

Dirk Bouter

What On Earth Is God Doing?

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It is an important question. The answer will:

- Help us know how to live for Him today and get excited about the future glories of the Lord Jesus,
- Cause us to be wise about what our calling is and is not, and
- Draw us to worship the Lord Jesus as we are reminded that all God's plans center on Him and will be accomplished through Him.

Beginning our study at the cross and ending with the eternal state, let us form a very basic outline of seven chronological points as to what God has done, is doing and will do on earth and beyond. In the process we will see that God's counsels are wise, His purpose good and His Christ great! Christ Himself will restore divine authority over the entire universe prior to the ushering in of the eternal state.

1. Christ's Cross

Christ's sacrifice on Calvary's cross is the focal point of all God's dealings with the human race. It proves God's love, satisfies His righteousness and allows Him to bring us into a relationship with Him through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 16:31; Rom. 5:1, 10:8-9). Without the cross the only dealing God could have with humanity was judgment (John 3:16-20, 5:22; Rev. 20:11-15). God's purpose has always been to have a relationship with the people He created, which is why man was made in the image of God – a relational being (Gen. 1:26; Ex. 25:8; Prov.

8:31). The work of Christ on the cross formed the basis by which God could accomplish this in righteousness and holiness (Col. 1:20).

The disciples of the Lord Jesus missed all of this during His ministry on earth. They merely looked for deliverance from their earthly enemies, the Romans (Matt. 20:21; John 6:15; Acts 1:6) – failing to realize this would accomplish nothing lasting if they remained in their sins. The Messiah, the Hebrew word for “Christ,” was promised in Old Testament times to unconditionally deliver Israel as a nation from their enemies (Isa. 9:6-7; Mic. 5:2). Because God is holy, before He reigns in power and majesty, His subjects must be redeemed from their sins, for only then can they truly be His people forever. As a nation the Jews rejected the Lord Jesus as their Messiah, saying, “Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him! ... We have no king but Caesar!” (John 19:15 NKJV).

The Messiah had also been promised unconditionally as a blessing to those who are not from Israel: the Gentiles (Gen. 22:18). The Romans, representative of the Gentile world, mocked and crucified Him. Hence the world as a whole cast out the Savior, and individuals who try to justify themselves before God continue this rejection in spirit.

God allowed man to crucify Christ, using this apex, or climax, of man’s injustice to pour out His wrath against sin on His well-beloved Son, the Lord Jesus. In doing so, Christ became the substitute for all who turn to Him for forgiveness (2 Cor. 5:21). He paid the debt that we could never pay (Ps. 49:7; 1 Pet. 1:18-19). Raising Him from the dead after three days, God confirmed that Christ’s sacrifice is able to save all who put their faith and trust in Him (Rom. 4:24-25). The Lord Jesus truly can give eternal life as He stated during His earthly ministry (John 10:27-28). He is the only way to a restored relationship with God (John 14:6).

2. Christ’s Bride

Even though the world as a whole cast out the Lord Jesus, His death was ultimately in obedience to the work His Father had given to Him (John 4:34; Phil. 2:8). This obedience unto death, even the death of the cross, made it possible for God to approach humanity in righteousness and grace (Rom. 3:21-26). Ever since, God has been accomplishing something very important and wonderful on earth! It is not a national work or general improvement in some area of the world, which God now calls “this present evil world” (Gal. 1:4 KJV). Instead, according to God’s

eternal purpose (Eph. 3:6-11) the Holy Spirit is gathering a heavenly bride for the Lord Jesus, (see End Note 1) redeemed out of love by Christ Himself (Eph. 5:25). She is also referred to as “the Church” (Eph. 1:23, 5:25) and the “body” of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23, 2:16, 4:4, 5:30-31; Col. 1:18). This bride is composed of believers in the Lord Jesus who are indwelt individually by the Holy Spirit (John 14:16; 1 Cor. 2:12; 2 Cor. 1:21-22) and baptized by the Spirit into one body (1 Cor. 12:13).

