

## **PART I**

# **The Heart of the Kingdom**



## Chapter 1

# The Centrality of the Throne

One generation was raised on Westerns; the next generation – Star Trek. It makes little difference, for the plot is essentially the same. The good guys beat the bad guys – but only just! It is politically incorrect to talk in these terms now, but the cowboys were the good guys. The cowboys bravely held on until finally the Cavalry arrived. Then the scene shifted to the final frontier: space. The battle between good and evil became inter-galactic, but it was the same storyline that kept a new generation on the edge of their seats until the end of the show. We boldly went back to the same plot where our forefathers had gone before!

Sadly, the church has based its theology on Star Trek. It seemed to be such a wholesome family show, with none of the swearing and sex that we don't want our children to see. Even the violence is acceptable if it is directed toward aliens from outer space who do not seem to bleed so profusely. In any case, violence is even to be considered exemplary in a good cause. Surely the Westerns are thoroughly moral in their portrayal of the triumph of good over evil? The moral is clear: Calvary is a spiritual equivalent of the Cavalry.

But this is fundamentally flawed. We dare not have a "Star Wars" theology which sees history as a cosmic battle between good and evil, with good triumphing, but only just and at the last minute, rather against the

Only those who had learned to overcome could be given the right to sit with the Son on his throne. History can thus be seen as on-the-job training for the church. It is not the cosmic battle between good and evil; it is the church's apprenticeship as the bride of Christ.

Man could have served his apprenticeship in the Garden of Eden. If he had overcome Satan there, he would have been qualified to rule in the dominion mandate given to him. As an overcomer he would have been entitled to rule. But God had an even greater plan. He could have shared his rule with angels, but he chose not to (Heb 1:13). He did not merely want created beings to share life with his Son; he wanted redeemed creatures to do so. Our privileges as those who have been saved are inestimable. Angels long to look into the mystery of salvation because they do not know the joy of being forgiven. Redemption has brought about a unique love relationship between Christ and his bride. We love because we have been forgiven (Lk 7:47).

History is not a battle; it is a marvellous plan, intricately worked. It starts with God ("In the beginning was God"), not with God and Satan. History is His story, not their story. God began by creating the perfect environment, and then he made the creature in whom he had planned to invest government. He immediately declared his purpose for that creature, man: to rule (Gen 1:28). And at the end of history his purpose is fulfilled: "And they will reign for ever and ever" (Rev 22:5).

Satan is not a co-star in the celestial star wars. He is a punch-bag for the rising star who is learning to reign with the morning star. God's throne is eternally established. His authority has never been in question. We need to live in the light of that authority; we shall consider two aspects of it with their implications for us.

## The Untouchable Throne

Firstly, God's throne is untouchable. His authority cannot be successfully challenged. Imagine a force-field surrounding the military HQ of some great power in a science fiction drama. Laser beams fry the bodies of all

run of play. History is not a process of war against evil as God strives with man to overcome the wayward universe. History is the masterful creative handiwork of God whose throne is eternally secure. From before the beginning of time, God had a marvellous plan. Calvary is part of that plan; the Lamb was slain “before the foundation of the world” (Rev 13:8), not as a late response to an unforeseen emergency.

A kingdom is an organized community headed by a king. It implies both the power of the king and the sphere over which that power is exercised. Jesus rules over heaven and earth. God’s kingdom does not depend upon what happens on earth. God’s actions are not reactions to events on earth, for his throne is established in the heavens. He is far above all things, not anxiously waiting to see what sinister trick the enemy will try next. He is not waiting in the fort for the telegraph message to get through requesting help, desperately hoping that the wires don’t get cut before the crucial prayer request gets through. He is ruling, not reacting; He is the King.

We do not always see that God is working all things out according to his eternal purpose. It is certainly not always clear what that purpose is. But when we are seeking the kingdom, we are looking for the manifestation of that rule in the practical realities of life on earth. It exists irrespective of earthly events, but our prayer is that increasingly men will acknowledge its reality.

The Psalmist David looked forward to the spread of the knowledge of God’s glorious kingdom (Ps 145:10-12). But he is also quick to point out that the kingdom is an everlasting kingdom (v13). The kingdom was as real in the past, when it was less apparent, as it is in the present, and as it will be in the future. Its earthly manifestation will increase but its eternal existence remains sure.

