

The Great Gap

Introduction

Jewish theology foretold two great events. One was God’s pouring out of His wrath upon the earth in judgment of Israel and the nations. The other was His establishment of His kingdom on the earth in which Israel would be preeminent among the nations. Woven throughout these events were prophecies of the coming of the Messiah to suffer and to reign on earth. What the prophets foretold can be charted as below:

Wrath of God on Earth (Zephaniah 1)	Kingdom of God on Earth (Zechariah 14.9)	New Heavens and a New Earth (Isaiah 66.22)
Advent and Rule of the Messiah Upon the Earth		

Unclear was the timing of these events. The Scriptures did not reveal when or how God would fulfill the prophecies. In most references, they appeared to follow one another in close succession. What was clear, based upon God’s covenant promises and prophecies was however the events unfolded, Israel was central in their fulfillment.

The Great Gap

In the chart below are passages that illustrate events fulfilled in Christ’s first advent and events that will be fulfilled in His second advent. Many passages throughout the Old Testament reveal these truths but these particular verses demonstrate most concisely how the Old Testament program was supposed to unfold. Reading these verses, one does not see a break in the time of their fulfillment. One would never image a gap of nearly 2,000 years would separate them. This article will explore the reason for this gap and what God has done during this intervening period.

1st Advent	2nd Advent	Comment
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<p>¹ Why are the nations in an uproar and the peoples devising a vain thing? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying, ³ Let us tear their fetters apart and cast away their cords from us! (Psalm 2.1-3)</p>	<p>⁴ He who sits in the heavens laughs, the Lord scoffs at them. ⁵ Then He will speak to them in His anger and terrify them in His fury, saying, ⁶ But as for Me, I have installed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain. (Psalm 2.4-6)</p>	<p>Verses 1-3 reveal the alliance of Jew and Gentile in opposition to the Messiah (His crucifixion) and future rebellion and war against Him before His return at the end of the Tribulation. Verses 4-6 speak of God's wrath in the Tribulation and His establishment of His kingdom on earth following His return.</p>
<p>⁷ I will surely tell of the decree of the Lord He said to Me, You are My Son, today I have begotten You. (Psalm 2.7)</p>	<p>⁸ Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Your possession. ⁹ You shall break them with a rod of iron, You shall shatter them like earthenware. (Psalm 2.8.9)</p>	<p>Christ's resurrection fulfilled v. 7. According to Acts 13.33-34, it was Christ's resurrection, not His birth, by which He became the Only Begotten. Verses 8-9 remain future and refer to God's wrath in the Tribulation and the establishment of His kingdom.</p>

<p>The Lord says to my Lord: Sit at My right hand (Psalm 110.1a)</p>	<p>until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet. (Psalm 110.1b)</p>	<p>The Son is now seated at the right hand of the Father. When He returns He will occupy His own throne and rule from Jerusalem (Zechariah 2.10).</p>
<p>The stone the builders rejected (Psalm 118.22a)</p>	<p>has become the chief corner stone. (Psalm 118.22b)</p>	<p>The first part of the verse describes Christ's rejection (crucifixion); the second, His reign as King on the earth.</p>

<p>⁶ For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; (Isaiah 9.6a)</p>	<p>⁶ And the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷ There will be no end to the increase of <i>His</i> government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this. (Isaiah 9.6b-7)</p>	<p>Verse 6a was fulfilled at Christ's first advent. Verses 6b-7 foretell future events when the Son will occupy the throne of David in Jerusalem. Peace and righteousness will define His kingdom and Matthew 6.10 will be fulfilled.</p>
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<p>¹ The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners; ² To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord (Isaiah 61.1-2a)</p>	<p>² and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn, (Isaiah 61.2b)</p>	<p>Verses 1-2a were fulfilled at Christ's first advent and he quoted this passage in Luke 4.16-21. His audience did not understand why He stopped reading. He stopped because He knew what Isaiah wrote in verse 2b and 2c, the wrath of God and the kingdom of God, would be delayed.</p>
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<p>²⁸ It will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; and your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. ²⁹ Even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days. (Joel 2.28-29)</p>	<p>³⁰ I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth, blood, fire and columns of smoke. ³¹ The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. ³² And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be delivered; (Joel 2.30-32)</p>	<p>Peter quoted Joel on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2.16-21) and expected all of the passage to be fulfilled shortly. The advent of the Holy Spirit occurred but verses 30-32 remain future. In Acts 2.34-35, Peter quoted Psalm 110.1. He expected this verse to be fulfilled shortly also.</p>
<p>⁹ Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, humble, and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey. (Zechariah 9.9)</p>	<p>¹⁰ I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem; and the bow of war will be cut off. And He will speak peace to the nations; and His dominion will be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. (Zechariah 9.10)</p>	<p>Verse 9 was fulfilled in the Lord's first advent (Matthew 21.5). Verse 10 remains future. It foretells God's wrath in judgment upon the nations against Israel. His judgment will be followed by His setting up of His kingdom on the earth.</p>