“In Christ,” believers have no national or social distinctions; they are one (Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11). This is something special and unique, which started on Pentecost following the resurrection of the Lord Jesus (Acts 2) and was not known in Old Testament times (Eph. 3; Col. 1:24-27). The bride of Christ:

- Belongs to heaven although presently on earth (Phil. 3:20),
- Has no affection for a world system that seeks satisfaction and renown without Christ (vv. 7-8),
- Looks to no man, woman, program or campaign to fix the world system around her, and
- Faithfully presents her Beloved as man’s only hope (Acts 4:12; Rom. 7-8; Phil. 4:13; Col. 2; 1 Tim. 4; 1 John 2:15-17).

Therefore she is outwardly a light in a dark world (Matt. 5:14-16), the salt of the earth (v. 13) and heaven’s ambassador on earth (2 Cor. 5:20). She does this work tirelessly to the blessing of mankind (Gal. 6:9; 1 Cor. 15:58), by the calling of God (1 Pet. 2), in separation from unbelievers (2 Cor. 6:14) and the world (Jas. 4:4). Inwardly she enjoys the blessings of her heavenly calling even now (Eph. 1:3), (see End Note 2) knowing her place is seated with Christ in heavenly places – now in spirit but soon face to face (Eph. 2:4-6; 1 Cor. 13:12; 2 Cor. 4:17-18).

From this biblical description of the bride’s calling and actions it immediately becomes clear that much of what is called “Christianity” is not really so. Over the centuries many have used the name of Christ to build political and religious systems and organizations that are primarily about power and riches. Christ promised His followers neither. This corruption of Christianity, termed “Christendom,” continues to thrive today in various forms. Whole groups have been abused under this umbrella. It comes in all flavors, ranging from nationalistic to anarchist – and to false theocracies where God is recognized as ruler in name but not practice. Christendom has Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant and Evangelical branches. Its chief purpose is to make a name for itself on earth, usually under the guises of “improving the world” or “honoring God.”

Members of the true bride of Christ have often been deceived into participating in the efforts of Christendom. Hence, we need to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves (Matt. 10:16), acting for Christ in a way that is consistent with our purpose and calling.

Dear Christian, if the world seems to get darker despite our labors, take encouragement from God's Word; what is done for Him, in His way, is not in vain (1 Cor. 15:58; Gal. 6:9). Although we want to be a blessing on earth we do not seek our blessing from the earth, but from the Man in the glory. He is coming soon to take us out of this present evil world to be with Him forever, and He will raise all believers who are asleep in Christ (1 Thess. 4:13-18)! The Church's time for glory is not now. God's Word says: "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory" (Col. 3:4). In addition to this, although we know the greatness of God's love and grace, let's not forget that Christ's glory is what God's purposes are ultimately about, not our blessing and destiny. May we be found watching, working and waiting for Him.

3. Christ's Wrath

Will God be finished with this earth when the Church is taken to heaven? We know from Scripture that following the rapture of the Church the "man of sin" will take prominence on earth and exalt himself to the place of God (2 Thess. 2:3-4). The world will hail him as a savior (John 5:43; Rev. 13:4). In fact, there will be a trinity of evil that rules over the western world led by a figure called "the beast" (presumably synonymous for "the man of sin"), his chief propagandist is called "the false prophet" and Satan (Rev. 12-13). This will be the pinnacle of fallen man's rebellion against God, drawing wrath and judgment from God even more terrible than the global flood of Noah's day (Matt. 24:21).

The time period of these events is known as the tribulation – and often our interest in prophecy inappropriately lingers here. However, God will not allow this world's history to end with a cast out Savior! The glory and honor of our Lord Jesus is where all history is headed (Ps. 72; 1 Cor. 15:25; Eph. 1:10). God does have purposes on earth following the rapture of the Church. Christ will rule in power and majesty over this world in a kingdom characterized by righteousness. He will be the center of heaven and earth. The Church is not the instrument God will use to bring this about, but it will be accomplished through God's wrath and judgment (Rev. 11:15-18). The blessing of the Church is to be with Him in His

kingdom, reflecting His heavenly glories for the whole world to see (Eph. 2:6-7; 2 Thess. 1:10).