Paul Billheimer, in his book “Destined for the Throne”<sup>1</sup>, gives some helpful insights into the mystery of God’s plan, which includes the existence of evil. He speaks of God’s desire for his Son to have an eternal companion to share his throne. It was not good that he should be alone, and out of his pierced side was brought forth a companion for the Son. So was born the church, to be given the kingdom (Lk 12:32) and to share in his sovereign power and authority (Rev 3:21).

about the inviolability of God's throne. He said,

“The eternal purpose of God to set his king upon the throne, and to make Jesus Christ reign for ever and ever, must be fulfilled, for the Holy Ghost has undertaken to see it accomplished. Amidst the surging tumult of the battle, the result of the conflict is never in doubt for a moment. It may seem as though the fate of Christ's cause hung in a balance, and that the scales were in equilibrium; but it is not so. The glory of Christ never wanes; it must increase from day to day; and the day shall come when Christ's praise shall go up from all human tongues.”<sup>3</sup>

So there can be no question of history being a battle between two thrones. It must be the drama of the ultimate throne achieving its intention of training man and placing him in his destined position as prince of this world. God's throne is eternal. It was established long before Satan ever rebelled and it will remain established long after Satan is destroyed. We know that the word “eternal” describes quality as well as quantity. It is hard enough to try to imagine the eternity of God's throne in the quantitative sense of its eternal duration. It is even more wonderful to consider the quality of its eternal power. It is beyond our comprehension to conceive of a throne that by its very nature cannot be reached by an alien power. Yet such is the ultimacy of God's throne. It is without rival.

### The Universal Throne

Secondly, God's throne is universal. It is absolute; it is complete. It is the one thing in the whole universe that is so fixed that everything else revolves around it. “By him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.... so that in everything he might have the supremacy.” (Col 1:16-18).

His supremacy is such that he alone can hold things together; his

beings who cross the line and deflect any missiles that approach. The fortress is untouchable.

But not only is this an impenetrable defence. The same force fields surround every offensive rocket that is fired: nothing can prevent them reaching their target. Every soldier enjoys the same protection; none can stop them fulfilling their mission. Such an army is invincible; such a power is untouchable.

“The Lord reigns, he is robed in majesty. The world is firmly established; it cannot be moved. Your throne was established long ago; you are from all eternity” (Ps 93:1,2). There is only one throne. Satan does not have a rival throne. Scripture speaks of Satan having been cast down. He is described as wandering the earth (Job 1:6,7; 1Pe 5:8) rather than occupying an exalted position on an alternative throne. He does not constitute a threat to God’s ultimate throne. As John Frame has written, “As controller and authority, God is “absolute,” that is, His power and wisdom are beyond any possibility of successful challenge.”<sup>2</sup>

When Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden, he fell from the position God had intended him to fill. Something very significant happened concerning rulership in the world. But what happened was not that God was displaced from his throne. It was man who lost his throne. There was a real change in government on the earth, but God’s throne remained intact. It has always been firmly established.

Clearly the Bible refers to Satan as the “Prince of this world” (Jn 14:30). But he did not usurp that title from God; he stole it from man. Man was intended to be the prince of this world (Gen 1:28). So when Jesus came, he came as a man to conquer and reclaim the world, and to restore to man the intended rule. He said “I have overcome the world” (Jn 16:33), so he was entitled to speak about the kingdom being given back to man in the persons of the redeemed community (Lk 12:32).

God’s throne remains unaffected by the events on earth. It is holy, which means that it is totally separate from all the vicissitudes of life on earth. His throne, and the place to which he has now raised Christ, is “far above all” (Eph 1:20,21). There is no rule, authority, power or dominion which can touch it. Its nature is such that it cannot be threatened.

The great preacher of the 19th century, C.H. Spurgeon, had no doubts

we find in the Bible that God's will has been clearly stated outlining its requirements and guidelines for every area of life.

“If there are no God-given standards of righteousness in every area of life, there can be no call to repentance in every area of life. But if we say this, then we are saying that sinful men can continue doing anything they want in these areas. But there is no zone of neutrality from God's standards of righteousness anywhere in the universe.” (Gary North)<sup>5</sup>

We are faced with a clear choice between antinomianism, in which every man is a law unto himself, and acknowledging that the whole of life has to revolve around the revealed law of God. That law is as relevant when we are sitting at home or walking down the street as it is when we are sitting in church (Deut 6:4-9; 11:18-21). It is that law which gives expression to the practical impact of the rule of the throne in day-to-day life.