<p>³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; (Luke 1.31-32a)</p>	<p>³² and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; ³³ and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end. (Luke 1.32b-33)</p>	<p>Mary gave birth to a son named Jesus who was known as the Son of God (Matthew 16.16). Verses 32b and 33, which foretell His reign over Israel and kingdom on earth, remain future.</p>
<p>⁵ And she gave birth to a son, a male <i>child</i>, and her child was caught up to God and to His throne. (Revelation 12.5a, c)</p>	<p>who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; (Revelation 12.5b)</p>	<p>The woman of Revelation 12 is Israel who gave birth to the Messiah (part a) who ascended to heaven (part c). He will return and rule (part b).</p>

Whence the Church?

What is glaringly missing from Old Testament prophecy? Where is the Church, the body of Christ? Not a word is breathed in the Old Testament or in any prophecy about the Church, the body of Christ, in which Jew and Gentile are equal in Christ (Galatians 3.28; Colossians 3.11).

Prophecies Concerning Gentiles

Scattered throughout the Old Testament were Scriptures that revealed that God would bless Gentiles (Genesis 12.3, 18.18, 22.18, 26.4; Isaiah 42.1-4, 49.5-6, 22-23, 60.1-3; Jeremiah 16.19; Ezekiel 39.21; Malachi 1.11; Zechariah 8.22-23). These blessings would come through the Messiah and through the nation of Israel. Wholly missing was any idea God would bless Gentiles apart from Israel. According to prophecy, Israel was

the channel through whom God would bless Gentiles.

Into the Gap: A New Creation

The Scriptures noted above reveal that in God's prophetic plan He would exercise wrath against a Christ-rejecting world and establish His kingdom in which the Messiah would reign over the earth (Zechariah 14.9). During this time God would fulfill his covenant promises to Israel. These included the promises God made in the Abrahamic, Palestinian (Land), Mosaic, Sabbatic, Davidic, and New covenants. Israel would become a kingdom of priests (Exodus 19.6) and preeminent among the nations of the world (Deuteronomy 28.1, 13). These events were expected to come in close succession (Luke 19.11). Indeed, the Lord Himself, in His earthly ministry, declared the kingdom was near (Matthew 4.17).

But God's promises to Israel did not come. God did not pour out His wrath upon the earth. He did not establish His kingdom on earth in which Israel is the preeminent nation of the world. Why not?

God's establishment of His kingdom on earth and His fulfillment of His promises to the Jews depended on Jewish national repentance. John the Baptist, Jesus, and Peter had preached repentance (Matthew 3.2, 4.17; Mark 1.14-15; Acts 2.36-39). But the nation refused their message (cf. Matthew 23.37-39). Instead of God exercising His prophesied wrath, He delayed it. The wrath Peter expected to fall shortly after Pentecost did not come (Acts 2.16-21; cf. Joel 2.30-31).

