



BETHEL
PRESBYTERIAN

MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Volume 15 Issue 5

December 25, 2016

The Morning Star

As a child, I always found the passing of a year and the start of another as a rather sad thing. First there was the empty, sad looking Christmas tree which, when I was a child, was always real and so now by New Year's Eve was drying up. Gone was its glory when it was welcomed by the family, placed in a prominent position in the room, and then adorned both by decorations and presents! By the New Year it had all been used up, consumed by heartless revelers! Yet the passing of a year was bigger than the death of a tree. As a child, the optimist side of me looked back upon the year and thought about all the wonderful things that I had enjoyed, most of which revolved around my parents and my siblings. The pessimist side of me always thought, "What if in this coming year, I lose a parent... or one of my brothers... or my sister? I don't think we'll be celebrating then!"

It was because of this I honestly resented people cheering on account of a new year. To me it was like standing over the grave of a loved one and having everyone around me celebrating their demise, “*Yippee! So and so is dead!*” It seemed so heartless and cold! But then one day it dawned on me that the start of a new year also marked A BEGINNING, where the failures of a past year could all be forgotten, where a person could start afresh and anew, where there were no mistakes... yet!¹ And so, while the passing of a year was sad, the start of a new year could bring with it a brightness and so a hope that the coming year could be better than the one left behind!

You know, Christianity brings with it this glorious expectation, specifically that tomorrow will be better! Paul described this in the book of 2 Corinthians.

2 Corinthians 5:17, “Therefore if any man is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”

From this passage, it is obvious that you can’t be a Christian and be a pessimist. As our faith is renewed every morning (Lamentations 3:23), so each day we can wake up with a glorious anticipation of what God is going to do! We see it in David’s psalms:

Psalms 5:3, “In the morning, O Lord, Thou wilt hear my voice; in the morning I will order *my prayer* to Thee and *eagerly* watch.”

Psalms 30:5, “...a shout of joy *comes* in the morning.”

The basis for this “optimism” is rooted and grounded in Revelation 22. Here we see another important title that our Lord bears as our Savior, “Bright Morning Star”!

In order to understand the book of Revelation, you really need to be familiar with a literary tool utilized throughout the Old Testament (most commonly in Psalms, Proverbs and many of the Prophets); it is called Progressive parallelism. Progressive parallelism is primarily a prophetic or poetic tool in which an historical account or an assertion is given and then repeated with advancement in thought or detail. Sinclair Ferguson described it this way:

A style of presentation in which the author takes us from the beginning to the end of a sequence of events and then returns to the beginning to describe them again, this time in different terms or from another perspective. (Ferguson, 1993, p. 17)

For example, in the Psalms we frequently see it on a microcosmic scale.

Psalms 105:1-4, “Oh give thanks to the Lord, call upon His name; make known His deeds among the peoples. [here it is...] Sing to Him, sing praises to Him; speak of all His wonders. Glory in His holy name; [we see it again...] let the heart of those who seek the Lord be glad. Seek the Lord and His strength; seek His face continually.”

Progressive parallelism is when an author makes a statement, then restates it giving more specificity, and then states it again giving even more specificity. In this case, we note that the statements made are NOT just parallel; RATHER they start somewhere in the territory of the previous statement and then progress beyond what was just said! And so, we read David's words in Psalm 29.

Psalms 29:1-2, "Ascribe to the Lord, O sons of the mighty, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due to His name; worship the Lord in holy array."

Do you see it? These four statements are most certainly parallel, BUT there is a progression in thought with each one. Recall that when we studied the Book of Daniel, we saw this on a much larger scale.

The book of Daniel was masterfully written in which the contents of Daniel 2, 7, 8, 9, and 11 are parallel! Each references the same history; YET each advances the story to proclaim the Sovereignty of God and His glorious Regency!

We see it in the opening book of the Bible, Genesis 1 and 2. Many of you have noted that the Bible repeats itself with the description of creation. Liberals have suggested that this was because a priestly writer had two different literary sources which he used to write Genesis. That just goes to show how biased the liberal commentator is. What we have in Genesis 1 and 2 clearly is the linguistic tool of progressive parallelism!

