

The Perfect

by [Adison Martin](#)

"... (B)ut when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away" [1 Cor. 13:10; ASV used in this article].

I once believed that the "coming" of the "perfect" referred to the return of Jesus himself. I suspect that some of my preterist friends would confess to having believed the same thing. After all, the "new testament" writers anticipated Jesus' return and, since he is perfect, that would fulfill the meaning of the passage. Right? Well... let's rethink that position.

One cannot read the "new testament" without realizing that the first century believers **expected** Jesus to return during their generation. Neither can one successfully argue that he was not perfect. I would even go so far as to say that the "perfect" that was to come, was to accompany the return of Jesus. But there is a difference between the "perfect" that was *to come*, and the coming again of the perfect one. Are you perfectly confused?

Actually, in the passage under consideration above, "*that which is perfect*" is in contrast to "*that which is in part.*" Therefore, in order to understand *the perfect*, it would be helpful to know what was *in part*. In order to learn that, we must expand our focus from the verse to its larger context. And when we do, we find that it lies within a passage wherein Paul divulged "*a most excellent way*" [1 Cor. 12:31]. He went on to very eloquently point out that the possession of gifts of the Spirit, without love, was not satisfactory. He wrote that love was superior to those gifts, as love would continue after they had ceased. He wrote that love ...

" [B]eareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Love never faileth: but whether [there be] prophecies, they shall be done away; whether [there be] tongues, they shall cease; whether [there be] knowledge, it shall be done away" [1 Cor. 13:7,8].

The gifts of *prophecy*, *tongues* (the Spirit given ability to immediately speak a human language that was not previously known by the speaker), and *knowledge* were to end. Why? Let Paul answer. He wrote, "*For we know in part, and we prophesy in part*" [1 Cor. 13:9]. Therefore, to argue about which gift was of the greatest value, was pointless. While the gifts of the Spirit were cherished blessings, the knowledge imparted to the ekklesia through them, was incomplete. The prophecies given by them were also incomplete, as a smoked glass mirror only provided a dim reflection of the true image [1 Cor. 13:12]. Thus the things that were *in part*, the gifts of the Spirit, were to last only until *the perfect* came. Now, what is *the perfect*?

According to the *Expository Dictionary Of New Testament Words* by W. E. Vine, Vol. III. Lo-Ser, pages 173-174, *perfect* is from the Greek "*teleios*." It "1 signifies having reached its end (*telos*), finished, complete, perfect.. . 2. "*Teleiotes*," the comparative degree of No.1, is used in Heb. 9: 11, of the very presence of God." Therefore the perfect must be something that was **finished**, something that had reached its desired end, or its **completion**. Ideally, it must also include *the very presence of God*. The "*new testament*" authors wrote about *the perfect*, but in order to recognize it we must once again expand our study to include what was happening among that first generation of Christians.

I stated earlier that those first Christians **expected** the return of Jesus, that is, his *parousia* (*presence* or *coming*) within their own generation. They had received that expectation from the lips of Jesus himself [**Matt. 16:28; Luke 21:5-36**]. So I believe that the return of Jesus occurred during their generation, specifically in the 70 A.D. destruction of Jerusalem and the temple located there, while "*some*" who had heard him teach were still alive to witness it. One thing that was to accompany the return of Jesus in that generation, was the long awaited eternal kingdom of God [**Luke 21:31**].

What do we think of when we hear the phrase, "*the eternal kingdom of God*?" If we think of it in terms of this world geography, such as the turf or territory over which a human king or queen could reign, I believe that we have the wrong idea. *Kingdom* is translated from the Greek "*basileia*," which, according to W. E. Vine in his *Expository Dictionary Of New Testament Words*. Vol. II. E-Li, page 294, "*is primarily an abstract noun, denoting sovereignty, royal power, dominion ... "The Kingdom of God is (a) the sphere of God's rule ..."*

The kingdom of God, then, is His sovereignty, royal power and dominion. His kingdom is also demarcated by the *sphere* of His rule, which, since God is Spirit and seeks spirits to worship (serve) Him [**John 4:23, 24**] must be *spiritual*.

Perhaps the first thing that we need to learn about God's reign is that it is eternal. He is sovereign; He has always reigned and He reigns forever. "*Jehovah shall reign for ever and ever*" [**Ex. 15:18**]. While God is sovereign and there is no one who is above Him, or who can reign over Him, men have rebelled against His rule from the beginning. Even so, the "*old testament*" provides many examples of God's continuing dominion over them. As one studies it, whether the subject is the Garden of Eden or the great flood - whether the Patriarchs or the nation - God's will, His *royal power* was always being exercised, though sometimes behind the scenes. He reigned over Israel while they suffered cruel bondage in Egypt. His reign continued when it was administered through Moses and the other leaders. And later, when Israel rejected God [**1 Sam. 8:7**], He continued to reign through His prophets and kings.

All of the prophets foretold the end times (*last days*) of biblical Israel, but they also foretold the setting up of an eternal kingdom (*reign*) of God. The Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar conquered Israel. He then had a troubling dream that none of his astrologers could interpret. But God gave him the meaning through Daniel, one of the Israelite captives. He revealed,

"And in the days of those kings [the Romans-am] shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed, nor shall the sovereignty thereof be left to another people; but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever" [Dan. 2:44].

Previously, God's reign over Israel had been expressed through the agency of *mortal* men who sat on *temporary* thrones, however briefly they did so. But the *kingdom* in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, which *the God of heaven* was to *set up*, was to *stand for ever*. That means that it was to be eternal, and eternal things are unseen-and therefore *spiritual*. The apostle Paul wrote,

"[F]or the things which are seen are temporal [temporary-am], but the things which are not seen are eternal" [2 Cor. 4:18].