Instead, God did something unforeseen by the prophets. He chose to bless Gentiles *apart from Israel*. He set Gentiles in the place of blessing Israel had occupied (Romans 11.17-26).¹ He has set Israel aside temporarily until they repent (Zechariah 12.10, 13.6; Matthew 23.37-39). When they do, God will save them all (Romans 11.26; cf. Isaiah 66.8). In the gap between His rejection by the Jews and their repentance

and acceptance of their Messiah, God created a new organism—the Church, the body of Christ—in which Jew and Gentile are equal in Christ (Galatians 3.26-28). To lead His new program, God saved and commissioned Saul of Tarsus, Paul, to be “the apostle of the Gentiles” (Romans 11.13). To Paul, He revealed a “secret”—the Church, the body of Christ. This was the birth of Christianity.

Paul wrote the Ephesians:

¹¹ Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called “Uncircumcision” by the so-called “Circumcision,” which is performed in the flesh by human hands—¹² remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, ¹⁵ by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity (Ephesians 2.11-16).

Paul wrote that Gentiles were “without hope and without God.” They were excluded from Israel’s “covenants of promise,” i.e., the blessings God would bestow upon Israel. But God in His grace brought Gentiles “near by the blood of Christ.” By means of the Messiah’s death, God removed the Mosaic Law which separated Jew and Gentile. The result was a new creation: Jew and Gentile were reconciled into one body—the Church, the body of Christ.

In the next chapter Paul wrote that God had kept this plan secret ([μυστήριον](#)). He did not reveal it in the Old Testament through prophecy or covenants. The prophets knew nothing of it and Jesus did not disclose this secret in His earthly ministry. Rather, the ascended, glorified Lord revealed this new truth to Paul. He wrote:

¹ For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—² if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you; ³ that by revelation there was made known to me the secret, as I wrote before in brief (Ephesians 3.1-3).

Paul explained in greater detail what he meant:

⁴ By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the secret of Christ, ⁵ which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; ⁶ to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, ⁷ of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power. ⁸ To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, ⁹ and to bring to light what is the administration of the secret which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; (Ephesians 3.4-9)

Note Paul's language in verse 4:

πρὸς ὃ δύνασθε ἀναγινώσκοντες νοῆσαι τὴν σύνεσίν μου ἐν τῷ μυστηρίῳ τοῦ Χριστοῦ

Paul wished the Ephesians to perceive ([νοῆσαι](#)) his knowledge (τὴν [σύνεσίν](#)) of this secret. The word σύνεσις was a fitting word choice. It means “bringing together” (Homer used it of the flowing together of two rivers) and is a pun of what God did in bringing together Jew and Gentile in Christ.² Paul received his knowledge of this secret through revelation (Ephesians 3.3). The ascended, glorified Lord communicated it directly to him.

In verse 5, Paul again stated this truth had been a secret: “in other generations was not made known to the sons of men.” He then stated, “as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit.” Most who teach this verse misunderstand it. They fail to recognize that the Church, the body of Christ, was a Pauline revelation, not a revelation God gave the Twelve in His earthly ministry. They teach the Twelve knew about the Church. Did they? The Scriptures indicate neither Peter nor any of the Twelve knew about the Church prior to Paul. Whatever they came to understand or learned came from Paul.

What is the evidence of this?

1. At Pentecost, Peter addressed only Jews (Acts 2.14, 22, 29, 36, 39). His message after Pentecost was the same. He addressed Jews only (Acts 3.12-13, 17, 25). If he knew of Jew-Gentile equality in Christ would he not have addressed Gentiles as well as Jews?
2. Years after Pentecost, we learn Peter had made no contact with Gentiles and resisted going to the house of the Gentile Cornelius (Acts 10.9-16). Apart from God’s direct command to go to Cornelius, Peter would have never gone. When he arrived at Cornelius’ house, he told him it was unlawful for him to enter (Acts 10.28). If Peter knew God had removed the barrier of the Mosaic Law separating Jew and Gentile and had created a new body, the body of Christ, the Church, in which Jew and Gentile

are equal, would he have had this attitude?