## The Trouble with Man

We have highlighted a couple of the qualities of God's authority: we have seen that his throne is untouchable and universal. But before we proceed we must pause to recognize that to talk of authority is not fashionable today. We live in a society with a negative attitude towards authority. It is as if the very idea of a throne seems restrictive to our personal freedom. But that is a distorted view of authority. Just as the railway track makes it possible for a train to cover great distances, by restricting it to follow a course that prevents it from getting bogged down in the first muddy field it comes to, so God's authority both limits us and enables us to reach our destination.

The reality is that God's authority is liberating, not restrictive. It was a lie of Satan that introduced the notion that it would be good for man to be autonomous (Gen 3). But the desire to be free of God's law proved to be damaging rather than beneficial to man. It brought death, not life.

We can clearly see the harm that was done in the Garden of Eden. God had decreed that man should be sovereign over the whole earth. So much for those who see God as wanting to place unnecessary restric-

throne is the cohesiveness that makes a universe rather than a multi-verse. Everything which is not in harmony with his government will ultimately fall apart. This is true on a personal level. Paul tells us in Romans that men who disregarded God's laws "received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion" (1:27). There is something in-built in the universe which means that life outside of God's ways carries its own consequences. Similarly on a national level, societies which disregard God's standards have an inherent tendency to disintegrate. "If you do not follow all the words of this law the Lord will send plagues, ... disasters, ...diseases." (Deut 28:58-60)

Men and nations face the same choice as they live in the light of God's absolute throne: autonomy or theonomy. They can live under self-rule or under God's rule. But in making their choice the lesson of Col 1:16-18 is clear; self-rule does not work. Only God's government can ultimately hold anything together.

God's throne thus has relevance in every pocket of reality. It has immensely practical implications for every facet of life. The word "every" is important in Scripture. We are told in Deut 8:3,6 that we are to live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord. Also, 2Tim 3:16 tells us that every scripture is God-breathed and is useful for every good work. Thus the whole of scripture speaks to the whole of life.

It was with this in mind that W.A. Visser t'Hooft wrote: "It is strange that after these many centuries in this respect the Bible is still largely a closed book. We have only the vaguest ideas about its message concerning the abiding realities of social and political life. We operate with a few obvious texts or a few general principles, but we know next to nothing about the biblical witness with regard to such basic elements of our common life as property, justice, work, soil, money."<sup>4</sup>

Yet such knowledge of the scriptures is vital if we really believe that the Word of God touches every area of life. If the Bible does not speak about the whole of life, then we are left to our own understanding as we seek to live under the government of God. In effect we make up our own minds about what the will of God is. But it is a very low view of Scripture which maintains that God's Word only addresses the so-called religious sphere of life. In reality, the relevance of the throne of God is such that

insubordination, man now sees himself as bearing the image of nature. His behaviour has become consistent with his evolutionary philosophy.

The survival of the fittest reduces man to the level of lower creatures as he exhibits a tendency to act like an animal. Contrary to modern thinking, insubordination does not lead to freedom; it has always led to bondage. That is why the message of the Kingdom of God is called good news; God's government is good news! Obedience does not lead to repression; it always leads to blessing. "If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land; but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken" (Is 1:19,20).

## Law and Order

Why is it that obedience always leads to blessing? Part of the reason is to be found in the fact that God is a God of order and peace (1Cor 14:33). The two attributes are inter-related. Peace comes from order. When everything is in its proper place, functioning according to God's order, peace results. Blessing is a manifestation of that peace, the sense of well-being that can only come from being in the proper place in relation to God.

That is why, when we want to experience God's peace, even in the midst of turmoil, it is for his *government* (not for his sympathy) that we should go to Jesus. Seek first the Kingdom of God ...and all these things will be added unto you. Jesus is the *Prince* of Peace, not the Shepherd or Counsellor of Peace. The key to peace is rulership, because government brings order, and order brings peace. The promise concerning the Prince of peace is that "of the increase of his government *and* peace there will be no end (Is 9:7). Government precedes peace.