Then there are the gospels; Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Have you ever wondered why there are four gospels? Did the early writers take offense that their comrades felt the need to write a second, third, and even fourth gospel account? Absolutely not! Having been raised with an understanding of the literary tool of progressive parallelism, they would have had no problem with parallel yet progressive account of Christ's life, sacrifice, death, burial, and resurrection!

Paul utilized this tool in his writings.

Philippians 2:18 & 3:1, "And you too, *I urge you*, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me... Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things *again* is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you."

Paul utilized this linguistic tool with an explanation, the Gentile population in Philippi wouldn't have understood what Paul was doing! So it is with the book before us, the book of Revelation! It is easy to assume that because Revelation contains history, the whole thing must proceed chronologically with the contents of the latter chapters occurring after the earlier chapters. Yet this is a faulty assumption in light of the literary tool we just examined.

Note well, the book reveals that Revelation contains seven distinct sections which chronologically are parallel to each other. Each of the seven sections roughly covers the same era, yet they give a different take on the story with each progression.

1. Section #1 (chapters 1-3): We see the Church as it exists in the current age- from Christ's first advent to His last. In fact, the Second Coming of Christ is referenced in Revelation 3:20-22.
2. Section #2 (chapters 4-7): We see the same history but this time viewed from the perspective of God's Throne. In this vision, we see the church suffering trial and persecution against the background of the victory of Christ. The metaphor used here is the Seven Sealed Scrolls.
3. Section #3 (chapters 8-11): Once again we have the same history, but now the church is avenged, protected, and victorious. In this section, the Second Coming of Christ is alluded to in Revelation 11:15-17. The metaphor used is the Seven Trumpets.
4. Section #4 (chapters 12-14): We have the same history as seen now from the perspective of Christ, His coming, and His people. Here we are introduced to the beast out of the sea and the beast out of the earth. The Second Coming of Christ is clearly referenced in Revelation 14:14-20.
5. Section #5 (chapters 15-16): Again we have the same history as before now with an emphasis on the wrath of God and its devastating effects upon mankind. The metaphor used here is the Seven bowls of Wrath.
6. Section #6 (chapters 17-19): Again we have the same history yet now with an emphasis on the fall of the Religio-Politico Babylon and the beasts. Here the dragon's two helpers, the two beasts, are punished. The Second Coming of Christ is referenced in Revelation 19:11-16.
7. Section #7 (chapters 20-22): Finally and again we have the same history but now progressing to the final judgment, the final triumph of Christ and His church, and so the New Heavens and Earth. Not surprisingly, the Second Coming of Christ is implied in Revelation 20:7-15 (cf. v. 12).

From all of this I hope you see that the same literary tool utilized in the Psalms, Proverbs, and the Prophets is the same literary tool utilized in the book of Revelation! As such, though the passage at which we are looking is at the end of Revelation, nevertheless it is DESCRIBING A PRESENT REALITY that applies to all in Christ today! With that, notice the name ascribed to Christ.

Revelation 22:16, "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star."

In a beautifully progressive-parallel way, Christ ends this prophecy where He began it, with a reference to the seven churches. With this, Christ identifies Himself with two names. "I am the root and the offspring [branch/rod] of David." This references a passage we've already examined in the course of this study, Isaiah 11 and the Rod of Jesse. Yet now it is more fully explained.

Recall in Isaiah 11 the emphasis was on Christ's humble beginning as the Rod of JESSE; here it is on His glory as 'the Rod of David' (which means Christ was His descendent) and yet, unimaginably, as also His origin/beginning!² Get this: He is 'the Root' as well as 'the Branch of David'! Secondly notice, He also is "THE BRIGHT MORNING STAR."

This text clearly is an allusion to Numbers 24:17, which even in the mind of the Jewish rabbi was a reference to the Messiah.³ This is Balaam speaking in reference to Christ's ultimate victory over His enemies.

Numbers 24:17, "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near; a star shall come forth from Jacob, and a scepter [root/branch] shall rise from Israel, and shall crush through the forehead of Moab, and tear down all the sons of Sheth."

What is this "star" whose appearance would herald the end of God's enemies? Revelation 22 says that it is a reference to Christ! And yet, it advances the original thought to include not only His victory, but also the dawn of a new age! He is "the bright MORNING star"!

