

God's Purposes for His Kingdom on Earth

“That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him.”

—*Ephesians 1:10*

MANY CHRISTIANS TODAY

have grave doubts that the kingdom of Christ will ever be set up on the earth. This is with good reason, as we look at the world around us and its myriad problems. According to the World Economic Forum’s “Outlook on the Global Agenda—2015,”

the top ten challenges currently facing the world and which will likely preoccupy its leaders over the next twelve to eighteen months are:

Deepening income inequality

Persistent jobless growth

Lack of leadership

Rising geostrategic competition between world regions

Weakening of representative democracy

Rising pollution in the developing world
Increasing occurrence of severe weather events
Intensifying nationalism
Increasing water stress
Growing importance of health in the economy

In addition, there are the continuing threats of terrorism in various forms, flagrant openness of immorality, and a general increase of godlessness throughout the world—all of which the religious and civil powers appear impotent to do anything about. Viewed only from this perspective, this is a dark and dismal outlook for the world in which we live today. Will Christ's kingdom ever come, and if it does, will it succeed in solving man's problems? Does the Bible tell us how?

In examining this important subject, we should first realize that God's plan of salvation for the fallen and dying human race embraces thousands of years in time. From this, we instinctively know there is a great deal more to it than simply believing on Christ and being saved. We should first remember that Jesus did not come to die for the world until 4,000 years after the fall of man. During that time, God gave no definitive revelation of his redemptive plan, speaking of it only vaguely through the prophets and by types and shadows, and then merely to the one little nation of Israel. It was not until Christ came and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel, that God's people began to realize that he has a plan, an "eternal purpose," and that it will not be until the "dispensation of the fulness of times" that things both in heaven and in earth will be gathered unto Christ.—Eph. 1:10; 3:11

Much of the detail of God's plan is revealed through his Word by means of illustrations and word pictures. Our first parents were tested as to their obedience to God's will. They failed, and even though Jesus paid the penalty of their sin, and thus provided a way of escape from death, no member of Adam's race will be given everlasting life until he is tried individually. The thousand-year period during which individuals of the race as a whole will undergo this trial is spoken of in the Scriptures as a judgment day. The word "judgment" used in this connection is to describe the thought of this particular aspect of God's purpose as it will be consummated during the "dispensation of the fulness of times."

The sin of our first parents was a rebellion against the Creator's will, and the entire human race has continued that rebellion to a greater or lesser extent ever since that time. God has assured us that this opposition to his will is to be put down, and his will is ultimately to reign supreme throughout the whole earth. In order to convey to our minds what is involved in this aspect of God's purpose toward mankind, the promises of his Word tell us of a kingdom, and that in this kingdom Christ will reign until all enemies are put under his feet—until God's will is done in earth even as it is now done in heaven. (Matt. 6:10) The term "subjects" is often used in connection with the thought of a kingdom, and it conveys the meaning of the kingdom illustration of the Bible. At that time, the world is to be made "subject" to the will of God.

There is another important word used in order to convey the full scope of God's intentions toward

the human race, and that is “covenant.” The human race is to be restored to covenant relationship with God. A man might prove loyal under trial, and might fully subject his will to the requirements of God’s law. Yet, to be restored to covenant relationship with the Creator provides an even greater and more complete picture of what God, through Christ, proposes to do for the fallen race. There are still other expressions used in the promises of the Scriptures, but in our present discussion we will confine ourselves to these three—the judgment work, the kingdom work, and the making of a covenant between God and men.

THE WORK OF PREPARATION

By reason of failure to rightly understand and harmonize the Word of truth, many have grossly misunderstood the divine purpose relating to God’s judgments, his kingdom, and his covenants. Most of the Christian world believe the human race is on trial during this life—that now is God’s judgment day for all men. Because the Bible speaks so emphatically of a future judgment day, this line of reasoning tries to take the Scriptures pertaining thereto into consideration, but the result is confusion and contradiction. It is bound to be so when based on the erroneous premise which insists that the moment of death marks the full end of probation for all.