This seems strange to us given our concept of peace. Our view is more akin to the Hindu concept of peace as the absence of conflict. But biblical peace is of the Jewish kind: Shalom. The root meaning of this Hebrew word includes, among other things, the idea of standing with

tions on man. That sovereignty was conditional upon man being willing to be subordinated to God and his very few laws. But God's desire was that man should rule.

Man, however, chose to be insubordinate. It is one of the unbreakable laws of the universe that you always reap what you sow. Therefore having sown insubordination into the earth, that is what he reaped. The curse of Genesis 3:17-19 meant that from that point on, man would have to strive to overcome an unco-operative earth to eke out an existence. Man now lives with the principle of insubordination in that which is under his dominion. His desire for freedom has brought him nothing but frustration.

It is not popular to talk of man's failure today; it harms his fragile self-esteem. Rather than saying that Adam failed, perhaps we should say that he achieved deficiency. But the end result, in the vernacular of the politically correct, was that he was terminally inconvenienced. In language that more ordinary people understand: he was dead.

Man's current lot is filled with irony. He was intended to live under God and over nature. But in his desire to exalt himself, to break out of the restrictions of authority, he sought to place himself over God, but ended up under nature. The ground that he was supposed to rule in order that it might feed him ended up ruling him. His body was buried beneath the ground and in the process of decomposition, the soil, as it were, ate him for lunch. Every graveyard proclaims that the earth subdues us.

The devaluation of man has reached its logical conclusion in recent history as he has come to adopt an evolutionary view of himself as being a product of nature. Viewed as a product of nature, man is now philosophically subordinated to nature, just as down through the centuries the frustration of work has born testimony to man's practical subordination to nature. Man regards himself as merely an animal, bearing the image of nature rather than the image of God. Evolutionary theory proclaims him to be no more than slime plus time.

If only man had been prepared to hold the subordinated position of bearing the image of God, he would have been free to stamp that image on nature, and rule the earth for the glory of God. But instead, in his

Peace is possible because there is one God who holds everything together to work according to his divinely decreed order and pattern. When we submit to that order, everything works properly. Seen in this light, submission to God is not the burden that Satan has deceived us into thinking it is. His commands are not burdensome (1Jn 5:3), and his yoke is easy (Mt 11:30). As David said, God's laws are more desirable than gold and sweeter than honey (Ps 19:10).

C.S. Lewis meditated upon the mysteriousness of such statements in the thinking of modern man.<sup>7</sup> He wrote,

“I can understand that a man can, and must, respect these statutes, and try to obey them and assent to them in his heart. But it is very hard to find how they could be, so to speak, delicious, how they exhilarate. If this is difficult at any time, it is doubly so when obedience is opposed to some strong, and perhaps in itself innocent, desire.

“A hungry man left alone, without money, in a shop filled with the smell and sight of new bread, roasting coffee, or fresh strawberries – can he find the prohibition of theft at all like honey? ... Surely it could be more aptly compared to the dentist's forceps or the front line than to anything enjoyable and sweet.”

But having compared the Jewish law with the paganism and murderous practices (such as child sacrifice) of the surrounding nations, Lewis concluded his meditation by giving whole-hearted assent to the Psalmist's praise of the law. He wrote:

“In so far as this idea of the Law's beauty, sweetness, or preciousness, arose from the contrast of the surrounding Paganisms, we may soon find occasion to recover it. Christians increasingly live on a spiritual island; new and rival ways of life surround it in all directions and their tides come further up the beach every time.

“None of these new ways is yet so filthy or cruel as some Semitic Paganism. But many of them ignore all individual rights and are cruel enough. Some give morality a whole new meaning which we cannot accept, some deny its possibility. Perhaps we shall learn, sharply enough,

your foot on the throat of your enemy. That is real peace! The Russian word for peace contains the same connotation - which is why the old Soviet empire could be so enthusiastically involved in peace-talks. The Americans were thinking about the absence of conflict while the Russians were frantically escalating the arms build-up in the cause of peace. They were desperate for the peace that would result from having their foot on their enemies' throat.

For us to have peace, we must understand this fundamental concept. We are at war with God, and the only hope for peace is to surrender to his authority. When we submit to his government, there will be peace. Until then, there will only be conflict. And there is no other place to find peace than under his government, though people are searching for it everywhere.

