Isaiah - Commentaries by Charles Stanley

Some Papers on the Second Coming of Christ and on Prophecy, Coming of the Lord, the Taking up of the Church, the Judgments That Will Follow, and Then the Millennium, With Illustrative Diagram, The

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I. This line is intended to represent the past history of Israel, up to the coming and rejection of the Lord Jesus.

C. This circle represents the present period, during which the church of God is being gathered out of the world.

M. This circle represents the period of the millennium, or kingdom.

W. This short line, the period of judgment, between this present period of grace and the millennium.

S. This short line, the letting loose of Satan again, after the thousand years.

E. This beginning of a circle points to the eternal state.

A. This upright line indicates the ascension of our blessed Lord to heaven, at the commencement of this period.

T. This line shows the coming of Christ to take the church to meet Him in the air, which closes this period.

R. This line shows the glorious appearing, or revelation, or coming of Christ to this earth.

Q. Why have you omitted to draw the line through the circle C?

A. The line I, W, M, S, shows the history of Israel, which is broken off during this period C.

Q. Well, now, you make two circles C and M. You say one represents the period of taking out the church, or the present gospel period; and the other circle (M) you say represents the period of the kingdom set up on the earth; for my part, I thought both had been one and the same. What scripture proof have you of the distinction of these two periods?

A. That is a very fair question. Will you turn to Luke 21:24,27. You will notice in this passage, that all through the times of the Gentiles, or this period, Jerusalem is trodden down underfoot, from its destruction right through the period C; and this brings us to the short period W, the distress of all nations; and then the Son of man is seen coming in a cloud with power and great glory, which event begins the period M, or the millennium. Now, contrast this with Isaiah 2:1,4, you will notice this is what the prophet saw concerning this very same Jerusalem. Read also Isaiah 11:1-12. Now, here we learn, that after the earth is smitten, and the wicked one slain, which does not take place during the period of grace C, but during the short space of judgment (W), then this very Jerusalem becomes the metropolis of the whole earth. Thus the contrast is very striking. During this period C Jerusalem is trodden under foot, and the Jews scattered amongst all nations; while during the period of the kingdom, Jerusalem is exalted above all cities, and the Jews gathered from all nations. Again, during this period C, the earth is full of wickedness (Luke 17:26-30; Thess. 2:7-11; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:1-5). But in the period to come (M), “The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.” Now a few are taken out of all nations (Acts 15:14), then all nations shall bear the name of the Lord (vs. 17); now all nations reject Christ, then all nations shall come up to worship Him at Jerusalem (Luke 19:12, 14; Zech. 14:16); now Satan is the “god of this world”; then shall he be cast out, and “the Lord shall be king over all the earth” (Eph. 2:2; 2 Cor. 4:4; Zech. 14:9). Perhaps the contrast could not be put in a stronger light than it is in Romans 8. During this period C the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain and bondage, waiting for the glorious liberty of the children of God. Will not this be a wondrous change?

Q. Well, I had no idea that there was so much scripture to show such a distinction. It must be very important rightly to understand what period scripture refers to. Is it not?

A. Indeed it is; and where the dispensations are not understood, all must be sad confusion. I would point out one instance; the beautiful passage in Isaiah 61:1-2, both periods, and the day of vengeance betwixt them, are in this verse. “To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord (C), and the day of vengeance of our God (W); to comfort all that mourn (M)”; and to the end of the chapter the prophet describes the millennial kingdom. If you compare this with Luke 4:17, you will find the Lord shut the book in the middle of this verse. So far the scripture was fulfilled. Little did those think, who heard Him, that before the book of wrath and vengeance should be opened (Rev. 5, 6 to 19), this long period of more than 1800 years, of grace, should intervene. Yes, this long period lay hid in the middle of that verse.

Q. Will you now tell me what you mean by the line A?

A. I must just remind you that the line I points out the history of Israel or the Jews, up to the birth, and death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. The line A, then, shows His ascension to heaven.

Q. Does the Scripture connect that event at all with His coming again?

A. Yes, it does very strikingly, to show two things: that He will come in person, and that He will come at the commencement of the period M, the millennium.

Q. I never knew that — Where is it, pray?

A. That He will come in person is very clear from Acts 1:10-11. “This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.”

And WHEN is quite as plain from Acts 3:21, “Whom the heaven must receive UNTIL the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets, since the world began.”

Nothing, then, is more certain than that at the beginning of the period (M), or times of restitution, Christ will come again in person.