Over four hundred years later - but *in the days of those (Roman) kings* - that cherished eternal kingdom of God had not yet been set up. However, due to the time limits established within Nebuchadnezzar's dream, the "*new testament*" rabbis were fervently anticipating its arrival.

John the Baptist arrived, proclaiming a simple message: "*Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*" [Matt. 3:2]. To paraphrase him: "*Turn back to God, for His eternal kingdom, His reign, is about to begin.*" After John was murdered [Mark. 6:17-29], Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, "*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe in the gospel*" [Mark 1:14, 15]. Since both John and Jesus taught that "*the kingdom of God (was) at hand,*" and since "*the time [was then-am] fulfilled,*" and since that message met the time expectations of the Jewish, religious leaders of that age, they came to hear them. But John was killed and Jesus taught that the kingdom (*reign*) of God was within them, that is, it was in their hearts [Luke 17:20, 21]. Thus, it was unseen and *spiritual*. Dissatisfied with a *spiritual* kingdom (*reign*), they rejected it and him, and finally crucified him.

That must have been perplexing to the disciples, who believed that Jesus was their Messiah, the Son of God, and that he was to reign forever *in the restored kingdom of Israel*. In fact, before Jesus ascended, they questioned him about whether it was time for that very event.

"They therefore, when they were come together, asked him, saying, 'Lord, dost thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel'" [Acts 1:6]?

Clearly, the disciples did not yet understand the *spiritual* nature of the kingdom [reign]. But, when endowed with power from heaven [Acts 2:1-4], they became witnesses of Jesus in Jerusalem, all Judea, Samaria and the uttermost part of the earth. And as they testified about him, the *spiritual* nature of God's kingdom (*reign*) was progressively revealed to and through them.

Earlier, I wrote that the prophets had foretold of biblical Israel's last days. That *natural* kingdom that was *evident* and *seen*, was *temporary*. It was to be replaced by an (*unseen*) eternal kingdom. The old heavens and earth of God's *natural* kingdom were passing away during "*new testament*" times. But the apostles wrote that a new kingdom; a "*new*" heavens and earth, were arriving.

"But, according to his promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" [2 Pet. 3:13].

It was Jesus who promised them *a new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness* [Matt. 24; Luke 21]. But that new system was to be the *spiritual* heavens and earth, and it would not fully arrive while the old system was still in place. Read what the author of Hebrews wrote about that:

"[T]he Holy Spirit this signifying, that the way into the holy place hath not yet been made manifest, while the first tabernacle is yet standing; which [is] a figure for the time present; according to which are offered both gifts and sacrifices that cannot, as touching the conscience, make the worshipper perfect, [being] only (with meats and drinks and divers washings) carnal ordinances, imposed until a time of reformation. But Christ having come a high priest of the good things to come, through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation ... " [Heb. 9:8-11].

While the first tabernacle—the old covenant *natural* system of imperfect rituals and sacrifices—still existed, the way into the holy place—the greater and more perfect *unseen* tabernacle—was not apparent. Is not *the greater and more perfect tabernacle*, greater and more perfect because it is **not** of this *natural* creation? If so, then it must be a *spiritual sphere*, or realm.

That same author to the Hebrews, in chapter 11 summarized *redemptive* history from the beginning until their time. He concluded it by writing,

"God having provided some better thing concerning us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect" [Heb. 11 :40].

In that verse, two groups of people were to be concurrently made perfect. One of them was referred to as "*they*." That group contained the "*old testament*" heroes of faith about whom he had written. Not one of them had been perfected at the time that Hebrews was written. None of them had reached the end of their faith - which was to live in the city having foundations [Heb. 11:10].

The group that was to be perfected with "*them*" was referred to as "*us*" and contained the author and the Hebrew Christians to whom he wrote. Thus the "*old testament*" and the "*new testament*" faithful were to be *perfected* together. That is, both groups would attain

to life in that city having foundations at the same time. Although they had not yet obtained it when Hebrews was written [**Heb. 13:14**], they had come to it.

*"[B]ut ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem ... [W]hose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, 'Yet once more will I make to tremble not the earth only, but also the heaven.' And this [word], 'Yet once more,' signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that have been made, that those things which are not shaken may remain. Wherefore, receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us have grace, whereby we may offer service well-pleasing to God with reverence and awe" [**Heb. 12:22-28**].*

The first century, Hebrew Christians were receiving a *spiritual* kingdom (*reign*). It only remained for God to shake (*remove*) the *natural* heaven and earth of biblical Israel, in order for them to fully inherit *the perfect* new heaven and earth, which was *spiritual*, complete and eternal. And when they did so, the imperfect gifts of the Spirit ended.

John was privileged to witness the arrival of *the perfect*.

*"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth are passed away; and the sea is no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven of God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of the throne saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall dwell with them, and they shall be his peoples, and God himself shall be with them, [and be] their God'" [**Rev. 21:1-3**].*

Gifts of the Spirit continued until *the perfect* arrived. *The perfect*, the completed, spiritual kingdom (*reign*) of God, was made apparent when the first tabernacle (*the Jewish temple*) was destroyed in 70 A.D. Since that time, God's *presence*, His kingdom (*reign*), has been within the unseen hearts (*spirits*) of His subjects. **If** we are His, and we are, He reigns within us and among us forever.

Does that sound *perfect* to you?

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