God’s promises concerning the kingdom of Christ and what it will do for the human race are also misunderstood. Not knowing the plan of God, many insist that the kingdom was set up either shortly after our Lord’s First Advent, or at some

time in the centuries which followed, and that it has since been reigning on the earth. This viewpoint nullifies God's promises of a future glorious kingdom which will bring peace and joy to mankind, and everlasting life to all who obey its laws. How we rejoice that we can see clearly that what began with Christ's First Advent was the calling and training of those who would be associate kings with Jesus, and not the setting up of the kingdom itself.

The same principle of interpretation holds true with respect to God's promises to establish a covenant relationship between himself and the estranged human race, beginning with the "house of Israel, and . . . the house of Judah." (Jer. 31:31) This is called by the prophet a "new covenant." Many, failing to understand God's plan, assume this New Covenant began to operate between God and men when the Holy Spirit came upon the waiting disciples at Pentecost. It is much the same mistake that is made with respect to the work of judgment and the work of the kingdom—and for the same reason.

The cause of so many failing to understand these fundamental doctrines of the Scriptures correctly is that they do not see the distinction between those whom God has promised to bless and those whom he will use to provide those blessings. They fail to discern that the association of his promises of the judgment day, the kingdom, and the New Covenant with his servants of this age does not mean that this is the world's judgment day, nor that the kingdom is now in operation, nor that we are now living under the terms of the New Covenant.

MYSTERIES REVEALED

Prior to Jesus' First Advent there was much of God's plan that remained a mystery. One important feature which was not unfolded until Christ came was that the seed of promise, the Messiah, the great King and Judge—through whom God's promises to bless the world are to be fulfilled—was to have associates who would share his glory and who would live, reign and judge with him. The Apostle Paul said that "this mystery . . . is Christ in you, the hope of glory." (Col. 1:27) When this mystery was revealed and unlocked, however, God's people learned that the saints "shall judge the world," that they will "reign with Christ a thousand years," and they were called to be made "able ministers" of the New Covenant.—I Cor. 6:2; Rev. 20:4,6; II Cor. 3:6

Taking note of the judgment day, Paul tells us plainly that God has "appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness" by Jesus, "that man whom he hath ordained." (Acts 17:31) The Scriptures also declare that God has "committed all judgment" to his Son Christ Jesus, who will judge the "quick [the living] and the dead at his appearing." (John 5:22; II Tim. 4:1) The first mention of the work of judgment that was given by one of God's prophets makes it clear that many would participate in it. That was Enoch, who, according to Jude, prophesied that the Lord would come with myriads of his saints, to execute judgment. (Jude 14,15) Corroborating this, Paul wrote, "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?"—I Cor. 6:2

Repeatedly, the Scriptures proclaim Christ Jesus the great King in the divine kingdom which is to

soon govern the affairs of the whole world. The Word of God also emphatically declares that Christ's faithful followers of this age are to share the glory of his kingship—that they are to reign with him. This is a wonderful “hope of glory” for those who sacrifice all, suffering and dying with Jesus, and who in the “first resurrection” will live and reign with him.

By the wondrous grace of God, the Bible authorizes us to include in that hope of glory the anticipation of sharing in the work of mediating the New Covenant. Christ Jesus is specifically declared to be the mediator of that covenant between God and man. (Heb. 12:24; I Tim. 2:5) However, the faithful followers of Jesus are also said to be “able ministers of the new [covenant],” called and trained to serve in the “ministry of reconciliation” under its arrangements.—II Cor. 3:6; 5:18

PRACTICAL TRAINING

In the divine arrangement, the training of those who are called to participate with Jesus in the blessing of all the families of the earth is being accomplished upon a very practical basis. When Paul inquired of the Corinthian brethren, “Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?” he was admonishing them to give greater diligence in applying the principles of the Truth in their own lives and particularly in their dealings with one another. He reasoned that if they were to share with Jesus in judging the world, they should learn properly to apply the principles of justice and righteousness in solving the problems which arose among themselves from time to time.