Q. This seems very plain; but why do you make the line A before the circle C?

A. Because the church did not exist before Christ ascended up to heaven.

Q. Indeed! Why what was there, then, before?

A. First, saved individuals, as Abel, Enoch, Job, and then a nation in the flesh — the Jews — called of God, and on their part professing to be keepers of His law. And this continued until they murdered the Son of God. Thus, the cross abolished Judaism, and put an end to all man’s pretensions to stand before God on the ground of works. Thus, when Christ had ascended up to heaven, the Holy Ghost came down on the day of Pentecost. All was then changed. Jesus in heaven proved the mighty work of redemption was finished. God is just, and the justifier of him that believeth (Rom. 3:19-28; 2 Cor. 3:13, 14; Col. 2:11,17).

Q. I had not thought how very great the change must be from Judaism to Christianity; and still I do not think I quite know what you mean by the church. Will you explain a little more fully what you mean, and tell me, what is the difference between the church and all the saved before Pentecost, and the saved after the church is taken from this earth to meet Christ in the air?

A. There are two terms used in Scripture to describe the church, which cannot be applied either to the saved before or after the church. The first is, “the body,” and the other is, “the bride of Christ.” You will find much about the first in 1 Corinthians 12:12, 27. Is not this very wonderful, that all saved persons now are not left as before, as separated saved persons, or even as distinct societies of saved persons? But all saved persons now, by the Holy Ghost, form ONE BODY. And more, this body, a heavenly body, because joined to Christ the head in heaven — risen with Him (Eph. 1:22-23; 2:4-6). To show how very distinct this is from Israel, or anything before, this wondrous mystery was not even made known in the past ages (Eph. 3:4,10; 4:4-12; Col. 1:18 ;Rom. 16:25-26). And then as to the second term, “The bride,” how different is the position of a wife in a family from all other persons! They may be guests, and of the same family; but their position is altogether different. Such is the wondrous distinction, the elect assembly gathered during this period C is destined to share with a glorified Christ forever (Eph. 5:23-32; Rev. 19:6-9; 21:9,11). But these precious truths can only be learned by the Spirit’s teaching, leading our souls into close communion with God in His own word.

Q. I am looking at the line T. Is there anything in Scripture about this taking the church to meet Christ?

A. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 there is a very plain passage. The 17th verse states, “We who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them [who were asleep in Christ] in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air.” And also in 1 Corinthians 15:51, “Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.” In Titus 2:13, “Looking for that blessed hope (T) and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ (R).”

Thus we see that the apostle, and all who had been “turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God and to wait for His Son from heaven,” not only believed in this taking up to meet Christ, but were actually looking for the blessed event. Read, also,
1 Thessalonians 2:19; 5:23; 2 Thessalonians 3:5; Hebrews 9:28; 10:37; James 5:8 Peter 1:7, 13; 1 John 2:28; 3:2; Revelation 22:7,12,20. Surely this is no speculative doctrine, but a great practical truth, a solemn reality, that the Son of God may come, and take the church this hour to meet Him in the air. Can you say this is your hope?

Q. I really feel it is a very serious question. It almost makes me tremble, the very possibility of that great event taking place this hour. Tell me what would enable me to look for Christ’s coming with joy?

A. Peace with God; the certainty that you are justified from all sin and condemnation; the certainty that when you meet Christ, you will meet Him who has loved you, and washed you from all your sins in His own blood. This certainty alone can enable you to look for this blessed hope.

Q. Aye, that is true; but how am I to get that certainty?

A. As a ruined sinner, receiving Christ as your entire salvation; believing in Him with all your heart; confessing Him with your mouth. If you have thus received Him, you are justified, you may be certain. God says it — it must be true; for God cannot lie.

Q. Well, I do think if my mind was more settled, as to the certainty of my having peace with God, I could even long for the coming of Christ. But I thought a great deal of scripture had to be fulfilled yet; if so, then how is it possible that Christ may take the church this hour?

A. That is a difficulty, I know, with some, but the answer is simply this: such scriptures have not to be fulfilled, before the coming of Christ to take the church, but after it. And that is just the reason why I place the short line (W) between the taking of the church (T) and the coming of Christ in judgment to this earth (R). There are many passages which refer to this period of judgment, all of which have to be fulfilled. And all will be fulfilled, after the church is taken, during this short period (W). This is very clear from 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2. It appears from the persecutions that raged, and the great tribulation that these saints were enduring, some had tried to persuade them that the day of the Lord was come. The apostle shows them the impossibility of this; as they ought to have known, that before then they would be gathered to Christ. This had been implied, in the first epistle, as they were not of the night; and he had no need to write to them about the day of the Lord. So now he says, “Now, we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto Him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind... as that the day of Christ (the Lord) is at hand,” — or is come. He then goes on to show the fearful state of this world, when the Spirit of God, I doubt not, with the church, is taken away. And then shall that wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming. You may judge what the fearful character of this period (W) will be, and the coming of Christ in judgment, called the day of the Lord, which closes it, by reading the following scriptures — Psalms 82:8; Isaiah 2:12, 21; 13:6,12; Daniel 12:1; Joel 2:1-11; 3:9-16; Zephaniah 1:7,14-18; 3:8; Malachi 4:1; Matthew 24:21-22.