The quest for inner peace is all-consuming in our narcissistic culture. Sadly many are not finding it because they are looking in the wrong place. One of the fallacies of the modern era is that inner peace is found in the domain of the Counsellor rather than the Prince. The psychology-based counsellor will often seek to help the person feel better about himself. The solution is seen in improved self-esteem. There are all kinds of support groups to counteract this lack of self worth. One that is currently growing in the USA is a support group for those suffering from a sense of inferiority because they have never been sexually harassed!

The unauthorized revised version of the Bible seems to say: "Seek ye first a proper self-esteem, and all these things will be added unto you." Preaching from this pretext, Robert Schuller is on record as saying: "Self-esteem is the single greatest need facing the human race today." He continues, "I contend that this unfulfilled need for self-esteem underlies every act."<sup>6</sup> However, the Bible is clear that it is our sinful nature that underlies every act. As we have so often gone along with the impulses of that nature, we feel bad because we are bad. Evangelicals who have so often used the maxim: "Feelings follow facts" when trying to give new converts assurance of salvation, should try to remember it when considering their own lives. Feeling good will follow being good. Being good entails living properly under God's government. Peace will follow obedience; it will not follow a self-esteem seminar.

We see the nature of Satan's rebellion in the simple words "I will." They are found repeatedly on his lips in the description of his rebellion in Is 14:13,14 - "I WILL ascend to heaven; I WILL raise my throne above the stars of God; I WILL sit enthroned on the mount of the assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I WILL ascend above the tops of the clouds; I WILL make myself like the Most High."

The moment the anointed cherub said in his heart "I will" (rather than focusing on "Your will"), sin was born. And as soon as he started the series of "I will"s, it was inevitable that eventually he would conclude by saying "I will be like God." God exercises his will; so will I. God determines what is right and wrong; so will I. In the assertion of his will, Satan determined no longer to be a subordinate. Now he was to be a sovereign.

What is important for us to see in this is that Satan's assertion of his self-will did not bring him the greater freedom that he coveted. He said, "I will ascend," but God said "You are brought down" (vs 13,15). At the end of time, people will be wondering what all the fuss was about for he will be seen to be nothing (v.16, cf Ezek 28:17-19). In his desire for more freedom, Satan robbed himself of all that God had given him.

It is interesting to note how Jesus is portrayed as being the exact opposite to Satan in Philippians 2. Jesus' response to his Father was to say, "I will descend, submit, obey." God's reply was to affirm, "You are exalted."

In the contrast between the two we see that the moment Satan rebelled, he committed himself to being a loser for all eternity. God's authority is such that his will shall be done. Anybody who seeks to pursue his own will at any point is bound to lose. If Satan had been willing to obey, he would have had a throne with the authority to rule over a large sphere. But because he was not willing to submit his will to God, he lost his throne and was cast down to earth. Here he knows his time is short, and every effort to establish a rival kingdom is being thwarted by the One who is in the process of making his enemies to be his footstool. The tragedy, however, is that man has got caught up in the rebellion, and therefore suffers the same fate of losing all that God had given him.

### **Man Gets Dragged In**

to value the clean air and “sweet reasonableness” of the Christian ethics which in a more Christian age we might have taken for granted.”

C.S.Lewis’ prophetic words (published in 1961) are being fulfilled today. In contrast with the darkness of godless cultures, be they primitive spiritism or atheistic totalitarianism, the Word of God shines out as gold. The Psalmist rejoiced in all that was laid up for those who learned to obey: Psalm 112 amplifies the thought expressed in its opening verse – “Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who finds great delight in his commands.” God’s commands are given to us for our own good, not to satisfy the arbitrary whims of some despotic deity (Deut 10;12,13).

The wise man builds his house, structures his life, upon the rock – which Jesus defined as putting into practice the commands of God. The reason that this is wise is that anything built on obedience lasts; whatever is built on disobedience eventually fails. Obedience is for our good!

### **My Will, not Yours, be Done**

If the scriptures are clear on the blessings that flow from obedience, we may be sure they are equally graphic in depicting the consequences of disobedience. Obedience says, “Thy will be done.” Disobedience says, “My will be done.” Frank Sinatra sings the hymn of modern man when he croons, “I did it my way.” But my way does not work.