This same practical training of the future blessers of the world is discerned in connection with their hope of reigning with Jesus, the King of Kings. When one prays, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven," they should remember first of all that God's will should be done in their own hearts and lives. Full and unreserved surrender to the will of God through Christ our Head is the condition upon which any may hope to share with Jesus in the work of establishing the divine will in the hearts of the people during the kingdom. Thus it is only as they humble themselves under the mighty hand of God that he will exalt them to kingdom glory with the Master.

Similarly, as prospective Messianic Age ministers of reconciliation, they are receiving their training now. In the present use of the word of reconciliation, it is their privilege whenever and wherever they find an ear to hear, to say, "Be ye reconciled to God." (II Cor. 5:20) Thus they serve as peacemakers in preparation for that enlarged service as able ministers of the New Covenant, when it will be their privilege to help bring the entire race into covenant relationship with God.

THE KINGDOM AT HAND

Students of the Scriptures should be familiar with the many texts which speak of the kingdom, from one standpoint, as having its beginning with the First Advent of Jesus. Paul wrote, "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his [God's] dear Son." (Col. 1:13) Jesus also stated during his First Advent that "the kingdom of heaven suffereth

violence.” (Matt. 11:12) These and other scriptures show that the kingdom, in a certain sense, came into being at the First Advent of Jesus. However, those who are able to rightly divide the Word of truth understand that the kingdom reign over mankind did not begin then. They know the kingdom has existed merely in its preparatory stage, and that the Gospel Age is the period during which those who will reign in the kingdom have been and are being called and trained for this high position.

The reason for stressing these facts of truth is to emphasize also that the same principle of interpretation holds true with respect to God’s promises of the New Covenant. Just as God’s promises make it clear that the reigning period of that kingdom is during the Messianic Age, so his original promises of the New Covenant likewise identify when it will become operative, and that it will first be made “with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah.” (Jer. 31:31-34) Similarly, just as in the case of the kingdom promises, those pertaining to the New Covenant also involve too much to be fulfilled in the experiences of the relatively small number of God’s consecrated people during the present age.

The New Testament does associate the consecrated footstep followers of Jesus with the New Covenant of promise, just as they are associated with God’s promises of the kingdom. When we understand that the present relationship of the saints to that covenant is merely in the sense of being trained as its servants, then we will have no difficulty in discerning the perfect harmony of all the Scriptures bearing on the subject. Let us then examine the New Testament references to the New

Covenant and note they imply no more than do the references of the New Testament to the kingdom and the church's relationship thereto.

THE BLOOD OF THE NEW COVENANT

In Matthew 26:27,28, Jesus is quoted as saying to his disciples when he gave them the Memorial cup, that it represented the “blood of the new testament,” or New Covenant. This is sometimes misunderstood to mean that Jesus was saying to his disciples that the foretold New Covenant had now become operative and that under its terms they were then, through his blood, being reconciled to God. When we examine the matter more carefully, however, we find that this is not the thought.

Hebrews 10:9 reads, “Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second.” The “first” referred to in this text is the old Law Covenant, and the “second” is the New Covenant. According to the Scriptures, Jesus did away with the Law Covenant as a means by which Israelites, or the people of any other nation, could be reconciled to God. It was taken away just as definitely as Israel's typical kingdom was removed by Babylon as forecast by Ezekiel and Jeremiah, and later by the Romans as forecast by Jesus when he said, “Your house is left unto you desolate.”—Ezek. 21:25-27; Jer. 25:9-11; Matt. 23:38

Paul writes that the first covenant was taken away in order that the second, the New Covenant, might be established. The same is true concerning the kingdom. The typical kingdom was removed in order that the antitypical kingdom, under Christ,

might be established. With the removal of the typical kingdom, the real kingdom was at hand. It began to be established in the sense that the kings for that kingdom began to be prepared for the high office to which they were called. So it was with the New Covenant. Following our Lord's First Advent, its able ministers began to be tutored in the school of Christ that they might be ready, in association with him, to inaugurate that covenant at the beginning of the Messianic Age—the thousand-year kingdom period and judgment day. That is why Jesus said his blood was the blood of the New Covenant. There is no other blood. The very purpose for which Jesus shed his blood was that the lost race might be reconciled to God, and that work of reconciliation is to be accomplished through the New Covenant.