So what is the purpose of the tribulation time in God's counsels? Let's back up for a moment and consider the big picture. God made promises to the patriarchs and Israel that have not been fulfilled (Gen. 13:14-16, 26:3, 35:10-12). These promises include that Israel will rule over the nations who have oppressed them (Isa. 14:2). Messiah will receive tribute from the nations (Ps. 72) with Jerusalem as His capital city (Isa. 60), never to be destroyed by the Gentiles again (Jer. 31:40). The nations will travel to Jerusalem annually to worship Jehovah there (Isa. 2:1-5; Zech. 8:20-23). However, Israel cannot enjoy these promises yet because of its rejection of Christ (Hos. 5; Matt. 23:37-39).

These promises are ultimately about the glory and honor of our Lord Jesus; He will be magnified and rule with power over a world which once rejected Him (Ps. 110; Luke 21:27; 1 Cor. 15:25; Phil. 2:9-11; 1 Tim. 6:15). History past, present and future is about His glory on earth and in heaven (Eph. 1:10). You might ask, "Isn't Christ reigning now?" Yes, He is on the Father's throne in heaven at this very time, but He is waiting until His enemies are made His footstool (Ps. 110:1).

Rebellion against God and sin against His name are practiced openly on earth both now and during the tribulation, but that will change in a future day. God needs to accomplish four things in order to fulfill His ancient promises:

- The apostate, false church of Christendom must be destroyed;
- The Jewish people must be led to repentance, prepared to receive their Messiah;
- The unrepentant Jewish people must be judged; and
- The unrepentant nations that persecute Israel and hate God must be judged.

Only then will the times of refreshing – also known as the millennial reign of Christ – come on this earth from the presence of the Lord (Acts 3:19).

The tribulation period accomplishes the first two items. It lasts seven years (Dan. 9:27; Matt. 24; Rev. 6:1-17, 11:2-3, 12:6,14, 13:5-6) and begins with the beast signing a protection treaty with Israel that God calls a "covenant with death ... and ... agreement with hell" (Isa. 28:18). The judgment which God will pour out on this earth during the tribulation is summarized in the book of Revelation. We read there of seal, trumpet and bowl judgments – seven of each (Rev. 6, 8-9, 16). God uses these judgments to bring a significant number of Jews, known as the Jewish

remnant, to repentance (Joel 2:12-18; Zech. 13:8-9), preparing them to receive their Messiah. The false church of Christendom will be completely destroyed during this time (Rev. 2:22-23, 17) while the beast and false prophet will continue to rule over the western world in defiance against God.

It is important to note that during this terrible time the gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the entire world. Many will receive it and be saved even though they will suffer intense persecution and many will be martyred. These saints will certainly be believers in the Lord Jesus, but they will not be part of the Church, not having its distinctive features. Of course they will be brought to glory and have their part in God's eternal city along with the Church. There they will serve before the throne of God and He will dwell among them (Rev. 6:9-11, 7:13-17, 14:6-7).

4. Christ's Controversy

God's Word speaks of His controversy and indignation with both unrepentant Israel and the unrepentant nations (Hos. 4:1, 12:2; Mic. 6:2; Jer. 25:31). (See End Note 3) God will use one of Israel's ancient enemies, Assyria, as "His rod" to execute His final judgment on unrepentant Israel. The leader of the Assyrian invasion is referred to as "the king of the North" (Isa. 10:5, 28:14-19; Dan. 11:40-43). At the close of the tribulation the king of the North will ravage the land of Israel as he passes through on a larger campaign to invade Egypt. The beast will make what appears to be a half-hearted attempt to meet his treaty obligation to protect Israel and belatedly send his armies. Kings of the east will converge on the land of Israel at the same time, apparently motivated by the news that Israel is on her knees and ready for the taking. Armageddon will have begun (Dan. 11:44; Joel 3; Rev. 9:13-17, 16:12-16; Zech. 14:1-3).