The most vivid illustration of this must be seen in the person of Satan himself. We are told that he initially held a position of great honour in God’s order. He even had a throne (Is 4:13), but eventually he could no longer bear to be subservient. He had great authority, but his authority was not of his own making. He was ordained (Ezek 28:14); he was given authority to carry out the will of another, the will of God.

Now we come to the heart of the matter. Regardless of how much authority a man may have, if it is derived from another it never gives him the power to do as he pleases. And it is that desire for self-determination, for the freedom to pursue his own will rather than the will of another, which was the essence of Satan’s downfall – and so too for us.

Satan offered man the one thing that was attractive to him: he could “be like God”(v.5). Suddenly man became the judge of God’s word, no longer subject to it. In a moment, humanism was born. Man decided he was free to determine what is pleasing and desirable (v.6), and to over-rule God’s word, to set his own rule over God’s rule.

On that basis, millions of autonomous decisions have been made. God’s word forbids homosexuality; but man is free to make his own laws which legitimize the practices of consenting adults. God’s word speaks of a baby in the womb as being a life formed by God with an already defined gifting and purpose; but man prefers to define life as beginning at birth in order to make it easier to do away with a “fetus” which would become an inconvenience if allowed to live.

Observing Adam and Eve’s response to the outcome of their new-found freedom is instructive for us. Their eyes were opened to the evil they had done and they were filled with shame. Instead of acknowledging their guilt, they tried to cover their shame (v.7) - using fig leaves to cover their nakedness. Man continues to try to cover his guilt and justify his actions.

Thus the baby being spoken about in the pregnancy check-up is suddenly referred to as a fetus when the conversation with the doctor becomes an abortion consultation. Homosexuality is spoken of simply in terms of that which is beyond a man’s control - something you are born with rather than an activity for which you are responsible.

But no covering, no excuse of our own making, will ever cover the guilt of overriding God’s will (as revealed in his word) by our will. The absurdity of the fig leaves illustrates this. Man’s only hope was that God in his mercy would provide an adequate covering. And that he did; he made it out of skins (v.21). Those skins were from the first animal sacrifice in history. God covered man with garments that could only be procured through death and the shedding of blood. This tells us that from the beginning, God knew that only Jesus’ blood can cover man’s guilt and shame effectively.

From the Garden of Eden, man became embroiled in rebellion. Man, in following Satan, decided to be like God. He wanted to make up his own mind as to whether God’s word was right or wrong, to reject that

When Satan was cast down, in his anger he was determined to take others down with him. Man was going to get pulled into the conflict. Of course God knew that this was going to happen, and had already planned to make it part of his overall strategy. But for mankind it appeared to be the beginning of trouble.

In leading his rebellion, Satan was not so foolish as to say, "Follow me, not God!" Nobody would have followed Satan rather than God. But he knew that man could be tempted to follow his own will rather than the will of God. Everybody who followed Satan by saying "I will" instead of "Your will be done" stepped out from under the protection of God's government, and into Satan's territory. This is the essence of the story of the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3. God had given a clear revelation of his will. Satan's strategy was to seduce man into questioning God's will (v.1). Was obedience to God's will really in man's best interests? Would it not be better for man to be able to make up his own mind about what is good and evil?

Eve sinned before she took a bite out of the piece of fruit in her hand. In even entertaining the possibility, she had fallen. She had two contradictory words to consider: God's word and the serpent's counter-proposal. She set herself up as the final arbiter: she would decide whether God's word or the serpent's was true. Even if she had decided God's word was true, she was still fallen - for she was making her independent decision rather than implicitly trusting God's word. She was determining matters of right and wrong on the basis of human reason and experience.

Eve, like all human beings since, did not want to be told what is good and evil. She wanted to discover it for herself, to come to her own conclusions. She wanted to listen to the alternatives and make her own decision. Mark Twain said: "Something moral is something you feel good after... and something immoral is something you feel bad after." In other words, you have to try everything at least once, and then you will know for yourself. But Eve's action was not merely bad because she felt bad afterwards; it was the ultimate arrogance to imagine she could test God's word in the crucible of human reason and experience.

