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From the column:

"A Ready Answer"

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(continued from last month)

Kingdom Initiated - Rather than the Dispensational earthly kingdom alleged to be "postponed" until the Second Coming, I believe that the Prophets and Jesus were correct - the Divinely-intended kingdom did come during the era of the 4th kingdom from Daniel's time, within the time-frame of the Roman Empire and within the lifetime of those who saw and heard Jesus (Mark 9:1). And just like David foretold, God installed His Messianic king in spite of the conspiracy against it (Acts 4:24-28) and now the nations are being warned to honor the Son before He comes in wrath and judgment (Psalm 2). If God was ever going to rule over mankind by force, why didn't He start in the Garden of Eden? If Jesus came the first time to establish an earthly Jewish Messianic monarchy and rule the earth "with a rod of iron" from Jerusalem (as Dispensationalists assert was His intention), why didn't He just go ahead and do it (or at least demonstrate some interest in such a program)? Doesn't Scripture repeatedly tell us that God does what He pleases and humans cannot thwart His purposes¹ and that angelic "enforcers" were just waiting on a signal from Jesus to roll in and sweep away the opposition (Matthew 26:53)? Mark this - Jesus' rejection of an earthly throne for a sacrificial death was no accident and it was NOT "plan-B" - it was the very purpose for which He had come!²

The Prophetic Picture Reconsidered - Several of the Prophets relay to us God's perspective on the Messianic program. We have already looked at the spiritual and theological significance of Israel's "kingdom request" to Samuel (1Samuel 8-12) and this is crucial. We also need to note certain parts of Daniel, Jeremiah, and Zechariah that are often ignored today.

Daniel - The meaning of what was going on is clear in Daniel 2 - God ruled Israel directly from heaven until Samuel's time and then Israel requested and got to try their own hand at worldly politics, but covenant disobedience brought the earthly kingdom to an end with the Babylonian conquest (586 B.C.). Did God, at that point, retake the reigns and resume direct rule over His covenant people? No, for He had already predicted that Israel would "serve their enemies" (Deuteronomy 28:48; Jeremiah 17:4) for a period of time so they could finally learn the difference between serving God and human kings (1Chronicles 12:8). So, after 300 years of generally disastrous human politics, God gave "the kingdom, power, and glory" (over Israel) to Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 2:36-38). Much of what is going on in the chapters of Daniel that prophecy buffs tend to ignore is God's work through Daniel's to humble Nebuchadnezzar and bring him to the recognition that he (and all human rulers) is working for God (chaps. 3-4), then humble the arrogant Belshazzar (ch. 5), and authenticate Daniel and his message during the beginning of the Persian era (ch. 6). In the summary vision (ch. 2), the message (in the imagery of a 4-sectioned statue) is that God is behind Israel's loss of national freedom to Babylon, after

which two more Middle Eastern kingdoms/empires (Persia & Greece) will rule over Israel (and the Middle East), and then in the days of the fourth empire from Nebuchadnezzar's time (Rome) God would re-establish His direct rule over His (new) covenant people (2:40-45). This is why the Messiah appeared in the days of Rome (Luke 2:1), declared that "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:14,15), and later said that the kingdom would be powerfully established within the lifetime of those who saw and heard Him (Mark 9:1). The reason Jews and dispensationalists have trouble with these verses is their unshakeable (and misguided) conviction that God's intention is to establish a glorified, earthly, political, Jewish Messianic monarchy on this planet!

In Daniel 7 we again encounter the four earthly kingdoms/empires (now portrayed as four beasts coming up out of the sea, compare with Revelation 13:1-2), with Messianic kingdom activity again coming during the fourth (Rome). However, 7:13,14 give us insight into what is central – the "Son of Man" would approach the Ancient of Days in clouds and be given authority so that all people on earth *should* serve him. I believe that it is this phraseology that Jesus was citing in Matthew 24:30,31 and it was fulfilled on the other side of Jesus' ascension up into the clouds (Acts 1:9-11). That "all peoples should serve Him" is the message going out now, during this age (Luke 19:11-27; Philippians 2:5-11) – Great Commission "disciple-making."

Jeremiah - After considering its origins, perhaps the most obvious piece of prophetic evidence against Jesus ruling an earthly monarchy comes in Jeremiah. Concerning Jeconiah and the final sad stages of the Israelite monarchy's decline, Jeremiah predicted "no man of his descendants will prosper sitting on the throne of David or ruling again in Judah" (Jeremiah 22:30). Matthew's genealogy records Jesus' legal royal lineage through Joseph to Jeconiah (Matthew 1:11), thus, if we are going to listen to the Prophets, this also should cause some doubts about Jesus ever ruling from an earthly Judean "throne of David." Jeremiah went on to prophesy that God would raise up a "righteous branch" from David's lineage and He would bring salvation to Judah and epitomize righteousness (23:5-6; see 1Corinthians 1:30). It is also from Jeremiah that we learn that the promised "new covenant" would be different from the Mosaic covenant by not having infant members in need of learning about the Lord after entering the covenant and its focus would be on the forgiveness of sin (31:31-34). According to Jesus (Matthew 26:28) and the writer of Hebrews (8; 9:15; 12:24), the current "New Covenant" that was mediated by Jesus is the one Jeremiah predicted (see Hebrews 8). (to be continued)

¹ God's purpose cannot be thwarted - Job 42:1,2; Psalm 115:3; 135:6; 2Chronicles 20:6; Isaiah 14:24,27; 43:13; 55:11; Jeremiah 50:45; Daniel 4:34,35; Amos 3:7; Micah 4:12

² Jesus came not to rule an earthly monarchy but to die as a ransom for many - Matthew 1:21; 16:21-23; 20:28; John 12:27