Let us further notice that Paul sets forth the complete thought of how the blood of Christ is the blood of the New Covenant. Prior to the inauguration of the typical "first" covenant, Moses, its mediator, sacrificed animals, and when the covenant was enjoined upon the people, he used the blood of these animals to sprinkle "both the book, and all the people." Then Paul adds, "Moreover he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry. . . . It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these."—Heb. 9:19-23

The sprinkling of "all the people" under the typical arrangement points forward to the inauguration of the New Covenant. In addition to that, however, as Paul explains, both the Tabernacle and all the vessels

of the ministry were also sprinkled, which, he said, pointed forward to the sprinkling of the antitypical tabernacle and its arrangements—the heavenly things of this age. The Book of Hebrews places the footstep followers of Christ in the same relationship to the antitypical tabernacle as the priests of Israel were to the typical Tabernacle. These are being developed as a priesthood, with a hope of entering the “Most Holy.”

We do not know how long it required for the building of the typical Tabernacle and the inauguration of its services through which the nation of Israel received its blessings under the Law Covenant, but it requires the entire Gospel Age to “build” the antitypical tabernacle and initiate its priesthood. This is a necessary work in connection with establishing the New Covenant. Because this is being done in preparation for reconciling the world to God through that arrangement, the blood of Christ which makes it possible is referred to as the blood of the New Covenant. In other words, the blood of Christ is being used during the Gospel Age to make acceptable the sacrifices of those who are being prepared as able ministers of the New Covenant. This does not mean they are under the New Covenant, but rather that they are being prepared to administer the laws of that covenant to the people when the preparation work of this Gospel Age is complete.

In Hebrews 9:14, Paul explains that the blood of Christ purges the Christian’s conscience from dead works. It is essential that this be done, else we could not be acceptable to God as able ministers of the New Covenant. In the next verse, Paul explains

that it is for the purging of sins that Jesus is the Mediator of the New Covenant. Because of this, writes the apostle, the death of Jesus will bring about the “redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament,” or covenant. Thus it will be that they who are called will receive “the promise of eternal inheritance.”

In this passage, therefore, we find two things which are accomplished by the blood of Christ. The first is the purging of our own conscience from dead works, and the second is the redemption of the transgressions under the first testament, or covenant. In Paul’s day, those Jews who had come “into Christ” had actually transgressed under the Old Covenant, but this was not true of the Gentile converts either then or now. What he is referring to is the manner in which the promise of Jeremiah 31:34 will be fulfilled when the New Covenant is made with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah.

Paul speaks, in Hebrews 9:15, of the natural house of Israel as they which are “called.” This is not a reference to those who are invited to the High Calling. We should remember that the nation of Israel was called to certain favors in the divine plan, and Paul refers to this in Romans 11:26-29. Here he explains that out of Zion shall come forth “the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob,” that this is God’s covenant with them when he takes away their sins. Then he adds, “For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.” Comparing this passage with Hebrews 10:16, we can see clearly that in the latter verse Paul is explaining that the ultimate work to be accomplished by the

blood of Christ will be “after those days” during which that blood has first been used to purge our conscience from dead works. In the case of the Jewish converts, some of these dead works were their efforts to gain life under the Law, but the whole church, Jews and Gentiles, needs this purging in order to be prepared to administer the laws of the New Covenant when it is inaugurated.

“FLESHY TABLES OF THE HEART”

In II Corinthians 3:3-8, Paul illuminates further the relationship of the footstep followers of Christ to the New Covenant. It is in this passage that these are spoken of as “able ministers” of that covenant, and Paul indicates clearly the nature of their service. He says that they are the “epistle of Christ,” written not on stone, but on “fleshy tables of the heart.” In verses seven and eight, he makes it clear that he is comparing the ministry of the Law Covenant with that of the New Covenant, and that the typical ministry to which he refers is that which was conducted by Moses in connection with the Law which was engraved on stones.