To understand the significant of Christ as the "morning star" we first must understand the Hebrew connotation of "morning."

The Hebrew word for "morning," בֹּקֶר (*boqer*), is derived from the meaning "to split." Hence, "morning" was the splitting of the darkness by sunlight,⁴ the precise moment when light begins to overrule darkness.⁵ This made "morning" a special time for the Jew who was poignantly aware of the theological significance of "light and darkness."⁶

1. Accordingly, it was in the "morning" that a Jew worshiped, 1 Samuel 1:19; Luke 21:38. All of life focused on the time of worship! And thus in the Jewish culture of the Bible "morning" became associated with a time in which the Jew adored God.
2. It was in the morning that a Jew prayed, Psalms 5:3; Mark 1:35. The faithful child of God in the Old Testament and New Testament awoke at sunrise to bring before God the needs and concerns of that day. And thus, "morning" was also a time of communion with God. It was when he worshiped, prayed, delighted, and so devoted himself to the Lord!
3. It is in the morning that a Jew rejoiced, Psalms 30:5. Because of the beauty of God and the opportunity to worship and pray to Him, "morning" also carried with it a time of rejoicing! A shout of joy truly did come in the morning!
4. And often times, it was in the morning that the Jews received revelation from God, Numbers 16:5; Judges 6:38.
5. It was in the morning that the Jews received the gift of God's manna, Exodus 16:7-24.

And so to the faithful Jew of the Old Testament, morning was eagerly anticipated (Psalms 130:6). It stood as a reminder of the freshness, reliability, and vastness of God's care for His

people, Lamentations 3:23; Zephaniah 3:5. It truly was the highlight of their day! What marked it?

Now everything that “morning” represented to the Old Testament Hebrew began when the “Morning Star” appeared. *The appearance of this star marked the beginning of a new day!* This actually was and is the planet Venus which, reflecting the rays of the sun, appears in the eastern sky just before sunrise. When a Jew saw this “Morning Star,” the blessing and joy of morning filled their heart and mind with anticipation and expectation! Their heart was roused with the excitement of the blessings that awaited them in their worship, praying, rejoicing, and communion as a new day dawned!

And so to the Old Testament Jew, the “morning star” was the sign of a new day; a seal of the approaching time when they could enter in to the fullness of worship, communion, rejoicing, fellowship, and service!

With this in mind, you must see that Christ’s identification as the “Bright Morning Star” is an assertion that He is the morning star that precedes the dawn, NOT of another day in this age, BUT of a glorious new world (Matthew 24:29-31)! We get this from such passages like John 6, where we see the theological significance in this name.

John 6:40, “For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him, may have eternal life; and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.”

This is one of many passages in the Bible which speaks of the child of God and “eternal life.” What is “eternal life”? Many today think of “eternal life” as an existence accompanied by harps, clouds, wings, and endless singing. Yet that has nothing to do with eternal life!

Likewise, most in and out of the church think of “eternal life” as *ceaseless existence*; living forever. If this is the definition, we must realize that we are saying that even the non-Christian has “eternal life.” The Bible teaches that the non-believer will suffer eternity in hell (Isaiah 66:24; Mark 9:43-48). From this it should be obvious that “eternal life” CANNOT mean ceaseless existence! So, what Biblically is “eternal life”?

In Scripture, “eternal life” is the translation of a phrase that literally means “life pertaining to the age.” Thus, “eternal life” does NOT denote ceaseless existence, BUT an existence in THE AGE TO COME in which the fullness of God’s Kingdom has been realized! It is an age in which:

- God reigns supreme, Revelation 19: 6b.
- Righteousness dwells, Romans 14:17.
- Sin is excluded, Revelation 21:3-4.
- Fellowship is perfectly enjoyed, Revelation 19:7-10.
- Discord and division are done away, Revelation 21:3-4.
- Love abounds, 1 Corinthians 13:13.

- Hope is realized, 1 Thessalonians 4:17.
- Righteousness, Peace and Joy are fully enjoyed, Romans 14:17.