In offering this possibility of knowing (or defining) good and evil,

tain zoning regulations. But organized society is man's responsibility. Man has excluded God's word from having any effect on issues of politics or economics. Man, not God, rules the city. The tower of Babel lives on.

In reality there is still only one throne. When men had built their tower in Babel, and exalted themselves as high as they could, still God had to descend even to look at it! His throne was not threatened in the least. He maintained the government and had both the right and the power to confuse and to bring to nothing the feeble attempts of a rebellious society.

Confusion and scattering have always been God's curse on societies that seek to exalt themselves and de-throne God. The Bible teaches that the issue will be with us until the return of Jesus, for Babylon (Babel) is still there at the end of the story when, in Revelation, its ultimate defeat is inflicted. But that city, which is the summation of all that man builds out of self-rule, is permanently under the curse of God.

The story of human history that is traced in the Bible does not place excessive weight on the development of Babylon. It would be more accurate to say that it describes history as a tale of two cities: Jerusalem and Babylon. Both have symbolic significance beyond their physical geography. They represent two kingdoms, two societies organized under different governments.

Babylon was the city that man decided to build to make a name for himself. Jerusalem is the lasting city that is built around those whose ultimate desire is for the glory of God's name (see Isaiah 26:1,8,13). Every attempt of man to build for the sake of his own name will come to nothing. The pride that originates in the Satanic desire for autonomous self-rule leads only to oblivion. Isaiah speaks of the fate of those who set themselves up to rule apart from God: "They are now dead, they live no more; ...you wiped out all memory of them" (Is 26:14). He says of the king of Babylon: "The offspring of the wicked will never be mentioned again" (Is 14:20). Nahum, in his denunciation of society organized apart from God, develops the meaning of this further when he says "You will have no descendants to bear your name" (Nah 1:14).

So much for the desire to make a name for oneself! Yet in stark con-

which he found displeasing. Human reason superseded divine revelation. Man placed himself on the throne.

### We're in it Together

Just as individual man's rebellion against God may be seen in the Garden of Eden (with its antidote being pre-figured to be later fulfilled in the Garden of Gethsemane), so corporate man's rebellion may be seen in the Tower of Babel. That, too, would have its New Testament solution, as we shall see. Not only have individuals determined to be autonomous; in society, men have organized together to break free of God's government.

In Genesis 11 we see that man in society has much the same desire as individual men and women. Corporate man's driving ambition is, "Let's make a name for ourselves!" (v.4). The purpose of the tower was to ascend to reach the heavens. It is interesting to see that the first mention of the word "kingdom" in the Bible refers to Babylon, the location of Babel (Gen 10:10). Clearly that which is at stake here is rule. Corporate man wants to become as God in his own little city.

To this day man wants to keep God out of his city. Keep religion out of politics. Barry Goldwater was considered to be very conservative when he ran for President of the USA in 1964. His campaign slogan was "In your heart you know he's right." Some of his opponents retorted, "In your guts you know he's nuts." There are now some conservatives who might agree with the latter. In 1993, in an interview with the homosexual magazine *The Advocate*, Goldwater stated clearly: "There is no place in this country for practising religion in politics."

Goldwater's statement is but one of the latest of a long line of such remarks. In 1788, Lord Melbourne said in the British Parliament during the debate on abolishing slavery: "Things have come to a pretty pass when religion is allowed to invade public life."<sup>8</sup> How ironical that the same argument used by those in favour of maintaining slavery is now used by the proponents of abortion!

In our secularized society, if people want to worship God in their hearts, that's fine. It's even permissible in church buildings within cer-

nation to hear the gospel of the kingdom in their own language. Barriers of communication were broken down and people from all backgrounds became fellow citizens in the new society. The Holy Spirit was given as the guarantee of the inheritance of those who had become members of the heavenly city that God was building.

The scriptures are clear about who may receive the Holy Spirit. In the context of the coronation of Jesus, Peter speaks of “the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him” (Acts 5:32). The Holy Spirit is often depicted as a river. In the City of God you cannot have the river without the throne. The river of the Holy Spirit flows out from the throne and out of the city to bring healing to a world that has been spoiled by the curse of disobedience.