Let us think of the tables of the Law as the “epistle of Moses.” Paul is telling us that those to whom he was writing—consecrated believers—are the “epistle of Christ,” and that this Gospel Age is the period during which these epistles are being inscribed by the Holy Spirit. In Exodus 24:12, God told Moses that the tables of the Law were given to him in order that he might teach the people. So it is with the antitypical tables of stone, the “epistle of Christ.” As able ministers of the New Covenant, they are being prepared as the future teachers of the people.

These are the Zion class, and the law of the New Covenant shall go forth from Zion. For this to be true, however, they must first learn that law, and be thoroughly reconciled to all of its terms, delighting in it even as did Jesus.

They are ministers of the New Covenant now, for there are two phases of that ministry. First, there is the sacrificial ministry of that covenant, and then will follow the ministry in glory. The sacrificial ministry has been going on throughout the entire Gospel Age, and soon the glory phase of the ministry will begin. This latter, Paul indicates, was typified by the glory on the countenance of Moses when he came down from the mount bearing the tables of the Law. Paul tells us that if Christ is in us we have this “hope of glory,” for the promise is that when he shall appear—typified by Moses’ appearance to Israel when he came down from the mount—we also shall “appear with him in glory.”—II Cor. 3:3-12; Col. 1:27; 3:4

Paul writes, in Romans 8:24, that one no longer hopes for that which they already see or possess. Therefore, if the glory phase of our able ministry of the New Covenant is as yet but a hope—and Paul makes it clear that this is so—we can assuredly say that the New Covenant is not operating now. Its future operation is in preparation. Those called are being sacrificed in its interests—their sacrifice being made acceptable through the blood of Christ. However, the New Covenant cannot be made with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, and through them with all nations, until Christ appears in glory, as Moses did, and with him his “epistles,”—his co-ministers—as those typical tables of stone

were with Moses when he came down from the mount.

Hebrews 8:6 speaks of Jesus' mediation of the New Covenant as a better and "more excellent ministry." There can be no doubt that when Paul speaks of the church as "able ministers" of the New Covenant he means that they are to share with Jesus in the work of mediation—that better ministry. Additionally, in Hebrews 9:21, the apostle speaks of the "vessels of the ministry" being "sprinkled with blood." These vessels are also typical of things in the antitypical tabernacle arrangement, which emphasizes the consecrated believers' true relationship to the New Covenant—as servants and ministers of that covenant—not as those who are to be blessed under its arrangements.

When we keep this distinction in mind—the difference between the "servants" and the "served"—then we will have no difficulty in understanding all that the Bible says about the New Covenant. For example, in the lesson of II Corinthians, chapters five and six, where Paul designates the footstep followers of Christ as participating in the work of reconciliation, he speaks of these as being coworkers with God. Then he explains that this present age is the acceptable time, the day of this great salvation. In this connection he quotes from Isaiah 49:8-12, and applies it to the church. In this wonderful prophecy God addresses the Christ, Head and body, and says, "I will . . . give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages." (vs. 8) Here the Lord makes it very plain that the faithful of this age are to be a part of that New Covenant arrangement through

which the blessings of the kingdom are to flow to Israel and the entire world.

Let us rejoice in the kingdom joys that are to be dispensed to all mankind in God's due time. Let us be happy knowing that all the willing and obedient of Israel and the world are to be brought into covenant relationship with God, and that his Law will be written in their hearts—that they will be restored to perfection of both mind and body. Finally, let us be thankful that this arrangement will result in the righteous judgment of all mankind. ■

“The LORD shall endure for ever: he hath prepared his throne for judgment. And he shall judge the world in righteousness, he shall minister judgment to the people in uprightness.”
—Psalm 9:7,8