

Regeneration

“Jesus said to them, ‘I tell you the truth, at the regeneration [Greek, *palingenesia*] of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses and . . . [family] and fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life’” (Matthew 19:28-29).

“But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of regeneration [Greek, *palingenesia*] and renewal by the Holy Spirit whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life . . . so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good” (Titus 3:5-8).

The Greek word, *palingenesia*, occurs only here in these two places, yet it’s the key to understanding all that God is doing in His creation. The *palingenesia* concept however is expressed in many other places. Thus, for example, there’s “born again” (John 3), “born anew” (1 Peter 1), and “new creation” (2 Corinthians 5 and Galatians 6:15). Also, we’ve been brought from death to life (Ephesians 2:1,5), and Peter says, “He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago” (Acts 3:21). Paul also refers to the *palingenesia* in Romans 8:19-21, as well as when he writes that we’re to put off the “old” man and put on the “new.”

Let’s review: God created a “very good” world. In it, He placed an innocent humanity that had a measure of moral free will and that bore His image. The man was instructed to “serve” and to “guard.” Guard!? Why? Because this very good place that God had made was open and exposed to the entrance of evil. And indeed, evil promptly sneaked right in. But, although what happened is complicated, the man didn’t protect God’s garden. In short, he disobeyed God. He failed. And so, a holy God in judgment condemned humanity to live in disobedience and sin, so that He might have mercy (Romans 11:32). And God cursed His very good creation so that it would not only frustrate and punish sinful humanity but so that it also would have to await a future redemption. So pain, disease, suffering, futility, decay and death were introduced. Sinful humanity too would have to wait for a future redemption.

The “redemption” would be mediated by the Son and the Holy Spirit. It would be a totally new creation, one without the curse and without sin or evil, one that would glorify God as creator. It would be a new creation populated by a humanity that was transformed into an obedient and loving humanity, one that reflected God’s glory. It would be a regenerated creation with a regenerated humanity, in which God would visibly dwell in His glory with His beloved creatures. It’s all yet future, even for us. Regeneration not only reverses the Fall and its consequences, it brings into existence a vastly greater and more glorious existence, for those privileged to experience it.

From beginning to end, the Bible anticipates this *palingenesia*. Sometimes it’s between the lines, sometimes it’s explicit. The types, the proleptic events, the themes, the reprises, the prophecies – all these anticipate a promised future new creation. At Creation, words such as “darkness” and “night,” and the fact it was only a “very good” creation suggest something better has to come in the future. After the Flood, repetition of creation words and themes indicate that a re-creation of sorts followed that judgment, suggesting that in the future there will be a vastly greater judgment followed, again, by a re-creation. Deuteronomy and later writing prophets promised a return after the judgment of exile for the nation of Israel. The “rock” that struck the Daniel 2 statue was to bring in a future new, glorious era. Jesus’ parables and his miracles of healing and exorcism anticipate a future era when all creation will be healed and delivered from bondage to evil.

When Jacob says, “I know, my son, I know” at the end of Genesis, what Jacob learned (and it took him a lifetime to learn it) is, Not the first (i.e., this creation) but the second (the *palingenesia*). The first generation to leave Egypt failed, but the second didn’t. The Nation of Israel failed to guard their land, reprising the failure of Adam in the Garden. The first exodus failed (Israel was thrust into Exile, reversing the Exodus); but the second, our exodus from Satan’s dominion, mediated by a second and better Moses, that is Jesus, doesn’t fail. Many, many other examples could be cited.

Why is there death? Death isn’t just the end of a physical life. It’s deeper and more significant: Everyone, even the whole cosmos, must die. Why? In order to experience resurrection, resurrection to a totally new kind of existence. The Son’s resurrection, the “first-fruits,” anticipates a whole new world, a new kind of life, a new heavens and earth.

In this present era, we dwell necessarily in the first creation, a condemned and doomed world. It’s God’s work of love during this era to provide for us, to forgive us our sins and to deliver us from our enemies, but His greater work is to call and prepare a people for the promised future era. The First Advent of the Son made it possible for an elect people to enter the future era. The Son then went back up to heaven to await His Return to fulfill the promise to make the regeneration a reality, leaving His called out people here to continue that work of calling and preparing others. What followers of Jesus experience in the here and now, a regeneration, is what the entire creation will physically experience, and what ethnic Israel will experience, in that future era.

In view of the above, it should be clear why there *must* be a millennium. (Amillennials may be God-fearing, Christ-loving people, but sadly they fail to properly understand Scripture on this important matter.) It’s why the Nation of Israel has a glorious future, when that nation is regenerated. It’s also why obedience and godliness is absolutely essential in the life and character of the follower of Jesus. We must be and do, now, in this life, what regenerated people will be and do in the *palingenesia*. It should be clear too why there must be a Tribulation period, as revealed in the Book of Revelation. It’s why there must be a hell. The regeneration also vindicates God’s goodness and justice. We need to grasp the importance of regeneration in the uber-narrative of Scripture.

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We are all so engrossed in the affairs of this present life that we easily miss the big picture. If we’re a follower of Jesus, we’re not any longer part of the old creation. We’ve been delivered from the world, from the grip of Satan, from the old life. We’ve been gifted with the empowering Holy Spirit, and we’ve been given the commands and teachings of Jesus to obey to make us godly. We’re not our own any more, but we belong to the One who rescued us and regenerated us. And we have a promise of a glorious future. We are not here to live according to our own desires or ideas, according to how our unsaved neighbors and family live.

“Regeneration” isn’t an abstract theological concept. “Born again” isn’t a Christian slogan. We need to make *palingenesia* a reality in our lives, in this present existence. It’s too easy to pursue the selfish life that characterizes most Americans, pursuing happiness and being indifferent to the needs of others. Let’s commit instead to pursuing the life that God has ordained is the life of one who is regenerated, as described in the Word. The Spirit will enable this supernatural kind of life, if we want it.

If we’re God’s adopted sons, we should want to devote ourselves to fulfilling our Father’s great, cosmic purposes. If we’re *in Christ*, we should want to be like Him and do as He did. If we say we love Jesus, we should want more than anything in life and regardless of the consequences to obey Him. So, once more: We’re here in this present age to live the life of one who is regenerated, doing the express will of our Savior while awaiting the Return of Christ in glory to regenerate all things.