Now notice something very important! In Scripture, the moment a person comes to Christ he receives “eternal life”!

John 3:16: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.”

That means when a person enters into a saving relationship with Christ, he *BEGINS* the life that he will live in the next age; he *BEGINS* eternity today!! Accordingly, listen to how the Bible described the first advent of Christ and its impact upon the believer. Hebrews teaches that when Christ walked the earth in His first advent we:

Hebrews 6:5, “...tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come...”

Christ came to this earth to inaugurate His Kingdom. Recall the words of Christ when He started to preach.

Matthew 4:17, 23, “From that time Jesus began to preach and say, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand’... And *Jesus* was going about in all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom...”

After establishing His kingdom in the hearts of His disciples, Christ gave this command:

Matthew 10:7, “And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’”

Truly, when Christ came to earth, He re-established His Kingdom in which He gave glimpses-foretastes- of how it someday will be manifested on the earth. Truly in His first advent we, “...tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come!” As such, notice how Paul described the child of God today:

1 Corinthians 10:11, “Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.”

When a person professes Christ as Lord and Savior, they enter into what for them will be the FINAL AGE! Do you understand what that means? For the Christian, death does NOT involve a change of identity or Kingdoms!

R. C. Sproul in his study on “*Developing Christian Character*” discussed the primary doctrinal belief today in the church when it comes to justification. He said that for most today, the belief NO LONGER is justification by faith alone, justification by works, justification by faith and works. Rather, most in the church today believe in “Justification by death.” Most have the erroneous thought that when a Christian dies, that is when they enter spotless into eternity!

That couldn't be further from the truth! As we just saw, death for the believer does NOT involve a change of identity or Kingdoms. RATHER, it is nothing more than a matter of *relocation... a change of address* where the Christian goes from co-reigning with Christ *in a sinful world* to co-reigning with Christ *in a mansion of glory* (John 14:2-3)! Truly if you are in Christ then upon you "the end of the ages has come!" In fact, we could picture the Biblical teaching with the following:



As such, describing the Christian, Paul wrote the following:

Romans 13:12-13, "The night is almost gone, and the day is at hand [IOW, the 'morning star' has appeared which means that this moment in Christ we are at the start of a new day/era!!! As that is true, Paul exhorted the Christian...] Let us therefore lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy."

Do you understand the profound implication of identifying Christ as the "Bright Morning Star"? It means that Christmas is the celebration of the beginning of Eternity, the start of a New Age... the Age to Come!

This means that while there most certainly is very little difference between the saved and unsaved when it comes to their flesh, their sinful proclivities, their "goodness" (Christians are not ontologically superior to non-Christians in any way), there is a world of difference when it comes to our:

- Mindset.
- Worldview.
- Expectations in life and in death.
- Purpose for living in this life.
- Sorrows, joys, tragedies.
- And much, much more!

For the Christian, we live our lives ever and always on the cusp of eternity- knowing that

everything we do in life is significant- EVERYTHING! When we are at our best, we are NOT therefore consumed by the things of this passing age; like power, money, pleasure, success, and the like!

Romans 14:17, “For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”

These are our concerns in our lives and the lives of our families!

This is why “New Year Days” AND their quasi new beginnings mean very little to me! From the perspective of eternity, a New Year’s Day is just a day we choose to highlight over any other in this state of sin and misery. OUR New Year/Age began when we were adopted into the Kingdom of God and set apart as His sons/daughters! It is this New Age that ought to excite us indeed!

As I just referenced, in the words of Paul, we are men and women “...upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (1 Corinthians 10:11)!

Bibliography

Ferguson, S. B. (1993). *Daniel (Mastering the Old Testament) Volume 19*. Grand Rapids: Thomas Nelson.

End Note(s)

¹ L. M. Montgomery said, “Isn't it nice to think that tomorrow is a new day with no mistakes in it yet?”

² cf. also Jn. 8:55-59; Mt. 22:41-46.

³ Talmud: Levi 18:3; Jud. 24:1

⁴ Gen. 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31; Job 38:12.

⁵ Judges 16:2

⁶ cf. Job 29:3; Psalms 27:1; 36:9; 37:6; 112:4; 119:105; Eccl. 2:3.