3. At the Jerusalem Council, in 51 A.D., about 20 years after Pentecost, believing Jews of the Jerusalem assembly adamantly insisted Paul's Gentile converts were not saved until they were circumcised and kept the Mosaic Law (Acts 15.1, 5). If they knew God had created a new body of equality for Jew and Gentile and had removed the Law, would they have made this declaration?
4. None of the letters of Peter, James, John, or Jude provide any reference to the Church, the body of Christ. Their salutations and content reveal they wrote Jewish believers (1 Peter 1.1; James 1.1), not Gentiles, not Christians. They never used the term "body of Christ" nor is there language we associate with the Church, the body of Christ. They use language associated with God's prophetic program and Christ's earthly ministry.
5. We have no Biblical record the Twelve ever had a ministry to Gentiles. If they knew the secret that God had removed the separating barrier between Jew and Gentile and created Jew and Gentile equal in Christ would they not have ministered to Gentiles? The Scriptures reveal that before the Council of Jerusalem they had no ministry to Gentiles and that after the Council they formalized this status (Galatians 2.7-9).

In addition to these facts Paul wrote:

⁸ *To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ,*

⁹ *and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; (Ephesians 3.8-9)*

Paul stated "to me," not Peter, not the Twelve, was this grace, i.e., the knowledge of the Church and the ministry to Gentiles (cf. Romans 11.13) given. God appointed Paul to

“bring to light what is the administration of the secret” God had hidden. Paul had written the Corinthians previously about this subject. He declared he was the wise “master-builder” of the Church and that he laid its foundation (1 Corinthians 3.10-11). A master-builder or architect ([ἀρχιτέκτων](#)) is one who lays the foundation ([θεμέλιος](#)) and guides the construction. This could in not be said of the Twelve: they never ministered to Gentiles and never wrote of Jewish-Gentile equality in Christ.

These facts should remove all doubt that Peter or the Twelve knew the secret of the Church, the body of Christ. Whatever knowledge they had, they learned from Paul.

The End of the Church

Paul revealed another secret God had kept: a partial hardening of the nation of Israel. He wrote in Romans 11.25:

ὅτι πώρωσις ἀπὸ μέρους τῷ Ἰσραὴλ γέγονεν ἄχρις οὗ τὸ πλήρωμα τῶν ἐθνῶν εἰσέλθῃ
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that a partial hardening has happened to Israel, until the fullness (or completion) of the Gentiles enters (or occurs).

While this partial hardening is in effect God is building the Church, the body of Christ. Jews and Gentiles now have equality in Christ. But the composition of the Church is 99.9% Gentile. The hardening of the Jews is national and will continue until all Israel repents (Matthew 23.37-39). When that occurs the Lord will return to fulfill His promises to the nation (Romans 11.26-27). The Church continues to grow and will one day be complete. Paul described this event as τὸ πλήρωμα τῶν ἐθνῶν (the fullness of the Gentiles). Once complete, God will remove it.³ When this occurs God will refocus on His prophetic plan in which Israel is the central actor.

Conclusion

Almost 2,000 years have passed since the Messiah's advent. Between then and now is a great gap. In this gap God created and has been growing the Church, the body of Christ. The Church was an unknown and unrevealed in the Old Testament, in Jesus' earthly ministry, and among the Twelve. It was a new program God revealed to and began with Paul. According to God's prophetic plan the Messiah's advent, His wrath, and His establishing His kingdom on earth were supposed to follow in quick succession. The Twelve and Paul expected these events to occur in their lifetime. Nothing in the Old Testament indicated God would delay establishing His kingdom on earth for 2,000 years. But God in His mercy delayed His judgment and extended His grace so Jew and Gentile can be saved by faith + 0 by believing Paul's gospel (1 Corinthians 15.1-4). This is grace!

¹ See the author's study [The Olive Tree](#) for elaboration on this great theme.

² The word σύνεσιν occurs 7x in the New Testament and Paul used it 5x, cf. Mark 12.33; Luke 2.47, 1 Corinthians 1.19; Ephesians 3.4; Colossians 1.9, 2.2; 2 Timothy 2.7)

³ God's removal of the Church is the doctrine of the Rapture or [ἁρπάζω](#). This was another secret the glorified Christ revealed to Paul (1 Corinthians 15.51). It was unprophesied and unknown. The Old Testament, Gospels, and the Twelve knew nothing of it. This is why the Rapture is found only in the letters of Paul.

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