Christ's controversy will then begin with the nations, and in an awesome display of power and glory He will return to earth (Matt. 24:27-30; 2 Thess. 2:8). The Church, His bride, will be with Him – she will always be with Him (1 Thess. 4:17; Rev. 19:11-14). This is the second coming, or appearing, of Christ.

Beginning with the beast and the false prophet, Christ will destroy His enemies (vv. 17-21). The king of the North, hearing of a challenger in the land of Israel, will return from Egypt only to meet his doom (Isa. 31:8; Dan. 11:44-45; Joel 2:20). Finally, in an intimate and personal introduction to the repentant faithful of Israel, Christ is to set foot on the Mount of Olives, just outside Jerusalem, and present

Himself as their Messiah (Zech. 14:4). With weeping and joy He will be received and the nation of Israel restored to Christ (Zech. 12:10-14). The ten scattered tribes will then return to Israel with help from the nations (Isa. 11:11-16, 14:1-2, 66:8; Jer. 31:6-9).

Christ's kingdom will be challenged unsuccessfully in its infancy by Gog and Magog – likely the backers of the previously defeated king of the North (Dan. 8:24; Ezek. 38-39). As the undisputed King of Kings and Lord of Lords, Christ will rule from the throne of His glory and gather all the nations formally (Matt. 25:31-46). Those found to be His enemies are to be confined to eternal fire while the rest live on in His kingdom. Christ's controversy is then settled and earth's golden era begins.

5. Christ's Reign

All Christ's enemies will be made His footstool (Ps. 110). Israel will be restored to Him (Ezek. 36-37). Satan will be bound (Rev. 20:2) and righteousness will reign in the universal kingdom the Lord establishes (Ps. 72; Isa. 9:7, 32:1). The earth itself will flourish, and the animal kingdom will be at peace, docile and vegetarian (Isa. 11:6-9). Crops will be so productive that the plowman will overtake the reaper (Amos 9:13). The desert shall blossom as the rose (Isa. 35:1). There will finally be world peace (Ps. 72:7; Isa. 2:4; Hos. 2:18)! The poor and needy will be saved and receive justice, for oppression will cease. Christ will bring blessing to all, and He will be honored by every nation (Ps. 72). The prophecies of a Ruler who is both human and divine will be fulfilled in Him (Ps. 8; Isa. 9:6; Jer. 33:15; Mic. 5:2).

The future reign of Christ in power over the earth will be the full display of His glory (Ps. 8, 24). He will be the center of everything in heaven and earth (Eph. 1:10). The cross is the focal point of all history, on which all God's purposes hinge, but God would not allow world history to end with the humiliation of His Son. Scripture testifies, "For He must reign" (1 Cor. 15:25).

How wonderful that God has revealed to us the future exaltation of the Lord Jesus on this earth. During the millennial reign of Christ, Israel will be the display of His glory on earth as the nation redeemed by Him, and the Church will be the display of Christ's glory in heaven (Eph. 2:6-7; 2 Thess. 1:10). How grateful and full of worship we should be, knowing that we will be associated with Him in that coming day. The Father has decreed the exaltation of the Lord Jesus over all

things in heaven and earth to be the climax of all history (Eph. 1:10). Even now, let us give Him the pre-eminence in our lives!

6. Christ's Court

Lest we think that an ideal environment is all fallen man needs to live in harmony with God, Scripture states that even the wonderful reign of Christ does not cause fallen man to love Him (Rev. 20:7-9). How completely this demonstrates the need for new birth! Children will be born during the millennial reign of Christ, but not all will accept Him as their Savior. Scripture states that after 1,000 years of Christ's glorious reign Satan will be loosed for a short while. Given the opportunity, fallen man will again act against God. Were it not written in God's Word we would not believe it.

This final revolt fails while still in the setup stage; Christ's kingdom is everlasting and will not fail (Dan. 7:13-14). The revolt is destroyed by a consuming fire from heaven and leads directly to the final judgment where God's righteousness is executed towards those who died in their sins (Rev. 20:11-15). They are found standing before God, the Lord Jesus seated on a great white throne with authority to execute judgment. From this dreadful scene heaven and earth flee.

