to be on earth during a particular time in history.

The Day of the Lord

This expression is used many times in the Old Testament⁴ and several times in the New Testament.⁵ Unquestionably it refers, at times, to the great climax of that day -- the pouring out of the wrath of God directly. However, it cannot be confined only to that exceedingly short period of time at the very close of the Tribulation. For example, in 2 Pet. 3:10 it stretches out into the future for a thousand years. There are clear indications it also, in some contexts, begins some seven years before Christ comes in glory -- at the opening of the seventieth "week" prophesied by Daniel in chapter nine of his book. Consider:

Almost the entire book of Revelation is cast in the "Lord's Day" (Rev. 1:10). The view

³In this study "Tribulation" or "Tribulation Period" will refer to the entire 7 years. The expression "Great Tribulation" will be used when the last 3 1/2 years is specifically in view.

⁴OT references -- Isa. 13:6, 9; Ezek. 13:5; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14; Amos 5:18, 20; Obadiah 15; Zeph. 1:7, 14; Mal. 4:5. A similar expression, "the day to/for the Lord" is found in Isa. 2:12; Ezek. 30:3; Zech. 14:1, 7.

⁵NT references -- Acts 2:20; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Thess. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:10. A similar expression, "the Lord's day" is found in Rev. 1:10.

that the Lord's Day is referring to Sunday, a new day of worship for the church, is not tenable. Dr. E. W. Bullinger, a recognized Hebrew and Greek scholar, comments on this in detail:

"The key that unlocks the door to the understanding of this book [Revelation] is, we believe, that it relates to the *Day of the Lord*, and not to any tradition which limits the reception of this vision to a particular day of the week; and that day Sunday.

"It is not a question of *when* John received this vision: but of *what he saw* in it. Whether it was a Sunday or a Monday can have no real relation to the book; nor can it have any weight in determining the interpretation of the contents of the book." ⁶

It is very unlikely that "the Lord's Day" refers to Sunday for the following reasons:

* There is no indication that Sunday was given any particular significance to any but those addressed in Paul's epistles -- the Body of Christ. Only three passages refer to meetings of the believers on the first day of the week: John 20:19; Acts 20:7 and 1 Cor. 16:2. The passage in John evidently does not refer to a day when the disciples met, for they were together in hiding every day. It must refer to one of those days when Christ made this particular appearance. Just as the kingdom believers in Jerusalem were zealous for the law, worshipping in the temple, and were still practicing circumcision, they must also have been observing the Sabbath. While Revelation was written long after the temple was destroyed and the Jewish believers scattered, John was writing with Israel and her end times specifically in mind -- with tremendous emphasis on Israel and Old Testament prophecy.

* The Sabbath was not replaced by a new day of worship for Israel. It was given to them forever (Ex. 31:13, 17; Ezek. 20:12, 20). Even Gentiles, under the prophetic program, were to keep the Sabbath (Isa. 56:6).

* It is much more likely that the expression "the Lord's Day" began to be applied to Sunday after Revelation was written, and because of a faulty understanding of Rev. 1:10, rather than that it was already being used in this way when John wrote.

* What day of the week John was "in the Spirit" could have no real significance in this context. To be told that, "in the Spirit," he was placed in the future Day of the Lord would be of tremendous significance, as it would set the stage for the rest of the book.

"Objection has been taken to the interpretation of 'the Lord's Day' (as referring to the Day of the Lord) because we have (in Rev. 1:10) the adjective, 'Lord's' instead of the noun, 'of the Lord,' as in the Hebrew. *But what else could it be called in Hebrew?* Such objectors do not seem to be aware of the fact that there is no adjective for 'Lord's' in Hebrew; and therefore the only way of expressing 'the Lord's Day' is by using the two nouns, 'the Day of the Lord' -- which means equally 'the Lord's Day' (Jehovah's Day). It is useless, therefore, to make any objection on this ground; for, if a Hebrew wanted to say 'the Lord's Day' he *must* say 'the Day of the Lord.'

"In the Greek there are two ways of expressing this ... either by saying literally, as in Hebrew, 'the Day of the Lord' (using two nouns); or by using the adjective 'Lord's' instead. It comes to exactly the same thing as to *signification*; the difference lies only in the emphasis." ⁷

Bullinger goes on to explain that when the adjective is used (as in Rev. 1:10) it would be "the Lord's DAY." When the two nouns are used (as in the Old Testament form) it would be "the LORD'S Day." He continues by saying, "The same day is meant in each case, but with a

⁶"The Apocalypse or the 'Day of the Lord'" by E. W. Bullinger, page ii.