So we have seen, from the beginning of the Bible to the end, the throne of God is central. The throne represents God’s will being done God’s way. Individual men and women have all rebelled against it. Society has rebelled against it. But it remains intact. Even Satan’s rebellion has not threatened it. Furthermore, that throne is not the threat to our freedom that we have been deceived into thinking that it is. In fact it is the key to our security. Healing flows from the throne; it is the only cure for a world that is being torn apart by the consequences of its rebellion.

To submit to God’s rule is not going to do him any favours. He does not breath a sigh of relief when another person becomes a Christian, as if somehow the balance may now be tipped as another moves out of the kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of God. His rule is unaffected; it cannot be added to. All that such submission means is that we can thereby come into a place where God’s throne works for our blessing instead of our curse. Whatever we decide to do, God will be God. As Benjamin Warfield has written:

“You must not fancy, then, that God sits helplessly by while the world which he has created for himself hurtles helplessly to destruction, and he is only able with difficulty to snatch here and there a brand from the universal burning. The world does not govern him in a single one of its acts: he governs it and leads it steadily onward to the end which, from

trast, Jesus, who wanted only to do his Father's will, has been given a name that is above every name (Phil 2:9). His name will be perpetuated in his offspring, for the inhabitants of the new Jerusalem will carry his name on their foreheads (Rev 22:4). That is why the true Biblical emphasis is not on the power of the Kingdom of Darkness. There is no doubt about the outcome. Babylon is doomed to oblivion. There is another city that God is building. We, like Abraham, are "looking forward to a city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Heb 11:10). It is a city that is built in heaven, and its central feature is a throne (Rev 22:3). But unlike Abraham, our vision is not merely futuristic, for Jesus said that his kingdom is at hand.

### The City with the Throne

Revelation speaks of the new Jerusalem "coming down from heaven" (21:2). But we should not be misled into thinking that this only refers to some future descent at the return of Jesus. While the fulfilment of all that is entailed in the new Jerusalem awaits Jesus' return, that scripture tells us more particularly that this city is of heavenly origin. As Jesus said, his kingdom is not of this world. Not that his government has no impact on this world, but it is not dependent on anything in the world for the source of its authority.

The writer to the Hebrews tells us that we are already receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken (12:28). In the same context, he also tells us "We have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God" (12:22). So, while this city is of heavenly origin, we can see that it is already being built on the earth. The curse of Babel was overcome at Pentecost, where the confusion of languages was overcome in the proclamation of the Gospel. That event was a demonstration on earth of the coronation of Jesus in heaven. It represented the establishment of a new city under his government. Peter's explanation of the extraordinary events of that day clearly depicted them as being a manifestation of Christ taking of his throne (Acts 2:33-36).

The gift of tongues, released at Pentecost, enabled men from every

the beginning He had determined for it.

“Through all the years, one increasing purpose runs: the kingdoms of the earth become ever more and more the Kingdom of our God and of his Christ. The process may be slow; the progress may appear to our impatient eyes to lag. But it is God who is building; and under his hands the structure rises as steadily as it does slowly, and in due time the capstone shall be set into its place, and to our astonished eyes shall be revealed nothing less than a saved world.”<sup>9</sup>

#### FOOTNOTES

1. Paul Billheimer: *Destined for the Throne* (London: Christian Literature Crusade; 1975)
2. John Frame: *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, p.17 (Phillipsburg NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Co.; 1987)
3. C.H.Spurgeon: *Sermon #2382 - "The Holy Spirit's Chief Office"* (London: Passmore & Alabaster; 1888)
4. W.A.Visser 't Hooft: *The Kingship of Christ*, p.144 (New York NY: Harper & Brothers; 1948)
5. Gary North: *Backward Christian Soldiers*, p.42 (Tyler TX: Institute for Christian Economics; 1984)
6. Quoted by Jay Adams: *The Biblical View of Self-Esteem, Self-Love, Self-Image*, p.9 (Eugene OR: Harvest House Publishers; 1986)
7. C.S.Lewis: *Reflections on the Psalms*, p.49-57 (Glasgow: Collins (Fount Paperbacks); 1977)
8. Quoted by Charles Colson: *Kingdoms in Conflict*, p.101 (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan; 1987)
9. Benjamin Warfield (from a sermon on Jn 3:16)  
Quoted by David Chilton: *Power in the Blood*, p.206 (Brentwood TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt; 1987)