Dear reader, the Lord Jesus died for our sins, was buried and rose again so we can be free from judgment by believing on Him. Confess your sin to Him and He will be your Savior. If you refuse His forgiveness, He must be your Judge.

7. Christ's Rest

"Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28 NKJV). We see that our blessed Lord Jesus will fully restore divine authority, ruling by the authority of the Father. Having accomplished this He will continue His rule forever under that same authority and in the same subjection. (see End Note 4) That is the thrust of the quoted passage. It is an amazing fact that our Lord Jesus will remain a Man for all eternity! However, the subjection He placed Himself under by becoming Man never made Him any less divine. In eternity the Lamb will share the throne and be the object of worship that belongs to God alone (Rev. 5:12-14, 22:3).

A new heaven and earth will usher in the eternal state with the eternal city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God (Rev. 21:1-2). Here righteousness dwells (2 Pet. 3:13), and a perfect rest of joyful fellowship is enjoyed forever (Matt. 11:28; 1 Cor. 13:12; Phil. 1:23; Heb. 4:9; 1 John 1:3-4; Rev. 2:17, 21:4, 22:4).

Throughout the ages of time God has reserved a redeemed company of people who put their faith in Him. The destiny of all the redeemed is to have their part in God's eternal city, with God dwelling among them (Heb. 11:10, 12:22-23; Rev. 21:9-10, 21:12, 22:3-4). All are eternally blessed and worshipers of God. (see End Note 5) In this way all the redeemed are equal and represented in the book of Revelation as the 24 elders who worship the Lamb. At the same time God has distinctive relationships among His redeemed ones that carry on in eternity as well. (see End Note 6) The bride and the friends of the bride retain these respective relationships with Christ in eternity (John 3:29). The twelve tribes of Israel remain distinct in eternity, as do the tribulation saints referred to earlier (Isa. 66:22; Rev. 7:14, 21:12). Therefore the fellowship all the redeemed enjoy in the eternal city will be a perfect balance of unity, diversity and individuality. God's ultimate purpose will be achieved: "And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God'" (v. 3).

Concluding Thoughts

Summing up, we see that God is ordering history in a way that will exalt His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, over all things. Through the blood of His cross, not only are people reconciled to God (Col. 1:21), but even creation itself will be restored (Rom. 8:19-22; Col. 1:20). Christ's reign will restore divine authority over the entire universe and vindicate the character of God where sin had brought ruin. The eternal state that follows will not be so much the vindication of the character of God as the satisfaction of His heart. (see End Note 7) This will be the perfect eternal rest of fellowship, life and love.

Let us close by thinking specifically of the relationship the bride of Christ enjoys with Him in eternity. The Lord Jesus shall be completely satisfied, the Bridegroom with His bride (Isa. 53:11; John 14:3; Eph. 5:25-32). Our longing for Him will be a fulfilled longing with continuous amazement far beyond the Queen of Sheba's response to Solomon's glory (1 Ki. 10:6-9). Union with Christ is the wonderful portion of the Church, now and for all eternity.

*Then we'll know Him as He knows us,
Face to face His name we'll bless,
This the perfect, precious fullness,
Of His glorious purposes!*

End Notes

1. First Corinthians 12:13 in connection with Ephesians 5:30-31 shows the link between the Church as one body and the bride.
2. Among others, our blessings include: peace with God, open access to the Father, fellowship with fellow-believers, a secure future with Christ.
3. The King James Version uses the word “controversy” in each of these verses. Isaiah 10:25 and 34:2 refer to the indignation of the Lord against Israel and the nations.
4. J. Dwight Pentecost, “Things To Come,” Zondervan Publishing House, first Grand Rapids printing 1964, pp. 493-494.
5. Hebrews 11:40 implies that the Old Testament saints will be made perfect with us.
6. First Thessalonians 4:16 includes Old Testament believers. Revelation 19:4 refers to the redeemed as “the 24 elders,” then separates the redeemed into “the bride” and implied guests in verses 7-9.
7. G. Davison, “Reconciliation”.

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