⁷ Ibid. Pages 11, 12.

different emphasis." ⁸

It would seem strange indeed if the book of Revelation, which gives the last and most complete word in the Bible on the Day of the Lord, never used that expression! Only if Revelation 1:10 contains the full equivalent of it is the matter resolved, for "the Day of the Lord" is not mentioned elsewhere in this book. If the "Lord's Day" is the "Day of the Lord," it indicates that at the very beginning of the book John was transported by the Spirit into a future day, much as Ezekiel was lifted up by the Spirit and "brought ... in the visions of God to Jerusalem" (Ezek. 8:3). All that John saw in the following chapters were the events of that long anticipated "Day of the Lord."

-- The "Day of the Lord" in 1 Thess. 5:2 quite clearly refers to the entire seven years of the Tribulation. Consider:

* It comes unannounced and unexpected -- like a thief in the night. Henry Hudson says, "The Day of the Lord follows the Tribulation ... it comes as a thief in the night -- which is not so with the Tribulation." ⁹ But if the Day of the Lord is the outpouring of God's wrath at the close of the Tribulation how can it come as a thief in the night? This period is very carefully time documented. After three and a half years have gone by, the "abomination of desolation" will be set up in the temple. The time remaining, from this event until the close of the "week," is given over and over in unmistakable terms. It will be three and a half years (Dan. 7:25; 9:27; 12:7; Rev. 12:14); forty two months (Rev. 12:2; 13:5); or one thousand two hundred and sixty days (Rev. 11:3; 12:6). What thief will tell you the year, month, and day he will come to rob you?

If, on the other hand, the Day of the Lord is the entire seven year interval itself, it could easily come as a thief in the night. There is no time schedule for the *beginning* of this epoch. Down through church history many dates have been set for it, but always they have been proven wrong and the date setters put to shame. More and more the prophecies concerning the coming of the Lord and associated events are ignored or rejected. Peter tells us that even the religious leaders of the day will be saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation" (2 Pet.3:4). But even the opening events of the Tribulation will shake men from that kind of unwarranted complacency. The beginning of the Tribulation will surprise and startle an unsuspecting world. The judgments at its *close* should not.

* The Day of the Lord is to be preceded by a time of peace and safety (1 Thess. 5:3). This false calm, as Scripture indicates, describes the world situation just before the Tribulation *begins*. During the closing days of 1989 a massive crumbling of Communism in Europe happened so fast that the whole world looked on in shock. Following these events many were convinced we were entering into an era of peace. This has not proved to be the source for that false sense of serenity mentioned in 1 Thess. 5:13 but it significantly illustrates how such an attitude could come upon the world. But the time just preceding the *close* of the Tribulation stands in stark contrast -- a situation as different as it is possible to imagine!

* The "sudden destruction" which comes upon men (1 Thess. 5:3) must be a reference to the seven year Tribulation as a whole, not merely the final few days of it. "Sudden"

⁸ Ibid.

⁹Leaflet, "Does Holy Scripture teach that Christ will return before the Great Tribulation?" -- Henry T. Hudson, page 5.

does not mean "instantaneous" for it is compared to travail coming upon a woman about to bear a child. The characteristics of travail are: a mild, but recognizable beginning; pains gradually intensifying to a predetermined climax; and intermittent spasms of pain interspersed by periods of rest. As the birth draws near, the periods of rest are shorter, and the times of agonizing pain longer and more severe, until the child is born. This is a very apt description of what will happen over the entire seven years of trouble.

* During the time just before the beginning of the Day of the Lord the unbelievers will be sleeping, unaware of the approaching danger. Read the book of Revelation through from chapter one to chapter eighteen. How can anyone living during these days be asleep to danger, specially during the last three and a half years? Unbelieving, hard headed, hard hearted, rebellious, and wicked they will be. But asleep? NEVER!

-- The Day of the Lord in 2 Thess. 2:2 is evidently also the entire seven years, as will be shown more fully in the study of Second Thessalonians, chapter two. The Thessalonians were not being told the Day of the Lord was approaching and "nigh," as the King James Version translates it. The teaching was that the Day of the Lord was then present -- that they were already experiencing it. With the time required to deliver letters in those days, if this "Day" was known by them to be very brief, they would have realized there would not be enough time to write to Paul, let alone get an answer back (taking months in those days)!

Whatever the Day of the Lord might mean in other contexts, in Thessalonians and Revelation it refers to seven years of great trouble for the descendents of Jacob climaxed by the glorious return of Christ, bringing judgment on the Gentiles and introducing God's kingdom on earth.

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