

An Interview with Max King
by staff writer
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What was the conceptual key for you that maximized Jesus' role in redemptive history?



In the early '60s, after a decade in ministry, I began to do some serious study on both Old Testament prophecy and New Testament fulfillment. The basic insight that organized my search was God's covenant with Abraham. That promise in Genesis 12:1-3 carried the two-fold blessing of making Abraham into a great nation and through his seed blessing all families of the earth. Jesus, as Abraham's seed, came to bring that nation of Israel to a climax in the establishment of the New Covenant. This was the universal blessing as declared in Jeremiah 31.

Working with this key, I began to see that Jesus' End-Time prophecy of Matthew 24, known as the Olivet Discourse, had to do with the termination of fleshly Israel--under law and the raising of spiritual Israel--under faith. I came to see every aspect of eschatology (Second Coming, Judgment, Resurrection and the hope of righteousness by faith) flowing together in the first-century fulfillment of God's promise to bless all nations.

Before you founded Transmillennialism, were you known to preach a good Second Coming sermon?

Yes. I was raised in that mind-set. In fact I have an outline from the '50s called "The Four Comings of Christ," referring to the Incarnation, Pentecost, the destruction of Jerusalem and then the final coming at the End of the World. I think I can reduce them now to two! Really, in view of all the numerous imminency passages in the New Testament, it disturbed me that people were talking about a postponed coming of Christ's kingdom. The great diversity of interpretations on the Second Coming of Christ was proof to me that something was not right. This set me on a path of working for a more unified approach to redemption.

You wrote *The Spirit of Prophecy* thirty years ago. Placing the return of Christ in a first-century context was unheard of, wasn't it?

It was unheard of as far as I was concerned, because I had never read any scholar who took that position. We do have bits and pieces of writings in the 1800s that lean toward a Second Coming fulfillment--even then these understandings were partial. When I began to set forth the view that Jesus initiated the Last Days from the Cross until A.D. 70, and therefore all of the imminency passages relative to the kingdom and the parousia fall into that time frame, that created a stir! Thankfully, in efforts to disprove it, many have come to look at the Bible as never before. Since that time, the acceptance of Covenant Eschatology has blossomed into the worldwide movement it is today.

Did you ever ask, "Lord, why did you choose me to recover this biblical truth?"

No, I never did because I don't think it is a matter of being "chosen" for any special work; rather, it is the choice of all believers to search the Scriptures and make sense of them as best they can. I don't feel anymore "called" than anyone else--all of us should feel humbled that God has given us the privilege to study His word.

Certainly there were a lot more educated people out there than Max King. But whenever I looked at the brilliant minds writing on the subject, there were many contradictory statements on eschatology and few, if any, of the people I was reading agreed with each other. This helped me see that what really counts is not the scope of one's education, but one's devotion to studying Scripture. I was blessed in that I was made aware of these problems in Christian theology very early in my ministry. This set me off on what I consider to be the greatest journey through Scripture that I possibly could have made.

Up until N.T. Wright emerged in 1996, no world-class theologian framed Jesus as you do. How do you view his work?

As far as I am concerned the writings of Dr. Wright are a breath of fresh air in the field of theology. He is one of the most outstanding scholars that I have ever encountered. I was very flattered to go to London this past September and meet with him in his home at Westminster Abbey. It was just next to a miracle that he would even take time to talk to someone like me. The strong point of Wright's work is that he concludes that Jesus' eschatology was about Israel's history drawing to its climax in the first century, not a supposed end to the space-time order. He is a marvelous writer, a brilliant man, and I have the greatest respect for the venture he has entered into.

In what ways is Wright's *Jesus and the Victory of God* compatible with your writings?

In specializing in Jesus studies, Wright applies the Gospel sayings of Jesus to the end of the first century, Jewish Age. He illuminates the outlook of Second Temple Judaism and apocalyptic expectations in Jesus' day far beyond what anyone else has done. However, while Wright's works properly emphasize the "victory of God" that Jesus expected would come through the Cross, Resurrection and temple destruction of A.D. 70, I believe he falls short of relating the full covenantal transformation that gave the Fall of Jerusalem its significance. Right now I am working on a book on Romans that will develop 11:26-27 as that time of consummation in A.D. 70.

This is where Wright, in my opinion, is missing the inward, historically transcendent significance of the restoration of Israel, hidden or veiled within Old Testament prophecy. The unbelief of Israel relative to an earthly, nationalistic belief, was to be taken away through the coming in of the Gentiles. This facet of the messianic reign of Christ needs much more attention than is being given to it today.

Where do you think Wright is going in his scholarship?

I don't want to assume too much here. At present, Wright still envisions a yet future coming of Christ--and his critics are pressuring him hard on that. He bases his premise on a few passages, such as Romans 8 or 1 Corinthians 15, that still appear to him as incompatible with the events of A.D. 70. He has three or four more volumes to write and it will be interesting to see where he is going to land. He has seen "Jesus" and the victory of God, but needs to approach Paul in the same vein. There is no way you can assign different eschatological horizons to Jesus and Paul, otherwise you end up with Paul's founding Christianity.

The fact is that both Jesus and Paul looked to the consummation of the Jewish age. Like Jesus, Paul never focused beyond his day for the fulfillment of the hope of Israel. This hope encompassed the hope of resurrection, the hope of righteousness. One cannot transfer this Jewish hope of resurrection from Israel to a hypothetical end of a Church Age in an attempt to find its fulfillment. It seems apparent that we are going to have to hold the meaning of the death and resurrection of Christ to the particular thought-world and covenantal transition of the first century if the "Rubics Cube" of eschatology is to be solved.