The Book of Revelation, from the 6th to the end of the 19th chapter, is mostly occupied with these terrible days of the fierceness of the wrath of Almighty God. This short period is marked (W).

The order of this wonderful book, Revelation, may be illustrated by the diagram. Thus, after the introduction, which occupies the first chapter, the 2nd and 3rd chapters, containing the addresses to the seven churches, describe the condition of the things that are now in Christendom during the present period (C). Then 4 and 5 take us up and let us see the redeemed above with the Lord. Then the 7, 8, 9, 10, 11th, and on to 19, show what will take place during the period W; and then the thousand years in Revelation 20, or period M, after which (S) Satan is loosed a little season; and then, Revelation 21, (E) the eternal state.

Q. I hope to examine the book of Revelation more closely: I never could make out the order of it before. But now as to the line R; do you not make two comings of Christ; and what proof have you in Scripture that there is any difference between the taking (T) and the revelation of Christ (R) at His coming to this earth?

A. There is the most clear proof of this. You remember at the taking, often called the “rapture”, the sleeping saints will be raised and the living ones changed and caught up to meet the Lord in the air. Now compare it with 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; Jude 14, 15; Revelation 1:7. In these passages it is the very opposite of going up to meet the Lord, as at the taking (T); it is Christ coming in judgment on an ungodly world. This judgment of living nations is described in Matthew 25:31-46.

Q. Why, is not that chapter a description of the last day and the general judgment?

A. Oh, no! If you compare it with Rev. 20:11-15, you will observe it is as different as possible. So far from all nations being gathered together, and judged, and separated which takes place at the commencement of the millennium (M), after the close of this thousand years the heavens and earth flee away, and the dead, small and great, stand before the great white throne of God at the end of the short period (S).

Q. Then during the millennium do you expect that all persons saved now will be on earth? and that Christ will also live on earth and reign over them?

A. The Scriptures teach that the earthly kingdom of Christ will be composed first of the Jews, and Israel in their own land; and all nations then on earth brought into subjection to Israel, and to Christ, the King of kings (Jeremiah 23:5-8; Zephaniah 3:8-20; Zechariah 14:8-21; Isaiah 2:1-4; 9:6-7; 11:1-11; 61:4-9). The church, composed of all the saved during this period (C), will share and enjoy the heavenly glory of Christ (John 14:1-3; 17:22; Ephesians 1:3; 2:4-7; 3:9-11; Revelation 5; 19:7-8; 21:9-11). The church will also reign with Christ over this earth. See Greek of Revelation 5:10, also 1:6, 19:14.

Oh reader, let me add one word more on the present work of God by the Holy Ghost “in visiting the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name.” What grace is this? Lost sinners are being brought to Christ. And not one that is brought can ever be cast out. Can you say from your very heart that Christ is your all? that as a sinner you have found Him to be your Savior? Oh, wondrous message to guilty men: “Be it known unto you, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him all that believe are justified from all things; from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:38-39). Justified! Yes, it is God that justifies. Who shall condemn? If a believer, will you not look for, and wait for the coming of Him who loved you and washed you in His own precious blood? Oh, can you say: “The coming of the Lord is nothing to me. What does it matter, if I only get to heaven, whether the Lord comes or I die.” Consummate selfishness! What would you think of a wife, whose husband was in a distant land, saying, “The return of my husband is nothing to me”? Where would be the affection of that heart that could receive a letter announcing that his return might be expected every day, and yet could lay aside that letter with indifference, saying, “It does not concern me”? The Spirit of God is arousing the cry, “Come, Lord Jesus.” A voice is heard from heaven, “Behold, I come quickly.” Is it possible for you to know the love of Christ, and say, “That voice does not speak to me”? Yes, if you are a Christian, that voice of love speaks to your very heart. It is your heart Christ wants. It is not your head filled with prophetic theories. He wants to hear, He counts on hearing the bride say, “Come, Lord Jesus.” And again He says, “Surely I come quickly.” Oh, that the whole church of God may be aroused to cry from their very heart. “EVEN SO, COME, LORD JESUS!”

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